

Compelled to import: Cuban consumption at the dawn of the nineteenth century

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Abstract

One of the sources that allow us to analyse certain consumption patterns are trade balances. These documents are especially relevant in the case of island colonies, such as Cuba, that depended on the outside world for many kinds of supplies, not just the basic ones. Despite their limitations, data on imported goods from Havana's balance of trade at the dawn of the nineteenth century allow us to examine the consumer goods that were most in demand in Cuba at that time. This essay uses that information to emphasise the relationship between colony and metropole in terms of material culture, with a particular focus on the core items of food, clothing and household goods. Overall, patterns of consumption reflect patterns of production and imports.

Keywords: Cuba; Spanish empire; consumption; statements of trade; commerce; textiles; household goods; population; Havana

Introduction

Cuba's insular character and its geostrategic position made it a key colony in the Americas in the early modern period. As Daylet Domínguez and Víctor Goldgel

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Carballo have pointed out, it was an essential hub in the Atlantic world and a central element in trans-imperial networks and rivalries.¹ It had an especially prominent role in transferring tax revenue to Spain thanks to its sustained economic growth following its insertion into the international market during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a period in which agrarian capitalism was expanding on the island.² However, until its agro-industrial sector was well established, there was a struggle over whether Cuba would adopt a protectionist stance or instead seek to conquer foreign markets, given that Spain was not able to absorb all of the island's produce or act as a re-exporter in Europe. Cuba was a clear example of the struggle between protectionist and liberalising policies, which reflected the opposing interests of Cuban planters and Spanish traders respectively.

Because of Cuba's lack of a developed secondary sector at the end of the eighteenth century, and its colonial relations both with the metropole and with other countries, the island needed to be supplied with manufactured goods as well as staple foods. Although data on imported goods from the annual statements of trade have their limitations, they allow us to analyse the most relevant consumer items. Apart from the tools and machinery required to increase agricultural production, the imports into the island reflected its social pyramid and the entangled histories of imperialism, race and gender, as the goods that each social group acquired, and their eating habits, differed according to their purchasing capacity.³ Rituals of consumption reflected the interplay of supply and demand. This essay focuses on these specific patterns, especially on the triad of "eating, clothing and dwelling."⁴

Sources and analytical framework

Scholars from different disciplines – including anthropologists, art historians, economic

historians, archaeologists, folklorists and curators – have shown a great interest in material culture and diverse analytical approaches have highlighted a relevant cross-disciplinary field of enquiry.⁵ This range of fields for examining material culture also uses an array of research methods from qualitative to quantitative approaches. When studying the material culture of the early modern period, historians consider tangible material objects as sources alongside more traditional textual sources in archival collections and museums, as well as probatory inventories or dowries.⁶ Also of interest are fiscal and trade sources, which are less commonly explored but equally relevant. Each source offers different perspectives on how to understand the past of a society through its consumption of, for example, furniture, clothing and household goods.

Trade statistics are useful in reconstructing commercial networks, although it is true that they have significant limitations such as not including smuggling, customs fraud or fluctuations in the valuations placed on products by customs authorities. Commercial records do not reveal the uses of fabrics and apparels, but they can provide insights that help to distinguish trends and meanings of consumption. According to Loïc Charles and Guillaume Daudin, “data on external trade give fundamental insights into the material culture of Early Modern Europe and its transformations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”⁷ Such statistics offer important information about shopping baskets, especially in the case of an island that was heavily dependent on its metropole.

In the case of Cuba, data on its commercial traffic are available from the end of the eighteenth century, a period in which the Royal Resolution of 18 April 1794 created a trade secretariat to record and monitor this traffic. Cuban historian Julio Le Riverend noted that figures for total trade from 1790 to 1795, from 1803 to 1815 and from 1826 onwards have been preserved.⁸ However, whereas from 1826 onwards the statements of

trade are printed and accessible, for the years at the end of the eighteenth century the only available printed statement is an incomplete copy of the Havana Balance of Trade of 1794.⁹ This contains lists of exported and imported goods in alphabetical order, with their respective weights or volumes, but without their prices (which would have been stated in the original document).¹⁰ It is likely that such data would have continued to be collected, although no more sources of this kind have appeared apart from the handwritten Havana balances of trade from 1803 to 1807.¹¹ These handwritten statements are much richer than the printed one of 1794.¹² Lists of imported and exported goods state their volume, their price in *pesos reales* and their port of origin or destination.¹³ With regard to the origin of imports, it should be noted that in some cases the statements only include the last port of embarkation, whereas in others the place where the goods started their journey is also included. In value, precious metals and enslaved Africans were the most imported trade goods followed by a variety of manufactures and other supplies that reflected the needs of the island's various social groups. Certain imported goods were intended for re-export, but the statements of trade do not indicate when this was the case – as it would often have been with cotton, for example. Exports can be divided into two main categories: agricultural goods of Cuban origin, and re-exports of precious metals.

The documentation from 1803 and 1804 is particularly useful because they were years of peace immediately following the Treaty of Amiens, signed by France and Great Britain on 25 March 1802. Although the treaty was broken as early as 16 May 1803, Spain was not adversely affected until late 1804, when it went to war against Britain in support of Napoleon. When France and Spain were defeated at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805, trade relations between Spain and its American colonies were cut until the end of hostilities between Spain and Britain on 5 June 1808. Hence, in 1806–

1807, Cuba's trade had to be conducted by "neutral" countries. In the statements of trade, these countries were included under the general term of *Colonies*. At the outbreak of the war between Britain and France on 18 May 1803, the United States took advantage of the situation to establish itself as the carrier between the Americas and Europe. In the case of sugar, when Britain blocked the French ports of Martinique and Guadeloupe from January 1804, North American traders took French and Spanish products to American ports, unloaded them, and then reloaded them for European ports as if they were American exports. Therefore, the United States merchant fleet purchased sugar in the colonies of belligerent countries and sold it in the European markets. The United States became the only neutral carrier engaged in foreign trade in the Caribbean and began to focus its attention on Cuban commodities, strengthening commercial relations with the colony.¹⁴ As Le Riverend has pointed out, the restrictive policy of monopoly interests and Spain's limited maritime power forced its colonies to take advantage of any opportunity to trade, as no navy was capable of exercising a monopoly over global trade routes.¹⁵ The Gulf of Mexico was one of the locations where the struggle for markets between the old powers of Europe (France, Britain, Spain) and emerging powers such as the United States took place.

One of the pillars of the colonial regime was the relationship between the Spanish administration and the colonial elites.¹⁶ Planters were expanding their productive capabilities and consumer demand for imports increased as the standard of living improved. Wider markets were needed.¹⁷ As a result, new legislation on commerce and administration was established from the final decades of the eighteenth century onwards.

Cuba's trade was first liberalised when the Royal Instruction of 16 November 1765 authorised direct trade between eight Spanish ports and the islands of Cuba, Saint-

Domingue, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Margarita, and then further when the regulations of 12 October 1778 enacted the decrees of freedom of trade between Spain and its American colonies, making Cuba the first American colony permitted to trade with all the Spanish ports. Almost at the same time, Spain liberalised inter-colonial trade in the Americas. These liberalising measures were a reflection of Cuban economic needs (Table 1).¹⁸

Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1796, Mexico's export custom duties to the Spanish Antilles, Guatemala, Santa Fe and Peru were reduced by 25 per cent and the silver extracted by Veracruz was made exempt from duties if it came from the profit of the sale of Antillean goods. However, the Havana Consulate also aspired to exempt silver sent from New Spain to Cuba to acquire sugar for the peninsular market. • From 1768, Cuba was authorised to import, tax-free, the food purchased in Campeche • From 1807, Spanish vessels departing from Cuba with Cuban commodities, as well as Spanish and foreign goods and effects from Spain, were permitted to unload in the ports of New Spain and Campeche, with the repeal of royal orders previously banning this.
Meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 1768, Cuba was authorised to import, tax-free, meats purchased in Campeche, Veracruz and Cumaná. • From 1787, exports of salted meats from Buenos Aires to La Havana were free of duties and <i>almojarifazgo</i> for six years, a measure that was then ratified by the king. • By the Royal Order of 10 April 1793, the king removed import and export duties even 'salted or appraisal meats or to the sebum of Buenos Aires from <i>alcabala</i> and other countries of America as well for the trade of the Metropolis, as for the interior of some Provinces to another, or from port to port of the Americas' • The Royal Order of 10 April 1793, was confirmed on 20 December 1802 and 22 June 1804, and decreed that American salted meats would be free from royal, municipal and other arbitration duties.
Flour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Royal Cédula of 1782 exempted from <i>alcabalas</i> the Mexican flour shipped to the Windward Islands. • The Royal Order of 18 February 1784 banned foreign flour but authorised flour of Novohispanic and Spanish origin. • The Royal Order of 17 July 1790 decreed that flour from Veracruz could enter freely into La Havana. These measures sought to neutralise the presence of North American flour brought by Bostonians to Cuba.

