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# Returning to Colombia: The Category of Émigré in the Consolidation of Republican Regimes during the Age of Revolutions

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## Abstract

This article delves into the Republic of Colombia's emigration policies and émigrés' petitions to return to the new republican regime in the early 1820s. During the Spanish American Revolutions, thousands abandoned their homelands with the hope of eventually coming back. However, returning was not an easy endeavour. The influx of returnees sparked many questions for the nascent government. Consequently, émigrés and their relatives employed various strategies to facilitate the return of the former to Colombia. This article argues that the constant back-and-forth movements experienced by émigrés during the war allowed them to highlight the temporary condition of emigration and, therefore, to embrace or reject the status of émigrés strategically. Concerned by the doubts about their return, expatriates, many times, rejected the epithet of “émigré.” Aware of the politicization of the term, they emphasised that they did not abandon the country out of political loyalty but out of fear. Furthermore, they appealed to ideas of belonging to the republic, family reunification, and national reconciliation to advocate for their return and formal recognition as Colombian citizens. In doing so, expatriates left the label of “émigré” behind, challenging the Colombian government's prior perception of emigration and promoting wider conceptions of republican citizenship.

## Introduction

On 3 December 1821, the Colombian government received a letter from Belén Ustaris requesting permission for her husband, Ramón Monteverde, to return to the new republic. He was living in Curaçao at the time after having abandoned Caracas because of revolutionary turmoil. Like thousands of other people who similarly fled New Granada and Venezuela, Monteverde became an *emigrado*. Aware of the situation of displaced persons like Monteverde, many of whom were neither exiled nor had been party to the conflicts, the ascendant Colombian government eventually published a decree granting that those who wished to return to the new republic could request a passport. Ustaris applied for one of these documents, painting a portrait of her husband as an ideal citizen of the new republic that had fled because of the uncertainties of the war.<sup>1</sup> As such, she succeeded, and in doing so, Ustaris, along with other wives, family members, and emigrants themselves, shed

<sup>1</sup> Archivo General de la Nación Colombia (hereafter AGNC), Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 9, f. 350r, Belén Ustaris' petition, 3 December 1821.

the term *emigrado* to identify and define a new class of persons who wanted to become integrated citizens of the republic while making demands of the state.

Ustari's story sheds light on émigrés and their relatives' strategies to secure the return of the former to the new Republic of Colombia. They played with the meaning of *émigré* and *emigration* to do so. As Friedemann Pestel has explained, emigration became a malleable category, open to discussion for émigrés and the different sides of the conflict during the Age of Revolutions.<sup>2</sup> The conversations also surfaced throughout the Spanish American Revolutions.<sup>3</sup> The political earthquake caused by the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1807–8 and the imprisonment of King Ferdinand VII sparked a wave of conflict within Spanish America, where loyalists, autonomists, revolutionaries, and royalists clashed over which path to follow to overcome the monarchical crisis: loyalty to the Crown, autonomy, or independence.<sup>4</sup> During the upheavals, thousands sought refuge beyond the Spanish realm – in places such as Curaçao, St. Thomas, Trinidad, Brazil, Jamaica, and London –, within contested regions such as the Venezuelan plains, the vicerealties of Buenos Aires and Peru, and in territories still loyal to the Spanish Crown, such as Cuba and Puerto Rico.<sup>5</sup> Many of them hoped to one day return to their homelands.

<sup>2</sup> Friedemann Pestel, "The Colors of Exile in the Age of Revolutions: New Perspectives for French Émigrés Studies," in *Yearbook of Transnational History* (2021), Volume Four, ed. Thomas Adam (Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2021), 32–3.

<sup>3</sup> On how exile became a major political topic to understand nineteenth-century Latin American history, see Edward Blumenthal and Romy Sánchez, "Towards a History of Latin American Exile in the Nineteenth Century. Introduction," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe* 32:2 (2021), 7–21, <https://doi.org/10.61490/eial.v32i2.1717>.

<sup>4</sup> The literature on the Spanish American Revolutions is vast. For comprehensive views, see Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *La independencia de la América española* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México; Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas; Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005); José Ma Portillo Valdés, *Crisis atlántica: autonomía e independencia en la crisis de la monarquía hispana* (Madrid: Fundación Carolina Centro de Estudios Hispánicos e Iberoamericanos; Marcial Pons Historia, 2006); Brian R. Hammett, *The End of Iberian Rule on the American Continent, 1770–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Anthony McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The literature on this topic has grown significantly in recent years. Some examples are 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 y el Caribe* 32:2 (2021), 48–73, <https://doi.org/10.61490/eial.v32i2.1719>; Mark A. Burkholder, "Life without Empire: Audience Ministers after Independence," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91:2 (2011), 271–98, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-1165217>; Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, "The Monarchical Caribbean: Tomas Wood, Exiles, and Royalist Strongholds during the Spanish American Independence Wars," *World History Connected* 16:1 (2019), [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiiinois.edu/16.1/forum\\_quintero.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiiinois.edu/16.1/forum_quintero.html); Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Continental Origins of Insular Proslavery: George Dawson Flinter in Curaçao, Venezuela, Britain, and Puerto Rico, 1810s–1830s," *Almanack* 8 (2014), 55–67, <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320140804>; Karen Racine, "Newsprint Nations: Spanish American Publishing in London, 1808–1827," in *The Foreign Political Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance*, ed. Constance Bantman and Cláudia Suriani da Silva (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 15–32; Carlos Augusto Bastos, "Rumores de guerra nas fronteiras amazônicas: Grão-Pará e Rio Negro e os limites com a América espanhola (1817–1829)," in *Guerras por toda parte: conflitos armados que impactaram as independências do Brasil*, ed. André Roberto de A. Machado and Sergio Guerra Filho (São Paulo: Alameda, 2023), 115–36; Scarlett O'Phelan, "Con la mira puesta en el Perú: exiliados peninsulares en Río de Janeiro y sus expectativas políticas, 1821–1825," in *El ocaso del antiguo régimen en los imperios ibéricos*, ed. Scarlett O'Phelan and Margarita Eva Rodríguez García (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la PUCP y CHAM Centro de Humanidades U Nova, 2017), 101–23; Ana Joanna Vergara Sierra, "The Escribano of Babel: Power, Exile, and Enslavement in the Venezuelan Llanos During the War of Independence (1806–1833)," *The Americas* 81:3 (2024), 435–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2023.91>; Elsa Caula, "Entre expectativas e incertidumbres: funcionarios y oficiales del Ejército Español en Río de Janeiro durante el Trienio Liberal," *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 49 (2023), 215–38, <https://doi.org/10.5209/rcha.87988>; Jesús Ruiz de Gordejuela Urquijo, *La expulsión de los españoles de México y su destino incierto, 1821–1836* (Sevilla: Diputación de Sevilla, 2006).

Their situation ignited debates about the meaning of emigration between civilian populations and colonial and revolutionary authorities throughout the war, and these discussions continued after the establishment of republican regimes on the Spanish American continent. Such was the case of the Republic of Colombia, founded in 1819. The new administration began formulating policies to deal with émigrés' properties and expatriates' possible return. These issues sparked many questions for a nascent government that hesitated between allowing the entrance of émigrés to reconstruct social bonds and its concern about expatriates' loyalty. As Jeremy Adelman has shown, the deterioration of the monarchy led to revolutions across the continent, and people did not automatically disidentify with the empire.<sup>6</sup> Remaining loyal to the Crown or supporting the revolution – or, at times, navigating both allegiances – were legitimate political choices, and the nascent republics had to confront this reality. Meanwhile, émigrés, emphasising the temporary status of their emigration and the many reasons for their travels, defended their right to return, reunite with their families, and be part of Colombia.

This paper explores the Republic of Colombia's emigration policies and émigrés' petitions to return to the new republican regime in the early 1820s. I argue that the constant back-and-forth movements experienced during the war allowed expatriates to emphasise the temporary condition of emigration and, therefore, to embrace or reject the status of émigrés strategically. Émigrés sought to convince republican authorities that they were not enemies of the nascent administration. They did so by promoting ideas of belonging to the republic and family reunification to advocate for their return and formal recognition as Colombian citizens. In that way, émigré communities lobbied for the Colombian government to cease considering them expatriates separate from the Colombian national community, arguing that their entry would benefit their families and the nascent republic.

As such, this paper contributes to a growing literature about the concepts of émigré, exile, and refuge during the Age of Revolutions. Delphine Diaz, Juan Luis Simal, Romy Sánchez, and Kit Candlin have previously explored the redefinition of ideas regarding exile, refuge, and *destierro* in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> As Diaz has shown, the boundaries between the categories and identities of émigrés, deportees, and exiles were blurry in the early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> However, the increasing number of refugees produced by revolutions inspired the creation of different administrative practices and the redefinition of old language regarding *destierro* to distinguish between political exiles and those seeking refuge.<sup>9</sup> Uprisings also prompted authorities to categorize the status of émigrés to guide their responses to the mass displacement caused by these upheavals. Furthermore, as Jan C. Jansen and Sarah Chambers have shown for the cases of the British and Spanish Empires, the arrival of exiles also led to the redefinition of concepts of alienness and citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 8–9. On how people navigated different political identities in New Granada during the revolution, see Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, *La restauración en la Nueva Granada (1815–1819)* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2016), 179–205.

