

## In the Shadow of Death

“The stranger in San Domingo was awakened by the cracks of the whip, the stifled cries, and the heavy groans of the Negroes who saw the sun rise only to curse it for its renewal of their labours and their pains”, this quote from C. L. R. James’ foundational text *The Black Jacobins* ([1938] 1989: 9–10) serves as a helpful entry way point through which to understand colonial Haiti, known in the eighteenth century as French Saint-Domingue. As African captives disembarked at Saint-Domingue’s ports – after surviving social, economic, and political upheaval in their homelands and months of trauma in the form of dislocation, violence, death, and illness – traffickers branded them and sold them off to plantations across the colony. From that moment forward, forced labor, daily acts of brutality and other indignities, and death characterized everyday life for the enslaved. The horrors of Saint-Domingue are infamous to readers who are already familiar with “New World” plantation societies, but sociologists who specialize in the study of race might be less familiar with Haiti’s centrality in the making of racial capitalism. To fully understand the significance of a major rebellion like the Haitian Revolution in the context of what was once the most profitable and deadly slave colony in the Americas, it is important to understand the complex set of social relations that eventually led to the astounding collapse of racial slavery in Haiti. This chapter does not merely attempt to recount what is now a fairly well-known historical narrative about the colony’s economic prosperity from sugar and coffee production, but to locate the experiences of enslaved Africans and African descendants within the island space on

which Haiti sits (Ayiti/Española/Saint-Domingue/Haiti) – the nucleus of several “firsts” in early the modern history of the Americas:

- the first site of European “discovery,” colonization, and indigenous genocide
- the first site of black enslavement
- the first site of indigenous and African collective resistance to European dominance
- the first site of a successful black revolt against slavery, and
- the first free and independent black nation.

Four tenets – human commodification, labor exploitation, death, and resistance – of Haiti’s structural reality have persisted beyond Spanish and French colonial systems to the period of the United States’ imperial influence. It might be argued that understanding Haiti from this perspective illuminates the ways in which black life throughout the Americas was and continues to be circumscribed by structural forces rooted in colonial encounters, slavery, and anti-blackness. After surviving the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans and their descendants experienced similar material conditions in Saint-Domingue. Africans also encountered each other and their respective cultural, social, and political heritages, and a landspace that was imbued with the Taíno presence and legacy, resulting in a deeper cultivation of collective consciousness and solidarity. To further comprehend how enslaved Africans responded to their newfound conditions in the Caribbean, I examine the immediate social world of enslaved people by looking at their social lives and recreation – particularly cultural and spiritual creations surrounding death – considering them as processes of enculturation that introduced new Africans to local idioms and modes of survival. These sacred ritual practices and symbolic remembrances of the dead eventually formed the “medium of the conspiracy” among enslaved Africans and African descendants to free themselves from slavery.<sup>1</sup>

## AYITI

Prior to Spanish arrival to the Caribbean, autochthonous Taíno AmerIndians of the Arawak family inhabited several islands, including *Quisqueya* – meaning “vast country,” or *Ayiti*, “land of the mountains” – the second largest island of the Greater Antilles. Moreau de Saint-Méry estimated that there were between 1 and 3 million inhabitants on the island, and during his travels noted the presence of indigenous ritual artifacts in the north.<sup>2</sup> The *Ayitian* indigenous population was divided into five kingdoms, each headed by

*cacique* chiefs who were often connected to one another, and Taíno *caciques* from other parts of the Caribbean, through kinship networks.<sup>3</sup> *Cacique* Guarionex led the Kingdom of Magua, which began at the north-central shore and extended east. The Marien Kingdom, governed by Guacanario, occupied what later became the northern department of Saint-Domingue. A third kingdom, Higüey, was in the south-east portion of what later became the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo. The island's south-central zone was held by the Kingdom of Maguana, whose *cacique* was an indigenous Caraĩbe of the Lesser Antilles named Caonabo, husband of Anacaona. Anacaona was the great-aunt of the famed rebel leader Enriquillo, and sister of one of the island's most powerful *caciques*, Behechio, who ruled the Xaragua Kingdom based on the island's southwestern peninsula, extending east toward what the French later dubbed the Cul-de-Sac plain.<sup>4</sup>

When Christopher Columbus and the European *conquistadors* arrived in 1492, they claimed ownership of the island from the indigenous people and renamed it Española. After his initial arrival, Columbus returned to the Americas on three occasions and visited Española, Cuba, the Bahamas, and the South and Central American coasts in search of gold before his death in 1506.<sup>5</sup> These first moments of contact between the Taíno and Europeans set in motion patterns of interaction and structures of dominance that shaped societal relations in the Americas for centuries to come. Religious sanctioning from the Catholic Church and European racialization of "others" informed the white supremacist logic of colonial conquest, which anchored the genocide of indigenous peoples of Española (Smith 2012: 69). By the first years of the sixteenth century, other Spanish *conquistadors* had invaded Española and bound the Taínos, and other indigenous captives from neighboring Caribbean islands, within a labor system to work in gold mining, agriculture and, later, sugarcane cultivation. However, slaughter in combat, starvation, and infectious disease stemming from contact with Europeans swiftly devastated the Taíno population.<sup>6</sup> To replenish their supply of an uncompensated labor force, the Catholic priest Bartholomé de las Casas suggested to the Spanish crown that the indigenous were "noble savages" that should not be enslaved. Instead, Africans who were not protected by negotiated agreements between the Spanish and Taíno *caciques* would be imported.<sup>7</sup> This second logic of white supremacy, slaveability, or anti-black racism, anchored capitalist development within one population pool – black people – who were seen as particularly vulnerable and suited to commodified labor (ibid.: 68–69).

The earliest of these Africans were free *ladinos* who were assimilated Catholics from the Iberian Coast of Spain; and later legal and illegal

channels of the slave trade carried African continent-born *bozales*.<sup>8</sup> Records of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century transAtlantic slave trade to Española are minimal, but the earliest Africans that Spaniards brought to the island worked in gold mines. As the mines became unproductive, sugar production signaled the rise of “New World” slave economies using involuntary African labor. Enslavers did not officially target African women as potential laborers until 1504. But in June 1527, the king of Spain permitted traders to bring in African women captives to close the population gap between black men and women and to encourage marriage and families, which the king hoped would increase an overall sense of contentment and dissuade men from escaping to the mountains or staging uprisings.<sup>9</sup> The African population had overtaken the Spanish and Taíno population as early as 1509, and by the 1540s, Española held between 20,000 and 30,000 enslaved Africans and African descendants, with Senegambians, West Central Africans, and Biafrans making up the largest portions of captives during the sixteenth century (Table 2.1).<sup>10</sup>

The rise of exploitative and oppressive social structures in Española engendered the social conditions that the small population of Taíno and growing number of Africans faced: forced removal from their homelands, the experience of being used as exploited labor for European resource extraction and protoindustrial production, commodification as a human being, and exorbitant death rates. The deeply penetrating reach of these structural realities shaped the terms of everyday life and everyday death, yet despite foreboding structural determinism, human beings can and do exhibit agency, as did the Taínos and Africans. Structures and agency are co-constituted and only exist in relationship to each other. Structures shape the lives of social actors, who in turn rely on elements from their symbolic world and social interactions to generate collective actions that minimally agitate or, at maximum, transform those structures (Hall 1990; Sewell 1992; Kane 2000; Diehl and McFarland 2010). Even with the institutionalization of social death at Española and alienation from human connections, identity, and labor value (Patterson 1982) in gold mines and on sugar plantations, some Taíno and enslaved Africans exerted collective agency by consistently escaping, fleeing to the densely forested mountains, and participating in organized attacks against the Spanish *encomienda* labor system.

The island of *Ayiti* – and its subsequent geopolitical designation, Española – can be thought of as a contact zone, a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically

TABLE 2.1. *Disembarkations to Española and Saint-Domingue by African regions, 1500–1700*

Year	Senegambia	Sierra Leone	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra	WC Africa & St. Helena	Other Africa	Total
1501–1525	0	0	0	287	0	0	287
1526–1550	1,547	0	0	861	0	0	2,408
1551–1575	3,816	279	0	1,377	0	561	6,033
1576–1600	3,352	0	0	1,133	643	3,278	8,406
1601–1625	0	0	0	0	4,530	1,883	6,413
1626–1650	0	0	319	380	1,060	287	2,046
1651–1675	0	0	882	0	225	0	1,107
1676–1700	1,861	0	0	0	272	821	2,954
Total	10,576	279	1,201	4,038	6,730	6,830	29,654

separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”<sup>11</sup> Taínos and other indigenous AmerIndians from the circum-Caribbean, Iberian black *ladinos* and African-born *bozales*, and Spanish and French colonists converged on the island and contributed – voluntarily and involuntarily, and to varying degrees – to *Ayiti*’s culture, language, and legacy of resistance that eventually culminated in the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution. As the island’s original inhabitants, the Taíno influenced the enslaved African and African descendant population’s collective consciousness, which was transmitted intergenerationally through sacred ritual practice and the memory of sixteenth century revolts against Spanish colonization (Beauvoir-Dominique 2009, 2010).

Less than 20 years after the arrival of enslaved laborers, slave resistance became a mainstay of *Ayiti* that coincided with the emergence of the Spanish sugar economy racialization processes, and the exorbitant death rates of enslaved people. By the early seventeenth century, however, Africans’ persistent struggle against slavery in the form of maroon raids on plantations, combined with the Spanish policy of depopulating much of the island, directly contributed to the essential collapse of the growing sugar industry.<sup>12</sup> The first plantation society in the Americas was undermined by black insurgency, representing what we might thus think of as the first of several “*Ayitian* Revolutions” and new sites and temporalities of modernity. By the late seventeenth century, the Spanish Empire incorporated new laws into the *Siete Partidas* code regulating enslaved and free people of color, legalizing the racialized slavery and oppression that had already been in existence.<sup>13</sup> These policies not only concretized the racial order, they were mechanisms of social control to prevent the kind of resistance from maroons and the enslaved that had undermined the Spanish sugar enterprise. The French soon resumed and expanded sugar production – as well as their own version of laws and mores that codified racial hierarchy in the *Code Noir* – overwhelming its own plantation economy a century later with excesses that undergirded economic, social, and political crises that helped to spark the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution.

## THE FIRST AYITIAN REVOLUTION: AFRICAN RESISTANCE AND MARRONNAGE IN THE SIXTEENTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

Enslaved Africans rebelled against their new circumstances from the moment of their arrival on what was then called *Española*. As early as

1503, the governor of Española, Nicolás de Ovando, lamented to the Spanish crown that the *ladinos* were consistently escaping after having learned “bad customs” from the Taíno.<sup>14</sup> Some of these self-liberated *ladinos* took up residence with members of the remaining Taíno population and participated in the *cacique* Enriquillo’s war against the Spanish that lasted from 1519 to 1534. Proximity to the Taíno while working in the gold mines was assumed to have instilled in the *ladino* bondspople a growing sense of discontent with enslavement; Ovando suggested that they be replaced with *bozales* – captive Africans born and socialized on the continent – assuming they would be easier to control because of their lack of exposure to the Spanish culture and language, and the Christian religion.<sup>15</sup> Ovando’s presumption was also based on a growing belief that “Europeanness” was the pinnacle of human superiority, while its opposite – non-Christian Africanness – was solely eligible for the opposite of freedom – slavery. Spanish colonists racialized enslaved *ladinos* and *bozales* in contrasting ways that nonetheless denied their intelligence and the essence of their humanity. Colonists described runaways as *cimarrons*, meaning wild or untamed in Spanish. The denial of runaways’ inherent impulses to be free by relegating their actions to those of unruly animals established a false dichotomy in slaveowners’ thinking about enslaved people that would last for centuries to come: the notion that freedom was a foreign concept to African people and therefore any of their attempts to self-liberate were dismissed as impossible (Trouillot 1995).