Table 1: Inter-colonial trade

Author's own elaboration. R.O. 10 May 1807, al virrey de Nueva España, AGI, Santo Domingo, 2.177; *Guía o Estado General de la Real Hacienda de España*, 1803 by *D. Joseph Señan*, Madrid, s/a., pp. 9-10; Expediente firmado por Garay el 31 January 1817

in Madrid in *Memoria de la Real Sociedad Patriótica* (1819). †

With this new legislation, the Crown was aiming to favour Cuba – which still depended on the Mexican *situados* as currency – as the colony had become strategically important since the Seven Years' War, when the British returned Havana and Manila to Spain in exchange for Florida.¹⁹ The measures intended to streamline trade between the metropole and its American colonies, but compliance depended first and foremost on whether Spain was militarily capable of controlling smuggling.²⁰ Secondly, in wartime, it was important for the purposes of trade and communication to keep open the shipping routes between Spain and the Antilles, and between the Antilles and the rest of Spain's American empire. Spain's limited naval power was not sufficient to prevent the expansion of unauthorised trade and, in wartime, allowed the neutrals to trade with Cuba. With the wars between European powers hindering, or at times preventing, the supply of Cuba by Spain and the continental American colonies, it was the neutrals that facilitated the expansion of Cuban agricultural production and provided the island with supplies and manufactured goods. It therefore became necessary for Spain to liberalise the legislation prohibiting direct trade with foreigners.

Moreover, Spain enacted special permits, such as the Royal Gracia granted in two stages on 24 December 1804 and on 1 May 1805, to various trading houses established in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Baltimore, allowing them to ship all

† See also Arcila, *Comercio entre Venezuela y México*, 96-97; Alonso, “Especialización mercantil y crisis de la economía rural,” 63-478; Ortiz de Tablas, *Comercio exterior de Veracruz 1778-1821*, 173-174; Barbier, “Imperial policy towards the port of Veracruz,” 248; Widner Sennehauser, “Veracruz y el comercio de harinas en el Caribe español,” 108.

kinds of supplies from their ports to Havana, Veracruz, Caracas, Montevideo and Venezuela in neutral-flagged vessels, paving the way towards clandestine trade.²¹

According to John R. Fisher, from 1793 on Cuba enjoyed virtually free trade with the United States, which was the dominant neutral power in the Atlantic.²²

Population and consumption

The trade data for Havana – the principal entrepôt of the New World – is not unrepresentative of trade for Cuba as a whole. As the American consul pointed out in 1805, “eight-tenths of [Cuban trade] is exported from Havana and its dependencies and about the same proportion of the population is dependent on the city for their supplies.”²³ After the British occupation of Havana, the Bourbons expanded the harbour and made the port not only one of the biggest fortifications but also one of the largest cities in the Spanish Empire.²⁴

	1792 Cuba		1792 La Havana		1817 Cuba		1817 La Havana	
Population	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
<i>white</i>	72,299	61,260	12,274	11,263	130,519	109,311	20,372	17,990
<i>negro and mixed blood – free</i>	25,211	28,941	4,425	5,375	58,885	55,173	11,159	10,212
<i>negro and mixed blood – slaves</i>	47,424	37,166	7,115	10,855	124,324	74,821	12,791	11,550
total	144,934	127,367	23,814	27,493	313,728	239,305	44,322	39,752

Table 2: Cuban censuses- 1792 and 1817

Authors’ own elaboration De la Sagra, *Historia física, política y natural de la isla de Cuba* and *Guía de Forasteros de la isla de Cuba*; Canga Argüelles, *Diccionario de Hacienda*, 527-531; *Calendario manual para el año de 1824*, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, HA 12377; *Affaire Etrangères*, Paris, Correspondance Consulaire, La Havane, Vol. 5, folio 11.

The population figures are those recorded by the official censuses and amended by Ramón de la Sagra for the years 1792, 1817 and 1827 or collected by foreign consuls on the island.²⁵ These statistics have their limitations – especially with regard to the large numbers of slaves, many of whom were illegally imported and therefore would not have been recorded.²⁶ As Michael Zeuske has noted, Spain “from 1493 to 1898 possessed the largest colonial empire in the Americas (still including Cuba and Puerto Rico after 1825), with the longest history of slavery.”²⁷ Nevertheless, slaves constituted a smaller proportion of the total population than in any other Spanish colony in the Americas.²⁸

Another problem with these early censuses is that they did not take into account the large temporary population, particularly the soldiers who came ashore from ships that might have been moored in Cuban ports for weeks and in some cases ended up staying permanently.²⁹ The garrison and the forced laborers working on the construction of the fortifications should also be considered. Indeed, French consular reports added 16,000 “troupes, marine, forçats” to the census numbers of 1792, increasing the total recorded population of 272,301 by 6 per cent. Almost 20 per cent of the population at that time lived in Havana.³⁰ By 1817 the population of Cuba would reach 553,033, an average annual rate of growth of 2.87 per cent. In fact, the population of the island increased five-fold between 1792 and 1862, an average annual rate of growth of 2.32 per cent.³¹ As Franklin Knight notes “the rapid population growth affected the social structure.”³² As the population grew, a degree of miscegenation blurred the dividing lines of the social hierarchy – whites, free people of colour, and slaves – but the white and creole Spanish culture remained dominant.

The demographic expansion was the result of immigration – both voluntary and forced – and a high birth rate. The slave uprising in Haiti (1791–1804) led to an influx into Cuba of French nationals (mainly men) with their slaves, and the achievement of

independence by the continental Spanish colonies brought white settlers and also favoured a white migration policy.³³ In 1796 the Marquis of Casa Peñalver proposed a limit on the number of blacks in Cuba so as to reduce the racial imbalance and avoid a rebellion like the one that had taken place in Haiti; instead he proposed the promotion of white immigration from New Spain, Campeche and the Canary Islands.³⁴ From 1817 the Spanish government supported the settlement of foreigners in Cuba (Royal Cédula 21 October 1817; Royal Order 27 June 1821) after the continental colonies had gained their independence.³⁵ The sale of Louisiana and Florida undoubtedly also contributed to migratory flows to Cuba.³⁶ According to Jacobo de la Pezuela, Leclerc's failed 1803 expedition to Saint-Domingue resulted in the emigration of more than 27,000 people from there to Santiago de Cuba and Baracoa.³⁷ Two decades later, in 1823, Consul Angelucci claimed that the French constituted a third of Havana's population.³⁸ The absence of subsistence crises and the arrival of the smallpox vaccine in 1804 undoubtedly also had a positive demographic impact, despite the presence of yellow and dengue fever that consuls and visitors frequently referred to.³⁹

Males outnumbered females in Cuba. More precisely, in 1792, males were 53 per cent of the population, and by 1817 reached 57 per cent. Even though the slave population was growing as a proportion of the total, it never exceeded the figure of 43 per cent reached in 1841 when the cultivation of sugar was expanding.⁴⁰ Whites constituted 49 per cent of all inhabitants in 1792, and 56 per cent in 1862. Essentially, therefore, although Cuba became a more racially complex society, the social structure continued to be dominated by free whites.

Most of the free white immigrants and wage-earners in Cuba from the late eighteenth century onwards were not engaged in the *zafra* (sugarcane harvest) or in other agricultural work: they were mostly working in the island's cities as artisans or

estate managers, or in commercial activities such as retail merchants and small shopkeepers or in tobacco shops rolling cigars or ground snuff or in the fortifications as masons.⁴¹ The *ingenios* (sugar mills) were also a source of employment for free whites, as they could work in roles such as *boyero* (oxen driver) or foreman in the boiling houses. At the lower strata of white society were the soldiers and sailors.⁴² The vast majority of slaves, meanwhile, were engaged in low-skilled agricultural work. However, in the cities, not only whites but also free people of colour and a small minority of slaves pursued trades such as day laborers, shoemaker, tailor, baker, household servants or performed occupations related to construction as carpenter or builder.⁴³ It should be noted that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Cuba had the largest free non-white population (free black and mulatto) in the Caribbean, because slaves could purchase their freedom under the *coartación* system.⁴⁴ As J. M. Félix de Arrate has described, the work carried out by free people of colour included silversmithing, sculpture, painting and carving.⁴⁵

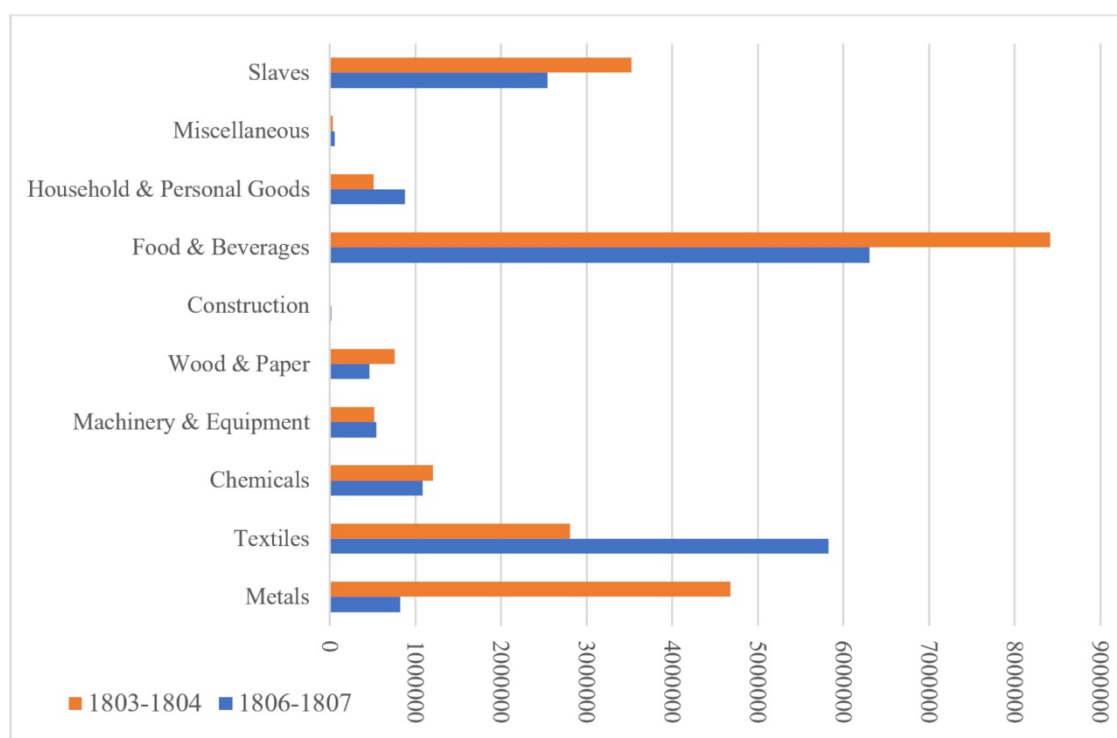
Enslaved men and women in the cities, particularly Havana, also performed domestic tasks – as coachmen, for example – or were engaged in shipbuilding or strengthening fortifications.⁴⁶ The capital was also where the Cuban upper classes with the greatest purchasing power – including the administrators, planters, merchants and commercial agents – were concentrated.⁴⁷ According to Knight, among whites there was a greater class diversity in Cuba than in other societies in the Caribbean, with *peninsulares* (those born on the Iberian Peninsula) living alongside Cuban-born *criollos*.⁴⁸ At the top of the social ladder were the titled families and creole patriciate of wealthy planters; they were followed by the heads of government departments, functionaries of royal administration, army and navy officers.

