

### **Migration from Anguilla to 18th-Century Puerto Rico: A Sociolinguistic Approach to African Identities in Caribbean Contexts**

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This essay offers preliminary documentation of a 1717 migration between Anguilla, a small English colonial settlement in the Eastern Caribbean, and the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico. It has two main objectives: first, to chronicle the movement of a group of enslaved persons of African ancestry to Crab Island, (contemporary Vieques, part of the US Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) during the second decade of the eighteenth century; second, to contemplate the roles that language change and language contact play in processes of identity formation.

Relating questions of identity to language, the discussion offered below contextualizes the aforementioned migration in terms of four main topics: (i) linguistic approaches to social identity; (ii) the documentation of enslaved Africans' linguistic origins and general migratory trends; (iii) the status of Puerto Rico as a place of refuge for runaway Africans from the Eastern Caribbean; (iv) the forced migration of enslaved Africans from Crab Island to San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1717. Most of the historical information discussed in this article falls within the "homestead" period, the chronological period that linguists believe Creole languages emerged as distinct varieties (i.e., the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries). As will be shown, archival data surrounding the 1717 migration exists in tension with assertions about the nature of slavery in the Leeward Islands, the origins of Puerto Rico's early African population, and the history of Puerto Rican Spanish.

### Social Identity and Language

Social identity is a key concept in linguistic anthropologists' approaches to sociohistory and language ideologies. It assists in relating processes of migration, community formation, and patterns of language change to the perspectives of speakers and historical information about socioeconomic and racial hierarchy characteristic of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Caribbean societies. Elinor Ochs suggests that researchers must use "the social and psychological world" in which the individual language user operates at a given time as his or her point of departure.<sup>102</sup> Primary historical sources cited below establish that African migrants' social and psychological worlds were relatively distinct from those of the Europeans who bought and sold them.

Joseph Forgas and Henri Tajfel define social identity as the part of an individual's self-concept that originates with his or her memberships in a social group, together with the attachment of emotional significance to it.<sup>103</sup> This notion, a concept developed in social psychology, helps to explain why the examination of speakers' lives remains important to understanding language change and variation from a historical perspective. Noteworthy is the attention it gives to phenomena that maintain an unquestionably "internal" dimension (e.g., sociality, emotion, communal ties). Anna Duszak argues for their relevance in scholarly analysis and points out the multiple ways in which they are manifest in social life. Her rationale helps to identify those historical factors that may have influenced the emergence of Caribbean languages:

The social groups that people join differ considerably at the level of institutionalization, formality, duration, social power, and relevance. As a result, human social identities tend to be indeterminate, situational rather than permanent, dynamic and interactively constructed. Furthermore, group divisions may run differently for various individuals and on various occasions. Individuals may also draw on different aspects of their social identities depending on how they choose to adapt to a given contextual configuration. If boundary marking is very important for our conceptualization of social distinctions, the nature of such demarcation processes is complex and often ambivalent.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Elinor Ochs, "Transcription as Theory," in *Developmental Pragmatics*, ed. Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 43.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Forgas and Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization: Cognitions, Values, and Groups," in *Social Cognition, Perspectives on Everyday Understanding*, ed. Joseph Forgas (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 124.

<sup>104</sup> Anna Duszak, "Us and Others, An Introduction," in *Us and Others: Social Identities Across Languages, Discourses, and Cultures*, ed. Anna Duszak (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 2-3.

While all of these ideas can be useful in the study of social groups, a subset stands out as particularly relevant for the study of migration and its relevance for tracking the emergence of African identities in historically accurate terms. These qualify as ideas that will be useful in rethinking traditional concepts from a sociolinguistic perspective, in contrast with those that insist on representing grammars as static and decontextualized systems:

- (i) Diversity exists across social groups, and groups are not necessarily defined by the same parameters or variables.
- (ii) Social identities are fluid, influenced by situation, interpersonal dynamics, and micro-level interaction.
- (iii) Divisions and fractures take form at the level of the individual and/or the situation, even while commonalities or replicated patterns may be observable at the group level.
- (iv) Boundary marking is significant for the study of social distinctions, but is neither simple nor always straightforward.

