‘Without liberty there is no honour’, nor democracy. Cuba, Slavery and Abolitionism in nineteenth century Spain’s empire

Jesús Sanjurjo[*]

Cardiff University, UK

Abstract

Democratic ideas were used to legitimize both the need to abolish and to preserve the slave trade and slavery in the Spanish empire during the nineteenth century. This article will demonstrate that the relationship between ‘slavery’ and ‘democracy’ in the Spanish political debate is complex and changing. For political actors, on various places of the ideological spectrum, democratic ideas were presented both as incompatible with slavery and as a reason to oppose its abolition.

Keywords: Democracy; Abolitionism; Slavery; Spanish Empire; Cuba.

In September 1868, the leaders of the Glorious Revolution proclaimed in Madrid that ‘without liberty there [was] no honour’ and that slavery was ‘outrageous to the human nature and an insult to the nation’ (Labra 1869, 111). Only four years later, in December 1872, Emilio Castelar declared in the Spanish Parliament that ‘with the adoption of this abolitionist bill the old Spain will be over, lying on the broken chains of the slave, and a new Spain is born that will join the Americas of Liberty, Democracy, and the Law’.[1] For Castelar, as for the revolutionaries of 1868, slavery was portrayed as the last remaining obstacle to democracy in Spain and its colonies. However, this relationship between democracy and abolitionism was very new in Spanish public debates. It was only in the context of the political radicalization of

[*] E-mail: SanjurjoJ@cardiff.ac.uk

the late 1860s that the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Puerto Rico was on the agenda of some of the relevant political actors. This article explores this relationship by focusing on three key historical episodes in which abolitionist and anti-abolitionist discourses found a form of legitimacy in democratizing ideas and rhetoric: The anti-abolitionist response of the Cuban slave-holders in 1811, Felix Varela's proposal to abolish slavery in 1823, and the exclusion of the colonial deputies from the Cortes in 1837.

Javier Fernández Sebastián (2012, 14) has argued that 'liberalism' in the first decades of the nineteenth century, 'far from being a stable and well-defined notion, was a variable bunch of vague and faltering concepts'. Similarly, and for the purpose of this article, the notion of 'democratizing ideas' or 'democratizing rhetoric' should not be understood as a narrow and perfectly defined notion. Generally, the idea of 'democracy' constitutes an anachronism when applied to the study of early nineteenth century Spanish politics; however, some practices and institutions that we now associate with the concept of democracy did exist in the minds and discourses of Spain's nineteenth-century political actors.

In this regard, Josep Fradera (2013, 277) has argued that one of the questions that researchers in the field should address is 'why, in a country dealing with major internal upheaval but with liberal institutions in place since the 1830s, the abolitionist movement failed to make headway until reformers on all sides realized, following the civil war in North America, that slavery was in its death throes'. A partial answer would be that to equate liberalism and abolitionism is to misinterpret the relation of the two phenomena. So even if Spain had 'liberal institutions' or a liberal parliamentary system, and indeed some of its political actors used a democratizing rhetoric, there is no reason to assume that it was a contradiction that Spain protected and even promoted slavery and the slave trade. The ideological and political tension between Spanish liberalism and imperialism is crucial to formulating a more comprehensive examination of the

reasons for the failure of anti-slave trade initiatives from 1811 to the 1860s. Spanish liberalism and the metropolitan elites prioritized the preservation of territorial integrity and the maintenance of the *status quo* in the colonies in the context of the imperial crisis. There was a tacit agreement between the metropolitan and Cuban elites, only broken by the rise of pro-autonomy or pro-independence movements on the island in 1868.

