

CATALAN AND SCOTTISH MIGRANTS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CANARY ISLANDS PORTS IN CARIBBEAN COMMODITIES NETWORKS (1840-1920)¹

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In 1812, James Swanston left Scotland bound for the Caribbean, aged just fourteen, with the intention of joining his brother Thomas, and other members of his family who had settled in St Kitts. However, he never reached his destination. The ‘Concord’ —the brigantine on which he was travelling— stopped at Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, where some cargo was off-loaded, and other merchandise shipped. Such a stop was a common one for journeys between Europe and the Caribbean, taking advantage of the transatlantic currents running South to the Canaries, before turning westwards. These were, of course, the same currents that Columbus had made use of in his voyages to the Americas – and since Columbus’s time, the Canary Islands were employed as a way-station for Atlantic navigation. Unfortunately (though in the end the events were to prove fortuitous), James Swanston never reached St Kitts. In 1812, Britain was still at war with France, and shortly after leaving Tenerife the Concord was set-upon by a French privateer, the Marengo, and taken to New York for sale (the United States also having recently declared war on Britain). Before this, though, James Swanston and the other passengers on board were landed on one of the Canary Islands, and left to fend for themselves. Swanston eventually made his way to the town of Las Palmas, on Grand Canary Island; but rather than seeking transport out, whether back to Scotland or onward to the Caribbean, he found himself attracted to life there, and decided to remain. Despite his young age, Swanston seems to have quickly prospered in his new home, and following the well-established pattern by which Scottish kinship networks provided the basis for ongoing migration, he began to encourage other members of his family to join him. Amongst these was his first cousin, Thomas Miller, who arrived in Las Palmas in 1824, and who later established one of the most important of Canary Islands merchant houses, Miller & Sons, a company that was to become instrumental in the development of Las Palmas as an important port in the growing transatlantic trade networks.²

Coinciding with the settlement of Scots on the Canary Islands was the similar arrival of Catalans. From the eighteenth century the Canaries had been importing Catalan wines for re-export to the Caribbean. But when Spain began to allow Cataluña to trade directly with the outside world (ending the monopoly of Cadiz over the Atlantic trade), Catalans began to expand their shipping and trading networks to the Canary Islands, and along with this a number of Catalans chose to migrate, settling mainly in Santa Cruz de Tenerife – which had dominated Canary Islands external trade since the seventeenth century. As with the Scots in Las Palmas, the Catalans in Tenerife began to grow to economic, social and political prominence over the course of the nineteenth century. Particularly prominent were the Guimerás, who became established on the back of their already existing involvement in the wine and aguardiente trade. Agustín Guimerá, following his settlement in Tenerife in 1826, quickly rose to prominence amongst local merchants, playing an important part in the development of the island’s external trade over the course of the century. His importance can be seen in the positions that he held in the island’s political life, including Vice President of the Board of Trade at the time of the establishment of the Canary Islands Free Ports in 1852.

As with many such migrants (both Scots and Catalans), despite their central importance to Canary Islands society, when Agustín Guimerá retired he returned to his land of origin, where his son was to become the celebrated Catalan playwright Ángel Guimerá.³

Although in the nineteenth century political control of the Caribbean was principally divided between the European powers, the globalising networks through which the region's commodities were produced, traded and consumed developed largely as a result of sub-imperial interconnections that operated beneath and beyond formal imperial bounds.⁴ Migrants from Cataluña and Scotland played an important role in these – and this paper is written in the context of a new research project aimed at uncovering their history and activities. Cataluña and Scotland were leading (even pioneering) centres of trade and industry within their respective countries (Spain and Great Britain), while maintaining a distinctive history and culture. Catalan and Scottish migrants played important international roles in the spread of trading and transport networks and industrial technology; and had a visible, but relatively under-studied, presence in the Caribbean. Although European political hegemony over the Caribbean region became increasingly fragile as the twentieth century approached, a complex set of transnational productive, commercial and industrial relations was maintained, and even strengthened. The ports of the Canary Islands had for long played an important part in this, and this paper explores how, in particular relation to the Catalan and Scottish migrants, these ports contributed to the development of Caribbean commodities.

The paper suggests that the Canary Island ports, while not controlling the Caribbean-European commodities networks, nor even figuring particularly highly in the trade itself, were nevertheless of crucial importance for holding these networks together. In effect, they were the lynchpin for these networks – in particular with the opening of the Free Ports in the 1850s – acting as coaling stations for the steamship routes that historically had used the islands as a way-point, providers of agricultural provision (both for shipping, and for the Caribbean colonies), bringing together transatlantic routes with those to West Africa and Asia (along the Cape route), and providing large numbers of migrants in particular as labourers for the Hispanic Caribbean in the aftermath of slavery. In this, Scots and Catalans played a disproportionate role— and just as they were playing a crucial role in the Caribbean itself, such migrants were instrumental in developing the Canary Islands and bringing them to prominence in the transnational trading routes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper explores some of the points of comparison between the Scots and Catalans: the importance of kinship networks, and how these were used to build wider transnational relations.

