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A Benevolent Empire? Exile, Politics of Relief, and Subjecthood in Havana (1790–1810)

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Abstract

This article delves into the emergence of Havana as site of refuge for exiles from the Greater Caribbean between approximately 1790 and 1810. It examines the institutional and political governance of relief to Spanish and foreign exiles in Havana, looking at the intricate intersection between notions of imperial relief, loyalty, and subjecthood. It scrutinises the confluence of two waves of exile migration to Havana from the island of Hispaniola, underscoring how both migratory flows were intricately linked and influenced one another. One involved the exile of French settlers from Saint-Domingue during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), while the other entailed the relocation of Spanish-speaking settlers from Santo Domingo following the Treaty of Basel (1795), which officially ceded the Spanish colony to the French Republic. Through the lens of relief policies, this article shows how colonial officials in Cuba aimed to present an imperial self-image of benevolence towards Spanish subjects and foreigners in exile who were perceived as loyal to the Spanish crown. Focusing on the category of *emigrados*, this article correspondingly highlights the instrumental use by these exiles of concepts of imperial loyalty and subjecthood, and their role in claiming special entitlements to material and financial assistance from Spanish colonial authorities.

Keywords: Exile; Subjecthood; Relief; Spanish Empire; Age of Revolutions

Introduction

The circulation of revolutionary actors and ideas across the Caribbean in the Age of Revolutions has been the subject of a vibrant historiographical field, vastly renewed during the last two decades. By contrast, migrations – forced or otherwise – of loyalist and counterrevolutionary subjects in the wake of revolutions and the shockwaves of imperial warfare remain comparatively less studied. This article explores Havana and its hinterland as transnational hub of Atlantic revolutions and site of refuge for exiles between roughly 1790 and 1810. It locates Havana's region as the confluence of two interrelated migratory streams from the island of Hispaniola to Cuba. It delves into the relocation to Havana of Spanish-speaking colonists from Santo Domingo following the Second Treaty of Basel (1795) that officially ceded it to the French Republic and of exiled colonists from Saint-Domingue in the context of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Cast directly or indirectly in exile by the Haitian Revolution, both populations shared the same micro-geography of exile despite differences in subjecthood, but have been scarcely studied in tandem so far. The role of the Spanish Caribbean as site of refuge for both loyalist Spanish so-called *emigrados* and foreign refugees from revolution and warfare warrants further examination. While

studies tend to focus on Spanish subjects in exile as a result of the wars for independence across Spanish America from the early 1810s onwards, exile migrations within – and to – the Spanish Empire at the turn of the century have comparatively received less attention.¹

This article examines the governance of relief provided to Spanish- and French-speaking exiles who settled in Havana and its surrounding areas, emphasising how concepts of imperial loyalty and subjecthood were strategically employed to claim entitlements and justify deservingness for relief and protection from Spanish colonial authorities. It explores how the label of *emigrados* functioned as a framework for articulating a protective and inclusive conception of Spanish subjecthood in a context of imperial crisis born out of transatlantic revolution and warfare. The article demonstrates that exiles from Santo Domingo, in their interactions with imperial authorities in Havana about relief, framed their subjecthood as a voluntary commitment rather than a coincidental status, thereby strengthening their claims for assistance. In doing so, they invoked a traditional discourse of colonial difference to assert particularistic entitlements to relief that superseded an emerging universalist rhetoric of rights. Additionally, the article delves into how a minority of French exiles from Saint-Domingue sought to use the *emigrados* category to their advantage, leveraging malleable notions of Spanish subjecthood as a negotiated and relational status. These French *emigrados* emphasised the existence of strong political ties with the community of Spanish subjects that transcended pre-existing national distinctions. Their voluntary embrace of – and appeal to – Spanish subjecthood, as a means of asserting political belonging and claiming rights to assistance and protection, reflects a transitional period during which the rigid binaries between national subjects or citizens and foreign aliens were not yet firmly established. Instead, as claims for relief show, subjecthood was actively negotiated from below, shaped through the agency of exiles themselves, rather than being strictly defined by imperial authorities.²

While Spanish- and French-speaking exiles from Hispaniola sought to mobilise the close connection between subjecthood and relief to their advantage, colonial officials in Cuba strived to project an imperial self-image of benevolence and generosity towards exiled Spanish subjects and foreigners deemed loyal to the Spanish crown. The provision of relief to *emigrados* generated an ad hoc fiscal and political infrastructure that further entrenched Havana's central position in the polycentric Spanish Empire. As Regina Grafe has emphasised, charity became a crucial instrument of imperial legitimacy during the colonial

¹ On Spanish loyalist exiles: Jesús Ruiz de Gordejuela Urquijo, *La Expulsión de los Españoles de México y su Destino Incierto* (Seville: CSIC, 2006); Sarah C. Chambers, "Rewarding Loyalty after the Wars of Independence in Spanish America: Displaced Bureaucrats in Cuba," in *War, Demobilization and Memory: The Legacy of War in the Era of Atlantic Revolutions*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Michael Row (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2016), 238–53; Nicolás A. González-Quintero, "Exile and Empire in the 19th-Century Spanish Caribbean" (PhD. Diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2020); Sarah C. Chambers, "Expatriados en la Madre Patria: El Estado de Limbo de los Emigrados Realistas en el Imperio Español, 1790–1830," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina* 32:2 (2021), 48–73. A few studies on Saint-Domingue exiles in western Cuba include Alain Yacou, "La Présence Française dans la Partie Occidentale de l'Île de Cuba au Lendemain de la révolution de Saint Domingue," *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 74:275 (1987), 149–88; Gabriel Debien, "Réfugiés de Saint-Domingue expulsés de la Havane en 1809," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, no. 25 (1978), 555–610. On Saint-Domingue exiles in Santiago de Cuba, see Agnès Renault, *D'une île rebelle à une île fidèle: Les Français de Santiago de Cuba (1791–1825)* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publication des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2012); Adriana Chira, *Patchwork Freedoms: Law, Slavery, and Race beyond Cuba's Plantations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 66–104.

² Recent studies have addressed the notion of subjecthood in the Caribbean during the Age of Revolutions, particularly from a British imperial perspective. See, among others, Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of Belonging in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jan C. Jansen, "Aliens in a Revolutionary World: Refugees, Migration Control and Subjecthood in the British Atlantic, 1790s–1820s," *Past & Present* 255:1 (2022), 189–231; April Lee Hatfield, *Boundaries of Belonging: English Jamaica and the Spanish Caribbean, 1655–1715* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

period. In these times of war and revolutionary uncertainty, state-sponsored relief continued playing a crucial role as an engine for reasserting the bonds of imperial subjecthood and belonging. Thus, support to *emigrados* in Havana became increasingly relevant to preserving the empire's legitimacy, as the capacity of colonial authorities in Havana to provide relief to fellow Spanish subjects was based on common subjecthood and monarchical loyalty, underpinning estimates of legitimacy and *buen gobierno* (good governance). Imperial humanitarian policies directed at both national and foreign subjects became emerging benchmarks and vehicles of state sovereignty across the Atlantic world. Notwithstanding a royal treasury seriously underfunded and overstretched by warfare and repeated interruptions of transatlantic trade, a royal order tasked imperial authorities across the Spanish Caribbean with the responsibility of providing relief to the thousands of displaced Spanish subjects leaving Hispaniola after 1795.³

Exiles, far from being passive recipients of imperial relief, often exerted political agency in claiming and shaping the administration of relief provided by the host state. Moreover, by engaging with the notion of Spanish subjecthood and claiming entitlements to imperial relief through petitions, both Spanish and French subjects in exile in Havana and its hinterland participated in the transformation of Spain's imperial rule in the Caribbean. These *emigrados* actively sought to shape the policies of relief that emerged in piecemeal fashion from 1795 onward, formulating their own understanding of Spanish subjecthood while articulating in the process their own vision of its boundaries and the entitlements it entailed. The unprecedented relocation of so many Spanish subjects within the borders of the empire posed an unforeseen challenge for Spanish authorities in Cuba. As an incubator of imperial humanitarianism, Havana was at the forefront of a self-declared benevolent empire that claimed to assume strong moral and material responsibilities towards exiled subjects belonging to the transatlantic Spanish nation. Not all *emigrados*, however, stood on an equal footing. As it turned out, imperial relief to *emigrados* did not simply rest on old imperatives of Christian charity and monarchical magnanimity, but entailed an ambition to restore a certain vision of colonial order. While limited finances soon greatly constrained the assistance provided by imperial officials to the newcomers, a tension lingered on between general instructions from Spain to assist all Spanish subjects in exile and the actual relief policy, which still heavily relied on Old Regime difference markers such as race, social status, and gender. What type of relief did Spanish colonial authorities provide to exiles in Havana and its hinterland, and what were the limitations of this assistance? How did imperial relief intersect with broader debates about the boundaries and significance of Spanish subjecthood? What role did the category of *emigrados* play in the imperial governance of exile and in exiles' efforts to claim assistance?