The economic reforms applied by the Bourbon monarchs in the previous four decades of the eighteenth century laid the foundations for a new political, social and economic order that brought crucial changes to Cuba. The freedom to import African slaves, established by in the *Reales Cédulas* of 1789 and 1791, started an economic revolution in Cuba which progressively changed the conditions of the island from an economic model based on farming and livestock to a plantation system (Fradera 2005, 34-35; Schmidt-Nowara 2013, 158; Paquette 2009; Johnson 2001). These developments altered the power balance between different social groups in the colony and led to the social rise of sugar producers and exporters, who became the most powerful colonial stakeholders and a counterweight to the metropolitan authorities. This economic group, labelled by Manuel Moreno (2008) Fraginals as the "sacarocracy," was characterized by a strong defense of the introduction of a freer domestic market and, at the same time, the preservation and development of slavery and the slave trade as key factors for the prosperity of the colony (Hernandez 2014; Alvarado 1998). Moreno Fraginals (2008, 16) has argued that the powerful owners of the sugar mills in Cuba operated as "one family in the feudal sense of the world," planning and arranging each marriage "so that accumulated fortunes would not be dispersed." This phenomenon was not limited to local individuals, as these networks included Spanish military and civil officials who had arrived in the Island "to gain rapid promotion, personal wealth, and political power" (Quiroz 2003, 474). Numerous peninsular military leaders, from across the political spectrum, served as military officials and captain generals in Cuba. In the words of Alfonso Quiroz (2003, 474), during the nineteenth

century the Spanish colony "became a strategic hub for corrupt networks of nepotism and favoritism plaguing the Spanish state bureaucracy and delaying much needed colonial reform in Cuba."

The relationship between liberalism and slave ownership was, according to Moreno Fraginals (2008, 166), "a constant flight from reality" as "the contradictions of the sugar regime […] formed a nucleus of negative ideas based not on what should be but on what [the sacarocrats] did not want to be. Moreno Fraginals (2008, 60) has also argued that this group had to deal with the "tremendous contradiction of selling merchandise on the world market and at the same time having slaves," and concluded that this "vacillating position" was "painfully reflected in their ideological world. Similarly, Candelaria Saiz Pastor (1990, 227-30) has also emphasized that these "slavery-related contradictions" represented the cornerstone of the relations between the Spanish colonies and the metropolis during the nineteenth century. The terms "liberalism" and "pro-slavery," operated as a "palpable conjunction," Saiz concluded. Within this ideological framework "the private ownership of the means of production, sanctioned by the liberal doctrine, applied to people" and this idea was embraced and implemented by slave-owners, officials and lawmakers alike (Moreno 2008, 61). Moreno Fraginals (2008, 61) concluded that this attitude explains the ideological world of the *sacarocrat*, which made him "a champion of inviolable property in the means of production […adapting] a bourgeois judicial concept to a situation which corresponded to the most primitive form of labor."

However, as Domenico Losurdo (2011, 35-65) has problematized, sheltered by the notion of "property rights," slavery also became a synonym of prosperity, stability and progress. "The rise of liberalism and the spread of racial chattel slavery are the product of a twin birth" and "slavery is not something that persisted despite the success of the three liberal

revolutions. On the contrary, it experienced its maximum development following that success." For slave-owners, planters and investors, slavery and the slave trade, far from representing a contradiction of their ideas and economic principles, were rooted in the fundamental belief that property rights were inviolable and compatible with a "liberal system of policy" (Losurdo 2011, 58-61).

From the second half of the eighteenth century, key representatives of this Cuban *sacarocracy*, such as Ignacio Pedro Montalvo, Nicolas Calvo, Antonio del Valle Hernández, Tomás Romay, José de Ilincheta, Captain General Luis de las Casas and Francisco Arango y Parreño, defined a political strategy for the development and protection of a new colonial economy based on the plantation system. The establishment of this new economic model demanded the importation of large numbers of enslaved African and thus led to the consolidation of pro-slave trade discourses within the new Cuban elite, which drew its wealth from the production of sugar, coffee and tobacco. During the nineteenth century, the slave trade into Cuba became a very profitable economic activity, which gradually became crucial to the material viability of the Spanish Empire (Alvarado 1998, 3-4; Adelman 2006, 88). As Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (1998, 158, 628) has argued, the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807, far from stopping the trade to Cuba and Puerto Rico, "consolidated dynamic slave economies and a political order that protected and encouraged these economies."