Consumption patterns in Cuba reflected the four principal social strata: the white elite; white workers (for example shopkeepers and small farmers); *mestizos* and free people of colour; and slaves. As Rosalía Oliva Suárez has highlighted, in terms of textiles and foodstuffs the Cuban elite tended to copy the styles and eating habits of Europeans, which they gradually adapted to the local climate.⁴⁹ And to a certain extent this applied even to the lowest stratum of society, with Robert S. Duplessis noting that even “slaves and natives were rarely passive recipients of dress.”⁵⁰

Introduction of commodities into Havana

Despite the limitations of the data, the statements of imports and exports allow a better understanding of the relationship between consumption, production and trade. In order to quantify the goods in large sections their customs value in *pesos reales* has been used. Excluding metals and slaves, two groups of items stand out (Figure 1): food and clothing. Even though the island’s economy was essentially agricultural during the first half of the nineteenth century, food accounted for more than 40 per cent of the customs value of imports. In the period 1803–1804, that figure reached almost 60 per cent, which probably reflects the fall in the quantity of manufactures arriving through the port – the latter were increasingly being smuggled, especially across western Cuba through Santiago de Cuba or Puerto Príncipe. By 1806–1807 the situation changed, with more manufactures (textiles) arriving through the port of Havana (that is, not smuggled) than in 1803–1804. The limited craftsmanship on the island made foreign manufactures highly valued as imports, with textiles the most important of all.

Figure 1: Imports of goods into La Havana (value in pesos reales) – comparison between 1803–1804 and 1806–1807



Authors' own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de la Habana 1803–1804 and 1806–1807.

The monopoly in force during 1803–1804 is clearly reflected in Table 3, which shows the pre-eminence of Spanish ports. In the case of textiles, Cádiz and Santander stand out, while for household and personal items the ports of Barcelona, Málaga and Coruña also played significant roles. In the case of food and beverages, Cádiz, the Canary Islands, Barcelona, Tarragona and Santander stand out.

The impact of the Napoleonic Wars significantly reduced the traffic between Spanish ports and the Americas, which led to the ships of neutral countries taking over almost all of Cuba's trade. That does not mean, however, that Spain disappeared from the trading routes in the Americas. North American ships sailed to Spain, and then set sail from there with Spanish and European products back in this case

to Havana.⁵¹ During 1805–1807, when neutral-flagged vessels virtually monopolised Cuba’s trade, the quantity and variety of products arriving in Havana increased.

	Textiles		Food & Beverages		Household & Personal goods	
	1803-1804	1806-1807	1803-1804	1806-1807	1803-1804	1806-1807
Port of departure	%	%	%	%	%	%
Alicante	0.01	--	0.62	--	0.18	--
Barcelona	4.82	--	5.53	--	7.46	--
Cádiz	53.36	--	14.23	--	37.54	--
Campeche	6.92	2.75	2.98	2-98	3.28	0.18
Canary Islands	1.09	--	6.63	0-00	0.21	--
Cartagena de Indias	0.69	--	0.96	0.12	0.91	0.16
Cartagena de Levante	--	--	0.01	--	--	--
Chagre	--	--	0.13	--	--	--
Colonies	2.47	94.52	21.07	91.35	8.05	98.12
Coro	--	--	0.01	--	--	--
Coruña	2.36	--	1.26	--	8.44	--
Florida	0.40	--	0.14	--	0.02	0.02
Gijón	0.29	--	0.22	--	0.09	--
Guaira	0.12	--	0.31	--	--	--
Málaga	1.81	--	6.37	--	13.66	--
Mallorca	1.27	--	0.18	--	0.24	--
Montevideo	0.42	--	13.81	0.95	0.06	0.03
Movila	0.01	--	0.00	--	--	--
Nicaragua	--	--	0.22	--	--	--
Nueva Barcelona	--	--	0.92	0.48	0.08	--
Nueva Orleans	2.31	--	4.66	--	1.00	--
Panzacola	0.01	--	0.01	--	--	--
Puerto Cabello	0.24	--	0.20	0.01	--	0.01
Puerto Rico	0.06	--	0.36	--	0.12	0.01
Puerto Velo	--	--	1.69	0.77	0.37	--
Santa Marta	0.10	--	0.02	--	--	--
Santander	14.46	--	3.45	--	6.18	--
Sevilla	0.21	--	0.51	--	1.92	--
Tarragona	0.63	--	4.65	--	3.49	--
Trinidad	--	--	0.00	0.08	--	0.01
Truxillo	0.03	0-01	0.50	0.16	0,42	0.08
Veracruz	5.58	2.36	8.24	2.81	6,26	1.18
Vigo	0.29	--	0.08	--	--	--
Villahermosa	0.02	--	0.01	--	--	--
Matanzas	--	0.34	--	0.21	--	0.20
Cumaná	--	--	--	0.07	--	--
Total in pesos reales	2,805,946	5,828,915	8,414,312	6,302,077	508,280	881,365

Table 3: Origin of imports (textiles / food and beverages / household and personal goods)

Authors’ own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de la Habana, 1803-07.

In the following, I analyse these three categories of goods in detail, since they are the ones that will allow us to get a better idea of the goods and foodstuffs that Cubans wanted to consume. At the same time, we will see the main differences between periods of peace and war.

Despite its economy being almost entirely agricultural, Cuba lacked some of the foodstuffs needed to feed its growing population – hence the increasing proportion of food among total imports from the 1760s on, when a greater diversification of crops (coffee, wax, indigo, mango, etc.) and a specialisation in commercial crops such as sugar, following Haiti's slave rebellion, took place.⁵²

The dependence on foreign trade for basic necessities was clear, although subsistence agriculture – the cultivation of tubers (sweet potato, cassava, potato), maize, legumes and a wide variety of tropical fruits (pineapple, guava, mamei, etc.) – was practised on the plantations themselves and on the banks of rivers, and there was also livestock farming in *potreros* and *hatos* housed cattle for the considerable consumption of fresh and dried meat from the island.⁵³

The shortage of basic foods was exacerbated by maritime blockades in times of war. The economic and racial dichotomy of the island was reflected in the major categories of foods and beverages that were imported. Salted fish and meat, for example, were consumed predominantly by slaves, so the quantities imported increased as the slave population expanded.⁵⁴ The relatively wealthy white population had a diet not dissimilar to the one they would have had in Spain: wheat flour, oil, wine, legumes and nuts – but also a greater quantity of fresh meat and fish than would have been the case in Spain. The troops, meanwhile, had a diet not dissimilar to that of the whites, with added *tasajo* (jerked beef), rice, legumes and wheat bread. The diet of the less wealthy classes consisted of yuca or cassava

bread, tubers, salted fish and meat.⁵⁵

Meat, particularly pork and beef, was a large part of the diet – but it is important to distinguish between the fresh and salted varieties. Cuba in the nineteenth century managed to meet the demand for fresh meat thanks to the rearing of livestock, mainly cattle and pigs, which provided fresh meat and in some cases dairy products (cheese and butter), a means of transporting goods (in the case of cattle) and also a supply of oxen and mules for export to neighbouring colonies.⁵⁶ Writings from the late seventeenth century highlight that cattle were already one of the island's principal resources – particularly the leather referred to in Europe as *cuir de la Havane*.⁵⁷

As Celia María Parceró Torre points out, meat was in fact one of the smuggled products that was exchanged for fabrics with the British settlers in Jamaica.⁵⁸ Fresh meat was eaten not by Cuba's slave population but by the whites, while salted meat, which the slaves did consume, was imported mainly from Río de la Plata. In the Royal Order of 10 April 1793, the king decreed salted meats from Spanish America free of rights of introduction and extraction, including the first-selling *alcabala*. In the case of Cuba, the exemption was confirmed and expanded on 20 December 1802 and 22 June 1804. As a consequence, American salted meats were decreed “free in their trafficking, not only of the royal rights but also of municipal and other *arbitrums*, whatever its origin.”⁵⁹ By 1803, between 500,000 and 600,000 *arrobas* of *tasajo* were being consumed in Cuba.⁶⁰