CANARY PORTS AS LYNCHPIN

Direct trade between the ports of the Canary Islands and the Caribbean in the nineteenth century was limited; but although it might have appeared that this was not on a scale significant enough to warrant the Canary Ports taking on the importance that they did, in fact in a number of respects it held a particular importance. With Cuba offering the most buoyant, and largest, Hispanic Caribbean market at the time, commerce between the Canary Islands and the Caribbean was primarily with this island, and to a lesser extent Puerto Rico. With sugar-cane cultivation increasingly dominating land use in Cuba, exports from the Canary Islands, in particular food products such as onion, cheese, potatoes, almonds and salt fish, were vital in helping to maintain Cuban society as it was drawn towards monoculture. Cuba was the single most important destination for Canary Island onions, in the 1870s taking around three-quarters of all onion exports. At the same time, all Canary Island cod exports

went to Cuba —it seeming that the salting process was of an inferior kind, which made it difficult for them to export to other markets. These same ships would then return, carrying above all sugar, rum and molasses—. ⁵ Hence the trade between the Canary Islands and the Caribbean both assisted the latter in the provision of supplies, while at the same time providing one of the threads of the spreading transnational networks of the sugar trade.

Indeed, the Canary Ports took on a role not only in bilateral export and import, but also within the growing global commercial networks of the period. For example, although the Canaries seemed to be receiving large quantities of rum from Cuba, most of this appears to have been immediately re-exported for sale in West Africa. Likewise, although much flour reached Cuba from the Canary Islands, this was not a local export, but again a re-export of a previously imported product. ⁶ This role —already present because of the geographically strategic location of the islands, on the transatlantic routes— was greatly encouraged by the opening of the Canary Island Free Ports in 1852. It was also this role that encouraged the settlement in the Canaries ports of migrants of various nationalities, in particular those most associated with the spreading of such transnational trade networks at this time: the Scots and the Catalans.

However, possibly the most important contribution of the Canary Islands to the development of these transnational networks was as a coaling station. Until the advent of steam, the Canaries had been important as a provisioning base for long-distance shipping. This continued with the opening of steam-ship lines, but took on an added importance —since such vessels required refuelling. From 1838, Canary Island ports were officially allowed to take on coaling functions— although this did not begin to expand rapidly until towards the end of the nineteenth century, following the construction of new, deep water ports in Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Canaries ports had become “the... principal coaling stations on the Atlantic trade route”, ⁸ both transatlantic to the Americas, and North-South between Europe, Africa and beyond. ⁹

With the coming of steam ships, the existing routes that had historically made the Canary Islands an important way-point became further enhanced. Mail packets, and other regular shipping lines, made use of the Canary ports not only to recoal, but also enabling passengers to tranship between the different routes. For example, the two regular itineraries of the steam ships of the French Compagnie Transatlantique, connecting the Caribbean with Europe, crossed in Santa Cruz de Tenerife: one travelling from El Havre via Cádiz bound for Havana, Vera Cruz and New Orleans; the other from Marseilles and Barcelona heading for Puerto Rico, La Guaira and Costa Rica. ¹⁰ It was not just transatlantic routes that interconnected here, but global routes in general. Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, ships travelling from Europe to Asia (in particular between Britain and India) necessarily called at Tenerife or Gran Canaria. Though of course for most passengers (and cargoes) this would have been little more than a brief stopover, it did open up the possibility of quite complex journeys using the Canary Islands as a point of transfer – making possible a voyage from India to the Caribbean, if a traveller so desired, using established shipping services.

The proximity of the Canary Islands to the West coast of Africa, as has already been noted, made them a convenient entrepot for trade with the African continent: both from Europe and from the Americas. But up until the first half of the nineteenth century this also meant that they played an important part in the transatlantic slave trade. However, while the Cape Verde islands, with their greater proximity to the slave-shipping coasts, had greater significance as ports for the vessels that transported the Africans to the Americas; the Canary Islands were

nevertheless strategically placed for servicing with provisions the ships bound for Africa from Europe with merchandise to trade for human bodies. Not only those of Spanish origin, but also English and French vessels used the islands in this way throughout the eighteenth century—a nefarious precursor to the transnational commercial role that the islands would come to play in the nineteenth century—. ¹¹ With the slave trade outlawed by the British from the early-nineteenth century, yet continuing illicitly as a highly profitable commercial venture to supply the sugar plantations of the Hispanic Caribbean—in particular Cuba—merchants based in the Canary Islands were well placed to capitalise upon their position. As will be seen below, migrant Catalan merchants played a significant part in this.

