

Black people in the Canary Islands: evolution, assimilation and miscegenation (16th-17th centuries)

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Resumo

Este artigo pretende dar uma visão precisa sobre a população negra nas Ilhas Canárias, não necessariamente escrava. O texto está estruturado em duas grandes partes: a primeira apresenta um panorama geográfico e cronológico da presença demográfica de afrodescendentes; e a segunda aborda a alienação, a assimilação e a vida quotidiana. Damos uma estimativa do número de africanos que chegaram às Ilhas. Tentamos associar os elementos da economia e da sociedade canárias às características específicas africanas, o que nos permite formar uma imagem da época em que as originalidades específicas deste grupo podiam ser observadas neste ponto do Atlântico.

Palavras Chave: África, população subsariana, negros, escravos, assimilação, Ilhas Canárias.

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Abstract

We wanted to give an accurate view on the black population in the Canary Islands, not only as slaves. The text is structured in two large parts, the first one relative to a geographical and chronological overview of the demographic presence of people of African descent and the second to alienation, assimilation and daily life. We will give an estimate on the number of Africans arrived in the Islands. We attempt to bring together the own elements of the Canarian economy and society with the African specific features, which allow us to set a picture of times in which the own originalities of this group in this Atlantic spot can be seen.

Keywords: Africa, sub-Saharan, black people, slaves, assimilation, Canary Islands.

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Since before the definitive conquest of the islands in 1496 finished, black population had already arrived, both from the incursions made in the sub-Saharan and Moroccan coast (and which arrived in those lands through sub-Saharan caravans), and from the trading activity from the south of Senegal river. Some slaves came from the Iberian Peninsula, accompanying their masters or from the trade with Madeira (Vieira 1991, 63-66; See also for the case of Azores Vaz do Machado, Gregorio and Silva 2013). After the conquest, their number increased with the purpose of both replacing the reduced native population after the subjugation, together with the Berber slaves, and preventing an excessive rise in the wages of the new colonial society in order to obtain competitive production. Slaves were cheap workforce in a time in which after the conquest wars the population was small. They meant an alternative, so that the wages of non-qualified free workers did not rise, as well as assigning population to an unstable border territory in a forced way.

Sub-Saharan population shared space with another enslaved population, the North African or Berber one, at least until the late 16th century, and it was a majority. Tens or hundreds of arrivals in the neighbouring sub-Saharan coast were counted, and they were called '*cabalgadas*' (Pérez Embid 1948; Rumeu de Armas 1956; Lobo Cabrera 1982; Salafrañca Ortega 2004; Gambín García 2015). Also, there were American and Asian slaves in a minimum number, coming from the European expeditions and trade in the 16th and 17th centuries. Together with Africans, the majority of the population of this new society was constituted with European colonists, who came from all over Europe, although most of them were Iberian, and with native survivors, who originally had a North African origin, and who were also object of slavery during the conquest period. With the North African corsair incursions, particularly those coming from Argel and Sale, many Canarians were enslaved at the same time in order to be sold in North African (Anaya Hernández 2006, 171-92) markets.

The increasing black slave population was a minority, but significant. Its presence was irregular depending on the islands and the areas of each island. Its function was not to colonise the just conquered land in a voluntary way, but they were assigned to that land according to the needs

of the Europeans. Like all slavery systems, their movement capacity was restricted. This group would be the largest among the slaves.

These Africans had a clear social status: being slaves or coming from slavery, with the stigma involved in it. Apart from this, the colour of their skin was also a clear sign that distinguished them from the rest of communities. The sub-Saharan was integrated in the new society, but not in an equal way. They were at the lowest and poorest level. Their descendants had few opportunities to improve their social status in a very hierarchical society in terms of prestige, honour, privilege, wealth, property possession, race and gender. In the Canary Islands, the fact that the majority of the population was white, did not give them many opportunities. Unlike Cabo Verde (Soares 2013, 20-22), no sub-Saharan could have an alderman or judge position or any relevant administrative position.

Their origin was very varied; they had different languages, religions, ethnic groups and cultures. Although all of them were called 'negroes' in the islands, except for the mulattos, the truth is that diversity was one of their features. The first separation was made among those who had just arrived and had a limited command of Spanish Castilian (*bozales*), and the acculturated ones (*ladinos*) who did know the language, and also among the different skin shades (*loro, moreno, de color vasa, membrillo cocho, coro, pardo, atezado, prieto*). Slaves were brought from Rivers of Guinea (located between the Senegal River and Sierra Leone), Cape Verde, Malagueta Coast (Liberia), Magarabomba (Sierra Leone), Elmina, São Tomé, Congo, Angola, and in general from all over the Western African coast, from Senegal to Namibia. Apart from this, we have to add that many slaves were captured in the interior of the continent, hundreds of kilometres away from the coast. The markets in the Rivers of Guinea, Cape Verde and São Tomé stood out during the 16th century, but from the second decade of the 17th century until 1640, many of them had an Angolan origin. Among the ethnic groups there were *jolofes, fulos, berbesin, zapes, mandingas, banus, arares, haffor, jagas, bulamas, papeis, manicongos* and *branes*.¹ Also, the

¹ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Las Palmas [AHPLP], Francisco Gallego, leg. 1.083, year 1628, Gran Canaria, fol. 295 r.v. In July 1628, Agustín Rodríguez, citizen of Telde, forced himself to give a female slave called Isabel, aged 24, 'from bran nation' with her son, called Juan, aged 2, to Nicolás Martínez de Escobar, alderman of Gran Canaria; Juan Fernández Fleitas, leg. 1.087, year 1623, Gran Canaria, fol. 321 r. Francisco de Salas, citizen of La Palma, sold Teresa Macías, citizen of Las Palmas, a black slave named Antonio of Banu caste, for 1,050 reales; José Bethencourt Herrera, leg. 1.320, year 1661, Gran Canaria, fol. 184 v. Captain Nicolás Vandevala de Aguiar, citizen of La Habana, sold Inés Andrés González, citizen of Las Palmas, a black slave named María del Pino "from Arare nation" for 1,850 reales; This origin is also collected in Manuel Lobo Cabrera, op. cit., 1982, pp. 137-140. The location of African nations is common in the documentation of Canarian notarial records.

jaga ethnic group, from Angola, has been found and *biafras* or *beafar*, whose origin is the current Cameroonian and Nigerian coast. Of course, the slaves from Angola, Cape Verde, Congo, São Tomé and Guinea were mentioned in a more generic way.

