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Revisiting Why Spaniards Migrated to Spain's Colonies of Puerto Rico and Cuba: Experiences of a Catalan Family in the 1800s

James W. Cortada

Few events so fundamentally change the arc of a family's future as migration. Many millions of migrations have been "voluntary," because individuals opt to move from where they had lived for generations seeking some alternative, often for economic reasons, occasionally, too, as a consequence of war or political strife.¹ Causes for permanent relocation by individual families continue to be explored, because they remain inadequately understood. Broad generalizations need more empirical qualification, largely through the study of the experiences of specific families. One of the longest running human migrations in the past millennium has been from Spain to the "New World" from the early 1490s to the end of the Franco dictatorship in the mid-1970s.² So, it is understandable why historians have long been interested in mass migrations from Europe to the Americas.³

Since historians understand this long variegated migration largely through general descriptions of the practice and not through the specific details of small communities or individual families, they can miss related issues, such as the effects of migration on the originating communities of these migrants, or how marriages among families that came to a new locality altered their original purposes for migrating. With the exception of slaves and prisoners, decisions to relocate were essentially voluntary, made by families and individuals in response to circumstances in their region of origins and personal circumstances. It was understood that such decisions would probably result in permanent departure from one's ancestral village and province to a strange new community where subsequent generations would be raised, especially prior to the early twentieth century. A migrant could expect never to see their parents and friends again. To put a fine point on this consequence, historians can move from generalized studies of

¹ Historians of migrations normally differentiate between "voluntary" (their term) and "involuntary," or "forced." The first type occurs when an individual opts to move to another locality, the second consisted of forced movement, such as of slaves from Africa to the Americas or prisoners sentenced to imprisonment at another locality in which, as with slaves, they normally did not return to their homeland. A widely known example is of the latter are English prisoners sent to Australia.

² An estimated half million Spaniards left Spain after the end of their civil war of 1936-39, with several hundred thousand permanently, Germán Rueda Hernanz, *Españoles emigrantes en América (Siglos XVI-XX)* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 2000): 16.

³ For a recent study of the issue, Michael H. Fisher, *Migration: A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 50-74.

immigration to more micro-level, village-by-village, region by region, and to the level of the family unit to enhance their findings.⁴

This essay presents case studies of what happened beginning within the tiny community of Begur, located in the province of Gerona, Spain, that in the early decades of the nineteenth century saw many of its young to migrate to Cuba and Puerto Rico. The work of local historians focused on Begur makes it possible to link their findings to those of other scholars working on Caribbean history.⁵ Our purpose is to understand the central decision to leave Begur for the Americas, entwining the town's collective efforts and those of one local family that had a large presence in Begur—the Cortada clan. There is evidence of what happened in Begur and both Spanish and Caribbean historians have debated the nature of this crucial decision.⁶ Micro case studies provide opportunities to qualify and fine-tune some of their findings. In this article, I argue that the case of the Cortada family affirms some of the main arguments historians have made about Spanish migration to Cuba but also add a second, often overlooked, dimension, by also examining migration to Puerto Rico

I begin by discussing what Catalans learned about the Caribbean, because they came to possess considerable knowledge and intimacy with the region. I rely on what Catalan historians have uncovered, particularly about Begur and the general province of Gerona, adding particulars of one local family. I explore why the youth of Begur left for the New World, introducing this new scholarship to the readers of this journal. Engaging with historians of immigration is kept to a minimum, but not ignored, since this topic is well-trod ground, saving space for explaining what occurred with this one family and community.

Before diving into the details some table setting context is useful. Sherry Johnson established the de facto methodological approaches and issues to explore, relying on the Cuban experiences, offering frameworks and issues that have proven useful for over the past two decades. These informed our work here. She demonstrated how to look at the role of families and of those who were part of the Spanish military ecosystem, that of creoles, and why deemphasizing sugar plantation economics made sense. In Puerto Rico, particularly in the Ponce region where our case studies were largely situated to explain the Puerto Rican experience, economic considerations played a greater role than military careers

⁴ Phylis Cancilla Martinelli and Ana Varela-Lago (eds.), *Hidden Out in the Open: Spanish Migration to the United States (1875-1930)* (Louisville, Col.: University Press of Colorado, 2018).

⁵ If the name Begur seems familiar to some readers it is because in the 1960s it began to attract Catalan vacationers and by the end of the century had become an important holiday destination for Europeans and Americans, yet maintained the majority of its buildings dating to the 1700s and 1800s.

⁶ This paper is an outgrowth of a larger project exploring a half dozen families from different nations who lived in Catalonia, later in the Caribbean, then in North America. One of those families is the author's. He is an historian.

(her main point of emphasis), so a contrast to her model.⁷ She called for more discussion of how individuals and families interacted among Cubans and Spaniards (in Spain), as that affected the identity and aspirations of local residents—a pattern also evident in Puerto Rico, if less so in Ponce, which had a more diverse European-wide population than in Cuba.⁸

Since Johnson's observations, the language used by historians of the Caribbean have evolved, with less use of the term plantations and more farms, and in the United States describing plantations and slaves more as forced labor camps.⁹ However, since even to the present the word *plantation* still dominates the academic literature and conventional conversation, especially in Puerto Rico, we do too, here, for convenience.¹⁰

Her observation that the Cuban experience was different than that of other Spanish colonies still rings true two decades after her initial observation.¹¹ As others have pointed out, a Spaniard working and living in an elite social class in Cuba was better off aligning with Spanish interests than with independence.¹² To validate this thesis, scholars explored social ordering and identities, leading to studies of families, and to that end, micro-historical explorations.¹³ This essay

⁷ Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001): 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ For a highly publicized, yet controversial example, of the changed language, see Nikole Hannah-Jones et al., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: New York Times Company, 2021) and for a more conventional economic perspective, Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2007): 12-26, 220-276.

¹⁰ Historians who grew up in the United States and educated in American colleges and universities were exposed to a mythology of plantations as ideal settings for white owners, even glamorous and probably exposed to the Homeric movie about the agricultural South, *Gone With the Wind*, that in a highly inaccurate fashion portrayed slaves as happy and their owners as prosperous, when in fact property owners were not always prosperous, lived in the middle of forced labor camps that were harsh environments for slaves and feared that slave revolts might lead to their deaths at any moment. European historians were not subject to the same Homeric mythology as the Americans and so use the word *plantation* as more a technical economic term than do (even can) the Americans.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

¹² Jorge J. Domínguez, *Insurrection or Loyalty: The Breakdown of the Spanish American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹³ For one model, Susan Eckstein and Loren Barberia, "Grounding Immigrant Generations in History: Cuban Americans and Their Transnational Ties," *International Migration Review* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 799-837; with an excellent bibliography is Sherry Johnson, "Casualties of Peace: Tracing the Historic Roots of the Florida-Cuba Diaspora, 1763-1800," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2001), https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol10/iss1/5/?utm_source=digitalrepository.unm.edu%2Fclahr%2Fvol10%2Fiss1%2F5&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages (Accessed October 10, 2023); Allan J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815: Crown, Military, and Society* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); also Karen Y. Morrison, *Cuba's Racial Crucible: The*

follows that tradition, largely confirming her findings and observations for families in Puerto Rico, if with some caveats and nuances.