Although the transatlantic slave trade vanished from the mid-nineteenth century, the Canary Islands continued to have a role in the supply of labourers to the islands of the Hispanic Caribbean. Migration between the archipelagos had been ongoing since the sixteenth century, as would be expected given the importance of the route for shipping and trade. However, it greatly accelerated in the nineteenth century, as the demand for cheap labour in the Antillean colonies increased—in particular Cuba, by then undergoing rapid economic expansion largely fuelled by the sugar industry, and seeking an alternative to slave labour—. Canary Islanders quickly became the most important Spanish regional grouping in Cuba, and by 1859 over 38,000 were resident there (almost half of all Spanish migrants). ¹² It was estimated that around 22 percent of the population of Cuba were Canary Islanders at this time. ¹³ From the 1830s, labourers from the Canary Islands were formed into contingents to build the Cuban railways. ¹⁴ But their principal destination was to work the land, with Canary Islanders being the only Spanish grouping in Cuba that was predominantly rural. ¹⁵ The outflow of islanders was stimulated by the collapse in the cochineal trade, provoked by the development of synthetic dyes; and the need in the Antilles for cheap rural labourers. ¹⁶ Although nominally free, the migration was one that was largely organised, and led many Canary Islanders into circumstances of semi-slavery in the Caribbean, bound by indentureship at least for the first few years following their arrival. ¹⁷ This flow of migrants represented an important commercial venture, and demonstrated the close ties between merchants in the Canary Islands, those based in the Antillean ports, and the Cuban and Puerto Rican landowners. ¹⁸

The human interconnection between the Canaries and the Antilles was not limited to that of rural labour for the development of the sugar industry, but was also importantly related to the development of another global commodity: tobacco. The climatic similarity between the two sets of islands encouraged the introduction of the Caribbean leaf into the Canary Islands, engaging Cuban expertise to do so. Likewise, many Canary Islanders settling in Cuba entered into tobacco cultivation, so strengthening the interconnection between the two archipelagos around this one product. ¹⁹ In fact, Cuban and Canary leaf entered into direct competition with each other in the nineteenth century, and although the Cubans were for a time able to stave this off because of the inferior quality of the Canary leaf, as the relationship between the two developed the latter steadily improved. ²⁰ The competition was such that until the 1890s, Cuban tobacco imports into the Canary Islands—for all that this was trade within the Spanish empire—carried twice the tariff that was imposed on Virginia leaf from the United States. ²¹

The Canary Islands can hardly be said to have dominated the Atlantic and its trade routes. However, clearly they played a very important role, in a number of respects, in the development of the networks (whether of commodities, trade, transport or human migration) that linked the Caribbean plantation economies not only to Europe, but to an increasingly globalised economy and society. In this the Islands can be seen to have had the function of

lynchpin, providing a fixed, stable point in the midst of such fluid interrelations: whether as a provisioning or coaling station for diverse shipping routes; as a source of colonial labour; or as a mid-Atlantic base for the merchants —many of them diasporic, such as the Scots and Catalans— who were so protagonistic in the expansion of these interconnections.

SCOTS AND CATALANS IN DEVELOPMENT OF CANARY ISLANDS

Scottish and Catalan migrants certainly did not hold a monopoly in the Canary Islands, but they do both seem to have been peculiarly and disproportionately prominent amongst, respectively, the British and Spanish residents in the part they played in the development of the economic role of the Islands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the case of the Catalans, the majority of these established themselves in Santa Cruz de Tenerife —which had dominated the external trade of the Canary Islands since the sixteenth century—. The relationship developed even before Barcelona was granted the right to trade directly with the overseas ports of the Spanish empire, with Catalan wines and aguardientes supplementing the liquor exports from the Canaries to the Caribbean when the harvest on the Canary Islands was poor. Red Catalan wines were also used to dye Canary Island wines, to help them approximate to those of Madeira, which had become very popular with the British. With the advent of free trade within the Spanish empire, this existing indirect commercial relationship could be readily built upon —with the Catalan wines that once supported the Canary Islands' industry become a direct challenge to the latter in the American markets. With ships able to trade openly out of Barcelona (rather than all overseas trade necessarily channelling through Cádiz), the Catalans could develop their own overseas shipping. This quickly led to the establishment of Catalans, such as Agustín Guimerá, in the Canary Islands—. ²²