From Hispaniola to Cuba: *Emigrados* amid Revolutions and Warfare

The exile of colonists from Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo stemmed from the escalating political and social unrest in the French colony starting in 1789, which eventually spread across the Spanish border, engulfing the island of Hispaniola as a whole. The revolutions that unfolded in Saint-Domingue encompassed a diverse array of participants.

³ On polycentric empire, see Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, and Gaetano Sabatini, eds., *Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2012). On charity during the early modern period in the Spanish Empire, see Regina Grafe, "Empires of Charity: Imperial Legitimacy and Profitable Charity in Colonial Spanish America," *New Global Studies* 12:2 (2018), 131–55. As David Sartorius notes, "the importance of popular support for European rule in the colonial Americas had almost always been necessary for the establishment of empire, and for much of the colonial period that support coalesced around the figure of the benevolent and protective monarch." David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013), 5.

First, many white settlers pursued colonial autonomy and fought off the legal and political changes brought about by revolution and the advent of the French Republic (1792). Second, free *gens de couleur*, many of whom had attained a certain degree of economic prosperity (including through slave ownership), advocated for political and racial equality. Third, beginning in August 1791, enslaved people rose up in northern Saint-Domingue, seeking to shake off the shackles of bondage through armed insurrection. Over time, the objectives of these various groups converged and diverged, leading to fluctuating and ambivalent political and military alliances contingent upon prevailing circumstances. As violence escalated, an increasing number of Black insurgents, free people of colour, and white settlers temporarily or permanently sought refuge across the Spanish border in Santo Domingo. Meanwhile, Spanish authorities in Santo Domingo maintained a policy of non-intervention while secretly cultivating contacts with the Black insurgents. In 1793, upon the outbreak of war between Spain and the French Republic, these initial informal connections metamorphosed into direct Spanish involvement in the Saint-Domingue revolutions in a context of open warfare between the two nations on the island of Hispaniola. Inextricably, Santo Domingo was brought into what Graham Nessler has termed “an islandwide struggle for freedom,” particularly through exile migration.⁴

In the early modern Spanish Empire, *emigración* was the umbrella term that designated both forced and voluntary migration, embracing both what is commonly – and artificially – referred to nowadays as the mobility of refugees and migrants. *Emigración* contrasted with the alternative notion of *destierro*, which referred to a more or less extensive and definitive banishment resulting from a criminal offense. The legal practice of *destierro* dated back to the Castilian medieval corpus of the *Siete Partidas*, designating expulsion policies exerted by the state. It was mobilised against convicted criminals, vagrants, people deemed to be disruptive of the socioeconomic order, and, occasionally, against disgraced political elites. *Emigración*, by contrast, did not necessarily have such legal connotations, as it simply referred to seeking refuge in another polity after voluntary or forced exile due to actual or potential political persecution in the country of origin. The related term *emigrados* gained traction in the Spanish language in the context of the French Revolution, derived from the French word *émigré*, to refer to legally free people in exile on political grounds.⁵

The *emigrados* category took a more tangible form for the Hispanophone world following the second Treaty of Basel, signed on 22 July 1795 between Spain and France, which ceded the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo to France in return for peninsular lands lost during the Franco-Spanish War (1793–5). According to the treaty’s provisions, colonists in Santo Domingo who wished to relocate within the Spanish Empire were given a period of one year to freely evacuate the colony with their properties (in practice, this period was often extended). Royal law initially established Cuba as the only destination where the *emigrados* could resettle. However, due to pressure from *emigrados* themselves, in 1796 the islands of Puerto Rico and Trinidad (just before its takeover by the British Empire) were added to

⁴ For detailed treatments, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 83–145; Graham T. Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle for Freedom: Revolution, Emancipation, and Reenslavement in Hispaniola, 1789–1809* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 23–61; Charlton W. Yingling, *Siblings of Soil: Dominicans and Haitians in the Age of Revolutions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022), 37–99.

⁵ Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Imagen del Exilio y del Exiliado en la España del Siglo XIX,” *Ayer*, no. 47 (2002), 35–56; Romy Sánchez and Juan Luis Simal, “Lexiques et Pratiques du Destierro: l’Exil Politique Espagnol en Péninsule et à l’Outre-mer, de 1814 aux Années 1880,” *Hommes & Migrations*, no. 1321 (April–June 2018): 23–31; Chambers, “Expatriados en la Madre Patria”; Edward Blumenthal and Romy Sánchez, “Toward a History of Latin American Exile in the Nineteenth-Century: Introduction,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina* 32:2 (2021), 7–21. The exclusion of enslaved people from the category of *emigrados* is discussed later in the article.

the list of potential destinations. During the next decade and a half, at least 4,000 *emigrados* sought refuge in Cuba. Between 3 March and 17 September 1796, for instance, at least 994 *emigrados* set foot in Havana. Thousands more exiles resettled in other possessions of the Spanish Empire, such as Puerto Rico, or the provinces of New Granada and Venezuela. For instance, more than 1,800 *emigrados* arrived on the Spanish mainland in early 1801 following Toussaint Louverture's swift takeover of Santo Domingo, which materialised by force a transfer to the French Republic long left pending.⁶

The 1795 cession of Santo Domingo foreshadowed the process of territorial retreat and forced imperial reinvention that the Spanish Empire experienced during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with exiles bringing serious challenges to Spanish Caribbean soil.⁷ A royal order issued on 8 September 1795 provided for the support of *emigrados* from Santo Domingo with an "equivalent" of their lost properties and the reimbursement of the costs of their *emigración* to Cuba. However, no concrete instructions were given on how to organise and finance such assistance. Imperial officials in Cuba were left – for the most part – with the task of designing more specific policies in practice. They did so with meagre finances to fund such a program as remittances from New Spain did not reliably reach Havana due to warfare and the ensuing disruption of maritime navigation and trade.⁸ Series of policies were institutionalised haphazardly from below, generating continuous debates and negotiations over who – and to what extent – should be entitled to relief. The so-called Junta de Emigrados, a newly formed council featuring a handful of prominent figures from Havana's political and military elites, began coordinating its provision. It examined each case in consultation with the Contaduría General de Ejército y de Hacienda (thereafter Contaduría General), the main local branch of the Real Hacienda (royal treasury), as well as Havana's Intendencia (Intendancy). This council's main responsibilities included examining requests by *emigrados* concerning the pensions they received in Cuba, coordinating the distribution of pensions, and requesting remittances from New Spain.⁹

Being a native of Santo Domingo or having resided for a long time (*vecindad*) in this location before 1795 was the basis on which newcomers could legally claim pensions as *emigrados*, as the case of José González illustrates. In July 1804, González requested a regular pension and payment of his travel expenses to Cuba. However, the report of the Contaduría General showed that the claimant was a native of Havana and was temporarily living in Santo Domingo at the time of the transfer. The Junta de Emigrados therefore ruled that González's transportation expenses should be compensated, but did not recognise his pension entitlement, as his residence in Santo Domingo was purely "accidental" and did not amount to full-blown *vecindad*. The term *emigrados*, or *emigrado/a* in its singular

⁶ Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes, DE 2012 PA 47/8, Copie du Traité de Paix entre la République Française et le Roi d'Espagne, 4 Thermidor an 3 (22 July 1795). Estimate for Havana based on Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI), Estado 5B, 95, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 11 March 1796; AGI Estado 5B, 99, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 7 April 1796; AGI Estado 5B, 142, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 28 June 1796; AGI Estado 5B, 153, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 6 August 1796; AGI Estado 5B, 187, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 10 September 1796; AGI Estado 5B, 189, Luis de las Casas to Príncipe de la Paz, 19 September 1796; AGI, Estado 5B, 124 and 204. Carlos E. Deive, *Los Refugiados Franceses en Santo Domingo (1789–1801)* (Santo Domingo: Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña, 1984); Carlos E. Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas a Cuba (1795–1808)* (Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1989); Cristina Soriano, *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018).

