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ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY OF AGUIRRE, PUERTO RICO

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Alvarez, Alejandra, "ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY OF AGUIRRE, PUERTO RICO", Master's Thesis, Michigan Technological University, 2013.
<https://doi.org/10.37099/mtu.dc.etds/688>

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ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY
OF AGUIRRE, PUERTO RICO

By

Alejandra Alvarez

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In Industrial Archaeology

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2013

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This thesis has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE in Industrial Archaeology.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my co-advisor, Carol MacLennan for her help and support. Thanks to her patience and enthusiasm I could finish this thesis. I would also like to thank my co-advisor, Dr. Susan Martin for encouraging me to move forward in the process of analysis and writing during the previous months. My offer my deepest gratitude to Dr. Kari Henquinet for the valuable time that she dedicated to discuss issues related to gender and family with me. Thanks Dr. Ciro Sandoval for being part of the evaluation committee and for his words of support and encouragement.

I will be always deeply grateful to the Aguirre residents and particularly to each interviewee for their time and wonderful life stories. It is through these stories that this research could be carried out. Thanks Dr. Sam Sweitz for inviting me to be part of this project, during which I learned a lot.

I would like to thank my parents Juan Jose and Carmen Alicia, my siblings Rodrigo, Michelle, Ana Maria, John and Emmanuel for supporting me and encouraging me during these two years, far from home.

Thanks to my friends in Houghton, especially Carol Griskavich and Rocio Jimenez, for their company and encouragement, which I always will remember and appreciate. Finally, thanks to my best friend and beloved husband, Ryan, for his support and unconditional love that permeate this research. *Lo logramos!*

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the gender relations of the residents of Aguirre, Puerto Rico, between 1940 and 1991. The primary goal of the project was to explore how gender roles and relations in the Aguirre community were impacted by the social class system introduced by the Aguirre Sugar Company. This project was based on the interpretation of the past and present situation of the Aguirre community using oral history, by conducting a series of interviews among its residents. The interviews resulted in three main themes. First, the concepts of ‘normal and natural’ were used to distinguish gender roles. Second, Aguirreños identified ‘family as community’, since through the family individuals built their gender identity and learned the basic rules of coexistence within the social hierarchy of the community. Third, although the gender and class roles were clear in the community, ‘resistance and negotiation’ occurred in the home and at the Company between those of different gender and social classes. The Aguirre Sugar Company was one of the principal influences on the construction of the Aguirreños identity, and left a mark on the past, present and future generations.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Central Aguirre Sugar Company

The sound of a siren, the ringing of a bell and the smell of sugar was part of everyday life of Aguirre's community in Puerto Rico. Each day was marked by the sweet taste of sugar that sweetened the air as well as its inhabitants. The small community of Aguirre was defined by the machinery and scale production brought by new technology. Aguirre life certainly was never the same after this sugar industrialization began in 1899.

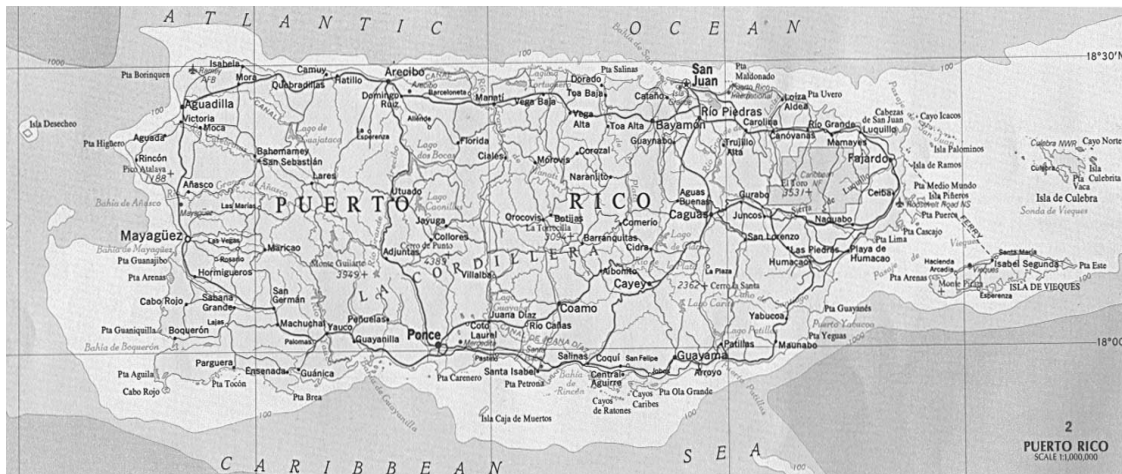


Figure 1.1 Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Maps. U.S. National Atlas 1970. Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. Appendix 1, permission for use.

The *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) is an unincorporated territory of the United States; the official languages are Spanish and English. To the east lies the Dominican Republic and to the west the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Puerto Rico has a land area of 3,515 square miles and has a set of small islands including Vieques, Culebra, and Mona. Aguirre town is located in the municipality of Salinas, bordering to the east with Guayama and to the south with Aibonito and Cayey.

According to the 2000 Census, Aguirre had a population of 1588 inhabitants and 562 housing units. The land area consists of 0.51 sq. miles and water area of 0.12 sq. miles. Currently, the Aguirre economy is based on agriculture and cattle ranching. The main agricultural products are coconut, banana and papaya.

In 1899 a group of investors from Boston began the Aguirre Sugar Company; the town was previously known as *Hacienda Aguirre* and was established in the mid-19th century by Don Antonio Jose Paramo Vasquez. The Old *Hacienda Aguirre* was dedicated to the processing of sugar cane on a small scale with a small mill and a few machines. The American investors paid \$100,000.00 in gold for the original *Hacienda* and progressively added other properties to it such as *Hacienda Carmen*, *Hacienda Jose Paramofa*, and *Hacienda Amateo*. With the acquisition of new land, the American investors sought to consolidate The Aguirre Company as one of the most important companies in Puerto Rico. Three factors were indispensable for this purpose: capital, land and workers. A large number of employees working on different schedules throughout the day and night were necessary. That is why the company decided to build an industrial town to concentrate the workers from/in the surrounding area.¹

The company developed a social system that clearly demarcated working patterns among its workers and can be compared to a paternalistic system under the Americans' control. In the paternalistic system the company can be likened to a father that looked to maintain the workers under his care and the workers can be equated with his children. To

¹ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

maintain order and discipline, the company designed a manual in which the standards and behavior expected of employees was reflected.

The new social system was the determinant in the construction of the Aguirre inhabitants' roles as women, men and children. The relationships and gender roles will be the main point of analysis in this research as well as the conditions and environment that allowed the town's development.

This research focuses on the analysis of gender relations in the Aguirre industrial community from 1940 until the closing of the company in 1991. The objective of this research is to explore through oral history how gender roles and relations in the Aguirre community are impacted by the social class system introduced by the Aguirre Sugar Company.

This paternalistic system imposed by a single owner was also reflected in rent, because the company was the owner of all the buildings, and maintained all public areas, stores, schools and churches, shop and warehouse, hospital, bank, cinema, and restaurant that all encouraged its workers to remain inside the area. Aguirre was distant from the major cities in the island of Puerto Rico such as Guayama (12 km away) and Salinas (7.5 km away). Therefore, this industrial community can be categorized as self-sufficient. Certainly many characteristics make Aguirre an interesting industrial community and a special case study of the sugar industry in the Caribbean region, in the fields of historical and industrial archaeology. However in this research the core of the analysis will be gender and family relationships.

The analysis of male, female and children's roles in its society makes it possible to understand the Aguirre's family and social structure. This analysis also contributes to the industrial archaeology because it makes it possible for us to understand how diverse aspects of an industry influence human behavior. The rise of an industrial mode of production brought new social relationships and in this case, new behaviors. The Aguirre Sugar Company introduced a new class in to the community as well: middle class workers with special training.

Those changes in the Aguirre community social structure were reflected in the gender roles of its people. With the passing of time, the Aguirre residents resorted to different mechanisms in order to express their acceptance or resistance to this new social system and also developed strategies to negotiate their daily lives at home with the family, with the Company, and with the community.

1.1. The history of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico and the Aguirre Sugar Company

Sugar production in the Caribbean has its beginnings in the seventeenth century when the French and British introduced sugarcane. The 'sugar islands' (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, etc.) were by nature the best area for development of any form of tropical agriculture. Sugar cane became the most cultivated crop. Sugar was one of the most desired and high value products in Europe during the 18th and 19th century and also a medicine bought by the ounce from the apothecary. Once the slave trade to the Caribbean was efficiently organized, sugar cultivation became an extremely profitable business.²

In Puerto Rico, sugar cane was introduced by the Spanish; the production system consisted of a simple mill to process the cane without refining the sugar. Sugar production on the island was minimal until the nineteenth century when the slave population was introduced. Despite the fact that in other Caribbean islands slavery had been abolished, in Puerto Rico until 1873 African slaves were the primary laborers in the

² Raymond E. Crist, "Sugar Cane and Coffee in Puerto Rico, I: The Rôle of Privilege and Monopoly in the Expropriation of the Jibaro," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 7, no. 2 (1948).

Spanish *Haciendas*. In the late nineteenth century, Puerto Rico experienced a sugar boom due to international changes in supply of sugar as a result of the Haitian revolution.

The cultivation and processing boom of sugarcane has had a significant historical impact in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the West Indies; especially in the twentieth century with the development of a free labor market, technological advances in sugar mills and the introduction of the U.S. economy.³

In 1899, a year after the war between Spain and the United States, the political structure of Puerto Rico took a drastic turn. The influence of United States economy transformed the social structure of Puerto Rico. After 400 years of Spanish domination, the Puerto Ricans faced a new economy and cultural system. Subsequent to the Spanish-American War, a new era of industrialization and modernization began on the Island. American companies were allowed to invest and expand the market in Puerto Rico. Since 1899, the Puerto Rican agricultural system has tended to increase specialization in productive systems, and the U.S. market was its principal destination. In 1899, roughly 58 percent of the land was used to produce sugar cane, tobacco, and coffee. “In 1901 it amounted to \$8,584,000; by 1928 it had increased to \$103,535,000... In 1929 sugar cane occupied 31 percent of the *cultivated* acreage and coffee 25 percent.”⁴ By that time, the

³ Ayala, Cesar. *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898- 1934*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

⁴ Arthur D. Gayer, Paul Thomas Homan, and Earle Kenneth James, *The sugar economy of Puerto Rico* (New York,: Columbia university press, 1938).

processing of sugar cane was widespread in the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico was one of the largest producers, making the island an attractive business place.

When the American occupation took place, sugar was no longer Puerto Rico's main crop. However, American capital flowed heavily into the sugar industry and transformed it completely...Great grinding mills (also call *Centrales*) were built, and the lands of scores of small haciendas were bought up to form the 'farms' of such mills. These new centrals were very modern in economic and industrial organization, enormous scale, and a symbol of the kinds of changes in Puerto Rican life wrought by the Americans.⁵

Sugar production on a large scale involved the establishment of an economic system that would ensure high dividends, as Spain and the United States wanted. Unlike the Spanish, Americans introduced a new system of production that would expand the scope of production and profit. The new system of cultivation and processing of sugar introduced by the Americans was based on a centralized and high production system that displaced the haciendas.

Aguirre's sugar mill (*Central* in Spanish) was established in 1899 and the construction of the first structures finished in 1901. Aguirre Sugar company brought new infrastructure to Aguirre town, changing the Spanish model characterized by central

⁵ Fernando Pla Luis Pumarada, "National Register Documentation of the Industrial Remains of the "Central Aguirre" Sugar Mill. ," in *Unpublished Report, Central Aguirre Industrial Area Building and Facilities 1998 Inventory* ed. Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office (San Juan 1995).

plaza, a church, a town hall, a bank and a warehouse. Under the leadership of Mr. Clark (Company president), the Central Aguirre was renovated from 1901-1948. The new model introduced two hotels including the Puerto Rican Hotel and the *Hotel Americano* (residential hotel for American management), Caribe General Store (company store), credit union, golf course, hospital, two clubhouses (Pan-American Clubhouse, the Puerto Rican or employees clubhouse), movie theatre, and a modern mill that processes and refines sugar. The previous Spanish model only possessed a mill to extract raw sugar from freshly harvested cane but did not have the capacity to refine the raw sugar. The new system combined milling and refining and also eliminated the transportation of sugar cane by mule but required the expansion of the railway.

The changes observed in the region varied from the transformation of the landscape to population increase. Previously, the working population lived outside of town but with the arrival of the Americans and the expansion of the mill, the demand of labor increased generating the necessity to develop a housing system that would allow the workers to live near the mill and under company supervision.

Lucy Rice Clark, the daughter of the president of the *Central Aguirre* narrates in her book '*Adios, Aguirre*' the following about the population in Aguirre:

The census of 1898 showed that the *Barrio* (neighborhood) of Aguirre had a population of 1,291. Until the Census of 1940 the population of Aguirre was always included in that of Salinas, the nearest town, for it was considered a part of that municipality. It is difficult, therefore, to establish any sort of patterns of growth in the

population of the central prior 1940. This census of 1940 shows the population of *Central* Aguirre as 2,563, and if you include the areas immediately surrounding the *Central* it was 7,811.⁶

After the arrival of the Americans in Aguirre, the increase in the population was significant. As a result, the demand for housing in the area increased, and motivated the company owners to develop a housing system that allowed them to concentrate their workers near the mill or cultivation areas, and thus to decrease the time that workers should use to travel from their homes to their working areas.

The development of a housing system brought division in the residents. Workers were classified according to class and social status defined by company rules. The design of neighborhoods was the core of this paternalistic structure in Aguirre and an important aspect in the development of gender and class relationships.

The town was divided into three neighborhoods according to upper, middle and lower class and this division can be seen in the architectural style of Aguirre houses. The neighborhood of the middle and lower class was called Montesoria and this in turn was divided into Lower Montesoria for the lower class and Middle Montesoria for the middle class. The architectural style of houses in Montesoria (poor neighborhood) was simple. Houses were bungalow style, one-level constructions, most made of wood. The roof was

⁶ Lucy Rice Clarke, *Adios, Aguirre : memories of a Puerto Rican childhood* (Leverett, Mass.: Beresford Books, 2005).

corrugated metal and the floor was a concrete slab. White was the standard color, but over the years the residents added color and other decorations.

The size of the houses varied according to each family and also the range of workers. Lower-class workers were assigned small houses with one bedroom and a small kitchen. Families of 5 or 6 members often inhabited these houses. The working conditions of lower class employees were harder; they spend long journeys working in the field. However the salary that those workers received was apparently enough and the company offered medical service to its workers and their families. Their duties within the company involved sowing, cutting and irrigating the sugarcane plantations. Often women and children were involved in these activities.

Middle class workers' houses were located in Middle Montesoria and usually had 2 or 3 rooms with living room and bathroom facilities. Houses in this area were of greater size, and the neighborhood was considered of higher social status among Aguirre residents. The inhabitants of this area were middle-class employees who worked in the mill operating machinery, performing maintenance and processing sugarcane. Their duties were more specialized and for that reason their pay was more elevated in contrast with lower class workers.

An upper class house were different, usually had more than 3 bedrooms, living and dining room, could have up to 2 bathrooms and generally in the back of the house

was a small house for domestic employees.⁷ Residents of this area were usually the Americans who were working in the company as engineers, managers or administrators. Doctors also were considered high class and also lived in this area.