After the end of the eighteenth century, it was the Río de la Plata area that took the lead in exploiting its livestock for the export of leather and began to expand its salting industry.⁶¹ Buenos Aires would begin shipping *tasajo* to Cuba, especially after American Spanish colonies start to gain their independence in 1820. Previously, as the

tasajo records in Havana demonstrate, Montevideo had been the main export port. But these were not the only centres supplying jerked beef around the turn of the nineteenth century. New Barcelona, Campeche and Tampico also participated in this trade, although they were unable to match the low prices of the Río de la Plata. When maritime traffic was disrupted by war, Cuban planters had to resort to “buying salted meats in brine introduced by northern Americans.”⁶² There were two types of meats for export – both salted, but prepared in different ways:

Some in pieces, with or without bones, preserved in brine and shipped in barrels. The rest are cut in slices then sealed in the sun and shipped without packaging. In this form, the meat is called *Tasajo* [...] it has a 40 per cent advantage in weight difference over sliced meat. The parcel is considered as defective.⁶³

Cubans complained that Americans brought brine meat – lower in quality than the jerked beef because the brine extracted all the substance from it.⁶⁴ However, not everyone agreed: the French consul in Buenos Aires, for example, claimed that “brine meat [...] tastes fresher and more pleasant.”⁶⁵ But South American jerked beef was cheaper than its North American equivalent, which guaranteed its pre-eminence. Demand for meat and fat ran parallel to the growth of the sugar industry. The other complement to the slaves’ diet was salted cod, the main suppliers of which were the United States – whose main export ports were Portland, Boston and New York – and Newfoundland, a British colony. After the embargo of 1807 and the war of 1812, it was Newfoundland that controlled this traffic.⁶⁶

The advantages of salted meat and fish were their high protein content, low price and the ease with which they could be conserved – which is why they became a

preferred food for planters and troops (whether on land or at sea).⁶⁷ The abundance of meats of all kinds resulted in dishes such as *ajiaco*, consisting of a stew of broth with lemon juice, chili peppers and “pork or cow meat, *tasajo*, pieces of bananas, cassava, pumpkins.”⁶⁸ Sidney Wilfred Mintz and Roderick Alexander McDonald point out that the planters wanted to improve slave self-provisioning by permitting them to have a garden plot, but the reality is that masters offered a poor food allowance to their slaves.⁶⁹

However, according to the statements of trade, flour and biscuits were the most important part of the Cuban diet. The flour from Santander, as well as the wines and oil from the Mediterranean ports, could be transported – with the appropriate tariffs – to the Americas by Spanish vessels, which would then return with colonial products and cotton.⁷⁰

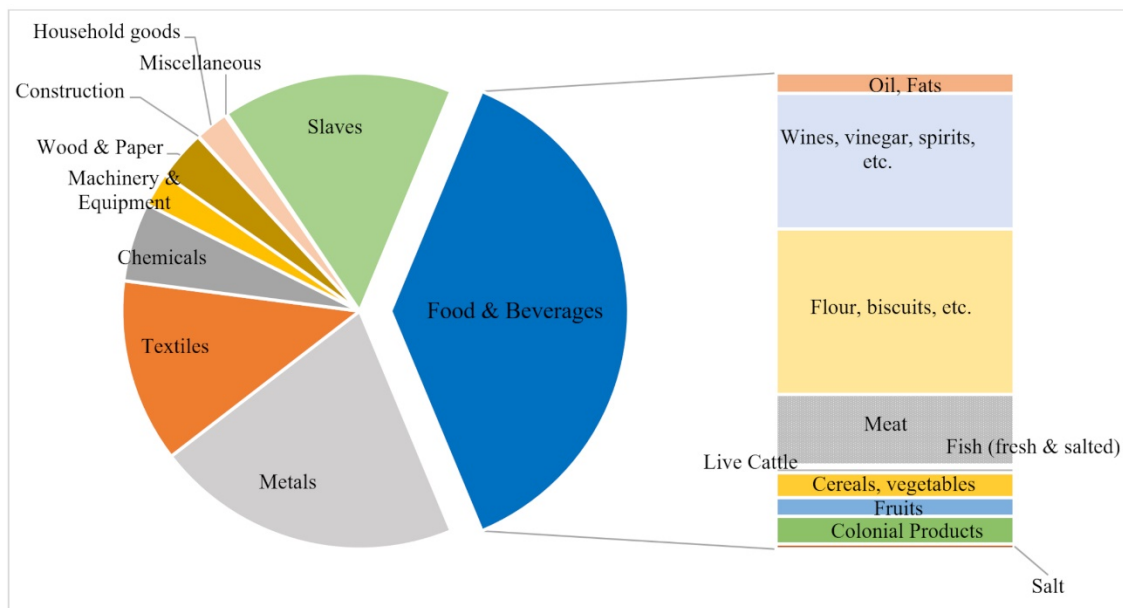


Figure 2: Imports into La Havana (in *pesos reales*), 1803-04, with detailed breakdown of food and beverages
 Authors’ own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de La Habana 1803 and 1804.

The commercial circuits did not merely consist of the direct exchange of these

products between Spain and the Gulf of Mexico, however. To return with colonial products, Spanish Mediterranean ships had to take goods, such as wines and oils, of similar volume to the Americas (Argentina and Brazil – and especially Cuba and Puerto Rico). For traders in the Cantabrian ports of northern Spain, the only cost-effective returns consisted of importing colonial products with a similar weight and value to flour or developing a triangular circuit – hence the emphasis placed by the Santander consulate on defending its flour exports, which involved the shipping of sugar in the opposite direction. Sugar could be redistributed by cabotage, especially through the Castilian wheat network. But flour and wine, as with any bulky goods, led to the development of the fleet and generated abundant employment if their export was conducted under the Spanish flag.

The flour trade generated an abundant literature, in newspapers and reports, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While Spain's competitors were in Europe in the case of wine and oil, the rivals in the flour trade were in the Americas and close to Cuba – such as New Orleans. Higher protectionist tariffs would therefore be necessary if the interests of Spanish flour producers were to be protected. Although the supply of flour to Cuba was legally in the hands of the metropole and New Spain (Royal Cédula of 1782 and Royal Order of 1784), the frequent wars forced Spain to allow the entry of foreign flour carried by foreign ships. As Eduardo Arcila points out, the Royal Order of 25 June 1793 allowed Anglo-American ships to introduce their flour into Cuba, displacing that of New Spain.⁷¹ Although the Royal Order of 22 January 1796 returned the flour trade to a Hispanic monopoly, in practice the United States maintained a decisive presence due to the smuggling and special licences.⁷²

The supply of flour to Cuba seems to have been a complex affair. According

to the *Observations on the commerce of Spain with her colonies, in time of war* (1800), even in peacetime Spain had to resort to the importation of American flour into the Iberian Peninsula and from here re-export it to its colonies:

If we consider that the said flour of Georgia – selling at 5 or 6 dollars per barrel – was in the first instance shipped either from New York, Philadelphia or Baltimore, for a port of Spain; that previous to its embarkation it paid here the ordinary charge of 5 per cent of commission, besides other small charges; that to these must be added freight and insurance to Spain; that there fresh duties and commission were incurred, as well as new charges on the unloading and reshipment on board of Spanish vessel, that the voyage to Havana occasioned new charges, new freight and new insurance; if to this be added the fresh commission in Havana, and the profit of the speculator; if again we add those charges from thence to Florida, the price of thirty dollars in that province cannot appear to us exorbitant.⁷³

When the Royal Order of 23 August 1796 granted to the Earl of Mompox and Jaruco a licence to export 9,000 cane brandy pipes from Cuba to the United States in two years, paying one *peso* per pipe, and allowed him, with the proceeds, to acquire flour for Cuba taxing the same rights as if they were Spanish, Cuban farmers and traders protested (21 November 1796).⁷⁴ Only in the early nineteenth century, as recorded by the statements of trade from 1805 to 1807, when American navigators become not only exporters of their flour but re-exporters of Cuban sugar to Europe, would the attitude of Cuban farmers and merchants change. The attitude that did not change, however, was that of the metropole.

While from 9 May 1809 foreign flour transported on a Spanish vessel would cost 45 silver *reales* of royal and municipal taxes, in the case of flour shipped on a foreign vessel it would cost 69 silver *reales*. A report from the Santander consulate to the Spanish government, dated 22 November 1814, regretted “the immense damage to the Spanish trade from foreigners [sic] transporting their flour directly to the Americas, without docking at the ports of the Peninsula,” and complained about smuggling.⁷⁵ The Spanish tariff of 1820, and especially the Cuban tariff of 1824, would begin, as with other products, to protect Spanish flour and its transportation by Spanish vessels, but change was not evident until 1830.

Less attention has been paid to wines and oil, which also required imports of goods that the Spanish Mediterranean was not able to provide. Despite being typically Mediterranean products, they needed a very high degree of tariff protection, like the most protected manufactured products (such as certain textiles). The taxes imposed on them were surpassed only by those on flour. While the Spanish monopoly was in force (1803–1804), the wine consumed in Cuba was mostly of Spanish origin. But during the blockade (1805–1807) French wines began to arrive. It should not be forgotten that after the slave rebellion in Haiti, many French citizens took refuge in Cuba and wanted to consume their own wines (particularly the Bordeaux variety). In 1805, 70 per cent of the wine imported by Cuba (in terms of its total value in *pesos*) was of French origin; the figure in 1806 was 64 per cent, and in 1807 53 per cent. But this was an exceptional situation and would eventually change, with customs tariffs and valuations favouring Spanish wines. De La Sagra attributes the decline of exports of French wines to Cuba in the 1830s to the “increased consumption of Catalan [wine] since speculators thought of bringing to Havana the softer qualities of the principality, which against a

misconception, although widespread about wines, was believed that they could not resist navigation without going bad.”⁷⁶

Besides wine, beverages such as gin, spirits, *resolí* (an aniseed-based liquor) and cider – none of which were produced locally – were also introduced into Cuba in large quantities.