The Catalans quickly showed signs of their importance in Santa Cruz, where migrant merchants purchased land and houses. By the mid-nineteenth century, of the 56 registered electors paying in excess of 1000 reales annual tax, 7 were Catalans. Although the proportion might seem small, it is clear that these prominent Catalans were amongst the most wealthy —since they contributed 18 percent of all contributions to the Treasury from the island; and included the two most important contributors—. Families bearing Catalan names began to play an important part in not only economic, but also social and political life: in Arrecife, Ballester and Coll; in Santa Cruz, Guimerá, Cumella and Auset. For example, Joaquin Ballester, a Catalan merchant, land and shipowner in Lanzarote, had become, by the 1820s, the wealthiest on the island, with ships engaging in the Caribbean trade as well as fishing in African waters. Manuel Coll y Brull became both the administrator of tithes, and *contador* of customs in Arrecife. In 1847, Antonio Auset was prominent in the creation of the Banco de Canarias (although this attempt at developing an indigenous financial infrastructure —a weak point throughout the Spanish empire— failed). That same year Juan Cumella i Monner arrived in the Canary Islands, subsequently making a fortune in the guano trade, and playing an important part in the supplying of fresh water and coal to ships. ²³ In the latter, Agustín Guimerá was also prominent —establishing his own coal warehouse in 1862—. ²⁴

Many other aspects of life in the Canary Islands soon found Catalans, or those of Catalan descent, playing an important part: in printing (Salvador Vidal); the judiciary (Domingo Fons y Salvá); in medicine (Ernesto Rumeu, who was involved in the commission that founded the Medico-Surgical Academy in Santa Cruz in 1878; or Juan Cumella, organising the establishment of a provisional hospital in Santa Cruz in 1893 to combat the cholera

epidemic); and in construction (Juan Sitjá y Capmany). In the arts and other intellectual activities, Angel Guimerá was not the only Catalan-Canary Islander to reach prominence—at least in local society, whether as directors of schools (Juan Ferrer); running musical societies (Ramón Torras, maestro of the ‘Clavé’ Orfeo); libraries (Enrique Font y Fonsdeviela); or theatre (with the Catalan businessmen, Juan Cumella and Agustín Guimerá, sponsoring the construction of the municipal theatre in Santa Cruz, opened in 1851)—. Catalan economic influence also led to local political influence, with Catalans occupying many important positions, as lieutenants or counsellors to the mayor of Santa Cruz, or as mayor itself (in the case of Manuel Coll y Brull in Arrecife, 1838; and Juan María Ballester y Ramón in Santa Cruz during the first years of the twentieth century).²⁵ As would be expected for a merchant of such prominence, Agustín Guimerá also occupied a number of political positions throughout the 1840s, 50s and 60s, significantly serving as Vice-President of the Board of Commerce from 1852 to 1854, at the time of the establishment of the Free Ports—a development that received considerable support from the Catalans in general, both on the island and within powerful political circles in Madrid, since they clearly stood to gain from any opening up of trading possibilities—.²⁶

The Catalans were also prominent in a darker side to Canary Island history, playing an important part in the African slave trade. With the Islands occupying such a strategic position for the triangular trade route between Cataluña, Africa and Cuba—and with the profits potentially made from the slave trade extremely high, albeit open to considerable risks, because of the outlawing of the trade from the early-nineteenth century— Catalan business were not slow to seize the advantages offered, whether running their own ships or provisioning those of others. According to the Catalan historian Josep María Fradera: “in general it can be affirmed that there were no middle-sized Catalan businesses that did not organise or finance slaving expeditions”.²⁷ For example, Cristóbal Roig i Vidal (a close associate of Agustín Guimerá) organised four or five expeditions to Madagascar in the 1820s, with the intention of establishing a permanent commercial base there. Although this project failed, he continued to develop his slaving activities, using the Canary Islands as a base, from the African coast to Cuba—feeding directly into a network of collaborators and associates based there—.²⁸

Although they possibly differed from the Catalans in that they do not appear to have been directly involved in the slave trade from their base in the Canary Islands, in other respects the Scots migrants show many similarities with their Catalan counterparts in terms of the disproportionate influence that they began to have over affairs in the islands. Taking advantage of their English and Scottish commercial and banking contacts, such merchants as the Millers, Swanstons or Hamiltons were well-placed to play an important part in extending the markets open to products from the islands, in particular cochineal (used as a scarlet/carmine dye in the textile industry), though also barilla (use in the manufacture of soap) and orchilla (another dye, this time purple). Cochineal was particularly important, and production in the Canary Islands, and exports, expanded rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Miller began to build his fortune in trading between the islands, and then began to charter ships for export of the cochineal as far afield as China.²⁹ Such initial beginnings in a growing commodity market provided such merchants with the solvency to diversify, and by the early 1840s Miller was importing cloth from the cotton and woollen mills of Manchester and Scotland, as well as “providing the local farmers with all their requirements such as seed potatoes and cattle feed”.³⁰

But it was the growing demand for coal in the Canary Islands —not only to supply steam ships, but also for local consumption in cooking and factories— that presented merchants such as the Millers with the opportunity to firmly establish their influence in the Islands. Again taking advantage of close relations with Britain (the principle coal-producing nation of the period), Thomas Miller pioneered its importation into Gran Canaria.