This sentiment was proven incorrect when, on Christmas Day of 1521, African *bozales* staged the first black-led uprising against enslavement in the Americas. A group of twenty Wolofs from Diego Columbus’ sugar mill recruited several other enslaved Africans and autochthonous individuals from a nearby plantation in an attempt to seize the town of Azua and then join Enriquillo in the Baoruco mountains.<sup>16</sup> By the second day of their escape, the rebels had secured weapons, killed several Spaniards, and mobilized a force of at least 400 black and indigenous people. The insurgents intended to kill all the “Christians” at the sugar mills, farms, and towns, including those at Enriquillo’s former home at San Juan de la Maguana.<sup>17</sup> The early presence of Wolofs in the Americas was a result of Spanish-controlled commercial trading through the *Damel* of Kajoor in the Senegambia region during the early sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup> These Wolofs were part of region-wide warrior traditions, and possibly were Muslims who may have been carrying out a continuation of jihad against the Spanish Christians as vengeance for their bondage.<sup>19</sup>

Archival records indicate that even after the 1521 revolt, colonial officials downplayed repeated uprisings and Africans' active participation in them to conceal a gradual loss of control over the enslaved population and the countryside outside the capital city of Santo Domingo, where maroons increasingly reigned. For example, a group of Wolof runaways attacked various plantations on horseback; their riding skills impressed, or embarrassed, Spanish representatives in Española.<sup>20</sup> King Charles V of Spain wrote a letter in December 1523, suggesting colonists in Española arm themselves given the growing African population.<sup>21</sup> In April 1528, the Crown received notice that there were

blacks that are run-aways and of wicked life and wiles that are not domestic, nor do they work as they are obliged, and [they] induce and call the other blacks that are peaceful and working to leave and rebel and do other crimes and ills, from which it results that the said blacks that are in the mines and other farms and businesses rebel and commit other crimes.

The king issued an order to the governor of Española to investigate the number of escaped Africans in the colony so that they could be returned and placed under surveillance.<sup>22</sup> Some runaways were captured, jailed, and sentenced to execution, which the Spanish crown attempted to expedite as they awaited their punishment.<sup>23</sup> The Spanish implemented waves of ordinances aimed at controlling the enslaved and implemented new taxes to finance military expeditions, but these were largely unsuccessful. Well-known leaders Diego Guzman, Diego Ocampo – who negotiated his freedom along with some 30 others – Miguel Biafara, Juan Criollo, and Juan Canario descended from the Baoruco mountains and constantly harassed the Spanish. These incursions prevented Spanish expansion into the countryside and kept settlements contained to Santo Domingo.<sup>24</sup> Accounts from 1532 describe a privileged enslaved man who killed his owner, then prompted others to begin a “killing spree” – but the perpetrators went unpunished because no one wanted to admit the uprising had occurred.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1540s, there were as many as seven thousand maroons living, mining, and trading independently in the eastern country and mountains, and population imbalances between the increasing number of enslaved Kongolese and plantation personnel left sugar plantations vulnerable to raids.<sup>26</sup> Maroon presence had spread beyond the city of Santo Domingo and the Baoruco mountains, reaching as far northwest as what later became Môle Saint Nicolas.<sup>27</sup> Maroons developed subsistence spaces – called *montes* by Spanish colonists – for raising livestock, agriculture, and collecting



drinking water. These spaces were attractive to enslaved people, runaways, and indigenous people who were seeking not only freedom but additional food to subsidize the inadequate provisions they received on plantations. Maroons shaped the island's ecological landscape by subverting Spanish authority, waging war, and financially benefitting from their production through trade.<sup>28</sup> In 1544, military squads were sent to fight two maroon groups roaming the island; one group was composed of 15 rebels and the other group had 37 members, but most were killed or captured then returned to their owners. These maroons seem to have had nearly complete control over the countryside and, in April 1545, Prince Philip of Spain expressed concern that there were so many rebellious blacks occupying the island's central zone that local Spaniards feared leaving their farms unless they were in groups, and that they had to sleep in shifts with weapons in their hands. Yet, despite the overwhelming presence of rebellious Wolofs in the 1521 uprising, Prince Philip continued to insist that the menace was due to *ladino* activity rather than that of the *bozales*, whom he believed did not have the ability to organize a revolt.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the 1540s, black rebellion was so widespread that by 1548 maroons had destroyed two-thirds of the island's sugar plantations.<sup>30</sup> One such African rebel was Sebastian Lemba, a feared Kongolese maroon who led Baoruco encampments for 15 years. Spanish sources described him as a highly skilled blacksmith with extensive military knowledge, which he used to organize West Central African-style raids on nearby plantations, dispersing his forces of 140 small groups to attack from varying directions.<sup>31</sup> During one such incursion for food, clothing, salt, and women, he kidnapped another KiKongo-speaking blacksmith to aid with the production of weapons.<sup>32</sup> The Spanish initiated convoys into the mountains, where they found many Taínos and Africans; Lemba was caught and executed in 1547. Colonists propped his head on a city wall in Santo Domingo – Porta de Lemba – as a warning to repress other potential rebellions. Years after the execution, residents of Santo Domingo remembered Lemba as a military leader, regarding him as “Captain Lemba” whose confrontations with colonial forces were a “war.”<sup>33</sup> Other rebels who rose up met a similar fate. Fernando Monteros and, later in Spring 1554, Juan Vaquero “the cowboy” were hung and quartered, and Monteros' body parts were displayed along the roads leading to Santo Domingo and in the city plaza.<sup>34</sup>

By the late sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century, the Spanish presence in western Española was declining, in part due to the constant threat of African rebellion. Maroons continued to establish strongholds

throughout the island, especially in the regions that would become part of French Saint-Domingue. Not only were maroons a mainstay in the Baoruco mountains and Môle Saint Nicolas, they also settled in areas including Fort Dauphin, the Artibonite Valley, and the Grand Anse southern peninsula.<sup>35</sup> The Spanish could no longer sufficiently defend themselves against the encroachment of the English and the Dutch, but more particularly the French. A greater number of French travelers and *boucaneer* sea raiders descended on Tortuga, a small island off the northwestern coast. There the French *boucaniers* met and began trading with Senegambian and West Central African runaways who had made their way from the island's Spanish side. Two African maroons, presumably Senegambians based on their ethnonym-based surnames – Cristobal Fula and Antonio Mandinga – spoke in court testimonies that they hunted and skinned cattle and brought the skins to the island's northern coasts, where they traded textiles with the Portuguese and the French.<sup>36</sup> Kongo-Angolans were brought to the island in part because of the 1580 union between the Spanish and the Portuguese, who for over a century already had trade relations and presence in the Kongolands, resulting in West Central African captives becoming the dominant group transported to the island in the seventeenth century. In the 1590s, the Spanish sent cavalry troops against the absconders in the north, where they captured several of the most “dangerous” Angolans: Louis Angola, who ran away with his pregnant Biafran wife, Antonin Angola, and Sebastian Angola. Subsequent expeditions to capture maroons in the north were unsuccessful, and in the face of defeat the Spanish organized a program to depopulate the north and to relocate to the south in 1605, essentially ceding the west to the French – and to the maroons.<sup>37</sup>

The Española census indicated that black and white populations steeply decreased after the forced relocation policy and also after the decline in new African arrivals: in 1606 there were almost 10,000 free and enslaved people, then only 4,500 in 1681.<sup>38</sup> As early as the mid-seventeenth century, the French informally settled on the island's western region in larger numbers and illegally trafficked Africans to develop sugar enterprises in what was soon to become Saint-Domingue. This included raids on Spanish towns; for example, a *ladino* maroon was said to have participated in a 1644 French incursion on Azua where several enslaved people were taken.<sup>39</sup> African and African descended captives posed as much of a threat to the French as they had been to the Spanish, and as Chapter 6 will discuss further, they quickly took note of the contestation over the west–east border and exploited it and French–Spanish tensions to their benefit. A “gang of warriors,” comprised of over 30 Africans, was captured in the Baoruco

mountains; many of these were Senegambians, as signified by their names: Juan Faula, Juan Mandigo, Beatriz Mandinga, Maria Mandinga, Francisco Mandinga, Anton Xolofo, and Ana Mandinga.<sup>40</sup> In 1662, a Spanish archbishop was sent to peacefully reduce the number of runaways in the Baoruco mountains. There he found 600 self-liberated families encamped in four *palenques*, another Spanish term for runaway communities, along the southern coast. The archbishop attempted to compromise with them; however, these maroons were self-sufficient and did not feel the need to negotiate surrender. They had corn and other crops, livestock, and the women searched for gold in the rivers. The men traded these goods in Santo Domingo – possibly with various African ethnic Catholic brotherhoods – and made weapons from iron and steel they acquired.<sup>41</sup>

There is no official count of maroons on the island in the seventeenth century, but it is likely that the settlements in Môle Saint Nicolas, Fort Dauphin, Artibonite, and Grand Anse expanded like the Baoruco mountain communities. Once the French officially claimed lands in a largely deserted western Española, the island's population majority were politically and economically autonomous black people who had already waged a century-long struggle against enslavement on sugar plantations in the form of marronnage. Geographic spaces like Tête des Nègres at Môle Saint Nicolas and Fonds des Nègres in Grand Anse reflect the historical presence of maroons who probably remained in their settlements and reproduced families. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century struggle against slavery had quickened the disruption of the Spanish colonial sugar industry, leading to broader legal and repressive measures in the 1680 *Siete Partidas* to constrain all black people including free blacks, *ladinos*, and *bozales*. Repression of free, enslaved, and maroon black people continued in the early eighteenth century as the French colonial state created its *maréchaussée* fugitive slave police force to support plantation economy development (also see Chapters 6 and 7). The historical memory of the maroon struggle, early collaboration with indigenous Taínos, and the significance of the Baoruco mountains and the countryside surrounding Santo Domingo as geographic scenes of action continued to be part of the cultural landscape that welcomed newly arrived Africans under French rule at the turn of the eighteenth century.

## FRENCH SLAVERY AND RACE IN SAINT-DOMINGUE

Structures and processes of human commodification, labor exploitation, death, and resistance were present in the Spanish colonial period and

escalated under the French. While African resistance contributed to dismantling the Spanish sugar industry at Española, French forces took advantage of the vacuum of imperial power and ushered in an intensified, crop-diverse plantation system that relied on human commodification, labor exploitation, and racial hierarchy, and engendered an invigorated wave of death and resistance among the enslaved. French imperial expansion began in the seventeenth century and spread to several colonies in North America and the Caribbean. Plantation owners and colonists included few settlers compared to the growing number of enslaved African laborers, furthering the economic productivity of slave-holding Caribbean colonies. Early seventeenth-century French slave trading activity was largely clandestine and/or illegal, thus much evidence for this period is lacking. Still, the French established several trading companies and claimed various locations within the Caribbean, including Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Christopher and western Española, or Saint-Domingue. The development of the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* (West Indies Company) in 1664 expanded and elevated slave trading and commercialism for the French crown.<sup>42</sup> The king of France deemed enslaved labor in the Caribbean islands as an “absolute necessity” to increase cultivation of cocoa, indigo, coffee, tobacco, and especially sugar, so he issued “a government bounty . . . on every African slave exported to the Americas.”<sup>43</sup> As profits from the Caribbean colonies, especially Martinique, grew, the French Crown’s 1685 *Code Noir* implemented mandates to dictate the slave trade and the people who were trafficked as enslaved labor.