Food & Beverages	1803	1804	1806	1807
	%	%	%	%
Oils & fats	4.1	4.5	11.0	8.4
Wines, vinegar, spirits, etc.	22.8	34.0	18.4	24.9
Flour, biscuits, etc.	37.8	31.8	31.1	33.2
Meat	17.2	12.4	21.1	11.9
Fish (including salted fish)	0.8	0.4	3.5	1.0
Live cattle	0.8	1.3	--	--
Cereals, vegetables	6.5	3.9	8.4	10.5
Fruits	5.2	2.8	2.2	4.5
Colonial products	4.8	6.8	4.2	5.2
Salt	--	2.1	--	--
Ice	--	--	--	0.4
Total value, pesos reales	4,212,521	4,201,791	3,248,748	3,053,329

Table 4: Composition of food and beverage imports in La Havana, as a percentage of their total value in *pesos reales*

Authors’ own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de La Habana 1803, 1804, 1806, 1807.

In addition, wines and flour also played a significant role. Since they are bulky, medium-priced products, their transport provided work for a large fleet whose profitability depended on having a similar volume of cargo for the return voyage.

For wines and flour, freight costs were a significant determinant of their final price as they took up a considerable proportion of the tonnage, and in return required goods of similar characteristics – bulky and not expensive – so as to make their transport profitable.

Much of the recovery of the Spanish navy after the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) would have been based to some extent on the:

excessive duties placed on foreign flour and wines and the big difference between the pavilion in which goods were traded. The North Americans [flour] and the French [wines] are the ones who suffer most from this state of affairs. Spain [...] almost [...] exclusively supplies Cuba with flour, and the wine of Catalonia is mostly the only kind that is consumed in the country.⁷⁷

The consumption of dairy products, such as milk, butter, and cheese, seems also to have been very widespread in Cuba. In the case of cheese, imports in 1806–1807 came mainly from elsewhere in the Americas, in particular from the *Colonies* and Nueva Barcelona. Fats consisted mostly of butter and sebum. While fish consumption in rural areas of the island consisted mainly of salted fish (cod, herring, mackerel), in cities such as Havana packaged sardines and other fish such as anchovies, tuna and salmon were also in demand. Also noted in the statements of trade, to a lesser extent, were shrimps (*camarones*), oysters and salted turtle meat. As for fruit and vegetables, the principal imports were noodles (*fideos*), chickpeas and vegetable stew, along with raisins, olives, almonds, and garlic either from Spanish or other American ports. Some products, such as *aji* or chili pepper, maize, beans (*frijoles*) and rice, came mainly from Campeche and Veracruz, and were part

of a hybrid cuisine. Spices garnished the dishes, especially the saffron that in years of peace came through the ports of Málaga, Barcelona and Cádiz. The pepper recorded in the statements of trade was of three types: from Tabasco, Holland, and Castile. In 1807, from the *Colonies* were imported into Cuba 71,606 *pesos reales* of *pimienta fina* but without specifying the type or origin. Coffee only appeared in 1803, from the ports of La Guaira and Puerto Rico, while tea came from Cádiz and Montevideo, and cocoa was shipped mostly from Puerto Velo, Cartagena de Indias and Veracruz. As with the majority of imported foods and beverages, from 1806 onwards almost all the products arriving in Cuba came from ports in the *Colonies*.

As Earle note “the Spanish state promulgated dozens of orders, pragmatics, cédulas and other ordinances,” with the aim of controlling New World attire to maintain an adequate correspondence between social position and sartorial performance.⁷⁸ In 1509 the first sumptuary law was enacted in Spanish America (Peru) to ban slaves from wearing expensive fabrics (particularly silks) and jewellery. Laws enacted in Europe or in the New World prohibited common people from wearing and spending too much by dictating a person's appearance based on moral and economic reasons. However sumptuary laws were constantly violated in both the colonies and in the metropolis, revealing the appetite for textiles and fashionable goods no matter what gender, race, or social rank in the colonial system.⁷⁹

The range of semi-luxury and luxury goods introduced into Havana at the dawn of the nineteenth century is well known, with several authors having mentioned what Pezuela refers to as “the reputation for luxury that owners and merchants were developing” on the island, which indicates the tendency towards luxury consumption that existed in all social strata of Cuban society.⁸⁰

Consumer goods included imported woven-fibre textiles. Although domestic weaving was widespread and every household produced clothing for their own needs, the more affluent sections of the Cuban population also purchased manufactured clothing. The popularity of buying ready-made garments can be seen in Table 5. These clothes were highly prized, to the point that, as Suárez has mentioned, a body of inspectors was created to monitor the exorbitant prices they were sold for.⁸¹ A taste for clothing as an aspect of conspicuous consumption was not limited to the wealthy, however.⁸²

Year	Port of departure	Product	Units	<i>Pesos reales</i>
1794	Europe	Dresses for women and men	13	--
1803	Coruña	Embroidered muslin dresses	2	40
1804	Barcelona	Dresses for women	1	50
1803	Cádiz	Fabric dresses for Religious images	1	50
1804	Cádiz	Embroidered dresses for men	3	112
1803	Málaga	Gold-embroidered muslin dresses	20	600
1803	Barcelona	Embroidered dresses for women	52	1,560
1807	Colonies	Muslin dresses	294	2,940
1806	Colonies	Cotton and silk dresses	87	870
1806	Colonies	Silk dresses	71	1,775

Table 5. Imports of ready-made dresses into the port of La Havana (quantity / value in *pesos reales*)

Authors' own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de La Habana 1794, 1803, 1804, 1806, 1807.

Cuban fashion tended to follow European patterns – in particular those of the metropole but also, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, those of France.⁸³ Arrate has pointed out that the drivers of the new fashions were the Castilians who came to Cuba: “So, once the new clothing is seen it is imitated in the cut, in the good taste of colour and in the nobility of the genre, and they do not skimp on the costumes, with the finest canvases and lace, the richest garrisons and gallons, the most priced tissues and fabrics, nor the silk fabrics of more beautiful work and more delicate dyes.”⁸⁴ Arrate adds that imitation and ostentation also applied to the indoor and outdoor domestic space, as with ornaments and furniture. He suggests that many Cuban families, of all social classes, were led into debt by the costly habit of seeking to emulate European consumption habits.

Fabrics & textiles	1803	1804	1806	1807
Raw materials	3.1	3.1	0.0	0.0
Textile manufactures (without indicating type of fabric)	25.5	22.8	23.4	14.7
Wool manufactures	2.7	2.0	12.0	6.8
Cotton manufactures	1.9	1.7	7.5	16.4
Silk manufactures	10.6	8.2	4.2	12.5
Linen manufactures	44.2	56.4	48.6	43.3
Furs	11.9	5.7	4.3	6.2
Value in <i>pesos reales</i>	1,427,878	1,378,068	3,771,732	2,057,183

Table 6: Imports of fabrics and textiles (percentages of total)

Authors’ own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de la Habana 1803-1804 and 1806-1807.

As Table 6 shows, linen fabrics were the most in demand in Cuba in the early 1800s, and, in fact, they would continue to top the list of textile imports in the middle decades of the century. Wool and silk textiles, although less in demand, would maintain similar percentages over the following decades.⁸⁵ Imports of cotton fabrics, which had hardly been introduced in the early nineteenth century, would triple in value by the middle of the century, reducing the relative weight of linen. Because of the climate, woollen products were not in high demand; in 1803–1804, imported woollen fabrics consisted mainly of cloth, followed by blankets, baize, *barragán* and cashmere. According to Richard Salvucci, however, coarse woollens were commonly used for slaves' clothing during the cooler months.⁸⁶ In 1806–1807, baize accounted for 24 per cent of all imported woollen fabrics, and cloths 19 per cent. One of the main differences during wartime was the wider variety of cloths available, such as English cloth (second and third quality), fine black and fine blue varieties, and cloth from Saxony. The *paños de rebozo* (common shawls) imported from Veracruz and the *Colonies* were common clothing “consumed in altar cloths and veils, and in coverlets and sashes” and woven by peasants in Mexico.⁸⁷

1803-04	Product	1806-07
<i>pesos reales</i>		<i>pesos reales</i>
4,160	Baize (<i>bayeta</i>)	
	<i>Bayeta de medio ancho</i>	15,940
	<i>Bayeta faxuela</i>	123,290
	<i>Bayetas angostas</i>	3,601
4,012	Cashmere	73,461
360	Flannel (<i>franelas</i>)	10,775
	<i>Fresadas de lana</i>	30,422
1,203	Etamine (<i>estameña</i>)	6,080
13,840	Woollen blankets	16,977
15,400	Cloth	
	Fine blue cloth (<i>pañó azul fino</i>)	4,080
	Cloth from Saxony (<i>pañó de Sajonia</i>)	13,182
	Medium-quality cloth (<i>pañó entrefino</i>)	8,070
	English cloth – second quality (<i>pañó inglés de 2^o</i>)	54,104
	English cloth – third quality (<i>pañó inglés de 3^o</i>)	57,324
1,150	Black cloth (<i>pañó negro</i>)	
	High-quality black cloth (<i>pañó negro fino</i>)	1,020
	Common cloth (<i>pañó ordinario</i>)	88,468
825	<i>Pañó de rebozo o reboso</i>	11,808
	Serge (<i>sarga de lana</i>)	7,170