The Aguirre Sugar Company ceased operations in 1991, but its contribution to the Caribbean sugar history and to the Aguirre community is something that cannot be denied. It closed for multiple reasons. The Company could not keep up with the latest industrial technology and methods. The prices in the international market did not allow Aguirre to compete with other sugar producing countries that had more modern sugar factories and equipment.

1.2. Social class in Aguirre

The analysis of this industrial site involves understanding not only the historical process of the sugar industry but also the people of the island. Puerto Rico was considered for centuries as an important zone for commerce and trade between the Caribbean and Europe. After the Spanish conquest, the island was subjected to a flow of cultural and economic exchange. The introduction of a new language and ethnic group on the island affected deeply the social life of the community already present in the area, the Taino Indian group. However, this was not the only change brought to Puerto Rico with

⁷ Luis Pumarada, Fernando Pla. "National Register Documentation of the Industrial Remains of the "Central Aguirre" Sugar Mill. ." In *Unpublished Report, Central Aguirre Industrial Area Building and Facilities 1998 Inventory* edited by Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office. San Juan, 1995

the arrival of the Spaniards. In the late 16th century, other communities also came to the island, such as the African slave population.

As new ethnic groups arrived they mixed physically and culturally, and thereby new traditions and cultural expressions gradually emerged. In the 19th century there were several ethnic groups present on the island, not only the indigenous population but also the Spaniards and the African population. “The population consists almost entirely of Native-born Puerto Ricans, mainly of Spanish descent, although about one-quarter of the population was classified by the census of 1930 as colored. In 1935 the density of the population was over 500 per square mile of the total area, or, 1,500 per square mile of cultivated land.”⁸ All of these groups mixed together, resulting in new ethnic groups like the *jibaros* and mestizos.

The Spanish, *Negro*, and mixed Indian population was supplemented from time to time by Indians brought as slaves from the mainland, deserters from ships docked at port, escaped prisoners, exiles, escaped slaves from other islands, French refugees from Haiti, a few Corsicans, a number of Chinese brought in to build the fortifications, a few Portuguese, some Spanish or Portuguese mestizos from the Canary Islands, a few English, a few Syrians, some refugees from Santo Domingo, some Spaniards or Spanish Creoles from other American colonies, some Americans from Louisiana and elsewhere,

⁸ Gayer, Homan, and James, *The sugar economy of Puerto Rico*.

and a few others. The amalgamation of these various racial fragments was advanced but still incomplete when the island became American in 1899.⁹

According to the census of 1812 there were 93,623 white residents and 89,391 blacks and mulatto residents.¹⁰ Despite the ethnic diversity, the white population was predominant in the 19th century. That the island had such a variety of groups in turn implied that the interaction between cultures gave way to a local identity based on identities from around the globe. The definition of Puerto Rican national identity arises from a mixture of groups. However, the feeling of nationality in Puerto Rico, and more specifically in the community of Aguirre, not only derives from the Spanish, Indian and African influence but also from a new group which arrived in the island in the late 20th century, the Americans.

The Americans' arrival created a gap not only political and economic, but also cultural. The Spaniards had established a cultural system based on exploitation and slavery. Their system was embodied not only in the culture and language but also in the architecture, which was a reproduction of the Spanish system based on ecclesiastical authority and the concentration of land. Nevertheless with the arrival of the Americans the system underwent a drastic change. For example, the distribution of land changed,

⁹ Reuter Edward Byron, "Culture Contacts in Puerto Rico," *American Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 2 (1946).

¹⁰ Luis Pumarada, Fernando Pla. "National Register Documentation of the Industrial Remains of the "Central Aguirre" Sugar Mill. ." In *Unpublished Report, Central Aguirre Industrial Area Building and Facilities 1998 Inventory* edited by Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office. San Juan, 1995

industry received an incentive from the government and large-scale production was the new target on the island. That the island was now American territory also meant that English was to be its second language. Rapid changes in the culture and traditions of the inhabitants of the island as they adapted to the new system were a challenge for Puerto Ricans.¹¹

These changes resulted in a series of new relationships between newcomers and the present people; the peasant continued to work the land but entered into a new industrial dynamic. Their daily work would be defined by a contract. At the same time, women in Puerto Rico were introduced into that same labor dynamic, and they began to play another role in addition to being housewives. The company's policy would allow women to join the workforce, and thus their participation in society became less limited. Women could apply to positions as secretaries, assistants or nurse within the new industrial dynamic.

This did not mean that female roles as wife and homemaker disappeared, but now women had a new form of participation in industry and home. Aguirre Company divided workers into three different groups. First, the workers without training, such as the cane cutters, were the lower class who lived in the lower zone in town. The second group included trained workers with specific skills. These workers were assigned to the manufacturing processes in the mill. They and their families lived in the area known as Middle Montesoria in Aguirre. This area had larger houses, some of them with

¹¹ Vasquez-Orlandi, Jenarin. *Aguirre y su Gente*. Madison: Wisconsin University, 1998.

bathrooms.¹² The salary range for these workers was higher, and they worked in steward or foreman positions.

The last social group was the upper class, represented by the Americans, often referred to ‘*Blanquitos*’ (whiteys). This class was constituted by managers and engineers as well as members of the high society, such as doctors and teachers. Their living conditions were defined by large homes with all the facilities included, private and bilingual education for their children as well as a private club.¹³

The experiences of each resident in Aguirre and their stories are part of the local memory and are indispensable for the construction of their identity as a community as well. By studying those memories it is possible to reconstruct a portion of the community and the sugar industry in Aguirre. It is the best way to interpret the relationships that women and men of each class built in this industrial community. These experiences are also relevant to analyzing how the global economy and the United States government influenced the culture and life of the Puerto Rican people. Sydney W. Mintz affirms that:

Though the United States government introduced many beneficial measures in Puerto Rican life, the private sugar interest did at least as much harm as good political

¹² Luis Pumarada, Fernando Pla. "National Register Documentation of the Industrial Remains of the "Central Aguirre" Sugar Mill. ." In *Unpublished Report, Central Aguirre Industrial Area Building and Facilities 1998 Inventory* edited by Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office. San Juan, 1995

¹³ Maria Lopez interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

activity was sternly suppressed on the plantation by coercion, blacklisting, and economic control of workers through company stores and company housing.¹⁴

The Aguirre sugar company did not directly suppress the workers' rights to make decisions, yet it dictated how employees interacted in their own community. The 'Workers Manual' explained that one of the company intentions was to provide an opportunity for each worker to express their opinions and suggestions. Workers like Lucia Tellez and Pedro Paramo agreed that they never made suggestions because in Aguirre there never was a space or way to communicate their opinions.¹⁵

The control exerted on the population of Aguirre by the Company, motivated the generation of resistance strategies such as the creation of unions that allowed residents to take active roles in their society. However that union was not well accepted by the *Americanos* or the middle and upper class inhabitants because the union represented the rejection of the system that they considered suitable and prosperous for the community.¹⁶

Although the union was a form used to express *inconformismos* or reforms in working and living condition of the Aguirre's workers, other forms of resistance and negotiation also were cultivated in Aguirre's women and men. Many women believed

¹⁴ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Worker in the cane: A Puerto Rican life history*, vol. 731 (WW Norton & Company, 1974).

¹⁵ Lucia Tellez and Pedro Paramo interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012

¹⁶ Rocio Carvajal interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012

that their roles were not only focused on caring and cleaning the house. They also performed other important roles. “The women became the informal bankers in society, making decisions as to who could be trusted to participate, developing the logistics of how society would work, and insuring that each member fulfilled his or her part in the agreement.”¹⁷ Negotiation and resistance in Aguirre was not always a conscious process. Many times Aguirre residents did not perceive that their role in society, company and family included much deeper functions than the visible ones.

The objective of this research is to analyze the gender relationships that the people of Aguirre built and the roles that society and the Company assigned to them. In order to understand and describe each of the roles in this community, and also to understand the changes that occurred in this community while the Company was in operation, we can use tools such as ethnography. Oral history and interviews make it possible to infer how the Aguirreños lived in before and after the Aguirre Sugar Company was established.

Each person’s testimony/story in Aguirre deserves a thorough analysis because of the essential information that it provides for this research and for industrial archeology. This sugar complex, apart from being an industry itself, is also a place in which lives have been transformed. Puerto Rico’s industrial sugar production in the 20th century

¹⁷ Irma M Olmedo, "Voices of our past: Using oral history to explore funds of knowledge within a Puerto Rican family," *Anthropology & education quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1997).

marked a new stage in the life of Puerto Ricans as it involved a new, distinct social and economic system.

1.3. Conclusion

In 1991 the Aguirre Sugar Company closed its doors after 71 years of existence. The Central Aguirre Sugar Company was expropriated in 1970, and the company's control over the Aguirre's inhabitants came to an end too. Nowadays, many of its main buildings like the hospital, Americano Hotel, the mill and the Administrative offices still stand in ruins. These ruins not only tell the story of an industrial past but the story of hundreds of workers that every day built an identity around the sugar industry.

The presence of the Americans originated several changes in Puerto Rico, including the end of the social structure imposed by Spain, new patterns of organization of capitalist enterprise and the different interactions between new colonial masters. These changes affected not only the social structure but also the social relationships in the community. Men and women have adapted to a new system that brought new roles and reinforced the existing roles. The main question in this research is directed to understand how the gender relations of Aguirre residents were influenced by the Aguirre Sugar Company and how with the time those relationships became essential elements in the construction of the identity as members of this community.

1.4. Outline of the Thesis

This research contains six chapters. The introduction provides a general history of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico as well as the Central Aguirre Sugar Company, and briefly introduces the research project and population surveyed in Puerto Rico.

Chapter two presents an overview on gender theory built around social institutions such as school, church, state, the company and family. Concepts used as a theoretical framework include feminism, masculinity and childhood. Chapter three discusses the methodology, oral history and ethnography. Chapters four, five and six contain the core of the investigation, the case study and the data collected during fieldwork. The aim of Chapter four is to introduce the people interviewed and the analysis categories used in the research.

Chapter five contains the analysis of information collected in relation to gender concepts. This chapter also explores the strategies of negotiation and resistance that residents of the community of Aguirre developed with the passing of the years as well as their behavior in response to the sugar industry's system during their daily lives. Chapter six presents the conclusion of this research, as well future questions to be explored.

Chapter 2: Notions of Gender

This chapter illustrates the theoretical concepts used in the analysis and discussion of the information collected. The first section in this chapter describes the general gender concept. Scholars as Lazzari, Lewis and Mills, Brettell and Sargent will be especially relevant due to their theoretical and conceptual studies in the context of gender studies in western.

The second section introduces Puerto Rican literature on gender research. Benmayor, Acosta-Belen and Olmedo are the more representative scholars on gender in Puerto Rico. By analyzing the gender research narrative from the Western as well as Puerto Rican perspectives, it will be possible to contrast their points of view and delineate key concepts that help to analyze gender roles in the Aguirre community.

2.1. General Literature on Gender

In recent decades, anthropologists and archaeologists have recognized the importance of gender's impact in society. Through a detailed study of the relationships that women and men construct with each other, it is possible to analyze how their social behavior and gender roles are impacted by economy, politics, culture and environment that surround them.

The archaeologist Marissa Lazzari points out that many anthropologists and archaeologists agree that the concept of gender instead of being regarded as a process or a

verb is rather used as a source of classification and social division.¹⁸ Lazzari considered relevant the feminist arguments concerning the necessity to listen carefully to the voices of women and men in the past and the present. Feminist archaeologists also have tried to make visible the role of women in history and it is through gender studies that many categories have emerged that assign an important role to women. The Feminist movement has sought to 're-assess the participation of women in productive processes', arguing that their participation in society is not limited to the domestic sphere, i.e. home care, child care, and other tasks set forth by a moral and social code imposed by society.¹⁹

Even if the home is not the only place where women interact, it is important to mark that behaviors performed by each gender are widely reproduced at home, the heart of ideological reproduction and the ideal social training place. Boys and girls grow under the premises taught by their parents and with the passage of time, forge their identity within the community to which they belong. In that order, during childhood women and men learn the social and natural order of things. Through parental figures and their example, infants identify their roles in society.

¹⁸ Marissa. Lazzari, "Archaeological visions - Gender, landscape and optic knowledge," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2003).

¹⁹ Ibid.

Reina Lewis and Sara Mills point out that the gender division initially based on the ‘biological difference of sex’ in western civilization is highly criticized by Black and third-world feminist theorists who considered that historically western civilization has drawn the idea of opposition between man and woman, placing one above the other. However in recent years, “the social construction of gender gained widespread acceptance and proved useful as a way of talking about masculinity and femininity without recourse to biological determinism”.²⁰

Scholars such as Lazzari (2003), Collins (2000), Ahrentzen (1992), Benmayor (1988), and Acosta-Belen (1986), argue that the argument that western society uses to justify their perception of gender has been based on the physical constitution of humanity as the principal element that defined men and women’s roles and behaviors.

Social constructivists such Hacking agree that the perception of individuals is defined by a set of categories that arise from the culture and environment in which they live rather than biological components. People build their ideas according to how they understood the reality as influenced by religion and education.²¹

The American philosopher of feminist and postcolonial theory Sandra Harding argues that gender oppression is structured along three main dimensions: the institutional,

²⁰ Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, *Feminist postcolonial theory : a reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

²¹ Ian Hacking, *The social construction of what?* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

the symbolic, and the individual. This is a useful model for a more comprehensive analysis which encompasses race, class and gender oppression. Systemic relationships of domination and subordination are structured through social institutions such as school, businesses, hospitals, work place, and government agencies which represent the institutional dimension of oppression.²²

Frequently gender roles are typecast according to their participation in daily life, both public and private. Women were delegated to remain in the domestic sphere that included the kitchen, bedroom and laundry area, while men exercised public functions in the living room, front yard or at work. Michelle Rosaldo explained that:

‘Domestic’ referred to those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children. In contrast, the ‘Public’ referred to activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank or organize particular mother-child groups.²³

Separation between domestic and public spaces leads to the segregation of a number of roles and functions for each gender. The domestic sphere is typically relegated to woman, who must remain confined at home, the place where she performs her duties

²² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and politics of empowerment* (Psychology Press, 2000).

²³ Caroline Brettell and Carolyn Fishel Sargent, *Gender in cross-cultural perspective* (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

as mother, wife and daughter. Man is typically located in a public sphere where he develops as patriarch, husband and provider of basic means of subsistence for his family.

In each family, children learn from their parents and create memories around the interaction at home; they also develop feelings with the environment and the landscape that surrounds them. Children build connections with certain physical spaces such as the home, neighborhood, and school because they spend most of the time during childhood in these spaces. Likewise, the ties established in a place depend on the interactions between individuals that inhabit the place such as parents, siblings and other family members at home, friends and teachers at school, and neighbors.

This division of roles and assignment of functions has been set in various ways by different societies. Political institutions like the state, the church and family have made possible its duration in history. Louis Althusser mentions that frequently as long as these political institutions endure, men and women will remain silent without manifesting any objection. The state institutions fulfill their function quietly in the collective imagination of each individual. Through culture, religion and education, state and society communicate the functions and roles of each individual in the community.²⁴

²⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation)," *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (1971).

Customs and traditions are a medium to reproduce the division between genders and as these are transmitted from generation to generation, division is socially accepted. In recent years many questions and discussions have emerged to change our concept of gender, adding new dimensions. Patricia Collins asks: ‘How can we reconceptualize race, class and gender as categories of analysis?’ One of the main barriers in the analysis of gender discourse is the frequent division that takes place between men and women and the dichotomy of presenting both genders as opposites, rather than analyzing their interconnection, that close the possibility to analyze not only the roles that each gender performs in society but also the relationships that are built among them.²⁵

I suggest that the way in which society has excluded or belittled male and female participation in the community is due to not only to cultural forces, but also economics and politics. Social dynamics of an individual are constantly permeated by countless factors, which may include the political environment or religious tensions.