The “us-them” distinctions suggested by this list bring to mind shifting and differentiated social and linguistic identities that are significant at the micro-level; at the same time when culture and linguistic differences which distinguish Europeans and Africans are considered alongside the violence endemic to European colonialism, African enslavement and socioeconomic hierarchy, it becomes apparent that racial difference played an extremely significant role in maintaining the idea that one group was altogether different from and inferior to the other.

### **Migration and Origins**

Anguilla, the most northerly of the Eastern Caribbean’s Leeward Islands, was formally recognized as an official settlement of Britain in 1650. Its colonization, like that of other Anglophone possessions in the region, coincides with the sale and commodification of enslaved Africans that Britain and other western European nations relied on to propel their expansion throughout the globe. The regular shipment of

enslaved Africans to the Leeward Islands increased and became regular by the early 1640s when large-scale sugar production began in Barbados.

Patterns of European commerce assist in formulating distinctions about the trans-Atlantic backgrounds of African migrants. The ancestors of those Africans who were born in Anguilla in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are likely to have been imported to the Caribbean by the Dutch and English, as The Netherlands and Holland supplied the majority of the overwhelming majority of enslaved laborers transported to the Leeward Islands. The large majority of the slaves the English forcibly transported in the seventeenth century were taken from West Africa. Initially, the primarily illicit trade was concentrated around New Calabar, but later it centered around Allada (contemporary Nigeria and Republic of Benin, respectively).<sup>105</sup> The Dutch are likely to have supplied slave labor to some of the smaller British islands in the area around Anguilla. After 1670, they traded out of the Loango Coast and through the mid-seventeenth century shipped large number of Africans to St. Eustatius for resale to English planters and others.<sup>106</sup> When the Royal African Company replaced the Company of Royal Adventures in 1672, a slave depot to serve the Leewards was established in Nevis. Sometimes planters from Nevis had priority in buying slaves, prompting complaints about the quality and quantity of slaves from potential purchasers in places like Anguilla.<sup>107</sup> By the 1690s the Dutch Trade had waned considerably and the English controlled most of the slave trade to their colonies. Soon thereafter the trade of enslaved Africans emerged as the principal basis of the formal economy along the coast of West Africa and in its hinterland, a position that it would occupy until the nineteenth century.

Significant for situating generalizations about “African identities,” the groups of the African continent enslaved by European traders were hardly homogenous or necessarily of similar sociocultural backgrounds. Early European observers describe West Africa as a “linguistically and ethnically fragmented” area.<sup>108</sup> Work by historians

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<sup>105</sup> P.E.H. Hair and Robin Law, “The English in West Africa to 1700,” in *The Origins of British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 254.

<sup>106</sup> Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean, Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>107</sup> Brian Dyde, *Out of the Crowded Vagueness, A History of the Islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2005), 55.

<sup>108</sup> Hair and Law, 241

offers a similar view, suggesting that propositions found in linguists' scholarship on population origins needs to be given a closer look. Maureen Warner-Lewis, for example, investigates Central African origins. She states that in the period 1600-1650, an estimated 461,900 persons from this region of Africa, including "Angolans" were transferred in the Atlantic Trade.<sup>109</sup> According to her research, fifteen percent of the slave population of the British Leewards came from Central rather than West Africa. Her scholarship is important because Central African languages and traditions are infrequently mentioned in discussions of Caribbean language origins and sociocultural creolization.

John Singler's scholarship also assists in debunking simplistic myths about African migrants, including the idea that the origins of Creole languages and Afro-Caribbean sociocultural identities can be traced to a single group or geographical area. He provides a useful overview of the backgrounds of those who were forcibly taken to the Caribbean, establishing that the linguistic origins of Africans who were forced to migrate during the period up to 1710 can be traced to three areas: the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast, and the Windward Coast.<sup>110</sup> Singler states that Africans enslaved and exported from the Gold Coast spoke mainly Akan, a Western Kwa dialect cluster; those from the Slave Coast generally spoke another Western Kwa cluster, Ewe-Fon; and those from the third area, the Windward Coast, included speakers of Mande, particularly Northwestern Mande and to a lesser extent Western Kru languages. His qualification "mainly" is a significant one, as it allows for diversity within regions and the existence of multilingualism among African peoples prior to and during the period at hand.