<sup>7</sup> Delphine Diaz, “From Exile to Refugee. Toward a Transnational History of Refuge in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in *Yearbook of Transnational History* (2021), Volume Four, ed. Thomas Adam (Teaneck, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2021), 1–26; 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. Revue française de référence sur les dynamiques migratoires*, no. 1321 (2018), 23–31; Kit Candlin, “The Expansion of the Idea of the Refugee in the Early-Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World,” *Slavery & Abolition* 30:4 (2009), 521–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440390903245091>.

<sup>8</sup> Sánchez and Simal, “Lexiques et pratiques du destierro”; Diaz, “From Exile to Refugee,” 6.

<sup>9</sup> Diaz, “From Exile to Refugee,” 11; Pestel, “The Colors of Exile,” 30–1.

<sup>10</sup> 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, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtab022>; Chambers, “Expatriados en la madre patria.”

Building on this literature, I show how émigrés highlighted the temporary status of their movements and the many reasons for their travels, shaping new connotations about what it meant to be or not to be an émigré during the Spanish American Revolutions.

This paper also contributes to a developing historiography on nation, family, and reconciliation in the nineteenth century. As Ansgar Reiss claimed, “the history of exile includes the history of return.”<sup>11</sup> The historiography has devoted less attention to returns because returnees were not under the same surveillance as exiles.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as Friedemann Pestel noted, we must consider the “long aftermath of exile as most émigrés considered their stay abroad a temporary experience that would eventually end.”<sup>13</sup> Studying returnees allows one to understand citizenship and reconciliation discussions during political upheavals. Sarah Chambers, Emily Yankowitz, Kelly Summers, and Helena Tóth have explored this topic. Chambers has demonstrated how émigré return and assistance inspired reconciliation policies in Chile after the revolution, while Yankowitz has explored how debates about loyalists’ movements between states after the American Revolution facilitated the creation of new conceptions of citizenship.<sup>14</sup> The Americas were not the only place where these discussions emerged. Summers has proved that Napoleon’s emigration policies enabled the return of émigrés in France and paved the way for the republic to evolve into an authoritarian security state, while Tóth has shown family efforts in securing the return of their relatives involved in the 1848 German and Hungarian revolutions by highlighting the importance of family reunification.<sup>15</sup> Adding to their insights, I demonstrate that émigrés and their families questioned the category of “émigré” itself, emphasising their desire to become citizens of the new republic. Despite the republican administration’s ambivalence towards their return, expatriates and their relatives defended their right to reunite with their families and belong to Colombia.

<sup>11</sup> Ansgar Reiss, “Home Alone? Reflections on Political Exiles Returning to their Native Countries,” in *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in Mid-Victorian England*, ed. Sabine Freitag (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 297.

<sup>12</sup> Delphine Diaz and Laura Godineau, “Chapter 8. Returns and Memories,” in *Banished: Traveling the Roads of Exile in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Delphine Diaz and Sylvie Aprile (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 241. We can find some examples of returnees on Philipp Mansel, “The Return of the Émigrés: Bordeaux, 12 March 1814,” in *French Emigrants in Revolutionised Europe: Connected Histories and Memories*, ed. Laure Philip and Juliette Reboul (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 277–96; Edward Blumenthal, “Los clubes constitucionales argentinos: Exilio y retorno en la ‘provincia flotante,’” *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”* 51 (2019), <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02265937>; Vanessa Mongey, “Going Home: The Back-to-Haiti Movement in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Atlantic Studies* 16:2 (2019), 184–202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2018.1434283>.

<sup>13</sup> Pestel, “The Colors of Exile,” 29.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah C. Chambers, “The Paternal Obligation to Provide: Political Familialism in Early-Nineteenth-Century Chile,” *The American Historical Review* 117:4 (2012), 1123–48; Sarah C. Chambers, “‘Drying Their Tears’: Women’s Petitions, National Reconciliation, and Commemoration in Post-Independence Chile,” in *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Comparisons, 1775–1830*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettetele, and Jane Rendall (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 343–60; Sarah C. Chambers, *Families in War and Peace: Chile from Colony to Nation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015); Sarah C. Chambers, “¿Emigrar o no emigrar? Las peregrinaciones e identidades de los realistas dentro y fuera de Chile durante y después de la independencia,” in *Una nueva mirada a las Independencias*, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 2021), 325–50; Emily Yankowitz, “‘Negative Patriots’: How Former Loyalists’ Movement between States Shaped the Development of American Citizenship, 1781–1790,” *Age of Revolutions*, 20 February 2023, <https://ageofrevolutions.com/2023/02/20/negative-patriots-how-former-loyalists-movement-between-states-shaped-the-development-of-american-citizenship-1781-1790/>.

<sup>15</sup> Kelly Summers, “Healing the Republic’s ‘Great Wound’: Emigration Reform and the Path to a General Amnesty, 1799–1802,” in *French Emigrants in Revolutionised Europe: Connected Histories and Memories*, ed. Laure Philip and Juliette Reboul (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 235–55; Helena Tóth, *An Exiled Generation: German and Hungarian Refugees of Revolution, 1848–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Last, my focus on return policies and petitions allows me to show another perspective on the consolidation of the Republic of Colombia. Recent historiography has demonstrated how different actors played a crucial role in legitimising the republic internally and externally. Historians such as Ernesto Bassi, Lina del Castillo, María José Afanador-Llach, Marcela Echeverri, Javier Ricardo Ardila, Isabel Arroyo, and León Hernández have analysed how diplomats, scientists, representatives, and printers helped to envision Colombia as a “colossal” republic that could turn into an illustrious nation open to abolitionism, migration, scientific enterprises, and global commerce.<sup>16</sup> The return of émigrés also motivated representatives and expatriates themselves to envision Colombia as a territory where families could recover from the hardships of war. Emigration policies became a way of safeguarding the republic and reconstructing the social fabric destroyed by the revolution.

This article has three parts. The first section delves into the meanings of emigration and how civilian populations learned to strategically embrace or reject the epithet of “émigré” during the war. The second part examines the Republic of Colombia’s repatriation policies, revealing that republican leaders hesitated about the return of émigrés and its possible political consequences. Finally, the third part focuses on *emigrados* and their families’ strategies to convince the nascent government about the importance of allowing émigrés’ re-entry. Arguing that they had the right to be part of the new republican regime, *emigrados* questioned the term *emigrado* itself as a proper way to describe their situation, asserting their belonging to the republican state and, more incipiently, the state’s duties toward them.

### The Meanings of Emigration during the Spanish American Revolutions

As Jan C. Jansen has explained, the Age of Revolutions was an age of political exodus.<sup>17</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people abandoned their homelands, seeking refuge mostly across the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds. In the Spanish-speaking world, the word *emigrado*, derived from the French *émigré*, was the one used to designate them. This choice is not surprising. Spain was one of the main destinations of *émigrés* fleeing from the French Revolution, and the term – along with its political connotation of a person escaping upheaval – entered the Spanish vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Authorities in the Spanish American colonies used it widely to describe those who fled from Saint-Domingue and landed in Cuba, Puerto

<sup>16</sup> Ernesto Bassi, “The ‘Franklins of Colombia’: Immigration Schemes and Hemispheric Solidarity in the Making of a Civilised Colombian Nation,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 50:3 (2018), 673–701, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X17001213>; Lina Del Castillo, “Entangled Fates: French-Trained Naturalists, the First Colombian Republic, and the Materiality of Geopolitical Practice, 1819–1830,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98:3 (2018), 407–38, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-6933545>; María José Afanador-Llach, “Una república colosal: la unión de Colombia, el acceso al Pacífico y la utopía del comercio global, 1819–1830,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de La Cultura* 45:2 (2018), 35–63; Javier Ricardo Ardila and León Hernández, “Los impresores como constructores de la República de Colombia: los casos de Espinosa, Roderick y Navas, 1819–1830,” *Procesos: Revista Ecuatoriana de Historia*, no. 53 (2021), 77–107, <https://doi.org/10.29078/procesos.vn53.2021.2633>; Marcela Echeverri, “Abolición de la esclavitud y formación del Estado en Colombia,” in *Historia de lo político en Colombia*, vol. 1, *Imaginando repúblicas en tiempos de independencia, 1780–1852*, ed. Margarita Garrido, Francisco A. Ortega, and Franz Hensel (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional–Universidad del Rosario, 2024), 271–310; Isabel Arroyo, “Cuando Colombia apareció en el mapa,” in *Historias de lo político en Colombia*, vol. 1, *Imaginando repúblicas en tiempos de independencia, 1780–1852*, ed. Margarita Garrido, Francisco A. Ortega, and Franz Hensel (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional–Universidad del Rosario, 2024), 73–97.