However, to understand the social dynamics in a community it is important to analyze them as a complex of relationships that occur in a specific way according to particular circumstances. Therefore, the next section in this chapter addresses the Puerto Rican research narrative to introduce the perception of the gender concept in the community of Puerto Rico.

²⁵ Collins, *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and politics of empowerment*.

2.2. Puerto Rican literature on gender studies

In western society, roles awarded to women have been limited to an ideological perception in which female roles are associated to sexuality, maternity and household care; each one of these roles should be practiced in a private, domestic environment. Several authors support that idea, such as Ahrentzen, who argues that women and men develop and interpret their daily acts according to the parameters that society provides. “The forces that shape options and channel actions, motives, and belief systems are often hidden from conscious awareness...structural as well as psychological processes mold behavior in ways that the actor barely recognizes.”²⁶

Information concerning women’s roles has historically been transmitted in Puerto Rico through different means such as the instruction received at school, in church sermons or even in talks between mother and daughter.²⁷ Women of each class understood their roles in society; feminist ideas, such as equal opportunity between genders, were (and in many cases still are) considered revolutionary.

Although the participation of women in domestic spheres is clearly articulated, there are other contexts in which female action is permitted and is also considered highly

²⁶ Sherry Boland Ahrentzen, "Home as a workplace in the lives of women," in *Place attachment* (Springer, 1992).

²⁷ Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican woman : perspectives on culture, history, and society*.

relevant. For example, in “powerful ritual roles as sorceresses, healers, and mediums; women are important resources of information for their male kin; and women act as ‘information brokers’, mediating social relations within both family and large society.”²⁸

The importance and significance of these roles are high in the community but their realization is in the private and domestic sphere. In many instances, being healer or midwife is a role of great importance but is dismissed in the presence of a physician, who is usually a male. The home is the core of ideological reproduction. It is there where roles are distributed between men and women. In the day-to-day, diverse activities are performed including decorations or the elaboration of crafts. It is at home where the woman acts primarily; for that reason in order to approach the female thinking or her daily work, it is first necessary to delve into the meaning of her words and actions at home.²⁹ It is at home where during childhood, terms like inside or outside make sense. As an example, Aguirre children are taught to stay within the limits of the house where they can be monitored and controlled by parents, especially the mother. Terms like inside or outside begin to be rationalized in another deeper way. Boys will be allowed to play and interact in the front yard, a public area.

Nevertheless the woman has not solely belonged in the home. The industrial era made possible her participation in factories, widening the spectrum of female

²⁸ Brettell and Sargent, *Gender in cross-cultural perspective*.

²⁹ Ahrentzen, "Home as a workplace in the lives of women."

participation not only as a mother, wife and daughter, but also as a worker. In Puerto Rico, before the arrival of the Americans, the workforce was formed by a group of landowners who administered the land and were accountable to the Spanish Crown, and a group of peasants who tilled the land, subsided on it, and paid tribute to the landowner. Industrial reform and the arrival of a new labor system changed the role of the farmer to a laborer. This new social division implied job segregation in Puerto Rico. Acosta-Belen (1986) stated that in 1930; women occupied 26.1 percent of labor force in Puerto Rico, she also explains that:

They worked in the following occupations: secretaries/stenographers, kitchen/food employees, social workers, maintenance staff, and hospital aides/nurses. Women have less participation than men in management and other executive administrative positions.³⁰

The majority of women that worked in industry in Puerto Rico were from the middle class, while for lower class women with no access to education, the only option was to continue the tradition of being a mother, wife or poorly paid worker. Puerto Rican women in the 19th century only had a few entertainment options like visiting their friends when their obligations at home allowed or going to the market or the town store; beyond these, recreational activities like going to a movie or restaurant depended on the husband

³⁰ Edna Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican woman : perspectives on culture, history, and society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1986).

and family income. Such activities were only carried out on the weekend and with the whole family.

In many cases, Puerto Rican women when married had to leave their families, friends and neighbors to start a new life in a new environment far from amenities, where the only daily work was to attend her husband and take care of the children. The possibilities of new entertainment were scarce, in most cases due to lack of money or poor access. It is then when the feelings of isolation, helplessness and entrapment emerge, but the solution does not depend on the woman but on social and economic boundaries in the home and community.³¹ In consequence of this routine, Ahrentzen suggests that feelings such as helplessness and feeling trapped at home have long been denominators in western female behavior.

Certain conditions are beyond the control of women; however this does not imply that they simply surrender to the circumstances. Women in the course of history have learned to resist and negotiate in different environments, many of them hostile. As Rita Benmayor says, women use their strongest weapons: a keen sense of social justice and personal dignity, and a steadfast commitment to their children.³² Women have developed

³¹ Ahrentzen, "Home as a workplace in the lives of women."

³² Rina Benmayor et al., "Stories to live by: continuity and change in three generations of Puerto Rican women," *Oral History Review* 16, no. 2 (1988).

a number of strategies in the home in order to mediate between parents and children, brothers and sisters.

The negotiation process allows a woman to obtain greater involvement in decision-making and a great interaction with her children. In Puerto Rico this interaction was performed at home because was the women area. Woman remained inside the house or in the backyard, in the private area. Meanwhile the man remains in public areas such as the factory, the bars and the front yard.

In her study of environmental autobiographies, Louise Chawla (specialist in education and child development) affirms that the most frequent source of attachment to a remembered childhood home was its association with loved family members, is in the childhood when children are confined to the indoor or immediate home surroundings in close proximity to the family members. In adolescence, a geographic division between the home and increasingly distant community places corresponds to the adolescent's ambiguous social status.³³

After marriage, women will reproduce the same cycle at home with their children. Nicholas Townsend argues that women decide what to tell to their husbands about daily activities, decisions and even on interactions and quarrels among children. But also they determine the kinds of interactions fathers and children will have and also control the

³³ Louise Chawla, "Childhood place attachments," in *Place attachment* (Springer, 1992).

flow of information between fathers and children.³⁴ This is one of the ways women use to resist. If it is the man who makes the final decision, this is driven by the women's influence. The man is often swayed towards a decision by the woman in favor to her children or according to what she considers more convenient for her family.

Mother's roles include endless activities that operate in several areas and affect the behavior of all members of society. Mothers broadly comprehend the behavior of the members of their family, predict behavior and feelings, know the activities and schedules of their children and husbands, and even control how they interact with each other.³⁵

Woman's capacity for negotiation in daily life proves why institutions such as church focus on her training as wife and mother. Women are reproductive elements of the state ideology at home and because of them future citizens can become exemplary individuals. Sometimes women did not understand their impact in society but social institutions realized that women are in charge of teaching state, family and religious institutional ideals.

In addition to our role as wage laborers, women in the family carry out the functions of the production and reproduction of labor power, through the production and

³⁴ Brettell and Sargent, *Gender in cross-cultural perspective*.

³⁵ Ibid.

socialization of the next generation and through the day-to-day maintenance of workers' lives.³⁶

As female roles are clearly identifiable in society, the role of man also has a historical significance. With the introduction of Catholicism in Puerto Rico in 1505, western civilization has used religion as one argument to justify male supremacy on the basis that God decreed it. Man has been made in the image and likeness of God and has been appointed to exercise functions as patriarch in society.³⁷

The model of Christian family life advanced by missionaries and colonial officials provided a supporting ideological framework for the structural separation of the male-dominated productive domain and the devalued, female domestic domain. The Bible describes the moral and correct family as consisting of a male head of family who is father and provider, and a female wife and mother who is his helpmate and subordinate.³⁸

In the same way that women have been taught by western society to play a subordinate role, the male gender was idealized under the premise of master and thus has played his part in subduing. Miller supports the idea that in Puerto Rico the reproduction of the male role in past centuries has been supported by the Catholic Church (based on a

³⁶ The Women's Work Study Group, "Loom, Broom, and Womb: Producers, Maintainers, and Reproducers," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (1975).

³⁷ Olmedo, Irma M. "Voices of Our Past: Using Oral History to Explore Sources of Knowledge within a Puerto Rican Family."

³⁸ Brettell and Sargent, *Gender in cross-cultural perspective*.

theological discourse) and the state (considered superior man in intellect and physical strength).³⁹ In Puerto Rico as well in other Latin American countries, adages such as ‘a woman’s place is in the home,’ ‘a woman’s chief functions are those of wife and mother,’ and ‘the good woman is the docile one (*la mansita*)’ are frequent.

A popular idea is that women are weaker, nervous and fragile, and for this reason unable to deal with decision-making that therefore must be assigned to the male.⁴⁰ Many of these ideas are supported and transmitted by education. As part of the overall development of individuals in society, education plays a crucial role. Rivera Quintero emphasizes that besides reading and writing, teaching centers in Puerto Rico as well as in South America instructed women in the arts that would allow them to play their role as mother and wife, that is, they received culinary lessons, knitting, home economics and arts.⁴¹

Men instead received instruction in carpentry, agriculture and other technical trades. This would enable them to work in the fields, factories, industry and commerce. These men would be the future doctors, lawyers, and engineers of society -- mostly professions that men held in the Aguirre community.⁴² Basham has investigated the concept of male domination as well as its historical significance and the patterns that

³⁹ Paul, Miller, *Historia de Puerto Rico*.

⁴⁰ Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican woman : perspectives on culture, history, and society*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

define a male. The idea of men or 'El Macho' as dominant is popularly known as *machismo*, in which the male has full control over the female as well as on the rest of the family and has control over the public sphere. The male supports his actions claiming that this is the natural order of society and by divine mandate man has control of woman.⁴³

From the macho's viewpoint, the natural place of women is in the home. She is a mother first, a wife second, and a sexual being almost never. At marriage she must be a virgin...She must recognize and accept her role, always remembering to show deference to her husband and brothers. She is remarkably similar to the idealized Victorian women without the latter's pedestal.⁴⁴

Although this is the predominant idea that men held toward women in Puerto Rican '*machista*' society, it is important to recognize that the male role should not be dismissed as evil or monstrous as it is the reproduction of a discourse than men repeated for centuries. Those ideas about male supremacy were present in culture and education. Boys grew up thinking and believing that this was the natural way to proceed.

In Puerto Rico, to be a man is a category that grants certain rights and obligations to his masculine gender. The reproduction of his conduct is the medium to identify him as

⁴³ Richard Basham, "Machismo," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 1, no. 2 (1976).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

a man. The Puerto Rican feminist Edna Acosta-Belen summarizes the ‘Macho’ behavior below:

In Puerto Rican culture (and in Latin American culture in general), men have the privilege to *echar una canita al aire* (literally, blow a gray hair to the wind; meaning to have an affair once in a while) while the *mujer sacrificada* (sacrificed woman) tolerates it. When men do not exhibit the traditional behavior norms of *el que lleva los pantalones en la casa* (the one who wears the pants in the family), he is said to be *sentado en el baul* (literally, seated on a trunk; meaning dominated by his wife), and the wife is considered to be guilty of *ponerle el delantal* (literally, place an apron on him). ⁴⁵

2.3. Conclusion

The analysis of the gender concept in Puerto Rico has been addressed primarily by feminists who stress the disparity between men and women in Puerto Rican society. Western and Puerto Rican society has settled the roles of each gender using religious and moral discourse. Likewise, experts in the area of gender point out that the economic and political situation should be relevant factors in the evolution of relations between genders.

Another important element in the analysis of gender is the context in which individuals live. The information that each gender transmits to the next generation

⁴⁵ Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican woman : perspectives on culture, history, and society*.

depends on the particular experiences of each individual at home and how long or short their stay. Louise Chawla argues that because during childhood men and women remain at home for a long time this helps to create memories that allow them to associate the home with feelings of love and safety or the opposite.⁴⁶ It is within the home where gender roles are learned and reproduced. Outside the nuclear family, it is in school through assignments and tasks that girls and boys learn their roles and it is in the community where individuals put into practice the social codes learned at home and school, ensuring a peaceful coexistence.

Gender roles are questioned by some members of the community, but this question does not trigger a change. Puerto Rican community accepts the roles imposed by society and justifies the division of classes as a process that simply was passed down from their ancestors. This is one of the reasons why Aguirre citizens accepted the social system imposed by the Americans. Class and gender division has been part of their collective imagination and is the reproduction of the island lifestyle.

In the discussion about Western and Puerto Rican society gender concepts, it is clear that women's role had a large impact in the society but unfortunately women or men did not perceive it. Society has given man a more visible significant role than women; the reproduction of the sexist mentality in Puerto Rico has been one factor in the exclusion of women's participation in public spheres. For many years the female and

⁴⁶ Chawla, "Childhood place attachments."

male populations were accustomed to live in a certain way and opposition to this social structure was not an option; it was part of their identity.

Despite the social structure, changes occurred in the community through processes of negotiation between men and women. Although these negotiation processes did not generate a great impact, they were important in the definition of roles between genders. The next chapters demonstrate how wives, mothers and daughters in Aguirre negotiated every day in a society that saw the woman only as a reproductive element.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will expose the methodology used in this research. Oral history was the principal tool used. Twelve interviews were conducted among the Aguirre community residents. During the interview process, company workers' or relatives' life stories were collected. This information was processed in order to understand the gender relationships and the roles that each gender performs at home and in the company.

Through archeology and anthropology research, information including the memories given by Aguirre's inhabitants can be analyzed. During the interview process, many life histories about work, gender roles, and family were collected to add a new dimension to the study of this industrial community. The research question is aimed at analyzing the diverse gender roles in Aguirre community according to the social class division developed by the Aguirre Sugar Company.

By the development of the research question, a number of secondary questions that complement the analysis of the data collected during interviews emerged and expanded the spectrum of analysis of this research: What was the interaction of men and women in Aguirre community? Were the inhabitants' behaviors the same at home, work and elsewhere in their daily lives in the community? Did this vary by social class? How did residents of different social classes interact?

It is important point out that this thesis has been preceded by Carmelo Davila, a Graduate student who completed his Master thesis on Aguirre with the support of Dr. Sam Sweitz and Michigan Technological University. Davila's research is focused on social stratification, power relationships and spatial arrangement of the community.

Particular emphasis is placed on reconstructing the social system within the company town, including correlations between the occupational hierarchy, social status, and perceptions of the spatial and material dimensions and issues of ethnicity.⁴⁷ however, there are many more elements to investigate in Aguirre, a land of *Jibaros*, Africans, Spanish, *Tainos* and Americans.

The study of gender and family relationships in Puerto Rico from 1940 to 1970 is an ongoing research directed towards the analysis of social relations that men, women and children built from the peak to the decline of the Central Aguirre. In order to achieve the objectives of this project it was essential to develop a methodology that ensures an effective approach to the research question. This includes analysis of the gender roles performed, as well as the impact of the sugar company on the community.

⁴⁷ Carmelo Dávila, "A Space for Production and a Space for Communality: Socio-historical Study of Central Aguirre and Its Industrial Community, Salinas, Puerto Rico: 1949-1970" (Michigan Technological University, 2009).

Significantly, oral history interviews often provide insights into the past motivations and actions of those interviewed not previously detailed in more traditional documentary sources like accounting books or topographical plans. The research process was divided into four different phases, with much data collection completed in the field during the summer of 2012. Data analysis was completed in Fall 2012 and spring of 2013.

Phase 1 consisted of the examination of documentary sources, including company records and architectural drawings. Its goal was to establish a broad historic context for the community. Some archival material was collected from the *Archivos de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* (AACUPR) during the summer of 2012. Although this material does not appear in the results, it served as a background for the research, provided a wide historical context, and aided in preparing the interview questionnaire.