Geographical and chronological overview of the demographic presence of people of African descent in the Canary Islands

It is difficult to specify the number of sub-Saharan Africans living on the islands, and even more difficult is to specify their evolution in Modern History. We do not have specific censuses regarding this minority on the islands scale. We are not certain either of their percentage regarding the rest of the population, due to the same deficiencies to know the total number of inhabitants. In addition, an important number of liberated slaves, who started to increase in the 17th and 18th centuries, joined the slaves. The main counts come from churches, particularly through baptism and decease books, and from sales and other notarial protocol documents, with the subsequent gaps due to the lack of proper counting by the authorities.

Bruquetas de Castro estimates that 25% of the population in Lanzarote was slave between 1618 and 1650, reaching the number of 400 people, from which more than 55% were black and 20% mulattos. However, we believe that this percentage is maybe a little exaggerated, since during this period 299 sales were made, from which 163 were black slaves. To this, we have to add 58 mulattos who represent 19.7% of the sales. We believe that the amount for 32 years should not be applied to one specific year and or compared to the total population, which is only likely (Bruquetas de Castro 1995, 39-40). This was not an impediment for the number of slaves and their percentages to be significant here, probably around 15%. What is clear in any case, is that at least in the group of slaves, the majority of them were sub-Saharan, regardless of the *Moriscos*' presence before that date, difficult to specify, since the island had suffered four big invasions from 1569 to 1618 by Barbary corsairs, who captured almost 2,000 people and destroyed numerous written sources.

We do not have information about the slaves in Fuerteventura in the Ancien Régime. The lack of sources for this island and the bad preservation explain this deficiency. However, the number would be smaller, since Lobo Cabrera has found only 80 sales throughout the 17th century (considering the deficiency in the sources), which he considers to be between 2.5 and 5% of the total population (Lobo Cabrera 1993, 21-22).

We believe that despite this worthy study, such a small number of slaves in a century is not believable (not even a sale per year), so we believe that his percentages are not reliable either. The situation for the 16th and 18th centuries is even more obscure.

In Gran Canaria we have different numbers in different times. This island, and particularly in the city of Las Palmas is without doubt where there is more information about the number of slaves and their evolution from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Manuel Lobo was able to compile 1,956 sales, without taking into consideration the donations in the 16th century in the Eastern Canary Islands (Lobo Cabrera 1982, 142). In the reign of Philip III, Elisa Torres has found the presence of 849 slaves (Torres Santana 1991, 141). In the reign of Philip IV we have been able to find 1,230 of them in Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura in sales, transfers and donations, although the number of slaves must have been greater, since this number would reach up to 1,799 if we counted other types of documents (Santana Pérez 2000, 68). The complete absence of series in all those studies makes us think that this number was actually larger. The slaves who were sold in auctions hardly ever appeared in the documents. This method must have been relatively frequent, especially for those coming in slave trader ships or those whose sale was simply done verbally. A census for black people was made in Gran Canaria in 1667 and the result was 6,478 between black people and moriscos (Sosa 1994, 59), although we do not know how many of them were slaves and how many were free.

Slave baptisms in Telde involved 16.5% in the 1520 decade, although the total of slaves in the 16th century was between 7 and 9%, around 391 (Rodríguez Calleja and Viera Ortega 2007, 62 and 69-70). In the areas of the interior of the islands, associated to self-supply crops, the percentage and number must have been lower in general. The census of Teror of 1595, which included the current towns of Teror and Valleseco, done at the request of the Inquisition by the priest Juan Ribero states that there were no *moriscos*, although he did mention slaves, who, we have to suppose, were black or mulattos. The slaves were 12 men and 8 women, which means 4.71% of the total population. He did not mention children and babies who had not received communion.² The proportion had decreased in this area the next century, since 1605 and 1725 only 70 slaves were baptised in that church, 1.1% of the total of baptised people (Trujillo Yáñez 2010, 23). In the town of Agüimes, 140 of them were baptised between 1602 and 1800

² Archivo de Acialeázar [AA], Obispado 1.

and only 6.4% was not native. That percentage was low in any case, 2.1% in the 17th century and 0.7% in the 18th century (Suárez Grimón and Quintana Andrés, 156-58). The majority of them used to do craftsmanship activities and domestic work, more than agriculture and stockbreeding in a place or cereal and stockbreeding economy. In Arucas, the percentage of slave population was 3.72% in the first half of the 17th century and 2.78% in the second half. For Moya, the percentage was 5.10% in the first half and 1.14% in the second one (Rodríguez Calleja 2007, 105).

