

O Engenho de açúcar: André João Antonil and the Anatomy of the Seventeenth-Century Brazilian Slave Plantation

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ABSTRACT: Jesuit João André Antonil's *Cultura e Opulência do Brasil* is perhaps the first comprehensive treatise on slave plantation agriculture in the Americas. However, it is neither a manual nor an economic analysis. Rather, it is a moral and ethical guide for the administration of a sugar mill. This article examines the concepts, categories of thought, structures of meaning, and interpretive strategies through which Antonil comprehends the process of commodity production for the world market on the slave *engenho*. Antonil's conceptual horizon was constrained by the Jesuit synthesis of Aristotelean thought and post-Tridentine Christian doctrine and the conception of the Last Judgement as the end of historical time. Consequently, he could not conceptualize the modernity of Atlantic slavery, the world market, and the plantation as a new temporality. Instead, he analyzes the *engenho* through the Aristotelean concept of *oikos* or household. The categories of thought and action through which Antonil comprehends the slave plantation and world market reveal the contradictory relation between slave production and the world market in the Iberian Atlantic.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle; *Oikos*; *Chrematistike*; Substantive economy; Patriarchy; Moral economy of master and servant; Redistributive justice; Slave rent.

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RESUMEN: O Engenho de açúcar: *André João Antonil y la anatomía de la plantación esclavista brasileña del siglo XVII.* – *Cultura e Opulência do Brasil*, del jesuita João André Antonil, es quizá el primer tratado exhaustivo sobre la agricultura de las plantaciones de esclavos en América. Sin embargo, no es ni un manual ni un análisis económico. Se trata más bien de una guía moral y ética para la administración de un ingenio azucarero. Este artículo examina los conceptos, las categorías de pensamiento, las estructuras de significado y las estrategias interpretativas a través de las cuales Antonil comprende el proceso de producción de mercancías para el mercado mundial en el *engenho* esclavo. El horizonte conceptual de Antonil estaba limitado por la síntesis jesuita del pensamiento aristotélico y la doctrina cristiana postridentina y la concepción del Juicio Final como fin del tiempo histórico. En consecuencia, no podía conceptualizar la modernidad de la esclavitud atlántica, el mercado mundial y la plantación como una nueva temporalidad. En su lugar, analiza el *engenho* a través del concepto aristotélico de *oikos* u hogar. Las categorías de pensamiento y acción a través de las cuales Antonil comprende la plantación de esclavos y el mercado mundial revelan la relación contradictoria entre la producción de esclavos y el mercado mundial en el Atlántico ibérico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Aristóteles; *Oikos*; *Chrematistike*; Economía sustantiva; Patriarcado; Economía moral del amo y el siervo; Justicia redistributiva; Renta de esclavos.

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INTRODUCTION. SLAVERY AND CAPITALISM IN THE PORTUGUESE ATLANTIC

The problem of slavery and capitalism has long been the terrain for controversy among historians, and in recent years it has begun to receive renewed attention. What is the relation of slavery to the emergence of modern capitalism? How was the slave plantation organized and how do we understand its social and economic organization? In our efforts to answer these questions we necessarily impose categories of thought and action that endeavor to make the past comprehensible to us. For historians working with neo-classical economic theory, the slave plantation presents no particular problems. They proceed by applying categories that presume the commodification of land, labor, and capital and the regulation of these relations by price-determined markets. These ostensibly universal categories may be applied to any historical situation (Boldizzoni, 2011, pp. 1-17; Tomich, 2017). However, scholars working with the historical concept of economy, capitalism, and slavery are confronted with a dilemma. Was the Atlantic slave plantation medieval or modern? Feudal or capitalist (Godinho, 1990, pp. 7-9)? Those who privilege the archaic character of slavery opt for the former while those who emphasize production for the market opt for the latter.

In his pioneering work *The Political Economy of Slavery*, Marxist historian Eugene D. Genovese expresses this problem clearly. There he contrasts the characteristics of the US slave South to Max Weber's criteria for formal economic rationality. He emphasizes the failure of Southern slavery to meet Weber's standard of rational economic action. He views the plantation society South as "a special civilization built on the relationship of master to slave." This "powerful, largely autonomous civilization" had "aristocratic pretensions and possibilities," He argues that the "essential element of this distinct civilization was the slaveholders' domination, made possible by their command of labor. Slavery provided the basis for a special Southern economic and social life, special problems and tensions, and special laws of development. "The essential features of Southern particularity, as well as of Southern backwardness," he continues, "can be traced to the relationship of master and slave." The slave South "remained tied to the capitalist world by bonds of commodity production," but the backward, "irrational" characteristics of the "pre-capitalist" South "impeded the development of every normal feature of capitalism" (Genovese, 1965, pp. 15-16, 23).

Genovese's interpretation of the slave South as an autonomous precapitalist or non-capitalist formation is firmly embedded within the capitalist-precapitalist binary. Here slavery is capitalism's Other. This binary conception has continued to inform subsequent debates over capitalism and slavery despite the many possible combinations and permutations of the two terms. Perhaps surprisingly, Marx, upon whom Genovese bases his argument, offers a way out of this impasse. In a passage that has drawn little attention from Marxists, Marx writes: "World trade and

the world market date from the sixteenth century, and from then on the modern history of capital starts to unfold. ... This ultimate product of commodity circulation is the first form of appearance of capital" (Marx, 1976, p. 247). By identifying the history of capital with the historical formation of the world market in the sixteenth century Marx transforms the terms in which the capital relation may be understood both conceptually and historically. Here Marx presents capital not as a fixed concept, but rather as an "unfolding," historically changing social relation of commodity production and exchange. Both the relations of capital and the concepts with which Marx analyzes them become more complex and more closely integrated as the capital relation develops historically. In Marx's approach, world trade and the world market of the sixteenth century mark the elementary expression of the capital relation and the beginning of its modern history, while the dominance of the capital-wage labor relation and industrial capital is itself an outcome of the development of the world market. The concept of capital-wage labor represents the full expression of the capital relation and helps to interpret the historical development of capital. However, the historical dominance of capital-wage labor is a moment in the history of capital and does not coincide with it, either before or after its appearance.¹

Marx's formulation requires us to go further back in time and to treat geographical space more comprehensively than the almost exclusive focus on the period from about 1750 to the end of the US Civil War in 1868, and on Britain and its West Indian colonies or on the relation between North and South in the United States that has characterized the scholarly debate over capitalism and slavery. It provides a conceptual and historical approach that allows us to examine the Atlantic slave-sugar complex as an integral part of the process of the creation of the world market and emergent capitalist world economy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This chapter contributes to this approach through an examination of Jesuit João André Antonil's *Cultura e Opulência do Brasil*. Antonil's work is perhaps the first comprehensive treatise on slave plantation agriculture in the Americas. Profoundly insightful, it is an invaluable document of the Brazilian sugar mill or *engenho* at the apogee of its development. However, it is neither a manual nor an economic analysis. Rather, it is a moral and ethical guide for the administration of a sugar mill. Even though it contains much valuable information, I do not treat it as a descriptive account of the sugar mill and a repository of factual information. Rather, because Antonil writes before political economy existed as a discipline, I am interested in examining the concepts, categories of thought, structures of meaning, and interpretive strategies through which he comprehends the process of commodity production on the slave *engenho*. I am particularly interested in how Antonil understood what Marx called the "social relations of production" on the *engenho* and how he construed the relation of slave labor, sugar production, and the world market.² In this way, I thus seek to shed light on the categories of thought and action through which contemporaries comprehended the

slave plantation and world market so as to contribute to our understanding of the social and economic history of the slave plantation and capitalism over the historical long term.