In Phase 2, twelve interviews were conducted during the summer of 2012 with former employees of the *Central*. Spanish is the official language on the island; therefore interviews were conducted in Spanish, a language of which I am a native speaker. Interviewees were mostly elderly people who lived in the region between 1940 and 1970. The interviews were semi-structured. Before the interviews, a series of questions was designed with the intent of directing the conversation towards certain topics. However, the respondent was allowed to provide any information they considered relevant.

The following is the basic outline of questions that was used in each interview.

Table 3.1. Basic Interview Questionnaire

Basic Questions:
1. Can you tell me your name, last name, day of birth and City of Birth?
3. You worked at the Central Aguirre? In which area?
4. Explain to me about your job
5. Do you remember your salary and the benefits that you received as an employee?
6. How many women worked with you?
7. Did you have family while you worked at the Central Aguirre?
8. Tell me about your daily routine.
9. How was your relationship with the other workers?
10. Did you ever feel rejected or discriminated?
11. Do you think that the Central Aguirre provide equal opportunities to men and women?
12. Do you know about other different jobs for women?
13. What kind of jobs did women have?
14. On average, how many women worked at that time?
15. Do you think that was easy to get a job at that time?

16. Was it normal for women to work at that time?
17. Was it disgraceful for a woman to work at that time?
18. Do you think that a woman had more than one job? Like working in gardening, cleaning houses, babysitting etc.
19. What kind of activities did women do for entertainment?
20. What kind of aspirations did a woman have at that time? Being a housewife, student, worker...
21. At school what kind of education did girls receive? Tell me about the classes that you took at that time.
22. Did those classes include housekeeping and home care?
23. What type of products did you buy in Aguirre? Where?
24. The prices of those products in comparison with stores outside of Aguirre were better or worse?
25. Do you remember if the store in Aguirre had imported products or just national ones?
26. If you needed some particular product, could you ask for it?
27. Do you think that at that time the advantage and/ or disadvantage according to your gender was visible?
28. What was the composition of a family in Aguirre? Was it common to live with Grandfathers and Grandmothers or other family members?
29. Was it allowed by the Central to share the house with other

members of the family?
30. What was the permissible limit of people living in each house?
31. What was the role of children at home?
32. What kind of contribution did they (children) make? Was it different for boys and girls?
33. Who were your neighbors?
34. Did you have cooperative relationships with them? How was that cooperation?
35. Did you have the same relations with people from other communities outside of Aguirre?
36. Do you remember cases of domestic violence?
37. Did the Company intervene in those cases?
38. What differences did you notice in the jobs according to social class?
39. How did you perceive the people who lived outside of Aguirre?
40. How did society perceive women working? Were they respected or not?
41. What expectations did women have according to their gender and social class?
42. What kind of things was public or private? Which places

were permitted to go and which not?
43. Which people could relate to each other and which not?
44. Do you think that roles changed during the “ <i>Zafra</i> ” (harvest time) or “ <i>Inviernazo</i> ” (dead period)?
45. At the present time is social stratification visible? How has Aguirre changed? Do you think that it the same place?

Most interviews took place in the immediate area of Aguirre and its surrounding communities. Respondents were contacted using the Snowball technique, which is a sampling strategy that uses a small team of initial informants who afterwards nominate more informants. The criteria taken into consideration for the selection of the interviewees was how long a person had been in the area, having worked in the company or had family members who had worked at the *Central*. The remaining time spent in the field in Puerto Rico was dedicated to archival research, transcript of interviews and field journal writing.

Phase 3 was the transcription of interviews. In order to protect the identity of each interviewee a given pseudonym takes the place of the interviewee’s real name; information such as age, gender, occupation and neighborhood during 1940-70 is provided in each transcript. The information was collected in Spanish with the aid of a voice recorder and a written transcription was made later for each one. Once transcription was complete, interviews were coded by establishing concepts and categories that

allowed conclusions to be inferred about the kind of relationships that interviewees developed in the community.

Phase 4 of the project involved the synthesis and analysis of the collected data. Parts of the interviews were translated into English to be presented in the results. Once the translation was complete, a coding and memoing system (Emerson, 1995) was used in order to point out the most relevant information in the research. Fifteen codes emerged during this process, such as: family, female roles, male roles, children's roles, dreams, sacrifice, normal and natural, male and female roles at the Company, relationships between social classes, female and male life cycle, community as family, private and public, paternalism, and knowledge and skills. Each code reflects aspects of the respondent's social life. These codes are interconnected and thus allow creating major themes, which will be presented in the next chapters.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and was recorded (video and voice, just the voice was used in this research); this material is under the custody of Michigan Technological University. Groups of 6 women and 6 men were established, ranging in age from 60 to 80 years approximately. Many of the interviewees worked in the Central Aguirre Sugar Company for at least 10 years. The majority of them retired after attaining the age and time required by law and stayed in Aguirre as current residents. All of them have lived most of their life in Aguirre and some grew up in Aguirre or the surrounding area.

The population surveyed worked in different sections of the Company. Many women worked in the administrative area, and often held positions as secretaries or accountants. The men interviewed worked directly in the mill; they were chief engineer assistants or machinery operation workers. Also interviewed were other residents who worked in the fields cutting cane or as foremen in the fields.

Interviewees were informed that the information collected from them would be confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. They received an IRB form in Spanish (Institutional Review Board), which explained how the information collected would be used and under what conditions it would be stored. Interviews are the property of Michigan Technological University, and the information will remain permanently in its custody, while researchers will be allowed to access it with University's authorization. Real names were changed and were assigned a pseudonym in order to ensure the privacy of the informants.

3.1. Interviewees

The following interviews have been categorized according to the social class to which the individual belonged. Below appears a short description of each individual, accompanied by the place of birth, age, gender, occupation in the company and family size. Three of the respondents never worked in the company but their husbands and other family members did, so their interviews are useful because they expose their views as relatives of employees of the company.

Lower class:

Maria Lopez

Profile: Maria Lopez was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico but was raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre and is 68 years old. She belongs to the lower class, her husband Martin worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. Maria Lopez's mother worked as a housekeeper at the *Hotel Americano*, owned by the Central Aguirre, for over 30 years. Maria Lopez worked as housewife; she remained at home caring for their 5 children.

Martin Tellez

Profile: Martin was born and was raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre. He was 75 years of age. He belonged to the lower class. Martin worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. His father also worked in the company for over 40 years. He had 5 children.

Alicia Lopez

Profile: Alicia was born and raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre; she is 90 years old. She belonged to the lower class. She was a housewife, and lived all her life in Montesoria. Alicia's father and brothers worked in the Central Aguirre as *azucareros* (mill operators) and her mother worked as a washerwoman. Alicia's husband also worked as foreman in the sugar cane fields at the Central Aguirre. She has 6 children.

Esperanza Martinez

Profile: Esperanza Martinez was born in Montesoria, Central Aguirre on July 28, 1922. She belonged to the lower class. She was a housewife and has lived all her life in Montesoria. Esperanza Martinez's father and brothers worked in the Central Aguirre as *azucareros* (mill operators) and her mother worked as washerwoman. Alicia was her sister. Esperanza Martinez's first husband worked as waiter in the Americano Hotel in Aguirre. Her second husband worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) at the Central Aguirre. She has 8 children.

Pedro Dominguez

Profile: Pedro was born in Lanausen, Salinas on 1928. He belonged to the lower class. Pedro worked as cane cutter for more than 30 years. His father also worked as cane cutter in the Central Aguirre for over 40 years. Pedro worked for the company but never lived in Aguirre. He lived on the outskirts of the town but within the company's property. He has 12 children.

Juan Solano

Profile: Juan was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico on October 24, 1954 and was raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre. He belonged to the lower class. Juan worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. Luis was his brother. Juan's father also worked in the IBM Aguirre Sugar Company Department company for over 40 years. He has 5 children.

Luis Solano

Profile: Luis was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico on February 10, 1952 and was raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre. He belonged to the lower class. Luis worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. Juan was his brother. Luis's father also worked in the IBM Aguirre Sugar Company Department company for over 40 years. He has 4 children.

Middle class:

Lucia Tellez

Profile: Lucia Tellez was born in Montesoria, Central Aguirre; she is 71 years old. She belongs to the middle class. Lucia Tellez was a nurse in the Aguirre hospital for more than 30 years. Her husband Jose Paramo worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. Lucia Tellez's father and brothers worked in the Central Aguirre as *azucareros* (mill operators); her mother also worked sewing bags to carry sugar at the Central Aguirre. She had no children.

Jose Paramo

Profile: Jose Paramo was born and raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre. He is 75 years old. He belonged to the middle class. Jose Paramo worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years at the Central. His wife, Lucia Tellez was a nurse who worked at the Aguirre Hospital. He had no children

Manuel Lopez

Profile: Manuel was born and raised in Guayama, Puerto Rico; he is 86 years old. He belonged to the middle class. He arrived in Aguirre in 1956. Manuel belonged to the middle class and worked as head of the accounting department (IBM, International Business Machine Department) for 39 years. He has 2 children

Rocio Carvajal

Profile: Rocio was born and raised in Coamo, Puerto Rico on September 6, 1928. She belonged to the middle class. Rocio arrived in Aguirre in 1948. Her husband was a train engineer at the Central Aguirre locomotive and worked there until his death. Rocio worked in the IBM (International Business Machine Department) for more than 25 years. After her husband's death she continued working until her retirement. She has 3 children.

Alvaro Manrique

Profile: Alvaro was born and raised in Montesoria, Central Aguirre. He is approximately 75 years in age. He belonged to the middle class. Alvaro worked as *azucarero* (mill operator) for more than 30 years. His father also worked in the company for over 40 years. He has 4 children.

Upper class:

Teresa Suarez

Profile: Teresa was born in the Dominican Republic but was raised in Aguirre. She is 82 years old. She came to Puerto Rico when only a few months old and belonged to the upper class. Her father was a mechanical engineer at the Central Aguirre and worked there until his retirement. Teresa was the Company President's Secretary for more than 25 years. Her husband also worked in the company as mechanical engineer. They had 4 children.

Chapter 4: Aguirre People-Case Study

As for the analysis of gender relations in The Aguirre industrial community, oral history proved to be the most effective tool. This chapter presents the data collected from interviews, and introduces the reader to the participants of this research and the community composition. The second part of the chapter discusses the major themes that emerge from the interviews: normal and natural, gender roles at work and home, family, paternalism, relationships between classes, private and public, community as a family, and knowledge and skills.

The economic and political situations of Puerto Rico were crucial factors in the constitution of the Aguirre sugar-producing society. The social structure of this community was organized according to ethnic characteristics, which with the passing of time created a clear social division. Historically, the social division in Puerto Rico was introduced by the arrival of the Spaniards and later reinforced by the storming of the island by the United States.

It is important to note that the social structure in Aguirre not only reflects differences between social classes, races and nationalities but also between genders. Aguirre is a town of cultural diversity where people from different cities, ethnic groups and social classes lived together for years.

Some of the interviewees in this project grew up in Salinas District and have been in the area for generations. Others, like Teresa Suarez who is originally from the

Dominican Republic, came to Aguirre in their childhood. (Salinas is a municipality in the southern part of Puerto Rico and is divided into six sections: Aguirre, Lapa, Palmas, Quebrada Yeguas, Rio Jueyes and Salinas Pueblo)

The participants were from distinct ethnic groups: Mulatto (mix between African and Native), *Jibaros* (mountain-dwelling peasants) and *Blanquitos* (North Americans). “All bosses were American and did not speak Spanish. They were all blond and white, and workers were colored (Mulatto).”⁴⁸ Of the twelve individuals interviewed, some worked in the administrative offices and mill, and others worked in the cane fields. Their experiences were shaped by their daily interactions that varied according to workplace.

Differences among workers also can be seen within each gender, since women and men in the company performed specific roles too. The contexts in which men and women interact are the home and the community, and also the spaces designated to each social class.

⁴⁸ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

4.1. Social classes

Aguirre community has been divided into lower, middle and upper classes.⁴⁹ Each one of these groups has a diverse and complex dynamic. The majority of the population was part of the lower class, consisting mostly of cane cutters and those who usually did the ‘dirty work’ in the fields for long periods. The division between classes was sustained under the premise of normal and natural. The population perceived the division between classes that generated higher profits for the upper class than for the lower class as logical.

4.1.1. Lower class

Unskilled worker’s homes were located in the lower part of the town known as Lower Montesoria. Not all workers lived inside Aguirre; some of them lived outside of town near the cane plantation. Lower Montesoria was considered the most depressed area since people had small houses without bathrooms and their purchasing capacity was limited. Because of potential problems due to lack of hygiene, the company built some bathrooms, which had to be shared with the rest of inhabitants of the area. Maria Lopez remembers that “in Lower Montesoria, bathrooms were public; every block had a public

⁴⁹ Davila, Carmelo. "A Space for Production and a Space for Commuality: Socio-Historical Study of Central Aguirre and Its Industrial Community, Salinas, Puerto Rico: 1949-1970."

bathroom located in the center. Bathrooms were divided, half for men and half for women; there were three or four showers and four bathrooms.”⁵⁰

The population in this group was a mix between people of African descent and *Jibaros* (peasants). Many of these workers were born in Aguirre and their families have worked at the Central for years as well. Some of them came from nearby towns such as Coamo or Yauco, and usually once they moved to Aguirre they rarely left. The lifestyle and the stability that the Company provided to its employees were comfortable enough for them to stay in the town until old age.

The living conditions of lower class workers were reflected by the positions that they held in the company. Their salaries were the lowest. Women in this group often worked as domestic servants, cooks, waitresses, nannies, laundresses, cane cutters, sugar packers, seamstresses, messengers and ‘*aguadoras*’ (women in charge of the water distribution in sugar cane areas). Women’s salaries were much lower than men’s; their obligations were equal or sometimes more so than men’s. Once women finished their working day, they returned home to care for their children and husbands. Maria Lopez remembers her mother’s history:

The salary that she earned was a miserable, 75 cents an hour.... She worked in the Americano Hotel and because her salary was so low, when Americans guests came who

⁵⁰ Maria Lopez interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

did not have anyone to wash their clothes, my mother did it and also ironed their clothes, and she washed their clothes too.⁵¹

Lower class children played various roles such as doing homework, caring for children or studying. While parents worked, children also fulfilled a number of responsibilities. Girls assumed their mothers' roles until the mothers returned home from work. They cared for younger siblings, cooked, washed, cleaned, and fulfilled their school obligations. Maria Lopez remembers her routine when she was a girl: "On weekends, I cleaned the house. I helped my mom wash and cook. Ever since, I was 10 years old I learned to cook".⁵²

Once they fulfilled the tasks assigned to them, girls were allowed to play with other girls; however they always remained close to home. When I was a girl, Maria Lopez said, "The other girls also were doing the same as I. We remained inside the house and when we had our spare time we played volleyball."

In contrast, boys were usually away from domestic duties and were allowed to play outside the home with other children from the same social class. Brothers Luis and Juan Solano (Mill workers) explain in the interview that they did not have any responsibility at home:

⁵¹ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁵² Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Alejandra (interviewer): What did you do after school; did you help your mother with the household chores, like cooking?

Luis and Juan: No, No. We were in charge of cleaning the yard and playing.

Alejandra: And why did you not work inside washing and cooking?