Benedicta Rivero's study about the population in the Vegueta neighbourhood in the city of Las Palmas, gives the considerable amount of 281 slaves (Rivero Suárez 1992, 75) in the late 17th century, in 1679. We are now in a time where the demand of slaves has begun to decrease quickly, increasing the percentage of freed slaves. Lobo Cabrera and Diaz Hernandez, through parish registers, have reached the conclusion that the baptised slaves in this city between 1601 and 1725 constitute 8.6%, although the proportion is much greater in the early 17th century, 13.4% between 1601 and 1610, and minimum in the early 18th century, 3.42% between 1700 and 1725. That study includes 922 children of slave couples who were baptised during the first four decades of the 17th century, while between 1641 and 1680, 941 more children were baptised. Almost 70% of the baptised were children (Lobo Cabrera and Díaz Hernández 1984, 189-223). If we take into consideration the 18th century, the slaves constitute 1.75% of the baptised in Las Palmas, reaching an insignificant 0.11% in the second half (Lobo Cabrera, López Caneda, and Torres Santana 1993, 188).

In La Palma we also know about relatively accurate studies of its capital. The slaves represent 15.1% of the baptised in Santa Cruz de La Palma between 1564 and 1700, with a total number of 2,910 individuals, although we have to take into consideration that this number includes both those who were born in the island and those coming from Africa who received the sacrament there. It is symptomatic that the number of baptised starts to decrease after 1650 (Lobo Cabrera and Quintana Andrés 1997, 68). Slightly more moderate are the sources for the island, at least in the first quarter of the 17th century (Toledo Bravo de Laguna and Bruquetas de Castro 1998). We should not forget that the existence of sugar mills in Argual and Tazacorte and in San Andres and Saucos involved the use of slave workforce.

In El Hierro, this number was practically insignificant, since there was a small population, which by its own production model demanded little slave workforce. There was not much mix of black people and *moriscos* during the 16th century and in the 1680 census only 34 slaves for the total of 3,148

people appear. From this number, 65% were located in Valverde (Quintero Rebozo 1997, 339 and 380-81), capital of the island. In La Gomera, the amount was higher. Both islands went towards a subsistence economy with scarce connection with the outside, although in this last island there was several sugar mills. Most part of the slaves were located in the capital, San Sebastian, where in the 1680 census there were still 52 people, 5.36% of the census in that jurisdiction and in Hermigua, where there were sugar mills and numerous lands dedicated to vine, there were 62, 6.6% of the total. The number in Agulo, only two, 0.5% of the population, Alajero with two more, Vallehermoso, with 20, 1.75%, Chipude with 12, 2.27% (Díaz Padilla and Rodríguez Yanes 1990, 259-272), going towards a personal consumption economy and without big elements of social status, their number and percentage is noticeably lower.

After the conquest, Tenerife became the island with more population. In the 17th century, more than half already lived in the island. The existence of black slaves was almost immediate (Marrero Rodríguez 1966). In the city of La Laguna, the most populated of the Islands, 1,658 slaves were baptised between 1548 and 1599, from which 75.5% were called negroes and 10.6% were called *prietos* (Marcos Martín 1980, 16-19). Between 1650 and 1661 a total of 132 slaves was baptised, between La Concepcion and Los Remedios churches, while the number of deceased reached 328 (Rodríguez Yanes 1997, 853). In the second half of the 16th century, 15% of the baptised in La Laguna were slaves. In the port of Santa Cruz, the baptisms in the only church in the area indicate 4.14% of the baptised (Cioranescu 1977, 108). In 1779, in Adeje, the slaves and the liberated meant 5.7% of the total population in the town (Díaz Frías, 1999, 149). In Tacoronte, the slaves, mainly black or mulattos, constituted 2.39% of the baptised, with an average of 2.35 baptised slaves per year between 1676 and 1688 (Sánchez Herrero 1975, 273-274). We barely know studies for the thriving centres of Puerto de la Cruz, La Orotava and Garachico.

For the 16th century, Lobo Cabrera has counted 563 liberated slaves through notarial documents, which include both black, and *moriscos*, and which mean 28,69% of the slaves counted in that century by this author (Lobo Cabrera 1983, 26). We have been able to identify 171 more liberated slaves in Lanzarote and Gran Canaria for the period between 1621 and 1665.³ From those, 33.91% were black and 53.19% were mulattos, being the importance of liberated *moriscos* or Berber small in comparison to the 16th

³ This information is based on notarial record unpublished.

century. Something that was the same as the previous century is the fact that more women than men were liberated, 60.11% and 39.88% respectively. We have little information for what happened at the end of the 17th century and the 18th. In any case, the percentage of liberation was always significant since the 16th century, although it speeded up after the second half of the 17th century.

Their replacement index is low. Among the female Africans who have children, the usual case was to have one; in some areas it was almost 70% of the total. Replacement indexes between 1.1 and 1.4, also usual in other Atlantic geographies were common in the Canary Islands. In studies of sales from both the 16th century (Lobo Cabrera) and the 17th century (Bruquetas de Castro, Santana Perez) there is a majority of men against women, about 60% of men against 40% in women. However, this proportion equals and even leans in favour of the females in studies of partial baptisms, although there were a great number of new-born slaves here, who had similar percentages per sex as a norm. This would coincide with the situation in other cities with slaves, such as Cadiz (Morgado García 2013).

As a consequence of all this information, we estimate that the number of black slaves who came to the Canary Islands or who were born there between the late 15th century and the 19th century was around 14,000. Most of them would arrive between 1550 and 1640. This does not mean that all of them reached an old age and that their replacement index was normal: it was the opposite, since it was significantly low, so not all their genetic inheritance was transferred to the future generations. With all of this, the percentage of mulattos gradually increased and it speeded up significantly after 1640. We would have to incorporate a significant number of *moriscos* to this group, particularly relevant during the 16th century. Therefore, we are talking about a ‘society with slaves’ and not a ‘slave society’.