<sup>17</sup> Jan C. Jansen, “Flucht und Exil im Zeitalter der Revolutionen: Perspektiven einer atlantischen Flüchtlingsgeschichte (1770er–1820er Jahre),” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44:4 (2018), 495–525.

<sup>18</sup> Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Imagen del exilio y del exiliado en la España del siglo XIX,” *Ayer: Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 47:3 (2002), 36–56.



Rico, New Granada, and Venezuela during the Haitian Revolution.<sup>19</sup> Their arrival sparked debates about how to assist them and their possible roles in their host societies. As Thomas Mareite has shown, “*emigrado*” was not only a word to describe a particular person, but also became a “sociopolitical identity and administrative status to which expectation of relief were linked.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the term was not neutral. Émigrés from Hispaniola and imperial officers adopted and shaped it as needed. This fact was not trivial. The everyday life of many of the newcomers frequently depended on imperial officers’ perceptions of what it meant to be an “émigré.”<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, émigrés accentuated their losses and loyalty, portraying themselves as deserving of assistance and Spanish subjects.<sup>22</sup> Those debates persisted in the following years. However, there was a striking difference. The Spanish American Revolutions were now generating waves of emigrants, and both revolutionaries and royalists had to grapple with massive movements of populations within and outside the continental territories. What it meant to be an émigré and the reasons for leaving the mainland became a topic of concern for several actors.

Emigration started at the beginning of the upheavals, drawing attention to royalists, revolutionaries, and even colonial authorities in the Caribbean about the length and the possible political and logistical consequences of these displacements. Uncertainty played a crucial role in how these actors portrayed emigration. For instance, British authorities in the Caribbean began collecting information about the landing of émigrés from the mainland.<sup>23</sup> They stressed that, since 1810, people had been abandoning Venezuela due to their fear of the consequences of the revolution. The governor of St. Thomas, John McClean, stated that many “Europeans or old Spaniards ... have withdrawn themselves from the Seaports and they have taken their temporary residence in the three large Spanish Islands.”<sup>24</sup> Four years later, McClean highlighted that, due to the fierce combats between revolutionaries and royalists in Venezuela, hundreds of “refugees have been attracted to take refuge here.” He underlined that the “scarcity occasioned by an extraordinary dry season and by the American War” had thwarted St. Thomas officers’ efforts to support them.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Alejandro E. Gómez, *Fidelidad bajo el viento: revolución y contrarrevolución en las Antillas Francesas en la experiencia de algunos oficiales franceses emigrados a Tierra Firme (1790–1795)* (Mexico City: Gobierno del Estado de Quintana Roo; Siglo XXI Editores, 2004); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 83–188; Adriana Chira, *Patchwork Freedoms: Law, Slavery, and Race beyond Cuba’s Plantations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 66–104; Juan R. González Mendoza, “Puerto Rico’s Creole Patriots and the Slave Trade after the Haitian Revolution,” in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David Geggus (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 58–71; Cristina Soriano, *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018), 149–81; 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, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-11503584>.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Mareite, “‘Emigrados’: The Many Meanings of Exile from Hispaniola to Cuba,” *Age of Revolutions*, 12 June 2023, <https://ageofrevolutions.com/2023/06/12/emigrados-the-many-meanings-of-exile-from-hispaniola-to-cuba/>.

<sup>21</sup> See Mareite’s contribution to this special issue.

<sup>22</sup> Chambers, “Expatriados en la madre patria.” See also Mareite’s contribution to this special issue.

<sup>23</sup> On how British authorities discussed about the meaning of refugee in the Caribbean, see Candlin, “The Expansion of the Idea of the Refugee.”

<sup>24</sup> National Archives, London (hereafter NA), WO 1/124, 59, John McClean to Earl of Liverpool, 28 November 1810.

<sup>25</sup> NA, WO 1/128, 322, John McClean to Earl of Bathurst, 29 September 1814. On the fate of émigré women from Venezuela in St. Thomas during the war, see Ana Joanna Vergara Sierra, “‘Descarreadas víctimas del terror’: exiliadas de la provincia de Venezuela y las colonias extranjeras durante los años de la guerra a muerte (1811–1821),” in

Those two examples illustrate how many people began to depict emigration during the Spanish American Revolutions. First, there was a temporary perspective of relocation. Émigrés were individuals looking for transient residences to escape the violence of the war. Authorities expected émigrés to return to their homelands. Second, there was a perspective that linked emigration with assistance and refuge. In the words of John Hodgson, the British governor of Curaçao between 1811 and 1814, émigrés were “fugitives,” “unfortunate persons” that deserved assistance.<sup>26</sup> However, scarcities, security concerns, and unwillingness to assist foreign subjects many times hindered the efforts to support émigrés, creating unease between refugees looking for assistance and local populations and officers who considered them a “heavy burden.”<sup>27</sup> These tensions increased when émigrés stayed longer than expected. Thus, the ideas of temporary refuge and assistance began to be intertwined. Both local authorities and émigrés expected that emigration would be a brief experience in which refugees should receive assistance due to their unfortunate situation.

The course of the war in New Granada and Venezuela consolidated this perception. Revolutionaries and royalists’ clashes made it challenging to establish military control over mainland territories. Hence, émigrés moved back and forth in response to the changing military and political circumstances. The rise and fall of the Second Republic of Venezuela (1813–4) illustrates this situation. After revolutionary troops entered Caracas in August 1813, approximately six thousand people fled the city and sought refuge in Curaçao.<sup>28</sup> “Spanish vessels are hourly arriving at this Port with many individuals and families, who have been compelled to fly from there for the preservation of their lives,” stated Governor Hodgson in a letter to the Earl of Bathurst.<sup>29</sup> Hodgson claimed that refugees received a “humane treatment.”<sup>30</sup> In Curaçao, émigrés organized to support the royal cause in Venezuela from afar.<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, many of the revolutionaries who entered Caracas had themselves been émigrés. Simón Bolívar was one of them.<sup>32</sup> Following the collapse of the First Venezuelan Republic (1811–2), some insurgents fled to Curaçao and then to New Granada. There, they received support to organize a new campaign against royalist rule in Venezuela. The Second Venezuelan Republic was as ephemeral as the first one. After bloody combats, it fell in December 1814. Several émigrés from Curaçao returned once royalists regained Caracas. Returning was always a possibility throughout the first years of the war.

This constant back-and-forth motivated émigré populations to create different strategies to cope with the trauma of displacement. To be considered an émigré could bring some benefits, especially getting financial support from royalist or revolutionary regimes. Consequently, some people began to embrace the term “émigré,” depicting their exodus as a political statement of allegiance. Diego Berenguer’s case sheds light on this issue. A royal employee of the tobacco factory in Girón (New Granada), Berenguer claimed that the insurgents removed him from his position because of his “loyalty to the king and the Spanish

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*El exilio en la independencia iberoamericana*, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy and Georges Lomné (Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad del Pacífico, 2025), 147–150.

<sup>26</sup> NA, WO 1/113, 264, John Hodgson to Earl of Bathurst, 26 August 1813.

<sup>27</sup> NA, WO 1/128, 322, John McClean to Earl of Bathurst, 29 September 1814.

<sup>28</sup> José Domingo Díaz, *Recuerdos sobre la rebelión de Caracas* (Madrid, 1829), 57. On how Curaçao turned into a haven for refugees at this time, see Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, “Entangled Irishman: George Flinter and Anglo-Spanish Imperial Rivalry,” in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500–1830*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 124–40.

<sup>29</sup> NA, WO 1/113, 259, John Hodgson to Earl of Bathurst, 10 August 1813.

<sup>30</sup> NA, WO 1/113, 263, John Hodgson to Earl of Bathurst, 26 August 1813.

<sup>31</sup> George Flinter, *A History of the Revolution of Caracas* (London, 1819), 69.

<sup>32</sup> On Bolívar’s exiles in the Caribbean, see Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada’s Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), 142–71.

nation.” Revolutionaries also imprisoned and later banished Berenguer, forcing him to separate from his family. Once in Santa Marta, one of New Granada’s royalist bastions, Berenguer asked for support after discovering that the Cortes of Cadiz had granted emigrated employees two-thirds of their salaries.<sup>33</sup> Santa Marta’s government approved the request in August 1815. But first, royalist authorities ensured that Berenguer had not pledged allegiance to independence in any “insurgent countries of the kingdom.”<sup>34</sup> Berenguer stayed in Santa Marta until March 1816, when he could return to Piedecuesta after royalist troops regained control of the town.

Revolutionary émigrés followed similar strategies. To be recognized as an émigré became a worthy strategy to recover estates and lands. For instance, after pro-independence troops took Santafé (present-day Bogotá) in August 1819, Francisco de la Cruz González returned to the city, seeking to recover some of his farms confiscated by the royalists during the monarchical restoration (1815–9).<sup>35</sup> He claimed that his “constant and strong commitment for the holy cause of liberty [had] caused [his] expatriation.” “I banished myself voluntarily,” emphasised de la Cruz, expecting to show the revolutionary government that his commitment to the pro-independence cause was such that he even abandoned his goods and properties.<sup>36</sup> Hence, he stated that the royalist government considered him a “patriot émigré.” By embracing the term “émigré,” de la Cruz portrayed himself as a revolutionary advocate who deserved to recover his properties.