The sugar plantation worked by African slaves was a fundamental feature of the Iberian colonization of the Atlantic and of the historical formation of the world market from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. From the beginning of the fifteenth-century sugar production moved across a succession of commodity frontiers with low population density and favorable environmental conditions for sugar cultivation (Moore, 2000) that extended from the Mediterranean to the coast of Africa and then to the Americas. The expansion of sugar created a continual demand for labor that was met by the mass enslavement of Africans and the African slave trade. At the same time, the expansion of the Atlantic sugar frontier gradually transformed European consumption as more sugar became available more cheaply. By the seventeenth century, the migration of sugar and slavery across the Atlantic created an interdependence between the two that transformed each and created something new. This geographical expansion culminated in the consolidation of the relationship between plantation agriculture, the Atlantic slave trade, racial slavery, and the production of sugar for the world market. The Atlantic commodity frontiers were transformed into zones of extensive sugar monoculture that were devoted to systematic production for the growing world market by means of slave labor and established their place in the world economic division of labor. Slavery was at once transformed into a system of commodity-producing labor and racialized. This combination of the world market, sugar, and African slavery gave rise to a new social-economic institution, the plantation. The sugar plantation ordered nature, the material processes of sugar production, and social control of the enslaved labor force in order to coordinate the activities necessary to produce sugar as a commodity for the world market.

Portugal dominated Atlantic sugar production and the Atlantic slave trade until the seventeenth century and the cycle of Portuguese Atlantic expansion culminated in Brazil. The sugar zones of Brazil, above all Bahia and Pernambuco, were far more extensive than the Atlantic islands. They offered sugar planters a favorable climate, rich soil, and numerous rivers that provided power for the grinding mills and transportation to the port cities. Sugar production in Brazil had to be conducted on a larger scale than elsewhere in the Portuguese Atlantic. Sugar, slaves, and manufactured goods had to be transported all the way across the Atlantic. The costs and risks of transportation were high and could only be offset by a greater scale of production. Greater output could be achieved by devoting more land and more slaves to sugar cultivation. Portugal controlled both sides of the South Atlantic. With or without the support of the Portuguese Crown, Portuguese, São Toméan, and Brazilian slave traders vigorously pursued the slave trade and created a slaving frontier in Africa in order to valorize the commodity-producing frontiers in Brazil (Alencastro, 2018). After the 1570s the enslaved

labor force engaged in sugar production in Brazil was almost exclusively of African origin and the ever-increasing demand for labor was supplied by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Conversely, the elasticity of sugar as a commodity meant more and cheaper sugar increased the demand for it (Furtado, 1963, p. 50). By the 1600s, Brazil's exports surpassed the combined production of all other Atlantic sugar colonies combined and greatly expanded the world sugar market (Galloway, 1989, pp. 50-77).

Cultura e Opulência is a response to the dramatic restructuring of the Atlantic economy and the world market of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. During the seventeenth century, the Portuguese empire found itself in a political, economic, and ideological conflict that spanned the Atlantic world. Beginning in 1624 the Dutch launched an offensive against the entire Portuguese sea-borne empire from the Atlantic to Asia. They invaded Bahia between 1624 and 1627, destroying hundreds of sugar mills, and occupied Brazil from 1630 to 1654. The Dutch became significantly involved in the African slave trade and were soon followed by the English and the French. Beginning in the 1630s sugar colonies in the British and French Caribbean emerged as powerful new competitors to Brazil. Aggressive mercantilist policies linked the new Caribbean sugar producers directly to the dynamic centers of capital accumulation in Britain and France and stimulated their rapid growth. Portuguese domination of both the slave and sugar trades was undermined. The world sugar market was at once expanded and restructured. The hub of world commerce shifted from Antwerp to Amsterdam. Sugar remained the leading export of Portuguese America but the Brazilian sugar industry underwent a period of stagnation and decline due to competition from the Caribbean sugar colonies (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 38-39).

When Antonil wrote his text on sugar in the 1690s colonial wars in the Caribbean and rising sugar prices allowed the Brazilian sugar industry to recover from its long period of torpor. It was a period of optimism, expansion, and rising prosperity for sugar planters in Brazil. New mills were built and old ones were enlarged or renovated. Sugar once again stimulated the economy of the colony. However, the recovery was short-lived. Unlike the sixteenth century when Portugal enjoyed the monopoly of the Atlantic sugar trade, the competitive market of the early eighteenth created cycles of prosperity and decline. By about 1710-1715 falling sugar prices and high slave prices initiated a new period of decline for the *engenhos*. Investment and economic activity shifted away from sugar to mining.³

ANDRÉ JOÃO ANTONIL: ARISTOTLE AND THE CHRISTIAN ECONOMY⁴ OF THE ENGENHO

Italian Jesuit André João Antonil's *Cultura e Opulência do Brasil por suas Drogas e Minas* is the only systematic account of the Brazilian sugar mill, or *engenho de açúcar*, written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵ The book is divided into four parts. Each part treats one of the four most important sources of wealth in

colonial Brazil: sugar, tobacco, mining, and cattle-raising. Although the book was published in 1711, the chapter on sugar, *Cultura e Opulência do Brasil na Lavra do Assucar: Engenho Real Moente e Corrente*, was written between 1693 and 1698 (Marquese, 1999, pp. 53-54; Mansuy, preface to Antonil, 1968, pp. 27-31). It is based on Antonil's observations on the renowned Jesuit sugar mill Sergipe de Conde in Bahia during a visit of a week or so. The book examines the social organization and management of a large sugar mill, or *engenho real* and it records the practical knowledge given to Antonil by the administrator of the mill, who had successfully directed the estate for thirty years, the famous master sugar producer, who had exercised his craft for more than fifty years, and a variety of other skilled workers. Its purpose was to present all the information Antonil had gathered on his brief visit to Sergipe de Conde to "those who do not know the cost of the sweetness of sugar for those who till the soil so that they know and regret less paying the price that it brings. And those who are beginning to operate an *engenho* may find here practical information that will show them how to conduct their work properly..." (Antonil, 1968, p. 78).

Antonil's *Cultura e Opulência* was written within the framework of the Jesuit mission to the Americas. By the seventeenth century, the Society of Jesus had a prominent role in the colonization of the Portuguese Atlantic. The Jesuits were the principal nucleus of men of letters in colonial Brazil, where literacy was not widespread, even among the elite. Through their evangelical and missionary vocation, the Jesuits provided the religious and moral justification for African slavery and the slave trade; they sought to convert and indoctrinate indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans and to assert the spiritual authority of the Church over the entire population of the colony, including Portuguese settlers. Guided by the principles of the Counter-Reformation and Tridentine reforms, they gave intellectual expression and coherence to the colonization of Brazil within the framework of Christian doctrine and Portuguese colonial policy (Vainfas, 1986, pp. 93-124; Marquese, 1999, pp. 51-52; Tomich, 2022).

Antonil's fellow Jesuits, most notably Antonio Vieira and Jorge Benci, had provided the religious justifications for racial slavery and religious-moral norms for relations between masters and slaves in general (Benci, 1977; Marquese, 1999, pp. 53-54, 78-88; Tomich, 2022). Antonil distinguishes himself from them by at once addressing the relations between master and slave through the social organization of the *engenho* and methodically examining the material and technical processes of sugar production. His work also stands in contrast to the pragmatic and empirical approach of Brazilian sugar planters who never standardized their practices or produced a manual. He thus provides the first systematic analysis of the Brazilian *engenho* that is accessible to a broad public. His precise descriptions of the techniques of sugar production remain an indispensable source for historians and economists (Canabrava, 1967, p. 33; Marquese, 1999, p. 50-51).

Antonil's *Cultura e Opulência* offers the opportunity to recover the conception of slave labor and sugar

production that informed thought and practice in seventeenth-century Brazil. However, here it is useful to recall Sir Moses Finley's distinction between the observation of economic activities and the concept of economy and economic analysis (Finley, 1970, p. 46). *Cultura e Opulência* is not an economic text or an agricultural manual. Absent are the categories of thought and action of what Karl Polanyi refers to as "formal economy." It offers no economic analysis of the *engenho* and contains no concept of economy or economic action. There is no discussion of increasing the profitability of the *engenho*, improving the productivity of labor, or of technological innovation. The *engenho* instead constitutes a variant of what Polanyi terms a "substantive economy"—the satisfaction of material wants through the interchange of society and nature (Polanyi, 1957b; Marquese, 1999, pp. 92-97).