After decades of raids from French, British, and Dutch pirates on western Española, and conflict between the French and Spanish, the Spanish officially ceded the contested territory to the French with the signing of the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick (Figure 2.1).<sup>44</sup> Chapter 6 will explore in more depth the position of enslaved Africans during ongoing contestations over the borderlands between the Spanish and the French – struggles that continued even after the treaty’s ratification. The treaty formally recognized French presence in the island’s western area, which they named Saint-Domingue – while the eastern territory still under Spanish rule was generally referred to as Santo Domingo. As Julius Scott has argued, during the seventeenth century several Caribbean islands, including Española, were essentially frontier zones populated by members of the “masterless class” – maroons, pirates, and European immigrant laborers. The turn of the eighteenth century, however, marked the rise of sugar production in the Caribbean and the unprecedented surge of the transAtlantic slave trade.<sup>45</sup> Though more research on early

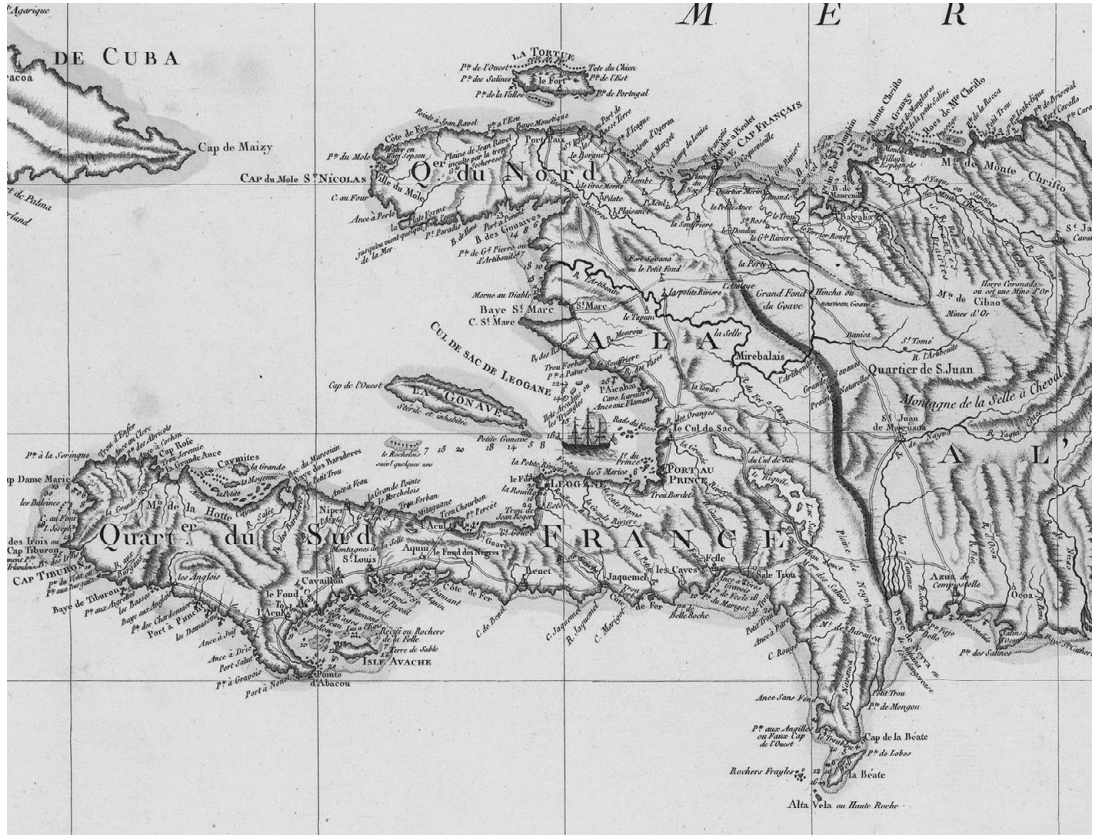


FIGURE 2.1. “Carte de l’Isle de St. Domingue”, Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library

eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue is needed, the French presence in western Española was solidified by the turn of the eighteenth century, and sugar and indigo production expanded. The steady output stimulated a growth in the enslaved population. In the century's first decade and a half, just over 10,000 African captives disembarked at Saint-Domingue. By 1716, the yearly number of Africans arriving was over 14,000, which more than doubled between 1736 and 1745. Cap Français was a main port site for the French trade, receiving over 9,000 ships in 1790 alone. In 1728 there were 50,000 enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue; in 1754 that figure increased to 172,000, then reached 500,000 by the end of the century.<sup>46</sup> Approximately one-third of these newly arrived Africans arrived in the northern port city Cap Français, and other ports such as Port-au-Prince and Jérémie were used to a lesser extent. There remained a gender imbalance between enslaved men and women and the colonial living conditions for the enslaved were so deadly that the Africans did not sustain and reproduce themselves, which led plantation owners to continually replace that pool of laborers with new, Africa-born captives.<sup>47</sup> The unnaturally enormous and rapid growth of sugar production and of the enslaved African population transformed Saint-Domingue into a full-scale plantation-based slave society – completing the sugar revolution first initiated by the Spanish in the sixteenth century.

In contrast to slavery in Africa, or any other known slave society where social or economic status was usually the primary factor in being enslaved, the European slave trade introduced racial dynamics that drastically altered the nature of bondage in the “New World,” simultaneously ushering in unequal power relations that permeated the fabric of the modern era (Winant 2001). Supported by evolving ideological and religious beliefs that Africans, especially those who were not baptized as Christians, were uncivilized, barbaric, and backwards, chattel slavery in the Americas generally operated on a polarity of opposing racial identities where blackness was equated with slave status, whiteness with liberty and freedom, and indigenous, Asian, and multi-racial individuals occupied intermediate spaces. The global political and economic forces of enslaving and capitalist development that deliberately precluded black people from power and other institutional resources to create change in their respective locations shaped the collective experiences of Africans in the early modern diaspora (Hamilton 1988, 2007). European colonies in the Americas, particularly sugar producing islands that were wholly dependent on slave labor, actively prevented African descendants from having full participation in or access to decision-making liberties within spheres

of political representation, education, and social or economic development (Stinchcombe 1995).

As competition between the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, and French for control of the slave trade and demands for sugar intensified, so did the exploitation of unfree labor and the hardening of racial lines using legal and coercive means. Violence was the primary idiom that upheld economic, social, and political powerlessness among enslaved people and repressed acts of rebellion. The *Code Noir*, the French statute on slavery, legally codified the brute force of slavery as well as the racialization of freedom and slavery. The *Code Noir* allowed European men to marry enslaved and free African and African-descended women, creating a paternalistic racial structure that distributed power and resources according to racial identity and biological connectedness to whiteness. Coerced interracial relationships produced a small mixed-race population, the *gens du couleur libre* – or free people of color – who inherited wealth, land, and social mobility from their fathers. Though some mixed-race African descendants remained enslaved, many obtained manumission, educational opportunities in France, financial capital, and prosperous plantation estates and numbers of slaves that at times rivaled that of rich, white Saint-Dominguans.<sup>48</sup> Racial categorization of those who were not “purely” white was an obsession of sorts in Saint-Domingue – so much so that writer Moreau de Saint-Méry developed an elaborate schema describing 128 combinations of black, white, and AmerIndian mixtures, based on “classes” of skin tones, facial features, and hair types. Even the small number of free and enslaved sub-continental Indians were included in Moreau de Saint-Méry’s model; though he compared them to whites in character, he also implied their susceptibility to downward mobility due to their darker skin or any intermingling with Africans.<sup>49</sup> The resulting overarching categories included the *mulâtre*, who was half-white, half-black; the *quarteron*, one-quarter black; and the *griffe*, three-quarters black.<sup>50</sup> Among the population of those who descended from Africans, there was considerable stratification according to skin color, ethnicity or lineage, slave status, and social class, which would later inform political struggles in the colony during the late 1780s and early 1790s.

The free people of color numbered over 27,000 and comprised 47 percent of the entire free population, accounting for a little over 5 percent of the colony. They found success in the coffee and, increasingly, the indigo niche markets, which required less start-up funds and smaller workforces, making them safer investments than sugar plantations.<sup>51</sup> Free women of

color were especially entrepreneurial in Saint-Domingue's urban centers. Their economic activities in domestic work allowed them to accumulate capital and shift toward the buying and selling of slaves, real estate, and luxury goods distribution.<sup>52</sup> During the late eighteenth century, French laws increasingly excluded free people of color from various occupations and prevented them from accessing full political representation in France. Despite their small numbers, the frustrations of this wealthy and powerful group triggered their campaign for citizenship led by *quarterons* Vincent Ogé and Julian Raimond, who challenged the French national assembly in 1790.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the *gens du couleur*, some enslaved Africans and creoles in urban areas with artisanal trades could purchase their freedom or receive manumission from a family member. These former slaves – *affranchis* – were a modestly wealthy group who often maintained connections to the enslaved population through family, ethnic identity bonds, and work relations. For example, Toussaint Louverture was an *affranchi* before the Haitian Revolution, and his innermost circle was mostly comprised of free and enslaved Fon-speakers of the Arada nation.<sup>54</sup> In 1789, there were over one thousand free women and men of color living in Cap Français, many of whom owned homes, businesses, and enslaved Africans.<sup>55</sup> Cooks, carpenters, hairdressers, tailors, and other such workers from the Kongo and the Bight of Benin bought their liberty. Enslaved seamstresses also occupied the higher echelons of the bonded labor force. They trained in France to learn about the latest fashion trends and their owners leased them to other enslavers, allowing them to freely travel to markets or to see their clients. These women then used their geographic mobility and earned income to manumit themselves.<sup>56</sup>

No singular racial identity existed among the African-descended population in Saint-Domingue due to the colonial hierarchy and stratification. Though free people of color faced racial discrimination and oppression, only the lives and labor of enslaved Africans and African descendants were commodified and exploited for the profit of others. Enslaved people, formerly enslaved *affranchis* and privileged *gens du couleur*, and self-emancipated maroons were mostly disconnected, though there were moments and situations where cooperation and solidarity, however fraught, among these groups was forged. Except for a few, most *gens du couleur* separated themselves socially, economically, and politically from Africanness and blackness. Free people of color held economic interests grounded in plantation slavery and virulently fought against abolition until it became painfully clear that civil rights for free people of color were only viable with the contributions of an army of



emancipated slaves. Before, during, and after the revolutionary era, racial solidarity between enslaved people, maroons, and free people of color was highly situational and vulnerable to cleavages along economic or political lines. Chapter 4 will explore aspects of solidarity building among maroons, and Chapter 7 will examine the temporal nature of marronnage and the interactive patterns forged through collective escape and rebellion. As this book argues, these were key processes that enhanced racial consciousness and solidarity, and informed both the struggle for independence in 1802 and post-revolutionary conceptions of race and citizenship. By declaring blackness as the undergirding qualifier for freedom and citizenship in the constitution, the Haitian revolutionary state became a “maroon nation” that had broken away from and subverted the racial capitalist order of the early modern Atlantic world (Roberts 2015; Gonzalez 2019).

## THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF LABOR EXPLOITATION

The major city of Saint-Domingue, and the wealthiest of all the French colonies, was Cap Français, usually referred to as Le Cap, a port along the northern coast. Known as the Northern plain, an area that spanned 75 kilometers from east to west and 25 kilometers from north to south of Le Cap, the districts surrounding and including the bustling port were the most affluent and opulent in the colony.<sup>57</sup> The city was home to a mixture of people – poor and wealthy whites, enslaved people who leased themselves out for contracted work, the *gens du couleur*, and *affranchi* artisans. Its social life was vibrant and included masonic lodges, philosophical and scientific societies, cafés, dance halls and theaters, rum shops, and churches. The city was also an attraction for visitors and runaway slaves who sought refuge there by passing as free. In the years of the North American War for Independence, some 200 runaways were found renting rooms in houses owned by free people of color during a police sweep of the Petite Guinée (Little Guinea) neighborhood on the west side of Le Cap.<sup>58</sup> The city was home to the *marché des nègres*, or the negro market, where, especially on Sundays, enslaved people from rural districts brought foodstuffs to buy and sell. The enslaved population for this region was about 170,000. [Table 2.2](#)<sup>59</sup> shows the population distribution of Le Cap’s surrounding parishes as well as those outside Port-au-Prince, the colonial capital and next most populated city.<sup>60</sup>

By 1789, the nearly 500,000 enslaved African and African descendants in Saint-Domingue were held on over 7,800 plantations: over 3,000 that grew indigo; 3,000 coffee producers; nearly 800 that cultivated cotton;

TABLE 2.2. *Population distribution of enslaved African diasporans, 1789*

Province	Region	Parishes	Number of African Diasporans
North	Le Cap	Le Cap and its dependences	21,613
		Petite Anse and Plain of Le Cap	11,122
		L'Acul, Limonade and St. Susan	19,876
		Quartier Morin and Grand Rivière	18,554
		Dondon and Marmelade	17,376
	Fort Dauphin	Limbé and Port Margot	15,978
		Plaisance and Le Borgne	15,018
		Fort Dauphin	10,004
	Port de Paix	Ouanaminthe and Vallière	9,987
		Terrier Rouge and Le Trou	15,476
	Mole St. Nicholas	Port de Paix, St. Louis, Jean Rabel, etc.	29,540
	Mole and Bombarde	3,183	
West	Port-au-Prince	Port au Prince	42,848
		Arcahaye	18,553
		Mirebalais	10,902
	Léogâne	Léogâne	14,896
	St. Marc	St. Marc, Petite Rivière, Verettes, and Gonaïves	57,216
	Petit Goâve	Petit Goâve, Grand Goâve, Le Fond des Nègres	18,829
		L'Anse a Vaux, le Petit Trou	13,229
Jérémie	Jérémie and Cape Dame Marie	20,774	
South	The Cayes	The Cayes and Torbuk/Torbeck	30,937
	Tiburon	Cape Tiburon and Les Côteaux	8,153
	St. Louis	St. Louis, Cavaillon, and Aquin	18,785
	Jacmel	Jacmel, Les Cayes, and Baynet	21,151
<b>Total</b>			<b>464,000</b>

and nearly 800 plantations that were producing sugar, which was the key to the colonial economy. Enslaved women, men, and children in this plantation economy lived within distinctly oppressive conditions. They were considered chattel that were commodities and forms of capital, typically counted alongside furniture and animals; they received no wages, nor did they have any political or legal rights or representation.<sup>61</sup> Depending on crop growth and geographic location, plantations had as

many as 250 enslaved African and African-descended women and men who performed a range of tasks that were hierarchically ranked according to the level of arduousness associated with the work. “Field hands” were those who spent the most time performing physical tasks: cultivating the ground, cutting and harvesting crops, then processing crops in preparation for sale and transport. *Commandeurs*, or slave drivers, were typically enslaved men who sometimes carried a whip to monitor and discipline the work gangs in the stead of the plantation’s owner. The *commandeur* was one of the most important positions on most plantations, since owners relied on them to guide the everyday labor practices and prevent any problems with enslaved workers. Though there were examples to the contrary, enslaved creole men typically occupied higher-ranked positions, including those that required artisanal apprenticeship, while women and Africans made up most of the field hands.

Men typically outnumbered women on plantations due to preferences for men during the early phases of the Atlantic trade, though the sex ratio came into balance in the years approaching the Haitian Revolution.<sup>62</sup> Despite, or perhaps due to, the apparent dominance of a male presence, the division of labor between enslaved men and women had little variance. Few women occupied the domestic arena labor force that had responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, laundry, and healthcare; generally, women rarely occupied specialized positions compared to those who performed strenuous field hand labor. Conversely, there were an array of specialized areas that enslaved men occupied, such as drivers, sugar boilers, watchmen or valets. On sugar plantations, it was regular for women and men to cut cane side-by-side as well as perform other tasks in the distilling and refining processes.<sup>63</sup> Gender compositions and divisions of labor were largely dependent on crop growth, as were ethnic divisions of labor. What follows is a description of plantation life, focusing on Saint-Domingue’s major commodities: sugar, coffee, and indigo.

### Indigo

Saint-Domingue began cultivating indigo in the early 1700s, though it was not wildly profitable, as potential planters initially considered the indigo trade to be an entryway to begin sugar and coffee production. However, since the start-up costs for indigo production were lower, Saint-Domingue’s free people of color gained wealth in indigo development in the latter three decades of the eighteenth century. In the south, illegal trading between free planters and merchants from Curaçao and Jamaica

bolstered indigo sales.<sup>64</sup> While most sugar plantations had as many as 250 enslaved workers, indigo plantations were smaller with between 30 and 80 workers in the 1780s. The 1784 sale of an indigo plantation in southern Torbeck included 72 enslaved people, indicating indigo estates were growing after the Seven Years War.<sup>65</sup> The workload was less arduous relative to sugar plantations. There was constant planting and weeding of the indigo shrubs, which laborers uprooted and replanted several times beginning at the start of the annual rainy season. Men used hoes to dig the holes while women followed, placing the seeds and covering them. As laborers collected bundles of the plant, they were placed into a basin of water and allowed to ferment until the liquid dye emerged and the men drained the basin.

As Chapter 1 explained, geographic location seems to have influenced the ethnic composition of enslaved Africans on plantations, with more homogeneity in the north, an even mixture in the west, and more diversity in the south. The degree of ethnic diversity or cohesion among the enslaved work force depended on planters' proximity to major port cities, their financial ability to pay higher prices for "in-demand" ethnic groups, as well as their perceptions of each African ethnic group's health and diet, physical strength, agricultural experience, and overall disposition. Just as Moreau de Saint-Méry documented the perceived attitudes of multi-racial individuals, slave traders, plantation owners, and horticulturalists relied on stereotypes to populate their plantations. Planters surrounding Le Cap had their choice of bondpeople, since most African captives disembarked there, while toward the west and especially the south planters purchased captives from less commonly exploited regions. In the north, indigo plantations had over 60 percent of Central Africans, but only 16 percent from the Bight of Benin, and even less, 1 percent, from the Bight of Biafra. In the west, there was near parity between Central Africans and those from Benin; while in the south there was no clear majority: 33 percent Central Africans, 19 percent Biafrans, 18 percent from Benin.<sup>66</sup> The Torbeck plantation, owned by Lemoine-Drouet, included 33 men, 22 women, 12 boys and 5 girls. Twenty-one of the adults were colony-born creoles, but the others were African-born: 21 Kongos, 4 Cangas, 4 Mandigues, 2 Minas, 2 Thiambas/Quiambas, and 1 Senegalaise (Senegambian).<sup>67</sup> Among them were one creole *commandeur* Gerome, aged 28; an 18-year-old wig-maker named Philippe; 2 creole servants named Jeannette, aged 45, and Sanitte; and Marie Jeanne, a creole *hospitalière*, or healthcare provider to the enslaved, aged 45. On plantations like at Torbeck, various African ethnic groups interacted with each

other and forged solidarity through labor and proximity. However, ethnic cohesion, rather than diversity, of especially sugar and coffee plantations in the north likely contributed to a sense of solidarity that facilitated the 1791 uprising (Geggus 1999).

### Coffee

Coffee plantations tended to have fewer creoles and more enslaved Africans, specifically larger numbers of the African ethnic groups sugar producers deemed undesirable, such as the Kongo, Bibi, Mondongue, or the Igbo. P. J. Laborie's *The Coffee Planter of Saint Domingo* (1798) served as an instruction manual for British planters planning coffee cultivation in Jamaica and provided insights into common practices on Saint Dominguan *caf eries*. According to Laborie, Kongos, Aradas, and Thiambas were the most desirable groups; Kongos were considered especially docile. However, as Chapter 3 will explain, several rebellious ritualists were West Central Africans based in northern coffee plantations. Laborie made other suggestions, such as organizing work gangs by ethnicity, ensuring that they received warm baths to help them adjust to the climate, and having the enslaver, rather than other Africans, baptize the newly-arrived, serving as godparent in order to dissuade non-Christian "superstitious" rituals. Interestingly, he noted that women were not cooperative because they were accustomed to working for men in Africa, perhaps referring to the fact that women performed agricultural labor, especially in West Central Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Coffee rapidly became a leading crop in Saint-Domingue after the Seven Years War and prior to the Haitian Revolution. It grew to rival sugar production between 1767 and 1789, during which time coffee export profits boomed sixfold and served to loosen France's grip on the colony. As I discuss further below, the increase in imported Africans corresponded to the growth of coffee sales between the years 1783 and 1788 (Table 2.3). Whereas sugar required large, flat plots of land, Saint-Domingue's heavy rainfall and cool temperatures in the mountainous highlands supported coffee cultivation on smaller plots. Planter Elias Monnereau noted: "At present there are scarce any plantations upon the mountains without being planted with coffee."<sup>69</sup> For example, Port Margot had 24 coffee plantations or *caf eries*, at the top of the mountain, 15 on the slope, and none at the base.<sup>70</sup> The favorable climate and topography made it considerably easier to start a *caf erie* with less initial capital than one would need for a sugar plantation. Smaller labor forces allowed coffee production to be a low-cost investment. The numbers of

enslaved workers were much lower than the labor force on sugar plantations, which typically were over 200. Coffee plantations tended to be larger in the west, averaging 76 people, than the north or south, averaging 43 and 38, respectively. In the west, coffee originated from Léogâne and spread to Grand-Goâve and sections of Port-au-Prince. Northern parishes that surrounded the Le Cap plains were coffee dominant; for example, Marmelade had 7,000 enslaved on 160 *cafétérias* and several provision grounds, while Dondon had 9,000 on 219 *cafétérias*. This coffee frontier originated in Terrier-Rouge and eventually spread southwestward toward l'Acul and Plaisance. In the southern peninsula region of Grand Anse, the Jérémie parish contributed a substantial amount of coffee in the 1770s and 1780s.<sup>71</sup>

### Sugar

If coffee and indigo growth stimulated the raw wealth for capital accumulation throughout the early French Empire, sugar was its cash cow. Sugar slowly gained popularity among Europeans, beginning as a delicacy for the upper classes and becoming a dietary staple for members of European societies. French traders and merchants established plantations in the lesser Antilles islands, beginning in the late seventeenth century, outfitted primarily for sugar cane cultivation. Sugar production was an intensive, multi-step process, and necessary technology had not developed sufficiently to make the sugar trade significant on a worldwide scale. However, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cultivation processes became more refined and sugar exports from the Americas to Europe multiplied exponentially.<sup>72</sup> Though other French and English colonies were also substantial contributors to the sugar trade, Saint-Domingue ascended to the top of the export chain by out-producing all of them combined at the end of the eighteenth century. Saint-Domingue became known as the “Pearl of the Antilles” by exporting 100 million pounds of sugar in 1765, and by 1788 sugar exports reached 200 million pounds.<sup>73</sup>

There were nearly 800 sugar plantations in Saint-Domingue by 1789. While this may not seem like a substantial number compared to coffee, sugar plantations were larger, more intensive operations that included a diversified labor force. Sugar plantations dominated the north; they averaged between 150 and 200 enslaved people, and were the largest in the north but slightly smaller in the west.<sup>74</sup> For example, the five Galliffet plantations, some of the most industrious in the colony, held a combined total of over 1,000 enslaved people.<sup>75</sup> A wealthy class of planters known

as *grand blancs*, or the “big” whites, heavily invested in the industrialization of sugar. French merchants funded many of these *grand blancs*, who used their capital to develop and run large sugar plantations. These merchants also controlled international trade by dictating prices for products such as food and commodities, as well as the prices for enslaved Africans.<sup>76</sup> *Petit blancs*, or “small” whites were overseers, artisans, shopkeepers, managers, or small-scale plantation owners.