Perhaps first introduced to Anguilla in small numbers in the 1650s or early 1660s, persons of African ancestry definitely constituted a substantial portion of the inhabitants by the 1680s. This seventeenth-century population probably consisted of some slaves who migrated with their masters and others who were bought elsewhere and then transported to the island as "new" purchases. Other Africans were born on the island, either to parents or grandparents of African ancestry. Thus it is unlikely that those who were made slaves in Anguilla arrived directly from Africa. Inhabitants of Central and

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<sup>109</sup> Warner-Lewis, 10

<sup>110</sup> John Singler, "African Influences upon Afro-American Language Varieties: A Consideration of Sociohistorical Factors" in *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties*, ed. Salikoko Mufwene and Nancy Condon (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 242-243.

Western Africa probably migrated to the island from St. Christopher (contemporary St. Kitts), Barbados, Antigua, and the other islands from which European settlers migrated. Some of the earliest Africans in the Eastern Caribbean were taken to St. Christopher from Senegal in 1626.<sup>111</sup> An “African” village of approximately 400 inhabitants is documented for the year 1640 near Basseterre, the capital of St. Christopher.<sup>112</sup> Data suggest that the population included numerous ethnicities and subgroups; they make reference to additional distinctions among Africans, including women, children, elderly, and the infirm.

In the modern discipline of linguistics, a rather narrow set of opinions has disproportionately shaped scholarly ideas about social phenomena and their relationship to language. While exceptions to this generalization exist, on the whole scholars underestimate the extent to which ideas about identity and group membership are intertwined with language structures and lived historical experience. This problem seems to be especially serious in scholarly work that theorizes the beginnings of those Caribbean languages that arose as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade and European colonialism, as dominant theories of language origins influenced by a Saussurean approach to language are impeded by a hesitancy to fully engage sociohistory.<sup>113</sup>

As the discussion above indicates, the task of describing African origins is a complex one. Moreover, it may be necessary to rethink longstanding assumptions about the Atlantic Slave Trade and the processes of identity formation which led identities to take on “new” and “old” meanings, in Caribbean as well as African contexts. Clearly it is unproductive to hold that the languages and identities of the enslaved are simply those of “Africans,” as the term had not been reified as label or category in the period at hand. The argument posited below holds that immigration to Puerto Rico from places to its east points to possible linguistic influences of early West Indian English on Spanish as used on the island. Contact between Spanish and African languages was by no means new, as early varieties used in Spain (e.g., Seville) and the Caribbean (e.g., Cuba and Puerto

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<sup>111</sup> V.K. Hubbard, *A History of St. Kitts: The Sweet Trade* (Oxford: Macmillan Education 2002), 21-22.

<sup>112</sup> Warner-Lewis, 10

<sup>113</sup> Examples of linguists’ approaches to Caribbean history which I am critical include Robert Chaudenson, *Creolization of Language and Culture* (New York: Routledge 2001); John McWhorter, *Defining Creole* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Claire Lefebvre, *Issues in the Studies of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004).

Rico) are also likely to have been influenced, as Peter Roberts holds, by long periods of interaction between Iberians and Africans in southern Spain.<sup>114</sup>