Antonil treats the *engenho* not as an economic institution organized around profit-making, but as an association grounded in the patriarchal authority of the *senhor*. His purpose is to legitimate the hierarchical social order of the *engenho* as a moral and ethical order formed within the religious and moral precepts of the Church. He defines and sanctions the authority of the *senhor* and the place of each group within the orbit of the *engenho*—the master, cane farmers, the chaplain, overseers and supervisory staff, the sugar master and artisans, slaves, and the family of the master. Within this stratified order, he prescribes a normative standard of behavior that enables the *senhor* to govern the *engenho* and maintain order, stability, and social equilibrium among its diverse groups. At the same time, he standardizes knowledge of sugar production in order to provide a practical guide to planters. In this way, *Cultura e Opulência* seeks to shape the social order of the *engenho* and reconcile it with the material processes of sugar production within the framework of a comprehensive religious view of the world. It thereby discloses how contemporaries conceptually understood and materially organized the production of sugar for the world market by means of slave labor.

Antonil's account of the *engenho* and racial slavery in Brazil was written at the end of the long historical cycle of the development of slavery that stretches from classical antiquity to the processes forming the capitalist world market during the seventeenth century. Antonil sees new phenomena through the lens of the old. The Jesuit interpretation of Aristotle structured his effort to provide moral-ethical norms of conduct that would guide the *senhor* in the governance of the *engenho*. He interprets slavery and the *engenho* from the perspective of the Aristotelean concept of *oikos*.⁶ His interpretation is a distinctively concrete expression of the Jesuit synthesis of Aristotelean thought and post-Tridentine Christian doctrine. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jesuit theologians, faced with the challenges of the Protestant Reformation and doctrinal struggles within the Church, continually appropriated and reinterpreted the thought of Aristotle as they standardized their teachings and sought to put forth a unified doctrine to maintain the Catholic faith. The Jesuit interpretation of Aristotle was integral to their doctrine.

Antonil was exceptionally well-grounded in these doctrinal matters through his many years of activity in the College of Bahia. His use of Aristotle to interpret the *engenho* was firmly within the more comprehensive Jesuit evangelical and missionary project.

By means of the Aristotelean concept of *oikos* Antonil attempted to bring the earthly history of the *engenho* and racial slavery into harmony with the Christian conception of historical time. In the Christian conception earthly historical experience is inscribed within a theological conception of historical time. The world and time are the creation of God. The history of the world begins with the Creation and, following the birth of Christ, the world entered its final epoch. The Last Judgement signifies not simply the end of history in the sense of the narrative of human events, but the end of time itself. The Last Judgement is a definite end that defines human history and provides absolute meaning for all earthly situations. All earthly events are thus interpreted in relation to it. Redemption and salvation provide the immanent meaning of history. Because the meaning of secular history lies beyond it, new phenomena must be incorporated into a structurally uniform final epoch. By providing absolute meaning for all earthly situations the Last Judgement relativizes practical experience. This cognitive framework enables earthly events to be effectively perceived and interpreted even as they are rendered unimportant (Koselleck, 1990, pp. 126-128; Löwith 1949, pp. 160-173; Tomich, 2022, pp. 17-19).

Antonil's effort to reconcile the new conditions of sugar production, racial slavery, and the world market with the Aristotelean concept of *oikos* revealed the limits of both Antonil's own mental universe and Aristotle's concept of *oikos*. At the same time, it exposed the tensions and contradictions that characterize the relationship between the plantation slavery and the capitalist world market. Antonil's effort to interpret his empirical description of the *engenho* through the moral and ethical precepts of the Church relativizes its secular history and subordinates it to the Christian concept of historical temporality and the Last Judgement. The concept of *oikos* provides the means of integrating the new historical experience of the Brazilian sugar frontier into the unchanging narrative and temporality of the Christian concept of historical time. In Reinhardt Koselleck's terms, the eschatological temporality of the Last Judgement determined Antonil's "horizon of expectation," that is, the future that he could conceive, and shaped his ability to interpret his "field of experience"⁷ (Koselleck, 1990, pp. 307-329, esp. pp. 316-319). For Antonil, modernity, the supersession of the old by the new, was "unthinkable" in its own terms (Bourdieu, 1990: esp. pp. 52-65).

ANTONIL AND THE MORAL ECONOMY OF MASTER AND SERVANT

Antonil formulated his interpretation of moral-ethical norms of conduct not by following abstract moral principles but by applying Aristotle's concept of proportional or redistributive justice to the *engenho* (Aristotle, 1955,

pp. 177-184).⁸ Offering the *senhor* guidance on how to govern the *engenho* (Antonil, 1968, pp. 124-126), he understood that rights and duties were distributed proportionally according to status and function. Antonil's detailed account of the status and role of the various groups on the *engenho* and of the processes of sugar production enable him to ascertain the rights and obligations of each group. His approach discloses the dense web of reciprocal but asymmetrical obligations that form a hierarchy of domination and subordination centered on the patriarchal figure of *senhor*. This hierarchy integrates the *engenho* as a social body and organizes the productive activity of the *engenho*. By establishing moral and ethical norms of comportment within this relational complex, Antonil sought to mitigate conflicts, balance the relations between the different social strata comprising the *engenho*, and legitimate the authority of the *senhor*. In this way, he sought to create the conditions for good governance.

Antonil's acceptance of the practical and juridical realities of racial slavery and the sugar mill (Canabrava, 1987, p. 55) has led some scholars to regard his interpretation of the *engenho* as the secularization of Jesuit thought (e.g. Vainfas, 1986, p. 98). However, in his conception, the secular life of the *engenho* was relativized and folded into the absolute temporality of the Last Judgement. Antonil constructed the moral order of the *engenho* around the patriarchal authority of the *senhor*, but the daily comportment of masters and slaves was subordinated to God's will and the doctrine of the Church. From this perspective, Antonil did not reject the relations and practices of the *engenho*, but rather sought to put limits or boundaries to behavior by enforcing a code of moral-ethical behavior. The master's foremost duty was to God. He must govern well and see to the religious education and practice of the groups on the *engenho*, above all, his family and the slaves.

As Rafael Marquese emphasizes, Antonil's discourse is cast in the Aristotelean view of the mutual obligations between master and servant. It thereby encompasses all of the servants on the *engenho*, free and slave, though the enslaved were the preponderant group, both because of their numbers and their role in the operation of the *engenho*. Within this framework, the relations of obligation and service to the master are emphasized. There is no category of laborer. The enslaved were understood as servants, not as slaves and their work is a service rendered to the *senhor*. However, within the web of mutual obligation that organized the social relations and productive activity of the *engenho*, the enslaved are excluded from the relations of reciprocity that governed the interactions of the community of free people of the *engenho*. Nonetheless, Antonil went beyond a simple minimal and repressive conception. His concept of good governance, based on moral-ethical principles, sought to establish the paternal authority of the *senhor* over the enslaved within the framework of Christian-Aristotelean doctrine (Antonil, 1968, pp. 126-129; Marquese, 1999, p. 64; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 55-56).

Unlike Aristotle who viewed slavery as a natural state, for Antonil and the Jesuits, the justification of racial slavery was religious. Religious doctrine imparted intellectu-

al coherence and ideological justification to the systemic enslavement of Africans and was a vehicle for the racialization of slavery. It formed a fundamental aspect of the political, social, and ideological culture of control that secured domination over enslaved Africans and legitimized the institutions and practices of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery. This theological formulation of racial slavery was based not on the physical and cultural characteristics of enslaved Africans, but rather on their spiritual condition.