Sugar estates were akin to compounds, with several buildings including the main house for the plantation owner, several housing units – more like shacks – for the bondspeople, animal quarters, an infirmary, and sugar-processing buildings – all covering up to 750 acres. At the height of cultivation season, work days lasted for 24 hours as enslaved people worked in shifts, receiving as little as four hours of sleep per night and a small window for lunch that allowed them time to cultivate their own gardens. During work hours, sugar cultivation required all field hands to plant, fertilize, weed, and cut sugar cane stalks. Under the supervision of a *maître sucrier* – sugar boiler monitor, women fed sugar cane stalks into the mill where the juice was extracted that was then boiled several times until it hardened and was prepared for shipping.<sup>77</sup> This was a dangerous process, and it was not uncommon for enslaved laborers to endure accidents such as having limbs cut by machetes or a body part trapped in the sugar grinder. In addition to sugar cane cutting and boiling, estates included farming and ranching, hospital working, midwifery, clothes washing, and other artisanal tasks. The occupational diversity of sugar estates allowed for more social mobility than on coffee plantations, although creole men were preferred for most specialized work.<sup>78</sup> While coffee planters tended to favor captives from the Kongolands, Bight of Benin Africans were more prevalent on sugar plantations, especially in Saint-Domingue’s western and southern regions. Planters regarded them as physically stronger and more capable of agricultural work than other ethnic groups. African ethnic cohesion and the proto-industrial nature of sugar production “proletarianized” the enslaved, contributing to the collective consciousness of the northern bondspeople who organized the August 1791 insurrection (James [1938] 1989, p. 86).

## HUMAN COMMODIFICATION AND DEATH

Enslavement in the Americas forced people to work for no compensation, thus they were alienated from the value of the agricultural items they produced. Based on the work of scholars like C. L. R. James and Eric

Williams, it is generally accepted that the wealth generated from the trade of products extracted using slave labor is a clear connection between slavery and capitalist development in Europe. Recent scholarship also has given attention to the processes of trafficking and converting human beings into commodities to be bought, sold, traded, leased and disposed at the whims of the plantocracy. As the previous chapter discussed, the French procured African captives at coastal ports in exchange for rum, guns, and various other wares. Warfare and violent raids produced an abundance of captives available at African enslaving ports, which entailed a lower price point for human life on the continent than in the colony. Purchasing captive Africans was relatively cheap – according to records from the slave ship *Marie-Séraphique*, between the years 1770 and 1780 the average purchase price of a captive at the Loango Coast was 348 *livres*.<sup>79</sup> Survivors of the Middle Passage were purchased based on their potential productivity as laborers; during the time of the *Marie-Séraphique* voyages, the average price for enslaved people in Saint-Domingue was over four times the selling price in Africa (Table 2.4). The inflation of slave prices between the point of the slave ship's departure and disembarkation further shows that enslavers were interested in maximizing profits at each stage of captivity between the Middle Passage to the Americas (Smallwood 2008; Berry 2017). Not only were African lives perceived as inferior to European lives, they were considered to be *worth less* in economic value until enslavers stripped them of every aspect of their African-ness and converted them into racialized chattel. Planters protected their financial investments in enslaved people by branding their initials to indicate ownership of an enslaved person. To obfuscate their ownership, or the shame of having been commodified and branded like cattle, bondspeople in Saint-Domingue used herbs to heal their scabs and make the brands illegible.<sup>80</sup>

The newly emerging world capitalist system was in part dependent on the expendability of human life (Mignolo 2011), and nowhere was this truer than Saint-Domingue where the deaths of enslaved people was inescapable. Early sources claimed that between one-third and one half of Africans brought to the colony perished in a short time frame, making it one of the deadliest colonies in the Americas.<sup>81</sup> Mass fatalities were not uncommon. For example, an account about an aspiring coffee planter in Dondon claimed that he “set out with a coffee plantation and sixteen negroes; at the end of eighteen months . . . he found himself reduced to a single negro, the fifteen being dead in so short a space of time.”<sup>82</sup> Rather than examine plantation records to calculate death rates as a lens through



TABLE 2.3. *Captive African imports and coffee sales*

Year	Africans imported & sold	[Slave] sales revenue	Cafes sold	Sale prices in the colony
1783	9,370	15,650,000	44,573,000	33,429,750
1784	25,025	43,602,000	57,885,000	44,951,250
1785	21,762	43,634,000	52,885,000	57,368,000
1786	27,648	54,420,000	52,180,000	57,398,000
1787	30,839	60,563,000	70,003,000	91,003,900
1788	29,506	61,936,000	68,151,000	92,003,850

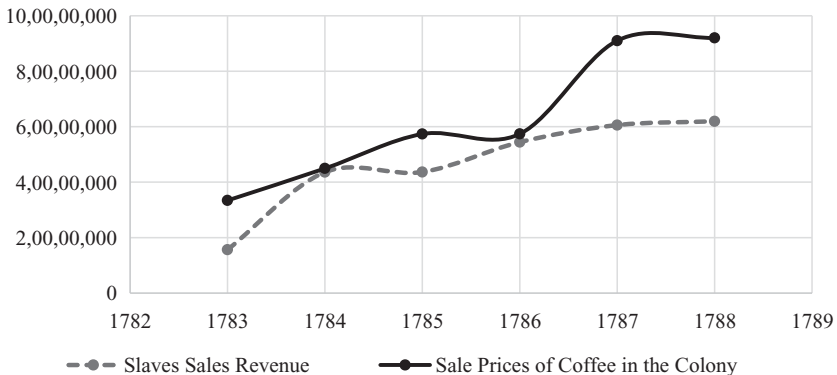


FIGURE 2.2. Slave sales revenue and sale prices of coffee in the colony

which to understand the lack of value of black life, I compare commodity prices to the monetary values associated with enslaved people to gain a glimpse into the ways economic trends reflected the lived reality of bondspeople who were similarly regarded as a commodity. Table 2.3, originally published in *Nouvelles de Saint Domingue*, compares the revenues from the sales of enslaved people (“Slave sales revenue”) and the “sale prices of coffee in the colony.”<sup>83</sup> The visualization of the relationship between “slave sales revenue” and “sale prices of coffee in the colony” represented in Figure 2.2 shows a slow growth of slave revenues while coffee sales quickly climbed toward the late 1780s. From these data points, we can speculate that the higher commodity prices rose, the relative value of black life declined. The growing demand for coffee and sugar in a global market stimulated the slave trade and likely was the cause for worsening conditions on plantations.

Table 2.4, originally published in *Les Affiches américaines*, similarly allows us to see the relationship between slave and sugar prices by

TABLE 2.4. “Tableau de comparaison des Nègres, depuis 1730, jusqu’à 1786, dans la Colonie de Saint-Domingue”

Year	Average price of <i>nègres</i>	Average price of raw sugar	Representative of the value of <i>nègres</i> in quintals of sugar	Fractions of quintal
1730	1,000 <i>livres</i>	8 <i>livres</i>	125	
1740	1,200 <i>livres</i>	18	66	deux tiers
1750	1,300 <i>livres</i>	24	54	un seizième
1765	1,450 <i>livres</i>	35	41	trois septièmes
1770	1,600 <i>livres</i>	33	48	seize 33ème
1775	1,650 <i>livres</i>	35	47	un septième
1778	1,600 <i>livres</i>	36	44	quatre neuvièmes
1786	1,968 <i>livres</i>	31	63	quinze 31ème

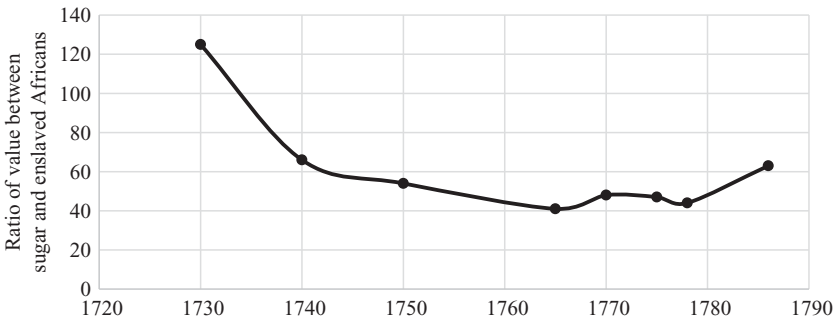


FIGURE 2.3. Representative of the value of enslaved africans in “quintals” of sugar

showing the trajectory of average slave prices over time, beginning with 1,000 *livres* in 1730 and ending with 1,968 *livres* in 1786.<sup>84</sup> While the price of slaves almost doubled over the 50-year period, the average price of raw sugar nearly quadrupled. The table column labelled “Representative of the value of *nègres* in quintals of sugar” displays the ratio between the average prices of enslaved people and average prices of raw sugar, and indicates a steady decline of the slave value–sugar price ratio. Therefore, when the value of sugar increased, the value of enslaved people decreased in relation to that of sugar. This ratio was not merely an economic statistic; it had real-life implications, especially given the well-known rigor and dangerous life on plantations. The increased sugar and coffee prices created incentives to increase production, which meant more forced labor, longer workdays, and more brutal practices to squeeze every

ounce of energy from the enslaved workers. Figure 2.3 displays the ratio between slave and sugar prices, “representative of the value of *négres* in quintals of sugar”; the ratio’s decrease reflects the reality that the abundance of low-priced African captives combined with rapidly increasing demands for sugar essentially cheapened the value of black lives in Saint-Domingue, especially in the years leading to the Haitian Revolution.