### **The Possibilities of Manumission in Puerto Rico**

The experience of migration was inflected by slavery in ways that underscore distinctions between the lives of persons of European masters and enslaved Africans. During this pre-plantation period, which Jorge Chinaea suggests lasted from roughly 1700 to 1800 in Puerto Rico, Spain's European rivals were especially aware of its reputation as a colony where escaped or runaway slaves had a relatively good chance of obtaining their freedom, (if not immediately, then following a period of enslavement or service under Spanish law).<sup>115</sup> Prior to the period in which attempts to migrate from Anguilla to Crab Island were made Spain did little to discourage the influx of slaves who fled the non-Spanish Caribbean to escape bondage. In some instances this policy seems to have coincided with a desire to weaken or otherwise obstruct the expansionist plans of European arrivals. Typically runaway slaves who reached Puerto Rico were taken to San Juan where they were sold and re-enslaved; however, this changed after 1644 when a consensus of sorts formed among Spanish authorities. Recognizing that Spain had failed to dislodge European intruders using diplomatic and military means, authorities decided to free and shelter runaway slaves in communities such as San Mateo de Cangrejos, contemporary Santurce. Evidently this led to an even greater influx of slaves. As Chinaea notes, "From about the middle of the seventeenth century, the possibilities of securing shelter and asylum attracted countless slaves, as well as European indentured workers and military deserters, to Puerto Rico."<sup>116</sup>

Morales Carrión provides more details about the policy, offering details about an incident in which a small group of "fugitive slaves" reached Puerto Rico. He recounts:

As early as 1664, four fugitive slaves arrived from Santa Cruz [Saint Croix]. The Governor of Puerto Rico, Don Juan Pérez de Guzmán, objected to selling them at public auction on the grounds that "it did not seem proper that the King should reduce to slavery those who sought his protection." The Governor's decision was upheld by the council of

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Roberts, *The Roots of Caribbean Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2008), 36-37

<sup>115</sup> Jorge L. Chinaea, "Fissures in el Primer Piso: Racial Politics in Spanish Colonial Puerto Rico during its Pre-plantation Era, c. 1700-1800," *Caribbean Studies* 30 (2002) 176.

<sup>116</sup> Chinaea, 176

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the Indies which granted the slaves their freedom and decreed that in the future all fugitive slaves arriving in Puerto Rico were to be considered as freemen if they were willing to be baptised and took an oath of allegiance to the kind. By the beginning of the century, so many had arrived that in the year 1714 they were organised as a separate settlement in the neighborhood of San Juan.<sup>117</sup>

Enslaved refugees seeking freedom repeatedly arrived from British as well as Danish colonies. In 1706 the St. Thomas Privy Council ordered the cutting down of all trees from which slaves could make canoes; at the end of the same year it issued a proclaimed that a monetary award for the return of any slave (dead or alive) that escaped to Puerto Rico.<sup>118</sup>

### The 1717 Migration

In 1717 a group of European settlers in Anguilla voiced their desire to settle on Crab Island. Those desiring to leave presented a petition to their Governor. As the forty-two men who signed the petition saw matters, their request was validated by shared knowledge

... that for several years past the island of Anguilla has been attended with insupportable droughts that the land of the same being very poor and barren by means whereof not capable of production sufficient for the inhabitants thereof to subsist on; many of them ready to perish and starve for want of food which we the said inhabitants to remove the island commonly called Crabb Island and there to endeavor to cultivate the same in planting necessary food for our relief and sustenance rather than utterly perish...<sup>119</sup>

The assessment of life in Anguilla offered in the 1717 petition contrasts markedly with the description of Crab Island offered in a government document from 1716:

The land is extraordinarily good, and all of it except some rocky points near the sea manurable, the soil very rich and level and is to the best of our judgment in length about eight leagues and in breadth about eight miles, very well timbered. As to the roads, there is two good roads, that is to say Sound Bay and Sandy Point at the west end. But for harbours there is but two, Great Harbour and Portafairo the first one tenn foot water upon the bar but enough water within, the latter is eleven foot on the barr, water within for great ships; this is all that we know of Crabb Island.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean*, Río Piedras, P R: University of Puerto Rico Press 1952, 63.

<sup>118</sup> N.A.T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies, St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix* (Mona: University of West Indies Press 1992), 126.

<sup>119</sup> CO 152/12: Petition of 1717 to Settle at Crabb Island, from the Inhabitants of His Majesty's Island of Anguilla, Anguilla Archives: Don Mitchell Collection, Anguilla Library Services.

<sup>120</sup> *An Account of the Virgin Islands*, Anguilla Archives: Don Mitchell Collection, Anguilla Library Services.