As a result of the studies about mitochondrial DNA and the Y chromosome, we know that in the current population the sub-Saharan contribution of mother’s lineages is greater than father’s, which indicates that although most of the slaves were males, their efficiency to incorporate to the Canarian population was lower than the females’. In the calculations about the mix of the current populations, sub-Saharan population constitutes only 3% of mother’s lineages, although the Tenerife population reached a significant 12% in the 18th century through the genetic characterisation of the mitochondrial DNA. Y chromosome analysis reduced those percentages to 6% in the 18th century and 1% in our days (Maca Meyer 2002; Fregel Lorenzo 2009/10, 175-80).

Año	Lanzarote	Fuerteventura	Gran Canaria	Tenerife	La Gomera	La Palma	El Hierro
1595			Teide 391 slaves 7-9%; Teror-Vallesco 20 adult slaves 4.71% (Rodríguez Calleja and Viera Ortega)				
1548-1599				En La Laguna 1.658 slaves 15% (Marcos Martín)			
1564-1700						2.910 baptized slaves 15.1% (Lobo Cabrera/ Quintana Andrés)	
Siglo XVII			1.956 sales of slaves (Lobo Cabrera)				
1600-1621			849 sales of slaves (Torres Santana)				
1601-1725			Las Palmas 8.69% (Lobo Cabrera and Diaz Hernández)				
1602-1800			Agüimes 140 slaves, 2.1% in 18 th century) and 0.7% in 18 th century (Suárez Grimón and Quintana Andrés)				
1605-1725			Teror 70 slaves 1.1% (Trujillo Yáñez)				
1618-1640	400 slaves-25% (Bruquetas de Castro)						
1618-1640		15% slaves (Santana Pérez)					
1621-1665			1.230 sales of slaves (Santana Pérez)				

Año	Lanzarote	Fuerteventura	Gran Canaria	Tenerife	La Gomera	La Palma	El Hierro
1650-1661				En La Concepción y Los Remedios 132 baptized slaves			
1667			6,478 black people and mortuoscous (census) 281 slaves (Rivero Suárez)				
1680					San Sebastián 52 slaves 5.36%; Hermigua 62 slaves 6.6%; Agulo 2 slaves 0.5%; Alajeró 2 slaves; Vallehermoso 20 slaves 1.75%; Chipude 12 slaves 2.21% (Díaz Padilla and Rodríguez Yanes)		34 slaves (census)
1676-1688				Tacoronte 2.39% black and mulattos people (Sánchez Herrero)			
1ª/2 siglo XVII			Arucas 3.72%; Moya 5.10% (Rodríguez Calleja)				
1ª/2 siglo XVII			Arucas 2.78%; Moya 1.14% (Rodríguez Calleja)				
XVIII		2.5-5% slaves (Lobo Cabrera)					
1779				5.7% slaves and liberated (Nelson Díaz)			
1ª/2 siglo XVIII			Las Palmas 0.11% (Lobo Cabrera, López Caneda and Torres Santana)				

1 Estimated slaves in Canary Islands

We can differentiate several stages in the arrival of the sub-Saharan. Admitting that the first ones would arrive in the last decades of the 15th century, we can extend the first stage until 1570 approximately. Their number increases, especially after the second half of the 16th century, but the presence of the *moriscos* is still higher. The end of the *cabalgadas* to Barbary marks the end of the importance of the *moriscos* as slaves and the overwhelming amount of black people. It coincides in time with the peak of sugar export, which attracts slave workforce. It is the moment of construction of a new society after the conquest. In this first stage, most Africans come from the Rivers of Guinea, and via these Rivers, from their redistributing centre in Cape Verde, to which we have to add other areas such as Malagueta Coast, Magarobomba, Elmina, and Sao Tome, which redistribute at the same time toward the Gulf of Benin and Biafra.

The second stage takes place between 1570 and 1640. In this stage, the period of Iberian Union takes place. The arrival of sub-Saharan slaves is higher, not only in percentage, but also in number; it is the Golden Age of the arrival of black people to the islands. We estimate that more than half of the sub-Saharan, who arrived during the Modern era, came during this period. The Canary Islands are the start point of the Spanish expeditions to Africa and America. The cultivation of the vine replaces the sugarcane. Although the demand for slave labour is lower with wine production, slave imports remain flourishing. Cape Verde and Guinea stand out until approximately 1610, to the extend where, according to the customs performance books, 85% of the boats coming in between 1609 and 1610 came from the Canary Islands (Santos 1995, 37). We have to add the massive arrival of slaves from Angola after these dates (Santana Pérez 2015), a general trend, which was also present in other areas, such as the Hispanic Caribbean (Wheat 2016, 258).

Between 1640 and 1668 there are only a few sub-Saharan slaves who introduce in the Islands. The Golden Age of the slave trade in the Canary Islands is broken. International political instability significantly affects the possibilities of trade with Africa. The loss of Portugal and the difficulties to start the slave Atlantic trade can be felt in the Islands. The Crown looked at the Canarians' Portuguese partners with suspicion (Santana Pérez 2017) in their trips to Africa.

After 1668 until 1690, there is a slight recovery in the amount of sub-Saharan entering the Islands, but the previous number is never reached. The standardisation of obtaining slaves both with Portugal and other powers such as Holland or England makes that slave ships arrive regularly in the islands again. However, the Canarians were gradually less involved in this

trade. At the same time, the demand is also lower compared to how it was before 1640, the trade with Cape Verde changes, and slave import in the islands decreases (Duncan 1972; Andrade 1996; Pereira n.d.).

After 1690 and during the 18th and 19th centuries until the abolition of slavery in the Iberian Peninsula and the adjacent islands in 1837, the number of new slaves is almost insignificant, curiously coinciding with the peak of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The great majority of those baptised will be mulattos now. The population figures from before the conquest have been recovered in the Canary Islands, so there is no danger of wages or production costs being excessively high. In addition, we see the highest figures in vine crops, so slave workforce is gradually less needed. The fact of Canarians emigrating to America becomes a usual and everyday phenomenon.