An example of nuanced differences: when she said that elite Cubans identified as Europeans and white to a far greater extent than residents elsewhere in the Caribbean, residents in Puerto Rico did too, as much as Cuban elites, and their social and familial behaviors proved similar, even down to political perspectives, styles of dress, attitudes toward their self importance, ways of raising children, approach to the treatment of slaves and their increasing reliance on the sugar industry when it expanded dramatically in the early 1800s. Such considerations go far to explain, for example, how a Puerto Rican and a Cuban could marry, which occurred in the Cortada family.¹⁴ Attitudes and behaviors of Ponce's creole families remained largely intact through the twentieth century, evolving as Puerto Rican creoles entered professions in the twentieth century and as children of these people who migrated to, say, New York City and were raised in the United States.¹⁵

The family case study does more to affirm what historians have already concluded were reasons for migration than to turnover their views. Micro case studies provide opportunities to qualify and fine-tune some of their findings. Family documents explaining their rationale for migrations prior to the mid-1800s remain scarce, here too. One observation that holds out hope for unearthing new family-specific documentation is that many of the immigrants were literate, which coming from Spain where high levels of illiteracy remained until the end of the nineteenth century, is remarkable.¹⁶

Introducing the Caribbean to Catalan Spaniards

Sexual Economy of Social Identities, 1750-2000 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), especially pp. 106-130; and in partial contrast in emphasis to Johnson, see Franklin W. Knight, "Origin of Wealth and the Sugar Revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57, no. 2 (1977): 231-253.

¹⁴ Your author's grandparents did that. Both were Creoles. Jaime Cortada was raised on a sugar plantation in Ponce, and his wife was raised in Santiago de Cuba while most of her relatives were engaged in sugar agriculture.

¹⁵ Research done but not yet published documents this observation with respect to the Colas family in New York, a family that had a long history of military experiences, valuing their dignity and the purity of their race.

¹⁶ Your author has 3 books published in Spain the late 1700s-early 1800s that were used by a number of Cortada children, each signed by their users and with blank pages annotated by them, such as in performing mathematical calculations. Sidney W. Minz, who had studied Puerto Rican families, told your author in the 1990s that there was an appalling dearth of family records for those living in the Ponce region.

Since Columbus' voyages to the New World Catalans had heard about the Caribbean.¹⁷ In the late eighteenth century, with the new free trade policy, the Cortadas obtained permission to start trading directly with the Spanish American colonies. Allowing Catalans to conduct commerce in the Americas (largely through Barcelona) became an important development, because locals from the surrounding region married into other Iberian and European families after migrating to the colonies such as in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In addition to civilians, Spain's navy and army staffed their American colonies with personnel born and raised all over Spain, later, too, in the colonies. Begurians came to engage in commerce or to find jobs. Regardless of their reasons for coming to the Americas, many stayed. That metamorphosis of a family into blended cultures is beginning to be explored by historians, with anecdotal evidence from individual families helping to explain why they changed culturally and did not feel the tug to return to their European homelands.¹⁸

The family discussed in this essay from Begur in the early 1800s knew a great deal about the Caribbean because Begurians had been moving to Cuba since 1757 when the first resident made the trip, one Joan Corp Ferrer (Ferrer?). Municipal records show that beginning with him and through 1784, 22 individuals went to Cuba, the majority listed as sailors.¹⁹ How well they appreciated what the Caribbean consisted of remains an open question, nonetheless any family sending their members to the Caribbean in the 1820s or 1830s, when the Cortadas began arriving, would have had over 60 years of some contact or knowledge of the area, especially about Cuba. Local merchants had also sailed to Havana in the 1820s and 1830s, bringing current information to Begur.²⁰ In the period when the Cortadas moved to the New World 176 Begurians from various other families did the same.²¹

The Caribbean differed economically and socially from Catalonia, so the decision to move there could almost be likened to someone moving to another planet. Their proposed migration would have seemed irreversible, as once started it was not clear that it could be reversed. The trip could take a couple of months by sea and its cost were considerable.²² The prospect of never talking with family

¹⁷ James W. Cortada, "Who Was Christopher Columbus?," *Renaissance and Reformation* 10, no. 2 (1974): 99-102.

¹⁸ Sherry Johnson studied two individuals to demonstrate how this kind of study can be done for the Caribbean, Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba*.

¹⁹ Lluís Costa, *L'illa dels somnis: L'Emigració de Begur a Cuba al segle XIX* (Begur: Ajuntament de Begur, 2000): 61-62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-84. In the entire nineteenth century, some 573 Begurians moved to the New World, with 440 to Cuba, the others to various parts of the Americas, *Ibid.*, 85-90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² The cost and time required for such a trip did not drop until after mid-century when steam-driven metal ships became available. By the early 1900s one could transit back and forth, say to

back in Begur would have seemed almost certain, although the opportunity to exchange letters and conduct business back-and-forth reasonably possible. So far there is no evidence that the Cortada family conducted business with Begur and relatives, or wrote letters. In practice, the break proved permanent for most families. Poor immigrants did not return to Spain, only a handful of the well off did, the latter usually not until the second half of the century, a decade or more after leaving Begur.

The Caribbean was simply too far away. The distance from Barcelona to Ponce, Puerto Rico was over 4,600 nautical miles. Barcelona was normally the port from where Catalans departed to the region. The largest Spanish colony in the area was Cuba with two major ports: Havana on the northwestern side of the island and Santiago de Cuba on the southeastern end. Begurians eventually settled in the area around Havana. Cuba had good soil for sugar and tobacco. Havana, although essentially a military port, was also a thriving center for legal and illegal trade with all of Latin America, the United States, and Spain. Catalans had a seafaring heritage that made such trips within their scope of confidence in which to engage. As one Catalan historian argued, that experience would have “augmented” such a migration to the Caribbean at large.²³

New York or to Europe, on weekly scheduled ships. Residents in Cuba who could afford newspaper subscriptions got weekly deliveries in major cities such as Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Ponce and San Juan from New York, and just slightly less frequently, from Barcelona.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.



To the east of Cuba is Haiti and Santo Domingo, a Spanish colony. The 1791 revolt by Haitian slaves led to their independence from France in 1793 and to the white flight of planters, merchants, and other French to Santo Domingo, eastern Cuba, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and to the British and Danish Virgin Islands. Some later intermarried into the Cortada family. To the right of Santo Domingo is Puerto Rico, home base for the Puerto Rican Begurian Cortadas. On its northern coast lay San Juan, the colonial capital, and at the opposite end to the south almost in a direct line below San Juan Ponce, first home of the Cortadas and to many of the families they married into, such as the Gillbees and Toros. Like Havana, San Juan was strategically positioned as a port from which to go to and from Europe since the earliest days of Spanish colonialism. Like Havana, the colonial government dominated its activities. Ponce, like Santiago de Cuba, was largely commercial and agricultural, with the latter the center primarily of economic activity into the twentieth century. The interiors of both colonies consisted of nearly impenetrable mountainous jungle until tobacco plantations and mining operations opened these regions for habitation. For Europeans, life took place near the coast of both islands.

Of equal importance to the Cortadas was a string of islands further to the east, just beyond Puerto Rico, occupied by various nations over time, which is one reason the entire region became involved in myriad international activities, trade rivalries, and wars. Like Cuba and Puerto Rico, they had similar attributes: land suitable for raising sugar cane and tobacco, fields for cattle, some mining, also ports useful for trade and, like Havana and San Juan. From those British communities came merchandise and machinery to Puerto Rico, while sugar, rum, tobacco, and cattle were traded in exchange, destined for Europe. So the southern part of Puerto Rico's economic and social orientation tilted eastward. Members of the Cortada family and relatives from other families would ply these routes.