The enslavement of Africans was justified by the Fall of Man. Antonil and his fellow Jesuit Benci addressed those slaves already in Brazil. Benci relates their fate to the Fall of Man. As the Children of Ham, Africans were condemned to eternal slavery because of their ignorance of God (Benci, 1977; Vainfas, 1986, pp. 94-95). Their enslavement was conceived as part of their spiritual education and offered them a path to salvation. On the *engenho* the enslaved were socialized into the norms of slavery and indoctrinated into the gospel of Christ. Through this education, the enslaved were to recognize their service to the *senhor* as a divine duty. For Antonil, as for Aristotle, the enslaved were excluded from the community of free men who made up the *oikos*, but for Antonil they were still children of God and therefore part of a larger community. Their duty was to accept their condition and serve their master, for to serve the master was to serve God. Their lot was to obey the master, to learn and understand the teachings of the Church, and to live in accordance with them. This was their path to salvation and reward for their earthly suffering. Religious conversion was a fundamental aspect of the enslavement of Africans in Brazil and acceptance of Christian beliefs and practices served as a primary measure of the socialization of the enslaved into their conditions of life on the *engenho* (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 34-35, 55-56; Aristotle, 1955, pp. 177-184). Thus, slavery and Antonil's social-moral order were at the intersection of the regulation of plantation labor and Jesuit cosmology and missionary activity.

THE ENGENHO REAL: SUGAR AND SLAVERY

Antonil's account is based on his observations at *engenho* Sergipe do Conde, a prominent *engenho real* or royal sugarmill owned by the Jesuits in the Bahian Recôncovo. "The royal sugarmills," writes Antonil, "draw their name from the perfection of all the parts of which they are composed, the great number of slaves in their workforce, the extent of the cane fields that belong to them or that grind their cane in their mill, and above all, because they use water-power to drive their mill in contrast to the others that use horses or oxen, are less well supplied and equipped, or at least have less ample and lower quality workshops (*officinas*), and have a smaller number of slaves to maintain the factory, as they say, in running and milling condition (*moente & corrente*)" (Antonil, 1968, pp. 76-79).

The *engenho real* dominated the Recôncovo, the Bahian sugar zone, and gave it its distinctive geographical

and social-economic character. The *engenho real* was the center of sugar manufacture and its defining attribute was its powerful watermill. The capacity of the mill determined the location and scale of operations and was key to the domination of the *engenho real* and the *senhor*. The *senhores de engenho* controlled access to rivers and other waterways that were suitable for driving the mill and in that way monopolized cane grinding within an extended area (Castro, 1980a; 1980b, pp. 682-693; Gama, 1983, esp. pp. 275-308; Ferlini, 1988, pp. 117-119; Canabrava, 1967, p. 43).⁹ The *engenho* possessed extensive land and a large number of slaves. Only someone with a great deal of wealth could afford to build and operate such an estate. While the *engenho* grew its own cane, it only cultivated a portion of its land. It also ground the cane of dependent cane farmers, themselves slaveholders, who usually leased their land and were obligated to grind their cane at the mill of the *engenho*. In addition to the mill, the *engenho real* had a refinery and all of the equipment necessary to convert cane into crystallized sugar. In addition to slaves, a large number of servants and retainers, including administrators, overseers and supervisory personnel, craftsmen and skilled workers, and household staff as well as the *senhor's* family were all residents on the estate. The *engenho real* and its dependencies formed an extensive if the highly stratified community that lived and worked under the authority of the *senhor*.

In Antonil's account, the market is presumed as a given condition outside of the organization of production on the *engenho*. *Cultura e Opulência* delineates the dense network of mutual, but unequal rights and obligations that defines the *senhor's* authority over each of the various subordinate groups. The authority of the *senhor*, exercised through the concept of "*governar*," forms the link between the social and material practices of the *engenho* and defines it as a social and productive unit. Here, the *senhor* is not a self-interested entrepreneur or manager seeking to maximize economic efficiency and profitability. Rather, drawing upon Aristotle, the *senhor's* role is to "govern" (*governar*) the *engenho* and its personnel. To "govern well" is to maintain the equilibrium between reciprocal rights and obligations of the various groups that sustains the hierarchical structure of the *engenho* and secures its operation. The moral-religious ethic provides the standard that regulates the relations between the groups on the *engenho*, in accordance with Aristotle's concept of redistributive or proportional justice. Each group must fulfill its duty as an obligation to God. The master's duty to God is to govern well and indoctrinate the groups on the *engenho*, above all his family and the slaves in the Faith (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 34-35; Aristotle, 1955, pp. 177-184).

Antonil begins his account with the figure of the *senhor de engenho*. The position of *senhor* is not simply identified with property ownership in the modern sense. Rather, it is a socially prescribed position defined by status considerations (Mansuy in Antonil, 1968, p. 60). Antonil writes, "Many aspire to the title of *senhor de engenho* because it carries with it the privilege of being

served, obeyed, and respected by many.” He continues “if the *senhor de engenho* is, as he should be, a man of great wealth and a good administrator (*homem de cabedal & governo*), it is with good reason that he can, in Brazil, regard his position in the same terms as one regards titles of nobility among the gentlemen of the Kingdom.” The *senhor*’s authority over the *engenho* and its human and material assets is a function of his status. Antonil uses the term “*cabedal*” to refer to the wealth of the *senhor*. *Cabedal* encompasses three distinct meanings: the property or wealth of an individual; his ingenuity, intelligence, and knowledge; and, linked to an ethical connotation, the ability to get things done. Antonil treats all these qualities as the personal attributes of the *senhor*. They form a matrix that unites the material, intellectual, and moral capacity of the *senhor* with the material and social conditions of the *engenho* (Marquese, 1999, p. 57). Through them, Antonil construes the material resources and organization of the *engenho* as the extension of the person of the *senhor*.

THE SENHOR DE ENGENHO AND LAVRADORES DE CANA

The social hierarchy of the *engenho* encompassed two categories of subordinates: those who were dependents of the *senhor* and those who served him. Antonil treats both categories through the Aristotelean concept of *oikos* (Antonil, 1969, pp. 84-86). The *lavradores de cana* or cane farmers were the most important dependents of the *senhor*. The vast expanse of land controlled by the *senhores* allowed them to construct a network of dependent cane farmers organized around the *engenho*. This pattern of organization characterized the expansion of Portuguese sugar production across the Atlantic and was a part of the formation of the Brazilian sugar industry from its beginning. The *engenho real* grew its own cane, but the mill could process much more cane than was grown on the *engenho*. The *lavradores* were freemen and slaveowners who specialized in growing sugar cane, but they were obligated to have it processed into sugar by the *engenho*. The system of *lavradores* mobilized the less affluent sectors of the colonizing population to occupy unused land and increase sugar production. However, this system of dependencies worked to the enormous advantage of the *senhor* who appropriated the surplus product of the *lavradores* before the sugar was sold on the market. With this arrangement, the *engenho* secured an adequate supply of cane for the mill, while the *lavradores* bore the expense of slave purchases, maintenance, and supervision. Further, losses from bad harvests or falling prices could be mitigated by spreading them among the *lavradores*. While this system offered some advantages to the *lavrador*, it greatly enhanced the economic power of the *senhor* (Canabrava, 1967, p. 50).

The *lavradores* were the most important group in the sugar economy after the *senhor de engenho*. They produced a substantial portion of the sugar cane grown in Brazil (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 43, 45-46, 50). The proportion of *lavrador*-produced cane and *engenho*-produced cane shifted with changing market and social conditions

and with the *engenho*’s particular production strategy. The number of cane farmers attached to an *engenho* could vary depending upon how the *engenho* organized cane planting, sugar manufacture, and the size of its labor force. In the seventeenth century, it was considered good planting practice for the *engenho* to grow some of its own cane and not overly rely on cane farmers. However, after Antonil wrote, in the period of decline that began in the mid-eighteenth century, more and more *engenhos* ceased growing their own cane and relied on *lavradores* for the primary material (Antonil, 1968, pp. 95-99; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 45-48; Schwartz, 1985, pp. 203, 295-312; Ferlini, 1988, pp. 162-206; Marquese, 1999, pp. 59-61).