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Though Spain and Denmark claimed sovereignty over Crab Island during this period, neither Western power officially maintained colonists there. Nevertheless, Spain had led military expeditions against British settlements on Crab Island and other Virgin Islands. Dating back to at least 1647, they precede Britain's official colonization of Anguilla by three years.<sup>121</sup> Denmark still maintained colonies in the region during the mid-seventeenth century, and its maritime officials stationed in St. Croix monitored maritime activity. Danish colonial officials, like their English counterparts, saw Crab Island's unique location as a threat to the institution of slavery. N.A.T. Hall explains,

In the early years of settlement, before the apotheosis of sugar, the primeval forest provided superb cover and supplied wood for canoes in which slaves could seek freedom in nearby islands. The "marine underground" to Puerto Rico and Vieques (Crab Island), and farther afield to islands in the northern Leewards and elsewhere, ultimately became a major route of escape.<sup>122</sup>

The 1717 request for official permission to migrate to Crab Island follows two previous migrations. The earlier movements took place in 1683 and 1688, but they were short-lived and unsuccessful as long-term settlements. In 1717 the group's aspirations may have been viewed more sympathetically than the earlier cases, at least by certain community members who stayed behind. Nevertheless, dialogue between those local administrators who were responsible for facilitating communications once again reflects tensions among the island's relatively small population. In this excerpt, dated August 12, 1717, George Leonard writes to Governor Walter Hamilton:

In yr last to me yr Excellency's desire was yt I shold use all endeavors to keep the people of this Island together until your Excellency had an answer from home, which accordingly I did use all arguments with them that I could produce and I showed them what a fatherly care yr Excellency has taken for them and yr Excellency's promise in continuing over them until yr Excellency had orders to settle them to their content, but all would not do with sinking men, for having no orders to restrain them they laid hold of any twigg. What orders Capt. Abraham Howell brought from yr Excellency I know not, neither was he so civil to inform me. I sent and signified yr Excellency's Instructions to me to him, but I don't understand he had any regard for it, but went away to Crabb Island and carried away forty odd white men and between twenty and thirty Negroes with him. I wish them well, but the success of such rash actions are always to be doubted.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Morales Carrión, 46-47.

<sup>122</sup> N.A.T. Hall, 126-127.

<sup>123</sup> August 12, 1717 Correspondence between George Leonard and Governor Walter Hamilton, Anguilla Archives: Don Mitchell Collection, Anguilla Library Services.

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The group that wanted to depart for Crab Island with official permission represents only a fraction of Anguilla's population. Nevertheless, echoing some of the concerns of the governors that preceded him, Governor Walter Hamilton denied the group's request. Hamilton supported his decision with a discussion of two topics: Crab Island's proximity to the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico and the desire to maintain a sizeable population on as many English possessions as possible.

Regarding the first point, Hamilton writes that Crab Island, "[...] lyes so very nigh the island of Puerto Rico that nobody is Secure in his property, that the Negroes or other slaves may upon the least Disgust get over to the island where once they get among the cow-killers there is no getting them again [...]." His comments indicate Hamilton believed that those who were willing to migrate would take their slaves with them, as the second group had done in 1688. Hamilton goes on to state,

... I am informed by this delusion several of the poor inhabitants from all of the other islands design to remove themselves thither [...] and tend much to the weakening of the other of His Majesty's chief islands who are already very thinly populated.<sup>124</sup>

The second topic brought up by Hamilton, the Crown's interest in curtailing movement concerns about the island remaining a British stronghold as an ongoing concern. It also shows that the colony lacked the full range of structures and institutions necessary for even the European population to sustain itself in a manner that its members considered appropriate.

The group departed for Crab Island in 1717, despite objections and the rejection of their petition. Many migrants took their most valuable property with them, the persons of African and Afro-American ancestry whom they owned. Wills from the period indicate that owners considered them necessary for the establishment of viable agricultural units. Moreover, the purchase of slaves stands out as an extremely lucrative investment, as well as a means of creating and maintaining material wealth that could be transferred to descendants.