Nevertheless, to be considered an émigré could bring many disadvantages. Both royalists and revolutionaries adopted confiscation policies during the confrontations. These confiscations often harmed people who did not emigrate. Therefore, they had to defend their non-emigrant status to protect their assets. Such was the case of Manuel Venegas. He was temporarily out of town when royalists arrived in Fúquene in 1816. Consequently, royalists mistakenly considered him an émigré and seized his properties.<sup>37</sup> Once he returned, Venegas replied categorically to this act. “I am not an émigré, and I have not committed the crime of rebellion,” stated Venegas, asking the royalist government to return his estate and avoid making the same mistake with “other innocent people.”<sup>38</sup> The royalist government accepted Venegas’s claim, ordering Fúquene’s board of confiscations to seize only the properties of those who were “notoriously émigrés” and those whom the justice had convicted.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> On the Spanish Empire’s policies to support émigré bureaucrats and the tensions around this issue, see 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 Rowe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 238–53.

<sup>34</sup> AGNC, Archivo Anexo I, Solicitudes, vol. 4, Diego Berenguer’s petition, 19 August 1815.

<sup>35</sup> On how royalists reestablished monarchical rule in New Granada at this time, see Gutiérrez Ardila, *La restauración en la Nueva Granada*; Alexander Chaparro-Silva, “The King and the Kingdom: Royalism and the Concept of Order in Tierra Firme during the Age of Revolutions,” *Almanack*, 36 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463336ed30423>.

<sup>36</sup> AGNC, Archivo Anexo, Fondo Reclamaciones, Vol. 2, 797r, Francisco de la Cruz González’s claim, 26 September 1819.

<sup>37</sup> On confiscation policies during the revolution in New Granada, see Marco Manuel Forero Polo, “El problema de los secuestros en el contexto de la guerra de independencia de Colombia, 1810–1820,” in *Consecuencias económicas de la Independencia*, ed. Heraclio Bonilla (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2012), 137–62; Daniel Pérez, “Familias y poderes: La Junta de Secuestros durante la Reconquista,” in *Consecuencias económicas de la Independencia*, ed. Heraclio Bonilla (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2012), 163–88.

<sup>38</sup> AGNC, Archivo Anexo, Fondo Embargos, vol. 2, Manuel Venegas’ petition, June 1816.

<sup>39</sup> AGNC, Archivo Anexo, Fondo Embargos, vol. 2, Diego Carrillo to Junta de Secuestros, 17 June 1816.



Venegas's story shows that not only émigrés but also royalist and revolutionary regimes politicised the act of emigrating.<sup>40</sup> As the war progressed, both sides viewed leaving the homeland as a demonstration of political allegiance that could be rewarded or a political offense that should be punished. In some cases, emigration was such a wrongdoing that it became an act that should be penalised with the loss of political and citizenship rights. For instance, the Congress of the United Provinces, the representative body of a confederation that ruled in some parts of New Granada between 1811 and 1815, declared in its naturalisation law that leaving the country due to "hatred for freedom and independence" or "emigrating of [New Granada] in the present war out of fear or caution" warranted the loss of citizenship.<sup>41</sup>

However, as we have seen, the uncertainties of the war complicated this exclusively negative perspective. First, for many, emigration was a temporary act, not a permanent status. Second, the constant back-and-forth movement of populations encouraged people to strategically embrace or refuse the label of "émigré." These debates persisted after the proclamation of the Republic of Colombia, where authorities extensively discussed how to handle émigré populations and their potential return to the nascent state.

### The Republic of Colombia and Its *Emigrado* Policies

The émigré question did not end up with the gradual defeat of the royalist armies and the creation of the Republic of Colombia in 1819. On the contrary, revolutionary leaders and members of the republican congress deliberated several times about the confiscation of émigrés' properties, the return of part of these populations, and the necessity of enforcing expatriates' loyalty to the new republican project. These debates show the continuities regarding émigrés' issues, the constant struggles about what it meant to be an émigré, and the ambivalence of revolutionary authorities regarding the fate of expatriates. Nonetheless, there was a significant change. The end of the constant back-and-forth movement of émigré populations after the triumph of the revolutionary armies forced republican leaders to consider incorporating these populations into the new political regime and the benefits and risks of doing so. Colombia was not alone. For instance, as Sarah Chambers has shown, the Chilean government also began debating these issues around the same time, highlighting the significance of the émigré question for the nascent Spanish American states.<sup>42</sup>

Republican leaders began discussing the fate of émigrés since the 1819 Angostura Congress, a deliberative body in charge of crafting a new constitutional charter and laws for the future Republic of Colombia. On 25 February 1819, the congress issued a general pardon to encourage mainland populations to support the new republican project.<sup>43</sup> The amnesty covered, among others, those who had served the royal cause and those who, having previously embraced the republican system, had emigrated following the Spanish government. They had four months to return. The congress reaffirmed this call on 6 March, when it decided to issue a decree extending a "fraternal" invitation to émigrés "reluctant to join the republic."<sup>44</sup> The enthusiasm was such that the congress even considered the petitions of

<sup>40</sup> On how royalist authorities politicised the act of emigrating during the monarchical restoration in Venezuela, see Vergara Sierra, "Descarreadas víctimas del terror", 141–43.

<sup>41</sup> "Decree," in *Congreso de las Provincias Unidas 1814–1816*, vol. 2 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 23.

<sup>42</sup> Chambers, "Drying Their Tears"; Chambers, "Paternal Obligation to Provide"; Chambers, *Families in War and Peace*.

<sup>43</sup> *Correo del Orinoco*, 27 February 1819, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Act 18, 6 March 1819, in *Actas del Congreso de Angostura 1819–1820* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 26.

some émigrés interested in returning to Colombia with their enslaved individuals.<sup>45</sup> Three years later, the republic allowed the entrance of these enslaved populations. Although the republic declared the end of the slave trade in 1821, republican leaders argued that the entry of these enslaved people occurred before this proclamation.<sup>46</sup> These policies highlight that émigrés return became a priority for republican legislators eager to garner support for the revolutionary cause.

These calls collided with revolutionary leaders' decisions on the ground. Dealing with émigrés was a complex challenge. Just twelve days later, Francisco de Paula Santander, the chief of the revolutionary army in New Granada, issued an amnesty decree in Pore. This decree pardoned civilian and military *Americanos* and Spaniards who had served the Crown but chose to remain in their hometowns after the revolutionary troops arrived. The decree did not pardon émigrés. "Emigration proved that [they] wish to live under Spanish despotism and [they] do not want that the patria recovers its natural rights," emphasised Santander.<sup>47</sup> Despite these concerns, he left the door open for émigrés by suggesting that the government could pardon them if they provided essential services to the republic. Yet, Santander remained cautious. In November 1819, he published a decree in Santafé, creating a secret police force to monitor suspicious meetings, particularly those involving women whose parents, children, or husbands had emigrated.<sup>48</sup> Santander was concerned that those who stayed might betray the republic through their communications with those who fled.

The debates surrounding the proclamation of laws and decrees to seize royalists' properties provided a fertile ground for republican authorities to discuss the émigré question. The Congress of Angostura presented an initial draft for a confiscation law on 16 January 1819, proposing to seize and administer the properties of the Spanish government and émigrés. The draft exempted those émigrés who returned within three months of their departure, émigrés under the age of sixteen who returned within one year, and the wives and children of expatriates who remained in liberated territories. Meanwhile, the state retained the right to keep the portion that children would have inherited from their fathers.<sup>49</sup> Estanislao Vergara, the minister of interior and justice, argued that this measure was fair, as the state would only maintain the portion belonging to the emigrated father. He also claimed that it benefited the republic by preventing "families perishing due to poverty."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the confiscation decree aimed at penalising émigrés for their absence, securing resources for the state, and providing economic relief for those who chose to stay.

<sup>45</sup> Act 94, 14 June 1819, in *Actas del Congreso de Angostura 1819-1820* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 103. Unfortunately, I have not found any of these petitions yet. However, we know that some émigrés did as much as possible to bring enslaved people to Cuba and Puerto Rico, oftentimes by taking them from the continent and other times by buying them in Caribbean islands such as Curaçao and St. Thomas. See some examples in Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Esclavos, 1824-26, Caja 61.

<sup>46</sup> Extraordinary Council, 23 May 1822, in *Acuerdos del Consejo de Gobierno de la República de Colombia, 1821-1824*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 48. On the Republic of Colombia's policies regarding slavery, see Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 162-94; Yesenia Barragan, *Freedom's Captives: Slavery and Gradual Emancipation on the Colombian Black Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 107-58; Marcela Echeverri, "Slavery in Mainland Spanish America in the Age of Second Slavery," in *Atlantic Transformations: Empire, Politics, and Slavery during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Dale W. Tomich (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 19-44.

