



BATEY GUAYABAL
ENTRADA A GUAYABAL

BATEY GUAJABO

CHUCHO GUAJABO N° 17

BATEY BRUJUELAS
CHUCHO BRUJUELAS

BATEY BLANCO

CHUCHO N° 15

CHUCHO MULA N° 17

ZENTRONGUE BRUJUELA

CHUCHO LA NAPA N° 12

CHUCHO MULA

LA LUISA

PROP. PARTICULAR

PESO GUANITO

CHUCHO DOBE EL NONGO

UTIER

BATEY GAUTIER

CHUCHO SEIS Y MEDIO

ENTRONGUE NONGO

BATEY LUISIA

CHUCHO JUBE N° 2

CRUCE DEL JUBE

ENTRONGUE GAUTIER

BATEY GAUTIER

ENTRONGUE CAYA

CHUCHO JUBE N° 3

Backstage of Global Sugar: Assembling life around the *batey*

Abstract

This contribution approaches the spatial assemblages of sugar plantation landscapes in the Dominican Republic by a close architectural reading of “*small spaces*” (Chattopadhyay, 2023) in a transcalar, multi-sited perspective informed by critical approaches to post-colonial geographies and globalised commodity production systems. Its focus and entry point is the *batey*, a particular type of settlement shaped in the 20th century by state and private conglomerates’ interventions to reconfigure the territorial apparatus of sugar cultivation and export processing as a modern industrialised one. Through archival research on architectural and planning documentation produced between 1970-1980s, the contribution discusses the Dominican state’s efforts in (re)producing spatial assemblages based on the continuation of colonial legacies at different scales: from parcelling the land and establishing infrastructures for sugar production to defining and controlling the various forms and trajectories of livelihood by establishing specific architectures which echo the labour hierarchies of the sugar scheme. Our analysis emphasises the processes of peripheralization, discipline, and alienation on both macro and micro levels that are distinctive of these settings.

Keywords

Plantation architectures, Dominican Republic, Spatial planning, Labour regime

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Processes of racial, colonial space-making are intrinsic to Caribbean spaces. In this context, the plantation model deserves special attention. Forged by colonial violence and rooted in relationships of dependency between colony and metropole, it established scalable commodity crop cultivation for foreign consumption based on a labour hierarchy of settlers, enslaved racialised labourers and their descendants.

In the Dominican Republic, the geographic focus of this study, the dependency patterns inherent to the colonial plantation model played a crucial role in the construction of its modern state in the 19th and 20th centuries. The racialised plantation labour hierarchy also came to define relations with neighbouring Haiti, linking agricultural and commodity production¹ to migration regimes. In this contribution, focus is set on the Dominican state operations for the planning and modernisation of the sugar plantation landscape in the second half of the 20th century. As main lens to read its patterns of spatial production, we discuss the seemingly peripheral but crucial spatial assemblage of the agricultural *batey* settlement, where migrant Haitian male cane-cutters and their intimate others were confined ostensibly just for times when they contributed to the production of the commodity, but where translocal communities actually continued (and continue) to live, assembling livelihoods in ways that were marginalized and made invisible, yet crucial to the reproduction of the labour and the ecologies upon which the global sugar economy was and is built. Planning documents from the 1970s-80s held in the Dominican National Archives are read as sources for the bureaucratic operations of reconfiguring space that characterised the sugar plantation project as one of progress and development. On a larger territorial scale, the analysis introduces the planned spatial hierarchy of the plantation scheme in relation to its racial-labour hierarchy. Shifting to smaller scales and spaces, by examining the proposed plans for agricultural *bateyes* and their specific architectural typologies, we trace how the same logics of bordering, alienation and discipline were applied. As such settlements continue to exist to the present day as an indispensable condition and backstage of sugar production, we conclude with an outlook on avenues for researching plantation afterlives by considering the emergence of other, translocal modes of economy and care relations branching out from the networked communities of the *bateyes'* inhabitants.

1. Andrés Cortén, "Migraciones e Intereses de Clases", paper presented at *Inmigración Haitiana hacia la República Dominicana, Copilación de Ponencias: Centro de la Planificación y Acción Ecuménica. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1975*, 17.