There was a great demand for coal for domestic kitchens, for bakeries, and for a number of small factories. For the vessels bringing coal and other cargoes there were no sheltered harbours. There was a very short mole in the town of Las Palmas which only provided limited shelter to small lighters and harbour craft. The deep-sea sailing schooners had to anchor off the coast and await favourable wave and wind conditions to enable the barges to come alongside to unload their cargoes. Tom erected coal sheds very close to the base of the town mole ...and his coal was manhandled ashore in bags from the bobbing and pitching lighters. This was a cumbersome and slow operation but there were no other facilities.³¹

Miller's coaling depot (Las Palmas Coaling Company) was the oldest such established in Gran Canaria. From the above improvised beginnings, the operation extended —first bying “an old sea-going vessel called the Alexander” and anchoring “her close inshore, where she was converted into a floating coal depot, using her hold for storage”; and then overcoming the problems caused by rough seas, that made loading and unloading difficult (Las Palmas harbour lacking a breakwater shelter in those days), to develop Las Palmas as an international port, eventually making it “one of the busiest shipping ports in the world”—.³² The latter was achieved with the formation of the new port, ‘Puerto de la Luz’, in the 1880s —with the Swanstons winning the contract to build the breakwaters—.

Just as were the Catalans, the Scottish merchants were important in the development of the financial infrastructure of the Canary Islands. Thus Thomas Miller established the first non-Spanish bank in Gran Canaria. This became the way in for a number of British banks, which made use of Miller's initiative to obtain a foothold, employing miller as their agent: the London and Westminster Bank, the National Bank of Scotland, the Union Bank of Spain and England, the London and River Plate Bank and the American Exchange in Europe.³³ Growing wealth also enabled continuing diversification, putting such merchants at the forefront of economic developments in the islands. Thus by the 1850s, the Millers were growing tobacco on their estates, and were manufacturing their own brand of cigars, ‘La Industria’. The Scots also played a role in local political life —although obviously not to the extent of the Catalans, who as Spanish subjects were able to hold public positions—. In the case of migrants such as the Millers, the political opening was as British consuls or vice-consuls —a position of considerable de facto power, at a time when British corporations were dominating the ostensibly Spanish islands—. Both Thomas Miller, his son James, and his grandson Gerald held such positions in Gran Canaria —the latter up until 1940, when he left the island for Madrid, appointed to the British Embassy there—.³⁴

SUB-IMPERIAL MIGRANTS AT THE INTERSECTION OF GLOBAL EMPIRES

By the nineteenth century, the Spanish empire was in rapid decline. However, with the loss of her continental American colonies following the wars of independence, Spain clung tenaciously throughout the century to the colonies that remained to her: principally Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, which would not succeed in separating themselves from Spanish dominion until the very end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the rise of in particular the British Empire, and the spread of transnational trading networks extending

beyond imperial boundaries —along with the increasing economic power within the Antillean colonies of a creole elite enriched by the coffee and (increasingly) sugar industries— from the latter part of the eighteenth century pushed Spain to gradually liberalise the trading possibilities of her overseas possessions. The first step to this was simply to allow Spanish ports other than Cádiz to be involved in foreign trade (which, as was indicated above, stimulated the migration and global economic activity of the Catalans), but increasingly it became difficult to maintain a fully protectionist policy. With Spain quickly falling behind the industrial and commercial developments of her imperial rivals, it became increasingly difficult to avoid accepting the inevitable opening up of trade. As was shown above, the Canary Islands were ideally placed to take advantage of this liberalisation, and develop a role as a lynchpin for intersecting transport and trade networks within the Atlantic space.

This intersection found its most visible representation in the adoption by the British of the Canary Islands as an important base for their Atlantic operations. Despite remaining administratively part of Spain itself, rather than a colony, by the mid-nineteenth century the role of the Islands both as an entrepot for Atlantic commerce, and increasingly as a coaling station for steam shipping routes, had greatly increased the direct influence of British-based companies, operating through representatives (often of British origin) based on the Islands. The native bourgeoisie not only entered into commercial relations, and frequently partnerships, with these – their economic development appeared to be intricately tied up with them.³⁵ As has been seen, migrant merchants such as the Millers took the initiative in improvements to the infrastructure of the islands, and in particular their ports. In this they were key protagonists in the decision to open these up as Free Ports from the 1850s —a significant exception to the generally protectionist policies pursued by the Spanish Empire with respect to the trading relations of its territories—. The importance of British trade for the Canary Islands is clearly seen in the figures for imports into the Islands:

