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Traversing Empires: The Trans-Imperial Career of the Luso-Spaniard Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo, 1760-1813

FABRÍCIO P. PRADO

In the early modern period, powerful social, political, and economic networks crossed political boundaries, connecting societies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These networks were avenues through which individuals circulated and established connections in different regions in order to mobilize resources both locally and remotely. Born in Lisbon around the year 1742, Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo grew up in Buenos Aires and later established businesses in West Africa, Salvador de Bahia, Colônia do Sacramento, Rio de Janeiro, and London, before finally settling in Montevideo. Throughout his life, Cipriano de Melo switched imperial allegiances and relocated many times, while still maintaining steady commercial, familial, and religious networks. His dynamic and sometimes convoluted career did not prevent him from becoming a high official in the Spanish bureaucracy of Montevideo, nor did it keep him from becoming one of the most prominent members in the community.

Cipriano de Melo's life is representative of the fluid, trans-imperial networks evident in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, and offers an opportunity to analyze the relationship between an individual and these networks, as well as the formation of colonial regional identities. Trans-imperial networks of interaction acted as a foundation on which individuals relied for social, economic, and political support. Furthermore, the control of such networks enabled local groups to develop a sense of community and regional identity within the realms of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Trans-imperial networks provided peripheral communities with social, political, and economic opportunities that served as alternatives to the ones offered by the local centers of power.

Focusing on how individuals manipulated and inserted themselves in trans-imperial networks of interaction reveals the important connections between different empires in the Atlantic world. The study of this topic has been revitalized in recent decades by a series

of works that emphasizes the interconnection of social and economic processes that unfolded on the three continents of the Atlantic basin.¹ However, these groundbreaking works are limited in scope: first, they are divided by geography—such as the British Atlantic, the Spanish Atlantic, and the North Atlantic—and, second, by the political boundaries of empires. Consequently, these studies emphasize processes that unfolded within political units that resemble contemporary national boundaries. In this manner, the study of interaction between empires has positioned the state at the center of analysis, thus favoring research on diplomatic and military aspects of trans-imperial interaction.

In the early 1990s, scholars John Elliot, Jack Greene, and António Manuel Hespanha each published works on the important notions of composite monarchies, negotiated authorities, and the role of the local elites in empire building and governance.² The study of diverse sources such as notary records, church records, and private correspondence, as well as the cross-referencing of evidence from various archives, illuminate imperial dynamics and further support the argument for the importance of the periphery to the development of imperial centers of power. As a result, a thriving body of scholarship has emphasized the importance of networks based on trade, family, friendship, and religious affiliations within the Atlantic empires. This scholarship, nonetheless, has been confined to the same geographical and political boundaries of the Atlantic empires.

It is evident that in different areas of the Atlantic, human interactions moved beyond the boundaries designated by the political metropolises. As a locus of trans-imperial interaction, the Río de la Plata region is one of the prime examples of such trans-imperial dynamics. In the eighteenth century, this area emerged as a stage for colonial disputes between Spain and Portugal and as a locale of interest for

¹ For a review of this trend, see the introduction to Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, eds., *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 2-5. Regarding efforts to connect the history of different empires, see Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713-1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); and Jeremy Adelman, *Revolution and Sovereignty in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

² John H. Elliott, "A Europe of Composite Monarchies," *Past and Present* 137 (1992):48-71; Jack P. Greene, *Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994); and António Manuel Hespanha, *As vésperas do leviathan: instituições e poder política, Portugal, século XVII* (Coimbra: Livraria Almedina, 1994).

Great Britain and France. As is to be expected, such networks strongly impacted both the behavior and loyalties of colonial subjects.³

In the Río de la Plata region, specifically Montevideo, the control of trans-imperial networks, combined with the manipulation of imperial reformist legislation, fostered the emergence of regional colonial identities. These identities, in turn, translated into the emergence of distinctive communities within imperial realms: namely, the clear difference between a community with interests centered in Montevideo and its adjacent territory of the Banda Oriental, and the community centered in Buenos Aires. This process of colonial regional identity formation is situated in a context that predated the emergence of modern nations.⁴

As a Portuguese businessman who served both Iberian empires in distinct moments of his life, Cipriano de Melo extended his networks beyond imperial limits in order to better manipulate resources and improve his position within the empire he was serving at the moment. Cipriano de Melo's life story is used herein to examine the larger impact of his connections—the vertical and horizontal networks which located him within and linked him beyond imperial boundaries. Cipriano de Melo's experiences were representative of the experiences of many of his contemporaries. However, he was able to capitalize on many of these occurrences and, in the process, turned the events of his life into an opportunity to create a hub for multiple networks. More than just the biography of an individual, his actions act as a backdrop

³ For a comparative study on borderlands, see Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, eds., *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998). For a discussion of identities in borderlands, see Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Manuel González Jiménez, "Frontier and Settlement in the Kingdom of Castile (1085-1350)," in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49-76; Hal Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands: Colonial Identity, Frontier Violence, and the Persistence of Brazil's Eastern Indians, 1750-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); and John C. Chasteen, *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

⁴ Regional colonial identity formation in this context is discussed in Nicholas P. Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and João Fragoso, "A nobreza da República: notas sobre a formação da primeira elite senhorial do Rio de Janeiro, séculos XVI e XVII," *Topoi: Revista de História* 1 (2000):45-122.