Table 7: Principal imports of woollen fabrics, 1803-1804 and 1806-1807

Authors' own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de la Habana 1803-1804 and 1806-1807

As for the imports of silk fabrics, they were clearly intended for the section of the Cuban population with the greatest purchasing power, capable of buying satin, taffeta, velvet and damasks. Imports of silk ribbons and stockings increased substantially between 1803–1804 and 1806–1807, while imports of taffeta diminished from 103,500 *pesos reales* in 1803–1804 to 18,148 *pesos reales* in 1806–1807.⁸⁸

The origin of these products is not known, only the port of embarkation. But given the patterns of trade with New Spain, it is not entirely unreasonable to presume that some silk fabrics came from Asia. In the dowry from 1650 that Suarez has studied, there are references to a bedspread from China, dresses in black damask, red silk, silk primavera in satin, blue and pink damask from Japan, a doublet made with black damask, and patterned linen shirts in black.⁸⁹ As for changes in consumer behaviour, it should be taken into account that the presence of Chinese textiles in colonial America was not a novelty.⁹⁰ In New Spain, the arrival of Chinese silks of varying types, qualities and prices via the Manila Galleon stimulated the consumption of hybridised cloth from sixteenth century on.⁹¹ Alongside classical aesthetics and taste, a new creative and blended culture emerged. However, there is a lack of research examining whether Asian influences had the same impact in Cuba as they did in New Spain. As trade in the Gulf of Mexico was shaped by a mixture of consumer preferences, government policy and geography, it is reasonable to consider if anything similar happen with the circulation of Asian goods in the Caribbean.⁹²

Imported linen fabrics were always popular in Cuba, partly because of their lightness. Even though cotton began to compete with linen, especially from the mid-1820s in the form of very fine fabrics such as *zarazas*, it did not supersede linen in Cuba until at least 1865. Between 1803–1804, *zarazas* of a total value of only 1,100 *pesos reales* appear in the statement of trade, while between 1806–1807 their total value was

363,082 *pesos reales*. The same happened with muslins, *cotines*, cotton stockings, handkerchiefs and *mahons* (a coarse durable twill-weave cotton fabric) whose imports grew between 1806–1807.

Throughout the nineteenth century, fabrics enjoyed a buoyant market in Cuba. An important aspect of this international trade were the cultural ties with Europe, in particular Spain and its colonial empire. As Pérez-García has noted, “the progressive integration of the global markets of Spanish America, such as those pertaining to the textile industry, with western Europe was a key factor in the consolidation of networks and commerce routes, as well as the flow of goods from one side of the Atlantic to the other.”⁹³

In the section “household and personal goods,” all domestic objects, furniture and utensils have been included, while differentiating between personal objects – umbrellas, fans, shaving cases, ivory combs, razors and glasses – and jewellery. The latter includes jewellery and watches from Spain and Veracruz, and from the *Colonies* during wartime. In Havana’s statements of trade we can find plentiful examples of jewellery, including necklaces and chains such as pearl chokers, rosaries (made from gold or pearls), and silver and gold crosses. There were also more sophisticated forms of jewellery, such as diamond pins, topazes, diamond rings and pearl bracelets. Timepieces included gold or silver watches along with table clocks and even fake watches.

Household and personal goods	1803	1804	1806	1807
Personal items (canes, suitcases, brushes, etc.)	39.6	21.3	15.4	20.8
Jewellery, watches, etc.	1.7	4.1	1.8	3.3
Musical instruments, toys, sports equipment	18.5	9.2	2.3	1.9
Writing and reading materials	14.8	28.2	13.2	15.1
Household utensils – kitchen, etc.	13.0	25.2	33.6	41.0
Furniture and home furnishings	4.9	8.1	20.0	9.7
Ornaments & Decorations	5.9	3.8	12.6	4.4
Haberdashery (buttons, needles, pins, etc.)	1.5	0.2	1.0	3.8
Total value in pesos reales	254,126	254,154	613,909	267,456

Table 8: Household and personal goods (as percentages of total) imported into La Havana

Authors' own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de La Habana 1803-1804 and 1806-1807.

The “writing and reading materials” category included books, fountain pens and pencils. The increase in the quantity of notebooks and books – such as French dictionaries and guides to French grammar; Spanish books, including comedies; and fashion magazines for women – that arrived during wartime is striking. Among the imported musical instruments were pianos, violins, and large and small organs. Cards, billiards, and toys for children are listed as items for entertainment and play. The objects related to domestic interiors included furnishings, tableware and decorations, along with a series of everyday household items such as kitchenware, cruets, glassware and silver knives – conspicuous consumption clearly extended to the home. Although the pottery prevalent in Havana from the second half of the seventeenth century until the late eighteenth century came from New Spain, it would be displaced by English china in the nineteenth

century.⁹⁴ The use of china or porcelain was widespread in the Americas, with Havana receiving a range of British, Dutch, French and Asian varieties. In the 1794 statement of trade, the two most sought-after types of crockery were from China and Britain.⁹⁵ In 1794, crockery arrived in Cuba from ports in America and Europe, while between 1803–1804 – whether from China or elsewhere – it arrived from the Spanish ports of Cádiz, Santander, Barcelona, Tarragona, Gijon, Málaga and the Canary Islands. The most expensive crockery was British and Chinese.⁹⁶ In terms of value, in all the selected years, it is the china or *loza* that stands out.

As for other imports from China, fabrics were also notable, albeit not in large quantities; they arrived mainly via the *Colonies* after the establishment of neutrality at the end of 1804 (see Table 9).

Year	Loading port	Product	Quantity	Measure	Customs value pesos reales
1794	Colonies	Cloaks	347	pieces (<i>piezas</i>)	12,075
1794	Colonies	Blankets	328	pieces	5,248
1803	Cadiz	Asian Fabrics	249	pieces	6,225
1803	Cadiz	China	10	dozens	30
1803	Europe	China	245	dozens	735
1803	Matanzas	Handkerchiefs	32	dozens	288
1804	Colonies	China	12	dozens	36
1804	Colonies	China	23	Boxes (<i>cajones</i>)	575
1804	Colonies	China (common)	23	<i>guacuales</i>	575
1804	Veracruz	Blanket	96	pieces	1,536
1804	Veracruz	Cloak	1.002	<i>varas</i>	2,004
1805	Veracruz	Bedsread	3	unity	48
1805	Colonies	China	137	Boxes (<i>cajones</i>)	3,425
1805	Colonies	Cloak	1.469	pieces	36,725
1805	Colonies	Taffeta	1.819	pieces	45,375
1806	Colonies	Ribbons	3.853	pieces	2,408
1806	Colonies	Coffee set	18	unity	720
1806	Colonies	China	30	box (<i>cajones</i>)	750
1807	Colonies	Coffee set	5	unity	50
1807	Colonies	Satin	431	pieces	17,240
1807	Colonies	Satin	67	<i>varas</i>	83
1807	Veracruz	Satin	140	<i>varas</i>	280
1807	Colonies	Taffeta	134	pieces	4,020

Table 9: Chinese goods imported through La Havana (quantity / value in pesos reales)

Authors' own elaboration. Balanzas del puerto de La Habana 1794, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 and 1807.

Furnishings also reflected Atlantic networks and the consolidation of conspicuous consumption. Suarez notes that “creole artisans, *mulatos* and half-breeds began to create a style of indigenous furniture, where Cuban woods with bold proportions and rich ornamentation were enhanced.”⁹⁷ After the British take-over of Havana in 1762, Cubans’ taste for British-style furniture became very pronounced. Cuba seems to have also exerted an influence on production: according to David Ormrod, furniture design in Britain was influenced by the arrival of large quantities of Cuban mahogany from the 1750s on.⁹⁸ Later, according to Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, the vogue for mahogany in France “appears to have begun as a British influence.”⁹⁹ Mahogany, also known as *acajou*, was much used in the Caribbean in the eighteenth century, not only due to its abundance but also because of its resistance to humidity. Although Cuba was one of the suppliers, the island also imported ready-made mahogany furniture. Referring to Saint-Domingue, Baron de Wimpffen noticed that “the wood was part of a complicated transatlantic trade network wherein mahogany was exported as raw material and imported as finished product” – and something similar seems to have been true of Cuba.¹⁰⁰ The imported pieces of mahogany furniture included wardrobes, linen cupboards, storage armoires, commodes, sideboards (*aparadores*) and corner cabinets (*esquineros*). This durable and expensive wood also arrived on the island in the form of beds, desks, tables, chairs and picture frames. Another common element in all homes that are also recorded in the statements of trade – without specifying the type of wood – were chests and wooden trunks used to store a multitude of items, from bedding to books, as storage was important in such a humid climate.