| | Great Britain | France | Germany | Spain | TOTAL |
|------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1865 | 179,914 | 51,004 | 11,669 | 47,866 | 391,492 |
| 1869 | 215,781 | 127,979 | 11,298 | 162,690 | 719,544 |
| 1874 | 206,714 | 84,771 | 8,435 | 66,000 | 486,239 |
| 1884 | 163,398 | 38,785 | 26,923 | 70,035 | 335,820 |
| 1885 | 210,464 | 59,574 | 31,590 | 75,036 | 419,944 |
| 1886 | 207,380 | 70,280 | 49,115 | 45,966 | 447,568 |
| 1887 | 224,996 | 51,675 | 49,922 | 48,920 | 438,340 |
| 1888 | 273,449 | 57,306 | 56,873 | 50,875 | 476,793 |
| 1889 | 286,296 | 48,642 | 61,024 | 42,116 | 517,918 |
| 1890 | 315,259 | 70,133 | 85,954 | 39,465 | 591,136 |
| 1892 | 307,160 | 55,826 | 84,141 | 33,876 | 575,018 |

Source: A. Sampler Brown, Madeira and the Canary Islands, London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1894, p. 234, cited in SUÁREZ BOSA, Miguel: "Ports and commodities in Iberian Atlantic islands", paper given at 1st Commodities of Empire International Workshop, London, July 2007.

As the above table shows, by the 1880s consistently more than half of imports into the Canary Islands originated in Great Britain, while those from Spain were in decline —and by 1892, British imports were nine times the value of Spanish imports—. The significance of the British to the economy of the Islands led to the British being able to exert considerable political pressure, in order to guarantee appropriate conditions for their merchants and companies. For example, in the 1870s the Spanish state levied special taxes, primarily to help

pay for the war in Cuba. This resulted in disputes with the British, who objected to having to pay such contributions —so integrated, and significant, were they to life in the Canary Islands at this point that they seem to have been treated more as Spanish subjects than foreigners—. Negotiations led first to them being granted the possibility of opting out individually.³⁶ However, this in itself resulted in disputes, and the British residents in Canary Islands continued to object to the inconvenience of the bureaucratic demands made of them to secure their exemption. Therefore, in 1876 British residents in the Canary Islands were granted “exemption from all extraordinary taxes and contributions” and “repayment of war and other extraordinary taxes which have been levied”. This was ostensibly to secure “privileges and rights, as are enjoyed by the subjects and citizens of other Powers”.³⁷ However, given the level of involvement by the British in the Canary Islands economy in this period —far exceeding that of other foreigners, with several British residents counted amongst the wealthiest, and potentially most important, tax payers— this was tantamount to having their cake and eating it. The Spanish clearly felt unable to do anything but accept their demands.

It is this intersection of two global empires —the British and Spanish— within the Canary Islands that makes particularly important the comparison of Scots and Catalans. Although each was very prominent within the trade networks of their respective imperial powers, and both Cataluña and Scotland were leading (even pioneering) centres of trade and industry, they can both be seen to have maintained to a certain extent a distinct cultural identity and history. Catalans were Spanish subjects, yet continued to be distinctively Catalan. Likewise, the Scots vis-à-vis Great Britain. Both had lost their independence in the early eighteenth century, and had found themselves subsumed within a supranational entity. In many respects collectively marginalised from political power (although both individual Scots and Catalans achieved considerable political influence), and both having populations that found the bounds of their homeland restrictive, Catalans and Scots became prominent amongst migrants, and leading pioneers for the globalising networks that emanated from Spain and Britain. In this, they were quick to take advantage of the reverse side of loss of independence: free access to global empire; and both Scots and Catalans showed themselves to be avid imperialists.

Comparison of Scottish and Catalan migrants reveals a further important similarity between them. Their migration was far from individualised, but rather developed through extensive kinship networks. This was seen in the case of the Millers/Swanstons, whose arrival in the Canary Islands began as an accidental consequence of their kinship-based migration to the British West Indies (St Kitts). Once James Swanston found himself in Gran Canaria, he quickly became the foot in the door for other members of his family to likewise migrate there. Clearly close communication was maintained with family in Scotland, and until newly arrived family members became settled in their new home they shared accommodation. More established family members would help new arrivals to set themselves up. Since the migrants were not just left to their own devices to sink or swim, this greatly facilitated the rapid encroachment of Scottish migrants on the economic and social life of the Islands. This is a phenomenon that has been noted elsewhere in relation to Scottish migrants —who displayed what has often been described as ‘clanishness’—. Douglas Hamilton argues, in relation to the Scots in the Caribbean, that:

...the networks were critical to the success of Scots in the islands. The networks provided opportunities, for employment, for investment and for advancement...