for analyzing the significance of networks in the periphery during the late colonial period.⁵

In order to better understand the context in which Cipriano de Melo lived, it is important to consider the significance of the Portuguese town of Colônia do Sacramento, where he lived as a ship pilot and merchant for almost two decades, and the rise in importance of the city of Montevideo within the Spanish empire. Indeed, Cipriano de Melo's life was tied inextricably to the rise of Montevideo and the fall of Colônia do Sacramento. Moreover, Cipriano de Melo and the members of his trans-imperial networks later were involved in the major conflicts between social factions in Buenos Aires and Montevideo regarding trans-Atlantic politics and trade.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, groups centered in Montevideo used their control over trans-imperial networks, along with the opportunities offered by Bourbon reformism, to gain autonomy from Buenos Aires and to improve the city's position within the Spanish empire. Colônia do Sacramento, located only one hundred fifty miles slightly northwest of Montevideo, was crucial to this process. As a major contraband entrepôt that supplied the region with sugar, textiles, rum, slaves, and other Atlantic products, Colônia do Sacramento epitomized the creation and maintenance of enduring social and commercial networks that linked Portuguese and Spanish America.⁶

Beginning in the mid-1770s, reforms radically changed the balance of power in the region and, by the late eighteenth century, helped to remake Montevideo as a new trans-imperial center. Of these, the most important reforms were the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata with its capital in Buenos Aires, the expulsion of the Portuguese from Colônia do Sacramento, and the establishment of free trade within the Spanish empire. After the conquest of Colônia do Sacramento by Spanish forces in 1777, many Portuguese subjects

⁵ The importance of networks in peripheral areas is discussed in Giovanni Levi, *A herança imaterial: trajetória de um exorcista no Piemonte do século XVII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000); Zacarias Moutoukias, "Las formas complejas de la acción política: justicia corporativa, faccionalismo y redes sociales, Buenos Aires, 1750-1760," *Jarbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 39 (2002):69-102; José María Imízcoz, ed., *Casa, familia y sociedad: país vasco, España y América, siglos XV-XIX* (Bilbao: Servicio Editorial, Universidad del País Vasco, 2004); and Michel Bertrand, "De la familia a la red de sociabilidad," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 61:2 (1999):107-35.

⁶ Fabrício Prado, *A Colônia do Sacramento: o extremo sul da América portuguesa no século XVIII* (Porto Alegre: F.P. Prado, 2002), 191-93.

relocated to Montevideo and the countryside of the Banda Oriental. Using previously established networks, the newly arrived inhabitants acquainted themselves with mercantile groups centered in Montevideo in order to renew smuggling connections with Portuguese and British traders. Furthermore, owing to its excellent harbor, the Bourbon reforms established Montevideo as a mandatory port of call and as the only port authorized to disembark slaves in the Río de la Plata. Moreover, Montevideo became the naval base of the South Atlantic fleet and the seat of the authorities in charge of policing contraband, both at sea and on land.⁷ The first officer appointed by Viceroy Pedro Antonio de Cevallos (1756-1766; 1777-1778) for the position in charge of repressing contraband trade in Montevideo was Cipriano de Melo.

Born into a wealthy family in Lisbon in 1740, Cipriano de Melo was orphaned before he turned ten years old. Thanks to his family connections, he was sent to Brazil and placed under the care of the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Gomes Freire de Andrade. In 1749, Governor Andrade sent him to Río de la Plata and entrusted his care to the governor of Colônia do Sacramento, Don Luís Garcia de Bivar. However, once in Río de la Plata, Cipriano de Melo soon ran away from Colônia do Sacramento to Buenos Aires, where he came under the patronage of the Spanish governor, Joseph de Andonaegui.⁸

Between 1754 and 1756, the Guaraní Indians from the Seven Eastern Missions of Paraguay rebelled over the provision in the Treaty of Madrid (1750) that stipulated the exchange of Colônia do Sacramento for the interior territory of the Jesuit missions. In 1754, Cipriano de Melo volunteered to be part of the Spanish forces during the resulting Guaránitic War (1754-1756).⁹ As a protégé of the governor of Buenos Aires, Cipriano de Melo most likely had the opportunity to interact with other regional authorities such as the governor of Colônia do Sacramento and, most importantly, the governor of Montevideo, José Joaquín de Viana. While still a teenager, the conflict provided Cipriano de Melo with the opportunity to

⁷ For more information on the impact of Bourbon Reforms on the Spanish administrative system in Río de la Plata, see Susan M. Socolow, *The Bureaucrats of Buenos Aires, 1769-1810* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989); and John Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782-1810: The Intendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969).

⁸ Vicente Osvaldo Cutolo, *Nuevo diccionario biográfico argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Elche, 1975), 520.

⁹ On one occasion, Cipriano de Melo traveled to the theater of war in a canoe.

familiarize himself with the region and the authorities with whom he shared similar experiences in the war.