That social and economic traffic between Puerto Rico and other islands awaits its historian, representing a worthy aspiration because so many British men and women came to Ponce and intermarried with Catalan and Spanish members of the local creole agricultural and entrepreneurial community in the nineteenth century, including families discussed here. Transportation, or the lack of convenient affordable forms along with convenient communications, influenced the extent to which families could maintain ties to Spain. That lacuna in the historical record, however, is beginning to be filled.²⁴

²⁴ Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información: Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012); Sylvia Sellers-Garcia, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire's Periphery* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2014); John A. Britton, *Cables, Crises, and the Press: The Geopolitics of the New International Information System in the Americas, 166-1903* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), with much of

With geographic distances in mind, one can understand what an extraordinary distance it was from Begur to Ponce or to Havana and so, would have caused Begurians to think through why go to what they knew was an economically vibrant region.²⁵ They understood that the journey was arduous. In the nineteenth century a traveler first had to go to Gerona to obtain a passport. Then, there was the trip from Begur to Barcelona, where a migrant would have boarded ship to the colonies. On today's roads the trip over land would be roughly 78 nautical miles, or roughly a two to three-hour car ride. In the early 1800s on poor roads it would have been a journey of several days. Next came the trip from Barcelona to Ponce, about 4,630 nautical miles. One had to sail to Havana or to San Juan, the legal ports of entry into these colonies, before transferring to a ship destined for Ponce. If one traveled outside the Spanish sailing routes, going instead to St. Thomas, again one had to transit further on yet another, usually smaller vessel.

These long and expensive trips were further complicated by the danger of bad weather, such as hurricanes in the fall, piracy prior to the end of the eighteenth century, privateering during any of the interminable wars fought in the area until the end of the American Civil War in 1865, bad food, crowded conditions, and sea sickness exacerbated by travel in small ships. However, the Caribbean was a busy place with thousands of ships moving back and forth in each century to South America and, by the nineteenth century, routinely to the United States. The distance from Havana to New York, a trip taken frequently by members of the family at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s, was a much shorter 1300 miles by ship.²⁶ Historians of such travel, say, from Cuba to the United States back-and-forth make clear that it is a fruitful topic to explore.²⁷

While Catalonia and the Caribbean were far apart, the weather would have been less of a shock. In Catalonia people experienced hot summers and mild winters, humid weather, and ranges in average temperatures from 82 degrees Fahrenheit in summer to an average of 55 degrees in December or January. It was also a sunny area, enjoying the Mediterranean's mild weather. Ponce had a more constant tropical climate, with less seasonal differentiation. Winters average 79 degrees while summers between 84 to 86 degrees. Both regions have humid rainy

the research focused less on families and more on such traditional themes as colonial administration, military considerations, and trade.

²⁵ Members of the Cortada families of Begur had been engaged in transnational trade since the 1600s to such areas as Africa, France, and Italy so had an international perspective on trade and commerce.

²⁶ Records of such trips are extensive through U.S. passport applications, ships' manifests, and logs of entries into Boston and New York, especially by the end of the 1800s. For a discussion of these records, James W. Cortada, "Cosmopolitan Creoles: A Cuban-Puerto Rican Family's Long Migration to New York City, 1880s-1940s," (forthcoming).

²⁷ For example, Ferrer, *Cuba*, 409-410.

seasons. The long days of summer are largely sunny, a bit less so in Catalonia during the winter. The surface temperatures of the waters off both Begur and Ponce are also similar. The surface temperature of the Mediterranean around Begur peaks at about 82 degrees in August and at the same time off Ponce nearly at 86 degrees. Palm trees had been planted in Barcelona before Begurians moved to the Caribbean so they saw at least one plant in the Caribbean that might have been familiar to them. Cuba and Puerto Rico both suffered from storms and high levels of humidity more extreme than experienced in Iberia. Catalans from Begur would have understood these weather circumstances and would have taken these into account when contemplating trips to the Caribbean.

Because of biodiversity and mix of nations engaged in the area by the late 1500s, the Caribbean became a center of globalization, emerging into what one historian described as part of “the brewing global system created by the European naval powers,” building European communities after decimating local Indian populations. “The settlers, enslaved labor force, agricultural know-how and machinery, language, legal system, religion, and much more were all imported.”²⁸ The region became part of a broader, complex and busy Atlantic ecosystem, making it part of Western Europe’s commercial, political, and military world. Since Catalans began coming to the region they were swept up by these global forces, which shaped their work, private lives, economic circumstances, religious views, and politics. Luis Martínez-Fernández put it nicely: “As early as the first decades of the sixteenth century the Caribbean became a stage on which the naval powers of Europe played out their rivalries. Well into the nineteenth century the region remained a battleground where the northern Atlantic nations contested for military, political, and commercial hegemony.”²⁹ After 1848 the United States began to increase its economic and social influence in the region. In 1898 Puerto Rico and Cuba came under U.S. control. The rising influence of the United States in the Caribbean became a motivating reason for the Spanish government to encourage its citizens to immigrate to Puerto Rico and Cuba after 1815, along with its strategic reasons for bolstering the colonies at the time all the others were in various stages of revolt against Madrid.³⁰ By the 1830s, Spain’s declining

²⁸ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Frontiers, Plantations, and Walled Cities* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), xiii.

²⁹ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Torn between Empires: Economy, Society, and Patterns of Political Thought in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1840-1878* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 1.

³⁰ Scott Eastman, *A Missionary Nation: Race, Religion, and Spain’s Age of Liberal Imperialism, 1841-1881* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 1; Andrés Sánchez Padilla, *Enemigos Íntimos: España y los Estados Unidos Antes de la Guerra de Cuba (1865-1898)*, 21-112; Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016): 226-250; Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 129-138.

influence in world affairs and growing influence of the United States began to shape the lives of all branches of the family in the New World. The international nature of the region motivated historians to think that this feature, along with a heightened focus on sugar economics distracted scholars from studying the local social structure shaped by families and one's position in society.³¹

Many contested world forces were at work: young military officers sent to Cuba to protect the island from British invasions who later turned into sugar plantation owners and local public officials; British sugar engineers in the Virgin Islands or Jamaica who brought steam technology to Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo and Cuba; revolutionaries fighting and dying against Spanish rule in Cuba in two nineteenth century rebellions while others remained loyal to Spain; still others from North America who rode the wave of economic opportunity presented by the U.S. occupation of Cuba, acquiring land bounded by how far one could hear a dog bark; World War II and tracking German commercial activities during World War II; and Cuban exiles from Castro's new regime, beginning in the early 1960s. They were soldiers, merchants, sugar planters, public officials from mayor to diplomat, Catholic and Episcopalian. All spoke Spanish as the need for Catalan waned. Some knew French and by the end of the 1800s increasingly English too, as North Americans became prominent in the region. Descendants of Begurians (and Cortadas) married into these other New World families.³²

But, return to the central decision made by Begurians to leave Catalonia for the New World. To find a similar experience in Catalonia requires reaching back to the various invasions of the region before Roman times all the way to when Napoleon invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 1808, and even there transformations occurred over centuries. Events in the Caribbean occurred more rapidly but slowed after the 1820s. Begurians, Catalans, and other Iberians arriving in the Americas now encountered more than new vegetation and a warm climate. For them it really was a New World.

With such circumstances in mind, understanding why they made such a transformative decision is crucial in appreciating the history of these families, and by deduction their migrations to the New World. For them it was the single most strategic decision made in their recorded history. Even the move from the Caribbean to North America proved less dramatic, done incrementally over the course of nearly a half-century in the 1900s.³³ For most Begurians, including the

³¹ For example, Johnson's excellent historiographical and methodological discussion, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba*, 1-17.

³² A useful source of information about the military transfers and marriages, see Enrique de Ocerin, *Indice de los expedients matrimoniales de militares y marinos que se conservan en el Archivo General Militar (1761-1865)* (Madrid: CSIC Instituto Jeronimo Zurita, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 127, 450-451, vol. 2 (1967), 141. The Cortada family archives include copies of these reports.

³³ Discussed in detail, Cortada, "Cosmopolitan Creoles: A Cuban-Puerto Rican Family's Long Migration to New York City, 1880s-1940s."

Cortadas, the move from Catalonia to the Caribbean took place in less than one generation.