Migration meant something distinct for the enslaved Africans who left with their masters and does not appear to have offered them a particularly hospitable place of

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<sup>124</sup> CSP 1716-1717, #118, and CSP 1717-1718 #40, Anguilla Archives: Don Mitchell Collection, Anguilla Library Services.

settlement; in addition, they were separated from their home environments and extended families. Nevertheless, life on the frontier of the Spanish Caribbean provided enslaved Africans with possibilities that were not previously available. First, it offered a terrain and climate more sustainable for the production of crops and other items; second, as already suggested, geopolitics increased the likelihood that those in bondage would gain their freedom. Puerto Rico stood just miles away and though slavery still existed as an institution (it was not completely abolished until 1873), manumission was generally more feasible under its laws than those of Britain.

Of the three migrations to Crab Island documented for the period 1683 to 1717, the 1717 exodus comes closest to the sort of existence for which the migrants longed. A wooden fort was built and agriculture endeavors proved sustainable and successful. By the end of 1717 Crab Island migrants and government officials recognized Abraham Howell as their leader. The settlement may have been established with the tacit approval of certain British officials, as Howell reported to a superior officer in Antigua named Baltasar Hamilton.<sup>125</sup> Also suggestive of cooperation between colonial administrators in the Leewards and leaders among the Crab Island population, a census of the fledging population was taken in conjunction with one in Anguilla.

British records from 1717 include an official census that lists the names of forty-six white men who migrated and the number of enslaved Africans that each owned. As shown in Table 1, the 1717 Crab Island census utilizes two categories: “men,” in which it lists forty-six by name; and “negroes” in which it lists sixty-two, not by individual names as is the case with Europeans, but by male owner.<sup>126</sup> According to the document, the enslaved population was distributed among twenty-five colonists. The number of enslaved Africans held by each slave-owner varied from one to seven.

The census indicates that approximately half of the White men listed did not have slaves. It appears that a substantial number of the men who were not owners were the sons of slave-owners. In some cases, they were single and appear to have been members (perhaps young adults) of homesteads run by their fathers. This seems to be the case, for example, with Abraham Chalwill Sr., owner of four slaves, and his two (probably

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<sup>125</sup> L. M. Díaz Solér, *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1953), 11.

<sup>126</sup> 1717 Crabb Island Census, Anguilla Archives: Don Mitchell Collection, Anguilla Library Services.

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unmarried) sons, William and Abraham, neither of whom officially owned slaves. The fact that several of the men listed neither appear to own slaves nor to be the sons of slave-owners, underscores the possibility that the group was socioeconomically diverse. The assumption here is that Europeans' wealth can be correlated with the ownership of African slaves.

**Table 1**  
**European Male Colonists and Enslaved Africans**

<b>Male Colonists (European)</b>	<b>Enslaved Africans</b>	<b>Male Colonists (European)</b>	<b>Enslaved Africans</b>
Thomas Allen	2	Samuel (F)loyd	3
George Garner	1	Samuel Floyd Jr	2
Nehemiah Richardson	5	Benjamin Arrindell	1
Christopher Hodge	2	William Gumbs	2
Thomas Hodge	3	Thomas Gumbs	3
Abraham Chalwill Sr.	4	Daniel Bryant	1
Abraham Wingwood	7	Rowland Williams	1
Thomas Lake	4	Cornelius Harragan	1
William Richardson	1	Thomas Coakley	3
David Derrick	1	Bazieliel Howell	4
Peter Downing	2	Thomas Howell	2
William Beal	1	Abraham Howell	5
Peter Hodge	1	<b>Totals</b>	
		<b>European Males: 26</b>	
		<b>Enslaved Africans: 62</b>	

### **Crab Island Census 1717**

In March of 1718, Spanish Captain Henríquez arrived on the island with a group of men from Puerto Rico to force off the settlers. The expedition consisted of schooners, property of the infantry, and 289 members of a militia. The latter included sixty-five free black soldiers, who were classified as *morenos* (“colored men”) from San Mateo de

Cangrejos, an area that then was located just outside of San Juan. At that time, San Mateo de Cangrejos was an area where persons of African and Afro-Caribbean ancestry clustered; among them were former slaves who migrated from various English islands.