Once the joint Iberian campaign against the rebellious Guaranís had ended, Cipriano de Melo went to Cádiz, where he studied nautical sciences and was introduced to its theater culture and playhouses. Upon concluding his studies, Cipriano do Melo traveled to Lisbon and collected his inheritance. Afterwards, he returned to Río de la Plata, arriving in Colônia do Sacramento with his heavy luggage and four slaves.¹⁰

In Colônia do Sacramento, Cipriano do Melo established himself as a pilot of ships in the Río de la Plata estuary.¹¹ During the 1762 military campaign against Colônia do Sacramento led by the new governor of Buenos Aires, Don Pedro de Cevallos, Cipriano de Melo switched imperial allegiance and was named pilot of the Spanish fleet organized to attack Colônia do Sacramento. He actively fought the Portuguese and British during the naval blockade of Colônia do Sacramento and took 260 prisoners from the latter. Nevertheless, Cipriano de Melo again was working under the Portuguese flag in 1763, when Colônia do Sacramento reverted to Portuguese control as part of a diplomatic agreement.¹²

In the following decades, Cipriano de Melo crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean, conducting business in Colônia do Sacramento, Salvador de Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Lisbon, West Africa, and London. In 1765, Cipriano de Melo was back in Colônia do Sacramento, where he married Ana Joaquina da Silva, the daughter of an important local merchant, and received a dowry of 30,000 pesos.¹³ In addition, Cipriano de Melo established an enduring position as a trader and pilot, thanks to his close relationships with authorities such as the governor and the prominent businessmen of the Portuguese colony.¹⁴ In doing so, he crossed imperial boundaries and traded many goods such as sugar, tobacco, textiles, woods, furniture, paper, and slaves.

¹⁰ Arturo Ariel Bentancur, *Don Cipriano de Melo, señor de fronteras* (Montevideo: ARCA, 1985), 9-12; and Cutolo, *Nuevo diccionario*, 520-21.

¹¹ Termo de Asentada, Colônia do Sacramento, 19 February 1776, Biblioteca Nacional Lisboa (hereinafter cited as BNL), Manuscritos Pombalinos, cod. 10855.

¹² Cutolo, *Nuevo diccionario*, 520-21.

¹³ Cipriano received Ana Joaquina's dowry on 12 August 1765. Bentancur, *Don Cipriano de Melo*, 8; and Cutolo, *Nuevo diccionario*, 520-21.

¹⁴ Termo de Asentada, Colônia do Sacramento, 19 February 1776, BNL, Manuscritos Pombalinos, cod. 10855.

Among his business partners were some of the wealthiest merchants and government officials of Colônia do Sacramento and Rio de Janeiro. Cipriano de Melo conducted extensive business with the powerful Colônia do Sacramento-based merchant Coronel João de Azevedo Souza, who often advanced money to the local government, and associated with the powerful merchant of Rio de Janeiro, Don Brás Carneiro Leão.¹⁵ His other business partners in Colônia do Sacramento included the merchants Don João Mamede, Don Joseph da Costa Ferreira, and the famous smuggler, João da Cunha Neves. In addition, the governor included Cipriano de Melo as one of the honorable people of Colônia do Sacramento asked to give a statement to the Conselho Ultramarino regarding the state of the colony.¹⁶ Through his business partners in Colônia do Sacramento, Cipriano de Melo gained access to networks in Rio de Janeiro that connected him to some of the wealthiest merchants of that city who also conducted extensive business in the South Atlantic slave trade.¹⁷

In 1777, a Spanish fleet transporting more than 10,000 troops, led by Viceroy Cevallos, arrived in Río de la Plata. Cevallos had orders to establish the viceroyalty in Buenos Aires and to expel the Portuguese from Colônia do Sacramento. Once again, Cevallos commissioned Cipriano de Melo as a pilot of a squadron of ships in charge of conquering Colônia do Sacramento. In June of that same year, Colônia do Sacramento fell into Spanish hands and was leveled to the ground. Subsequently, Cipriano de Melo and hundreds of Portuguese citizens swore an oath of loyalty to the king of Spain. Thereafter, Cipriano de Melo relocated to Montevideo where, as a reward for his service to the Spanish Crown, he was appointed to the new office tasked with the repression of contraband trade, the Comandancia del Resguardo.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lista das Letras que se passaram sobre a thezouraria Geral do Erario da Cap. Do Rio de Janeiro, Colônia do Sacramento, 8 June 1776, BNL, Manuscritos Pombalinos, cod. 10855.

¹⁶ Cartas do Governador Francisco José da Rocha, Colônia do Sacramento, 8 February 1776, BNL, Manuscritos Pombalinos, cod. 10855.

¹⁷ Carta de Francisco Antonio Maciel a Francisco Jose de Luzena, Montevideo, 12 November 1783, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereinafter cited as AGI), Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333; and João Fragoso, *Homens de Grossa Ventura: acumulação e hierarquia na praça mercantil do Rio de Janeiro, 1790-1830* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1993), 319-32.

¹⁸ Representacion de Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo para que se declare se debe ser considerado extranjero o sudito de SMC y goce de los fueros apropiados, Montevideo, 1783, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 311.

Once relocated to Montevideo, Cipriano de Melo found himself in a strategic position, not only because of his position in the Spanish bureaucracy, but also due to his connections and capital. As the Segundo Comandante del Resguardo, Cipriano de Melo was in charge of controlling ports and regulating navigation in lakes and lagoons and counted thirty-two men under his authority. More importantly, his responsibilities included determining the legality of ship arrivals in the port and inspecting their cargo. Furthermore, Melo successfully collected compensation from the Spanish Crown for the estates he possessed in Colônia do Sacramento, and he received a license to import 32,000 pesos worth of merchandise from Brazil—slaves, tobacco, sugar, *cachaça*, and other goods.¹⁹ Taken together, these factors ensured his privileged insertion into Montevideo's society.