Conceptual considerations

Plantation-making systematizes socio-spatial orders² through the repetition of the same pattern across the landscape, based on scalability, standardization, and simplification.³ It amounts to an attempt to reassemble everything that existed before,⁴ leading to the destruction of forms of life, both local and those that were "*planted*".⁵ As a model of enclosure, its nature follows the logics of controlling bodies, their practices and the landscape for calculability and profit whilst setting rhythms of life that concern spatial formations far beyond their constitutive productive nature.⁶ The institutional operations of plantation-making leave document traces that situate the archive as a repository of evidence for its logics.⁷ Paying attention to the neglected "*small spaces*", as suggested by Swati Chattopadhyay,⁸ in our reading of archival documentation of the Dominican state's plantation-making strategies, we seek to engage with the (spatial) narratives foregrounded and obscured in them. Resonating with recent scholarship⁹ on the Plantationocene, such spaces, Chattopadhyay explains,

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2. Edgar T. Thompson, "The Plantation as a Social System," *Revista Geográfica* 25, no. 51 (1959): 41–56.
 3. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "On Nonscalability," *Common Knowledge* 18, no. 3 (2012): 505–24, <https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-1630424>; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology: An Introduction to Supplement 20," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. S20 (2019): S186–97.
 4. Tsing, "On Nonscalability", 512.
 5. Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-2378892>.
 6. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Nachdr. (University of Michigan Press, 1990), 63.
 7. Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, nos 1–2 (2002): 87–109.
 8. Swati Chattopadhyay, *Small Spaces: Recasting the Architecture of Empire* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023).
 9. Maan Barua, *Plantation Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2024); Maan Barua et al., "Introduction: Plantationocene," *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, 24 January 2023, <https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/introduction-plantationocene>; Colette Le Petitcorps et al., eds, *Global Plantations in the Modern World: Sovereignties, Ecologies, Afterlives*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies (Springer International Publishing, 2023).



Figure 1. Consejo Estatal del Azúcar, CEA. “General Plan for the Boca Chica sugar complex”, 1987. 1.1.1.5, *Planos de Ingenios*. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

embody lived experiences and the power relations embedded in their production. Therefore, this situates them both amid “dominant networks” —those belonging to hegemonic systems—and networks which remain outside.

Our interest in the situated, relational and transcalar analysis of such small spaces is motivated by complementary perspectives on how to understand and critically describe the formative role(s) of specific architectures and spatial arrangements within the dominant hierarchical networks of hegemonic globalized production systems and labour regimes where often invisibilized and hidden translocal spatialities and trajectories encompassing care and social reproduction practices and relations coexist. Collaboratively, in this contribution, we seek to diffract various concepts and frameworks of analysis informed by critical approaches to post-colonial geographies of

the plantation and globalised commodity production.¹⁰ Foregrounding the relevance of local ecologies and spaces of social reproduction, scholars of global production networks propose to take ostensible peripheries seriously as “sources of global processes” rather than mere “site”.¹¹ The concern to shift attention to the contested geographies of social reproduction and care as primary, yet mainly invisibilized locations of value extraction and space making across scales in modern capitalism has also been raised and approached by a rapidly growing body of intersectional

10. Jennifer Bair and Marion Werner, “Commodity Chains and the Uneven Geographies of Global Capitalism: A Disarticulations Perspective,” *Environment and Planning A* 43, no. 5 (2011): 988–97; Nicholas A Phelps et al., “An Invitation to the Dark Side of Economic Geography,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50, no. 1 (2018): 236–44; Marion Werner, *Global Displacements: The Making of Uneven Development in the Caribbean*, Antipode Book Series (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). See also Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Alessandra Mezzadri, Satoshi Miyamura, Jonathan Pattenden, and Benjamin Selwyn, “Exploitation and Labour Regimes: Production, Circulation, Social Reproduction, Ecology,” in *Labour Regimes and Global Production*, edited by Adrian Smith, Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, and Neil M. Coe. Economic Transformations. (Agenda Publishing, 2022).
11. Philip F. Kelly, “From Global Production Networks to Global Reproduction Networks: Households, Migration, and Regional Development in Cavite, the Philippines,” *Regional Studies* 43, no. 3 (2009): 450; Philip F. Kelly, “Production Networks, Place and Development: Thinking through Global Production Networks in Cavite, Philippines,” *Geoforum, Global Production Networks, Labour and Development* 44, no. Supplement C (2013): 82–92; Jana Maria Kleibert, “Islands of Globalisation: Offshore Services and the Changing Spatial Divisions of Labour,” *Environment and Planning A* 47, no. 4 (2015): 884–902.

feminist urban research.¹² Informed by this literature, our research seeks to set grounds for the study of the emancipatory potential of life's work and care relations as we consider as site of departure “*the critical description of relational encounters across difference*”¹³ by providing a more complete understanding of the spatialities and trajectories involved in making the hostile plantation landscape, the backstage of global sugar, to which we now turn.