The 1685 *Code Noir* was the official royal policy that claimed to provide protected treatment of slaves in the French colonies, and it included a minimum ration of food, clothing, and medical care for the disabled. Yet planters disregarded the *Code*, and plantations provided insufficient clothing, food, shelter, and little to no medical assistance. Only after the king of France reinforced *Code Noir* in 1784 were plantation owners required to provide the enslaved with land plots for cultivation. Newly arrived Africans were given a transition period of six to twelve months of “seasoning,” which was a process of structured care to acclimate the captives to the unfamiliar environment. Despite these efforts, newly arrived Africans died at rapid rates – to the extent that death rates exceeded birth rates throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>85</sup> African women’s fertility and overall health were particularly vulnerable to deterioration due to the trauma and violence of capture, the Middle Passage, and the relentless labor regimes on plantations.<sup>86</sup>

Death was ubiquitous in Saint-Domingue and was particularly unkind to the enslaved population. Diseases such as smallpox, typhoid and yellow fever, dysentery, syphilis, scurvy, and scabies were widespread in the Atlantic zone and prevalent on slave ships due to lack of nourishment, supplies, and sanitation. Sick captives from ships sometimes brought these illnesses to the colony; for example, a slave ship that arrived at Le Cap in 1772 held several smallpox-infected captives who spread the disease, which eventually killed nearly 1,200 people.<sup>87</sup> In addition near unending work schedules, and illness and hunger, brutality toward slaves was commonplace. Enslavers sexually exploited women and girls with regularity and they even sexually violated men. In Trou, group of enslaved domestic laborers killed a planter named Poncet – he was their biological father, who had castrated his sons and committed incest with and impregnated his daughter. Sannite, Poncet’s pregnant daughter, was sentenced to a public hanging after the delivery of what was presumed to be his child.

Indiscretions of any kind were met with violence and torturous acts, some of which was documented by Baron de Vastey. Writing in 1814, de Vastey relayed horrific stories of planters’ treatment of enslaved people,

which occurred frequently and often with impunity. Bordering on sadism, planters buried slaves alive, used their blood to clarify sugar, mutilated their genitals and cut off their limbs, while bloodhounds were commonly trained to hunt and capture enslaved runaways.<sup>88</sup> Enslaved people escaped for a myriad of reasons, one of which was torturous and even murderous plantation owners. In 1741 a wealthy colonist was charged with murdering over 200 of his own slaves, five of whom had been mutilated. His restitution was a 150,000-pound donation to the public works fund.<sup>89</sup> At the Dame de l'Isle Adam property in Plaine du Nord, a former runaway named Thomas was interviewed about his experiences and the reasons he escaped. Thomas was a creole *commandeur* who fled before All Saint's Day in early November 1774, then returned in early January 1775. He fled because he feared retribution from the plantation agent M. Chapuzet for killing a mule, and the agent had a penchant for murdering enslaved people suspected of harming animals. Thomas testified that part of the reason he left was because he was trying to avoid the same fate as his own father, whom Chapuzet murdered for allegedly killing an enslaved woman.<sup>90</sup>

Conceptions of death in popular Kreyol sayings like “moun fèt pou mouri” (people are born to die) point to the overwhelming volume and nature of death that began with the mass casualties of the Taíno and extended into the French colonial period.<sup>91</sup> Death during the Middle Passage, from being overworked, illness, suicide or murder was a commonplace, and they were given the spiritual significance of death in West African and West Central African cosmologies, as were commemorations of the dead. Reverence of deceased familial ancestors and African royalty were and continue to be central to Haitian religious belief and practice. The Guedevis were the indigenous inhabitants of what later became the Dahomey Kingdom and may have been among Dahomey's first victims to slave trading upon losing power to the kingdom's growing imperial dominance. Known as the “children of Guede,” individuals and spirits from the Guedevis formed the Guede rite of *lwa*, or Haitian deities, which today rules over and protects matters concerning the life cycle to ensure collective survival: life, death, health, children, and fertility.<sup>92</sup> Not only can the dead communicate important messages to the living about the mysteries of the material and non-material worlds, but death also represents freedom in the form of repatriation to Africa. The idea that one's soul would return to Africa upon death was a commonly held belief among enslaved people, and in Haiti this notion is made most explicit

in that the sacred, “other-world” of spirits and the dead is referred to as Guinea – the West African coastal region from which most captives from the Bight of Benin were taken.<sup>93</sup> Rituals related to death or the dead figured prominently in the sacred practices of the enslaved, and the next chapter will further explore how death intersected with an ethos of liberation. Though we do not have many records of African Saint Domingans’ funerary practices, the few extant accounts give insights into the re-creation of ritual life in the colony.

### AFRICAN-INSPIRED CULTURAL CREATIONS IN SAINT-DOMINGUE

Members of the African Diaspora did not lose their inherent understandings of themselves or the social and symbolic world(s) as they grappled with forceful separation from their African homelands and their respective social, economic, political, and religious institutions; new geographic locations; new societal structures; and unfamiliar human groups such as Europeans, AmerIndians, and other African ethnic groups. African Diaspora members constructed new and distinct identities and cultural formations that were largely rooted in their homeland worldviews and reformulated and re-articulated in the host society. Their collective ritual life connected them to Africa and to each other, and death rites and other practices helped integrate newly arrived enslaved people into the existing social fabric of the population, enculturating new arrivals and establishing the basis for collective consciousness, solidarity, and means of survival in the colony. Enslaved people in Saint-Domingue, when out of sight from plantation personnel, displayed unseen facets of their personalities through laughter and joking, satirical song, gossip, and storytelling.<sup>94</sup> Some plantation workers employed a communal style of hoeing, timing their strokes to African rhythms. Pierre de Vaissière noted food preparation and eating styles, reverence for the elderly, and cultural expressions through song, dance, and death rites as distinctly African and connected to non-Christian beliefs.<sup>95</sup> Enslaved women practiced extended breastfeeding, a common method of birth control in West and West Central African societies, and even referred to themselves as the mother of their oldest child, suggesting motherhood bestowed a sense of honor. There were strong emotional bonds and affectionate relationships between mothers and their children; enslaved mothers were meticulous in caring for children and took considerable pride in children’s hygiene, appearance, and health.<sup>96</sup>

Saint-Domingue had no formal educational opportunities for the enslaved population, and enslavers and some commentators assumed Africans were intellectually inferior. Yet, the enslaved indeed exemplified intelligence and many were literate in their native languages, including Arabic.<sup>97</sup> African descendants brought to Saint-Domingue from other colonies were familiar with European languages spoken within the Atlantic world. Many advertisements placed in *Les Affiches américaines* made note of runaways' French, Spanish, English, Portuguese, or Dutch reading and writing skills as a form of human capital that could help the person pass for free. Enslaved Africans and African descendants had a "public face" in their contact with whites, but also shared an inner symbolic universe to which whites were not privy (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Gomez 1998).

### Death Rites

One significant way that enslaved people humanized themselves and expressed their African-inspired practices was through funeral rites (Wynter n.d. :77–83). Enslaved people died rapidly and there were several burial sites for unbaptized blacks in Saint-Domingue, although they were not well tended. The law required the enslaved to be buried in alignment with the Catholic faith, but blacks often appropriated these rituals in their own styling and held funerals at night. Whites eventually abandoned the cemeteries, leaving Africans and African descendants to freely practice their sacred traditions for the dead. In a funeral procession in the southern Aquin, people carried with them *garde-corps*, or small figurine "bodyguards." Women followed the body, singing and clapping their hands, while men came behind, playing slow drums. Afterward, family, friends, and members of the same ethnic group gathered for a repast. For several days after the funeral, mourners wore all-white clothing with kerchiefs on their heads.<sup>98</sup>

As a public practice, enslaved peoples' death rites were perhaps more visible to European eyes than other African-inspired cultural practices. As practices unfamiliar to European observers, they were still notable and thus survive in written records. In the 1760s, indigo planter Elias Monnereau documented a funeral ritual that culminated with a unique practice. Family and friends of the deceased invited associates to a Sunday ceremony to which everyone brought something to share, either food, rum, or another alcoholic beverage. As each person arrived, they paid respects and compliments to the dead, then formed a circle at the door

opposite to where the corpse lay to collectively celebrate the person's life with drink. Participants then knelt and recited prayers one after the other, then laid down to kiss the ground. After another drink, they danced in pairs until dinner, at which time they consumed a sacrificed pig.<sup>99</sup>

Michel Descourtiz also observed a funeral that involved the *calenda* dance. A creole woman named Ursule had lost her friend François, and approached Descourtiz begging for a sheep, saying they already had the *banza* guitar and *bamboula* drums prepared for the dancing portion of François' burial ceremony. Ursule sang and wept for her friend: "François, he has gone! Poor François! Poor man who has died!" She suddenly began to dance the *chica*, which Moreau de Saint-Méry identified as having Kongolese origins, saying "let me dance for him, let me dance for him."<sup>100</sup> After the funeral proceedings, loved ones carefully cleaned and tended to corpses in preparation for sending them to burial sites. At times children led the procession in front of the coffin, carrying a large wooden cross to the feast and *calenda* dance.

Peyrac family plantation papers from Croix-de-Bouquet describe an interesting burial ritual wherein observers thought the ceremony was a spectacle or a game rather than a final farewell. Four men carried the deceased in her or his coffin on their shoulders and walked around

with a frightful spell, all at once running in zigzags, sometimes right, sometimes left, pretending that the spirit of the dead did not want to go through this or that road. The women uttered frightful cries, they wept, and conjured the evil spirit not to torment the soul of the deceased. Sometimes the carriers stopped, saying that the dead man did not want to go any further. Soon they resumed their contortions and pretended to let the coffin fall on the ground, but after a thousand exercises of address[ing the community], the body was restored to equilibrium and...deposit[ed] in its last abode. In reality, this strange race, corpse on the shoulder, [is to] "disorient the dead one to prevent him [from] find[ing] the way of his house."<sup>101</sup>

This funerary practice of allowing the dead person's spirit to visit members of the community before their final departure remarkably mirrors burial rites recorded in nineteenth-century Jamaica (Figure 2.4), where Bight of Biafran Igbos and Gold Coast Coromantees were most culturally influential. Processions for the dead on the Anglophone island had a social function of shaping values in the slave community by affirming the social status of the deceased, or by admonishing evil spirits and wrongdoers who were still alive. Some Africans in Jamaica believed that evil spirits could lure the newly dead into haunting the living, and that it was the responsibility of loved ones to ensure a proper burial so the

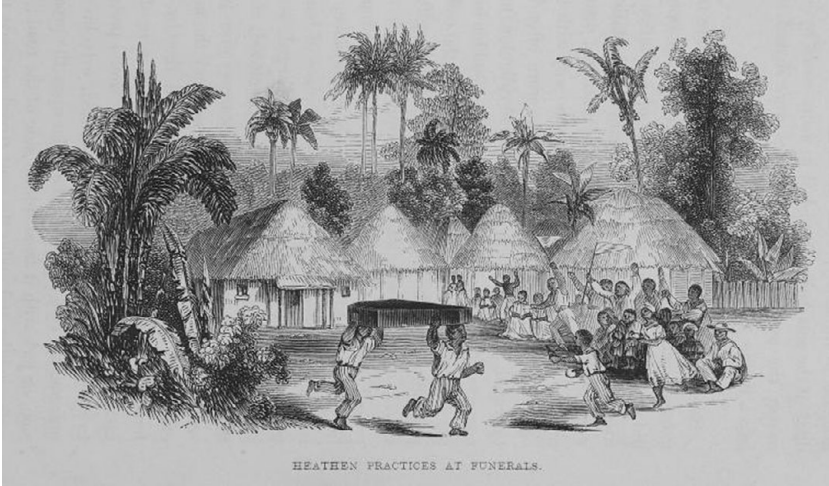


FIGURE 2.4. “Heathen practices at funerals, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture”

spirit could peacefully transition to the other world.<sup>102</sup> Bight of Benin/Gold Coast Minas in Saint Croix reported to a missionary named Christian Oldendorp that only those who “belonged to God” could receive a proper burial and that opposing forces would prevent the bearers from carrying the corpse forward.<sup>103</sup> These beliefs would help explain why the women and pallbearers in the ceremony at the Peyrac plantation in Croix-de-Bouquet allowed the spirit of the deceased to maneuver its way around evil spirits toward its final resting place.