Reestablished in Montevideo, Cipriano de Melo had all of the necessary resources, means, and knowledge needed to reconnect the commercial routes between Rio de Janeiro and Río de la Plata, the hub of which had been formerly located in Colônia do Sacramento. Cipriano de Melo secured not only the legal ability to ensure the safety of the operations, but also attained enough capital to finance his own business ventures. If knowledge about Luso-Brazilian markets and products was essential, then inclusion in the local community also proved crucial: an important group of merchants, eager to profit from Montevideo's newly acquired status within the Spanish empire, welcomed Cipriano de Melo into their fold. These kind of local arrangements were fundamental to the growth of the local mercantile and political community.

In 1780, a close associate of Cipriano de Melo, the Montevidean merchant Francisco Maciel, departed on a business trip to Rio de Janeiro. According to the Luso-Brazilian viceroy, Don Luís de Vasconcelos, Maciel went as a delegate and represented the interests of Montevidean merchants. He met with merchants and authorities in Rio de Janeiro in order to acquire ninety slaves and to purchase tobacco, sugar, and textiles. However, reestablishment of the trade route between Rio de Janeiro and Río de la Plata constituted the most important part of his visit. Under the pretext of the need for repairs, Maciel ensured that Portuguese ships would be welcomed in

¹⁹ *Cachaça* is a liquor made of fermented sugarcane, similar to rum. Representacion de Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo, 1783, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 311; and Expediente del Virrey Marques de Loreto con el Intendente de Buenos Aires Francisco Paula Sanz sobre el Arreglo de los Campos de Montevideo, Montevideo, 1786, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

Montevideo by the Segundo Comandante Cipriano de Melo.²⁰ Although suspicious of the proffered strategy, the viceroy was reassured by Carneiro Leão, a merchant of "good reputation and large credit" in Rio de Janeiro, who vouched for the trustworthiness of the authorities and merchants of Montevideo and assured the safety of the ships.²¹

Between 1781 and 1786, seventy-four Portuguese ships arrived in Montevideo, forty-three of which had declared at departure their destination as other Portuguese ports, usually Rio Grande do Sul or Santa Catarina. Portuguese pilots navigating Spanish and Portuguese vessels could be found among the captains who frequently traveled this route. Moreover, some of these Portuguese captains were Cipriano de Melo's business partners and friends who traveled the route between Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro carrying cargos of sugar, tobacco, and slaves. In Montevideo, Cipriano de Melo often hosted them at his house or invited them for dinner.²²

Cipriano de Melo also participated actively as a merchant in the Río de la Plata-Luso-America route. In 1779, Cipriano de Melo petitioned the Spanish Crown for permission to collect the money owed to him by Luso-Brazilian merchants. The total sum owed to Cipriano de Melo by merchants in Portuguese America totaled approximately 32,000 pesos. To support his claim, Cipriano de Melo collected the statements of many businessmen located in Colônia do Sacramento, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo, who confirmed the well-known fact that Cipriano de Melo had credits in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia, as well as on the island of Santa Catarina. Moreover, Cipriano de Melo also had several statements from a Spanish officer who had fought alongside him in 1777, attesting to the

²⁰ Carta de Francisco Antonio Maciel a Luis de Vasconcelos, Rio de Janeiro, 30 March 1780, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisboa (hereinafter cited as AHU), Rio de Janeiro, doc. 9294.

²¹ Ofício, Luis de Vasconcelos e Sousa ao Martinho de Melo e Castro, Rio de Janeiro 12 July 1781, AHU, Rio de Janeiro, doc. 9561; and Representacion de Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo, 1783, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 311. Brás Carneiro Leão had been involved in trade with Colônia do Sacramento in the past and had declared to the Spanish Crown that he owed money to Don Cipriano de Melo.

²² Autos Seguidos entre Dn. Manuel Perez y Dn. Miguel Josef de Fleitas sobre anular la venta de unos esclavos que el segundo hizo al primero, Montevideo, 1794, Archivo General de la Nación, Uruguay (hereinafter cited as AGN, Uruguay), Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 22, exp. 38. The pilots were Miguel de Fleitas, Antonio João da Cunha, and Leonardo Perdígão. Miguel de Fleitas and Cipriano de Melo severed their partnership during this judicial case.

good service performed by Cipriano de Melo to the Spanish Crown. The Crown granted Cipriano de Melo's petition and further authorized Viceroy Cevallos to compensate him for his lost property in Colônia do Sacramento, which included the property of his father-in-law, Don Manuel Pereira Gonzales, who had fled to Rio de Janeiro in 1777.²³

Cipriano de Melo found important allies among the merchants and authorities of Montevideo (see Figure 1). The group most responsible for Cipriano de Melo's integration into Montevideo's society was the Viana family and their allies, who also stood to profit both from the new status of Montevideo as an Atlantic port and from their dealings in the port of Buenos Aires. The clan included the former governor of Montevideo, José Joaquín de Viana; his cousin, Melchor de Viana; the merchant Don Francisco Maciel; and later, Cipriano de Melo himself. The Viana familial networks connected them to the first settlers of the Banda Oriental and guaranteed that their families received favors from the Crown in compensation for their efforts to build the city.²⁴