The State Sugar Consortium and the *batey*: spatial logics for bordering and disciplining

The Dominican agrarian landscape has been shaped by continuities of “*colonial inhabitation*”,¹⁴ reproduced by statal and private capitalist ventures that consolidated

cane sugar as an export commodity whilst dictating the nature of economic relations and migration patterns between the two countries on the island. In the second half of the 20th century, although sugar production continued to be a joint effort of a local plantocracy constituted by private landowners and sugar conglomerates, it developed into an institutionalised public affair. The Dominican state became deeply invested in the expansion of sugar plantations, reproducing existing patterns of cultivation across the Dominican territory with a capitalist industrial drive –first, under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961), who concentrated the lucrative export sector in his personal portfolio, and after his demise, when the complexes under his name were transferred to the state, positioning it as the leading sugar producer and the largest landholder until the industry's decline in the 1990s.

To administer and modernise the recently acquired properties, throughout the 1960s, a governmental entity that operates to this day was established: the State Sugar Consortium (CEA, for *Consejo Estatal del Azúcar*). The CEA reproduced and expanded the existing spatial orders of sugar production, while delineating the properties and modernising the corresponding infrastructures. In parallel, the migration schemes inherent to the plantation model were institutionalised through bilateral agreements with Haiti—which began under Trujillo's rule—from 1952 to 1986 and the active encouragement of clandestine migration.¹⁵ These agreements explicitly prohibited the workers and their kin from leaving the plantations, where the administration of each complex controlled their access to documentation. Contained within the plantation, the Haitian male cane cutters—known as *braceros* in the Dominican imaginary—along with their intimate others, were allocated to a specific kind of settlement, the “*agricultural batey*”.

Rationalising the Landscape: The hierarchy of central and agricultural *bateyes*

The spatial planning model embraced by the CEA considered two complementary geographies that reflected the linear hierarchy of the export-oriented production process: an industrial settlement connected by roads and/or rails to a port, the *batey* central, and a vast agricultural hinterland with multiple enclaves within it, the agricultural *bateyes*. The central and agricultural *bateyes* differed not only in size, placement, and morphology, but also in the ethnicity

12. Katharyne Mitchell et al., “Introduction: Life's Work: An Introduction, Review and Critique,” *Antipode* 35, no. 3 (2003): 415–42; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Penguin Book, 2021); Linda Peake, *A Feminist Urban Theory for Our Time: Rethinking Social Reproduction and the Urban* (John Wiley & Sons, 2021); Alessandra Mezzadri, “On the Value of Social Reproduction: Informal Labour, the Majority World and the Need for Inclusive Theories and Politics,” *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (2019): 33–41; Tithi Bhattacharya and Liselotte Vogel, eds, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (Pluto Press, 2017); Katie Meehan and Kendra Strauss, *Precarious Worlds: Contested Geographies of Social Reproduction* (University of Georgia Press, 2015); Angelika Gabauer et al., eds, *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).
13. Tsing, “On Nonscalability,” 512.
14. Malcom Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, Critical South (Polity Press, 2022), 26–35.

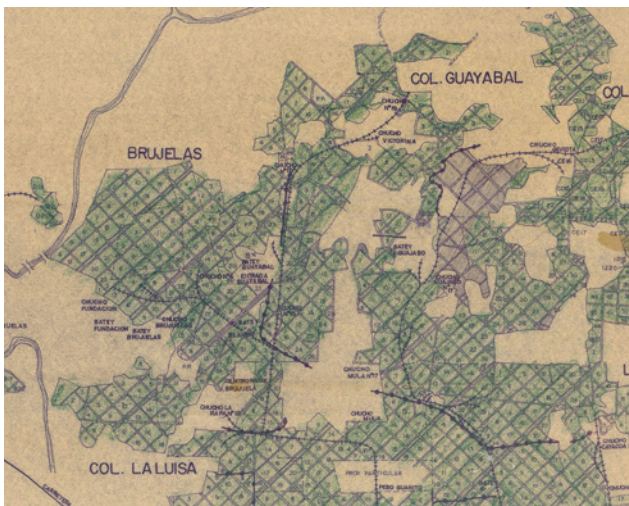


Figure 2. Partial view of Fig. 1, showing spatial organizational system and identification of agricultural *bateyes*.