In northern Saint-Domingue, funerals were held at a burial mound called *Croix bossale* at Fossette in the south end of Le Cap. Fossette was a heavily used cemetery, averaging almost two burials per day and completely turning over the cemetery grounds every three years.<sup>104</sup> Fossette, along with the public square in Le Cap, was a gathering space for African-Saint Domingans to hold services that were infused with Africa-inspired and Catholic practices. In accounts from 1777, Fossette was a center of dance and musical activity on Sunday nights and holidays.<sup>105</sup> The burial processions were organized affairs, and leaders were ranked as kings and queens with

sashes of different colors with different types of gold and silver braid that they wear on their jackets, and the women wear around their waist. They pay a subscription of several *portugaises* and burial fees which the others inflate as



they feel like it. These funerals give rise to big processions, at which the sashes are worn.<sup>106</sup>

There was an informal system of inheritance, where a person's belongings were distributed in a hierarchical fashion to her or his children first, other family members second, then to other blacks who also had children.<sup>107</sup> The large parade, mutual aid effort, and uniform costumes are indicators of a lay brotherhood/sisterhood organization for and by black Catholics, as was the case in Afro-Iberian-influenced places like Brazil, Cuba, Rio de la Plata, and even New York and New England. These confraternities held ritual celebrations on Sundays and major holidays, ensured a proper burial for the dead, served as informal banks for enslaved blacks to purchase their freedom, and often were the nexus of identity formation and rebellion organization.<sup>108</sup>

Death was an inescapable reality in Saint-Domingue; therefore, commemorating it, preventing it, and at times inflicting death were core components of African-Saint Dominguan's ritual life. Naturally, the preoccupation with death was accompanied by supernatural powers that enslaved people drew upon to not only address personal concerns, but to critique and rectify the societal imbalances created by racialized enslavement. Thus, death rites, as a mode of enculturation, functioned as platform for resistance to the very racialized enslavement that commodified, exploited, and killed enslaved people. The François Mackandal affair (discussed below and in Chapter 3) and subsequent ritual events stand as examples of spiritual activities intersecting with seditious notions of freedom and liberation. However, participants of these rituals, as well as those rituals described below, came from various African ethnic backgrounds and statuses in the slave community, suggesting solidarity was beginning to form a collective identity around blackness and anti-slavery sentiments.

## WORLDVIEWS AND RITUAL LIFE

Analysis of enslaved populations' lifeways, particularly religious practices, in the Americas must begin with an historical study of Africa – a difficult and complex task due to African geo-political processes and gaps in slave trade data (Lovejoy 1997; Morgan 1997). Africa was and continues to be extremely diverse, with thousands of languages and cultural groups. However, many of these distinct cultural expressions and identities were mutually intelligible through geographic proximity, political

allegiance, and trade relations. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the slave trade did not randomly distribute captive Africans, it trafficked them in homogeneous clusters alongside peoples from neighboring regions (Hall 2005). Further, several African groups shared undergirding worldview principles that informed their behaviors and practices (Herskovits 1958; Mbiti 1990). Christian Oldendorp, a Moravian missionary in eighteenth-century Danish St. Croix, documented findings from his observations, interactions, and conversations with enslaved Africans about their identities, homelands, cultures, and religious beliefs. While he acknowledged variance in Africans' beliefs and practices, there were several areas of overlapping spiritual tenets, including: (1) one supreme, benevolent deity; (2) lesser gods associated with forces of nature, territories, and family that mediate between humans and the supreme god; (3) the use of material objects imbued with sacrality; (4) the performance of prayers and sacrificial offerings to the supreme and lesser gods; (5) ritual leaders, male or female, who also operated as community healers and diviners; and (6) the transmigration of spirits post-mortem.<sup>109</sup>

This historical overview of African worldviews and emergent cultural connections focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the Bight of Benin and West Central Africa. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Ouidah port on the Bight of Benin Coast provided the largest number of slaves to Saint-Domingue. The *vaudoux* – derived from the Fon term *vodun* – was the most well-known ritual in the colony, and the term was probably liberally applied to rituals and practitioners that may have been performing rites from another region. Due to the dominance of West African cultural and religious continuations in historical and contemporary accounts of Haitian Vodou, scholars argue that Bight of Benin groups (Arada/Fon, Nagô/Yoruba) established the mold for religiosity among the enslaved in Saint-Domingue into which later-arriving groups would be incorporated (Hebblethwaite 2014). After the 1750s, ports along the West Central African Loango Coast were most used in the French slave trade, and the broadly defined “Kongolese” became the majority ethnic group in the prosperous colony. Recent research has focused on the cultural influence of the Kongolese (Thornton 1993b, 1991; Vanhee 2002; Mobley 2015) and sheds new light on how their activities may have reflected a sense of militancy, particularly given the contentious history of the Kongo and its surrounding kingdoms in the late eighteenth century.

Members of the various African ethnic groups, along with creole African descendants born in the colony, formed ritual sects that were

distinct from each other yet shared common worldviews. These groups were described as “nations,” and were distinguished by dances, songs, association with spirit forces, and the use of flora and fauna that facilitated healing, divination, and protection. Among others, the *calenda*, *chica*, *wangua*, and the Dahomean *vaudou* and Kongolese *petro* rites were the predecessors to what would become the Haitian Vodou religion.<sup>110</sup> Initiation processes and vows of secrecy characterized several of these rites. Sacred practices often occurred when Africans and African descendants gathered in wooded areas after dark, in unused churches or burial processions, as these were protected places away from plantation authorities.<sup>111</sup> These assemblies were not merely spiritual in nature but were protected spaces for Africans and African descendants to express their intentionality for liberation.

Along with spiritual gatherings, individuals used ritual artifact technologies in their daily lives to mediate conflicts, to bring about good fortune, to heal sickness, or for protection from negative spirits. Ritual leaders who created these artifacts held privilege within the enslaved community but lived and worked alongside other laborers and runaways. Their esteem within the community was based on their efficacy in using spiritual power to make things happen in the natural realm. When leaders or their respective spirits were not efficacious, followers shifted their allegiance to more powerful rites. This would have been particularly true for newly arrived Africans whose traditions included the veneration of familial ancestors in sacred spaces such as burials or shrines. These Africans would not have had access to their familial spirits due to their forced migration to Saint-Domingue; therefore, they would have gravitated to spirits that were associated with universal forces, for example the Yoruba *orisha*. Given the ethnic pluralism of the colony, we can assume there was a rapidly changing spiritual landscape of shifting loyalties between competing sects and shared symbols between cooperative sects, all of which contributed to the forging of a collective consciousness and a cultural repository of ideas, histories, and practices.<sup>112</sup>

### Vaudoux

Bight of Benin Africans were the most numerous group brought to Saint-Domingue in the early eighteenth century, and their cultural and religious influence seems to have set the mold for spiritual life in the colony. The most direct correlation between religion in the Bight of Benin and Saint-Domingue is the transfer of *vodun* spirits that appear on the other side of

the Atlantic as the Haitian *lwa* spirits, such as Legba, Mawu-Lihzah, Azli, and several others.<sup>113</sup> The *voudoux* refers to the most well-known and earliest documented ritual dance in Saint-Domingue; the term derives from a shorthand description of the dance of the *vodun*.<sup>114</sup> *Voudoux* gatherings were highly secretive, guarded by levels of oaths and initiations, and presided over by a king and queen, reflecting the male–female leadership tradition of the Fon/Gbe-speaking region.<sup>115</sup> The snake spirit Dangbe/Danbala was the central deity of the *voudoux* and was thought of as an all-knowing god. The priest and priestess administered the ritual oaths of secrecy within the group, and represented Danbala as members made appeals for money, healing from sickness, love, or influence over their owners. During the ceremony, the female leader stood on a box containing a snake and became mounted by the spirit. The woman issued directives and orders for the adherents to follow, or they risked misfortune or peril. After the spirit embodiment, offerings ensued, enhanced with dancing, a poultry-based meal, and alcohol consumption. Moreau de Saint-Méry considered these events to be benign, yet thought they could have subversive potential because of the willingness of adherents to assign ultimate power to the priest and priestess and the spirits they served.<sup>116</sup>

It was believed that the *voudoux* was wildly popular in the colony; however, some observers mistook other ethnic groups' ritual activities for the *voudoux*. For example, a Mozambican ritual in Cayes Saint-Louis in the southern department was described as *voudoux* because it also involved “convulsions” of the spirit.<sup>117</sup> The presence of Mozambican captives increased after the Seven Years War when the French lost their Senegambian posts to the British. The French ventured south of Angola, a long-standing trade region of the Portuguese, along the East African shores, and significantly increased trade volume between 1769 and 1776.<sup>118</sup> Between the years 1750 and 1800, 3,713 Mozambicans disembarked at Saint-Domingue's western department ports Les Cayes, Léogâne, and Port-au-Prince.<sup>119</sup> It is plausible that the increased visibility of Mozambican's non-Islamic indigenous ritual practice involved similar elements like spirit reverence, possession, and herbalism that European observers were unable to distinguish.

Alternatively, Africans from other regions may have felt an affinity for the *voudoux* and attempted to join Arada-led ceremonies. The *voudoux* involved participants dancing in circular movements around the king and queen, and as Sterling Stuckey observed, the practice of circular dance – especially in the counterclockwise direction – was commonplace and held spiritual significance among several West and West Central African

cultural groups. The dances, along with the singing and musical instruments, summoned ancestral spirits and other deities, which helped foster inter-ethnic contact and served as “the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them.”<sup>120</sup> For example, Michel Descourtiz witnessed an enslaved Igbo man trying to join an Arada ceremony in Artibonite by offering rum, money, and a few chickens for sacrifice, but the man was refused entry.<sup>121</sup> The *voudoux* gatherings were clandestine, and their participants were sworn to secrecy. Additionally, the Aradas and other Bight of Benin Africans were numerous enough in Saint-Domingue that they may not have felt inclined to welcome others to their assemblies. On the other hand, this account simultaneously supports and disproves claims that African ethnic groups self-segregated and held no regard for one another’s gods.<sup>122</sup> African religions generally were not organized around a structured orthodoxy, allowing them to be welcoming of beliefs and practices that were compatible with their own worldview.<sup>123</sup>

The fact that an Igbo person willingly approached the Aradas and made an offering so his request would be taken more seriously shows that ethnic and/or racial differences did not prevent varying groups from interacting with each other in ritual spaces. Igbos were few in Saint-Domingue, so this Igbo man gravitated to Arada practices due to the reputation of *voudoux* as having efficaciousness. Further, Igbos’ spirituality was connected to reverence for their ancestral lands; therefore, alienation from their Bight of Biafra origins was especially disorienting, resulting in a reputation for suicidal tendencies. Igbos believed in the transmigration of spirits and that death would return them to their homeland.<sup>124</sup> The *voudoux* was the primary religious and cultural influence in the colony due to their numerous presence at the beginning of the eighteenth century; participation in a *voudoux* ceremony may have presented an opportunity to communicate with spirit beings who could provide insight into why the Igbo man had been expelled from his home and how he could remedy his predicament.