Condemning the slave trade meant not only having to confront the Cuban elites, but also very powerful metropolitan interests. Several aspects of the Cuban slave economy such as the slave trade, commodity production, investment in infrastructures and shipping represented enormous earnings for some of the biggest fortunes in Spain and were "based on the vertical integration of all activities related to the colonial sugar economy" (Schmidt-Nowara 1998,

609). The ideological and political reaction against slavery and the slave trade in Spain, confronting both domestic and colonial interests, was a complex and fragmented historical process. However, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, some voices started to publicly condemn those practices and to develop a Spanish abolitionist discourse.

The development of this new economic system demanded the systematic introduction of enslaved Africans, which led to the consolidation of pro-slavery and pro-slave-trade legitimising discourses among the Cuban people (Alvarado 1998, 3-4). During the nineteenth century, the slave trade into the Spanish Caribbean was a very profitable economic activity which gradually became crucial for the material viability of the Spanish Empire (Schmidt-Nowara 1998, 158, 628; Adelman 2006, 88). As David Murray (2002, 76-77) has convincingly argued, 'Cubans of all classes' participated and benefited from the slave trade and passionately believed that British abolitionists aimed, 'under a cloak of philanthropy', to put an to end to 'the Cuban prosperity' (Murray 2002, 76-77). Slavery became an illegal activity in 1820, but it would continue being tolerated, and even promoted, by the Spanish authorities until the 1860s. Robert Jameson, British Commissioner in Havana between 1819 and 1823, reported in August 1821 that shares in slave-trade expeditions were 'eagerly sought for by clerks in public and mercantile offices, petty *caballeros* or gentry […] and shopkeepers, overseers, etc.'[2] The involvement in the slave trade was transversal to a wide spectrum of the colonial population and the metropolitan economic and political elites.

The ideological and political reaction against slavery and the slave trade in Spain, confronting both domestic and colonial interests, was a complex and fragmented historical process. However, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, some voices started to publicly condemn those practices and to develop a Spanish abolitionist discourse.

¡Condenarnos sin oirnos! Abolitionism as an Anti-Democratic Discourse

The abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807 marked the beginning of a new political strategy with an almost immediate impact in Spain. In the context of the Peninsular War (1807-1814), Britain would become the main promoter of abolitionist ideas and a useful ally to many liberal Spanish politicians. The British government, in close collaboration with the British abolitionist lobby headed by William Wilberforce, was committed to achieving the international abolition of the slave trade. These actions were behind the parliamentary proposal of Agustín de Argüelles in April 1811, which was to become crucial in defining a new ideological stance within the Spanish political debate (Sanjurjo, 2017).

In his speech and later correspondence with Wilberforce, Argüelles argued for the abolition of the slave trade in Spain's empire on humanitarian and religious grounds, adopting the moral condemnation elaborated by the British abolitionist movement. Argüelles proclaimed that:

> Trafficking [...] in slaves is not only contrary to the purity and liberality of feelings of the Spanish nation, but also to the spirit of its religion. Trading in the blood of our brothers is horrendous, atrocious and inhumane and the National Congress must not hesitate for a single moment between its high principles and the interest of certain individuals.[3]

In their parliamentary response to Argüelles' proposal, the Cuban deputies characterized the initiative as radical, unwise and, crucially, as undemocratic. On 20 July 1811 the *Ayuntamiento*, the *Sociedad Patriótica* and the *Consulado* of Havana submitted a joint statement to the Cortes explaining the ruinous and dangerous effects that the abolition of the slave trade would have on Cuba's economy, and political stability. The document was written by the Cuban aristocrat Francisco Arango y Parreño, who confronted Argüelles' proposal on the basis of two main ideas: Cuban slaveholders and traders had to be listened to by the Cortes, and Argüelles' proposal was a radical attack on property rights (Schmidt-Nowara 2013, 165-166; Rojas 2013).