Working under the supervision of Spanish officials, this group dislodged the group. The effort was led by Marina Real commander José Rocher de la Pena, who supported Henríquez with an armed vessel. Mr. Abraham Wells (Howell) the “English governor of Vieques” is said to have offered no resistance, but according to Morales Carrión, the colonists only surrendered after a “short skirmish in which some of the settlers were killed” and soon the Crab Island settlement was destroyed.<sup>127</sup> The small settlement and its fort were burned, and the fields of sugar cane, corn, cotton, and tobacco that they had planted were razed.

What happened to these migrants in 1718? Determining the exact fate all of the individuals listed above requires more research, but apparently members of the community were treated differently. The European colonists’ legal property was seized, including three small covered boats, one sailing vessel, cattle, birds, and farm equipment, and ninety-five black slaves. The confiscated property was sold, producing revenue totaling 100,584 pesos.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, the enslaved Africans were auctioned in San Juan, Puerto Rico and presumably purchased by Spaniards.

Most of Howell’s colonists (if not all) were, at least temporarily, made prisoners before the returned to Anguilla. On April 15, 1718 Captain Hume reached San Juan with a letter of protest from Governor Hamilton. He later requested restitution for the slaves who had been taken and for the return of the colonists.<sup>129</sup> The Governor of Puerto Rico, Alberto de Bertadano, refused to read the letter. Six cannons that the colonists had obtained in order to protect their settlement were installed at fort San Jerónimo in San Juan. Eventually Howell and another leader were sent to Mexico to be tried.

It appears that subordination and racism acted as basic social parameters responsible for shaping the societies of Anguilla and Crab Island in significant and profound ways. As forces of meaning-making, they also shaped linguistic variation: in

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<sup>127</sup> Morales Carrión, 64-65.

<sup>128</sup> J. Bonnet Benítez Amédée, *Vieques en la historia de Puerto Rico*, 2da ed. (San Juan: F. Ortiz Nieves 1977), 17.

<sup>129</sup> Morales Carrión, 65-66.

the case of pre-migration they assist in understanding why the speech repertoires of European colonists are likely to have differed from those of slaves; in the case of the 1717 migration, race and subordination help to explain why Blacks and their descendants became speakers of PRS while the large majority of White colonists returned to Anguilla where they contributed to the further development of ANG. These historical data support Mervyn Alleyne's assertion that racial hierarchy and its effects (i.e., limited close contact with the new language and limited opportunities for economic and social mobility) are definitive characteristics of the situation of language contact and bilingualism between African languages and English that emerged in the Caribbean.<sup>130</sup>

### **Linguistic Implications**

What insights might the 1717 migration offer about language contact and the history of Puerto Rican Spanish? John Holm identifies several factors that he states influenced the formation of partially restructured varieties. Two of his assertions are especially relevant to this discussion:

- (i) A partially restructured language rather than a fully restructured language emerged in Puerto Rico due to the fact that "there were simply more native speakers to provide non-native speakers with samples of the language from which the latter could derive the rules to speak it."
- (ii) "... Despite social stratification, learners still had better access to the target language than they did in those plantations where fully creolized languages developed."<sup>131</sup>

He links these statements to two "defining characteristics" of "semi-creoles" (a category in which he places Puerto Rican Spanish) that identify the latter varieties in terms of the sociohistorical context in which they emerged, not their grammatical features. They are: first, the non-native version of the European language was never as completely restructured as a fully creolized language; second, as the language acquired native speakers (among the descendants of Europeans and non-Europeans), it developed into an "identifying community language that could draw on features not only from the

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<sup>130</sup> Mervyn Alleyne, *Comparative Afro-American* (Ann Arbor: Karoma 1980), 220.