They “provided security for those taking their chances, in two ways”. First, they offered the “welcoming embrace of friends or family”. Second, they “provided economic security, through the availability of capital”.³⁸

In utilising kinship and local connections, Scots ...extended their links ...purchasing land, engaging attorneys, managers, overseers and book-keepers, and welcoming new arrivals... The networks, almost uniformly, were based on pre-existing bonds. From this base, they were extended by individual contacts, both in the colonies and in Britain. In this way, the image of networks of Scots emerges. They were quite consciously transatlantic: investments by Scottish family members ...were often rewarded by the appointment of a younger family member in the colonies. The patterns of support reflected those of Scottish society, almost as if there were no ocean between them... These networks... did not exist merely as a series of bilateral links for the transfer of goods, capital and people between Scotland and a colony; they established a lattice of connections that enmeshed Scotland, the Caribbean and Britain in a transatlantic complex.³⁹

Clearly this was a transatlantic complex that encompassed the Canary Islands.

In this, the Catalans were very similar. For example, when Josep Ball·lletinas i Mont emigrated from Catalunya, he was able to do so through a kinship network that encompassed not only Havana (where he decided to settle, with the assistance of an uncle who owned a shop there), but also Cienfuegos, Mexico and Buenos Aires. His journey was facilitated by his father, a mariner. When it seemed that he was facing ill fortune in Havana, pressure was put on him from his brother in Buenos Aires (who was doing very well, thanks to the initial assistance of another uncle based there) to leave Cuba for Argentina —although in the end his pride prevented him from doing this—. ⁴⁰ As with the Scots, the Catalans were able to take advantage of the presence of family members and acquaintances abroad to facilitate their migration, both providing them with a way in and initial shelter and employment; and then the means for establishing their independence. Certainly other migrant groups demonstrated similar practices —the Scots and Catalans were not unique— but that the use of kinship networks was particularly important for them, possibly more than for other migrants, can be seen in the tendency for both Scottish and Catalan migrants to stand out from others as distinctive, and (as with the charge of ‘clannishness’ levelled against the Scots) self-helping, thereby giving them an advantage over others.

However, for all that migration by both Scots and Catalans was built upon the foundations of kinship networks that might imply that they were tied to their homeland, the way in which these networks operated and were extended actually points in a transnational direction. Despite the impression of ethnic solidarity that both gave, nevertheless the alliances that they established in fact went beyond this, to encompass others. In the first instance, because of language ties, this would mean other Britons and Spanish, respectively. Thus, “Scottish involvement ...played a crucial role in forging a unity among Britons”;⁴¹ and likewise, the vibrancy of Catalan commerce within the Spanish Empire in the nineteenth century did not occur against, but as an integral part of Spanish dominion. It was only with the final collapse of the Spanish Empire at the end of the nineteenth century that Catalans began to assert their discontent with Spain, and raise the prospect of independence.⁴² Although the principle links of the Scots may have been with Britain, and the Catalans with Spain, they were by no means limited to these. Rather, “they were enmeshed in a lattice of personal financial and mercantile

connections”,⁴³ which extended from Europe, via the Canary Islands to the Caribbean, Africa and even Asia:

The breadth of mercantile connections points to the existence of a transnational Atlantic world, where national boundaries, even between rival powers, did not prevent the transfer of goods or finance.⁴⁴

Thus, the apparent tightness of the Scottish and Catalan kinship networks may actually have led these two migrant groups to play an important role in the opening up of the Canary Islands (as of the other places where they established themselves) to transnational relations that went well beyond the confines of their respective imperial bounds.

CONCLUSION

The connection that joined Catalunya, the Canary Islands and the Caribbean found an iconic figure in the Cuban independence leader, and arguably the island’s most important intellectual figure, José Martí. Martí’s father (Mariano Martí Navarro) was from Valencia (historically a part of a greater Catalunya, and the surname Martí is a Catalan one), while his mother (Leonor Pérez y Cabrera) was born in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Although Martí’s parents met and married in Havana, where Mariano was based with the army, Leonor came from the community where most Catalans settled in the Canary Islands. Indeed, there are records of another José Martí in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the 1820s, serving as an alderman of the local government.⁴⁵ Of course, this may well be purely coincidental (Martí is not an uncommon Catalan surname); however, given what is known about the extensive transatlantic kinship networks that were established, in which the connection between Cuba and the Canary Islands was of particular importance, it is not inconceivable that the introduction between Mariano and Leonor in Havana came through such a family acquaintance. José Martí certainly showed in his extensive writings the importance that the Canary Islands played both in him personally, and in the emergence of the Cuban national identity.⁴⁶