⁷ Chambers, "Expatriados en la Madre Patria"; González Quintero, "Exile and Empire". See also González Quintero's contribution to this special issue.

⁸ AGI Estado 17, 12.

⁹ Harvard University, Houghton Library, José Augusto Escoto Cuban History and Literature Collection, Escribanía de Real Haciendas, Expediente seguido por el remate de los barracones para las familias emigradas de Santo Domingo (1797–1804); Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 46.

form, which initially referred to a condition (the experience of having emigrated), gradually crystallised into a distinct status to which expectations of support from the Spanish royal treasury became linked. In contrast, there was no such presumption of assistance for French colonists who had sought asylum in Cuba, although many did receive financial support from the Spanish authorities, as discussed later in this article.¹⁰

The category of *emigrados* therefore constituted a useful label for the identification and monitoring of a special class of subjects for whom the assistance of the royal treasury was to be merely transitory until they found adequate means of subsistence, stable income, and full integration into Cuban society, or one day returned to Santo Domingo. It proved expedient in organising relief distribution while avoiding fraud as well as the indefinite stay of unproductive vassals as a financial burden on a royal treasury already stretched to its limits. As explored below, the imperial authorities in Cuba were at pains to finance such relief, and were alert to possible fraud or any structural incentive for *emigrados* to remain unproductive by receiving overly generous pensions.¹¹

To guide its deliberations, the Junta de Emigrados often relied on thorough inquiries conducted by the Contaduría General. Decisions by colonial administrators about relief rested upon explicit criteria as well as normative assessments of character and behaviour. The Contaduría General in Havana closely monitored the households of these exiles, documenting their assets, livelihoods, and their exile trajectories from Hispaniola to Cuba. Bernardo Miyaya was one of many exiles who arrived in Havana in May 1796, where he began receiving one and a half real daily. Two months later, however, Miyaya returned to Santo Domingo. After losing all his properties in Hispaniola “with the revolution of the blacks,” Miyaya returned to Havana in September 1801. Six months later his pension was once more suspended on the grounds that he was able to sustain himself through his commercial activities. The official examining his case, however, noted that Miyaya was unable to make a living from his trade, although he was “very good-natured and abhor[ed] idleness,” and recommended resuming relief.¹²

Relief and Regimes of Difference

Within this framework of imperial relief, the category of *emigrados* framed claims of special merit for assistance in a discourse that was both intelligible to imperial officials in Cuba and politically secure, appealing to the monarch’s protection and fitting well within the established colonial order. By emphasising the unforeseen loss incurred as a consequence of their loyalty, it rooted appeals for financial and material assistance in the prevailing themes of allegiance to the Spanish monarchy. Beyond its purely institutional use, the *emigrados* category gradually became part of the self-proclaimed identity of Dominicans who had resettled in the Spanish Caribbean as collateral victims of the revolution. But this collective identity label still allowed for the expression of individual status. Besides placing their condition as loyal Spanish subjects in exile centre stage, *emigrados* framed their deprivation as a subjective experience, coupled with demands for justice through relief that aligned with the hierarchical expectations of what was owed to individuals based on their rank in colonial society.¹³

¹⁰ AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804.

¹¹ AGI Estado 13, 55.

¹² AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804. Miyaya was likely referring to Toussaint Louverture’s effective takeover of Santo Domingo in early 1801. The suspension of his pension was determined by the 27 January 1802 ruling of the Junta, which halted allowances for self-sufficient *emigrados* engaged in trade or holding office.

¹³ On subjective conceptions of poverty as relative to colonial hierarchies, see Cynthia E. Milton, *The Many Meanings of Poverty: Colonialism, Social Compacts and Assistance in Eighteenth-Century Ecuador* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

The Fernández sisters, María de los Dolores, María de la Concepción, Petronilla, and Felipa, daughters of infantry captain Manuel Fernández, exemplify how *emigrados* constructed narratives of loss and loyalty to establish their particular merit. In their petition, they requested an additional monthly allowance of twenty-five pesos each, in addition to their current pensions. They underscored the impact of losing their estate in close proximity to Santo Domingo city, which had facilitated their ties to affluent families within the colony. An official reviewing their case acknowledged that the sisters “lack[ed] in this place which is entirely foreign to them all those relations which might afford them some relief from their unhappiness.” As stated in a report by the Contaduría General, due to the high costs of living in Havana, they faced severe financial difficulties and were on the verge of resorting to begging in order to meet their basic needs. The sisters highlighted their family’s history of service to the Crown, including military and administrative positions, and presented testimonies from respected figures in Santo Domingo, affirming their nobility and good conduct. They also stressed their unwavering allegiance to Spanish rule, a common theme in *emigrados’* pleas.¹⁴

As Sarah C. Chambers notes, *emigrados* relocated within the empire while asserting their belonging to the broader Spanish nation (this emphasis on belonging long predated the constitutional debates on Spanish identity in Cádiz), although *emigrados* simultaneously underlined how exile had made them strangers in their own fatherland. Yet this collective use of the category of *emigrados*, based on former residency (*vecindad*) in Santo Domingo, did not sideline regimes of statutory and racial differentiation applied by both imperial authorities and *emigrados* themselves. Over time, the Junta de Emigrados established a differential relief system. Those *emigrados* who were recognised as “distinguished” subjects or heads of households received three reales per day for subsistence (instead of one and a half for regular *emigrados*) and ten pesos monthly for housing (instead of six).¹⁵

As relief went hand in hand with the social and economic status (*calidad*) of the newcomer, many of the claims for differential treatment by *emigrados* were thus based on their status prior to their transfer from Hispaniola to Cuba.¹⁶ The way in which regimes of difference intersected with relief provision reveals a tension between minimal humanitarian assistance aimed at preventing destitution and vagrancy (guaranteeing a basic level of subsistence) and more restorative support aimed at reaffirming social and economic statuses that predated exile (assistance commensurate to status), even if only symbolically. Thus, many *emigrados* sought to demonstrate their distinction or nobility, frequently debating and negotiating claims of high status with imperial officials in Cuba.

In January 1805, the Junta de Emigrados examined the request of Domingo Ramos and Rosa de Mena to receive a pension as persons belonging to “the noble class.” The Intendancy had decided four months earlier that the couple would only receive an ordinary allowance. They contested this decision. After examining testimonies of fellow *emigrados*, evidence of their *limpieza de sangre* (racial purity of their lineage) as well as proof of the distinguished military and religious service of their relatives, the council finally determined

¹⁴ AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804. The sisters provided testimonies made by canonical reader Julián José del Barrio, a former priest in Santo Domingo city named Pedro Valera, and by former *vecino* Bernardo Correa. As head of household, the elder María de los Dolores received three reales daily for subsistence and ten pesos monthly for housing. The narratives of misery experienced by *emigrados* in Havana cannot be dismissed as mere rhetorical devices. Many lost properties, capital, and enslaved individuals, leading to significant impoverishment. Similarly, the fear of poverty compelled some colonists to stay in Hispaniola, despite the potential risks posed by French rule, the spread of revolutionary ideals, and the looming threat of racial conflict.

¹⁵ *Obras del Excmo. Señor D. Francisco de Arango y Parreño* (Havana, 1888), 1:285–7; Chambers, “Expatriados en la Madre Patria.”