<sup>47</sup> "Nueva Granada: Libertarla de sus opresores, Pore, 18 March 1819," in *Santander y los ejércitos patriotas 1819*, vol. 2 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 369.

<sup>48</sup> "Decreto sobre Policía Secreta *Ad Honorem*, Santafé, 9 November 1819," in *De Boyacá a Cúcuta, Memoria Administrativa 1819-1821* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 66.

<sup>49</sup> Act 96, 16 June 1819, in *Actas del Congreso de Angostura 1819-1820* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 105-7.

<sup>50</sup> "Memoria del Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia presentada al Vicepresidente, 31 December 1819," in *De Boyacá a Cúcuta, Memoria Administrativa 1819-1821* (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 109.

The decree established a framework for the republic's confiscation policies, remaining a highly debated issue in the subsequent years. In the 1821 Congress of Cúcuta, republican representatives continued discussing sequestration laws, with a primary focus on property rights for those who stayed and those intending to return. Some representatives advocated prioritising the rights of women and children, particularly those lacking sufficient documentation to prove ownership of their possessions. Meanwhile, others, such as Ignacio Peña, claimed that the law should "secure properties for the government" rather than "protect émigrés' assets." Still, the congress understood the importance of providing security to "the sons of the country who had neither emigrated nor declared themselves to be its enemies."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the congress decided that those who stayed could keep their properties if they showed the estate's deed or presented five witnesses "of well-known reputation and patriotism."<sup>52</sup>

Representatives also debated why émigrés left and the consequences of this act. The debate about the age limit for confiscation illustrates this issue. Félix Restrepo claimed it was necessary to modify the minimum age of people exempted from seizure. For him, sixteen-year-old people lacked the necessary judgment and followed their fathers out "of obligation and love." The bishop of Mérida agreed, proposing raising the age limit to twenty-one. Bernardo Tobar and Francisco Soto differed, claiming that sixteen-year-old people were "already capable of committing the greatest atrocities" and that many of them had been some of the "most bitter enemies of the republic."<sup>53</sup> Tobar and Soto believed that sixteen-year-old people had the autonomy to decide for themselves. The president of the congress settled this dispute by suggesting that individuals under twenty-one should not face penalties but "on the express condition that these minors had not engaged in any activities against the republic."<sup>54</sup>

The timing of the return of women also sparked controversies. In the discussions regarding the age limit, congressmen agreed to grant émigrés under twenty-one one year to return. Some representatives requested to extend this benefit to women, arguing that females, like émigrés under twenty-one, might have left the country for love. This argument angered Restrepo, José Ignacio de Márquez, and Nicolás Ballén. They stated that émigré women were "bitter enemies of the *Americano* cause." For them, this was the sole justifiable reason for women leaving the country despite the "weakness of their sex" and the hardships of emigration.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, they suggested denying this grace to females, arguing that their return could harm the republic. They succeeded. In the bill approved in October 1821, the congress exempted émigrés' wives who remained and émigrés under twenty-one from confiscation. The bill made no mention of émigré women, regardless of whether they intended to return within one year. The government would confiscate their properties without hesitation.

In 1824, the debate over the properties of people living in Spanish territories reignited discussions about emigration within the congress. The status of these people confused congressmen, who doubted whether to call them émigrés. José Miguel de Unda invited their colleagues to discuss how they should "consider those individuals who at the time of Colombia's political transformation were absent, in enemy territory, or another foreign country." The question, once again, revolved around the intent behind their absence. For

<sup>51</sup> Act 164, 15 September 1821, in *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta, 1821*, vol. 3 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 67.

<sup>52</sup> Act 174, 22 September 1821, in *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta, 1821*, vol. 3 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 102.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Act 165, 17 September 1821, in *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta, 1821*, vol. 3 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 73.

instance, Salvador Camacho proposed a two-year window for individuals who had voluntarily resided in Spanish territories before the war to reclaim their properties. Likewise, the secretary of the congress suggested that those “Colombians” needed to prove they had not committed any “hostile act” against the republic.<sup>56</sup> The discussions on the law appeared to adopt a more lenient approach towards individuals who had voluntarily relocated before or during the war, opening the door for those who could demonstrate that they were “truly friends of the republic and had provided important service to the independence cause.”<sup>57</sup>

However, the final bill reveals something completely different. A month after discussions began, Santander sent a letter to the lower chamber president, stating that those who remained within Spanish territories should be considered enemies of the country.<sup>58</sup> For Santander, these people had voted with their feet by staying in Spanish provinces. The letter set the tone for the bill. The law stated that individuals who remained under Spanish domination had demonstrated “allegiance to Spain and their disaffection toward Colombia’s cause.” It also declared that those who had not supported or had opposed the independence cause should not have the right to reclaim their estates. Therefore, the law ordered the confiscation of properties belonging to people living in Spanish territories. It only exempted those with heirs in Colombia and the heirs of those who had died as Colombian citizens or serving the independence cause. Nevertheless, they should return to “be part of the Colombian family” before reaching age twenty-one.<sup>59</sup> Otherwise, the government would seize their inheritance. This decision forced heirs to choose between Spanish subjecthood or Colombian citizenship.

The congress also debated émigrés’ political rights, an issue that had been significant since the republic’s early years. On 6 July 1821, Ildefonso Méndez complained about denying representation rights to individuals who had not resided in their hometowns for the past couple of years. Méndez claimed that the resolution affected those who had fled because of their loyalty to the republican case. Some representatives supported Méndez’s objection, advocating for exemptions for émigrés and those banished by the Spanish government. Nevertheless, Santander, José Manuel Restrepo, and Vicente Azuero stated they should be cautious of those émigrés “living in foreign countries full of comforts and looking with indifference at the bloodshed of patriots.” For them, those émigrés should be “detested and forever erased from the Colombian nation.”<sup>60</sup> Despite this aversion, congressmen granted representation rights to expatriates, with the stipulation that the government would review “the conduct of any incoming émigré.”<sup>61</sup>

Distrust regarding émigrés’ loyalty increased in the following years, especially after the defeat of royalist troops on the Caribbean coast and the fall of the liberal regime in Spain in 1823. Suspicions of subversion led the new republic to remain wary. On 22 June 1822, the Colombian government banned the entrance of émigrés that had remained within foreign colonies.<sup>62</sup> That was not the only case. In the early months of 1824, the Government

<sup>56</sup> Act 13 April 1824, in *Santander y el Congreso de 1824, Actas y Correspondencias. Cámara de Representantes*, vol. 4 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 42.

<sup>57</sup> Act 13 July 1824, in *Santander y el Congreso de 1824, Actas y Correspondencias. Cámara de Representantes*, vol. 5 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 145.

<sup>58</sup> Santander to the President of the Lower Chamber, 17 May 1824, in *Santander y el Congreso de 1824, Actas y Correspondencias. Cámara de Representantes*, vol. 4 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 264–66.

<sup>59</sup> Ley de 30 julio de 1824 que declara secuestrados y confiscados todos los bienes existentes en el territorio de la República, pertenecientes a los súbditos del rey de España, in *Cuerpo de leyes de la República de Colombia* (Caracas: Imprenta de Valentín Espinal, 1840), 265.

<sup>60</sup> Act 66, 6 July 1821, in *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta, 1821*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1989), 258.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>62</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Historia, SR. 49, 9. D. 69, Agueda Garmendia de Paul to Soubllette, 22 September 1822.

Council deliberated on whether to permit the entry of Spanish liberal exiles who had fled Spain following the fall of the Liberal Triennium and the restoration of Ferdinand VII's absolutist rule in October 1823.<sup>63</sup> The decision was unequivocal. The council ordered Colombian commissioners in Europe to refuse passports to any Spanish liberal. Likewise, the council sent a circular to ports' intendants, commanding them to forbid the entrance of any person fleeing from Spain or any Spanish possessions that had not declared its independence. The order made exceptions for those residing in the Peninsula due to their "support for independence."<sup>64</sup> Likewise, it exempted individuals living in Spain or any of its colonies before the beginning of the revolution and who had not acted against the republican cause.

The Colombian administration exercised caution regarding the potential repercussions of émigrés' arrival. They believed that permitting the entrance of Spanish liberals or *Americanos* from Cuba, Puerto Rico, or former Spanish territories without being certain of their loyalty to the republican cause might open the door to individuals intending to destabilise the government. Anxieties about émigrés' actions persisted over the years. In December 1826, Bolívar ordered that "any expelled foreigner or émigré from Colombia" could not enter the country's ports without government authorization.<sup>65</sup> Colombian authorities decided to enforce any necessary measures to prevent the arrival of suspected émigrés. Colombian emigration policy evolved into a means of safeguarding the republican regime.