Why the Youth of Begur Left Home

Since the 1790s, residents in Puerto Rico had petitioned Madrid to open trade and immigration to their island to bring into legal conformity a lucrative illegal commerce; to attract capital, slaves, free and indentured labor; and to generate economic activity. By 1815, with the French now out of the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish government started to take more seriously the rebellious behavior already underway in its American colonies, which, to a large extent, officials had ignored, in order to deal with Napoleon's invasion of Spain. But in 1815 to encourage Puerto Rico to remain loyal to Madrid and to stimulate the local economy, then in dire straits, the government issued a royal decree, the *Real Cédula de Gracias*. It invited foreigners to migrate to Puerto Rico, to bring their capital, property and slaves along, and allowed them to take these assets out of the island should they leave, except cash, but did include exporting crops. These immigrants were exempt from taxation for 15 years, and were secured legally in their ownership of property. However, they had to be loyal to the Catholic Church. The royal decree permitted Spaniards to immigrate to the island, including Catalans.³⁴

The decree was published in Spanish, French and English, and officials widely dispersed these throughout the Caribbean and Europe, including in Catalonia. The decree had its intended effects. Foreign immigrants brought knowhow, capital, technology, and slaves to Puerto Rico, sparking a significant increase in agricultural activity in the 1820s and 1830s. The timing was nearly perfect as demand for sugar was rising rapidly across Europe and North America.³⁵ These new immigrants built on the proven economic model of primarily running sugar plantations, also raising cattle and pigs. The entire Caribbean economy had a reinforcing cohesion that gave it stability and economies of scale and scope. One historian explained: "the functional unity of the region is best viewed in the context of the plantation system as the underlying economic structure that made the Caribbean economies very similar to each other, despite ecological and political variations."³⁶ The same held mostly for the Cortadas and the families they married into in the New World. For all, the

³⁴ Ana Gabriela Calderón, "Real Cédula de Gracias de 1815: inmigración y progreso, un acercamiento historiográfico," *Revista Umbral* no. 12 (Octubre 2016): 9-31.

³⁵ Including the Gillbee family (James Gillbee) that married into the Cortada clan in Ponce, and was by training an engineer with expertise in constructing windmills, "Thurrocks Windmills," www.thurrock-history.org.uk/winmills.htm (accessed 8/20/2017); Gillbee Papers, in possession of the author.

³⁶ Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean* (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 2007), 309.

plantation economic and social ecosystem and its related business infrastructures shaped the economic destinies and familial behaviors of this family until the last third of the century.

Cuba remained the largest exporter of sugar, but Puerto Rico soon became the second busiest producer. Between 1817 and 1827, sugar exports grew by 680 percent, and that did not include the sharp increase in exports of another byproduct of sugar cane farming, molasses. Sugar exports grew an additional 252 percent by 1862.³⁷ This massive expansion was just underway when Juan Christobal Pablo Cortada came to the island; in time he became a prosperous plantation owner. One historian concluded that the change in Spanish colonial policy “helped to foster an unprecedented increase in the movement toward the export economy based largely on plantation agriculture that both colonial policy makers and creole and Spanish colonial elites had begun to envision and had slowly begun to put into practice.”³⁸ This observation neatly summarized the experience of the Puerto Rican Cortada family for the next several decades.

In the period from 1765 to 1824, a long enough period for the word to get out on whether a move to the New World was worthwhile, nearly 11,000 Spaniards obtained passports from their home provinces to move to the Americas. Nearly 16 percent went to Cuba and Puerto Rico, most in the early 1800s, while nearly half went to Mexico and Central America, the vast majority before the wars of independence erupted in the early 1800s.³⁹ Between 1825 and 1881, some 650,000 Spaniards immigrated to the New World, with 225,000 just in the years 1825 to 1859.⁴⁰ While precise data for each year are unavailable, however, in 1860, just over 1,400 sailed from Barcelona for the Americas. Others came from Madrid, the Canarias, Oviedo, and La Coruña.⁴¹ The greatest numbers arriving in Puerto Rico were Catalans and Mallorcans, some with their families, accounting for the children listed as moving. Juan Cortada came alone and like most Catalans, headed for the southern coastline; other Catalans moved to the western end of Puerto Rico. Ponce had a large commercial Catalan community, making it reasonable to expect Juan Cortada to connect to for work, out of the convenience of being able to speak Catalan, and to deal with others who shared his culture.⁴²

Who were these people of the first half of the nineteenth century? Most were young, ranging in age from 13 to 20. They were largely unskilled workers.

³⁷ Luís A. Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴² For statistics on Catalans coming to Puerto Rico, with data on Ponce, Estela Cifre de Loubriel, *La formación del pueblo catalanes, baleáricos y valencianos* (San Juan, P.R.: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1975), 27, 32, 54.

For all age groups some 25 percent migrated to improve their economic opportunities. That statistic seems low, but the data suggests they sought employment with existing businesses in places like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New Orleans in the United States, not necessarily to immediately establish their own commercial operations or plantations. Another factor was the success of the early Catalan immigrants who entered lucrative businesses of the day, thus making them attractive candidates for immigration: sugar growing, import/exports, and general merchandizing, probably after some residence in the islands before starting their enterprises. More specific to the circumstance faced by Juan Cortada and others, export businesses in the Caribbean expanded enormously, creating opportunities on both sides of the Atlantic to trade, requiring more employees and business owners, particularly on the Caribbean side of the Atlantic. In short, he and others went during a Golden Age, because by the 1860s sugar driven economic growth began slowing.⁴³

Back in Begur, migrations shared common circumstances. Across the entire century some 573 people left for the New World, of which 87 percent went to Cuba, the rest to various other places, including Puerto Rico. A local historian called the number that moved “spectacular,” because Begur was such a small town. Its population in 1787, when interest in the New World was just beginning, consisted of 1,911 residents. By 1842 its population had dropped to 1,826, grew a bit by 1860 to 1,849, and ended the century at 1,908.⁴⁴ The town could not have supported those extra people and their anticipated families if they had not left. But, they had a sufficient variety of skills attractive for the expanding economies of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Some from the village stayed in the New World for approximately 15 years and returned home at ages ranging from 35 to 40, a few older. In the case of Cuba, as in Puerto Rico, royal decrees issued in the 1820s and 1830s encouraged immigration out of Gerona Province. Because Juan Cortada was able to take advantage of the reputation Catalans had in the colonies of being sharp businessmen he undoubtedly saw little reason to return to Begur.

But ultimately, the issue turned on the reality that over 90 percent of the households in Begur could not sustain their families.⁴⁵ The land was too poor and rough for expanded farming, fishing was not doing well, the coral business had played out, and industrialization was still tiny cottage enterprises. Begur had three types of migrants: the poor in need of work, those looking for adventure, and others seeking to leverage emerging economic opportunities. Juan Cortada fit into

⁴³ César Yáñez Gallardo, “La emigración catalane a América: Un vision de largo plazo,” in Antonio Eiras Roel (ed.), *La emigración española a Ultramar, 1492-1914* (Madrid: Tabapress, 1991), 179-181.