The *lavradores* held their land through a variety of arrangements, including tenancy, sharecropping, rental, and independent ownership. The various kinds of tenure imposed unequal conditions on the different categories of *lavradores*. Common to all of these arrangements, however, *senhor de engenho*’s use of his monopoly of milling operations to maintain the *lavradores* dependence on the *engenho*. This web of material and personal dependence organized and articulated the entire productive complex of the *engenho*. The original *sesmarias* that granted *senhores* the right to establish an *engenho real* also required that land be set aside for cane farmers. These *lavradores*, either tenant or sharecroppers, were to devote themselves to sugar cane cultivation and were obligated to process their cane at the *engenho*. They thus were given legal standing but were legally bound to the *engenho*. The *senhores* also sold land to less well-off buyers at prices below the market value of the land on the condition that the cane that they produced be milled by the *engenho* (Antonil, 1968, p. 147; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 46-47). These two groups of *lavradores* were permanently bound to the *engenho* through the use of the land. In addition, the *engenho* rented its own land to *lavradores* to plant cane who were also bound to have it milled by the *engenho*. Tenants, sharecroppers, and renters received one-fourth or one-third of the sugar produced from their cane (Antonil, 1968, pp. 84, 94-95; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 48-50; Schwartz, 1985, pp. 296-298). *Lavradores* who owned their own land were in the most advantageous position. They were completely independent and were in principle free to grind their own cane wherever they wished. In their case, the *senhor de engenho* sought to purchase not their cane but the obligation that the *lavrador* mill his cane at the *engenho*. The *lavrador* received a half share of the cane submitted and the purchase price was perhaps accompanied by financial guarantees and incentives (Antonil, 1968, pp. 94-99, 143-147, 260-263; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 47-51; Schwartz, 1985, pp. 296-313; Ferlini, 1988, pp. 170-171).

There was a structural tension between the *lavradores* and the *senhor*. The *lavradores* were free men and slaveholders and therefore part of the upper strata of colonial society but the encumbrances on land and crop made them dependents of the *engenho* and the *senhor*. Although it was very difficult to accomplish, many *lavradores* aspired to become *senhores* themselves. Relative social and economic mobility, though still slow and difficult, was con-

centrated among those *lavradores* who owned their own land (Antonil, 1968, pp 98-99; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 50-51).

The return of the Brazilian sugar industry to earlier levels of production at the time Antonil was writing aggravated tensions between *senhores* and *lavradores*. The *senhores* were concerned with guaranteeing a constant supply of cane to their mills, while the *lavradores* were concerned with increasing their income either by revising their leases with the *senhor* or by establishing their own mills. Many *lavradores*, encouraged by readily available credit, were building “*engenhocas*” to mill their own sugar. The *engenhoca* was a relatively cheap and efficient three-cylinder vertical mill that could be operated by water, animal, or wind power. The adoption of these mills reduced the social distance between the owners of the *engenhocas* and the *senhores de engenho*. It shifted the balance of power toward the *lavradores* by allowing them to manufacture sugar independently. It thereby broke the dependency of the *lavradores* on the *senhores* and reconfigured the supply of cane to the mills causing shortages for the *engenhos*. It also lessened the social distance between owners of *engenhocas* and the *senhores de engenho* and generated conflicts (Castro, 1980b; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 40-41, 50-51; Gama, 1983, pp. 264-295).

Antonil’s conception of social order centered on the authority and prestige of the *senhor*. He sought to establish moral norms of conduct consistent with the unequal status of *lavradores* and *senhores* in order to regulate the relationship between them. Antonil’s proposals sought to subjectively bind together the cane farmers and the *engenho* through the Aristotelean-Christian ethic. These norms of conduct would reduce conflict, reinforce the relations of dependency and enhance the authority of the *senhor*, in order to secure more effective cooperation between the cane growers and the *engenho*. He viewed self-interest as the root of conflict and emphasized mutual obligations between *lavradores* and *senhores* as the way to maintain order on the *engenho*. He admonished the *lavradores* to behave with gratitude and respect toward the *senhor* and, on the other hand, warned the *senhores* against behaving with contempt for the poorer *lavradores*. The *senhores* should not exploit their superior position. They should avoid haughtiness, arrogance, and instead behave with civility, equity, and honesty toward the *lavradores* (Antonil, 1968, pp. 94-96).

SERVANTS OF THE SENHOR DE ENGENHO: SUGAR AND SLAVES

The other category of subordinates was those who serve the *senhor*. This category included all those groups that were residents of the *engenho* and lived and worked under the authority of the *senhor*. They were part of the *cabedal* of the *senhor*. Antonil uses the organic metaphor of the human body to describe the hierarchical structure of the *engenho*. The *senhor* is the head. He is the seat of intelligence, knowledge, and moral authority. His will directs the body and guides the social and material activities

of the *engenho*. The supervisory staff and technicians are the arms (*braços*) of the *senhor*. They operate under his direction and see that his will is carried out. Finally, the slaves are the hands and feet (*mãos e pés*) of the planter and execute the tasks necessary for the operation of the *engenho*. This description of the *engenho* as the human body derives from Aristotle and medieval Christian tradition (Marquese, 1999, pp. 61-62; Vainfas, 1986, p. 98). In this description, there is no distinction between the property and the proprietor. This organic image is not simply a descriptive metaphor. Rather, it creates and articulates hierarchies of social control and material production based on function. The supervision, regulation, and discipline of the slaves and control sugar manufacture are interdependent spheres of competence that are related to one another through personal dependence between those above and below each station. Finally, there are the slaves who carry out the tasks necessary to produce sugar under the direction of their superiors.

Before he begins his discussion of the overseers and specialized workers who supervise the slaves and organize sugar production Antonil devotes an entire chapter of his manuscript to the selection of the chaplain, whose task is to direct the spiritual life of the *engenho*. The chaplain is charged with the instruction of all those who follow a Christian life. Antonil admonishes that the customary practice of informal instruction by an overseer who teaches the prayers and the laws of God and the Church by rote is unsatisfactory. A chaplain is required on the *engenho* because he can explain what they should believe, how they should act, and how they should ask God for the things that they need. The chaplain is a Servant of God, not the master. The presence of the chaplain allows the *senhor* to fulfill his greatest duty, that of teaching the Christian doctrine or having it taught to his family and to his slaves (Antonil, 1968, pp. 100-105).

Antonil stresses that more than any other decision, the master must demonstrate competence and prudence in his choice of the staff. Good governance of the *engenho* required judicious choice of officials and workers. The prudent *senhor* must not select personnel who are of bad character or who are unqualified for the jobs they are to perform. The former is not pleasing to God, and the latter can cause great damage to the estate. Antonil declares that the overseers serve the master for the good governance of the estate. However, if each of them wants to be the chief, the government of the estate will be monstrous, a veritable portrait of the three-headed dog Cerberus of Greek mythology. It is necessary to delegate authority to the overseers but that authority must be well-ordered, controlled, and not absolute. The inferior ranks must be subordinated to a superior and all must be subordinated to the master whom they serve (Antonil, 1968, pp. 90, 100-101, 106-107; Marquese, 1999, pp. 55, 61-63).

The authority of the *senhor* and control over the slaves is distributed through a chain of interpersonal dependence among administrators and overseers that ultimately begins and ends with the *senhor*. Antonil writes that the slaves must believe that the chief overseer has superior authority

to command them and to punish them when necessary. But this must be organized in such a way that slaves understand that they may have recourse to the master and that they will be heard by him and receive justice from him. The disciplinary structure of the *engenho* is embedded in and legitimized by the personal authority of the *senhor*. The paternalistic authority of the *senhor* is both the beginning and the end of the structure of command and each overseer exercises a share of that authority. The other sub-overseers have authority over the slaves but their power to punish them is limited and restrained. The master must clearly enunciate the power granted to each of the overseers including the chief overseer, especially with regard to physical punishment. If they exceed their limits, he must reprimand them. In order to preserve the authority of the overseer, the reprimand must not take place in front of the slaves. An intermediary should make known to the slave who suffered the abuse as well as others selected from the elders of the property that the *senhor* has addressed the misdeed committed by the overseer and that it will not happen again. Antonil enumerates the restrictions that were imposed on the overseer's ability to administer physical punishment in order to protect the enslaved from maltreatment and to maintain the structure of justice and authority on the *engenho*. Such constraints on subordinates were essential to governing the *engenho* well (Antonil, 1968, p. 106).