<sup>131</sup> John Holm, *Languages in Contact* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2004), 136.

non-native *lingua franca*, but also from the native-speaker varieties of the European languages.<sup>132</sup>

I hold that the 1718 evacuation of Crab Island sheds some light on a subset of sociohistorical factors that contributed to the emergence of PRS and its development as a variety of Spanish that is, as Holm and others observe, somewhat distinct from peninsular (European) Spanish. It directs attention to elements of social life that undoubtedly had an impact on the acquisition of an unfamiliar by the individuals who were taken to San Juan and sold as slaves. Those in question were probably not speakers of Spanish and dominant in the English-lexifier Creole spoken by persons of African ancestry in the Leewards. It seems somewhat inappropriate to evaluate their acquisition of Spanish primarily in terms of demographics, as Holm does when he suggests that there would have been more native speakers to model the superstrate in Puerto Rico than in Anguilla or Crab Island. Certainly access to superstrate speakers was not the only factor to determine or influence the acquisition of Spanish. If language change is to be described from a theoretical position that recognizes sociolinguistic factors as significant, then speaker agency and power relationships should be recognized as historical factors that played significant roles in the formation and everyday performance of Afro-Caribbean identities.

Myriad phenomena point to ways in which the events associated with the communities that migrated between Anguilla and Crab Island and Puerto Rico could have influenced language change at the community level: exposure to new experiences and non-native languages, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, enslavement, imprisonment, maroonage, military conflict, and religious conversion. Sociohistorical details about these and related events can be extremely useful in efforts to pay closer attention to diachrony's smaller constitutive, "more synchronic" elements. They flesh out the social identities of migrants at the same time that they raise questions about the assertion that persons of African ancestry always or consistently targeted the superstrate, in this case presumably peninsular Spanish. Furthermore, the archival data chronicling movement from Crab Island to San Juan does not clearly indicate, as Holm's analysis suggests was the case, that migration led the enslaved to have greater or more frequent

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 136

interaction with the relevant European variety in Puerto Rico than they did on Anguilla and Crab Island, at least not during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Settlement patterns, social norms (including those of minority groups and adult immigrants who were non-native speakers of Spanish), and government institutions (e.g., military service, occupations to which slaves were typically assigned) merit more careful investigation. As Alleyne points out, significant portions of the Caribbean's colonial populations, namely Africans and Caribbean-born Creoles of African ancestry, were subjected to the most extreme form of social oppression and developed a strong ethnic identity distinct from that of Europeans.<sup>133</sup> He acknowledges that the emergence of Creoles as systems of communication was reinforced by systems of mediation that predate situations of contact, including language, heritage, and memory.

In contemporary Puerto Rico myths surround knowledge about the origins of the island's unique variety of Spanish, including one that, according to Jorge Duany, "reifies the Spanish language as the litmus test of Puerto Ricanness."<sup>134</sup> Duany holds that the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and other cultural institutions have often displayed a "pro-Hispanic bent." This attitude is reflected in ideas that effectively present the island's early relationship with Afro-Caribbean populations of the Leeward Islands as demographically and/ or sociolinguistically insignificant.

Congruent with this article's initial argument that social identity is basic to any sound theory of language change, I hold that the analysis of colonization, slavery, and migration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterizes Caribbean speech communities as sociolinguistically complex and heteroglossic. One possibility is that an African-influenced variety of English (a fully-restructured Creole or its historical precursor) was maintained *as a community language* (perhaps alongside learner varieties of Spanish) in areas that were densely populated by slaves who migrated to Puerto Rico from Crab Island and other locations in the Eastern Caribbean (including Saint Croix, Saint John, and Anguilla). Undoubtedly influenced by nineteenth-century influxes of Africans, Puerto Rican Spanish could have emerged later as a more widely and "evenly" spoken variety that had been shaped by the languages spoken by those enslaved Africans

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<sup>133</sup> Alleyne, 220

<sup>134</sup> Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2002, 135

who traced their origins to the seventeenth-century Caribbean's English islands. These two claims can be used to situate previous claims about colonial-era Afro-Puerto Rican identity and Puerto Rican Spanish in terms of a historical perspective that includes Vieques and the Anglophone Caribbean.

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