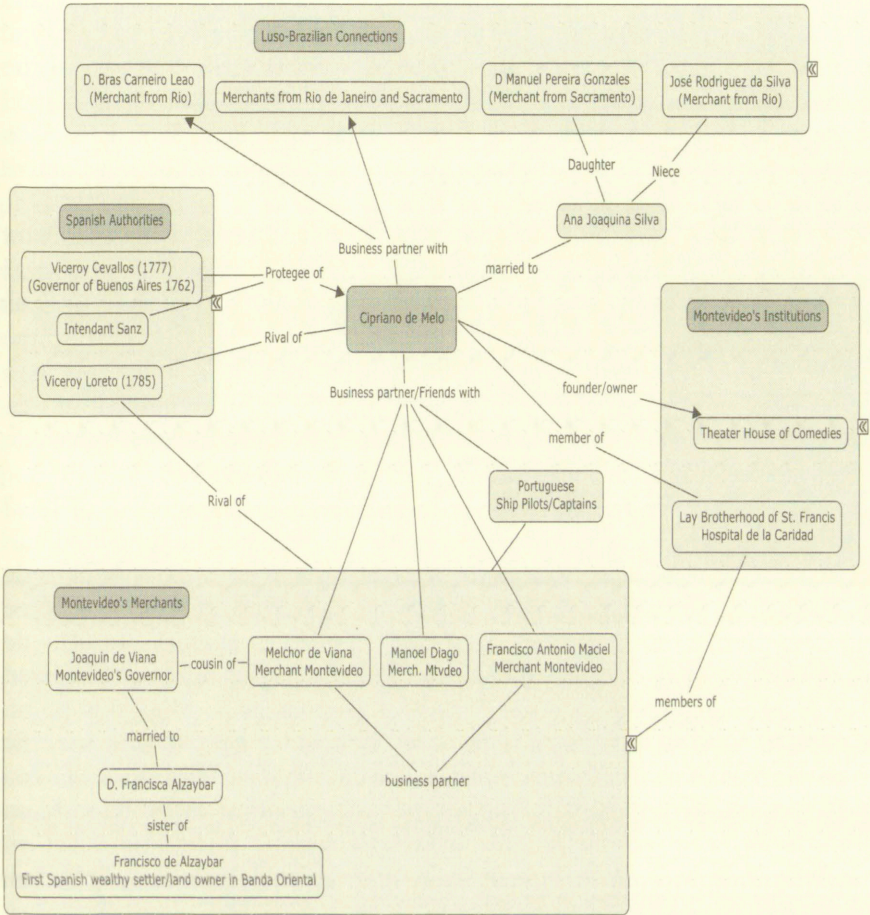
The first governor of Montevideo, Don José Joaquín de Viana, married Doña Francisca de Alzaybar, the sister of Don Francisco de Alzaybar, who was the first settler and *latifundia* (large estate) owner in the Banda Oriental. In two separate terms in office, Viana governed Montevideo for fifteen years (1751-1764; 1771-1773). During this period, the governor formed strong networks in the city. The connection with the Alzaybar family not only assured access to ample economic and social resources in the area, but also ensured *mercedes* (favors) from the Crown for the Alzaybar family, who assisted settlers and patrolled the Río de la Plata.²⁵ Moreover, Viana had led Spanish troops during the Guaranitic War, which entitled him to royal favors. In the following decades, Joaquín de Viana was responsible for distributing land, choosing the two subsequent governors of Montevideo (Agustín de la Rosa and Joaquín del Pino, respectively),

²³ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, Montevideo, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333; and Statement signed by Francisco de Paula Sanz, Buenos Aires, 6 October 1784, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

²⁴ Juan Alejandro Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya: los habitantes de Montevideo en sus primeros 40 años, filiaciones, ascendencias, entronques, descendencias* (Montevideo: n.p., 1975), 931-40.

²⁵ For more details about the Alzaybar family and their influence in early Montevideo, see Fabricio Prado, "In the Shadows of Empires: Trans-Imperial Networks and Colonial Identity in Bourbon Río de la Plata" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2009), Chap. 3.

Figure 1
 Networks of Don Manuel Cipriano de Melo



and in the process secured a prominent estate for himself and his family in the region.²⁶

Joaquín de Viana built an extensive network of relatives, fictive kin, and business associates who were prominent in the later decades of the eighteenth century in Montevideo. For example, Viana was a cousin of Don Melchor de Viana, who traded slaves and all type of goods from Europe and the Americas, which made him one of the most important merchants of Montevideo. Furthermore, Viana named the sister of another powerful Montevidean merchant, Don Francisco Maciel, as the executor of his estate. Maciel was one of the most active slave traders in Montevideo.