¹⁶ On *vecindad* and *calidad*, see Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003).

that Ramos and Mena were entitled to a higher pension. In November 1804, the Junta de Emigrados approved a similar request by Ignacio Cabrera after he demonstrated that his family descended from the founders of Montechristi in Santo Domingo and that he held the “privilege of distinction or local nobility,” as the Contaduría General’s examination attested.¹⁷ But petitions based on social distinction continued to pile up on the desks of colonial officials, who often expressed frustration at receiving unsubstantiated or fraudulent claims of high *calidad*.¹⁸

In addition to social and economic status as a marker of differentiation, differences between *emigrados* in terms of racial statuses and dependency relations were also re-naturalised once in Cuba. As Rebecca J. Scott and Carlos Venegas Fornias underscore, the recreation of slaveholding and dependency statuses in Cuba often implied a de facto return to slavery for many Black people whose legal status had *in theory* been altered by French general emancipation (1793–4).¹⁹ In Cuba, the term *emigrados* carried an implicit connotation of free status, as enslaved people were excluded from this label. If at all present in petitions for support, racial status was often alluded to or strongly suggested by proxies, but sometimes it was explicitly spelled out as an argument for special deservingness. In her request to have her pension raised to three reales per day, María de la Merced Ventura linked her racial status, her former socioeconomic status, and her *vecindad*. She explicitly stressed her whiteness and emphasised the loss of her home and of enslaved people in Santo Domingo in an attempt to buttress her claim.²⁰ While enslaved people were not entitled to relief, free people of colour, however, received some monetary and material assistance from the royal treasury. The *parda libre* María Merced, for instance, was one of the free people of colour entitled to relief. She received a monthly stipend and lived in Matanzas in one of twenty-five houses built specifically for *emigrados* on the outskirts of the city.²¹ The significant presence of free people of colour within the exile community, which was congruous with Santo Domingo’s racial composition by the eve of the Haitian Revolution, challenges the assumption that exile migration from Santo Domingo constituted primarily “white flight.”²² For instance, Ada Ferrer estimates that, out of 633 *emigrados* arriving in Havana in January 1796, 476 were non-white people.²³ Yet the relative underrepresentation of free people of colour among petitioners, compared to their significant presence within the Santo Domingo exile population, suggests that race had a filtering effect, with white *emigrados* – a minority subgroup – being disproportionately represented among relief beneficiaries and claimants.

The Limits of Benevolence

Overall, imperial relief provided to free Black people from Santo Domingo tended to be both more precarious and less generous. Officials from the Contaduría General often expressed

¹⁷ AGI Estado 2, 70, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 21 April 1805; Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Estado, 6367, 14.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Viguri’s argument on Simona de Fromesta’s unsubstantiated claim in AGI Cuba 1693, Luis de Viguri a Someruelos, 20 February 1800.

¹⁹ Rebecca J. Scott and Carlos Venegas Fornias, “María Coleta and the Capuchin Friar: Slavery, Salvation, and the Adjudication of Status,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76:4 (2019), 727–62.

²⁰ Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 107–8.

²¹ AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804, doc. no. 2. Debates on racial statuses arose regarding the assistance extended to *emigrados*. Francisco Arango and Captain Cayetano Reyna disagreed on whether *libertos* (freed slaves) should receive pensions. Reyna believed that their loyalty and support eligibility were demonstrated by following slaveholders to Cuba. Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 89–90.

²² See Yingling, *Siblings of Soil*, 101.

²³ *Obras del Excmo. Señor D. Francisco de Arango y Parreño*, 1:285; Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 21–2; Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, 137.

unease at the idea that many “women of colour” continued receiving financial support after the death of their *emigrado* husbands, arguing that it was improper that they should receive more relief than some white *emigradas* who – being neither married nor widows – were not officially entitled to as much support as them.²⁴ The provision of aid to free people of colour caused tensions between the various branches of the colonial administration involved in this relief program. The Junta de Emigrados tended to take a more liberal approach to applications from free people of colour, which clashed with the royal treasury officials’ preference for a rather minimal and exclusionary relief policy. During the summer of 1804, the *parda libre* María de la Luz Domínguez, from Puerto Príncipe, asked for the four pesos per month she had received until August 1803 as housing allowance. According to the report of the Contaduría General, the subsidy had been rescinded on the grounds that, at the time of her departure from Santo Domingo, the *parda libre* was not the head of household but instead part of auditor Pedro Catani’s household, who owned the house in which she lived. The Junta decided to uphold María de la Luz Domínguez’s right to a housing allowance, either because they considered the argument fallacious or because they wanted to assert their authority in this matter. Divergences among colonial officials over the treatment of free people of colour were symptomatic of broader institutional tensions over who exactly – and to what extent – should be entitled to relief.²⁵

Despite official efforts to prevent the concentration of *emigrados* in Havana, driven by prospects of economic opportunities offered by a booming plantation economy, the city offered them the best chance to remain close to the organs of imperial power that channelled relief. According to an 1807 Contaduría General report, aid provided to *emigrados* across Cuba from 1796 to 1805 amounted to approximately 1.325.556 pesos and five and a half reales. Those residing in Havana received over half of this total, precisely 695.117 pesos and three reales.²⁶ This hefty financial burden was further compounded by the unreliability and insufficiency of New Spain’s *situado*.²⁷ As soon as the first *emigrados* set foot on Cuban soil, fierce debates arose among the diverse colonial institutions involved in the governance of relief in Havana. These debates were by no means a Spanish specificity, as they resonated on an interimperial stage during the Age of Revolutions. British officers in Kingston clashed over relief to exiled Loyalists and to so-called French emigrants in Jamaica.²⁸ The same was

²⁴ AGI Cuba 1693, Juan José de la Hoz to Someruelos, 16 January 1804; AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804.

²⁵ AGI Estado 2, 70, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 21 April 1805; AGI Cuba 1693, Gómez Roubaud to Someruelos, 4 August 1804.

²⁶ AGI Estado 17, 86. This calculation provides an insightful indication of Havana’s prominence as place of settlement for *emigrados*. Santiago de Cuba came second with close to 350.000 pesos spent on support. By contrast, Baracoa, Holguín, Matanzas, Trinidad, Puerto del Príncipe, Bayamo, and San Juan de los Remedios were far behind in terms of relative expenses (put all together, about 237.000 pesos). Concerns for urban concentration in Havana contrasted with long-standing efforts to attract white settlers – as Spanish imperial reformers from the last third of the eighteenth century onwards viewed white colonisation as the best way to ensure Cuba’s loyalty, security, and economic prosperity – such as when the Conde de Mopox highlighted the benefits for Cuba of welcoming white *dominicanos* fleeing from Louverture’s incursion into Santo Domingo (AGI Cuba 1693, Conde de Mopox to Someruelos, 23 February 1801).

²⁷ On the fiscal structure of the Spanish colonial empire, see Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, “The Spanish Empire and Its Legacy: Fiscal Re-Distribution and Political Conflict in Colonial and Post-Colonial Spanish America,” *Journal of Global History* 1:2 (2006), 241–67; Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, “A Stakeholder Empire: The Political Economy of Spanish Imperial Rule in America,” *Economic History Review* 65:2 (2012), 609–51; Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars between Spain, Britain and France, 1760–1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). These fiscal difficulties and imperial crisis, to a significant extent, predated the outbreak of the Peninsular War. Brian R. Hamnett, *The End of Iberian Rule on the American Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 72–103.