Alienation, assimilation and daily life

The black people of the Canary Islands arrived being slaves, and even when they obtained their freedom, they were still under the stigma of slavery, poverty and race. They constituted one of the lowest groups in society. Even being a minority, their increasing number concerned the population, particularly the authorities, which feared that the Canary Islands could become one of the Antilles of the 17th century or the nearby Cape Verde (Klein 1986, 42; Teixeira 2004, 164-66; Andrés-Gallego 2005, 19; Soares 2013, 20-22), where the population, black or mulattos, was a majority. They were also worried that the privileges of the white people against the black people were in danger, especially the privileges of the dominant groups. The appreciation of the arrival process of Africans was greater compared, at the same time, to the number of white populations who emigrated to America on a regular basis, searching for better opportunities. Since the beginning of the 16th century, in 1536, the Governor Bernardino Ledesma, complaining and exaggerating said: 'in this island of Gran Canaria, there are more Berber and negro slaves than citizens' (Lobo Cabrera 1983, 44).

Black people were accused of organising possible riots and altercations of all kinds. It was believed that they were closely linked to crime. The idea of relating illegal activities to the Africans was not new, since it existed since the 16th century. These human groups were constantly blamed for stealing livestock and being highwaymen, as some official declared in the sessions of the Council of Tenerife.⁴ The fear of the citizens increased in

⁴ Archivo Municipal de La Laguna [AMLL], Acuerdos del Cabildo, Tercer Libro Capitular, 7-VIII-1525, Folio 34 r.

the darkness of the night. The officer don Pedro de Ocampo made these accusations and some others in one of his explanations to the Tenerife Council in the decade of the 80's of the 17th century.⁵ Essentially, this consideration was a hidden way of consolidating the established hierarchy and social system, reminding the lowest social groups their condition of subjection, so that they did not break the rules of the game; generalising, they were accused of being out of the prevailing social structure, which meant distance in their capacity of decision regarding political subjects; this is, an ideological defence against these dispossessed groups with which white people had to live.

Part of the apprehension against the Africans came from the suspicion that they kept practising their old religion, since converting to Catholicism was an essential condition imposed to both free citizens and slaves. They had to be baptised and educated in the 'true' Catholic faith, but this education was not always present in their owners. In addition, being Catholic did not guarantee freedom, since the slaves had been earned by 'fighting with loyalty', and therefore, they and their descendants belonged to their masters until they changed their mind. According to Catholic theologians and thinkers, slavery had its origin in sin. It was considered legal and legitimate, in conformity with nature and laws, admitted by the Holy Scriptures, by the Church, by civil and canon law, and by the customs of many cultures, although diverse authors believed that the slavery of the majority of black people was unfair, since it did not adjust to wars promoted by reason and right, but it was based on captures through tricks and traps (Garía Añoveros 2000, 206-14). The truth is that the sum of black and mulatto women was the majority of the reported by the Canarian Inquisition for the crime of sorcery and witchcraft between 1499 and 1714, 19.64% and 25,86% respectively from differentiated ethnic groups, compared to whites, gypsies, Canarian indigenous, Jews and moriscos, with lower percentages (Fajardo Spínola 1992, 323-24).

Another fear when buying them from foreigners (mainly from Portuguese, English and Dutch) was contributing to the release of the always-scarce money in the islands, silver export and smuggling promotion, absolutely against the mercantile policy prevailing at that moment. In addition, the increase of population caused by introducing Africans, made them think that the wheat would not be enough for the rest of the citizens.⁶

⁵ AMLL, Exposiciones de Personeros, booklet 6, without fol..

⁶ AMLL, Exposiciones de Personeros, booklet 6, without fol..

Slavery and perceptions of Africanness had an influence in many aspects of life. In ‘racial purity’, these races coming from Africa were seen as being inferior, since they did not have clean blood like the old Christians.⁷ Calling an authority negro or *morisco* could be the object of a report for harm and slander. This distinction was aimed to consolidate the criterion of hierarchy and prevalence of the old Christians against the new ones inside the Ancien Régime society. As José Antonio Piqueras points out, coercion is based on punishment and psychological deprivation (Piqueras 2011, 153).

The fact that they came from far-off lands in unhealthy conditions after the voyage, the frequent existence of epidemics (although they were not introduced by sub-Saharan Africans) caused them to be considered guilty of introducing diseases. The authorities tried to do their best with the health examinations of those coming from Africa in the ships. The Councils took these measures, in which the slaves were examined one by one. These exams are valuable as historical source because the authorities asked how many people had died during the voyage.⁸ Death reached those who were less strong, such as children, the elderly and the ill. The descriptions of child death in the crude official documents about the physical exams are still moving.⁹ In the ship called *La Cargadora de leche*, which arrived in Gran Canaria from the Elmina fortress in 15th October 1652, many slaves had died without being baptised.¹⁰ The conditions were harsh during the voyage, since apart from overcrowding, the cold and the diseases, the slaves were subject to physical abuse by their captors, which included the lack of food

⁷ AHPLP, Cala Valdés, Domingo de, leg. 1.494, year 1700, fols. 97 r.-98 v. 13 January 1700, captain don Rodrigo Marín de Cubas, perpetual alderman of Gran Canaria, answered some questions regarding blood cleaning about Pedro López saying that ‘his ancestors were old Christians with a lineage free of all the bad races, such as Jews, Moorish, negroes, mulattos and those who just converted to the Catholic Holy Faith’.

⁸ AMLL, Sanidad, 2, booklet 9, s./fol. In 1700 the ship *El Sol* arrived in the Santa Cruz de Tenerife port, with 40 black people, and since they left from Cape Verde, only two had died, one of them aged 5.