This paper does not pretend to fully uncover the multiple connections that tied the Canary Islands into the networks of Caribbean commodities. Having been written at the start of a long-term project into the role of Scottish and Catalan in these networks, what has been presented here has only been able to draw upon the results of initial research. Nevertheless, what this early essay has revealed is of considerable interest for the wider project. It has shown that in order to understand the transatlantic connections that linked the Caribbean to Europe, the Canary Islands played a crucial role. The ports of the island acted as a lynchpin for the trade, transport and migration networks, servicing them and also facilitating their strengthening and extension. Catalan and Scottish migrants seem to have been particularly important in this. Because of the geographical position of the Canary Islands, these had been vital for transatlantic crossings (as well as North-South navigation) since at least the fifteenth century. However, the arrival of Catalan and Scottish migrants in particular from the start of the nineteenth century did much to open up the islands to trade—not just within the two empires, Spanish and British, that intersected in the Canaries ports, but globally—. They facilitated the international trade in important Catalan commodities (in particular cochineal); they made the first moves (and then became the principal agents) for the use of the Islands as coaling station; and they were amongst the prime promoters of the opening up of the Canary Islands with the establishment of free ports.

Both Catalans and Scots were very distinctive migrant groups. They were ‘sub-imperial’, in two senses. Firstly, Catalunya and Scotland, for all that they were considered integral parts of Spain and Britain respectively, both had distinct identities, and had lost their independence in the early eighteenth century. Although Catalans and Scots both became enthusiastic imperialists, their impulse to this possibly came in part from their distinctive position within their respective empires. Secondly, they showed themselves to be ‘sub-imperial’ in another respect—in that they were protagonistic in the breaking down of imperial boundaries. Although their migratory extension was based upon strong kinship networks, and although both Catalans and Scots maintained close ties to their homelands— where they would frequently send their children to be educated, and where many eventually retired—they used these as a firm foundation (which facilitated them becoming strongly established wherever they settled, be that in the Canary Islands or in the Caribbean) upon which to construct commercial and social relations that furthered the development of, in particular, trading networks that extended beneath and beyond the bounds of political empire—. Not only did such migrants contribute decisively to the making these boundaries increasingly porous. Through their agency, the rules of imperial exclusivity and protection were broken down, replacing them with the free trade that brought Caribbean products to a global market, and in which Canary Islands ports took on such a key role.

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NOTAS

- ¹ This paper is written in the context of a new study into the role of Scottish and Catalan migrants in the production and trade of Caribbean commodities, and the networks established between Glasgow and Barcelona and the principal Caribbean port cities. This is being developed within the frame of the collaborative/comparative project, 'Ports across Empires', which is a research initiative coming from the 'Commodities of Empire' project (<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/commodities-of-empire/index.html>). As such, this paper has been written very much at the start of what is a work in progress.
- ² MILLER, Basil: *Canary Saga: the Miller family in Las Palmas, 1824-1990*, London: Haggerston Press, 1990. On importance of kinship networks for developing Scottish transatlantic migration, see HAMILTON, Douglas J.: *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic world, 1750-1820*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.
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- ⁴ See, for example, CURRY-MACHADO, Jonathan: "Sin azúcar no hay país: The Transnational Counterpoint of Sugar and Nation in Nineteenth Century Cuba", *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 34:1 (2007); and "Rich flames and hired tears: Sugar, sub-imperial agents and the Cuban phoenix of empire", *Journal of Global History*, 4:1, 2009.
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- ⁸ SUÁREZ: "Role of the Canary Islands...", p. 121.
- ⁹ Despite the growing importance of steam shipping, most trade between the Canary Islands and the Caribbean and South America continued to be in sailing ships until the late-nineteenth century (Report of Vice Consul Wetherell, Las Palmas, 1874, in QUINTANA: *Informes consulares*, Vol.1, p. 175).
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- ¹⁴ ZANETTI, Oscar & GARCÍA, Alejandro: *Sugar and Railroads: A Cuban history, 1837-1959*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998, p. 117.
- ¹⁵ MALUQUER: *Nación e inmigración*, p. 71.
- ¹⁶ SÁNCHEZ SILVA Carlos & SUÁREZ BOSA, Miguel: "Evolución de la producción y el comercio mundial de la grana cochinilla, siglos XVI-XIX", *Revista de Indias*, LXVI: 237, 2006, pp. 473-90.
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- ²⁷ GUIMERÁ: “El dramaturgo Ángel Guimerá”, p. 242.
- ²⁸ GUIMERÁ: “El dramaturgo Ángel Guimerá”, p. 243.
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- ³² MILLER: *Canary Saga*, pp. 37-9.
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- ³⁴ *Hoy, Diario de la Mañana*, 31 March 1940 (with thanks to William Miller).
- ³⁵ See, for example, MÁRQUEZ, “Canarias en el imperio británico”.
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