Viana's connections, however, extended beyond the merchant community of Montevideo. The Montevidean governor was a political protégé of Viceroy Juan José Vértiz, who ruled in Buenos Aires as governor from 1770-1776 and as viceroy from 1778-1784. Among the merchants of Buenos Aires, he counted Martín de Altolaquirre as a business associate and political ally.²⁷ He also regarded as an acquaintance Don Francisco de Medina, a wealthy trader responsible for the creation of the first *saladero* in the Banda Oriental.²⁸

After the fall of Colônia do Sacramento, this network of local elites welcomed Cipriano de Melo in Montevideo and incorporated him as a business associate and as a friend. Cipriano de Melo, Melchor de Viana, and Francisco Maciel hired the same vessels and the same pilots, and, most importantly, shared the same networks in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia.²⁹ Moreover, these merchants utilized the same agents and submitted orders for goods as a group, relying on Cipriano de Melo's contacts in order to acquire general and specific products such as chairs made of the fine Brazilian wood *jacaranda* and slave cooks from Bahia.³⁰ These types of operations relied directly on trust. Because of the nature of trans-imperial trade, the level of informality was much higher than in traditional intra-imperial trade

²⁶ Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya*, 931-33.

²⁷ Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya*, 935-37, 967.

²⁸ *Saladero* was an estate for the production of dried meat through the process of dehydration with salt. Turning meat into *tasajo* or *charque* extended the time for consumption of the meat as well as offered a cheap protein diet to slaves in plantation areas. Bentancur, *Don Cipriano de Melo*, 20-25. As reported in Medina's probate records, Cipriano de Melo had credits of more than 2,000 pesos.

²⁹ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

³⁰ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

networks. The latter system relied on legal regulation much more than it did upon interpersonal relationships.

The trans-imperial connections of Cipriano de Melo benefited groups centered in Montevideo and the non-monopolist merchants of Buenos Aires that were active in the slave trade and in trade with foreign colonies. Montevideo became the preferred Atlantic port of the region, not only due to the Bourbon reforms, but also because of its Luso-Platine networks—the port of Montevideo filled the former role of Colônia do Sacramento as the center of networks of Portuguese and British traders in the region. As a result, Montevideo became the preeminent port for both legal and illegal trade.

Because he profited from the new offices and regulations created by the Bourbon reforms, Cipriano de Melo had a relatively easy task in reestablishing himself in Montevideo. He also mobilized his connections in Portuguese America and Montevideo. During periods of war between Spain and Great Britain, increasingly lax regulation of neutral trade allowed trans-imperial networks to function even more actively and with a higher level of legality. The intense traffic in the port of Montevideo in the years after the downfall of Colônia do Sacramento initially had been welcomed by traders in Buenos Aires. However, the growing power of Montevideo's merchant community and officials in controlling trans-imperial trade began to concern important factions in Buenos Aires.

By the mid-1780s, some of the merchants and authorities in Buenos Aires felt dissatisfied by the fact that Montevideo constituted the only port authorized to harbor trans-Atlantic ships. As a result of this arrangement, the merchants of Buenos Aires depended upon their proxies and business associates in Montevideo, which allowed the merchant community of Montevideo to increase their own business at the expense of the merchant community in Buenos Aires. Yet not all merchants from Buenos Aires objected to the new role of Montevideo. An emergent group of merchants without monopolistic contracts—but who were active in enterprises such as the slave trade, trade with foreign colonies, and free trade with other ports in the Spanish empire—did not complain about Montevideo's new role. The most visible members among this group included Tomás Antonio Romero; his son, Don José de Maria; and Don Juan de Aguirre.³¹

³¹ The group identified as "monopolist" merchants was the group of merchants that had traditionally operated within the monopolistic system centered on the axis Cádiz-Río de la Plata. Susan M. Socolow and Viviana L. Grieco offer a better analysis of the

The nomination of a new viceroy for Buenos Aires triggered conflict among some factions of the mercantile communities in both port cities. Important segments of the mercantile community of Buenos Aires welcomed the arrival of the viceroy, Francisco Cristóbal del Campo, the marquis of Loreto, to Buenos Aires in 1784. Determined to put an end to the intense trans-imperial traffic channeled through Montevideo, the viceroy enacted measures designed to constrain the "excesses" of autonomy and the contraband activities of Montevideo's authorities.³²

Beyond the contraband issue, the conflict involved a dispute between Viceroy del Campo and the intendant of Río de la Plata, Don Francisco de Paula Sanz. In the Río de la Plata, the viceroy and the intendant often had overlapping or loosely defined jurisdiction.³³ In addition, the arrival of the marquis of Loreto generated divergent opinions about policies regarding trade with neutrals and how best to stimulate local industries. On the one hand, Intendant Sanz sought to protect trade and local shipyards and factories and, on the other hand, Viceroy del Campo aimed to protect monopolistic policies. The conflict could be understood as competing visions of imperial policy or as the conflict between the old and the new structure of power created by the Bourbon reforms. Nevertheless, personal grievances between the two men, combined with their loyalties to the various factions which they served, also should be acknowledged.

One of the most visible targets of the *porteño* reaction was Cipriano de Melo. The viceroy and other authorities accused Cipriano de Melo of supporting the contraband trade by allowing Portuguese ships to harbor in Montevideo, thus facilitating the illegal introduction of goods and subjects into Spanish dominions.³⁴ The events that culminated in a series of lawsuits against Cipriano de Melo began when one of his Portuguese business partners, the pilot and well-known smuggler Don Antonio Joseph de Acuña, was arrested after illegally

merchants of Buenos Aires. Susan M. Socolow, *Los mercaderes del Buenos Aires virreinal: familia y comercio*, trans. Alicia Steimberg (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Flor, 1991); and Viviana L. Grieco, "Politics and Public Credit: The Limits of Absolutism in Late Colonial Buenos Aires" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2005).

³² Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

³³ Socolow, *The Bureaucrats of Buenos Aires*, discusses the bureaucracy in Río de la Plata.

³⁴ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

entering Montevideo, where he stayed for two days at the house of Cipriano de Melo. Acuña had arrived in the city onboard a Portuguese brigantine that had entered into Montevideo's port two days earlier. According to his statement, he went to Cipriano de Melo's house because of his connections to Don Melchor de Viana. Acuña justified his presence in the city by claiming that he needed to collect a debt from this important merchant.

The episode gave birth to a long lawsuit in which the authorities in Buenos Aires made a case against Cipriano de Melo and questioned the ability of Montevidean authorities to control trans-Atlantic trade. The dispute centered upon who had jurisdiction to inspect the ships and to authorize the disembarkment of goods. The case was further complicated in two ways: first, Acuña's alleged infractions fell under the jurisdiction of customs officials, who at that time were under the direct influence of the new viceroy and *porteño* authorities; and second, because the letters, receipts, and account books of operations involving Cipriano de Melo, his wife Ana Joaquina, Melchor de Viana, Francisco Maciel, and other important merchants of Montevideo had been found among Acuña's confiscated belongings.

In the lawsuit, prosecutors exposed an intricate network of cooperation among the Montevidean merchants. According to evidence cited in the case, Cipriano de Melo and his wife operated an enduring business that sent illegally imported slaves to Alto Perú. Using one of their own slaves to manage the deliveries, the couple allegedly exported anywhere from twenty-seven to three hundred slaves.³⁵ The viceroy also questioned the legitimacy of Cipriano de Melo's license to introduce 32,000 *pesos fuertes* from Luso-America. According to Viceroy del Campo, Cipriano de Melo had stated that he had transported less than 5,000 pesos to date. However, the viceroy argued that Cipriano de Melo had five ships under his command in Brazil; thus, the viceroy calculated that the amount carried by each ship would be roughly 1,000 pesos, which was not enough to cover the cost of the voyage of the ship and its crew.

The evidence exposed even larger underground networks of contraband trade that involved the Portuguese pilot, Juan de Acuña, and the Montevidean merchants Leonardo Pereyra, Melchor de Viana, Francisco Maciel, and Francisco de Medina. Acuña's papers revealed that, for more than four years, these merchants had been smuggling

³⁵ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

slaves, sugar, tobacco, and other goods, and had been illegally exporting hides to Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia. These operations amounted to more than 51,400 *pesos fuertes*.³⁶ Among his partners in Rio de Janeiro, Cipriano de Melo counted Don Antonio João da Costa, João da Costa Pineiro, João Diniz Vieira, and Don Brás Carneiro Leão. The representative of the group in Salvador de Bahia was Don Francisco José de Lucena. It is revealing that these groups had more connections to Rio de Janeiro than to Salvador de Bahia. In addition to the larger number of associates in the *fluminense* port, Don Francisco Maciel complained about a former partner from Bahia, Manoel José Froes, who had not paid for the 5,697 hides sent to him on account. The Montevidean merchants spread this information, not only to their associate in Salvador de Bahia in charge of collecting the debt, but also among their business associates in Rio de Janeiro. Such behavior was characteristic of business organizations in Old Regime societies: network structures ensured trust and the safety of operations.³⁷

Among the confiscated papers were lists of goods ordered by Cipriano de Melo—for his family, the governor of Montevideo, and the Primer Comandante del Resguardo, Don Antonio Pereira—that included various pieces of furniture made from *jacaranda* wood, shirts, velvet dresses, *salterio* scores, a slave musician, and slave cooks. All of these items and slaves were intended for personal or household use by their families. In addition, lists were found that specified items for sale.³⁸

The viceroy used the evidence found among Acuña's belongings to argue against the primacy of Montevideo as a mandatory port of call for the region. He bolstered his argument by highlighting the corruption of the Montevidean authorities, whom he accused of protecting smuggling with the Portuguese. Moreover, the viceroy advocated against the liberal policies of neutral trade and saw the need to "close the door to Portuguese traders," as well as to the British, "even if it meant to allow their ships to sink in front of the harbor." The

³⁶ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333. The operations involved the purchasing of slaves, sugar, tobacco, furniture, textiles, and clothing. The values mentioned in individual receipts were 30,000 pesos, 1,400 pesos, 13,000 pesos, and 7,000 pesos.