Antonil's detailed treatment of the process, technology, and techniques employed in seventeenth-century sugar production can only be briefly summarized here. The distinctive botanical economy of the cane sugar plant determined the organizational structure and productive routines of the *engenho* (Warman, 2009, pp. 12-27). Sugar production entails the integration of both agricultural and manufacturing operations. The cane must be cut when it is ripe and then processed into sugar within eighteen to thirty-six hours if crystallized sugar is to be obtained. Processing requires a series of sequential distinct physical and chemical processes that have to be performed in order. Once cut, the juice must be extracted from the cane stalks by crushing or grinding them in the mill. After removing impurities from the juice, it is then boiled down in open kettles until the syrup is ready to be "struck" or crystallized into sugar. Once struck, excess molasses must be separated from the crystallized sugar. Upon crystallization, the sugar is packed for sale or shipment. No more cane can be cut than could be ground in the mill. No more cane can be ground into juice than can be boiled down into syrup. No more syrup can be reduced from the juice than can be crystallized into sugar. Thus, the physical characteristics of sugar impose a strict proportional relation among each sector of production and an economy of time and space on the operations of the *engenho*. The sugar plantation has a factory-like division of labor and labor discipline not because of the social organization of labor but because of the material requirements of sugar production.

The hierarchy of authority of the *engenho* integrated control over the enslaved labor force and the material process of sugar production. The chief overseer (*feitor mór*)

supervised the entire production process throughout the crop cycle. He reported to the *senhor* at every stage of the process (Antonil, 1968, p. 110). Under his authority each sector—the fields, the mill, the boiling house, and the curing—was under the supervision of a specialized overseer or artisan. During the harvest, the sugar master (*mestre do assucar*) supervised the activities in the boiling house but also coordinated the activities in the mill, boiling house, furnaces, and curing house with one another. Successful manufacture depended on the personal knowledge, skill, and judgement of the artisans and skilled workers (including slaves) who conducted each step of the process and on the collective activity of the enslaved laborers. The overseers and supervisors were the links between the objective and subjective factors of production. Together they harnessed the laboring activity of the enslaved to the material requirements of production, while the links between them were determined by the material conditions of production and relations of interpersonal dependence (Antonil, 1968, pp. 112-117, 196-205, esp. pp. 208-213; Marquese, 1999, p. 65, 75-76).

The size and disposition of the slave labor force were determined by the labor requirements of sugar production. The appropriation of the enslaved labor as property meant that the size and composition of the labor force had to be adapted to the given material and technical organization of production (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 58-59). In this context, Antonil asserted that the good or bad quality of the work depended upon the good governance of the *engenho*. The slaves had to be assigned to jobs that were appropriate to their age, strength, and aptitude (Antonil, 1968, pp. 122-123). Enslaved workers were distributed among the various tasks according to their personal attributes—real or imagined—where they worked under the supervision of overseers and artisans. The field hands included both men and women, those of African origin, and adolescents entering the adult labor force. The skilled workers in the mill, refinery, and curing house were predominantly slaves born in Brazil and mulattos. Women were the key workers in the mill and in the curing house where the delicate task of separating molasses from the crystallized sugar was performed (Antonil, 1968, pp. 108-117, 161-163).

Material interdependence and the system of reciprocal but unequal obligations, that is to say, the hierarchy of domination and subordination, delineated by Antonil bound together the *engenho* as a social body through which the process of sugar production was conducted. It formed a social-material equilibrium that was only reinforced by Antonil's efforts to regulate it. Thus, the plantation was a fixed and durable unit that was closed off to the outside by the network of interpersonal dependencies that comprise it. It was a world unto itself.

OIKOS, ENGENHO, AND THE WORLD MARKET: THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL TEMPORALITY

Through his treatment of the *engenho* as *oikos* Antonil confronts the problem of seventeenth-century Atlantic

slavery with the conceptual tools of the late Middle Ages. The dispositions, problematics, concepts, methods, and techniques (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 5) available to Antonil did not allow him to think beyond the Aristotelean categories of *oikos* and proportional justice. Consequently, he sought to contain the new relations of the *engenho* in the old categories of *oikos*. However, the creation of the *engenho* as part of the formation of the world market superseded the Aristotelean category of *oikos*. In Aristotelean terms, the *engenho* at once embodies both *oikos* and *chrematistike*. The internal organization *engenho* has the form of *oikos* but the purpose of its productive activity is *chrematistike*, the acquisition of wealth. The majority of the population of the *engenho* are black slaves who devote their energy to the production of sugar as a commodity and the overwhelming majority of the produce of the *engenho* is sugar that has to be sold on the world market in order obtain the revenue necessary to maintain the estate. Thus, the *engenho* embodies the problems of commodity production, racial slavery, and the world market. It represents the genesis of modern slavery. These historical conditions expose the fundamental tension in Antonil's approach to the *engenho*, and indeed the great contradiction in the relation of slavery and capitalism.

Antonil's perspective fails to furnish categories capable of adequately conceptualizing the historical novelty of the *engenho* and modern racial slavery. Instead, he must treat it as *oikos*. As a result, there is a contradiction between his interpretive framework and his rich empirical description. Antonil treats *oikos* as at once a theological and a secular category. He seeks to impose the moral order of the patriarchic household on the *engenho*. From this perspective, the social and material structure of the *engenho* may be understood as the institutional embodiment of the Christian-Aristotelean ethic of the mutual obligation of master and servant. The secular empirical history of the slave *engenho* is thus integrated into the narrative and temporality of Christian theology. Empirical history is thereby relativized and subordinated to the absolute temporality of the Last Judgement. Antonil remains imprisoned within the theological conception of historical temporality. He cannot recognize the *engenho* as the slave plantation producing for the world market and must instead treat it as *oikos* even as the Aristotelean concept of *oikos* is emptied of its original content and distorted by its application entirely to *chrematistike* in a new historical context. He is therefore compelled to integrate commodity production, racial slavery, and the world market within the concept of *oikos*.

Antonil is unable to surpass the long-term mental structures of Aristotle and the theological interpretation of history at the same time that he describes and acts in the new times of the slave plantation and world market. Here we have what Koselleck calls the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" (Koselleck, 1990, pp. 121-129). The conception of history is itself an integral part of the historical problem of slavery and the world market. The Christian conception of historical temporality, with a definite beginning and a definite end, at once coexists

and clashes with the secular, open-ended, social-material temporality of the *engenho* and slave commodity production, increasingly regulated by a new sort of *chrematistike*, more accurately the temporality of the capitalist world market. At stake for the Jesuit Antonil, however, is not the description of the given historical present but the prognostication of the future and the course of future action. Here we may suggest that Antonil's inability to embrace the new results in what Robin Blackburn (1997, pp. 22-23) has termed "Baroque slavery," the increasingly elaborate representation of new phenomena in old forms.

Antonil's approach allows us to posit the relation of slavery and capitalism, not through the precapitalist/capitalist binomial but rather as a contradictory unity that is historically formed and reformed through its own processes (Franco, 1976, pp. 9-19; 1984). While Antonil's attempt to contain the relations of commodity production, racial slavery, and the world market within the Aristotelean category of *oikos* appears as the great contradiction within his interpretation of the *engenho*, it reveals the unity of plantation slavery and world capitalism continually reproducing itself through their contradictory relation to one another. His account is accurate and inaccurate at the same time and remains partially valid from a one-sided perspective.