Despite their concerns about émigrés' loyalty to the republic, Colombian leaders knew that they needed to facilitate the return of expatriates, especially if they wanted to reconstruct the social fabric destroyed during the revolution. Thousands of émigrés had abandoned Costa Firme during the last part of the war, tearing many families and leaving many territories with few resources. Nevertheless, émigrés were not passive subjects in this story. Many of them made several efforts to return, challenging republican attitudes regarding ideas of citizenship and nationhood. Furthermore, émigrés and their families questioned the category of émigré itself. Who could be considered an émigré, and under what circumstances? What could they contribute to the new republic? These questions became more relevant in October 1821, when the Colombian government declared the end of a grace period for the re-entry of émigrés. They, in tandem with their families, began to send droves of petitions to the republican administration.<sup>66</sup> Through studying these

<sup>63</sup> Spanish liberals fled from Spain escaping from the persecution of Ferdinand VII both in 1814 – following the fall of the Cádiz Regime – and in 1823. They escaped to France, Great Britain, Mexico, and other places across the Atlantic World. See Juan Luis Simal, *Emigrados: España y el exilio internacional, 1814–1834* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2012). On the arrival of Spanish liberals to the Americas after 1823, see Juan Luis Simal, "Exils et circulations des idées politiques entre Amérique hispanique et Espagne après les indépendances (1820–1836)," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, no. 51 (2015), 35–51, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rh19.4918>. On how Spanish liberals that found refuge in Mexico reacted to republican expulsion laws in the late 1820s, see Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, "Envisioning Empire from Inside the United States: Exile, Constitutional Monarchism, and Ethnic Conflict in Post-Independence Mexico," *The Americas* 80:4 (2023), 537–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2023.63>.

<sup>64</sup> Ordinary Council, 10 March 1824, in *Acuerdos del Consejo de Gobierno de la República de Colombia, 1821–1824*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 187.

<sup>65</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Negocios Administrativos, Serie 71, Caja 2, Jorge López to Secretary of State, 9 December 1826.

<sup>66</sup> As Miguel Dantas da Cruz has explained, the petitions were a key instrument of governance in the Atlantic World during the modern period. They were widely used to request royal grants, ask for pardons, and apply for jobs and positions. Petitioning evolved and persisted in the nineteenth century. See Miguel Dantas da Cruz, "Introduction: Atlantic Petitionary Traditions and Developments," in *Petitioning in the Atlantic World, c. 1500–1840: Empires, Revolutions and Social Movements*, ed. Miguel Dantas da Cruz (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1–18. On how different actors understood and elaborated petitions for political purposes during the Age of Revolutions in the Americas, see Álvaro Caso Bello, "Petitions to Correct Revolutionary Rumours: The City



petitions, the following section analyses how émigrés and their families advocated for their return and the strategies they deployed to do so.

## Returning to Colombia

Debates regarding émigré issues extended beyond the halls of the congress. Republican leaders and émigrés themselves actively participated in the discussions about how to deal with this problem and what it meant to be an émigré. The Colombian government emphasised the need to regulate the return of émigrés and rebuild the social fabric of a fragmented society. Meanwhile, expatriates used different strategies to secure their re-entry. Many of them questioned the politicisation of their travels, arguing that they were not émigrés since they left out of fear rather than loyalty to the Spanish Crown. Others invoked notions of family unity, stressing that they wanted to reunite with their relatives and overcome the tragedy of war. Finally, others, aware of Colombian authorities' distrust, called upon their rights as citizens, adopting republican notions of nationhood to ensure their repatriation. These strategies reveal that expatriates constantly considered the possibility of returning and played with the meaning of émigré to achieve their goals.

As revolutionary troops began consolidating their positions in New Granada, republican leaders began to craft a reconciliation strategy to overcome the political divisions created by the war.<sup>67</sup> Within this scenario, the return of émigrés became a potential tool to strengthen social and political bonds within the new republic. The Colombian government's amnesty issued on 15 January 1820 aimed at persuading émigrés to come back to the country.<sup>68</sup> This proclamation sought to "consolidate family bonds again, just like unions consolidate social bonds." It also wanted to "calm the anxiety and distress of so many mothers, wives, and children of the wretched ones who emigrated because of the terror aroused by the Spanish government or their commitment with it."<sup>69</sup> Republican leaders understood the importance of announcing humanitarian measures to celebrate the creation of Colombia, offering pardons as a symbol of their commitment to rebuilding social ties.

The negotiation of a truce between Bolívar and Pablo Morillo, commander of the royalist armies, forced the Colombian government to address the arrival of émigrés. Signed in November 1820, the Armistice Treaty and the Treaty to Regularize the War sought to decrease the levels of violence and halt hostilities for six months. The armistice motivated some émigrés to return, but their entry stirred tensions. A letter from Santander to Bolívar unveils this situation: Santander lamented the necessity of allowing the entrance of "individuals known for their disaffection to independence."<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, he highlighted that he had "welcomed all the Spaniards and *Americanos* who have come forward imploring our generosity."<sup>71</sup> Fuelled by suspicion, Santander issued a decree on 11 April 1821, ordering

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Council of Santafé Bogotá and Madrid's Agentes de Indias, c. 1780–1795," in *Petitioning in the Atlantic World, c. 1500–1840: Empires, Revolutions and Social Movements*, ed. Miguel Dantas da Cruz (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 86–102; Andréa Slemian and Renata Silva Fernandes, "'Na forma que com tanta justiça se requer': O direito de petição no contexto da Independência do Brasil," in "A Independência do Brasil – 200 anos", special issue, *Antíteses* 15 (2022), 146–81, <https://doi.org/10.5433/1984-3356.2022v15nEspecialp146-181>.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila and Rodrigo Moreno Gutiérrez, "El derrumbe de la Monarquía Española en el Nuevo Reino de Granada y en Nueva España, 1819–1821," *Revista Brasileira de História* 42 (2022), 64, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-93472022v42n91-04>.

<sup>68</sup> *Correo del Orinoco*, no. 52, 12 February 1820, 1.

<sup>69</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Negocios Administrativos, Serie 71, Caja 5, f. 155r, Secretary of Justice's Memorial, 31 December 1820.

<sup>70</sup> Santander to Bolívar, 31 October 1820, in *Cartas Santander-Bolívar*, vol. 3, 1820–1822 (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 51.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

returnees to “swear an oath of loyalty to the republic or return to the enemies.”<sup>72</sup> This decree circulated widely across Colombian provinces.

Doubts regarding expatriates’ return led the Colombian government to establish the “Émigré Commission.” Devoted to studying émigrés’ requests to return, the commission sought to protect the republic from external threats. The commission gained significant importance in late 1821. On 18 October of that year, the *Gaceta de Caracas* announced the expiration of the period for *Americano* émigrés to return to the country. The ultimatum persuaded numerous émigrés in the Caribbean islands and their relatives in Venezuela to apply for a passport to enter the country. Passports had already served as tools of regulation under the Spanish Empire, particularly to control the movements of foreigners during the colonial period. Their importance increased significantly at the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, amid rising tensions between European empires during the Age of Revolution.<sup>73</sup> Colombia adopted a similar policy. Unwilling to admit individuals “that did not deserve its complete trust during the ongoing war of independence,” the Colombian government became increasingly concerned with identifying those who sought to re-entry.<sup>74</sup> More than two years after the initial decree, the Colombian government ultimately chose to employ the Émigré Commission to control the return of individuals who had left the country during the war.

The decision aimed at regulating the ongoing influx of émigrés. The *Gaceta de Caracas* stressed that some expatriates were “entering the republic, retracting from their old mistakes and opinions.”<sup>75</sup> They had many reasons to return. Mostly living in Curaçao, émigrés faced several hardships. Lack of food and water hit the island hard. The situation was such that Curaçao’s authorities sought ways to relocate émigrés to the mainland and, in some cases, even forced them to do it.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the consolidation of republican rule in Colombia inspired many expatriates to return. “Many emigrants from the Main are returning, and several of the number are induced by the acknowledgment of their independence by our Government,” claimed the U.S. Consul in a letter to John Quincy Adams in April 1822.<sup>77</sup> Émigrés saw the decree and the government’s disposition as an opportunity to reunite with their families or return home. We do not know how many people returned, but at least forty-eight persons applied for a passport for themselves or their relatives. Many others decided to stay in Curaçao or travelled to Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Spain to restart their lives.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> AGNC, Negocios Administrativos, Serie 71, Caja 9, f. 868, José María Montillo to Minister of Interior and Justice, 8 May 1821.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Biersack, “Identidad, pasaportes y vigilancia política: la expulsión de los extranjeros de Buenos Aires en 1809–1810,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 25:3 (2016), 371–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2016.1227613>; 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, <https://doi.org/10.3989/revindias.2016.021>. On how issuing passports to regulate the movement of people shaped modern nation-states, see John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>74</sup> *Gaceta de Caracas*, 18 October 1821, 2. Thanks to Alexander Chaparro Silva for sharing with me the references in the *Gaceta de Caracas*.

<sup>75</sup> *Gaceta de Caracas*, 26 September 1821, 62.