⁴⁴ Lluís Costa, *L'illa dels somnis: L'emigració de Begur a Cuba al segle XIX* (Begur: Ajuntament de Begur, 2000), 21-22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

that last group.⁴⁶ Pere Cortada Sabater, too, proved willing to help his family by promoting trade in the New World in mid-century, probably earlier, as had his father.⁴⁷ The New World was a reasonable opportunity in waiting. The idea of moving to Cuba or Puerto Rico was not an alien idea.⁴⁸ Their voyages were facilitated by merchants in Begur sailing ships to the Caribbean, largely to Havana.⁴⁹

When we put together all these factors—diminishing economic prospects at home, preexisting Catalan and even Begurian connections, availability of transportation to the Caribbean, government incentives, and economic opportunities—one can understand why 573 people left Begur to seek their fortunes. Thirty of them went to Puerto Rico, a handful to Argentina, Columbia, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, the United States, and Guatemala, and 440 to Cuba. Those few off to Puerto Rico went largely to Ponce.⁵⁰ The boom years for migrating were the 1820s and 1830s, with declining migrations in the 1840s. In 1818, only 5 villagers went to the Caribbean, then less than that each year until 1822, when 50 migrated (possibly in that number Juan Cortada, although he probably went a couple of years later), then a small handful until 1829 when the number jumped to 10, then to 21 the following year, and to 17 in 1831 and another 12 in 1832 before dropping in number. Between 1816 and 1835 (another boom year with 29 migrants), a total of 172 left the village for America. Another wave in 1840 (during the Carlist civil war of 1833-1840) led 47 more to leave. Yet another surge occurred in 1845 with 29 people, pushing the total to over 250 by 1850. Some may have left if they had supported the Carlists during the civil war at home; they would have been on the losing side and subject to imprisonment or execution.⁵¹ We just do not know much about the influence of that conflict on migration to Cuba and Puerto Rico.⁵²

Examining existing age data on where Juan Cortada fit helps to shed light on the situation of he and other Cortadas who chose to go to Cuba. The ages of immigrants supports the logic for why they left to find better economic conditions. Some 44 percent of the villagers who left did so between the ages of 16 and 20, another 23 percent at the ages of 21 to 25, while the third largest cohort were 11 to 15 years of age (nearly 18 percent). In our estimate of when

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-88.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵² That they took sides seems evident. In July 1968 your author visited a Cortada house in Begur built in 1775 with a hidden room that a descendent of the nineteenth century family said had served as a “safe house” room during the 1840s. Whether true or not is impossible to determine, but the information was volunteered, not requested.

Juan Cortada departed in his thirties of all the Begurians that century in his age group, there were only 9 to 12. Ninety-four percent of all were male.⁵³ Most immigrants were young enough that the majority did not yet have families to support, thus had more flexibility in immigrating, largely as laborers. There were only a handful of children.

One can conclude that the Begurian immigrants made the move at an optimal point in their lives, no doubt encouraged or financially assisted by their families. While Juan Cortada did not mirror fully this demographic profile, he undoubtedly shared their interest in leaving a poor area and establishing a new economic beachhead for the family. Family lore holds that he went to Puerto Rico in 1825; however, no documented evidence supporting that contention has turned up. He married in Ponce in either 1830 or 1831, which indirectly supports the mid-1820s date, because it would have taken him several years to establish himself financially so that he could support a wife, and they would have needed time, too, to know each other sufficiently to warrant their marriage. A remarkably similar story of migration could be told of other families, about their reasons for coming to the Caribbean, the influence of wars and difficult economic times in France, England, Denmark, the various Italian and German states, of disruptions caused by the Latin American revolts against Spain, and Brazil's too against Portugal. But the Begurian experience serves as a shorthand example of the broader experience of the Europeans.

One cluster of Catalans settled in Ponce. Effects on Spanish, Catalan, French, German, and English immigration spilled over all into other areas of life. Each developed bonds among co-nationals. The British tended to interact with each other, largely in mercantile and agricultural trade and intermarriages. The Spanish were overwhelmingly merchants, Catalans both merchants and planters. In time residents intermarried across nationalities, the English extensively with local Spanish creole whites. Their behaviors mirrored the conduct of the Cortada families, for instance in defending local social structures, such as existed in slave-using societies. Historians of Puerto Rico have focused considerable attention on the arrival of slaves, thanks to the royal decree, which made planters largely dependent on this form of labor until slave independence in 1873. In 1828 Ponce had the second largest slave population on the island (3,204), but by 1858 the largest with 4,431, peaking at 4,700 in 1865.⁵⁴ Cortada and all other *hacienda* (plantation) owners relied on slave labor.

It would have become increasingly clear to Catalans that Puerto Rico was a land of opportunity and they acted upon that knowledge. Between 1800 and 1830, 2,147 immigrants "officially" came to the island, of which 529 were merchants by trade, 334 worked in agriculture. Between 1828 and 1849, three-

⁵³ Ibid., 90-92.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 54.

quarters of all sugar plantation owners in the Ponce area were foreigners.⁵⁵ In Cuba, Spanish officials encouraged immigration at a slower pace, but that island's population and sugar business grew too. It tended to be more Spanish and local.⁵⁶ That there were Catalan merchants and that the Caribbean agricultural economy was export oriented suggested important considerations for why Begurians came to Puerto Rico. Arrival of sugar from the Caribbean colonies would have been accompanied by accounts of what was happening. Personal connections were established and, of course, ships bound for the islands carried finished goods and immigrants to the colonies, often manned by Catalan sailors. Some of the latter had links to island merchants that would have helped them get started in the New World, which is what probably happened with the Cortadas.

The family's experience in Cuba adds details helping to explain why Begurians came to the Caribbean. That experience reinforces the contention that in combination opportunity, escape from challenging economic conditions in Catalonia, and connections to prior arrivals to the New World contributed to the decision to leave Spain. While the experience of the Cuba-bound branch of the Begurian Cortadas followed a different path than that of the family in Puerto Rico, decisions to migrate proved similar. They were part of the nineteenth century "Indio" experience of Begur in which local immigrants to Cuba who were financially successful came back to their Catalan town. The Indios's ties to Begur proved stronger than that of the Catalans in Ponce, probably because there were more of them in Cuba than in Puerto Rico, including the Cortadas.⁵⁷

During the second half of the 1820s Juan Christobal (sometimes Cristobal) Pablo Cortada (baptized 1792), one of nine children born in Begur to José Antonio Cortada and Anna Mathó Gispert, left his home village for Barcelona and from there embarked on the long voyage to Puerto Rico, ending when he arrived in Ponce.⁵⁸ His parents had not had an easy time of it with so many mouths to feed between 1783, when their first child Pedro José Francisco was born, and the last one in 1802, Sebastia Salvador Pere. Some of the children did not live long, one dying in 1789, another in 1801.⁵⁹ Juan Christobal Pablo was the fifth child

⁵⁵ Francisco Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800-1850* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 15, 27.

⁵⁶ Jorge Ibarra, "Cultura e identidad nacional en el Caribe hispánico: el case puertorriqueño y el cubano," in Consuelo Naranjo, Miguel A. Puig-Samper, and Luis Miguel García Mora (eds.), *La Nación Soñada: Cuba, Puerto Rico y Filipinas ante el 98* (Madrid: Ediciones Doce Calles, 1996), 89.

⁵⁷ Costa, *L'illa dels somnis*, 47-57, and specifically about the Cortadas, *Ibid.*, 50, 95.

⁵⁸ James N. Cortada to Francisco A. Scarano, November 19, 1984, Cortada Family Papers.

⁵⁹ The nine children were Pere Joseph Francisco (born 1783-died 1835), Joseph Francisco Pere (born 1785-died 1789), Sebastia Francisco Joan (born 1787), Francisco Pere Narcis (born 1790), Joan Christobal Pau (born 1792), Maria Francisca Anna (born 1793-died?), Christobal Sebastia

born, so hardly in line for much of an inheritance, let alone economic opportunity within the family. He must have tried, however, because he was in his early thirties when he made the decision to go to Puerto Rico at an age considered old for such moves. By that age, he would have learned about the family's business of trading from one port to another in the Mediterranean, also the art of selling goods. His parents were sufficiently flush economically to fund his trip. He went to Gerona to obtain his passport, then off to Barcelona to embark on his trip, landing at San Juan before heading down to Ponce, also by boat.⁶⁰

But why did he go? Actually, we do not know his reason, because no letters or diaries survived to reveal his thinking. However, historians on both sides of the Atlantic explaining why Catalans came to both Puerto Rico and to Cuba helps to understand his circumstance. These boil down to two possible explanations. One, offered by Puerto Rican historians, is that when the island opened up for immigrants after 1815, it created the economic opportunity sufficient to motivate him to make the perilous journey.⁶¹ The second interpretation, offered by Catalan historians studying events in Gerona argued that the local economy was sufficiently weak that many residents saw few options than to seek opportunities elsewhere.⁶² Both interpretations are supported by historical evidence, if one keeps in mind how Iberian families implemented strategies for the overall welfare of their clan.⁶³

Salvador (born 1795-died 1801), Reparada Theresa (born 1798-died 1877), and Sebastia Salvador Pere (born 1802).