Arango accused Argüelles of aiming to 'condemn' the Cuban planters 'without hearing us!,' ignoring what slaveholders, merchants and investors had to say, and without considering normal parliamentary procedures (Saco 1938, 98). The Cuban spokesman pointed out that 'Argüelles did not want to allow a day for the law to be published' and stressed that the slave trade was so deeply rooted in Cuba's society and economy that it could not 'be removed easily and, even less, suddenly' (Saco 1938, 112). The Cuban aristocrat defined the slave trade as 'infamous' and described abolition as 'the cause of humanity' but argued that a sudden abolition of the traffic would 'violate the rule of law, and the acquired rights according to the current laws' (Saco 1938, 101-102). If property rights were ignored by the Spanish authorities, some important members of Cuban society would feel marginalized by the metropolis in the context of a growing threat from the United States (Barcia 2012, 26-28; Ferrer 2014; Gonzalez-Ripoll, Naranjo, Ferrer, Gracía, Opatrny 2004; Geggus 2001).

> We see growing in the northern part of this world a colossus that threatens to swallow, if not our entire America, at least the northern part; and instead of trying to give [to the landowners] the moral and physical force, and the will that is necessary to resist such combat; we continue idolizing the wrong principles that cause our indolence (Saco 1938, 105-110; Piqueras 2002b, 465-484; 2014, 183-206).

They maintained that the end of the slave trade would cause a collapse of the sugar economy and would lead to economic difficulties for the whole of the empire. Moreover, they argued that a sudden abolition of the slave trade, or even its public debate at the Cortes, could spark a massive slave revolt that would destroy the colony (Barcia 2012, 26-28; Ferrer 2014; González-Ripoll 2004; Geggus, 2001; Clavin 2010; Dun 2016).

In declaring that the will of the Cuban people was to protect the slave trade and slavery, Cuban oligarchs successfully characterised abolitionist discourses as undemocratic and despotic. They fundamentally appealed to their property rights to reject the abolition, but also to their 'right' to be listed and their interests to be protected by a representative parliament. Eventually, the

proposal of Argüelles was relegated to a secret 'special commission' which buried the issue and never submitted a report back to the Cortes (Sanjurjo 2017; Piqueras 2002a, 474).

'What the people of Cuba want': Felix Varela's Anti-Slavery Proposal

The idea that Cuban people were against the abolition of the slave trade was challenged by the Cuban deputy Félix Varela during the Liberal Triennium. Varela's intense work at the Cortes focused on two issues: the slave trade and Cuban autonomy. As Olga Portuondo (2008, 143) noted, in both cases his views differed from the Cuban elites who had given their vote to choose him as deputy. In 1822, Varela drafted a legal proposal to gradually abolish slavery in Spain, in which he denounced the consistent disregard to the human dignity that enlaved Africans and free men and women of colour (the so-called *libertos*) suffered in Cuba (Saco 1938, 5-17). He argued that it was 'only natural that these people [the *libertos*] try, in every possible way, to remove this obstacle to their happiness by liberating their equals', and stressed that it was unsustainable to built a democratic system that consistently excluded its own free population:

> Their inferiority compared to the whites has never been so conspicuous for them or so deeply felt as the day when they are deprived by the Constitution of their political rights, when the door available to them is then almost closed on account of their nature, and they are even cut off from what constitutes the basis of the represented population, consequently they are Spanish but they are not represented (Saco 1938, 15).

Varela defended a utopian model of conciliation between the desire for freedom for the enslaved Africans, on the one hand, and the interests of the oligarchy, on the other, presaging a bloody and unpredictable outcome if an understanding was not reached soon, as 'frustration and despair will force them to choose between liberty or death' (Saco 1938, 16). Wars of independence in America had upended the continent, and with the Haitian Revolution ever present in the Spanish consciousness, Varela concluded that 'the first one to give the cry for

independence [in Cuba] will have all those of African origin on his side' (Saco 1938, 16). As Manuel Barcia (2012, 37-38) has argued, Varela 'formally attacked Great Britain and cited the fears of an invasion from the nearby Republic of Haiti and the risk of a major slave uprising in Cuba' to call on the Cortes to gradually put an end to slavery. The Cuban deputy reproduced this way the same rhetoric previously advanced by Arango at the Cortes of Cadiz, but with an opposite goal.