<sup>76</sup> Archivo Histórico Nacional-Madrid, Estado, 8734, 218, Canztlaar to Torre y Pando, 13 August 1821.

<sup>77</sup> US National Archives, M42, Despatches from US ministers to the Netherlands, v. 7 (1822–1824, roll 11), Parker to John Quincy Adams, 27 April 1822. Thanks to Thomas Mareite for this reference.

<sup>78</sup> On about the fate of exiles from New Granada and Venezuela in the remnants of the Spanish Empire, see Chambers, “Expatriados en la madre patria”; Sarah Chambers, “¿Refugiados o exiliados? El caso de los emigrados realistas a Puerto Rico en el siglo XIX,” in *El exilio en la independencia iberoamericana*, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy and Georges Lomné (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Pacífico, 2025), 65–86; Romy Sánchez, “El refugio cubano: Emigrados a la Siempre Fiel en tiempos de independencia,” in *El exilio en la independencia iberoamericana*, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy and Georges Lomné (Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad del Pacífico, 2025), 87–103; Nicolás

Expatriates and their families used several strategies to secure the return successfully. Women played a crucial role in shaping these strategies. Aware of the fragile political situation, they emphasised their loyalty to the new republic, the necessity of reconstructing their families, and their relatives' emigration conditions. As Helena Tóth has shown for the German and Hungarian cases, women quickly learned the language of the political culture emerging during the revolutions.<sup>79</sup> Conscious of the suffering and extreme circumstances they and their relatives faced in Curaçao and Venezuela, women and émigrés stressed the importance of allowing the re-entry of expatriates.

Depoliticisation of travel became one of the first approaches that émigrés and their families used to obtain the Colombian government's permission to enter the country. During the war, civilian populations realised that both sides viewed emigration as a sign of political loyalty. Thus, several petitioners highlighted that they left because of the uncertainties of the war. For instance, in a petition sent by the priest José Gabriel Sutil, agent of Juan Vicente Arévalo's sons and heirs, he argued that the brothers Juan Vicente, José Bernardo, and Luis left the country after the republican triumph in the battle of Carabobo. Sutil claimed that "terror" clouded the three brothers' judgment. "It is not possible to make a firm and right resolution in such times of trouble; and much less so for inexperienced and timid young men," Sutil argued.<sup>80</sup> At a time when traveling was considered an expression of partisanship, expatriates such as the Arévalo brothers demonstrated that fear caused by the unpredictability of the war, detached from any political motivations, had become one of the primary reasons people decided to emigrate. Thus, by depoliticising their travels, expatriates sought to demonstrate that they were not "émigrés" in the strict sense of the term. Instead, many expatriates portrayed themselves as refugees.

New perceptions of the republican government also influenced émigrés' decision to return. Memories from the war and royalist propaganda against the revolutionaries had undermined émigrés' trust in the republican cause. Such was the case of José Melo Navarrate, a Canarian merchant. His wife, María Antonia González, said Navarrate did not know about "the fair and benign character of the current government." Indeed, González emphasised that the Spanish government depicted the revolutionaries as "enemies of humanity," which was why he had fled.<sup>81</sup> Like other relatives, González attributed Navarrate's departure to fear. However, she argued that Navarrate decided to return as soon as he knew that the "Americanos and the Europeans were considered in the same way."<sup>82</sup> Other émigrés felt similarly. Many opted to pledge allegiance to Colombia once they sensed that the new government could guarantee their security and expressed its interest in incorporating Spaniards and *Americanos* into the new republic.

Family reunification emerged as a significant concern for émigrés and their relatives seeking to return to Colombia. The uncertainties of the war had torn families apart since the early years of the conflict. Several men abandoned cities such as Caracas, leaving behind

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Alejandro González Quintero, "Preservando Cuba de la 'manía de la independencia': autonomía, esclavitud y emigrados en el Caribe durante la disolución de la monarquía española," in *El exilio en la independencia iberoamericana*, ed. Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy and Georges Lomné (Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad del Pacífico, 2025), 105–34; Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, "Struggling against Independence: Loyalist Exiles' Views on Imperial Rule During and After the Spanish American Revolutions," *Almanack* 36 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463336ed30323>; Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, "Juan Manuel García del Castillo y Tejada: uma vida marcada pelo exílio durante as guerras da Independência na América Espanhola," in *Migrações e Exílios no Mundo Atlântico durante a Era das Revoluções*, ed. Murillo Dias Winter and Kelly Eleuterio (forthcoming).

<sup>79</sup> Tóth, *An Exiled Generation*, 111.

<sup>80</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 4, f. 134r, José Gabriel Sutil's Petition, 24 December 1821.

<sup>81</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 4, f. 135v, María Antonia González's petition, 26 December 1821.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

women and children. Many of these women and children often had to contend with the government's confiscation policies, highlighting that they did not "incur in the hostility of following the government of Spain."<sup>83</sup> Hence, the ones who stayed endured the hardships of a fierce war, experiencing poverty and separation. First-hand witnesses of the effects of the confrontation, émigrés and their relatives insisted on the importance of reunifying their families as a cornerstone of the consolidation of the new Colombian republic.<sup>84</sup>

Such was the case of Micaela Hernández, a native of Caracas and the wife of Juan Valero. A European Spaniard pharmacist, Valero had abandoned Caracas with one of his daughters and his sick son-in-law, after which they travelled to Curaçao before returning to Venezuela without a passport. Meanwhile, Hernández and four additional children stayed behind. For that reason, Hernandez asked the Colombian government to receive Valero and allow him to care for their three daughters. Moreover, Hernandez and Valero's son had died during the displacement, an eight-year-old child who "could have been useful to the republic."<sup>85</sup> By emphasising the role that her deceased son might have played in the future, Hernández highlighted how significant her husband's return to the republic was. Keeping families apart because of emigration was detrimental for families, and the republican cause was also losing potential and valuable citizens, and potential future leaders.

For émigrés, Colombia turned into a place where families could recover from the unfortunate consequence of the war. Émigrés and their relatives highlighted the importance of rebuilding family bonds and patriarchal authority upon expatriates' return. María del Carmen Betancourt's case illustrates this point. In November 1821, the Colombian government expelled her husband, Juan Santos Larrazabal, after he returned from Curaçao. In her petition, Betancourt claimed that although they did not understand the government's decision, he obeyed without hesitation. She depicted his husband's obedience as proof of his "desire to belong to the Republic of Colombia."<sup>86</sup> Betancourt also stated that Larrazabal wanted to "return to the capital, obey and support, as he had sworn, the republic's government, and assist his large and unfortunate family."<sup>87</sup> For her, supporting the government and family were two intertwined issues. Therefore, she requested that the administration allow her husband to serve Colombia and assist his relatives in recovering from the hardships of war.

Émigrés and their relatives realised that they needed to show their allegiance to the new republic to facilitate the reunification of their families. Proving a lack of support for the Spanish government was one of the strategies that they adopted. Around 1821, many émigrés continued to fund royalist troops from their posts in the Caribbean, increasing Colombian government distrust regarding the return of expatriates.<sup>88</sup> For that reason, émigrés had to swear that they were not participating in these activities. Such was the case of Juan José Lander. Several witnesses testified that Lander did not join conspiracies against the republican administration. For instance, Francisco Cabrera stated that Lander's conduct in Curaçao was "prudent" and did not "contribute with any donation to General Morales'

<sup>83</sup> AGNC, Archivo Anexo, Fondo Embargos, vol. 5, 17, Claim of the assets seized from the émigré Baldirio Domenech, 12 March 1823.

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Chambers has explored this issue in depth for the Chilean case in *Families in War and Peace*.

<sup>85</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17. D.9, f. 313v, Micaela Hernández's petition, 21 December 1821.

<sup>86</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17. D.9, f. 304v, María del Carmen Betancourt's petition, 22 December 1821.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 305f.

<sup>88</sup> To see émigrés' support to the royalist cause from Curaçao, Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, "The Monarchical Caribbean."

expedition against the Colombian government.”<sup>89</sup> This statement underlined that émigrés were not planning to take part in any plan to overthrow the nascent administration. Aware of the suspicions around their return, émigrés understood that they must recover the trust of the Colombian government.