Antonil's treatment of the *engenho* as *oikos* appears anachronistic from the point of view of the world market. He makes no mention of the slave economy, production costs, labor costs, or of profitability and productivity. Instead, he demonstrates that interpreting the *engenho* through these economic categories is itself anachronistic. The conditions for reducing costs or increasing productivity or profitability did not exist on the slave *engenho*. In their place, Antonil discloses the relations of personal domination, dependence, and subordination that organized slave commodity production on the *engenho*. His account demonstrates the enduring relevance of Aristotle's conception of master-slave relations. The productive activity of the *engenho*, was organized through a hierarchy of domination and subordination that rested upon the personal authority of the *senhor*. There were no economic mechanisms at work within it (Castro, 1980a; Canabrava, 1967, pp. 58-59). The *activity of labor* was not a social relation of production. Rather it was secured through the subordination of enslaved laborers. Slave labor is not a commodity and the activity of labor has no value. There are no labor costs and no production costs. The relations of slavery offer no means of saving or economizing labor. As historian Douglass Hall (1961) has argued, slave labor is quite literally "incalculable." Consequently, the conditions for economic action or economizing do not exist. What prevails is the logic of social domination, not economic efficiency.

In contrast to the seigneurial relations in early modern Europe, the monopoly of land did not create the labor force in the Atlantic slave commodity frontiers. Rather, the direct command over the enslaved labor force valorized the land (Tomich, 2020, p. 537). Antonil describes the enslaved Africans working on the plantation as "the

hands and feet of the planter.” This expression, which is frequently repeated in the historiography of Brazilian slavery, does not refer simply to the depersonalization of the slave and her/his reduction to an instrument of labor. Rather, it finds its full meaning in Antonil’s conception of the *engenho* as a household (*oikos*). The slave belongs to the *cabedal* of the *senhor*, what Antonil conceives as the body of the *engenho*. She/he is organically linked to the master as part of a hierarchical, functional whole and is the necessary extension of the person of the *senhor*. Thus, here slavery is not an economic relation. Rather, it is an integral part of the hierarchical and paternalist social order of the *engenho*. It is what Marx terms a relation of direct domination.¹⁰ The condition for the exploitation of slave labor is ownership of the enslaved as chattel property. The conditions of production confront the enslaved worker not as capital but as the personal dominion of the *senhor*.

The slaves were the animating force of the *engenho*. “Without them, in Brazil,” writes Antonil, “it would not be possible to build, maintain, and expand an estate or to have a mill that is operational. And whether they do the work well or poorly depends on the way they are treated” (Antonil, 1968, pp. 120-121). However, because the slave is the property of the *senhor*, the labor necessary to reproduce the laborer and surplus labor are manifested differently than in the capital-wage labor relation. Marx argues:

In slave-labor, even that part of the working-day in which the slave is only replacing the value of his own means of subsistence, in which he therefore actually works for himself alone, appears as labor for his master. All his labor appears as unpaid labor. In wage-labor, on the contrary, even surplus labor, or unpaid labor, appears as paid. In the one case, the property-relation conceals the slave’s labor for himself; in the other case the money-relation conceals the uncompensated labor of the wage-laborer (Marx, 1976, p. 680).

For the wage laborer, the *activity* of labor (or what Marx refers to as “labor-power”) has a value of its own and is the source of the value of the commodity that is produced. Through the commodification of labor-power, the production and expropriation of surplus value appear as the exchange of equivalent values. In Marxist terms that labor-power has a value that makes economic calculation possible. For the slave, there is no exchange between master and slave. As property, the slave is totally at the disposition of the planter. From the perspective of political economy, the slave is the capital of the planter, not labor. The slave’s working activity does not have a value. It is performed as a compulsory service to the *senhor*. The product of slave labor is directly appropriated through the domination of the master. All of the slave’s working activity is labor for the master. While the value of the slave may be approximated by the potential value produced by the slave over the course of a working lifetime, it is independent of the value actually produced by the labor of the slave. Further, the cost of slave subsistence is

not a return to labor. The slave has to be fed, clothed, and housed whether she/he works or not. The labor expended on the reproduction of the person of the slave reproduces the master’s property. In other words, the body of the enslaved has a value but the activity of working does not. Labor is not an economic relation. There is no economy of labor and no socially necessary labor time, in other words, there is no economy and no economic action (Tomich, 2020, p. 537). However, the slave differs from the other elements of the master’s capital—land, instruments of production, money—in that, she/he is the bearer of living labor, the animating force of plantation production. Consequently, the slave as capital is not variable and must be synchronized with capital in land and instruments of production in accordance with the requirements of sugar production.

While Antonil describes the relations of domination and personal dependency that characterize the relation between master and slave, he fails to adequately account for slave labor as a form of commodity production for the world market. The daily productive activities carried out on the *engenho* were not subject to economic or monetary calculation. Rather, their execution depended upon the social equilibrium between master and slave. The surplus produced by slave labor took the form of what Antonio Barros de Castro terms “slave rent.” Slave rent is not an economic relation determined by the value of labor. Rather, it is the revenue derived from the ownership of the slave as property. It is the difference between the labor dedicated to slave subsistence, i.e. the maintenance of the master’s property, and the labor devoted to the production of the export commodity.

Castro (1984) provides an appropriate and illuminating approximation but the determination of surplus produced on the *engenho* remains a difficult task shrouded in ambiguity. The relations and categories required for such a task do not exist. The only points at which the productive activity of the *engenho* became calculable was through the process of exchange where it came into contact with the market and was equated with the products of other labor, that is, the purchase of slaves and other goods that could not be produced on the *engenho* and the sale of sugar. Then a balance of expense and income, profit and loss could then be drawn up. But even such a balance could not fully encompass the necessary and surplus labor entailed in slave production. Incalculability haunts the operation of the *engenho*. Thus, the *engenho* systematically produces commodities for the world market but the costs of production remain incalculable. In good times plantation slavery generated great wealth. The return from the market was much greater than expenses. But in hard times the plantation was unable to secure a sufficient return from the sale of its product to reproduce itself. During such periods, because all of the factors of production were the property of the *senhor*, the fundamental structure of the *engenho* remained intact and it turned inward to simply produce for its own subsistence. To borrow from Gabriel García Márquez, it was the autumn of the patriarch.

CONCLUSION. ANTONIL, SLAVERY, AND CAPITALISM: THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE NON-CONTEMPORANEOUS

Antonil's work reveals the inner connections, tensions, and contradictions between the mental, social, and material factors that characterize slave sugar production. It turns us away from the either/ or logic that has characterized debates over capitalism and slavery. Instead, it opens a new perspective on the history of slavery and the plantation in the maritime Atlantic that enables us to understand slavery and capitalism as parts of a relational whole that historically change through their association with one another.

Over the course of the history of Atlantic slavery, the expansion and diversification of the world market progressively subordinated the productive activity of the sugar plantation to the world market. Antonil's analysis discloses why the further subordination of production could not take place through the reorganization of slave labor. Instead, it suggests that increases in the output of the plantation system took place through the reorganization of the technical and material processes of sugar production. Slave labor was then adapted to the material requirements of production. The conditions of slave labor were altered by altering the conditions of sugar production. Under these conditions, production could only be increased by putting more slaves to work on more land. Most dramatically, such expansions took the form of opening new sugar frontiers (Moore, 2000). The opening of new sugar frontiers throughout the maritime Atlantic was accompanied by the diffusion of knowledge of sugar cultivation and manufacture and of the management of plantations and slaves. It was carried by the movement of people, both slave and free, and of technology, plants, and practices. The Atlantic sugar-slavery complex may be said to have developed within a shared cultural framework even as each particular site had its own variations. The understanding of the plantation through the categories of *oikos* constructed by Antonil was a part of this culture and it circulated, if not as text, then as vernacular knowledge and practice. At the same time, the work of Aristotle was available everywhere and was part of the vocabulary of an educated person of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It served as a repository of concepts and interpretations.