Varela did not argue for radical emancipation. He conceded that the interests of the slaveholders were lawful and aimed to achieve the abolition of slavery with full respect to property rights. He advocated for freeing the slaves 'in such a way that their owners do not lose the money invested in the purchase, […] nor the free slaves under the enthusiasm produced by their new situation, go beyond the limits that must be set for them' (Saco 1938, 17; Castellanos and Castellanos 1988, 228). In his legal proposal, Varela argued for a gradual abolition of slavery, emphasizing a model that reconciled the interests of the Cuban elites and the slaves. He presented himself as the representative of the will of the majority of Cubans and argued that by 'asking to free the African slaves made compatible with the interests of the landowners and with security and public order […], I am merely demanding what the people of Cuba want' (Saco 1938, 9).

Although Varela's project was fully drafted, he never submitted it to the Cortes. The sudden return of absolutism, and the subsequent shutdown of the Cortes, stifled any chance of moving his proposals forward. He was sentenced to death by Ferdinand VII and was forced into exile first to Gibraltar and from there to the United States in 1823, where we would later advocate for Cuba's independence.

Varela's powerful reference to 'what the people of Cuba want' directly confronted Arango's argument of 1811 and aimed to build a sense of abolitionist legitimacy upon democratic

grounds. His assertion, however, was very problematic and a misrepresentation of the interests and political position of the colonial merchant and planter elites, for whom the protection of the –now illicit— slave trade and the promotion of slavery were unquestionable.

'A man of colour might sit at my side on these benches': Civil Rights and Slavery at the Cortes of 1837

In the context of the parliamentary debates that preceded the approval of the Constitution of 1837, the relationship between democratic discourses, representative institutions and slavery became central to the Spanish political debate. The new constitution re-established in Spain a representative monarchy, but determined that the remaining Spanish colonies would be ruled by 'special laws', restricting the access of colonial subjects to the civil rights proclaimed in the new constitution and withdrawing its political representation in the Cortes (Fradera 1999, 51-70; 2006, 163; 2013; 2015; Alvarado 1998; Piqueras 2016, 17-52).

The restriction of democratizing changes in the colonial territories consolidated an asymmetrical imperial model. In the context of a general collapse of the territorial integrity of the Spanish Empire, the new Constitution aimed to preserve the sovereignty over Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. The fear for the dissemination of pro-independence ideas if political liberties were granted and the demographic 'heterogeneity' of these colonies justified, in the eyes of the peninsular deputies, a 'special treatment'. The debate about this point took place between 7 and 11 March 1837, and confronted the opinions of several deputies led by Vicente Sancho and Agustín de Argüelles on one side and Domingo María Vila on the other.

As Josep M. Fradera (2005, 156-163) has argued, the debate on the exclusion of the colonies from the Constitutional provisions turned around historical justifications, fiscal and tax control

and the 'singularities' of the colonial territories. The strategic importance of slavery in Cuba's economy, the fact that slaves and free Black people represented a majority of its total population (including possible electoral consequences) and, crucially, as José Antonio Piqueras (2016, 32) has stressed, the disposition of Cuban slave owners and planters not to oppose the Constitutional exclusion justified this decision. The report of the parliamentary commission that suggested the exclusion of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines from the Constitutional provisions praised the 'carefulness' with which the absolutist governments had administrated Cuba, the success of its thriving economy and concluded that it was 'not possible for a homogeneous law to rule upon such heterogeneous elements'.[4] The new colonial regime would have the support of the Cuban elites that in return of a restriction of their direct representation in the metropolis, they were reassured about Spain's role in protecting the 'internal social order' and as a 'necessary accomplice' in the protection of the illegal slave trade. As Piqueras (2016, 32) has concluded, this solution 'provided a nexus of strengthened colonial dependency' that was welcomed by both parties.