⁹ AMLL, Sanidad, 2, booklet 6, s./fol. Juan de la Fuente, when coming back with his ship from Cacheo and Guinea Rivers stated that out of the 100 slaves that he brought, about 12 had died, due to the cold weather, and they were all infants.

¹⁰ Archivo del Museo Canario [AMC], Fondo de la Inquisición, expediente XVI-6, s./fol. In the interrogation carried out by the Inquisition on Pedro Lunque, merchant of the ship, the Dutch consul and several witnesses, the emphasis is placed on the necessity of the baptism of the slaves before they die, in which they were sold to Catholics and in the proper registration of the merchandise.

(Torres Santana 1989, 775).¹¹ The conditions of those who survived the voyage were pitiful, to the point where emergency baptisms were made in the Canary Islands for those who could die in the following hours.

Despite this situation of control and alienation, integration took place, but not at an equal level. The Africans would end up by mixing with the rest of the Canarian population. In the way, they would lose their language, their religion, their customs and the greatest part of their culture. There are very few words left in the Canarian popular dialect with sub-Saharan origin (for example, *bemba*, *cachimba*, *guasa*, *macuto*, *ñame*, *tangana*, *tonga*). In this sense, we should talk about assimilation, more than integration. Their presence appears in the abundant toponymy referring to them. Terms like *la negra*, *el negro*, *el mulato*, *la mulata*, and *Guinea* are relatively abundant in the Canary Islands. The population did not only have illegitimate children with Africans, but marriage between races in the low social classes became relatively normal. Mixed-racial sexual unions became a constant and a main feature in the new Canarian society. Even in the 19th century, visitors like Olivia Stone, the French anthropologist René Vernau or writers like Jules Verne in his novel *The Thompson Travel Agency* mentioned the black village in the Southeast of Gran Canaria, which actually was a place with black and mulatto elements, which still existed around the area of the Tirajana gully. Also, we have photographs of the late 19th century of mulatto people, as we know for the case of La Palma or Gran Canaria.

Worrying about the slaves' good living conditions was not a priority among the Canarian institutions. Slavery was an old phenomenon, which had existed in the Canary Islands since the very same moment of the conquest, and questioning it was not worth it.

Feelings like rootlessness, sense of loss, fear and impotence were present in this sector of society. Although the voice of the defeated is rarely considered, some testimonials talk about this difficult relationship. In 1659, the captain Francisco Ortiz de Padilla, citizen of Las Palmas, had given the letter of freedom to a female slave called Gregoria, who, according to him, would not stop slandering him, so he requested the justice to revoke the letter of freedom.¹² The owner's argument was that the slave owed should respect him after being released. However, this woman decided to settle past accounts endangering their own freedom. More frequent was that the

¹¹ Francisco de La Cruz, the court Clerk of Gran Canaria, sued Domingo Gonzales in the early 17th century for being the grand master of a ship that came from Cape Verde, where five slaves had died for not having fed them.

¹² AHPLP, Moya, Francisco de, leg. 1.207, año 1659, Gran Canaria, fol. 434 r.v.

negotiation between the owner and the slave to obtain his freedom will not come to fruition, with the consequent feeling of helplessness on the part of the person who wanted to achieve their freedom.

Apart from liars (their word meant nothing compared to a free man's), thieves and fond of running away, they were branded as sleepyheads and unwilling to work, arrogant, troublemakers, weak-bladdered, gamblers, fond of bad habits, sodomites, whores and heavy drinkers. Precisely, and despite the prohibition of buying without their master's permission, alcoholism must have been a constant way out to this life of alienation.

A slave received more punishments for the fact of being a slave, and most of the times it involved corporal punishment, lashes, apart from others such as exile or fines. In 1531, the decrees of Gran Canaria Council established that any slave without a license, who was found out of his house at night, after the sound of the bell, would be sent to prison and receive 50 lashes tied up to the whipping post. They could not meet for a meal or to go dancing during the day or at night; they could not own a house either and sleeping out of their master's home was not allowed. Those who ran away had to be captured, taken to prison and be whipped (Morales Padrón 1974, 43). This way, in Tenerife, in 1522, the council admitted that the slaves did more harm at night than during the day, so in La Laguna and La Orotava the council ordered to ring the bell as a curfew so the slaves were not on the streets, unless they came from outside towards their master's farm. Those who were captured had to be taken to a prison cell and be released in the morning by paying 30 *maravedis* (Serra Rafols and De la Rosa 1986, 128).

Some foreign travellers witnessed the violence that the Spanish and Portuguese used against their slaves in the Atlantic colonies in the 16th century, particularly in the Canary Islands. One of them was the Frenchman André Thevet, who in the middle of the 16th century wrote about the slaves in the descriptions of the Canary Islands that 'they were very harshly treated by the Spanish, especially by the Portuguese, even worse than if they were among Turkish or Arabs. I have to say it because I have seen how bad they were treated' (Pico and Corbella 2000, 22).

The mark of their masters was another usual way of violence. Different types of marks were branded, most of the times it was the owner's initial, in different parts of the body such as their chest or their face. In December 1652, Francisco Hernández Ramos, citizen of Las Palmas, sold a mulatto slave called Amaro, aged 22 or 23 to Gaspar de Aponte Jimenez, citizen of Garachico for 1450 real. This slave had a property mark on his face; he had run away and he was not in his master's possession, with the condition

that he did not stay in Gran Canaria.¹³ The slave was considered a thing for which the owner had the right to mark his property. In various cities of Spain the habit of marking them was common (Morgado García 2013, 212-13).