Luis and Juan: Because our mom had everything ready when we returned from school and our sister helped her with the housework.⁵³

Due to the economic conditions of the family, many children were obliged to leave school because it was their obligation to help at home. Esperanza Martinez sadly tells her story: “My mom took me out of school because she had no money to pay for uniforms and books; I stayed at home taking care of my little brother.”⁵⁴ Parents often did not consider it important that their children attended school; they knew that their only option in life was to be workers. For that reason, going to college or even finishing secondary school was not an option or it was not necessary to do so. Lucia Tellez tells us of her experience:

I always wanted to be a nurse. I had two older sisters who graduated as teachers. My father decided that we could not go to school because someone had to stay at home

⁵³ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁵⁴ Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

working and he chooses me for that. Then my mom did not agree with my dad's decision and she supported me.⁵⁵

4.1.2. Middle class

Middle Montesoria was the area in which the middle class was located. Despite their physical proximity, middle class residents' interactions with lower class residents were limited. The workers conditions in this middle class were drastically different from those of the lower class. The middle class enjoyed a number of privileges that often generated rivalry. Homes in this area were bigger, had bathrooms, and were stylistically different.

The inhabitants of the middle class also were distinguished from the lower class by the rank that they occupied in the company. These workers usually possessed training in specific areas, which assured them a better position within the company and a better salary. Their training also increased their chances to ascend in the company's rank.

Their working days were not as long as they were for field workers. Middle class men were always mill workers and lower class men were primarily sugar cane field workers. Despite being above the lower class in the social hierarchy, middle class workers did not always mix socially with the upper class.

⁵⁵ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

The majority of women in the middle class usually did not work; the principal reason was their husbands. Men argued that their salary was enough to maintain the family and for that reason their wives did not have the necessity to leave home for any reason. Nevertheless, some women worked because they wanted to earn extra income for the family. As Maria Lopez a housewife, explains: “I wanted to work, but my husband did not let me work, you know to have a little money at home for buying other things ... Although I thank God I never lacked anything I've always had everything and I am not complaining about that.”⁵⁶

However if those women worked, they would not do any heavy work; instead they worked in the administrative area as secretaries or as accounting assistants. For this to be possible, it was necessary for them to demonstrate experience and knowledge. Middle class jobs for women were in the administrative areas; they worked the same hours as men but their salaries were lower.⁵⁷ The selection processes of employees in the company were rigorous. Rocio Carvajal, a former keypunch operator recalls, “when the company was recruiting staff, they did not choose everyone. Managers and also secretaries did a lot of interviews, and research of applicant’s lives.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Maria Lopez interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁵⁷ Teresa Suarez interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁵⁸ Rocio Carvajal interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Many women preferred to stay at home caring for their children. Half of the women interviewed stayed at home and the other half worked at the Central. It is interesting that despite having positions available for women within the company, the number of women working was low; the majority of workers in Aguirre Sugar Company were men. “The company preferred to have male workers, as not to have the problem of maternity leave pay; you know that every year women were giving birth, and giving birth, and the company had to pay the maternity leave. It was not discrimination, the company preferred boys (men), and they gave good results, and for that reason they choose males who were more practical for the company.”⁵⁹

Other jobs besides the Central were available for women in the hospital, the post office, the store or the school. Women working in the hospital usually were single, such as nurses, and usually were not from Aguirre. Their work was not very well paid, but they shared housing with relatives or friends to make life easier. Lucia Tellez, a nurse in the Aguirre hospital, remembers that many of her colleagues stayed with other families because their wages were low and they could not afford a house of their own.⁶⁰

Men and women of the middle class rarely interacted with the upper class, as their relationships were limited to the working area. They did not come into contact with

⁵⁹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

⁶⁰ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

engineers or managers, unless it was essential. Jose Paramo recounts: “Our relationship was limited to work; the Americans did not mix with the workers.”⁶¹

Middle-class children had a number of privileges. Their participation in domestic work was not as prevalent because their mothers stayed at home. Generally, they had access to education and their parents motivated them to study. Teresa recounted in the interview that... “I always encouraged my children to study and be someone in life and now all of them are professionals and successful.”⁶² Children of lower and middle class constantly socialized because they interacted with each other at school. Upon reaching high school, kids moved to Guayama since education only continued through elementary school in Aguirre.

4.1.3. Upper class

The third social group in Aguirre was the upper class that was geographically located in the elevated area of town. Large houses, surrounded by trees and flowers, characterized this area. The members of this class were usually Americans or Puerto Ricans (from the Puerto Rican upper class); they came with their families and occupied the highest positions in the Company. Their wages were the highest and thus enjoyed all

⁶¹ Paramo, Jose. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁶² Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

the amenities provided by the Company, including bigger houses, health insurance and private education for their children.

Men of this class rarely engaged with the other social classes. Often the impediment was language, since many of them did not speak Spanish. Thus they only related to middle-class members that were bilingual. However, this interaction was only to be cordial, as their relationship never went beyond the workplace. An upper class man's workday was primarily during the daytime, and he always remained in the offices, as his presence was not required in the field. Because of these men's higher income, it was not necessary for their wives to work. "They stayed at home maintaining an active social life and shopping in Guayama."⁶³

Usually upper class women only supervised their maids – women responsible for the domestic work were usually of lower class. Maids were responsible for the cleaning, cooking and other household chores. Children of this class had no contact with the other children of the village. Like their parents, the American children did not have a chance to interact with the other kids in part because they did not speak Spanish. Children did not work at home; their only assignment was to study. Lucia Tellez said that:

Lucia: The school was American for Americans, not for Puerto Ricans, and students had to be the sons of the managers or high position workers.

⁶³ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Alejandra: Did these children sometimes mix with the children of Aguirre?

Lucia: Never, never, never, never. They remained in the American school until they began college.

Alejandra: Did they play outside?

Lucia: Maybe in their free time

Alejandra: Did they play with children from other classes?

Lucia: Never, never, they had their own group; they had their class to play and interact with. ⁶⁴

After the brief introduction of Aguirre's Community participants and their roles, it is important to elucidate the concepts that emerged during the twelve interviews conducted in the months of July and August of 2012. The interviews conducted in Aguirre were based on open conversations in which participants freely expressed their ideas and memories concerning Aguirre. After the coding process, fifteen themes emerged that will be grouped into the following topics: normal and natural, gender roles, family, private and public, community as a family, and knowledge and skills.

4.2. Normal and natural

Residents from each social class believe that the time that they spend in Aguirre represented a positive influence on their lives and their families. The social and economic

⁶⁴ Rocio Carvajal interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

system provided by the Aguirre Sugar Company allowed them to live comfortably. Aguirre inhabitants never had problems with the social system introduced by the company and they adapted easily because it was natural and normal to them and as Teresa Suarez said: “The system helped them to adapt, they liked it, and it was a natural process.”⁶⁵

Aguirre residents such as Teresa Suarez, who worked in the *Central* for more than 25 years as the president’s secretary, recalls that people visualized the social division as ‘normal and natural’, because for a society to operate in harmony it needs to divide and organize its members, in this way everyone knows their place and proper role.⁶⁶

Lower class residents believe that although it may be natural and normal to have class division, this does not make it right or fair. A portion of the respondents that came from the lower class disagreed with the division of classes, which only gave broad benefits to the upper class. Despite the disagreement between classes, the inhabitants of Aguirre only expressed verbally their rejection to the system; they never objected publicly as individuals to the directives of the Company. The union was responsible for all formal public criticism, and “labor union benefited the workers and thus spoke to the directors of the Company.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rey, Manuel. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

The idea of normal and natural in the Aguirre community is part of a historical construction on the island, where class inequality has been a permanent and dominant factor. Class division is a permanent concept in the collective imagination of the people of Aguirre and Puerto Ricans in general. The less privileged sectors of society understood that social division was dictated by God or nature.

Despite social division being rooted in the community of Aguirre as a normal, natural concept, there still was an underlying opposition to it. Accepting social inequality as natural and normal may have caused more conflict in other communities. However, in Aguirre, the workers' living conditions allowed them all the things necessary for survival; thus they accepted class division as a natural factor.

4.3. Gender roles

The day-to-day lives of men, women and children in Aguirre were defined by the roles that corresponded to each gender, and also depended on the place and time where women or men were. Some of these roles also varied according to the social class to which a person belonged.

4.3.1. Children's roles

Children in the community of Aguirre fulfilled various roles; these roles often related to their social class. In the lower class, boys and girls contributed at home; that

means that many of them left school before finishing it. “I helped my mom economically, so that my brothers could study.”⁶⁸ Boys looked for jobs in the area, i.e. at the Aguirre Sugar Company, and girls worked at home as mothers and nannies, since often their mothers were working. Girls had to take charge of the household: washing, ironing, cooking and caring for their siblings. Esperanza Martinez, a housewife and current resident in Aguirre, tells that because her mother worked they had to help at home. “My mom left us both alone at home; I took care of my brother because I was bigger than he.”⁶⁹

In the middle and upper classes, children had a different situation. Boys and girls were encouraged to finish school and later go to college. “At that time no one thought to go to college; I had very little money. So who could go to college? Well the better off for example with more money. Here they were the children of engineers, the children of big heads in the Central.”⁷⁰ Lower class children did not aspire to go to college because they did not have the financial resources. Nevertheless they could study in local institutions in order to get knowledge and later work in the same areas that their parents did.

Lucia Tellez (nurse at the Aguirre’s hospital) states that girls in the middle class usually choose professions that allow them to return home like being a teacher, secretary

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁷⁰ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

or nurse.⁷¹ Boys were inclined towards military service or to get training from their parents to continue their legacy of working in the Aguirre Sugar Company.

In Aguirre, as in other Puerto Rican sugar companies, a man worked at a certain position and then his son and the next generation also worked doing the same. I did the same work that my dad did and my brother also worked in the Central. For better or for worse it was hard work but I could buy a car and had money in my pocket.⁷² Children in upper classes were totally different. They had more options concerning their future and had no economic pressures. All of them, once finished with high school, went to the United States where they could attend college.

4.3.2. Male roles

One recurrent topic in the interviews was the variation of gender role according to social class. Men's responsibility as assigned by society, regardless of class, was to bring food and money to the home. They were patriarchs who controlled and dominated the household without actually performing domestic duties. Rocio Carvajal remarked: "My husband was wonderful, an exemplary father, but in this matter of cooking? He did not

⁷¹ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

⁷² Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

know how to fry an egg. I always washed his clothes, ironed his clothes – I even did the same for my daughters and my grandchildren – and I took good care of my husband.”⁷³

In the lower and middle classes men and women shared the responsibility to work in order to secure a livelihood. Nevertheless, household care, cooking, and cleaning were not included within the roles that lower class men performed in Aguirre. Rocio Carvajal notes that despite the mutual respect that existed in her relationship with her husband, the roles of women and men were well demarcated by the knowledge that everyone had their place in the home.

The man was usually the one who made decisions at home regardless of social class. Men chided and imparted discipline to their children. In each social class, men displayed themselves as a source of security and protection. According to the women interviewed, men not only control the household but also the chastity of their wives. Husbands did not like that their wives were outside for a long time; they limited the wives’ interactions with other men. The same control applied to the wife was applied to daughters and sisters. Maria Lopez’s husband, Manuel, who worked as azucarero (mill operator) for more than 30 years remembers:

Maria: I stayed at home because he did not want me to work.

⁷³ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

Manuel: I was a little jealous, what happens is that at the time when a woman was going to work she could interact with good women with good feelings and thoughts, but also she could find women with bad ideas.

Maria Lopez: Then... his fear was that those women who did not have good things on their minds could damage my mind.

Alejandra (Interviewer): What kind of things could those women teach you?

Maria Lopez: I will not go into details but you know... things like for example, that lady was married and had her friend (lover). So to avoid a bad influence it was best to stay at home.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, men's roles allowed them to be free to interact in different areas in the community, including with other women. "In Aguirre they (men) had a lot of respect; a man could have adventures (affairs) but that was not routine." Certainly one of the male roles was to have total control of his sexuality and the kind of relationships that he had with women besides his wife. Being a man in Aguirre was to have absolute freedom in making decisions.⁷⁵

Aguirre's men play their roles in the home but also at work. The working day in Aguirre varied according to worker's rank. A Field worker worked more hours than a mill worker. Respondents point out that the dynamics of work were positive; their roles

⁷⁴ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

⁷⁵ Dominguez, Pedro. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

as employees were limited to specific activities. Only chiefs and engineers made decisions regarding the company. Middle and lower class workers were limited to obey and follow the instructions that their bosses gave to them. The relationships between employees were cordial and never showed any conflict as brothers Luis and Juan said in their interviews “Our relationship was like a family; it was very good. It had a lot of companionship.”⁷⁶

Sometimes workers were dissatisfied when the company favored other workers. Usually that happened because some workers had specific skills such as speaking English or possessing additional training. Interviewees point out that those feelings were uncommon and in general terms, Central Aguirre was a place where harmony ruled among workers. They understood their roles as workers and they fulfilled them to their best. Alvaro Manrique (skilled worker) remembers his experience in Aguirre:

I went to study in the United States sent by the Company to learn about ventilation systems of mills. The company commissioned me two times. They sent me because I spoke English and I had studied in the United States. That was a plus for me.

I spoke English and understood it. I could talk to the managers and engineers in English and that bothered the other workers sometimes.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Luis Solano, interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁷⁷ Manrique, Alvaro. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

4.3.3. Female roles

In Puerto Rican society, certain roles have been assigned universally to women of all classes. It is the duty of women to be mothers and wives; they take care of children and husbands and stay at home to nurse the domestic space. All Aguirre women, regardless of class, understood that their role was part of tradition and it was natural for women to remain in the private sphere. They considered that their duty and responsibility was being at home, while their husbands were working. “The life was the normal life of the time: the mother was devoted to her children and the father was devoted to his work.”⁷⁸

Lower class women all knew that their role included being faithful to their husbands, but in the middle class, women were more independent since they were allowed to work in areas where their knowledge was valued and considered important. Rocio Tellez affirms that: “Not everyone could work as a secretary at Central, many women were not prepared. Alejandra: What kind of jobs did other women have? Rocio: Working as maids or at home.”⁷⁹

However, even if women of middle class had some liberty, they always remembered to behave correctly, i.e., be prudent, industrious and obedient. Juan Solano, a mill worker that worked for more than 20 years in Aguirre, points out that “At that time

⁷⁸ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

⁷⁹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

a woman smoking or drinking was not well seen, well that was the same throughout Puerto Rico.”⁸⁰

Upper class women had similar roles to those of the others classes, i.e., they remained in a private sphere but their participation at home was minor as they had servants to care for their children and do other household tasks. The interview with Rocio Carvajal (keypunch worker) points out the following:

Alejandra (Interviewer): How were the relationships of upper-class women with women in the other classes?

Rocio: ‘Hello, hello, how are you?’ and that was it. No more. If they needed someone to help them at home they called the gardener who looked for someone, but did they come down to look for anyone? Never.⁸¹

Women’s roles at the company as at home were limited. Women’s functions at the Central Aguirre Sugar Company were limited to the administrative area and in some cases to the sugar plantations. Female workers in Aguirre usually did not have contact with the mill. Their roles were usually as secretaries, accounting assistants, messengers or as timekeepers of employee arrivals and departures. These women fulfilled the same schedule as men, and followed the same procedures.

⁸⁰ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

⁸¹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Women surveyed reported that they never felt rejection or discrimination by the company because they were trained. Women working in the Central had always enjoyed an atmosphere of respect. “I was the only woman; all others were male but, thank God, they always respected me and saw me as a lady.”⁸² The men with whom the women worked were always respectful and gentlemanly.