²⁸ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: The Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire* (London: Harper, 2011); Jansen, “Aliens in a Revolutionary World.” See also Jannik Keindorf’s article in this special issue.

true of their counterparts on the US coast, faced with the massive influx of Saint-Domingue refugees fleeing the Haitian Revolution. In both cases, philanthropy took clearly racialised and exclusionary forms.²⁹

Starting from mid-1798, due to insufficient funds for assistance and the ongoing influx of *emigrados*, the Intendancy periodically proposed a temporary suspension of all pensions to address suspected fraud and encourage *emigrados* to distribute themselves across the island instead of concentrating in Havana. The Contaduría General also sounded the alarm about the royal treasury's depletion, calling for a more selective relief policy. However, this restrictive stance caused frequent friction with the Junta de Emigrados. The case of José de Heredia illustrates such tensions. The Intendancy suspended José's pension in May 1802 following his marriage to a Cuban woman named Josefa Ferrer, claiming that the couple could subsist without state aid. However, the Junta de Emigrados judged the decision "arbitrary." Although Ferrer's family was indeed quite well off, the council took issue with the fact that Heredia had been essentially sent to live at the Ferrers' expense and instructed the reinstatement of his pension.³⁰

During a session of the Junta de Emigrados held on 26 September 1800, influential landowner and political figure Francisco de Arango y Parreño emphasised the necessity of providing *emigrados* with unconditional and unrestricted support in the absence of fair compensation. This support should be long-term rather than temporary and contingent upon specific conditions. For Arango, the 1795 royal order did not establish any limitation in time or discrimination between persons: on this basis, no *emigrados* should be deprived of a pension without new royal instructions or the provision of just compensation (*equivalente*). With the only exceptions – enshrined in early practice and set as policy at the turn of the century – of "individuals who benefit from salaries [from the royal treasury], the *libertos* who left slavery here, and intruders [*sic*] who came here before 8 September [1795]," all *emigrados* were to continue receiving financial assistance for subsistence and housing.³¹ Cayetano de Reyna, special commissioner in charge of distributing relief to *emigrados*, articulated a similarly liberal though not entirely disinterested vision of their resettlement in Cuba. At the Junta de Emigrados held on 12 June 1800, Reyna underscored the uniqueness of the experience of *emigración* in an impassioned plea for compassion and proactive assistance to subjects thrown out of Hispaniola. Beyond humanitarian motives, Reyna sought to emphasise the benefits of welcoming loyal *emigrados* as stepping stone to colonisation with free settlers in Cuba, an argument with particular resonance at a time of a spectacular increase in the introduction of enslaved captives on the island via the transatlantic and inter-Caribbean slave trades.³²

By contrast, Intendant Luis de Viguri stressed the urgency of reform. He argued that, with an annual total hovering around a hundred thousand pesos, pensions had become a significant burden on state coffers. Viguri strongly disapproved of the largely

²⁹ Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). See also Megan Maruschke's article in this special issue.

³⁰ AGI Estado 2, 70, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 21 April 1805.

³¹ *Obras del Excmo. Señor D. Francisco de Arango y Parreño*, 1:289–93. On alleged fraud, see Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 85–6.

³² Deive, *Las Emigraciones Dominicanas*, 133 and 139–51. On Cuba's slave trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Elena Schneider, "African Slavery and Spanish Empire: Imperial Imaginings and Bourbon Reform in Eighteenth-Century Cuba and Beyond," *Journal of Early American History* 5:1 (2015), 3–29; Michael Zeuske, "Out of the Americas: Slave Traders and the Hidden Atlantic in the Nineteenth-Century," *Atlantic Studies* 15:1 (2018), 103–35; Martín Rodrigo y Alharilla, "Spanish Merchants and the Slave Trade: From Legality to Illegality, 1814–1870," in *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire*, ed. Josep M. Fradera and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 176–99; Pierre Force and Carlos Venegas Fornias, "Cuba as a Center of the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Carricaburu Family Network, 1791–1820," *William and Mary Quarterly* 82:1 (2025), 49–86.

indiscriminate granting of allowances to *emigrado* families without assessing whether they were in urgent need of relief. While he considered generosity to fellow Spanish subjects commendable, the Intendant argued that excessive benevolence discouraged many *emigrados* from finding a steady and honest source of income. In turn, many families already lived from sugar and coffee estates or from revenues derived from husbandry or other trades that provided them with “enough not to consider them in the class of beggar.” Viguri therefore advocated a rapid reform – preferably sponsored by the metropolitan royal treasury, trumping the local Junta de Emigrados in that matter – as he argued that pensions should only be distributed to *emigrados* in conditions of “real need” (*verdadera necesidad*).³³

Far from being passive spectators of these debates, *emigrados* themselves intervened in controversies between colonial officials. Juan Bautista Oyarzabal, a prominent colonist from Santo Domingo (he had operated the Boca Nigua plantation, the scene of a major slave revolt in 1796) and representative of the *emigrado* community in Cuba, supported several families of officers from Santo Domingo whose pensions had been stopped because they had temporarily left Havana. In his plea, Oyarzabal criticised officials of the Contaduría General for their penchant for finding grounds to stop funding pensions and discriminate among *emigrados*, while praising the Junta de Emigrados for fighting back against suspensions.³⁴ Amidst these intra-imperial debates, petitions by *emigrados* frequently bore fruit and partly shaped relief policies in Havana. In January 1802, the Junta de Emigrados ruled that the wives and children of displaced officials who received *sueldos* (salaries) in Cuba, under the condition of being native or *vecinos* of Santo Domingo, would henceforth be entitled to relief – as opposed to relatives born in Cuba – after examining several cases of this type.³⁵

Relief and Subjecthood

The *vecindad* of claimants was a determining criterion for eligibility to imperial relief, prevailing over strict notions of subjecthood, as argued above. The case of José de los Santos Hernández exemplifies this point. The Contaduría examined Hernández’s case in August 1804, determining that he was a native from the Dutch colony of Curaçao who had resided in Santo Domingo for more than ten years prior to his exile. Both the officials of the Contaduría General and the Junta de Emigrados consequently considered Hernández as a *vecino* who should be entitled to relief, as were other foreigners with a similarly documented long-term *vecindad* in Santo Domingo. The implication was that imperial relief was not reserved exclusively for Spanish subjects, and imperial allegiance – as suggested by long-term residency – represented a vehicle for the inclusion of certain non-natives as relief beneficiaries. This question emerged with particular acuity as Saint-Domingue exiles began setting foot on Cuban soil from the early 1790s onwards.³⁶

Their settlement took place against the backdrop of colonial fears of revolutionary contagion and race war. While a majority of them settled in eastern Cuba (especially in Santiago

³³ AGI Estado 13, 55, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados held on 27 January 1802. See especially Viguri to Miguel Cayetano Soler, 19 April 1802.

³⁴ AGI Estado 17, 12. On Oyarzabal and the Boca Nigua slave revolt, consult Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle*, 62–3 and 125; Yingling, *Siblings of Soil*, 112–8.

³⁵ AGI Estado 13, 55, Report of Contaduría General de Ejército to Intendencia General, 18 February 1802. *Emigrados* who settled in Puerto Rico, the Spanish mainland, and other Spanish colonies also successfully lobbied for relief – with Oyarzabal presiding over such efforts. On 26 October 1803, a royal order confirmed that *emigrados* in Spanish American colonies other than Cuba should be assisted by the “benevolence of the king” (in other words, by funds from the Real Hacienda) exactly as *emigrados* in Cuba had been until then. See AGI Estado 17, 12; Soriano, *Tides of Revolution*, 77–114.