The importance of fashion and appearances was directly linked with interior decoration – particularly in the case of mirrors, which were shapers of people's identity and closely associated with image and hygiene. Mirrors were luxury items that

proliferated from the eighteenth century onwards.¹⁰¹ From 1803 to 1807, imports included looking glasses of various sizes (1/4, 1/2; 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 *varas*). In 1807, for example, 2,728 mirrors of sizes between 1/4 and 1/2 *varas* arrived. The largest mirrors, meanwhile, were probably destined to adorn the wealthiest homes.¹⁰² Small mirrors and mirrors of very different sizes and frames made in gold, mahogany or even cardboard were also recorded in the statements of trade. In 1806–1807, 2,438 vanity mirrors from the *Colonies* were imported. Other objects of decoration which were imported were picture frames, paintings, crystal chandeliers, portraits (one of Napoleon Bonaparte is mentioned), vases, table clocks, wax figures, and bouquets of dried flowers. Overall, Cuban homes were stocked at the dawn of nineteenth century with a great variety of foreign imported objects, illustrating the tastes of the different social classes.

Conclusions

Despite discriminatory customs duties and tariff rates, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Cuba was a society with a distinct tendency towards conspicuous consumption.¹⁰³ The large scale imports of agricultural produce and industrial goods did not encourage the Cuban population to develop new means of manufacturing, but international prices and the size of the markets for the island's staples exports were important in creating incentives for technological innovations that succeeded in increasing production elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ For a colony that was essentially the hub of the Gulf of Mexico, international trade was highly important. In times of war, when communications and trade with Spain were suspended or at least sharply reduced, new opportunities emerged for the so-called neutrals, mainly the United States. In terms of imports, the main difference between times of peace and war was that the variety of commodities arriving on the island increased during conflict – especially in the case of

textiles, and personal and domestic items.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, clothing, household goods and eating habits in Havana reflected the circulation within the Atlantic. Needs were met from abroad, mainly through imports from Europe and the rest of America, with galleons in turn connecting America to Asia. As a result, international networks of commodities disseminated new patterns of material culture in Cuba. As seen in the case of Havana, imports corresponded to a combination of habits and needs. On one hand, royal directives and tariff policies made possible the emulation of metropolitan habits in the colony. On the other hand, Asian objects and spices were consumed in combination with Caribbean raw materials and food. This convergence produced hybrid styles, as in the case of furniture. The resultant mix was enhanced in wartime when trade restrictions could no longer be enforced. The intermingling of influences within Cuba's material culture was spurred by economic growth and the emergence of new identities. Cuban trade was more than merely an exchange of New World commodities for metropolitan goods: it was part of an expanding world market.

Notes

¹ Domínguez and Carballo, "Slavery, Mobility, and Networks," 2.

² Pretel and Leonard, *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy*; Fernández-de-Pinedo, Saiz, and Pretel, "Patent, Sugar Technology."

³ La Torre noted that "las horas ordinarias de comer hasta principios el presente siglo era las doce del día, meredándose en la tarde y cenándose de 8 à 10 de la noche" (the ordinary hours of eating, until the beginning of the present century, was twelve o'clock

in the day, having snacks in the afternoon and dinner from 8 to 10 at night) to which he adds that coffee began to replace chocolate. Torre, *Lo que fuimos y lo que somos*, 120.

⁴ “The three basic needs of human existence: dwelling/shelter; taste/food; clothing”
Bauer, *Goods, Power, History*, 1.

⁵ Schlereth, “Material Culture Research and Historical Explanation.”

⁶ As noted by Duplessis, probate inventories or post-mortem inventories are the most detailed documentary sources used to study consumption even if they only can provide a record of accumulation. DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic Clothing*, 9.

⁷ Charles and Daudin, “Eighteenth-Century International Trade Statistics.”

⁸ Le Riverend, *Historia económica de Cuba*, 21.

⁹ Copies can be found in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid and in the Archivo Nacional de Cuba. For more details see Moreno Friginals, *El Ingenio* and Fernández-de-Pinedo, *Comercio exterior y fiscalidad*.

¹⁰ It is noted that weapons, ammunition or other war equipment required by the Plaza and Arsenal are not included, nor are the construction woods consumed on the Island, nor those sent to Spain, and that 13,432,478 pesos 4 strong were drawn in silver and gold coins, jewelry and bars. *Guía de Forasteros de la Habana 1796*, 129–163.

¹¹ Complementary information in “Estado general de los derechos reales y debidos cobrar en las administraciones generales de rentas de mar y tierra de las cantidades procedentes de comisos, de las exigidas para el vestuario de milicias, del medio por ciento de consulado, de los licores, harinas y negros introducidos, de las cajas de azúcar extraídas y de los buques de guerra, correos y mercantes entrados y salidos en 1802, 1803, 1804 y 1808.” National Archives of the United States, Despatches from US Consuls in Havana, Roll 1, December 1783 to October 1807. (hereafter NA/US/).

¹² Fernández-de-Pinedo, *Las balanzas del comercio exterior de La Habana*.

¹³ The data in the tables do not contain the *reales*, but they have been taken into account in the calculations.

¹⁴ Schnakenbourg, “Neutral Cover and Globalised Commerce.”

¹⁵ Le Riverend, *Historia económica de Cuba*, 104. Even though free trade with foreigners was legalised in 1818, non-Spanish ships still had to pay a high export duty, reinforcing protectionism.

¹⁶ Fernández de Pinedo Fernández, “Comercio colonial.”

¹⁷ Pérez, “Cuba and the United States,” 58.

¹⁸ Kuethe, “Havanna in the Eighteenth century,” 26–28.

¹⁹ In addition, Spain tried to promote the Cuban internal economy by promulgating a series of regulations that sought to lower the cost of labor and the indispensable instruments for the agricultural sector such as “Utensils and tools” for Cuban agriculture that were declared free of import directly from abroad, in national vessels (Royal Cédula of 1792) and two years later, the same measure was adopted for staves and barrel arches; Royal Order of 22 April 1804. This Royal Order also exempted this sugar from *alcabalas* and the *ingenios* created from that date on from *diezmos*. The successive Royal Cédulas liberalized the importation of slaves (28 February 1789 and 24 November 1791) and allowed their traffic on foreign ships. Marichal and Souto Mantecón, “Silver and Situados.” Tarragó, *Understanding Cuba as a Nation*, 9.

²⁰ Thanks to those located in Mexico, silver circulated through Cuba, which was to be acquired through smuggling.

²¹ Delgado Ribas, “El Impacto de Las Crisis Coloniales,” 169.

²² Fisher, *Relaciones económicas*, 211. In fact, the Royal Orders of 17 and 18 November 1797, authorized foreign goods shipped from Spanish ports in neutral ships to Spanish America. Although the Royal Order of 20 April 1799, ended this permission,

the island's authorities allowed the importation of provisions and 1,800 clothes, provided they came on ships from friendly nations. Finally, the Royal Order of 8 January 1801 approved these measures. Exhibition of the Board of Commerce of Catalonia to the King, 8 December 1797 and Individual exhibitions of 6 and 13 December 1797. Archivo General de Indias, Santo Domingo, 2.177. (hereafter AGI).

²³ Havana, 1 November 1805. NA/ US/ Despatches from US consuls in Havana, 1783–1807, T. 20, Washington, D.C., roll 1, vol. 1 (1805).

²⁴ Kuethe, “Havanna in the Eighteenth century,” 17.

²⁵ De la Sagra, *Historia Física*, Vol. I, 147–227.

²⁶ Huetz de Lempis, “Le commerce des esclaves vers Cuba.”

²⁷ Zeuske, “Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery,” 88; Schneider, “African Slavery and Spanish Empire.”

²⁸ Taber and Yingling, “Networks, Tastes, and Labor,” 268.

²⁹ For this reason, Havana is described as a “foire continuelle” given the role of hub and connector it had in the Atlantic. Anonyme, *Ouvrages politiques et philosophiques*, 81.

³⁰ *Affaire Étrangères, Statistiques Extérieures d'Espagne, 1825–1853, V. 25, folio 217.* (hereafter AE/SEE).

³¹ Maluquer, *Nación e Inmigración*, 14–15.

³² Knight, “Social Structure of Cuban Slave Society,” 259.

³³ Yacou, “La présence française.”

³⁴ “Expediente acerca de los perjuicios que puede ocasionar en la Isla de Cuba la introducción de negros de otras islas.” Archivo Histórico Nacional, Ultramar, 1834, leg.2, 27. (hereafter AHN/Ultramar).

³⁵ Vázquez Queipó, *Informe fiscal*, 2; Orovio “Medio siglo de políticas poblacionistas en Cuba,” 339.

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- ³⁶ “Observaciones sobre la región de Santiago de Cuba.” 4 July 1824, NA/US/ Despatches from USA. Consuls in Santiago, 13 May 1817–27 December 1836. T 55.
- ³⁷ Pezuela, *Diccionario*, Vol. II, 180.
- ³⁸ Affaires Étrangères, Paris, Correspondance Consulaire, La Havane, Vol 5, La Havane, 10 March 1823, 198 and 204. (hereafter AE/CC/La Havane).
- ³⁹ 10 January 1826, 235. AE/CC/La Havane; 26 July 1827, 104. AE/CC/La Havane; 11 Mai 1835, 225–227. AE/CC/La Havane.
- ⁴⁰ Fernández de Pinedo, *Comercio exterior*, Table 2, 195.
- ⁴¹ Le Riverend, *Historia económica de Cuba*, 143.
- ⁴² Kuethe, “Havanna in the Eighteenth century,” 19–20.
- ⁴³ Fernández-de-Pinedo, *Comercio exterior*, 225–227.
- ⁴⁴ Yelvington, Sainton, and Casimir, “Caribbean Social Structure,” 327; Knight, “Social Structure of Cuban Slave Society.”
- ⁴⁵ Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo*, Chapter XIX.
- ⁴⁶ Klein “The Cuban slave trade,” 67–68; Pérez Guzmán, “Modo de vida de esclavos y forzados,” 241.
- ⁴⁷ Luzón, “Comer y beber en La Habana colonial.”
- ⁴⁸ Knight, “Social Structure of Cuban Slave Society,” 262.
- ⁴⁹ Suárez, “Los espacios domésticos habaneros,” 232.
- ⁵⁰ DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic Clothing*, 229.
- ⁵¹ Fernández-de-Pinedo, *Las balanzas del comercio exterior de La Habana*, 14.
- ⁵² Le Riverend, *Historia económica de Cuba*, 113.
- ⁵³ Balboa, *De los dominios del rey al imperio*, 211. Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, 331.