After the Council of Trent, there was an insistence regarding the family's inviolability, even if they were slaves. The Church admitted that the Africans had an immortal soul and they were given the right to receiving the sacraments, recommending a good treatment to the slaves and manumission, although legalising the relationship and advising the slaves to accept their condition as a way of penitence (Romero Pellitero 2013, 129). In the bishop Don Cristobal de la Camara y Murga's Synodal documents, he insisted that the masters did not stop slave marriages, which indicates that some of them were already doing it in that moment. The problem for the Church was cohabitation. For the masters who did not follow the law, the punishment was the excommunication (Cámara y Murga 1631, 123). Although the Church insisted in the fact that marriages or young children were not separated, it was not always like this, and in some cases, the babies or youngest children were rapidly separated from their mothers. In November 1647, Agustina Ramírez, citizen of Guia, said that she owned a black female slave called Maria, who had had 3 mulatto children, and the youngest of them called Miguel, 3 months old, was given to Salvador Perez, her brother-in-law and his wife Ana de Betancor.¹⁴

Some slaves rebelled against the oppression and confronted their masters. One of them, Diego, a black slave, went to Las Palmas prison for hurting his master Martin Hernandez.¹⁵ It was relatively frequent to find slaves who were in prison in the moment of their sale, in many cases for common crimes. The runaway slaves were called rebels, who were relatively common in the early 16th century. Many of them acted in organised groups, endangering properties, especially livestock, concentrating in the mountainous and wooded areas of the interior of the island. Although most of them were natives, soon other black people followed their path. In January 1519, the Tenerife Council confirmed that many criminals and white and *prieto* slaves had risen up and were still rising up on the island, causing a great damage, so the council had to provide an officer to take the slaves (Serra Rafols and De la Rosa 1986, 21-22).

¹³ AHPLP, Ascanio, Luis, leg. 1.263, year 1652, fols. 369 v.-370 r.

¹⁴ AHPLP, Moya, Francisco de, leg. 1.201, año 1647, fol. 181 r.v.

¹⁵ AHPLP, Leal Camacho, Juan, leg. 1.107, año 1641, fols. 187 v.-188 r.

The daily life was also full of violence. Any moment was good to remind the African inferior level and their second-class, impure nature. We know that on 3 April 1602, after a group of black people and free ones paid for the image of Benedict the Moor, they attended the service in San Francisco, before the preacher Fray Fabian de Casanova, who told them from the pulpit that this festivity was not pleasant to God because it was created with the money the slaves stole from their masters. The Africans' reaction was to move the image to El Salvador church, celebrating the festivity there in successive years (Marín González 1999, 66). These incidents were not isolated and similar episodes also occurred in other parts as in Andalusia, where the civil and religious authorities used racist terms in the usual way towards the emancipating will of the slaves (Stella 2000, 127). Some of the slaves who were punished by their masters, for example with lashes, ended up dead when their master could not control his fury attacks. Insults, slaps and humiliations must have been their daily life. This is what happens with captain Gonzalo de Quintana, notary of the Holy Office, who gave his authorisation to Domingo de Olivares in Lanzarote so that, appointing him steward in his farm, could order, rule and whip his servants and slaves (Bruquetas de Castro 1995, 100).

Canarian mills had a limited number of workers, which did not usually exceed forty. Generally an important part of workers were slave workforce, but there were other combined relations of production, such as wage earners or sharecroppers. However, according to what we know from the studies about the slaves in the mills, it seems that the majority of them were black (Viña Brito 2006, 378). Also, we have to take into consideration that most part of the Canarian population did not work in the sugar cane crops in this moment, even if it was the main product for exportation, since other exportation and subsistence products had an important place in terms of professional occupation.

A great number of slaves was still demanded once the sugar crops start decreasing or in islands where there were no mills. The most populated areas and the places where the groups with more resources in the islands lived were those that demand a greater number and percentage of slaves. This was so because a great amount of the Africans worked doing craftsmanship activities or domestic service. However, it is true that we find them practically in all sectors, although the sectors related to the sea had their doors closed most of the time. On the contrary, in interior areas, dedicated to self-sufficiency crops had a lower demand of slave workforce, although in the cereal-producing islands, like Lanzarote, it was frequent to find them in the fields.

Some citizens, and not only the wealthiest ones, sometimes had more than ten,¹⁶ and it was not infrequent that many of the masters had between three and five, although there were many masters who only owned one single slave, particularly the middle-class groups. They were considered capital, although humans with a soul, whose possession generated wealth, and they could even solve some economic problem their master could have.¹⁷

The slaves were forced to do the hardest tasks. However, among those jobs, the executioner one stands out. In 1532, the Tenerife Council forced a black slave called Pedro to do this task. This slave had been accused of being a thief, deserving, according to the council, sentence to death by hanging, so he escaped from prison and withdrew in Santo Domingo monastery and in order to replace the death sentence and other corporal punishments, the friars were asked to hand him over, being sentenced to being an executioner for life (Serra Rafols and De la Rosa 1986, 361). This option of turning slaves into executioners was not new, because in 1519 the slave Juan de Castilla, owned by Francisco Díaz, was forced to do that job, indicating a three-gold *dobla* salary per year in thirds for the master (Serra Rafols and De la Rosa 1986, 24).

Black people were present in all the aspects of daily life in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was practically impossible not to find them in the main population centres. They were also present in written documents, on the charters to bring them from the African continent or in the Inquisition processes, in the council decrees, protocol books related to their sale or auctions, wills, donations, in their land purchase and artisan work.