³⁶ AGI Estado 2, 70, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 21 April 1805.

de Cuba in 1803–4),³⁷ at least a thousand opted for Havana's hinterland. Spanish offers of asylum to these newcomers were based on piecemeal refugee policies rather than a coherent policy of imperial philanthropy. Colonial records unveil the systematically problematic arrival of Saint-Domingue exiles in Cuba, especially with regard to free and enslaved Black people who faced multiple barriers to their entry as well as repeated threats of banishment, particularly when they hailed from the French Caribbean. Racially restrictive Spanish offers of asylum in Cuba were primarily driven by solidarity with fellow white slaveholders and the imperative to grant "hospitality" – even if only temporarily – to exiled subjects of an allied nation. Running alongside fears of political and social subversion, the granting of asylum to Saint-Domingue exiles became problematic in yet another way as intricate ties between French-speaking exiles and the Spanish nation forged in Hispaniola resurfaced in Cuba. Their cases, caught in the limbo of discrete subjecthoods, raised pressing questions about the precise limits of the *emigrado* status and the extent to which imperial support should extend beyond Spanish natives.³⁸

Far from drawing strict lines of subjecthood that firmly separated Spanish from French nationals, the term *emigrados* was applied rather indiscriminately to both Spanish-speaking and French-speaking free exiles in Cuba. From 1791 onwards, Spanish authorities in Cuba often designated free French exiles from Saint-Domingue as *emigrados franceses* as the label emphasised the political underpinnings of their forced migration from one island to the other. This undifferentiated designation followed the established practice in pre-1795 Spanish Santo Domingo. During the conflict between Spain and the French Republic on Hispaniola from 1793 to 1795, Saint-Domingue colonists seeking asylum in Spanish settlements were labelled *emigrados*. Some obtained imperial support in Santo Domingo based on military or civilian service to the Spanish Crown, or due to personal vulnerabilities like widowhood, old age, disability, illness, or extreme destitution. In July 1794, for instance, Spanish authorities in the town of San Juan drew up a list of thirty-nine *emigrados franceses* who had received financial assistance – from two to four reales per day – during the previous month, either on account of their imperial loyalty or their position as vulnerable strangers to whom pity ought to be extended.³⁹ In Santo Domingo, the management and assistance to exiles from Saint-Domingue fell under the same administrative branch as that of French prisoners of war, but the label of *emigrados* served to strictly differentiate people considered as legitimate, loyal, and politically safe refugees from the class of captives and convicts.⁴⁰

During the course of the war between Spain and France, as Saint-Domingue exiles crossed imperial boundaries in Hispaniola to the Spanish side, their subjecthood became somewhat hybrid and ambiguous, first in Santo Domingo, and then in Cuba, where many relocated after 1795. When news of the second Treaty of Basel reached Santo Domingo city on 18 October 1795, most of the French colonists who had taken refuge on the former

³⁷ Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, COL CC9 B 22, Bascher Boisgely to Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies, Santiago de Cuba, 27 Pluviôse an XII (17 February 1804); Archives Départementales de la Gironde, Bordeaux, Fonds Faure, 47J, box 1, Reytre frères to M. Faure, négociant, Santiago de Cuba, 19 September 1803.

³⁸ See Archivo General de Simancas, Simancas (hereafter AGS), Secretaría de Guerra (hereafter SGU) 6851, 34, Gardoqui to Conde del Campo de Alange, 3 May 1794; AGS, SGU 6851, 7, Luis de las Casas to Conde del Campo de Alange, 8 February 1794. The term "hospitality" was most commonly used by Spanish officials in Cuba when referring to granting asylum to exiles from Saint-Domingue. See also Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*.

³⁹ Archivo General de la Nación, Dominican Republic, Reales Cajas de Santo Domingo, Época Colonial Española 26, 6.

⁴⁰ Archivo General de la Nación, Dominican Republic, Reales Cajas de Santo Domingo, Época Colonial Española 28, 6. As later in Cuba, support to French *emigrados* weighed significantly on the Spanish treasury. Juan de Labastida and Juan González Ferino, accountants of the Real Hacienda, estimated that around 18,000 pesos had been spent on support to French *emigrados* in Santo Domingo city between August and December 1795 only. See also Soriano, *Tides of Revolution*.

Spanish side and had become Spanish vassals of Carlos IV after taking an oath of allegiance tried to escape French republican rule and abolitionist legislation by departing from Hispaniola.⁴¹

Once in Cuba, many of these exiles claimed entitlements to imperial relief. Shortly before the evacuation of Fort-Dauphin, Désirée Platil, originally from Cap-Français, followed the Spanish army to Bayajá (Fort-Dauphin) and later relocated to Havana. Accompanying her were an enslaved man named Guillaume and a Black person named José, described as “free but with the same circumstances as a slave” in colonial records. In Cuba, Désirée was registered as *emigrada* and received a pension.⁴² In the rural district of Güines, French *emigrados* and *emigradas* with diverse connections to the Spanish nation formed a small community. Marie-Françoise Bosquets, born in Cap-Français, settled there in 1795 along with her mother Reine, both of whom were “pensioned [sic] by the king of Spain.” Her husband was a carpenter and vase-maker who had sailed from Cap-Français to Cuba in 1797; twelve years later the household had grown with “three Spanish children” according to a local official. Nearby lived Victoire Audibert, a native from Saint-Domingue who also received an allowance from the Spanish royal treasury.⁴³

In Cuba, official recognition and treatment as *emigrados* also encompassed free Blacks of French origin, with notable examples in the lives of Ramona Jacobo and her sister Bárbara. Ramona, widow of Georges Biassou, the renowned leader of the Black Auxiliaries who died in 1801, received a substantial monthly stipend of thirty pesos, while Bárbara was granted five pesos. Ramona was married to Pierre Bidot, and Bárbara to Jean de Bua, a native of Port-au-Prince who had pledged his loyalty to Spain in Fort-Dauphin during the war between France and Spain. Both men found work as bakers in Havana’s bustling Calvario neighbourhood.⁴⁴

The presence of French *emigrados* and *emigradas* in Havana’s hinterland, receiving regular assistance from the Spanish treasury in Cuba, can therefore be in great part accounted by the fact that the island received most of the Saint-Domingue exiles who had taken refuge in Spanish Santo Domingo before 1795.⁴⁵ It reflects the enduring ties of loyalty forged between Saint-Domingue exiles and the transatlantic Spanish national community, manifested through relief practices. Dominique Lafargue, a former surgeon in the Spanish royal navy in Santo Domingo, settled in Wajay and established a coffee estate in San Andrés, living with the *parda libre* Rose Dumas and their six children, four of whom received allowances from the Spanish royal treasury.⁴⁶ The distribution of Spanish pensions to these exiles indicates that imperial relief in Cuba paved the way to a rather inclusive conception of imperial belonging and subjecthood, a conception promoted by these very exiles. In May 1805, for instance, Jeanne Grenot, described as a French national “*emigrada de Santo Domingo*,” solicited relief from the Spanish royal treasury and to be officially considered as “*Española dominicana*” (Dominican Spaniard).⁴⁷

⁴¹ Deive, *Refugiados Franceses*, 131–2.

⁴² Archivo Nacional de la República de Cuba (hereafter ANC), Asuntos Políticos, leg. 252, 2, Segunda lista de los asientos correspondientes a las familias de Santo Domingo, f°10–11; ANC, Asuntos Políticos, leg. 252, 3, Lista segunda para llevar los asientos de las familias de Santo Domingo que gozan pensión para pagar las habitaciones que ocupan, f°56; AGI Cuba 1702, Matías Pérez Sánchez to Someruelos, Bahía Honda, 2 April 1809.

⁴³ AGI Cuba 1683, Pedro Diago to Someruelos, 29 April 1809.

⁴⁴ AGI Cuba 1702, José Rafael Manresa to Someruelos, 11 August 1808. On relatives of Black Auxiliaries in Havana, see Miriam Franchina, “From Slave to Royal Vassal: Jean-Francois’s Negotiation Strategies in the Haitian Revolution,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42:4 (2021), 777–802.

⁴⁵ ANC, Miscelánea de Libros 2014, “Lista de los Franceses que se presentan a la Junta de Vigilancia para ser examinados conforme al espíritu de la Proclama colocada al principio de este libro” (hereafter Lista de los Franceses).

⁴⁶ AGI Cuba 1702, Mariano Espinosa Jiménez to Someruelos, Noticia de los franceses que existen en este Partido de Wajay, 9 August 1808.

⁴⁷ AGI Cuba 1693, Gómez Roubaud to Someruelos, 6 May 1805.

As Tamar Herzog has shown, practices of naturalisation in early modern Spanish America began to deviate to some degree from medieval Castilian traditions of paperless naturalisation-by-integration to a local community (integration from below) as a result of growing pressure from merchant corporations interested in keeping the competition of foreign merchants at bay. Naturalisation in the American colonies thus came to depend on the issuance of a formal letter (*carta de naturaleza*) from the metropolis, based on the examination of individual cases through the lens of prescriptive but somewhat negotiable criteria that included a long period of residence (usually twenty years in Spanish America, against ten in Spain), marriage, and property of landed estate. Yet, naturalisation in Spanish America remained, for the most part, a local prerogative during the early modern period. In fact, although in theory the Council of Indies had exclusive control over the issuance of naturalisation letters in Spanish America, colonial governors disputed this monopoly, as they habitually claimed for themselves the competence of granting naturalisation papers to non-natives. These administrators found scope – albeit sometimes informally – to enshrine the integration of “useful” and sound foreigners over a long period of time, as socially recognised from below, through a formal recognition of their belonging to the wider community of Spaniards (*españoles*).