Women could play roles of great importance and impact as workers in the Company. Teresa Suarez emphasized in her interview, “I studied and I was a prepared woman and therefore they treated me as an equal. My husband never gave me problems if I wanted to work because he understood that I had studied and I wanted to work.”⁸³ Aguirre women as workers were employed at different times of their lives; in the lower classes women started work at a very early age and they kept laboring until old age. Esperanza Martinez tells of her memories of childhood: “My mother was a laundress; she washed clothes outside so we could maintain ourselves. My mom took us out of school early. My sister who was five years older than me went to work for a lady, to wash clothes and take care of the children.”⁸⁴

Work in the middle and upper class was more relaxed because generally, women studied first, and that gave them more possibilities to get a job. Sometimes their working

⁸² Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

⁸³ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁸⁴ Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012

years were interrupted by pregnancy. During that time they took a break. However, after pregnancy, many of them stayed at home permanently.

4.4. Private and public

The private concept in the Aguirre community makes reference to home and domestic life. This is a space to which only family members have access. However, despite being a private space, the company also pretended to control it. Examples were the employee monitoring and security policies. The Central made sure that any children were not out of their home after 8 pm. This not only forced parents to have control over their children, but also controlled the permanence of the population in their homes at night. The time control of children was also a time control for parents who should stay at home controlling their children. This type of measure was an indirect way of controlling workers private space as well as their routine.

In Aguirre, women understood that they interacted mostly inside the home. Staying in the private sphere gave them security and peace. This also assured the husband control and surveillance over the wife and children. Not only wives stayed in the private space, but children too. Girls were encouraged to stay at home while boys had the chance to explore other areas outside the domestic context. Rocio Carvajal recalls: “My brothers were always with my dad, learning about mechanics, but we (daughters) were always in

the home.”⁸⁵ Private and public spheres do not only refer to the family sphere, but also to the labor context. Some jobs inside the company related to private spaces, usually assigned to senior workers or skilled workers. Other jobs were performed in a wider area that was considered a public space for unskilled workers. Rocio Carvajal also remembers that:

Aguirre was always divided into three sections. The American section was the big bosses’ area. The second sector included the foremen who had positions as employees classified according to their abilities and consistent with their experience. Finally, the unskilled workers who were those who lived on the ground floor of Aguirre.⁸⁶

4.5. Knowledge and skills

In *Central Aguirre* workers were placed in different areas according the knowledge they had. Skilled workers were those who held highly specialized work, operating machinery or working in the administrative section. Workers who harvested and collected cane were those whose knowledge was not suitable to operate machinery in the mill. Juan, one of the interviewees points out that “cane-cutters received regular salaries, but they were always suffering” Cane-cutters salaries were the lowest in the company because they were unskilled workers with no formal training. “Those who

⁸⁵ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁸⁶ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

worked in the cane field earned as little as 25 cents an hour and were the lower class, poor people like us.” (Garcia, interview)⁸⁷

Some skills allowed workers to move up within the Company, such as language. Those workers who could speak English had a greater chance of being placed in higher ranges, as they could communicate with engineers or senior officers. Rocio Carvajal said that: There was a lot of racism, remember that it was a U.S. company and my boss would not let us speak Spanish to him. If you were going to say good morning he responded, “How do you say good morning?” And we had to say, “good morning, how are you?” Because they were from the U.S., they never, never, never spoke Spanish. He did not speak Spanish.⁸⁸

The benefits that those skilled workers obtained brought dissatisfaction among workers because some employees felt discriminated against, since they could not access the same jobs and benefits. However, The Americans’ contact with the villagers was very limited because they did not speak Spanish. Puerto Ricans were not the only ones who were at a disadvantage because of language. American workers also faced a big challenge because many of them did not speak Spanish; American residents were never enthusiastic about learning the local language. They only learned what it took to express basic ideas. Their wives and children were not immersed in the language and culture and never

⁸⁷ Paramo, Jose. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁸⁸ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

sought a way to immerse them in the language, thus the American school and church was administered in English.

4.6. Family life

The family as a social and political institution was and remains a fundamental part of Aguirre's society. For the inhabitants of Aguirre, creating a family is a natural and essential part of being human. It is in the family where people breed concepts such as gender differentiation and social division, and where individuals internalize what their duties and responsibilities in society are. In the lower classes, families were extended. Families usually included father, mother, children, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. These families grew over time and created alliances with neighbors. Neighbors and blood relatives with time ended up living and working well as a large family.

Getting formally married was not usual for several reasons. One was the lack of money to get married because they had to pay for the ceremony in the Church. Lower class families did not have the resources to do this. Another reason was that the population, despite the majority of people being culturally Catholics, was not practicing and getting married was not essential. Most lower class people were never married. This was the case for the sisters Esperanza and Alicia Angarita whom never married officially but lived in free union with their husbands.

Middle and upper classes family composition was nuclear based on parents and children. Sometimes nephews or grandparents lived with them, but for short periods of time. Marriage was essential and was feasible for the residents of these classes and in many cases they had large weddings, as was the case for Rocio Carvajal who remembers her wedding with great emotion.

Men and women learned earlier in life how to work and appropriate the spaces that they were entitled to. Those teachings were taught and indoctrinated in the family, where the rules of society are reproduced “I went to school with ironed Uniforms. Saturday and Sunday we had to wash ourselves before doing chores, cleaning furniture, or polishing the floor.”⁸⁹ In each one of the interviews, to have a family was the ultimate goal for men and women. There were single people in the community, but this was a provisional status. Tradition demarcated that part of the normal course in life was to marry and have children.⁹⁰ Aguirre’s residents inspired future generations to follow the example of their parents and this explains why in some cases three consecutive generations worked at the Company. Juan and Pedro Solano remember “...going to work at the Central Company was like a familiar routine where father, uncle, and brothers worked. Almost all families worked at the Central.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Solano, Luis. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

4.6.1. Life cycle

Another frequent category in the interviews was female and male life cycles. Residents believed that their life cycles were based on biological and natural conditions. Women and men agreed that the nature of women demanded her to stay at home and get married at a certain age to make way for motherhood. Female roles such as mother and wife defined women's essence. "I got married very young, at sixteen years, and moved from playing with dolls to having my own children. I had 6 children and I was very happy. I liked having kids and my husband did too."⁹²

For some women in Aguirre their role as mother was more relevant than professional development. In the case of Rocio Carvajal, getting married interrupted her childhood. She was 15 years old when she had her first son, and only a year before she was playing with dolls. Rocio exposed in her interview that her children became analogically her dolls. During pregnancy, women working at the Central preferred to be at home, and after childbirth they usually stopped working and came back into the domestic sphere. However other women in the middle class did not feel the same way. Maria Solano remembers that:

Did you know why some women wanted to work? Maybe to leaving their routine, many did not have the vocation of housewife. When they were in that

⁹² Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

situation, they decided to go to work or do anything else that they wanted.

Sometimes being a housewife can kill you, the daily routine is to get up, make breakfast, cook, wash, clean the house, and deal with the boys ... it's really hard. I supposed that they chose to go to work to get out of the routine.⁹³

In the case of men, their parents and society motivated them to find a woman and have a family. Being a man in any class meant maintaining a home and having a family. "I was the one who worked and was responsible for my wife and my children. I worked so that they did not miss anything" said Martin, a middle class worker⁹⁴. Alicia remembers how her husband worked hard to cover his family's needs and to give their children the chance to go to school. Men and women naturally accepted these life cycles, as they saw that their parents did the same. People of Aguirre really believed that marriage and a family with children was their destiny.

4.6.2. Sacrifices

Being a father, a mother, a wife or a husband according to Aguirre residents meant making sacrifices. Women and men sacrificed their dreams, time and energy to provide a better future for their families. Women sacrificed their body to having children and also sacrificed their time, since they had to stay at home most of the day looking after

⁹³ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

⁹⁴ Tellez, Martin. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

their children. Women also sacrificed their autonomy, as it was the husband who controlled home. According to Teresa Martinez, having the experience of motherhood meant sacrificing the opportunity to work “When I had children I did not worked. I stayed at home and that is where I broke the labor cycle. Years later [The opportunity] returned and opened later when all my children were already in school and I could then go to work without having to sacrifice them.”⁹⁵

Men also felt that their male role demanded a sacrifice. Men endured hard workdays in the Central, night hours, and unemployment in the post-harvest season because they considered themselves as the head of their household, responsible for providing food and economic support to their families.

Pedro Dominguez refers to his life as an arduous journey during which he supported a family of 12 children. He reflects about how men in Aguirre worked long shifts in order to assure a better future for their families.⁹⁶ Men and women in Aguirre feel that their roles demanded a sacrifice at different levels. Part of their youth was developed helping at home, as girls contributed with the home care while some boys worked to bring money or food. Once they got married, responsibilities increased,

⁹⁵ Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

⁹⁶ Dominguez, Pedro. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 2012.

decreasing personal free time. It was unavoidable to sacrifice time and energy for the family and home because it was part of the life cycle of men and women.

4.6.3. Dreams

Dreams and aspirations of Aguirre residents have been developed through the dictates of society and economy. Children in the community grew and forged their identity understanding that their future was not a random decision, but rather a future that depended on others' decisions, including those of their parents. Maria Lopez remembers that her "...illusion was always studying nursing but she never came to achieving it".

Esperanza Martinez also remembers: I always said to my mother ... because of you I could not be something, one of my friends was a teacher and I'm ... a zero to the left [a nobody]. I wanted to be something, something. I'd like to be a secretary. After having my first child it came time for me to study at night and my mom said: She cannot go to school because she has to be conscious of her child. I always remember that, it would have been my chance to study. ⁹⁷

Most of the interviewees point out that their lives would have been different if they had the opportunity to choose. Lower and middle class women in Aguirre had the dream of being a teacher, a nurse or a secretary. Those professions were valued in society

⁹⁷ Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

as suitable roles for women. However, many girls' dreams were largely frustrated and derailed in the middle and lower classes because lack of economic resources. Maria Lopez was one of those women who wanted to go to college "Being female was a disadvantage, one wanted a better life, to do other things and find opportunities you had not." Some families prevented their daughters from studying using as an argument that just the rich had an opportunity to go to college. Ever since Lucia Tellez was a teenager, her father decided that her destiny was to stay at home because one of his daughters had to help with housework.

Only upper class women had the opportunity to go to college. However, many of them never did because they decided to get married and start a family early. Not all women showed a desire to have a profession; some just longed for a husband and a home with children. Aguirre men's dreams were associated with two issues, money and family. Lower and middle class young men usually never finished school even if they wanted to go to college. Their aspirations were limited because often they had to work to help their families. The common dream of young men in Aguirre was to be able to get a job at the Aguirre Sugar Company and thus continue the family tradition. Having a job meant having a salary that allowed them to buy a car, have fun, and then have a wife and children. Juan and Luis Solano refer to their experience:

We did not go to college ... at that time you had no such facilities as now, and you always looked for work, I was 16 years (between fast work)... One wanted to buy a car, I bought a car, clothes ... I wanted to work, it was so close and so easy to enter the Central

... We would have liked to go to college but had no orientation (from school and family) to go, so we went to work.⁹⁸ Dreams in the lower and middle classes often were never realized because of the circumstances. Men and women spoke of their ideas of a different or better life. However, many of those dreams were still present in memories passed down to children and grandchildren, allowing parents in Aguirre to see later generations accomplish what they could not.

4.7. Community

The town of Aguirre has always been distinguished in the area for being one of the most prosperous and peaceful communities in Puerto Rico. Aguirre residents perceive their community as a place where everybody was respected and lived in harmony. Thanks to the flourishing economic and social system that the company introduced in the area, people say that the dynamics were healthy and gave people the opportunity to grow up in a good environment. In Aguirre each inhabitant was seen and considered symbolically as a brother; they were like a family, though class limited the extent of brotherhood.

As Rocio Carvajal, Esperanza Martinez and the other informants' thought "we were all like one big family in Aguirre." If that fellowship was real or just an illusion depends on each individual's point of view. While it is true that the class division of the inhabitants of Aguirre was real, in order to keep harmony it was necessary to maintain

⁹⁸ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

basic levels of social warmth. People always tried to be cordial as far possible with each other. Being cordial was part of the Puerto Rican moral code and a greeting was never to be denied to anyone. Starting from the basic rules of education taught at home and school, members of society always accepted the necessity of being cordial as one of the basic rules of the Aguirreño family.

4.7.1. Paternalism

There are many occasions in which respondents expressed their feelings about Aguirre as a family. In the sugar industry, the Company represented a father who cared for and ensured the welfare of each worker. The Company owners were Americans who had control over the inhabitants of Aguirre. The Company defined the appropriate behavior in each place according to social class. Workers never objected to this, since the paternal system imposed by the Company operated appropriately for the inhabitants of the region.

It was very notable the division in Aguirre. It was what it was. Aguirre people were very happy with that, and of course there were those (lower and middle class workers) living their lives by sea, at their homes, in a single small room, but they were happy because they had the chance to earn their bread, they were happy that they had worked in the Central. ⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

The paternalistic system made a safe and quiet area, which remained while the *Central* Company was in operation. Living standards of Aguirre inhabitants were always optimal in terms of free housing and a stable job. The paternalistic system introduced by the American company, had never before been practiced in the area. The success of this system was based in the naturalization of the social conditions introduced by it. It was natural and normal to the workers that the company controlled their decisions, but unlike the Spaniards, the Americans provided a livelihood, which satisfied them.

Anthropologist Sherine Hafez (2012), gender studies researcher, developed the idea that paternalism can be analyzed as a conduct where “The honor, prestige, and power of the patriarch thus derive from his abilities to provide for, as well as to control and ensure the obedience of the members of the group.”¹⁰⁰ In Aguirre town the company developed a paternalist system based on the control over their employees as a father controlled their children. Used as mechanisms of control, the jobs offered to workers provided economic and emotional stability, and the disciplinary system introduced in the community extended a new concept of family life.

The system was effective while the company was in operation, however once the company withdrew from Puerto Rico this paternal system simply disappeared. After that,

¹⁰⁰ Sherine Hafez, "No longer a bargain: Women, masculinity, and the Egyptian uprising," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012).

the population noticed a void that was not only explained by the closure of the Central but by the disappearance of an authority figure to maintain order. Maria Lopez says that, she like most of the people wept when the *Central* closed its doors; the demise of the company was the disappearance of a system that had maintained them as a family.

4.8. Relationships between social classes

The social class to which each resident belonged defined his or her relationships with the other residents in Aguirre. Usually friendships and bonds of fraternity were developed between individuals of the same class. The interviewees explained in their histories that relations between friends and neighbors were always cordial.

However, relations between social classes were not very frequent, i.e., the upper class did not relate to the other class. They never interacted in social environments; their only contact was at work. An example of that was the theater; the upper class as upper class possessed the privilege of occupying the second floor, with the most privileged view, while the rest of the community occupied the first floor. “The upstairs theater was for the Americans and the ground floor was for Puerto Ricans, do you see? Do you notice the division? It was a nice life, despite the division.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Sometimes members of the middle class sympathized with the upper class but because they were close to the upper class requirements, which means they spoke English or they had an intellectual background in common with the upper class managers or engineers. The interests between classes were probably similar, i.e. all wanted to live in peace and harmony, and certainly they did so, but everyone stayed in the place socially allotted for them. “The middle class mingled with the lower class? They mingled, because sometimes they were relatives or children of the lower class who had socially ascended.”¹⁰²

Respect was always a common denominator between classes, i.e. always greeting warmly, but their interaction was limited only to that. “If a classified worker greeted an American when he went to work, they answer hello, how are you? And the worker would answer, but that was it ... so it was, but it was pretty much Aguirre’s life.”¹⁰³ Cordiality was always present among the community of Aguirre, and it was a principle taught from early childhood and reproduced at work, family and church, even stipulated in the employee handbook. “The Company regards its good will as one of its more valuable assets. You can help protect and promote this good will by being courteous and cordial to all with whom you come in contact.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Rey, Manuel. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹⁰³ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Rice, E.F. You and Aguirre.