From the 16th century, slave trade had been used to pay for some fortification works, like the walls enclosing Las Palmas, since in 1576 Philip II had authorised the shipment and sale of captives to America in order to finance them (Herrera Piqué 1984, 92). This strategy was carried out afterwards in order to build this type of works. La Palma obtained the favour of 500 slave licenses and with those benefits the island could have a quay in Santa Cruz de la Palma port, a tower in La Caldereta and the money left

¹⁶ AHPLP, Mirabal Rivero, Bartolomé, leg. 1.193, year 1658, Gran Canaria, fol. 422 v. In an advanced year as 1658, Diego Rodríguez Travieso, citizen of Arucas, declared having 10 slaves, black and mulattos: Francisco, Juana, Francisco, Luis, Silvestre, Lucia, Paula, Esteban, Juan y Maria.

¹⁷ AHPLP, Monguía Betancourt, Juan, leg. 2.747, year 1643, Lanzarote, fol. 238 r. In his will, in August 1643, Pedro de Cabrera Betancor, citizen of Lanzarote, declared that when he got married, he received as dowry a Little slave called Simon, aged 10, who he had to sell 10 or 12 years ago, due to his need to subsist because of all the bad years that Lanzarote and Fuerteventura had.

could be used in fortifying the island.¹⁸ In 1669, the Count of La Gomera asked the authorities in the mainland to be provided with the granted permission as a cost allowance, in order to get 100 black people in Angola or Cape Verde and sell them in New Spain. With the benefits obtained, he wanted to contribute to the island's fortification; however, this request did not cause any interest (Rodríguez Vicente 1985, 388-89). Without doubt, the slave trade was so profitable that it occasionally allowed financing expensive constructions, such as defence ones.

Many of the slaves grouped around religious brotherhoods, standing out Nuestra Señora del Rosario and San Sebastian in the islands, where they could mix among equals, protected by a religious tradition (Alemán González 2012, 1.443-46). El Salvador church in Santa Cruz de La Palma, in one of the relevant chapels, the *Cristo de los Mulatos* is watching over, called this way by the Brotherhood, the Mulattos, who took looked after him. We believe that mulattos mainly constituted this brotherhood, descendants of African slaves settled in the islands between the 16th and the 17th centuries. In fact, several mulatto and black people brotherhoods existed in the islands.

Black representations, and particularly African ones in Canarian churches and chapels are significant. We can estimate that this is the richest region regarding these types of images in Spain, together with Andalusia in relation to the population. Images of black Africans are reflected in both positive and negative ways. It is true that there are many images of black Balthazar, Benedict the Moor, or the black Virgin Nuestra Señora de Regla, but in other paintings and sculptures there are black people burning in hellfire, in daily scenes working in domestic service or even as a devil, which sometimes has black skin, while he is defeated by the Archangel (Devisse and Mollat 1979; Aponte Ramos 1992; Morabito 2000; Martín Casares and García Barranco 2010; Vincent 2010; Méndez Rodríguez 2011).¹⁹ In any case, the abundant black community in the islands caused fear and they had to be reminded of their social position, within the lowest social groups.

In La Encarnacion church in La Palma there is an image of Baby Jesus, surrounded by gold vegetal rinceaux that carry a series of angels. Although it is not an African representation, this image was a donation made by a

¹⁸ Archivo General de Simancas [A.G.S.], Guerra y Marina, leg. 339, 536.A part of these licenses were sold by Hernan Rodríguez Perera, citizen of Seville, in that city and in others by Juan de Alarcon.

¹⁹ This type of representations is also common in the rest of Spain, along with others such as the 'Miracle of San Cosme and San Damiano'.

freed female slave called Francisca del Rosario. This image had a name on it, Joseph Lvis del Rossario, Francisca's son. 14 July 1737 this freed woman declared, before dying, that her son had given her an image of Baby Jesus with a gold portable platform before embarking for Campeche, and her last will was to give the image to the patron of La Encarnacion church (Pérez Morera 1994). This image could date back to the early 18th century and it would also be a proof of the integration of African people in La Palma, as well as the assimilation of Christian religious beliefs and their use as a way of increasing their level or social reaffirmation.

Some African music and dances had also an influence in the Canarian music and dances, some of them with a strong sensual content, like the 'pampano roto', which was danced in the Southeast of Gran Canaria and has always been related to the presence of Africans on the island. *Gurumbe* and other African music were listened by Eugenio Salazar, governor of the Canary Islands, played by militiamen with African origin between 1567 and 1573 (Swiadon 1998, 133-47). These types of music were not the only ones heard and seen in the islands at all.

Conclusions

The sub-Saharan population of the Canary Islands meant the fourth essential population contribution to the new Canarian society, together with the already existing native population, the Europeans and the North Africans. After the second half of the 16th century, their number was higher than the North Africans'. Because they formed a group who had been brought in a violent way, characterised by the stigma of slavery and negritude, their social position was low, which together with the fact of being a minority, gave them scarce opportunities for social advancement.

We have estimated that the number of black people who arrived or who were born in the islands during almost four centuries is 14,000, although the low replacement rates made impossible preserving the legacy of all of them. The early-started mixed-racial sexual unions made that the number of mulattos increased, particularly after 1640. It is precisely the time between 1570 and 1640 when more sub-Saharans were brought and when their percentage is higher as a population group. It will be in the late 17th century when their demand decreases almost definitely, and therefore, their number and percentage reduces dramatically.

Their contribution to Canarian life was important, not only as work-force both in the fields, and especially in the production of sugar cane,

the craft industry and domestic context, but also in other aspects of the everyday and cultural life (cost of defence buildings, dance, music, words, images, participation in brotherhoods and religious manifestations, toponymy, etcetera). There would not be a Canarian society the way we understand it nowadays without the existence of that African population.

The assimilation was early, keeping after the appreciated freedom a low social position. The presence of slaves was very residual for the 18th century, but black people and mulattos still lived in the islands until the total miscegenation with the white majority.

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