Likewise, émigrés needed to demonstrate that they could switch sides and openly support the Colombian government. That was a crucial requirement for royalist officers seeking to return to Colombia. These officers held significant potential value for the republican cause: they could serve a government eager for military personnel, and securing their services could weaken the royalist cause. Such was the case of José Venancio de Silva, lieutenant colonel of the royal army. He had travelled to Curaçao with royalist troops but decided to return to Colombia. In his petition, Silva asked to be “admitted as an honest citizen” who wanted to take “the sacred oath of following the flag of the Republic of Colombia.”<sup>90</sup> He promised to defend Colombia from “any foreign nation, especially the Spanish.”<sup>91</sup> Colombian authorities welcomed Silva to stay. Later, they replied that Silva had taken his oath of fidelity and promised to defend Colombia in its war against the Spanish monarchy. After that, Silva became a “true republican” for Colombian authorities.<sup>92</sup>

Royalist officers were not the only ones seeking to return to Colombia and participate in the republican project. Some people left the continent for reasons related to the revolutions but not the war. For instance, Felipe Fermín de Paul travelled to Spain to serve as Venezuela’s representative in the Spanish Cortes in 1820.<sup>93</sup> In September 1822, his wife, Agueda Garmendia de Paul, asked permission for residency for her husband. She claimed that de Paul had been in Spain before the establishment of “our republican government.” Thus, Garmendia argued that her husband was not an “émigré” because he “[had] not [left] the country to run away from the republic’s weapons.”<sup>94</sup> Instead, she stressed that her husband was a family man and a peaceful law professor. Furthermore, Garmendia expressed her husband’s desire to be incorporated into the “Colombian nation.” The Colombian government had already begun to reintegrate others who had fought in arms against the revolutionaries. Hence, for Garmendia, her husband had the same right. Vice-President Soublette echoed her claims, stating that de Paul was a “Colombian” and not an “émigré.”<sup>95</sup> However, the Colombian central administration hesitated about de Paul’s entrance, fearing he might be a Spanish spy. The decision was under Soublette’s jurisdiction. The final decision remains uncertain, but it is plausible to suppose that de Paul was able to return.

Petitions such as Silva and de Paul’s began to shed light on a critical issue: expatriates wanted to become Colombian citizens and leave the label of “émigré” behind. The expectation of becoming citizens of Colombia drove the petitions of many émigrés. For instance, Juan José Lander stated that he had the “firm resolution of being a citizen that would take on his obligations as part of the society [he would] belong to.”<sup>96</sup> Lander was not the only

<sup>89</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 4, f. 128v, Francisco Cabrera to Venezuela Vice-Presidency, 3 December 1821.

<sup>90</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 7, f. 256r, José Venancio Silva’s petition, 9 October 1821.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 256r.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 257r.

<sup>93</sup> On de Paul’s actions as Venezuelan representatives at the Cortes, see Robinson Meza, “Las políticas del Trienio Liberal y la independencia de Venezuela (1820–1823),” *Anuario de Estudios Bolivarianos* 13, no. 14 (2007), 91–2.

<sup>94</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Historia, SR. 49, 9, D. 69, Agueda Garmendia de Paul to Soublette, 21 September 1822.

<sup>95</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Historia, SR. 49, 9, D. 69, Soublette to Central government, 22 September 1822.

<sup>96</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D.4, f. 132v, José María Lander’s petition, 3 December 1821.



one. On 6 December 1821, Pedro Pérez asked the Colombian government for a passport, hoping to return to the country as “a citizen.”<sup>97</sup> Exiled in St. Thomas, Pérez had been waiting to return to “the country [he had] devoted [his] existence to.”<sup>98</sup> Expatriates petitioned to be considered as inhabitants of the new republic, seeking to escape from their temporary status as émigrés.

The concept of citizenship allowed émigrés to imagine themselves as part of the new republican project. As Clément Thibaud has explained, the Colombian republican project adopted the principle of citizenship early, making the individual both the purpose and the foundation of the political community.<sup>99</sup> This idea did not entirely break with colonial understandings of society, as it remained rooted in the concept of *vecino*. However, it expanded the political horizon for the lower classes and people of colour by challenging colonial notions of status and affirming the principle of legal equality.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the status of “citizen” and “Colombian” became vital concepts to integrate New Granada and Venezuelan inhabitants into the new republic. The Colombian Constitution of 1821 established that all the freemen born in Colombia and their children were Colombians. Likewise, the constitution recognised that naturalised foreigners and people who lived in Colombia and were faithful to the independent republic were also Colombians.<sup>101</sup> Émigrés’ families used the title with pride. Many of them identified as “citizens.” That is not a trivial fact. By stating that they were citizens of the republic, they appealed to their belonging to the community and the duties of the state to them, while sending their pleas to Colombian authorities. Citizenship allowed them to demand the reunification of their families and their return to Colombia.

Therefore, becoming a Colombian citizen turned into one of the main goals of émigrés re-entering to the country. Returning became an act of family reintegration and political incorporation into the republic. For that reason, émigrés and their relatives stated that they chose to be part of Colombia. José María de las Llamosas, a native of Caracas, stressed that he “had sincere wishes of belonging to Colombia” and, for that reason, he expressed his firm resolution of “being a Colombian citizen.”<sup>102</sup> De las Llamosas had been born in Venezuela, and because of that, he was a Colombian according to the constitution. However, his petition highlighted how important it was to show a genuine interest in being part of the new republic. Being born in Colombian territory was not enough. Choosing to be Colombians became proof of émigrés’ adherence to the new republic.

New ideas of nationality built on their sentiments towards the republic and family connections also helped émigrés shape their claims. Émigrés not only emphasised their commitment to being part of Colombia. They also stressed their rights and feelings towards the new government to be incorporated into nascent Colombia. Such was the case of Belén Ustaris and her husband, Ramón Monteverde. She declared that Monteverde was “a Colombian because of his liberal sentiments” and because he was “married with a daughter

<sup>97</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 9 f. 338r, Pedro Pérez’s petition, 6 December 1821.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 338v.

<sup>99</sup> Clément Thibaud, “La emergencia de la ciudadanía en la Nueva Granada,” in *Historias de lo político en Colombia*, vol. 1, *Imaginando repúblicas en tiempos de independencia, 1780–1852*, ed. Margarita Garrido, Francisco A. Ortega, and Franz Hensel (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional-Universidad del Rosario, 2024), 219.

<sup>100</sup> Thibaud, “La emergencia de la ciudadanía en la Nueva Granada.”

<sup>101</sup> Constitución Política de la República de Colombia, 1821, Sui Juriscol, <https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?ruta=Constitucion/30020077>.

<sup>102</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 9, f. 352r, José María Llamosas’s petition, 20 November 1821.

of the republic.”<sup>103</sup> Ustaris highlighted two crucial issues within these statements. First, she underlined that Monteverde’s political opinions made him a Colombian. As other émigrés had already highlighted, being Colombian was not only a matter of birth but an issue of political affiliation. Second, Ustaris stressed that Monteverde had the right to return to the republic since he was married to a Colombian woman. Ustaris and Monteverde’s successful case of return reveals that émigrés effectively used new conceptions of citizenship to stop being considered expatriates by the Colombian government.

Ustaris’s case illustrates how émigrés and their families strategically deployed the language of rights and citizenship government to secure the return of their relatives. Mainly focused on displacement during the war and the aid of royalists in the Caribbean islands, this concept of “émigré” eventually came to exclude many people who ran from misery and fear and those who, although they had supported the royalists, now wanted to be part of the republic. Émigrés and their relatives pushed against this idea by arguing that many of those classified as émigrés actually had the desire and the right to return and become part of the new republic. In doing so, they signalled their devotion to rebuilding confidence and trust with the nascent administration and expanding what it meant to be Colombian.

## Conclusions

Emigration was common during the Spanish American Revolutions. As occurred with other upheavals worldwide, thousands of people abandoned their homelands due to their political beliefs or fear. The historiography has often focused on one side of the story. While many fled and decided to reside elsewhere permanently, many also returned. This situation was frequent. Émigrés were aware of their homelands’ political situation, looking to receive news encouraging them to return or stay in their host societies. Thus, in several cases, being an émigré was a temporary status rather than a permanent one. Authorities on the continent and in the Caribbean knew that. Consequently, expatriates embraced or rejected the term “émigré” according to political circumstances. Being considered an émigré or denied being one was, in some cases, a strategic decision. The constant back-and-forth movements during the revolution in Spanish America facilitated this process as individuals moved around, making return a common experience for revolutionaries and royalists.

Therefore, returnees sought to leave the label of “émigré” behind when they decided to return to the new Republic of Colombia. “Émigré” became a politicised term that expressed a political association. Revolutionaries and royalists associated emigration with political loyalty. However, that association was not beneficial when republican authorities and émigrés sought to reconstruct the social fabric of the nascent republic. Republican leaders eagerly debated about the possible return of émigrés. They understood that, despite their doubts, they had to provide individuals willing to return an opportunity to do so. Émigrés seized it. They and their relatives sought to create a difference between political exiles and refugees. Throughout their petitions, émigrés highlighted why people decided to leave during fierce military confrontations and periods of political instability. Fear and uncertainty encouraged many people to abandon their residences in New Granada, Venezuela, and other Spanish American territories. Meanwhile, amnesties and republican deadlines to abandon their host residences persuaded émigrés to return. Appealing to ideas of loyalty to the republic, family reunification, and national reconciliation, émigrés and their relatives sought to convince the Colombian government to accept their re-entry. In doing so,

<sup>103</sup> AGNC, Sección República, Peticiones y Solicitudes, SR. 75, 17, D. 9, f. 350f, Belén Ustaris’ petition, 3 December 1821.

they successfully challenged the Colombian government's prior perception of emigration and promoted wider conceptions of republican citizenship.

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