15. Frank Moya Pons, *El Batey: Estudio Socioeconómico de los Bateyes del Consejo Estatal del Azúcar* (Fondo para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales, 1986), 213–216; Samuel Martínez, *Peripheral Migrants: Haitians and Dominican Republic Sugar Plantations*, 1st ed (University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 8; Bridget Wooding, *Needed but Unwanted* (Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2004), 14.

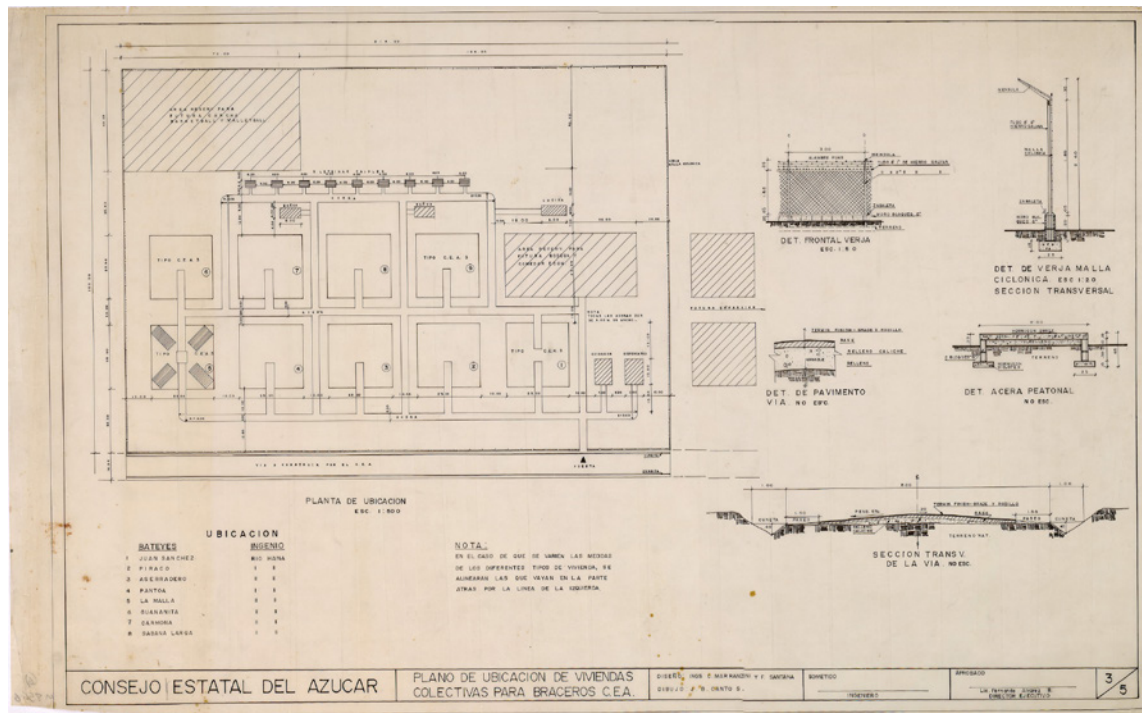


Figure 3. Consejo Estatal del Azúcar, CEA. “Location plans for the collective housing for the CEA’s bracero”, ca. 1970–1975. 1.1.3.1, *Planos de construcciones y edificaciones del Consejo Estatal del Azúcar*. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

of their population, which was strictly attached to the labour performed in the sugar scheme. It was the materialisation of a stratified society, based on the binary division between Dominicans and Haitians, as well as gender and class hierarchies representative of the sugar plantation model.¹⁶ In the *batey* central, the population was predominantly Dominican.¹⁷ These settlements included, besides the sugar mill and its corresponding industrial and administrative facilities, domestic typologies for the employees and their families, in addition to educational and recreational infrastructure. Every central *batey* was connected to several agricultural *bateyes* through a transportation network. In contrast, the latter were conceived under the premise of being temporal, male-dominated settlements, where only Haitian and Haitian-descent male subjects were supposed to receive accommodation when working as *braceros* during the months of harvest.¹⁸ Under the administration of the CEA, however, these settlements also became home to those holding an intimate bond with the *braceros*, giving rise

to a permanent, population of Haitian, Dominican, and Dominican-Haitian subjects.¹⁹

The making of the sugar complex on a larger territorial scale by the CEA can be read through the abstractions²⁰ and omissions produced by the act of gridding.²¹ This allows us to discern the “logics that undergird choices made in the production of objects”²² where the “rules of practice”²³ become traceable in the representational space. As seen in the general plan of the *Boca Chica*

16. Samuel Martínez, *Decency and Excess: Global Aspirations and Material Deprivation on a Caribbean Sugar Plantation* (Paradigm, 2007).