Agustín de Argüelles passionately argued in favour of the exclusion of the colonial deputies and the necessity of 'special laws', different from the Constitutional provisions, for preserving the colonies as part of Spain's empire. As Fradera (2005, 157) has pointed out, Argüelles' idea of 'American disloyalty' to the Constitution of 1812 characterised all his speeches. He argued that the 'philanthropic theories' that he advocated in 1811 had had a harmful effect in the Spanish colonies, and therefore he asked the deputies not to commit the same mistake again and to subordinate those maxims to the preservation of the remaining territories.[5] He stated that those 'special laws' would protect the prosperity of the colonies, and the security of the Cuban subjects who were not fully aware of the fragility of their own safety. Argüelles pointed out that the colonies would enjoy the liberties of the Peninsula when 'it would be compatible with the circumstances of those countries'. [6] However, the deputy believed that in the current

demographic state such freedoms were ‘a dangerous germ’, as Cubans ‘set their feet on a volcano’.[7]

> There [in Cuba] gentlemen, there is a race that believes itself irreconcilable, and that aspires to the destruction of the other inhabitants, as the only way to obtain its freedom; However, the treatment that the negroes have in the island of Cuba is the least bad that is given in any country.[8]

Argüelles was using the same arguments that Andrés Jauregui and Francisco Arango y Parreño, representing the slave traders’ interests, had used in the Cortes of Cadiz in 1811. The fear of sparking a racial war that would replicate a ‘the horrors’ of Haiti’s Revolution and the ‘mild conditions’ of the Spanish slavery regime justified this ‘necessary evil’ (Saco 1938, 85-98).

The deputy Vicente Sancho, in a similar vein to Argüelles, argued for the exclusion of the overseas deputies and the necessity of ‘special laws’ to rule those provinces. For Sancho, the Constitution of 1812 made the mistake of recognising the same rights to ‘the Spaniards of both hemispheres’ when this was simply not possible. As Fradera (2005, 160) has shown, Sancho perfectly understood the contradiction ‘between universal rights (applied to the white population) and the heterogeneity of civil and racial status that such unlimited equality could hide’. Sancho argued that a Constitution was a legal instrument to provide ‘freedom and equality’ to men, but ‘in those countries [Cuba and Puerto Rico], those words, that sound so nicely in our ears, are words of extermination and death’.[9] He concluded that ‘if the island of Cuba in not Spanish, it will be black, necessarily black, and everybody knows that’.[10] As Argüelles had done before, Sancho raised the spectrum of ‘black fear’ to justify the political repression and militarisation of Cuba that would protect ‘the whites, our brothers, from the dagger of the negroes’.[11]

It is enlightening to observe how the same rhetorical figure, ‘our brothers’, that Argüelles had adopted in 1811 to advocate the abolition of the slave trade, was now used by Sancho as a racist

attack to protect slavery and the need for repressive policies in Cuba.[12] As Piqueras (2016, 35-36) has convincingly argued, Sancho opened the door to 'the theory of racial superiority and inferiority to Spanish parliamentarianism' and championed the notion that political freedom should be subordinated to the preservation of the Imperial integrity. For Sancho and Argüelles, slavery was out of the question and even the continuity of the slave trade, which they both avoid mentioning, was not publicly condemned anymore. Without the support of the metropolis, the Cuban white male 'effeminate and corrupted' population, as Sancho described it, would be destroyed.[13] Any change in the colonial *status quo*, they believed, would irreversibly lead to Cuba's ruin (Piqueras 2016, 35-36).

The deputy Domingo María Vila rejected Argüelles' and Sancho's arguments and warned the Cortes about the potential consequences of depriving the colonial population of political and electoral rights. Vila, a member of the Progressive Party, had been in exile in Great Britain, probably in Scotland, after the end of the Liberal Triennium (Balañà 2013, 234). During his exile, he established a close relationship with Quaker circles and, in 1833, when the scientist and abolitionist leader William Allen (1770-1843) visited Madrid, Vila was his first contact in the Spanish capital. As Allen himself wrote, Vila has 'just returned from England, and is acquainted with Friends [Quakers]' (Balañà 2013, 236). Vila knew the Americas well and had travelled to Rio de la Plata and Brazil as a representative of the Spanish government in 1820. The Catalan deputy highlighted the complexity of Cuba's society and the existence of a 'separationist germ' among the *criollo* elite, but declared that:

> If the Cortes close the door […] to the deputies that have been elected by the Overseas provinces, the consequences in my view will be fatal; if these doors are closed, the interpretation will be malicious, the results disastrous, and all your good faith, gentlemen, will not be enough to convince anyone of the truth of your ideas.[14]