⁶⁰ At the time there was one road in Puerto Rico, built by the Spanish for military purposes that ran from San Juan to Ponce. However, using it would have been an arduous, time consuming, perhaps expensive way to get to the other side of the island, which is why I suggested he took a ship to Ponce.

⁶¹ James Gillbee, an Englishman born in 1794, was on his way from Saints Kitts to San Juan to seek work as an engineer on a sugar plantation when his ship encountered a violent storm and sank. He survived clinging on the ship's wreckage and survived for three days before being picked up and taken to Ponce. A daughter of his married Manuel Cortada in 1865. Manuel was a descendant of the first Cortada to arrive from Begur in Ponce. Gillbee became a successful planter and member of the local creole class, Ivette Pérez Vega, "Las Oleadas de Inmigracion sobre el Sur de Puerto Rico: El Caso de Sociedades Mercantiles Cradas en Ponce, 1816-1830" (PhD diss., Universidad de Valladolid, 1985).

⁶² One of the first scholars to discuss Catalan history of the period 1700s-1800s was Jaime Carrera Pujal, *La economia de Catalunya en el siglo XIX*, 4 vols (Barcelona: BOSCH, 1961); Jordi Maluquer de Motes, "La Grande Mutation (1833-1898," in Joaquim Nadal Ferreras and Philippe Wolff (eds.), *Histoire de la Catalogne* (Toulouse: PRIVAT, 1982), 423-453; and Jaime Vicens Vives and M. Llorens, *Industrials I Politics* (Barcelona: Editorial Teide, 1958); Ramon Alberch et al., *Girona al segle XIX* (Girona: GOTHIA, 1978), 9-19.

⁶³ For a thorough account accompanied by an excellent bibliography of the relevant literature see, Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, *Las migraciones de España a Iberoamérica desde la Independencia* (Madrid: CSIC, 2010). See also for a broader discussion concerning all of Spain, David S. Reher, *Perspectives on the Family in Spain Past and Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

Regardless of the family's level of prosperity, unless the first son—and Juan Christobal Pablo was not—he ultimately needed to make his way in the world outside of the family business in tiny Begur. In the 1820s, a local weak job market may not have been a problem as opportunities could be found in other provinces or in Barcelona.⁶⁴ The Cuban Cortadas became the basis of their families that settled in Miami and in other parts of Florida as a result of the Castro revolution. Between the end of the 1950s and 2015, Miami, Florida, counted 35 Cortada households, the state as a whole 61 addresses. Add Cortadas who were spouses and children in those homes, and female Cortada spouses listed by their husband's last names, and the Cortada clan in Florida became larger than combined existed in Cuba and Puerto Rico in earlier times.⁶⁵

While the Spanish government required immigrants to enter Cuba through Havana, the Begurian Cortadas did not concentrate in the provincial capital in the nineteenth century. At least one line clustered in a small inland town located 12 miles from the center of Havana, in Santiago de las Vegas. Established in the early 1600s on the frontier south of Havana where tobacco farming was beginning, within a half century its citizens built a church and a commercial district. The community gained the status of an incorporated town in 1725, as a city in 1836. In 1861—just four decades after the arrival of the first Cortadas—the town had a population of 3,300. Santiago de las Vegas was smaller than Ponce or Santiago de Cuba. At the end of the 1950s members of the family began thinking about leaving Cuba, weighing similar decision criteria as earlier generations leaving Begur.

Santiago de las Vegas prospered thanks to tobacco production. Plentiful sources of water, including mineral water deemed of medicinal value, and rich agricultural land provided the physical and economic rationale for establishing the community. The case for migrating to there out of Havana made sense. Havana was a rough garrison town, with economic growth occurring in the interior with tobacco and sugar plantations established or expanded. As in Ponce and Santiago de Cuba, merchants followed in the wake of plantation owners and the military. In the case of Santiago de las Vegas a handful of Catalan merchants established themselves. As they expanded, they hired others from their home Spanish provinces, from the ranks of the newly arrived with whom they could communicate, or with whom they had links to Catalonia. Businesses tied directly to the tobacco industry provided much of the economic backbone for the

⁶⁴ Roughly half of those who went across the nineteenth century were between the ages of 16 and 20 years of age, another 23 percent ages 21 to 25, Costa, *L'illa dels somnis*, 91.

⁶⁵ It is not clear how many Cortadas still live in Cuba, although there are some and they communicate with members of their family in Florida and through Facebook. The older adults in Miami were born and raised in Cuba, while a young generation of adults were raised in the United States and their children were born outside of Cuba.

community. Small shops processed tobacco for shipment out of the colony; others made cigars by hand; additional workers packaged tobacco for use in pipe smoking, later for chewing. The community's economic fortunes rose and fell with the tobacco industry's, enjoying, for example, a period of rapidly expanding prosperity at the dawn of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Over subsequent decades Cortadas worked in a climate of economic growth; a few others, too, in nearby Havana, just slightly less than a day's ride by horseback from the smaller town.

The social and familial life of Santiago de las Vegas mimicked patterns familiar to residents in Santiago de Cuba and Ponce. As one local historian described it, "the young visited frequently with family and friends in ways appropriate to their age," with family reunions and dances common, too.⁶⁷ Families behaved according to the practices of their respective social classes, while church services provided occasions for the young to meet. What little is known about community life focuses on the active street life of the *campesinos* (workers, rural and urban), less about other segments of local society.

The first Cortada known to arrive in the village was Pere (Peter) Mato (Matho?, b. 1790) in 1820. In Begur he had manufactured spirits. In Santiago de las Vegas he did the same. He brought along his young sons Peter, Jaime, Josep, and Sebastian. By the time he had written his will in 1835, which he registered in Begur, he claimed ownership to several pieces of land in the Cuban town. By then, however, per his will his son, Jamie and wife had died of unknown causes. Pere died the following year in Cuba. Meanwhile, his living sons had become active in business affairs, ran shops (general store later a bakery too), invested in the tobacco business, and created their own snuff, *Leon de Oro*. Pere's son, Peter in Cuba, also active in business, was appointed chief law enforcement officer of the village on October 24, 1846. In 1854, he wrapped up his business affairs in the village, turning over his enterprises to his brothers. Josep took over the general store and bakery, while Sebastian the tobacco business that included the *Leon de Oro* brand. Pere then moved back to Spain, took up residence in Barcelona where he facilitated the tobacco trade between his family in Cuba and others in Spain. Records in Begur indicate that this business continued throughout the 1850s and that some of it took place with merchants in his ancestral village.⁶⁸

The original Cortada in Santiago de las Vegas had nephews who, too, saw the expanding economy of Havana Province where the town existed as more attractive than prospects in Catalonia. Three brothers, named Manuel, Pere, and

⁶⁶ Francisco Fina García, *Historia de Santiago de las Vegas desde los primeros tiempos hasta el cese del gobierno español* (Miami, Fla.: Ediciones Altagràcia, 2007). This is the only known history of the town.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁸ Lluís Costa, *L'illa dels somnis: L'emigració de Begur a Cuba al segle XIX* (Begur: Ajuntament de Begur, 2000), 95, 105-108, 136-137.