17. Natalia Riveros, *Estado de la cuestión de la población de los bateyes dominicanos en relación a la documentación*, with Observatorio Migrantes del Caribe (Observatorio Migrantes del Caribe, 2014), 19.

18. Moya Pons, *El Batey: Estudio Socioeconómico de los Bateyes del Consejo Estatal del Azúcar*.

19. It is important to note that Dominican and Haitian women had continuously inhabited the agricultural *bateyes*, with records of the presence of date back to the migration schemes of the 1920s. Refer to: Sneider Jansen and Cecilia Millán, *Género, Trabajo y Etnia en los Bateyes Dominicanos*, Serie Investigaciones, no. 9 (Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, Programa Estudios de la Mujer, 1991), 16; Amelia Hintzen, “Una mirada histórica a las mujeres en los bateyes de la República Dominicana,” in *Género y el riesgo de apatridia para la población de ascendencia haitiana en los bateyes de la República Dominicana*, Segunda edición, ed. Allison Petrozziello (Centro para la Observación Migratoria y el Desarrollo en el Caribe (OBMICA), 2017), 39.

20. Chattopadhyay, *Small Spaces*, 152.

21. Fernando Luiz Lara and Felipe Hernandez, *Spatial Concepts for Decolonizing the Americas* (2021), 13–14.

22. Chattopadhyay, *Small Spaces*, 5 citing James Deetz.

23. Stoler, “Colonial Archives,” 103.

sugar complex (Fig. 1), gridding translated into a parcelling system applied to the plantation's sugar fields, and thus the agricultural *bateyes* concealed in them. The map, in this sense, served as a medium to scale down the system into manageable units.²⁴ Parcels were quantified and grouped into agricultural sections, labelled on the plan as "*colonias*" (Fig. 2). This enabled control by setting borders on different scales as the agricultural *bateyes* were now confined to the field, the parcel, and the *colonia*. It is important to note that this system of measurement and ordering was only applied to agricultural land—one territory already tied to a race/class hierarchy.

As rendered in the map, parcels and *colonias* were conceived in relation to transportation infrastructure, from railways to roads and paths. Their presence or absence produced circuits of (im)mobility, facilitating the flow of raw materials while making invisible and restricting the circulation of the *batey's* subjects. As a structuring device for the complex, the railway connected all *bateyes* in the network but favoured only the transportation of sugar cane. Its presence did not mean to provide mobility to the racialised migrant population, but to keep them "*in place*"²⁵ at the sugar fields, only able to rely on the convoluted and monotonous paths in between.

The agricultural *batey* and its architectures

The Dominican National Archive holds a series of

24. Chattopadhyay, *Small Spaces*, 21.

25. Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Places Journal* 2, no. 2 (1984); Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (2011): 947–63.

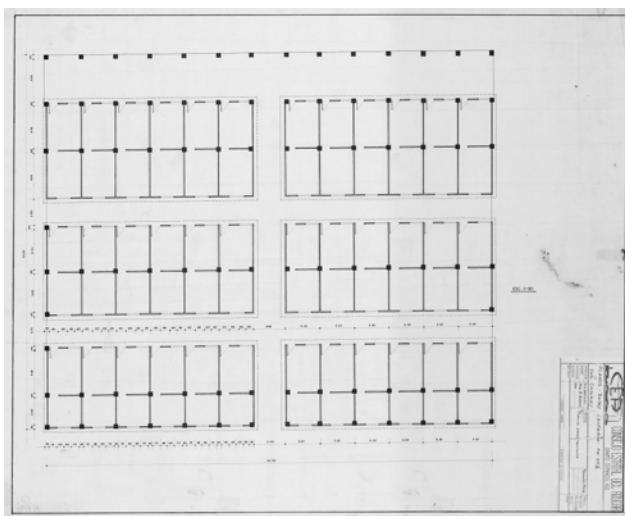


Figure 4. Consejo Estatal del Azúcar, CEA. "Plans of *batey* Lechería" KM 59 ½, 1981. 1.1.1.4, *Planos de porciones de terrenos y bateyes*. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