In Cuba, for instance, a 1777 royal order that entrusted the captain generals with attracting foreigners with “good habits,” who were “Catholics” and engaged in lawful trades, was taken as legal sanction for a custom of selective naturalisation-by-integration that persisted in practice, subsequently recognised on paper through *cartas de naturaleza*. And while most French-speaking exiles were denied naturalisation in Cuba during the first half of the 1790s for security reasons, the alliance forged in 1796 between the two nations opened the door to a more liberal practice of naturalisation.⁴⁸ In many cases, being listed as a beneficiary of imperial relief provided a path to Spanish subjecthood (as seen in Jeanne Grenot’s case) while, conversely, naturalisation strengthened claims to assistance, further solidifying one’s entitlement to the monarch’s benevolence.⁴⁹

Petitions for relief submitted by Saint-Domingue exiles to the Junta de Emigrados often generated complex paper trails, as they faced a burden of proof at least equal to that of Spanish natives, and reveal how imperial loyalty often outweighed strict criteria of nativeness and *vecindad* in decisions about granting relief in Cuba. In June 1806, the council debated the request for relief of Barthélemy Truffin, born Reinot-Faux, widow of a Saint-Domingue infantry captain named Martial de la Valade du Repaire de Truffin (hereafter Truffin) upon referral from Cuba’s Intendancy, which had initially examined her case. Born in Angoisse (Périgord) in March 1746, Truffin emigrated to Saint-Domingue in the late 1760s, where he rose to the rank of captain in the Cap-Français regiment in 1781. The owner of an estate near Plaisance (northern Saint-Domingue), Truffin was one of the colonists who, in May 1788, petitioned for colonial representation at the Estates-General of 1789. When open warfare broke out between Spain and the French Republic, “after having lost all her valuable goods in the unfortunate revolution and plundering by the Negroes [*sic*],” Barthélemy “went to the Spanish side with her husband,” as well as their son Martial. Truffin served as infantry captain in the Spanish troops stationed at Hinchá, where he eventually died. Barthélemy remained with Martial at Hinchá but was forced to move to Gonaïves – then under Spanish control – in February 1794, after the town fell to French

⁴⁸ AGS, SGU, 6846, 73, Governor of Havana to Conde de Alange, 16 November 1791. Herzog, *Defining Nations*. This was in spite of Cuba’s captain general receiving strict instructions from the metropole in 1804 to stop naturalising Frenchmen. On the social construction of foreignness from below and alienness as continuum rather than a strict binary between nationals and non-nationals across Spanish America, see Martin Biersack, “Las Prácticas de Control sobre los Extranjeros en el Virreinato del Río de la Plata (1730–1809),” *Revista de Indias* 76:268 (2016), 673–716.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, the case of Jean-Baptiste Aubert in AGI Estado 2, 67, Minutes of the Junta de Emigrados, 28 August 1804.

troops. When Spain evacuated Gonaïves, Barthélemy and Martial sailed to Kingston, before reaching Havana in 1800.

In Havana, Barthélemy spent five years “without being able to claim the pension that the king’s pity distributed to French emigrants [in Santo Domingo],” as she remained unable to find witnesses to corroborate her account. Upon learning that the archives of Santo Domingo’s royal treasury were now kept in Havana, Barthélemy felt she had empirical evidence to substantiate her claims to a pension of forty pesos per month as a widow, along with fifteen pesos as *emigrada*, which she claimed she had received at Hincha. Intendancy officials questioned Juan Ferino as a former treasury official in Santo Domingo and leafed through the few papers of San Rafael’s administration that accountant Juan de Labastida had managed to rescue. In this messy collection they found a monthly register of daily allowances distributed to French *emigrados*. This document stated that, until February 1794, when she departed to Gonaïves, Barthélemy did receive four reales per day. Captain Truffin had been receiving forty pesos a month, although there was no solid proof that Barthélemy had been granted this sum in Santo Domingo after his death. Still and all, and although she was “not Spanish nor was she a former neighbour [*vecina*] of the towns of the Spanish part of the island of Santo Domingo,” Intendancy officials argued that Barthélemy should be “entitled to the protection of His Majesty,” either in the form of fifteen pesos per month or through the pension generally granted to other *emigrados*. Taking into account this endorsement alongside the loyalty credentials of her deceased husband, the Junta de Emigrados eventually agreed to grant Barthélemy three reales per day and ten pesos per month for housing – the allowance granted to subjects of distinguished status – although she was neither a native Spaniard nor a long-term resident of Santo Domingo.⁵⁰

Transatlantic Warfare and the Legacies of Imperial Relief

These transimperial entanglements came to the fore – rather problematically for officials in Cuba – when news of the Bonapartist usurpation of the Spanish throne and military occupation of the Iberian Peninsula (1808) reached the island. From March 1809 onward, the vigilance committees, tasked with processing case-by-case expulsions of French exile colonists in Cuba in reaction to news from the metropole and to both real and imagined French designs over Spanish America, unearthed connections forged between former colonists of Saint-Domingue and the Spanish nation – often materialised through imperial relief – that challenged clear-cut divides in subjecthood.⁵¹

Asserting to belong to the community of Spaniards, broadly conceived, some exile colonists claimed the status of loyal *emigrados* in their efforts to remain on the island. The case of Bernard Frère highlights the challenges they encountered while attempting to assert their claims. Frère, a surgeon and dentist residing in the Monserrate neighbourhood of Havana, had obtained Spanish naturalisation in 1804, which proved insufficient

⁵⁰ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Estado 6367, exp. 14, Someruelos to Ceballos, Remite copia del acta de la Junta de Emigrados de Santo Domingo celebrada el 21 de junio, 20 August 1806. Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Secrétariat d’État à la Marine, Personnel Colonial Ancien, COL E 262, Truffin de Lavalade, Martial, Chevalier, Capitaine au Régiment du Cap, à Saint-Domingue. Théodore Courtaux, *Généalogie de la famille de La Valade de Truffin, de ses alliances et des seigneuries qu’elle a possédées (Périgord, Nivernais, Bourgogne, îles de Saint-Domingue et de Cuba)* (Paris, 1898), 15–20.

⁵¹ On the outbreak of the Peninsular War in Spain (1808–13), with its implications on notions of Spanish nation, see Hamnett, *The End of Iberian Rule*; Antonio Feros, *Speaking of Spain: The Evolution of Race and Nation in the Hispanic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 232–77; Herzog, *Defining Nations*, 141–63. On French imperial ambitions over the Spanish Caribbean, see Thomas Mareite, “‘Sterile in Spanish Hands’: French Visions of Empire, Saint-Domingue Refugees, and the Spanish Caribbean in the Age of the Haitian Revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 48:1 (2025), 37–64.

to be spared expulsion as, on 20 March 1809, the Havana vigilance committee gave him a month to leave Cuba. Frère and his wife Marie Madeleine Duluc, a native of Port-au-Prince, planned to depart for New Orleans. But a few days later, Frère's coffee plantation in the San Luis de la Seyba del Agua district – where thirty enslaved people toiled – suffered severe damages during the anti-French riots that erupted across Havana's hinterland, and Frère requested an additional month to settle his affairs. He then kept a low profile until the committee re-examined his case in mid-July 1809. This time, Frère came prepared with proofs of his “good habits” and *emigrado* status. Frère had secured a certificate of good conduct from neighbourhood commissioner Damian Muñoz y Pita and a certificate of his marriage at the Church of Santo Cristo del Buenviaje in November 1801 signed by priest Juan Rafael de Aljovín, and gathered testimonies about his wartime activities on the Spanish border of Saint-Domingue. Surgeon Pierre Lafargue, a fellow exile, confirmed Frère's loyal service with royalist troops, while Manuel Quezada, an envoy of Santo Domingo's archbishop, reported meeting Frère in Borgne in 1794, where his medical aid during a French attack earned him widespread recognition from Lieutenant Colonel Isidoro Linares and the Spanish garrison. These accounts, portraying Frère as loyal *emigrado*, eventually convinced the Havana vigilance committee to allow him to remain in Cuba.⁵²