Josep Cortada Sabater left for Cuba, probably in the 1830s, and entered business, operating between Matanzas (56 miles east of Havana) and Santiago de las Vegas. In the mid-1850s Josep moved his residence from Santiago de las Vegas to Havana. Records in Begur documented periodic trips he made back to Begur, such as in May 1864, for business and family reasons.⁶⁹ Manuel had to return to Spain in the same decade because he could not pass the medical exam required for immigrants to Cuba, as he had a lesion on his left leg.⁷⁰ The experience of this family as merchants interacting between and among Cubans and Catalans has a rich historiography, so does not need to be rehearsed here. However, the Cortada experience mirrored what historians have noted about the merchant networks. We have only to recall, for instance, the positive role *Indios* played through their reinvestments in small villages like Begur after successful careers in Cuba, less so in Puerto Rico.⁷¹

Meanwhile in the 1860s and 1870s, Cortadas in and around the Cuban village also raised sheep. Pere maintained his economic ties to Begur in the 1860s.⁷² Back there the family sustained its historic position in the community.⁷³ Another, Pere Cortada y Puig, served as mayor of Begur in 1867 and 1868, while yet another did the same in Ponce in 1873-1874.⁷⁴ The former remained active in local politics for many years during this turbulent period in Spanish history as the nation experienced the exile of Queen Isabel II in 1868, creation of a republic, then restoration of the monarchy in 1875.⁷⁵ All the while, Cuba and Puerto Rico served as safety valves should the family need to evacuate Catalonia.

With so many Cortadas coming into Cuba in the 1820s and 1830s, a summary is in order. Municipal records in Begur are precise about who came over. These are summarized in Table 1. The data in the table has much to teach us. First, two branches of the Begurian family went to one small village in Cuba in two waves. They obviously leveraged pre-existing local contacts and then each

⁶⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 136.

⁷¹ Yolanda Blasco-Martel and Martín Rodrigo Alharilla, "Human Capital and Financial Capital in the Atlantic Space: From America to Catalonia, 1829-1855," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 4 (2015): 482-500. Their article includes citations to related articles they wrote based on Catalan sources. For a case study demonstrating the power of microhistory, see Raimon Soler, "Comerciants i fabricants. Una reflexion sobre l'origen comercial del capital industrial: el cas de Vilanova i la Geltrú," *Recerques* 36 (1998): 109-136. Much of the literature focuses on banking, slave, and sugar trade, less so on smaller businesses in Cuba, such as engaged the attention of the Cortadas.

⁷² Ibid., 204.

⁷³ They served as community leaders and lived the lives of what today one might refer to as upper middle class throughout the nineteenth century.

⁷⁴ The mayor in Ponce (1873-1874) was Juan Cortada y Quintana. It was not uncommon for mayors to be appointed for only one to two terms. This Cortada was also a plantation operator.

⁷⁵ For discussion of his political activities, see Lluís Costa, *Arxius I recerca Municipal de Begur* (Begur: Ajuntament de Begur, 1994), 95.

other. Second, as happened with most immigrants to Cuba, they were young and male, their families hoping they would make a better life for themselves in the colony. Third, this all happened while the local Cuban economy was expanding rapidly, with tobacco and sugar the driving forces. The Cortadas developed their presence largely through mercantile business and later with some agricultural holdings, as yet not fully understood. In the same period, 17 other Begurians migrated to the same village. Dozens of Begurians from various families located to Santiago de Cuba, Matanzas, and Havana, evidence of a vibrant Begurian community in Cuba. To put things in perspective, about two dozen of them moved to Puerto Rico in the entire nineteenth century, but many scores to Cuba.⁷⁶ At least one Cortada, possibly two, moved to Cuba in 1820 out of a total of seven people of all families that migrated to Cuba that year. In 1835—the big year for Cortadas moving to Cuba, when seven came to the colony among a total of 29 migrants from Begur that year.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 251-264.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

TABLE 1 Migration of Cortada Family to Cuba, 1820s-1830s

Name	Destination	Year	Birth Year
Cortada Corp, Joseph	Santiago de las Vegas	Unknown	Unknown
Cortada Mató, Pere	Santiago de las Vegas	1820	Unknown
Cortada Puig, Jaume	Santiago de las Vegas	1835	1817
Cortada Puig, Josep	Santiago de las Vegas	1835	1817
Cortada Puig, Pere	Santiago de las Vegas	1835	Unknown
Cortada Puig, Sebastià	Santiago de las Vegas	1835	1820
Cortada Sabater, Josep	Santiago de las Vegas/ Havana	1835	1818
Cortada Sabater, Manuel	Matanzas	1835	1819
Cortada Sabater, Pere	Santiago de las Vegas	1835	1815

Source: Lluís Costa, *L'illa dels somnis: L'emigració de Begur a Cuba al segle XIX* (Begur: Ajuntament de Begur, 2000), 254.

Because the Cortada families that went to Cuba took a different path than those in Puerto Rico, they illustrate yet another trajectory of families living in Cuba normally not described by historians of Cuba's evolution in the nearly one century from the turbulent 1860s to the establishment of the Castro regime in 1959. These Cortadas represent the least understood of all the Cortada descendants of Begur to live in the Caribbean, a few of whom mixed with the Puerto Rican Cortadas in New York and elsewhere during the twentieth century. Some moved to Puerto Rico upon the occasion of Castro coming to power, examples of the continued movement of residents in the Caribbean to other islands, as had been occurring since the seventeenth century. The Cuban Cortada story is additionally confused because names vary in the records, such as Pere and Peter, Josep and Joseph. The issue of names is important for these appellations document cultural and social changes of the family. For example, Pere became Pedro, as Catalan parents transformed into Caribbean (Hispanic) families. Jaume (Catalan) appears later as Jaime (Spanish/Puerto Rican) then as James (Anglo/U.S.A.). Finally, so many Cortadas went to Cuba when compared to those who immigrated to Puerto Rico, many with similar names.

One branch that went to Cuba descended from Pere Josep Francisco Cortada (1783-1835), the older brother of Juan Cristobal Paul Cortada and his wife, Montserrat Quintana Alverado (b. 1790 raised in Begur, d. 1821). This older brother married a local Begurian woman, Ursula Puig Ros (also known as Ursula Theresa Narsis Ros, b. 1790-d. 1821). They had three sons, no girls. Their first son—Pedro—and his wife raised their family in Begur, and never resided in Cuba.⁷⁸

The second son—Josep Jaume—married a lady in Cuba from a local family (Nieves Hernandez), about whom we know little, but by her name was probably of Castilian ancestry. He went to Cuba in 1835, settling in Santiago de las Vegas where he established a line of Cortadas. He, like the other two boys were nephews of Juan Cristobal Pau, a direct member of the Cortada line that settled in Ponce. His business interests were diverse, largely mercantile, but included properties. While he and his wife were what one might today call a “professional class,” they would have seen themselves as a cut above that designation, as they would have been doing business and interacting with the creoles. One gains a hint of that from the history of their children, all born in Cuba. One of their sons, Manuel, became a medical doctor, who in turn married Serafina Brito. Their son, Raul, thus Josep Jaume's grandson, became a lawyer

⁷⁸ Pedro Josep Francisco Cortada married twice. His first wife was Maria Julia (last name unknown) who he wed in 1859 and who probably died in childbirth. His second wife, who he married in 1861 was Ursula Puig, bearing the same name as the wife of Pere Josep Francisco's wife, that is to say, her mother's name. Data based on baptismal records, Sant Pere de Begur, copies in the possession of the author.