4.8.1. Social codes as frontiers

In Aguirre community harmony always reined among its inhabitants and, the reasons as to why these feelings flourished were the social codes that society developed. “The division was something that we knew was clear, but it was not a conflict.”¹⁰⁵ Social codes can be expressed as the behaviors that people in the community every day performed in order to ensure stability in the community. An example of this was that when a high-class person was walking on the street he did not share the same sidewalk with someone of low or middle class. “Here there was a border, the street above; we could get to the corner. The people were divided, to the left whiteys and on the other side the ‘*Negritos*’ (black people).”¹⁰⁶

Aguirreños never approached ‘*Blanquitos*’ houses and if this happened the Americans had permission to call the police. Aguirreños understood and assimilated the idea that they could not frequent the same places that upper class people did. In this order of ideas it may be seen that social codes are built by the community and were not only intended to ensure harmony and good behavior, but also over time to construct frontiers that separated the population for years until the end of the Company.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Solano, Luis. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

The workers were separated; the Americans were never seen down there [in lower or middle Montesoria], and the workers could not go there [to the upper class neighborhood]. And what would happen if they passed? They scolded and punished them [lower and middle class residents], they said they could not go through because it was a private sector. The only ones who could cross these borders were the maids and the nannies, who were often the wives of the workers, but they were not permitted to enter [the upper class homes], they had houses down below... I mean they could not directly enter the house? No, they had a boarding room and another to care for the children.¹⁰⁸

4.9. Conclusion

Analysis of social dynamics in the Aguirre community involves exploring a variety of concepts around which community residents built their life stories. Throughout the stories that each resident shared in the interviews, patterns could be found. For example, the Aguirreños' behavior derived from the social system introduced by the Company, which molded the employee's character making them obedient and disciplined. The Company reinforced the gender role division present in the community before the arrival of the Company in Aguirre. The emergence of social classes has a definite ample historical undertone that was widely used by the company to organize the staff intensifying inequality in the population. The Company helped to reinforce the idea

¹⁰⁸ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

that women must stay in domestic spheres while men are in their public by creating primarily jobs for males and a minority of positions within the Company for women.

People in Aguirre were also classified according to their skills and technical knowledge. It is obvious that this knowledge was acquired according to the ethnic group to which they belonged. In contrast with the Americans, peasants or those of African descent generally had limited access to education and without knowledge their chances of moving up the hierarchy of the Company were scarce or nonexistent.

Society adjudicated roles to each gender and class that developed passive behaviors at work; in consequence the Aguirre residents became obedient to the orders and tasks assigned to them by the company. However, they were active in other contexts as they built strong bonds of friendship within their own class. Those relationships allowed them to believe that their community life was like living in a family this is why they remain with good memories of cooperation and friendship that contributes to develop the idea that life in Aguirre, despite inequality, was pleasant. The company analogically could be seen as a father who provided food, health, and home for workers. Aguirre's paternalistic system not only consolidated the image of the company as a providing entity, but also as a source of order, peace and discipline to the community. This is in the end the image that Aguirre residents retained.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The interviews and literature reviewed in the previous chapters have explored the relationships that men and women of different classes in Aguirre, Puerto Rico built in their daily lives – at home as well as while working at the Aguirre Sugar Company. To understand the social dynamics within the community it is also important to analyze how these dynamics were related to the gender and class division that defined the role each individual played in society, family and at the Company.

To analyze these concepts, it is important to look at them in a social and cultural context taking into consideration the impact that foreign communities had upon arriving on the island. The static class division in Puerto Rico has been evident since the Spanish conquest up to the United States' possession 1898. Social division was evident in the interviews conducted in Aguirre community and distinctions between classes allowed for the development of complex dynamics among its inhabitants. Analyzing the social categories that people in the community built and transmitted orally to subsequent generations can elucidate these complex dynamics. These categories have a strong political and religious tone that has permeated the social structure while enabling the ideological reproduction of gender differentiation. The concepts that emerged in each chapter are directly related to the research question, the analysis of the relationships that men and women of low, middle and upper classes in Aguirre community built during the *Central Aguirre's* operation.

These social relationships were woven in different contexts, such as home, work and community. One of the results of this research is that the way in which people of Aguirre community interacted varied according to social class and ethnic group; some relationships between those of the same group were stronger and lasted longer, while others were developed by the people of the community only as a basic expression of neighborhood social codes. This chapter will address the key categories introduced in chapter four.

5.1. Normal and natural cycle of life

Aguirre residents' class and gender dynamics were defined by what their community considered natural and normal. Their life cycles were determined not only by biological conditions but also by social rules. Aguirre residents developed their gender identity under the premise that their life was defined by a natural construction: the biological cycle of birth, growth, reproduction and death.

Aguirre residents thought that their identity as members of society was dictated according to the roles that society assigned to each class and gender in the community and the assignment of these roles was based on the biological condition of each gender. It was perceived as normal to be born into a certain social class and to remain there until death. According to Pedro Dominguez, some were born poor and others were born rich and this is the natural law of life and cannot be changed – that is how things work in the

world.¹⁰⁹ Aguirre residents considered the division between classes as natural and normal because this was the model of their lives since their childhood and that of their parents and ancestors.

From the perspective of Aguirreños, it was reasonable to grow up under a social standard that assigned women and men a position within the biological and social sphere. In each class the role of each gender was permanent. It was natural within their concept of society, and thus there was no reason to object to pre-defined, permanent gender roles. Esperanza Martinez, a middle class housewife, says her only destiny was to stay at home while her husband was away from home working and often having fun¹¹⁰.

Concepts such as normal and natural were widely disseminated in the family, the church, and the community. Aguirre citizens considered normal and natural their position in the social structure of society that had been instilled since childhood. Their parents and grandparents reproduced the same speech that was also highly disseminated in school and at church. The upper classes considered normal the social division that allowed them to maintain the status quo enjoyed by their ancestors. The people of the lower class in contrast, had assimilated the difference and supremacy of one class over another but in many cases did not accept it. For them it was not right to remain in the same circumstances without the same benefits that '*Blanquitos*' had. Yet their resistance was

¹⁰⁹Dominguez, Pedro. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹¹⁰Martinez, Esperanza. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

committed to words only.

Lewis Reina and Sara Mills (2003) argue that humanity has used for centuries the biological determinist argument in order to superimpose one gender over another. This is why in the collective imagination of men and women; the supremacy of men over women was a simply natural fact. In Aguirre, men and women have internalized the discourse that society has applied for generations, assigning each gender to a specific function. To fulfill their function in this society, men occupied certain jobs according to their social class and performed the same jobs all their lives. Some exceptions can be found, but even so, the average man during the course of his life remained in the same labor status from birth to death and his descendants likely would do the same.

In the case of a woman, her natural environment could be seen as home; sometimes women occupied certain positions in the career ladder that gave them lower paid jobs. After work, women returned home and continued their usual routine. Society justified this by the fact that it is natural that women remain at home, and woman accepted this as a natural part of her life “Women at that time understood that they has to be separated from public areas and remained in their space.”¹¹¹

On the other hand it is interesting to understand how natural and normal terms emerged in the Aguirre community. The maintenance of ideological discourse on the

¹¹¹ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

division of roles between genders has been widely disseminated by the Catholic Church in Aguirre. By using the religious argument it tried to portray women as the temptress of man; she must remain at home caring for children, under constant supervision of her husband.

Victoria S. Lockwood (2005) supports the idea that Christianity in western has sought since its inception as a religious movement to delimit female participation to a closed atmosphere such as home, while man as the Bible points out, must fulfill his natural function to provide support at home and therefore be outside of the home working.

Although it was normal and expected for a person comply with society's rules, men and women had different dreams and life expectations that were not in accordance with what the school, the church or the home regularly taught. Despite understanding their position in life, Aguirreños hoped someday to have the same amenities as the upper class had. Lucia Tellez and her husband Jose point out that "their dream was to someday be able to have a house like the Americans did, and that it only became possible when the Americans left town."¹¹² Unfortunately, many of these aspirations were never achieved.

Nevertheless, many Aguirre residents sacrificed their dreams by keeping the roles that society demanded of them, as it was more important to maintain social stability and thus to fulfill the natural cycle of life. Sherry Boland Ahrentzen (1992) considered that

¹¹² Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

knowledge imparted by the political institutions in western society had a major impact on the awareness allowing these institutions to change the society's behavior. The construction of dreams, wishes and expectations in life are developed unconsciously under the parameters determined by these political institutions.

In Aguirre the dream of many lower or middle class women was to be married at a young age, enter the labor world, and build a family. This life scheme was not viewed as wrong, but was a component of the biological cycle and part of the normal process of identity construction. Esperanza Martinez remembers her mother telling her that her destiny was to be a housewife as was every woman's destiny.

To qualify as a member of society it was necessary to comply with society's stipulations even if they did not agree with a person's dreams or goals. Conversely it is interesting how despite the imposition of certain traditions, people of this community never objected or expressed their dissent about themselves. They passively accepted their roles, and only in certain cases, some women resisted who wanted a different destiny. "My mom always wanted me to study. My dad did not want me to, but she opposed him and supported me. My mom bought me all the shoes and uniforms."¹¹³

Cases of women who wanted to have a profession and fulfill their dreams were rare. In the end, members of Aguirre community did not challenge the only system that

¹¹³ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

they knew because it was part of their normal life. Natural and normal concepts were widely introduced in the community and stayed in Aguirre residents' memories permanently. This allowed the internalization of behavior patterns in the community; despite the fact that some knew that these patterns were not fair. This behavior divided the population into groups and gave more privilege to some groups than others. Aguirre residents accepted these ideas and got used to them and thus justified gender and social division.

5.2. Community as a family

Respondents refer to Aguirre as a quiet town where moral values had a place of great importance.¹¹⁴ Family, church and community were considered the ideal combination for building an integral society. These three institutions were directly connected and occupied a central place in the reproduction of roles in society. However, their roles were performed in different ways depending on the place or time. In order to understand the dynamics between genders, one must note that these dynamics were developed in different ways according to the context in which they were built, whether in the private or public spheres. Both concepts are ambiguous and can be analyzed through different points of view.

Men and women of the Aguirre community played different roles according to whether they were at home, at work, or in other public or private settings. Within

¹¹⁴ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

households, roles depended on what society required, i.e. women would act as mothers and men as fathers at different times. The parents' function was to secure the complete development of their children, and to make this possible the mother should stay at home while the father was working.

Rosaldo (2005) points out that many women around the world often interact with their children in the domestic arena, at home. In public spaces such as the park or the market, mothers and children often interacted with other mothers and children. Fathers in Aguirre interacted with their children usually on weekends, when they went together shopping or for ice cream. Sometimes these interactions included mother, father and children. In Aguirre households the home space was split. An example of this is that the kitchen was a private and exclusive area for women, whereas the living room was a public area that man controlled. Role division emphasizes the presence of each gender in certain spaces, giving man total control of the public area and woman control of the private area within the household.

Men and women in Aguirre interacted in both areas in the home, but only in certain situations. The husband sometimes went to the kitchen and worked cooking while the wife was busy with the children, but his presence there was fleeting. The fact that men on certain occasions approached the domestic area reveals that they were not totally disconnected from the domestic roles: "After work I return to my home to make food and

for my children, and my husband helped me, and if I could not manage to make dinner he helped me.”¹¹⁵

Edna Acosta-Belen mentioned that if the husband felt that he was approaching the domestic role too much, he preferred to withdraw and remember that his male role and space were not related to the tasks that corresponded to his wife. Alvaro Manrique remembers: “I learned to cook after my wife died, before that she cooked and took care of everything, I just cleaned the yard.”¹¹⁶

Parents passed down to their children the same concepts of gender division in public and private spaces. Girls should stay indoors; their games reinforced the ideal of female homemaker. Boys could interact outside the home and their games were related to male roles like working in the industry. Rivera Quintero (1980), a Puerto Rican feminist, argues that this behavior is due to the instruction received at home, school and other institutions whose primary purpose was to assign each individual a specific role in society. For instance, men were motivated to apply themselves as engineers or lawyers while women were trained in the culinary arts and home care. The knowledge gained by parents was passed to the children and thus the cycle was repeated.

¹¹⁵ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹¹⁶Manrique, Alvaro. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Another area of interaction between genders was the workplace. At the Central Aguirre, men usually worked in public areas such as the plantation or the mill. Women were kept isolated from this work and stayed in the offices where they interacted with other women; this area was under female control. Male workers only approached if they were called or if they needed something specific there.

In the community, interactions between the inhabitants of Aguirre were carried out in the public area. People interacted in the main square, the market, the theater, or the store. In some public contexts such as the mill, workers of different classes interacted. Otherwise, workers usually interacted in public spaces with others in the same class. It was uncommon for low-ranking workers to mix with engineers outside of the mill.

Among the middle and lower classes the contact with the upper class was always clearly limited. Aguirre's middle and lower classes were never satisfied with the upper class because they thought that Americans were authoritarian. Juan Solano remembered that the "*Blanquitos* were unsympathetic and distant; we could not talk to them or be mixed with them, much less walk near their homes or they called the police."¹¹⁷

They never expressed disagreement with the presence of the Americans in Aguirre but were not satisfied with their conduct, i.e., '*Blanquitos*' were strict and exclusionary with the rest of the population. However, these feelings were never

¹¹⁷ Solano, Juan. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

expressed in public, they always remained private. Because as Luis Solano said: “if you did not like it, what else you could do.”¹¹⁸ These patterns of interactions in Aguirre with the passing of the years were considered as part of everyday life. People assimilated gender and class distinctions and finally, these dynamics became part of the communities’ identity.

People in Aguirre have always expressed their memories of Aguirre visualizing the community as a family. Residents described themselves as brothers and sisters, with the Central Aguirre as a father who assembled together his children. “Aguirre’s people thought that they were a family, helping each other and even after the mill was closed we still kept talking and appreciating each other as brothers. When someone died they played the sirens at the mill; it was as if the Central were crying for one of his sons.”¹¹⁹

Although the Aguirre community saw itself as a family, there were rules to ensure this harmony. The Company developed a system that allowed it to control harmony in the community. The implementation of behavior standards ensured the reproduction of the company’s economic system. Aguirre's family followed a hierarchal structure, with the Company representing the father whose duty it was to discipline workers, who were children in need of education and behavior norms.

¹¹⁸ Solano, Luis. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Lopez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

“Any employee is subject to discharge, suspension or other disciplinary action for dishonesty, incompetence, insubordination, negligence, misconduct or any other justified cause as determined by the Company. We hope that this won’t be necessary in your case, however, if it happens you’ll be given a full explanation of the reasons for the action taken...”¹²⁰

The Company developed a code of behavior that was handed over as a manual to each employee. The manual established rigorous standards of conduct and also the worker’s schedule in order to increase production levels and profit margins for the Company. “Because absence or tardiness interferes with the proper functioning of the Company’s business, dependability in attendance is required of all employees. Record of absence, tardiness, sick leave, etc., is maintained for all employee. Good attendance could be an important factor when making salary increases and promotions.”¹²¹ This code of conduct established a routine and life parameters, which assured that everyone was happy while the Company, earned large sums of money and were known worldwide for its high standards of production and content workforce. According to the Company, people had no complaints whatsoever, since they had a high standard of living. They had jobs, housing and food, and that was enough for them.