### Islam

A scant but growing amount of archival data, in addition to what has already been uncovered and interpreted by Emilie Diouf (1998) and Michael Gomez (2005), further indicates there were a number of enslaved Muslims in Saint-Domingue. Slave trade records, as discussed in Chapter 1, indicate that captives from Senegambia and other Muslim

areas on the Upper Guinea Coast were the third largest group brought to Saint-Domingue in the early eighteenth century. Though their numbers declined in the latter half of the century, a disproportionately high frequency of insurrections on ships leaving Senegambia headed to the Caribbean occurred in the years surrounding the Futa Jallon jihad and the short-lived Futa Tooro revolution that banned the slave trade. The influence of anti-slavery sentiments in Senegambian Islamic thought and practice may have influenced rebellion in Saint-Domingue. Accounts described maroon and famed poisoner François Mackandal as a Muslim from the Upper Guinea region, and several of his associates were Nagô/Yorubas also from the Bight of Benin. The notes from the prosecution trial against Mackandal include descriptions of his *gris-gris* sacred amulets, which contained written Qur'anic prayers. During his late seventeenth century religious movement, Nasir Al Din similarly instructed Senegambian soldiers of the Islamic faith to carry their talismans with them in battle to symbolize the power of the Qur'an.<sup>125</sup> Over one century later, Colonel Charles Malenfant reported finding African rebels during the Haitian Revolution in 1792 who carried *macoutes*, a type of basket or sack that enslaved people carried over their arms or chest, which contained Arabic writings believed to be prayers in text.<sup>126</sup> Swiss traveler Pierre Du Simitière visited Saint-Domingue, mainly Port-au-Prince and Léogâne, in the 1770s. In January 1773 at Léogâne, he recorded that an enslaved man of the Mandinga nation wrote a Qur'anic prayer in Arabic. A photograph of the text remains and appears in Figure 2.5.

Memorizing, reciting, and re-writing the Qur'an was an important way of proving oneself to be an upstanding Muslim.<sup>127</sup> Some enslaved Muslims in Artibonite attempted to fashion writing utensils using lemon juice, bamboo, wood tablets, and parts of palm trees.<sup>128</sup> Du Simitière found a second prayer that cast blessings on believers and castigated scandal mongers, back-biters, and those who piled up wealth.<sup>129</sup> This prayer was likely contained in a *macoute* ritual packet, and seemingly reflected a spiritual castigation of the type of unethical trading practices

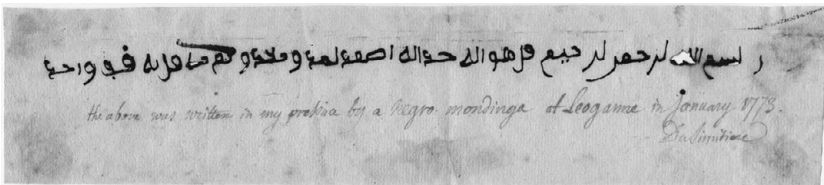


FIGURE 2.5. "Arabic fragment, a West African *gris-gris*, Library Company of Philadelphia"

that were rife during the height of the transAtlantic slave trade. The little evidence of these writings that exists further proves there were captives from Islamic regions of Africa who were taken to Saint-Domingue. A group of four runaways escaped a St. Marc plantation in 1768; possibly at least two of them were Muslim: Simon of the Tapa nation and Sultan *dit* or “the so-called” Alla, a 45–50-year-old *commandeur* of Aguaia ethnicity.<sup>130</sup> Simon and Sultan’s ethnic origins suggest they were from regions of the Bight of Benin that were influenced by Islam.<sup>131</sup> Given that Sultan, in particular, retained an Arabic name along with the nickname “Alla,” meaning God, it is possible he had been targeted during the Futa Jallon jihad for being a Muslim cleric who was against slavery – presumably because he escaped his bondage. Sultan’s spiritual power and leadership qualities may have been considered an asset to maintain order in the plantation economy, thus he was put in the position of a *commandeur*.

### West Central African Beliefs and Practices

In West Central Africa among Kimbundu-speaking people, *zumbis* were ancestral otherworldly beings and *kilundas* were deities.<sup>132</sup> These terms, or their derivatives, appeared in the Saint-Domingue colonial context, although with slightly different meanings. The notion of a “zombie” existed in the colonial Kreyol lexicon as the appearance of a returning spirit, and descriptions of *calendas* in Saint-Domingue match aspects of *nganga*-led *kilundu* gatherings in seventeenth-century Angola and *calundu* ceremonies in Brazil.<sup>133</sup> At the *calendas*, a man or woman stood in the center of a group, including musicians and others who sang and shouted to call on a spirit being to occupy the body of the centered individual. The mounted person convulsed and spoke in the metaphoric language of the deceased spirit. Participants then consulted with the spirit about topics pertaining to the natural realm. West Central African *calenda* gatherings were not unlike the *vaudou* rituals in that they both involved dance; alcohol consumption to heighten the senses of participants; and non-living spirits that occupied a living person, who was typically the assembly convener and communicated messages from the spirit world to advise, caution, or heal the living. Writing in the early eighteenth century, the priest Jean Baptiste Labat described the *calenda* as a dance gathering that had the potential to inspire rebellion because it brought blacks together in a state of “collective effervescence” induced by alcohol and the joy of time away from forced labor. Two drums regulated the dance movements: the three- to four-foot long *grand tambour* made

from hollowed out wood and the shorter *bamboula* drum was made from bamboo. Performers played one drum rhythmically while playing the other drum more slowly; calabashes filled with small stones or grains of corn complemented the drumming sounds along with the *banza*, a hand-plucked four-string violin. Women and men danced in a counterclockwise circle, following the direction of the sun's movement to symbolize the beginning and end of the human life cycle and to invoke their ancestors, while clapping their hands and improvising songs in a call and response fashion.<sup>134</sup>

The gatherings in Saint-Domingue also centered around healing rituals to cure physical and spiritual ills through the removal of malevolent spirits.<sup>135</sup> Participants did not have access to the shrines that typically housed ancestral and territorial spirits; however, they captured spiritual power associated with respective spirits by carrying them in *nkisi* objects.<sup>136</sup> In West Central Africa, *nkisis* were public shrines that held regionally recognized spirits that supported good health and abundance. Without the freedom to construct such shrines in Saint-Domingue, Africans converted larger *nkisis* to smaller, individualized vessels that could allow users to clandestinely carry spirit energies. As such, *nkisis* in Saint-Domingue performed the same function as *gris-gris* or *macoutes* used by Muslims from Senegambia and the Bight of Benin – providing the wearer with spiritual protection. People could purchase *nkisis* and other sacred objects at *calendas*, which were also free spaces that enhanced oppositional consciousness. The participation of multiple ethnic groups in these gatherings may suggest that they were becoming “generically African” and contributed to the growth of solidarity around race and the most powerful spirit beings.<sup>137</sup> Though we cannot necessarily track each *calenda* occurrence, since they were held secretly, we can induce through primary and secondary sources that they were regularly occurring events, despite attempts to suppress them.<sup>138</sup>

Some Africans from the Angolan coast south of the Congo River were already familiar with Christianity and had been combining their local traditions with Catholicism while still on the continent.<sup>139</sup> Other Africans seem to have passively accepted baptism and participated in church services but maintained their fundamental beliefs and practices. Catholic priests were responsible for baptizing newly arrived Africans, though they often found themselves understaffed and unprepared for the booming population increases. The Jesuit order bore the responsibility of reaching and converting the enslaved population, but the priests' efforts often appeared to colonial authorities as collusion with the slaves' maintenance



of African practices and rebellious activity. In February 1761, there was a statement from the Council of Le Cap against the “abuses” of religion by free and enslaved people who conducted unsupervised and unauthorized church services for afternoon and night meetings with choir leaders, prayers, and lay preachers who promoted faith in the surrounding areas of Le Cap.<sup>140</sup>

In 1764, colonial authorities expelled the Jesuits from Saint-Domingue. Among other things, such as financial crimes, they were viewed as being complicit with rebellion by harboring runaways and discouraging an enslaved woman, Assam, from divulging the names of people involved in the Mackandal poison conspiracy.<sup>141</sup> The spiritual aspects of the Mackandal conspiracy and his network of followers, as well as other ritualists who represented leaders within the enslaved community and at times wielded that power to incite rebellion, will be explored in the next chapter. Though the Capuchin order took over Jesuit responsibilities, the volume of Africans brought to Saint-Domingue overwhelmed Catholic priests. The Kongolese routinely embraced healers and mediums to access spirits, therefore as enslaved people in Saint-Domingue they turned to priests for spiritual help and to perform rites. Catholic priests represented such a medium capable of reaching saints, who Africans would have interpreted as spirits local to either Central Africa or the Saint-Domingue context.<sup>142</sup> In the early 1770s, a priest revealed that enslaved Catholics, either those from the Kongo Kingdom or the recently baptized, would approach him to cast spells and to communicate with spirits. In the same decade, another priest claimed to have been walking with an elderly black Catholic woman who spotted a man carrying a staff with a garter snake. The woman immediately attacked the man, then knelt before the snake and prayed that Jesus and Mary protect it. The source described the snake as a symbol of the Dahomean Dangbe ritual sect present in Le Cap, of which the man with the staff may have been a member.<sup>143</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Moreau de Saint-Méry’s early observations of the enslaved population in Saint-Domingue indicated that Africans of different ethnicities did not interact and opposed one another for worshipping different gods, and that creoles overall dismissed continent-born Africans. The above examples of ritual life in Saint-Domingue, however, show that Africans of various ethnicities performed rites that typically are associated with other groups; for example, the Mozambicans who danced the *vaudou*,

or the Igbo man seeking entrance to an Arada ceremony. These cases suggest that white observers probably incorrectly labeled or misunderstood the ritual practice or the identity of the Africans themselves. This book uses primary source evidence to propose the idea that creoles and Africans of various extractions were not as self-segregating as previously assumed, since labor regimes largely dictated their social interactions. The newly arrived needed sources of human affirmation from a community of individuals sharing the same positionality, facilitating biological ties between creoles and their first-generation African kin. Recent plantation and slave trade studies have shown the demographic makeup of the enslaved population with a focus on ethnic dominance in particular geographic areas, for example the large numbers of West Central Africans on Saint-Domingue's northern coffee plantations. But these approaches neglect the existence of enslaved people of other ethnic identities and the ways in which they were enculturated into plantation-based communities during ritual practices and marronage.

Due to the rigors of the plantation workday, it was not easy for enslaved Africans and African descendants to find time to engage in their sacred rituals. Field hands especially, who were overwhelmingly women and African, spent long days performing arduous labor under the strict supervision of the *commandeur* plantation driver. The *commandeur*, though usually an enslaved person, held a place of authority and was responsible for keeping order among the work gangs and doling out punishments with a whip. His authority in the fields often translated to authority in marronage, which will be further explored in later chapters. The workday generally ended at sundown, although sugar plantations ran in 24-hour shifts, so there were only pockets of time when laborers were not heavily monitored, such as in their shared housing quarters, during assigned errands, or at the weekly Sunday market at the urban centers Cap Français and Port-au-Prince. Artisanal laborers, mostly males and creoles, such as carpenters, shoemakers, and hairdressers, had more flexibility to traverse the colony as part of their quotidian work duties. These everyday forms of mobility, along with slaves' escapes, allowed enslaved people to foster and maintain relationships, and to surreptitiously exchange sacred objects and organize ritual gatherings.

Ritual activity and marronage were not only ways for enslaved people to gather and communicate, they were also vehicles through which long-standing traditions of resistance challenged the commodification, forced labor, and death that pervaded and shaped their lives in grotesque ways.

The following chapter will explore further the spiritual worlds of the enslaved who, in conjunction with and sometimes organized by maroons, used sacred objects and their sacred understandings of their social conditions to mediate the realities of enslavement in Saint-Domingue and castigate its most oppressive and exploitative dimensions.