⁵⁴ On slave diet see among others Sarmiento, “Alimentación y relaciones sociales en la Cuba colonial” and “Del ‘funche’ al ‘ajiaco’”; Ortiz, *Los negros esclavos*; Salmoral, *Los Códigos Negros*; Florez, “La alimentación de la población esclava.”

⁵⁵ Parcero Torre, “La alimentación en Cuba en el siglo XVIII.”

⁵⁶ Moreno Fraginalls, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba*, 213.

⁵⁷ Anonyme, *Ouvrages politiques et philosophiques*, 30. In the statements of trade of Havana, the introduction of live animals such as birds, horses (frisons), donkeys, mules, fighting roosters or oxen also stands out.

⁵⁸ Parcero Torre, “La alimentación en Cuba en el siglo XVIII,” 103.

⁵⁹ *Guía o Estado General de la Real Hacienda de España*, 9–10. Garay, *Memoria de la Real Sociedad Patriótica*, Madrid, 31 January 1817.

⁶⁰ Letter signed by Marqués de Peñalver, A. de Arregui, M. C. de Soler and the Marqués de Santa Cruz in 1803. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Real Consulado, Junta de Fomento, leg. 73, expediente 2.804. (hereafter ANC/RC/Junta de Fomento).

⁶¹ Fernández de Pinedo Fernández ‘La recuperación del comercio español con América,’ 59–60.

⁶² Buenos Aires, 31 January 1855. AE/CC/Buenos Aires, Vol. 4, f. 6.

⁶³ (Translation by the author). “Les unes par morceaux, avec ou sans os, conservées en saumure et expédiées dans des barils. Les autres découpées par tranches scellées ensuite au soleil et expédiées sans emballage. Sous cette forme, la viande reçoit le nom de Tasajo [...] elle présente un avantage de 40% en différence de poids sur la viande en tranches. Le colis est considéré comme tare.” Buenos Aires, 31 January 1855. AE/CC/Buenos Aires, vol. 4, fs. 6–7.

⁶⁴ 21 November 1797. ANC/ Intendencia General de Hacienda, leg. 378, expediente 2.

⁶⁵ (Translation by the author) “la viande en saumure... est d’un goût plus frais et plus agréable.” Buenos Aires, 31 January 1855. AE/CC/ Buenos Aires, vol. 4, fs. 6–7.

⁶⁶ Ryan, *Fish out of water*, 234.

⁶⁷ “However, it must be noted that saltfish was the cheapest source of a plentiful supply of protein-rich food which would not spoil in hot climates.” Ryan, 251.

⁶⁸ Luzón, “Comer y beber en La Habana colonial,” 25.

⁶⁹ Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*; McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves*; Sarmiento, “Del ‘funche’ al ‘ajiaco’”; Kiple, *Blacks in Colonial Cuba*.

⁷⁰ Imports went from 121,335 pesos of olive oil in the years 1803–1804 to 47,803 in the period 1805–1807. Fernández-de-Pinedo, *Comercio exterior y fiscalidad*, 156.

⁷¹ Arcila, *Comercio entre Venezuela y México*, 93; Kuethe, “Havana in the Eighteenth Century,” 29.

⁷² Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, “A Taste for French Style in Bourbon Spain.”

⁷³ *Observations on the commerce of Spain with her colonies, in time of war*, 48–49.

⁷⁴ Vincent Gray, American agent in La Havana. Havana, 29 October 1802. NA/US/ Dispatches from USA. Consuls in Havana, 1783–1807, T-20, roll 1, vol. 1.

⁷⁵ (translation by the author) “los inmensos perjuicios que se seguían al comercio español de que los extranjeros [sic] remitiesen sus harinas directamente a las Américas, sin tocar ni adeudar en los puertos habilitados de la Península.” De la Sagra, *Historia Física*, Vol. II, 107–108 and 531–532. Sierra, *Memoria sobre el estado del comercio que publica la Real Junta del de Santander*, 68–69.

⁷⁶ (translation by the author) “mayor consumo que se hace del [vino] catalán desde que los especuladores pensaron en llevar a La Habana las calidades más suaves del principado, que contra una opinión equivocada, aunque muy generalizada sobre los

vinos, se creía que no podían resistir a la navegación sin torcerse.” De la Sagra, *Historia Física*, Vol. II, 51 and 475.

⁷⁷ (translation by the author) “droits excessifs mis sur les farines et les vins étrangers et de la grande différence dans le traitement fait au pavillon espagnol et aux autres. Les américains du Nord [por las harinas] et les français [por los vinos] sont ceux qui souffrent le plus de cet état de choses. L’Espagne... presque... exclusivement fournit Cuba de farine, et le vin de Catalogne est à peu près le seul qu’on consomme dans le Pays.” Havana, 11 January 1835. AE/CC/ La Havane, vol. 10, f. 4.

⁷⁸ Earle, “Race, Clothing and Identity,” 338.

⁷⁹ Riello and Rublack, “Introduction,” 1–33; Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, “Memoirs of the fruits of Globalization.”

⁸⁰ (translation by the author) “la afición al lujo que se iba desarrollando entre los propietarios y mercaderes.” Pezuela, *Ensayo histórico de la isla de Cuba*, 246.

⁸¹ Suárez, “Los espacios domésticos habaneros,” 233.

⁸² Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, “A Taste for French Style in Bourbon Spain.”

⁸³ Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset “Memoirs of the fruits of Globalization.”

⁸⁴ (translation by the autor) “De modo que apenas es visto el nuevo ropaje, cuando ya es imitado en la especialidad del corte, en el buen gusto del color y en la nobleza del género, no escaseándose para el vestuario los lienzos y encajes más finos, las guarniciones y galones más ricos, los tisúes y telas de más precio, ni los tejidos de seda de obra más primorosa y de tintes más delicados.” Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo*, Cap. XIX.

⁸⁵ According to DuPlessis “the rising consumption of silks and woolens in that colony [Saint-Domingue], as well as the declining use of cottons and linens, was evidence of an

emerging tropical free settler dress regime. Despite their different path, across the eighteenth century the textile cultures of Jamaica, Bahia and Saint-Domingue were converging.” DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic Clothing*, 178.

⁸⁶ Salvucci, *Textiles and Capitalism in Mexico*, 59.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

⁸⁸ Silk stocking accounted for 9,009 *pesos reales* in 1803–1804 and rose to 45,405 *pesos reales* in 1806–1807. In the case of ribbons, in 1803–1804 silk ribbons were introduced for a value of 1,270 *pesos reales* and in 1806–1807, the amount reached 52,746 *pesos reales*.

⁸⁹ ANC/Protocolo: Escribanía de Regueyra, 1650, Tomo 1, f. 76, f. 0250v; f. 323v, f. 393v, f. 504. In Suárez, “Los espacios domésticos habaneros.” On Peruvian inventories see Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset (<https://dressworld.hypotheses.org/363>).

⁹⁰ Perez-Garcia, “Creating Global Demand”; Perez Garcia and Sousa, eds., *Global History and New Polycentric Approaches*; Ibarra, “El mundo en una nuez”; Bonialian, “La ‘ropa de la China’ desde Filipinas hasta Buenos Aires. Circulación, consumo y lucha corporativa, 1580–1620.”

⁹¹ Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, “Memoirs of the fruits of Globalization.”

⁹² Dobado, “The Hispanic Globalization of Commerce and Art in the Early Modern Era.” As the Manila Galleon trade started in 1571 and lasted until 1815, the access to Asian commodities via Mexico had an enormous impact in the Spanish American Colonies. Priyadarshini, “Introduction,” 10.

⁹³ Perez-Garcia, “Mercados Globales de La América Española,” 184.

⁹⁴ Hernández Oliva, “Cerámica Mexicana,” 56–61.

⁹⁵ Gerritsen and Mcdowall, “Material Culture and the Other.”

⁹⁶ In the case of earthenwares coming from America it must be taken into account that “[i]ndeed, the earthenware ceramics from Puebla enjoyed some fame in colonial Latin America. They were exported north to the mining regions and beyond to New Mexico, east to Veracruz, south to Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guatemala, and Honduras, and to Cuba and Santo Domingo in the Caribbean.” Priyadarshini, *Chinese Porcelain in Colonial Mexico*, 134.

⁹⁷ Suárez, “Los espacios domésticos habaneros.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., 257; Ormrod, “Consuming the Orient in Britain,” 4.

⁹⁹ Pastore, “Mahogany as Status,” 40; Goodman, Sherratt, and Lovejoy, *Consuming Habits*.

¹⁰⁰ Pastore, “Mahogany as Status,” 19–20 and 41.

¹⁰¹ Shrum, *In the Looking Glass*, 2.

¹⁰² Ibid., 22.

¹⁰³ Knight, “Social Structure of Cuban Slave Society,” 263.

¹⁰⁴ Fernández-de-Pinedo, Saiz, and Pretel, “Patent, Sugar Technology.”

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