As Frère's case illustrates, the officials charged with processing this expulsion order on a case-by-case basis in and around Havana soon found out that the distribution of imperial relief to French *emigrados* had blurred the very boundaries between national communities that they sought to redraw and gave them tangible grounds to be exempted from expulsion. The case of André Vincent, a tailor from Fort-Dauphin, examined in Havana in April 1809, demonstrates as much. His examiners observed that Vincent “was given a prize of four hundred pesos and four reales of pension ... for having contributed to [Fort-Dauphin's] surrender” to Spanish troops at the end of January 1794, the reason why the committee allowed him to stay.⁵³ Similarly, Nicolas Couplet, a doctor and surgeon, occupied a liminal space between the French and Spanish communities. During an investigation by the vigilance committee at Matanzas, it appeared that he had served Spanish troops in Hispaniola, supported by testimonies from military officers. Couplet presented proof of relief payments as an “*emigrado de Santo Domingo*” and his naturalisation as a Spaniard. After a brief inquiry, the committee permitted him to remain in Cuba.⁵⁴

Causing confusion among officials in Cuba, the legacies of imperial relief therefore remained very much influential, and these exiles – when interrogated – skilfully mentioned their presence as *emigrados* on nominative lists of relief beneficiaries to avoid expulsion.⁵⁵ Françoise Bonassie, a widow and mother of six children who had been residing in Havana for twelve years, whose case was scrutinised in Havana in May 1809, was allowed to continue living in Cuba on this ground. Marie-Françoise Lorignac and Isabelle Bigeon de la Sablonnière, who had emigrated to Santo Domingo prior to their evacuation to Havana, both received allowances of twelve pesos and a half monthly, and were similarly exempted

⁵² AGI Cuba 1683, Examination of Bernardo Frero [sic] by the Junta de Vigilancia (1809); ANC, Miscelánea de Libros 2014, Lista de los Franceses. Debien, “Réfugiés de Saint-Domingue expulsés” 577. On the attack on Borgne in 1794, see AGS, SGU 7159, 72, Defensa de Borgne.

⁵³ ANC, Miscelánea de Libros 2014, Lista de los Franceses.

⁵⁴ AGI Cuba 1702, Ximeno to Someruelos, 26 June 1809 and 26 August 1809.

⁵⁵ A partial record of these nominative lists can be found at ANC, Asuntos Políticos, leg. 252, 1, Lista primera que comprende los asientos correspondientes a las familias de Santo Domingo; leg. 252, 2, Segunda lista de los asientos correspondientes a las familias de Santo Domingo; leg. 252, 3, Lista segunda para llevar los asientos de las familias de Santo Domingo que gozan pensión para pagar las habitaciones que ocupan; leg. 252, 4, Lista 9.a de asientos de familias de Santo Domingo, noviembre 1806 a septiembre 1811.

from the expulsion.⁵⁶ The protective aura of this status stretched even beyond direct beneficiaries, shielding their close relatives. Victorien Capaz, a gunsmith of the Havana regiment, was allowed to stay thanks to his marriage to Rose Allard, a French woman who received relief as *emigrada*. After a positive assessment of his religious and civil conduct, Jean-Baptiste Sabatier, married to an “*emigrada* who benefited from a pension,” was also exonerated.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the shock waves of transatlantic warfare also reached the shores of Santo Domingo in the form of a military expedition led between November 1808 and July 1809 by Spanish voluntaries – including *emigrados* living in Puerto Rico and Cuba – supported both by the British navy and Haitian political leaders. This expedition ousted the French regime which still clung on Hispaniola’s eastern side, composed by the remnants of the Leclerc expeditionary force amid the chaos of Haiti’s independence in 1804. While most *emigrados* returned to Hispaniola in the wake of the Spanish reconquest of Santo Domingo, contests over imperial relief and its strong connection with Spanish subjecthood continued well into the nineteenth century across the Spanish Empire.⁵⁸

Conclusion

This article has explored the lability of the category of *emigrados*, analysing how imperial relief granted to exiles from Hispaniola who settled in and around Havana between about 1790 and 1810 intersected with evolving conceptions of Spanish subjecthood. As exiles from Spanish Santo Domingo set foot on Cuban soil after 1795, following its cession to the French Republic, the label *emigrados* quickly became the administrative cornerstone of imperial relief efforts in Cuba. These exiles claimed entitlement to relief and protection by virtue of their subjecthood and loyalty to the empire, and the category inserted their individual experiences into a collective discourse intended to inspire compassion and establish a filial connection to the Spanish monarch.

These evacuees from Santo Domingo not only emphasised their collective identity as *emigrados* but also often stressed specific statuses – socioeconomic, racial, religious and corporate ones – when soliciting imperial assistance. Assistance to *emigrados* in Havana went beyond immediate relief and sought to reinforce social hierarchies in an exile population where displacement threatened to erase status distinctions, and *emigrados* skilfully framed their experiences of loss and deprivation in relation to their social rank and the support they expected from the monarch based on these hierarchies. Exiled colonists from recognised “distinguished families” received higher pensions than the rest of their *emigrado* counterparts, and relief provision – reproducing colonial regimes of differences – thus became a frequent bone of contention between imperial officials and exiles claiming entitlement to higher material support. These conflicts became particularly acute in a context in which imperial relief to *emigrados* in Havana and its hinterland turned into a serious financial challenge, as pensions fell on a royal treasury in Cuba that was under constant strain. These financial constraints tested the limits of the benevolent assistance provided by

⁵⁶ ANC, Miscelánea de Libros 2014, Lista de los Franceses. On Marie-Françoise Lorignac, see Scott and Venegas Fornias, “Maria Coleta and the Capuchin Friar,” 727–62. Gender norms played a significant role in the selective expulsion of French colonists, with womanhood and widowhood functioning as important mitigating factors, as seen in these cases. First, being a woman, in addition to claiming the *emigrada* status, offered some defence against suspicions of instigating political and racial revolution, which primarily targeted male exiles. Second, widowhood constituted one of the strongest markers of vulnerability in an imperial relief regime strongly inspired by ancien régime sensibilities on charity.

⁵⁷ ANC, Miscelánea de Libros 2014, Lista de los Franceses.

⁵⁸ See Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle*, 185–91; Chambers, “Expatriados en la Madre Patria.”

imperial bureaucrats, further sharpening intra-imperial debates over relief and the specific responsibilities of the Spanish crown towards its subjects in exile.

Finally, the provision of imperial relief to many *emigrados franceses* deemed loyal to Spain challenged the very boundaries of Spanish subjecthood while showing the ability of some exiles to forge narratives of belonging to their advantage, both material and political. A legacy of Franco-Spanish military entanglements during the early years of the Haitian Revolution, the distribution of pensions to many Saint-Domingue exiles who had first found refuge in Spanish Santo Domingo before emigrating to Cuba from 1795 onward gave imperial relief a certain trans-imperial depth and further blurred the lines separating French and Spanish national communities. Their claims to the category of *emigrados* and their articulation of an inclusive and volitional conception of Spanish subjecthood reflect a time when boundaries between political identities were still imperfectly defined and sealed. They highlight the active role played by exiles in negotiating the boundaries and meaning of Spanish subjecthood during a period of early territorial contraction of the Spanish Empire, similar to the thousands of exiles loyal to the Spanish Crown who settled in the Spanish Caribbean during and after the wars of national independence in Spanish America between 1810 and 1824.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Nicolás A. González Quintero, "Struggling Against Independence: Loyalist Exiles' Views on Imperial Rule during and after the Spanish American Revolutions," *Almanack*, no. 36 (2024), <http://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463336ed30323>.

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