¹²⁰ Rice, E. F., *You and Aguirre*.

¹²¹ Rice, E. F., *You and Aguirre*.

5.3. Resistance and negotiation

According to Carmelo Davila (2009) the Central Aguirre for years was the most important sugar company in the Caribbean and this was achieved thanks to the efficiency of cane processing but also with the social system implemented to control employees. Whenever a worker entered the company, his family accompanied him. It was essential for the *Central* Sugar Company to mold each employee's character to make him or her responsible and manageable. It was important for the company not only to regulate employee behavior but also each family's behavior. Teresa Suarez thought: "For that reason we lived together and we shared the same rules, discipline, and accommodated to the company system, thus we could have a better life."¹²²

Aguirre Sugar Company's objective was to create an industrial complex where everybody lived in harmony. The Company believed that a peaceful environment was ideal to form responsible and efficient workers. Workers, due to the strict order, admired part of the control exercised by the Company. They understood that some discipline made possible the order and harmony in the area; as a result violence was not a topic of discussion in Aguirre. Apart from being a prosperous village, it was also a great family.

The image that the Company produced sounded appealing to many workers who came from neighboring cities looking for a better future with their families. From the

¹²² Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

time Central Aguirre opened its doors until the end, Aguirre residents praised the Company's efforts to create a fair and friendly environment for future generations, as many residents said 'living in Aguirre was perfect.'

Behind that perfect image, Aguirre residents did not always agree with the class division that the Company built. The inequality in the division of labor was an element much of the population disapproved of but their complaints and grievances but was not expressed in public or to the Company. Aguirre workers never expressed their opinion in front of the Company directors, perhaps for fear of reprisals or because they simply accepted that the status quo worked well. The process of resistance in this community is not an active process, but a passive one. Interviews conducted among residents of low or middle class reflected a rejection of the concept of natural and normal, but no one voiced disapproval. Rocio Carvajal also remembers that:

Alejandra (Interviewer): And you agree with that division, you agreed with that division, you think that was logical? Rocio: Well.... remember that we were all subject to American bosses and we could not protest about that, because it was something established ... those (lower class) were one world, the middle was another world, and Americans another world.¹²³

¹²³ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Aguirre residents believed that the division of work affected directly their relationships with the community because the division limited their contact with all community members and restrained their interaction to certain areas in town, like the Montesoria neighborhood. The difference of job positions impacted directly the workers' personal life; sometimes people felt it was not fair that they could not apply to the same positions and receive more profits and benefits as workers from a higher class did. Aguirre residents, especially low and middle class, often resisted the fact that the upper class was above them and in certain ways sought to differentiate from them.

Alejandra (Interviewer) Do you think or can you still see stratification and division in Aguirre? Even now that the Americans are not in town?

Rocio Carvajal: No. Alejandra: So... you believe that it was the Americans who imposed the division? Rocio: That was, they were the leaders, but not anymore, now we all greet each other [equally]. We share all the time. Now I live here (American sector) and if somebody says: Rocio now you live in where Americans lived? I answered no, I do not live where Americans lived, I live in the house where Americans lived. I did not change my class.¹²⁴

It is important to note that a negotiation process directly accompanied residents' resistance. Sometimes they obtained results and other times not. Workers at the Company

¹²⁴ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

never traded Aguirre's spaces with those of another class, as each knew which place corresponded to them. The social class was something difficult to change. At home, family members resisted and negotiated gender roles in the same way that workers did. The Aguirre community sometimes regarded women as fragile elements; however women resisted and negotiated their roles every day at home. Rita Benmayor (1988) considered that women in Puerto Rico not only use their physical strength but also moral and intellectual strength to protect, manage and care for their homes. Aguirre women definitely were no strangers to resistance and negotiation at home.

Women's negotiation processes did not only involve the expression of their opinion in public. Privately, women expressed their ideas and autonomy when they made some decisions that allowed them direct their home, but these decisions were made discreetly because the wife did not want to overshadow the husband's role and as patriarch. An example of this is the case of the mother of Lucia Tellez, she was not agree with her husband decision to leave her daughter at home – denying her the opportunity to study. That is why she decided to support her daughter Lucia, and accompanied her to enroll in an institution where she could study. She bought her uniforms and study materials without the approval of the father.¹²⁵

In Aguirre, the man's role as husband and father was crucial in determining his masculinity; this was the justification for his absolute control over his home. If he lost

¹²⁵ Tellez, Lucia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

control of the home, the rest of society could question a man's masculinity. However, in many cases his behavior in public was not the same as when a husband was at home with his wife and children.

Authors such as Nicholas Townsend (2005) think it was common in different societies for a woman stay at home and to be a mother, but also to be a negotiator between her children and their father. She managed their time at home, including playtime, nutrition, study and work. A mother's role was to never consider herself superior to men, but the wife in one way or another controlled the household and its members.

Women's intervention shapes the character and identity of society's members. This may be one reason why some societies limit female activity at home because their influence is so powerful in shaping citizens. Women's education since childhood has been directed to create submissive women who reproduce the system, training future men and women according to society's statutes.

Despite the fact that the Company tried to control the employees' behavior and create an image based on discipline and order, the behavior of Aguirre residents always retained one characteristic element among the inhabitants of the island, and this element was their happiness. Notwithstanding the sense of discipline and order in the community, Alicia Martinez remembers the parties in lower Montesoria had the music and bustle that characterize the Puerto Rican. They did not care whether or not Americans were bothered

because Americans would not approach their area. In one-way or another, Montesoria was workers' zone, an area where workers had control and could freely express their personality.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Martinez, Alicia. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The Aguirre Sugar Company was the most prosperous and prominent sugar company in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean for nearly a century. The arrival in 1898 of foreign companies such as the Aguirre Sugar Company contributed to Puerto Rico's economic development. The legacy of the sugar industry still remains in the memory of Puerto Ricans. The introduction of the company socio-economic system did not only change their lives, but also was a consolidating element of their character and identity.

Over the years, Aguirre community residents built bonds of friendship and brotherhood that gradually transformed the town of Aguirre into a family. The present study has sought to analyze the relationships that people of this community eventually built. Some relationships were developed at various levels such as at home, at work or in the community. These relationships operated in different ways according to the gender and social class to which each person belonged.

The interviews conducted in the community resulted in three main themes. First: normal and natural, second: family as community, and third: resistance and negotiation. These themes are not discussed in isolation; they are interconnected with the main theme of this study: gender roles and gender relationships. The analysis of these categories demonstrated that gender relations in Aguirre were built based on the perception of the community members, which derived from an ideological discourse that streamlined Aguirre residents' behavior. Analyzing how social institutions naturalize gender roles, it

is possible to see that the “natural” concept was used to distinguish gender hierarchy, placing men’s rationality over women’s emotionality. Society has often placed women at home because they are more involved with their children. As a consequence, women’s decisions and actions have a strong sentimental tone, and according to Aguirre men, this made women fragile and less objective. Instead, men were expected to be less sentimental and maintain control over every situation. The facts that men controlled the public sphere supposedly made them stronger than women. Maria Lopez remembers an experience with her husband when they were young:

Maria Tellez: I remember when we were dating; he always made me crazy when we played Volleyball.

Martin: I scolded her when she did not play well and she got crazy.

Maria: What happened was that you were ashamed me in front of everyone and made me feel bad.

Martin: What happened was that women are very weak so they should stay home.¹²⁷

In Aguirre was common the idea that man were stronger and dominant. This idea was widespread in Aguirre and was used to justify gender divisions, accepted in Puerto Rican society for decades. This does not imply that all society members accepted the argument. Teresa Suarez (Secretary) says that she always was opposed to the idea that

¹²⁷ Tellez, Maria. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

women in Puerto Rico are weak. “Puertorriqueña women are very strong and do anything for their family.”¹²⁸ Certainly that idea remains in the collective imagination without further questioning.

Gender relations in Aguirre should be seen as a cycle that is repeated from generation to generation. Aguirre residents considered that it was a tradition that each family worked in Central; also it was a tradition that woman stayed mostly at home while man went out to work. This cycle was based on the biological fact that women bear children, and therefore should be with them, while men are the ones who protect and govern the family.

The second theme in this research is related to community as family. One of the most important political institutions is the family and you could say that in Aguirre the family was the core of society. It is through the family that individuals built their identity and learned the basic rules of coexistence. Puerto Rican society includes in its background Spanish influence, which developed concepts of morality and good behavior, instilled in the community by the Catholic religion. This morality was a pillar in the construction of national identity. In Aguirre, the foreign company used this idea to support its goal of building an industrial town over which it maintained control.

¹²⁸ Suarez, Teresa. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Aguirre residents since childhood learned what their positions in the community were. In family and school, men and women internalized concepts such as obedience and loyalty. Aguirre's educational system taught certain ideas aimed at creating obedient citizens and a law-abiding morality. Parents considered the division of gender roles normal and natural, so they passed down the same roles from generation to generation. Aguirre informants consistently suggested the idea that the most suitable way for a happy coexistence at home, school or company was to visualize the whole community as a family.

Aguirre's general structure was similar to a family's, consisting of a father who was the Company and children who were the workers. The children owed obedience and respect to the father as he provided food, housing and education. It could be said that the reason why Aguirre community continued in prosperity for years was due to the relationship that developed between its inhabitants and the Company. "To you, who are newly come to *Central Aguirre Sugar Company*, we dedicate this little booklet to show that you have been chosen to become a member of our family because we have faith and confidence in you."¹²⁹

The third theme is the process of negotiation and resistance that took place in the community of Aguirre. Speaking with Aguirre's residents, one can imagine a community where prosperity reigned, violence was not a common term, and poverty did not exist

¹²⁹ Rice, E. F., *You and Aguirre*.

because each individual had what it took to survive. This seemingly egalitarian society was maintained by stifling the autonomy and free expression of individuals, resulting in of discontent and quiet resistance to the system. The descriptions Aguirre residents provide of the community recreate an image of peace and harmony, but every day private negotiation and resistance processes were carried out.

Behind such an imagined perfection, it is possible to find a range of feelings and opinions that residents and managers of the Company overlooked. This image of perfection outlined by the Company and supported by society had the principal purpose of maintaining order and control over its employees, thus ensuring their maximum work performance. The company-sustained harmony developed a concept of community and brotherhood, by which it ensured the division between classes without causing discomfort among the population.

The company system sought to justify the division between classes, by keeping the population satisfied, granting them the necessary elements to survive, and giving them little reason to complain. In Aguirre, the upper class controlled economic resources, and had better living conditions. This was often justified with the natural division of social classes, an idea introduced by the Company. However, this does not mean that the rest of the population was in agreement. It is important to note that although the inhabitants of Aguirre internalized the roles that society conferred on them, this did not mean they did not wish to live in the same conditions as upper class residents.

Among Aguirre inhabitants there always was some form of resistance, which can be analyzed at different levels. Between men and women there was resistance because of the inequalities in public participation, i.e. men and women saw that their participation ought not be limited only to the home in the case of women, or to certain positions in the Company in the case of men. They had the right to go to college, acquire knowledge and develop skills that would enable them to perform other work functions. However, due to their socioeconomic position or status in society, men and women were constrained to develop only in the fields pertaining to their class. There was resistance between the ‘*Central*’ and the workers due to the company policy of sorting workers by class and education.

Sometimes workers resented that other workers had greater opportunities and went further because of knowledge they had. For them it was unfair to not have equal opportunity to acquire more skills, which would have made them more qualified for certain jobs. Rocio Carvajal said that:

Rocio Carvajal: An American named Ayleen lived here; when she went to the hospital she gave me magazines in English for my daughters. She did not speak Spanish, she always spoke to me in English and one day my supervisor heard us and said: Why do you have to speak in English? (My supervisor did not speak English)

Alejandra (Interviewer): Do you think she was jealous? Rocio: Of course, if she (Ayleen) spoke to me in English, it would be a lack of education [for me] to reply in Spanish.

Alejandra: Do you think you have an advantage, being able to speak English, an advantage in comparison with the rest who did not speak English?

Rocio: That certainly placed me in a higher position in comparison with the rest, but also it was more complicated because with that position came jealousy.”¹³⁰

Discontent with the social classes was accompanied by a process of negotiation, in Aguirre, woman is the one who usually played the role of intermediary between the father as authority figure and the children. Sometimes this negotiation was effective and sometimes not. The woman, despite being distinguished as having a passive role, demonstrated her influence with negotiation at home, although social institutions often underestimated her role. In the Company, negotiation also existed as the worker's union strived for equality. This included equality between genders, since men and women were denied equal privileges by the Company.

To conclude, my research underscored that in order to understand gender relations, it is necessary to observe them as a complex network of relationships, which are part of a historical and political process. The information collected in Aguirre shows that the social structure was organized hierarchically favoring one class over another. This hierarchical structure was accepted by the community publicly, but privately rejected.

¹³⁰ Carvajal, Rocio. Interviewed by Alejandra Alvarez, Aguirre, Puerto Rico, August 10, 2012.

Many years after the mill's closure, the Aguirre Sugar Company town is still part of Aguirre inhabitants' memories. Their experiences were good and bad, but in general the community keeps sweet and happy memories. It is from the present that Aguirre's people wistfully contemplate the ruins of what is part of their identity. Most likely in the past, objection regarding the social system of the Company were in the forefront in the community, but now yearning for what once was in Aguirre overwhelms this community. When we talk about gender relations, we tend to generalize them as a battle between men and women. It is common to analyze these relationships like a competition, seeking to demonstrate which gender dominates the other. The present investigation illustrated that the relationships between the men and women of Aguirre were an exchange and negotiation process.

Men and women operated in different environments but that does not mean they could not switch roles or support each other. The exchange between genders varied according to economic and intellectual level. However, this exchange had limits defined by the parameters of society. Society in Aguirre as elsewhere creates a series of moral and ethical codes that direct community members' behavior.

The information collected also suggests that in Aguirre society, despite being largely dominated by the male gender, women's impact was wide. It is common to victimize women and present them as the weaker gender; even women themselves in their eagerness to defend their own rights tend to present themselves as victims. In many cases women certainly are victims, but in Aguirre's case, despite the difficult

circumstances, women negotiated their roles at home, in the community, or at the Company. Thus, women were integrated into the public sphere.

The study of gender relations is certainly a complex process, which implies analysis of people's ideas and behaviors in various contexts and circumstances, such as in the present case study. Another possible analysis would be to analyze the population that comprised the Central Aguirre Sugar Company from its beginning and see how the population was gradually mixed as new players appeared on the scene. It is important to note that in 1898 when the Company started, Puerto Rico was going through a transition process from the European economy to the new American system; this had repercussions not only on economics but also on the social and political structure of the island.

It is noteworthy that the abolition of slavery on the island was proclaimed in 1873. A large number of workers in the sugar companies were African slaves many of whom even after the abolition of slavery continued working at Aguirre. It could be interesting to analyze how the population after slavery was integrated into the new economic system. Did the emancipated slaves receive the same conditions and benefits as other workers? How did they participate in the social and hierarchical structure of society and the Company?

The last locomotive in Aguirre stopped working in 1991; the last time the siren sounded was an epic event in the memory of the inhabitants of Aguirre. Despite the passing of the years, residents of this community can still smell the sugar and remember

the beautiful village of Aguirre. Many of the houses are still intact, as if the whole town along with its inhabitants has been frozen in time. Perhaps the company town is not frozen in time, but it certainly is in the Aguirreños' memories.

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Appendix 1

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1. Figure 1.1. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Maps. U.S. National Atlas 1970.
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