plans proposed by the CEA²⁶ detailing the spatial arrangements for agricultural *bateyes* belonging to different sugar complexes in the 1970s, titled "*Location plans for the collective housing for the CEA's bracero*"²⁷ (Fig. 3) and representing them as martially fenced-in enclaves, blueprints for materialising the logics of policing and racial/social distinction. The "collective housing" referred to in the plan's title was no other than the barrack typology (Fig. 4) imposed upon the Haitian population. The interiors were restricted to sleeping quarters projected for four male workers.²⁸ Facilities for cooking and hygiene—such as latrines and showers were shared and placed outside. Such arrangements, specifically the shared outdoor latrines, were reserved for the architectures for the migrant worker population, sharply establishing difference through material distinctions. In contrast, the settlement plans also include a housing typology for its Dominican local boss, the "*mayordomo*". Other architectures, such as those for leisure and social reproduction were reduced in the plan to abstract, undefined outlines. The differentiation of the spaces of daily social reproduction serves as evidence of how racial violence manifests as material neglect.²⁹

Outlook: Assembling life in the *bateyes* - translocal livelihoods and care relations as research avenues

As we consider the "small" in relation to broader scales—the border, the nation, the plantation—it allows us to begin discerning how the social and spatial logics sustaining the sugar economy set the stage for later transformations. This sets the ground for investigating plantations' afterlives and mutations, echoing Katherine McKittrick's³⁰ considerations of the "*plantation as migratory*", as it extends its socio-spatial logics of monocultural standardisation,³¹ value extraction and dispossession³² to other exploitative systems articulating production, reproduction and

26. Until now, in the Dominican National Archives, one of the proposed layouts can be traced back to other drawings produced later on (1983): "*Estudio para el Desarrollo socio-económico en los Bateyes del CEA, batey Mata los Indios, Ingenio Ozama, Monte Plata. 52/80*".

27. Own translation.

28. Consejo Estatal del Azúcar CEA, '*Empleo en la Zafra Azucarera Dominicana*', 1981, 331.11 R42E, p. 58, Archivo de la Nación, Santo Domingo, República Dominicana.

29. Zandi Sherman, "Coloniality of Infrastructure - Infrastructures and the Ontological Question of Race," *e-flux*, 2021.

30. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 3.

31. Tsing et al., "Patchy Anthropocene".

32. McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place".

ecology.³³ The main author's recent engagements in multi-sited field/work have shown the coexistence of other modes of economy and care relations branching out from the networked communities of the *bateyes'* inhabitants, where the question of how life is sustained in the agricultural batey, as well as what other labours, spatialities, and temporalities come into play becomes crucial.

Engaging with/from the spatialities of the Dominican sugar plantation system, we argue that a critical analysis of these historically marginalised sites helps us discern the logics through which coloniality continues to operate in the Caribbean. Our reading of the planning and modernisation of the Dominican sugar plantation landscape in the second half of the 20th century through a closer relational and transcalar analysis of the agricultural batey settlement contributes to the understanding of the specific racialised and gendered labour regime it embodies, situating labour exploitation more precisely in the spatial assemblages of the plantation landscape. We cannot consider land as productive without considering the conditions under which it is made to produce.³⁴ Therefore, the shifting and considerations of scales in our analysis allow us to explore how oppression is materialised through planning and spatial production, to open other research avenues for exploring mutations and transfers of the plantation regime, as well as counterreactions, which make of the plantation a heterogeneous landscape,³⁵ container of "multiple worlds."³⁶

33. Elena Baglioni et al., "Exploitation and Labour Regimes," 93.

34. Hélène Frichot et al., eds, *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies, Critiques: Critical Studies in Architectural Humanities*, volume 13 (Routledge, 2018), 26.

35. Irene Peano et al., "Introduction: Viewing Plantations at the Intersection of Political Ecologies and Multiple Space-Times," in *Global Plantations in the Modern World: Sovereignities, Ecologies, Afterlives*, ed. Colette Le Petitcorps et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 4.

36. Barua, *Plantation Worlds*.