who married a local woman, Elvita Marude. To the end of the twentieth century they worked in professions, such as medicine. One's class dictated whom one married or interacted with socially, a point made by historians interested in family history, including Johnson.⁷⁹

Manuel the doctor is remembered for an accidental meeting between him and Jaime A. Cortada, of Ponce, in Havana in 1911 or 1912 that provides additional insight about the family in the New World. James N. Cortada (son of Jaime A. Cortada, born 1872) recollected the event:

My father in one of his trips around South America either went through Havana or came back through Havana. Either way, he stayed at the Hotel Inglaterra in Havana and when he signed the register he noticed that the name Manuel Cortada was on it. Well, my uncle, that is my father's oldest brother, was Manuel Cortada and was also in the export business, and could very well have been in Cuba. My father was quite indignant that if Manuel was in Cuba or going to Cuba that he had not notified him about it. So, he got a piece of paper and wrote a very insulting note to whom he presumed was his brother. It so happened that not long after that, Dr. Manuel Cortada, who by this time was an elderly gentleman and who was reputed to have a hell of a temper, turned up on the scene and was given this note. He, of course, grew terribly indignant and wanted to know exactly who had written it. Well, my father turned up on the scene and after some explanation everything was cleared up and they found that indirectly, they were distantly related, because their ancestors both came from Begur. Neither one of them knew that there was either a Puerto Rican branch, one side, and on the other Cuban branch.⁸⁰

Here we have evidence that the Cuban and Puerto Rican Cortadas did not interact with each other once they left Begur; that situation was only partially ameliorated in New York City in the 1880s-1920s when various families connected. One can see the social proprieties of the hidalgo/creole culture at work, with the doctor not accustomed to the informality of the note, which would

⁷⁹ Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba*, discusses such issues in a chapter devoted to the role of women, 97-120, but also earlier, 24-25; an issue teed up earlier by Lyle N. McAlister, "Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43 (August 1966): 349-370.

⁸⁰ The story was recounted by Jaime A. Cortada to his son, James N. Cortada, "A History of the Cortada Family," 53. James N. Cortada's history was recorded with his having access to all the family records available to consult for the recording; completed in 1996, in possession of James W. Cortada.

have been perfectly normal between two brothers. The situation was resolved quickly, because Jaime was of an age where his social demeanor and profession would have made it possible for the doctor to take him seriously; Jaime would have been 39 or 40 years of age. Finally, note that both gentlemen stayed in what would have been Havana's Five Star hotel of its day. It would have been exactly the kind of hotel a prosperous Cortada from nearby Santiago de las Vegas would have stayed at while in Havana on business or pleasure.

The third son from the Cortada-Puig marriage—Sebastian Juan Josep Cortada Puig—was also active in business and in military affairs. He moved to Cuba in 1835. During the first Cuban war of independence (1868-1878) he served as a volunteer in a military unit organized by the Spanish government in Santiago de Vegas.⁸¹

Conclusions

Was the move from Begur to the Caribbean worth it? If so, how? The answer was yes for both branches of the family. The economies of these Spanish islands enjoyed periods of rising prosperity and challenges, and certainly dramatic changes in how people earned their living. Wars and new military occupations disrupted rhythms of private life, but they avoided the terrible civil war in Spain of 1936-1939, although several members in eastern Cuba died in the rebellions against Spain between the 1860s and the 1890s and their properties were damaged. They recovered from difficult times and personal losses, restoring comparable standards of living within one generation. All this happened while the economies of Begur and Catalonia languished during the nineteenth century, with the exception of Barcelona and nearby communities that industrialized. Residents from Begur who chose to go to the Caribbean made the best decision for their wellbeing.

Catalan and other Iberian immigrants identified as Puerto Ricans, Cubans, creoles, and became citizens of the United States. The Cortadas stopped speaking Catalan after one generation, appropriated Spanish as their primary language, added English, and acquired some French. A few departed from the Catholic faith, embracing the Anglican Church. If there was a price for their trips to the New World, it was their decision to surrender much of their Catalan heritage, but not necessarily family values. Because of their success in migrating out of Begur and their growing familiarity with North America, subsequent decisions to leave the Caribbean were less definitive than what they did in the 1820s and 1830s. That was largely the Puerto Rican experience.⁸² The Cuban Begurians' experiences proved similar.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 53. 52.

⁸² James W. Cortada, "Cosmopolitan Creoles: A Cuban-Puerto Rican Family's Long Migration to New York City, 1880s-1940s," forthcoming.

Recall that Begur was a tiny community, occupied a small footprint crowded on the shoreline of the Mediterranean on the side of a hill. One could walk from one end of town to the other in approximately 30 minutes. Cortadas and other families would have had many opportunities to discuss the benefits and risks of migration. They understood what was involved. They had centuries of experience trading with other parts of Spain, southern France, and Africa. Barcelona was familiar to these people. Cuba presented larger more diverse economic opportunities than Puerto Rico and so was no surprise that the majority moving to the New World would have selected a known “safer bet.” Several hundred Begurians moved to other parts of the Americas, most in the later 1800s. The Begurians reflected one decision-making model about migration that suggests historians could embrace both perspectives (and be right) that positive economic opportunities in the New World and weak economic and dangerous political and military circumstances in Spain made evacuation from Catalonia attractive.

A consideration not reflected in the historical records or in the academic discourses regarding migrations, creole/slave dynamics, political and economic issues among others is the human drama and internal tensions involved in such moves. For a Cortada in his 30s to decide to leave all that he knew, including family and friends, must have kept him awake at night. A 16-year old boy—a teenager—sent 4,000 miles away without his parents or older siblings to a far-away place must also have experienced angst. Ultimately, every move by any immigrant was personally a major event. As historians, we should not lose sight of that reality at the individual and family levels.

There is additionally the never-ending debate about how to conduct micro history, that is to say, the study of specific narrow cases. Here, we unapologetically chose to learn from many secondary sources, largely based on archival research, much in Begur and Gerona, to help explain the actions of specific actors to make sense of what they did and to compare and contrast their activities to those described by other historians. The behaviors of immigrants and permanent residents in Cuba and Puerto Rico reinforced patterns of behavior identified by earlier scholars, but with subtle differences. This is good news for those who wish to study the behavior of other families and individuals, because it gives them context, a frame of reference, against which to assess the activities of their subjects. So moving from top down (macro history) to the narrower micro history approach proved beneficial.

Taking a longer view seen through the lens of multiple generations of a family made evident that both families and communities evolved slowly. Study of the Cortada family’s experience conducted since the 1950s suggests that handed-down values from initial generations in Spain remained surprisingly intact over

the centuries.⁸³ Thinking through issues addressed in this essay called for asking: Should current historiography of immigration to the Caribbean be altered? The story told here suggests fewer differences existed than the historiography suggests. In all four major metropolitan regions—Santiago de Cuba, Havana, San Juan, and Ponce—people came for similar reasons.

Whoever came to these two islands succeeded sufficiently to integrate permanently into local creole society. We can now accept that such patterns of behavior transcended any particular colony and, for that matter, spilled over into nearby British outposts such as Saint Thomas and Jamaica.

Broad patterns of familial behavior, and the reasons for coming to the Caribbean, were long standing. Historians documented these as individual patterns from the 1500s in Cuba, the 1600s in Puerto Rico, and for British in both colonies and across the Caribbean in an on-and-off manner for almost the same period. So, distinguishing events in Havana from Santiago de Cuba, for example, may need rectification, or at least greater qualification, made possible by examining the histories of individual families.⁸⁴

⁸³ Research began as a traditional family history project but over the next three generations involved over a dozen participants trained academically by members with advanced degrees in history, economics, library science, business, and management and from the beginning using both academic and legal standards of documentation and evidentiary practices.

⁸⁴ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*.