Vila also added the provocative assertion advanced by those in favour of the exclusion that giving electoral rights to the Cuban population would eventually result in the election of a black

deputy. Vila responded to this fear that 'in vain are my efforts to arouse any repugnance in myself at the thought that a man of colour might sit at my side on these benches' and proclaimed that 'intelligence also lays under a skin less white than ours'.[15] Vila's anti-racist and democratic discourse went beyond the demands of the Cuban liberal elites and advanced the idea that a liberal Constitutional regime was not only capable of ruling among a 'heterogeneous' community, but also of strengthening its internal cohesion. Vila's speech relied on an implicit anti-slavery discourse because, as Balañà (2013, 235) has suggested; he was perfectly conscious that 'the recognition of the free black's political rights would announce the beginning of the end of slavery'. In other words, slavery was fundamentally incompatible to Vila's notion of liberal Constitutionalism.

Freedom and political rights were the answer, according to Vila, to the secessionist question. Granting political rights to the *criollos, pardos*, and liberated Africans, was for Vila the antidote to the 'supreme command' and preatorianism of Cuba's Capitan Generals. Contrary to Argüelles and Sancho's belief, Vila considered that political repression would only exacerbate pro-independence aspirations and ultimately fail to preserve Cuba as a Spanish territory.[16]

Ultimately, on 16 April 1837, 150 deputies voted in favour, and two against, that the overseas provinces should be ruled by 'special laws' and excluded from the Constitutional provisions. On a different vote, 90 deputies supported, and 65 opposed, the exclusion of the colonial deputies from the Chamber (Piqueras 2016, 38).

Conclusions

The relationship between democratizing ideas and abolitionism in Spain's empire during the nineteenth century was complex and conflicted. This article has shown how in the late 1860s

and early 1870s key liberal political actors had naturalised the idea that slavery was incompatible with democracy, while in the 1810s, Cuban slave-owners had used a democratic rhetoric to argue against the abolition of the slave trade. Felix Varela in 1823, and Domingo María Vila in 1837, adopted a democratic and anti-racist discourse to oppose slavery and open the door to Black people's political rights in Spain. Tacitly accepting that slavery and democracy were incompatible, a majority of Spanish deputies, headed by Argüelles and Sancho in 1837, prioritised the protection of slavery over the vision of Spain as 'the collectivity of the Spaniards of both hemispheres'.[17]

The rise of political liberalism and the establishment of representative institutions were key in the reception and construction of abolitionist ideas in Spain. However, to assume a teleological projection between the development of liberalism, democratic practises and abolitionism would be fundamentally inaccurate. Throughout the nineteenth century, discourses against the slave trade and slavery took multiple forms and were advocated by liberal and absolutist, progressive and conservative, egalitarian and racist actors.

Notes

[1] *Diario de Sesiones*, 21 December 1872, p. 2541.

[2] Jameson to Clanwillian, 1 September 1821, FO 84/13. Murray 2002, 76-77.

[3] *Diario de Sesiones*, 2 April 1810, p. 812.

[4] 'Dictamen de las comisiones reunidas de Ultramar y Constitución, proponiendo que las provincias ultramarinas de América y Asía sean regidas y administradas por leyes especiales', *Diario de Sesiones de Cortes Constituyentes*, 12 February 1837, pp. 1491-1493. Piqueras 2016, pp. 19-20, 23-24.

[5] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 10 March 1837, p. 2039.

[6] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 10 March 1837, p. 2039-2044.

[7] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 10 March 1837, p. 2039-2044.

[8] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 10 March 1837, p. 2042.

[9] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 5 April 1837, p. 2508.

[10] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 5 April 1837, p. 2508.

[11] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 5 April 1837, p. 2508; and 25 March 1837, p.2317. Piqueras 2016, 33-34.

[12] *Diario de Sesiones*, 2 April 1810, 812.

[13] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 5 April 1837, p. 2509.

[14] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 10 March 1837, p. 2036-2038.

[15] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 9 March 1837, p. 2037.

[16] *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes*, 9 March 1837, p. 2022.

[17] *Constitución Política de la Monarquía Española*, 1812, Article 1.

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