In each cycle of expansion and restructuring of the plantation in response to the increased pressure of the world market, the application of the Aristotelean conception of *oikos* to the plantation pioneered by Antonil was successively appropriated and reinterpreted by the slaveholders in new historical circumstances. Each successive new configuration organized social life and productive activity not through economic principles but by means of a racialized hierarchy of domination and subordination operating through the personal authority of the slaveholder. The conception of the plantation as *oikos* provided intellectual and practical coherence, a normative structure, and theoretical justification for the relations and activities

of the slave plantation. It furnished concepts, vocabulary, and normative beliefs and values that ordered the social and material practices through which the plantation and its enslaved workers were managed. From the perspective of the social world of the sugar mill, the world market, no matter how powerful, remained an external force.

During each major historical cycle restructuring the Atlantic slave-sugar complex, that is each restructuring of the historical relation of slavery and capitalism, the conception of the plantation as *oikos* pioneered by Antonil was appropriated and reinterpreted in new historical circumstances. Each successive iteration of the concept enabled slaveholders to order and justify the relations of domination and subordination through which the social life and productive activity of the plantation were organized. At the same time, the interpretation of slave plantation as *oikos* enabled slave-owning elites to appropriate Aristotle to construct their own image of their past (Marquese and Joly, 2008). They elaborated an image of themselves as the bearers of an aristocratic agrarian order based on natural hierarchy and paternalism with its roots in classical antiquity. They opposed this construction of what Genovese termed "a special civilization built on the relationship of master to slave" to the acquisitive values and individualism of the market and urban industrial capital even as the Atlantic slave plantation was part and parcel of modern capitalism. To put it more simply they created their own image of themselves as pre-capitalist and pre-modern. This self-image runs through each successive iteration of the plantation and unifies the historical temporality of modern capitalist slavery by recreating the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous." It constitutes a difference but a difference within a unity.

NOTES

- 1 In this regard, Marx (1973, p. 310) emphasizes the conceptual importance of wage labor: "But it is necessary to establish the specific form in which it [capital] is posited at a *certain* point. Otherwise, confusion arises."
- 2 Marx's conception of capital as a historical relation that changes through time implies that the categories of thought appropriate to an account of the developed capital relation, that is, those derived from capital-wage labor as the dominant form of labor, did not yet exist and cannot explain the historical processes forming the world market of the sixteenth century. Concepts of economics, economic reason, and economic rationality did not yet exist. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did Adam Smith and classical political economy identify labor as the source of value. What then took the place of political economy before the discourse of political economy? How did planters understand their reality and interpret their actions in the absence of categories of economic rationality and economic activity? What concepts guided the organization of the *engenho*, the production of sugar for the world market, and the management of slave labor? These questions help to illuminate the specific historical processes that guided both the operation of the Brazilian *engenho* and the formation of the world market in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
- 3 Antonil's chapter on mining was the first description of the social and economic characteristics of the mining zone and offers his reflections on the impact of mining on agriculture. Thus, *Cultura e Opulência* documents a key period of transition in Brazilian economic history (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 33, 36-39; Marquese, 1999, p. 54).

- 4 I take the concept “Christian Economy” from the title of the book by Antonil’s contemporary, Jesuit Jorge Benci (1977).
- 5 Born João Antonio Andreoni, Antonil was born in Tuscany in 1649. He entered the Company of Jesus in Rome in 1667 after studying civil law in Perugia for three years. In 1681 embarked to Brazil under the influence of illustrious Jesuit Antonio Viera. He took his vows in Salvador, Bahia, and remained in Brazil until his death in 1716. He served as a professor of rhetoric and director of the congregation of studies at the College of Bahia. While still exercising these functions, he was secretary to Visitor-General Antonio Viera in 1698 and also served as secretary to other provincials for many years. He held the position of Provincial between 1706 and 1709 and in that capacity, visited missions among the Tapuias in Rio Grande do Norte and in Ceará. He was twice rector of the Royal College of Bahia, in 1698 and 1709. He was recognized for his capacity for clear exposition and the systematization of ideas (Canabrava, 1967, pp. 9-10).
- 6 Antonil grounded his conception of moral-ethical norms in Aristotle’s formulation of the patriarchal authority of the *oikos*. Aristotle regards the *oikos* or household as an association comprised of master and slave, husband and wife, parents and children (Aristotle, 1962, p. 8). Like the *polis*, it is, in his view, a natural form of association (*koinonia*), that is, it conforms to the nature of man. It is governed by the authority of the patriarch, the “union of the naturally ruling element with the naturally ruled, for the preservation of both” (Aristotle, 1962, p. 3). The *oikos* is not what we would understand today as an economic unit (Finley, 1970; 1973, pp. 17-26; Polanyi, 1957a). For Aristotle the purpose of the household is not gain but life, or, perhaps better, the good life. He draws a clear distinction between activity and production. The purpose of the activity is to provide the means of life. ... Each article of property is an instrument for the purpose of life. The property of the household is both animate and inanimate and the property of the household in general is the sum of such instruments. The slave is an animate article of property and like all instruments of the household is intended for action, for the purpose of life, and not for production (Aristotle, 1962, pp. 9-10). The property of the household is limited in amount because it is intended to serve only the actual needs of the household. It may be defined as the number of instruments used in a household and it is limited in number and size by the requirements of the household. It is what Aristotle terms “true wealth” (Aristotle, 1962, pp. 21, 25). In contrast, the purpose of chrematistic is the accumulation of wealth. It originates in exchange and turns on the power of the currency. It is concerned only with getting a fund of money by the exchange of commodities. Currency is the starting point, as it is also the goal, of exchange. In contrast to the limited wealth of the *oikos*, the wealth produced by chrematistic is unlimited (Aristotle, 1962, p. 25). Aristotle regards chrematistic as an unnatural form of exchange. He views it as the product of “a certain sort of experience and skill” that he associates with retail trade (Aristotle, 1962, p. 23). It makes a profit from currency itself, instead of making it from the process which currency was meant to serve (Aristotle, 1962, pp. 28-29). He laments that “the gain in which it results is not naturally made but is made at the expense of other men” (Aristotle, 1962, p. 28).
- 7 Koselleck (1990, p. 311) regards the field of experience as the “present past” [*le passé actuel*] into which events have been integrated and can be recalled. It unites rational elaboration of such events and unconscious behavior that is not or is no longer necessarily present in our knowledge.
- 8 In Aristotle’s conception of household management different classes of the members of the household have different qualities of goodness. “The goodness of the head of the household has a quality of its own... it is the function of some to guide, and of others to be guided—and guided, too in different ways.” Obligations and duties are asymmetrical in the hierarchical world of the household (See Aristotle, 1955, pp. 177-179). Each is treated according to his station. The task of household management is to maintain the balance between the unequal relations among the groups comprising the household. It is concerned more with

the goodness of the free members of the household than with that of the slaves (Aristotle, 1962, pp. 33-34). There is a natural form of the art of acquisition, which is not distinct from but rather is a part of, the art of household management. This natural form of acquisition aims at the accumulation not of currency but of true wealth—and therefore not at the infinite but at the finite (Aristotle, 1962, p. 22).

- 9 Historian Ruy Gama writes that the term *engenho real* is linked to concessions for the use of waters by the Portuguese Crown. He continues: The *engenho real* “was not royal because it was large, rather it could be large and profitable if it was royal. The water-powered mill was the most powerful mill available for sugar mills. The great sugar mills were economically viable if they were “royal, that is, if they were powered by water” (Gama, 1983, pp. 130-131).
- 10 Slavery does not develop the social productivity of labor beyond the elementary form of simple cooperation. It merely organizes a given body of enslaved laborers in relation to a determined material division of labor. “Wealth confronts direct forced labor [slavery], not as capital but rather as a relation of domination [*Herrschaftverhältniss*]; thus, the relation of domination is the only thing which is reproduced on this basis, for which wealth itself has value only as gratification, not as wealth itself [capital]—and which can therefore never create *general industriousness*” (Marx, 1973, p. 326).

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