³⁷ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

³⁸ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

marquis of Loreto also leveled direct charges against Cipriano de Melo, who the viceroy described as a "corrupt official, who was receptive to bribes," "a foreigner," and "a Portuguese, whose conduct and performance were so damaging to the Royal Treasury."³⁹

In his defense, Cipriano de Melo presented a list of all the services he had performed for the Spanish Crown: participation in military actions during the war of 1777, the conquest of Colônia do Sacramento, and expeditions to ensure the control of Patagonia and the Malvinas. Furthermore, he provided a list of all his contraband confiscations since he took office as Segundo Comandante del Resguardo. Cipriano de Melo also cited canons of Natural Law justifying the licenses for foreign ships to harbor in Montevideo for repairs and reviewed the royal ordinances regarding trade with neutrals.⁴⁰ Most importantly, Cipriano de Melo adamantly affirmed his loyalty to the Spanish Crown, stating: "It is a public and well known fact that I was a resident [*vezino*] of Colônia do Sacramento; thus, I shall not be considered a foreigner, and rather I should be reputed as a Spaniard, with all the rights and privileges that Spanish subjects enjoy." Cipriano de Melo argued that, according to the laws of conquest, residents who wanted to swear loyalty would enjoy full rights as vassals of the Spanish Crown.⁴¹

Cipriano de Melo also stated that the arrival of the Portuguese traders ensured the continued flow of slaves during the years of war with Great Britain. Furthermore, he used this argument to justify his involvement with Antonio Juan de Acuña, who, according to Cipriano de Melo, was one of the agents involved in the slave trade. The Bourbon reforms had been intended to stimulate the introduction of slaves into the Americas in order to expand agricultural production. However, policies designed to foster the acquisition of slaves in the empire ultimately reinforced the traditional commercial route between Río de la Plata and Rio de Janeiro. After the wars of 1777, the king had authorized certain subjects to import their capital from Portuguese America into Spanish America. The intendant of Río de la Plata, Francisco de Paula Sanz, stated that trade with the Portuguese benefited the empire, mainly owing to the introduction of slaves. Moreover,

³⁹ Autos formados por la prision del portugues Juan de Acuña, 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333.

⁴⁰ Representacion de Manuel Cipriano de Melo, 1783, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 311.

⁴¹ Representacion de Manuel Cipriano de Melo, 1783, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 311.

Intendant Sanz argued that such flows of capital favored the Spanish empire and, therefore, should not be labeled as contraband.⁴²

What had started as a local conflict soon reached the Council of the Indies in Seville as a confrontation between the intendant, under whose jurisdiction the Comandancia del Resguardo functioned, and the viceroy, who controlled the custom officials. In short, the conflict turned into an imperial one between the supporters of the newly instituted reforms and the old power structure. Such a dispute clearly exemplifies how local elites and authorities interpreted and manipulated colonial legislation according to their own interests. In 1788, Sanz was sent to Potosí as the new intendant of Alto Perú, and the viceroy was replaced in Buenos Aires. Montevideo's officials retained jurisdiction over all trans-Atlantic arrivals in the Río de la Plata. In spite of the fact that the port activity of both cities complemented one another, such an outcome did not mean an end to the conflict between the factions of the mercantile communities of Montevideo and Buenos Aires.

The enemies of Cipriano de Melo presented charges to the Council of the Indies accusing him and his business associate, Don Manuel Diago, of contributing to fraud, which had led to the bankruptcy of the Customs House of Buenos Aires and to smuggling goods to Brazil and La Habana.⁴³ In his defense, he emphasized the lack of evidence connecting him to the corruption in the Customs House in Buenos Aires and instead blamed the influence of Viceroy del Campo over the *fiscal* of the Council of the Indies. Cipriano de Melo denounced the viceroy for the false accusations against him and the *fiscal* for his failure to process the documents he had sent to the council. Moreover, Cipriano de Melo accused them both of persecuting

⁴² Parecer sobre pedido de Francisco Mendes Ribeyro para pasar al Rio de Geneiro, Buenos Aires, 24 May 1785, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 333. In addition to the case of Cipriano de Melo, Sanz cited the case of Francisco Mendez Ribeyro, a Portuguese man living in Buenos Aires, who had his request to import an inheritance from a deceased brother from Rio de Janeiro denied.

⁴³ Procedimientos Contra Dn. Manuel Cipriano de Melo, Segundo Comandante del Resguardo de Rentas Reales, Buenos Aires, 1788, Archivo General de la Nación, Argentina (hereinafter cited as AGN, Argentina), Sala IX, Hacienda, 33-4-5, exp. 41, fols. 2-5; and Rl. Orn. Para que se Remitam los Documentos relativos a la Defensa de D. Cipriano de Melo, 2º. Comandante de los Resguardos y D. Manuel Diago, Buenos Aires, 1791, AGN, Argentina, Sala IX, Justicia, 31-6-1. The denunciations of smuggling also involved his wife, Ana Joaquina. They were charged with smuggling *tasajo*, wax, tallow, candles, and slaves.

him "since he had sworn vassalage to the King of Spain, thus having denied his status as a Portuguese subject."⁴⁴

As for the smuggling charges, Cipriano de Melo presented in his defense that all the trade with La Habana had been conducted by his wife, Ana Joaquina da Silva, and thus none of his business. After a long and drawn-out lawsuit, officials decided that Cipriano de Melo's wife had obtained his consent to engage in commerce and found him guilty of smuggling slaves and other goods. As a result, Cipriano de Melo went to jail in Buenos Aires for a brief period of time in 1788, after which the king reaffirmed Cipriano de Melo's status as a naturalized Spaniard and allowed him to retain his office but forbade him to trade in slaves and other goods. The ban, however, did not prevent his wife from conducting a series of commercial transactions that involved slaves, sugar, and tobacco, as well as a series of trans-imperial deals with Potosí, Chile, La Habana, Portuguese America, and Europe.⁴⁵ Don Manuel Diago, furthermore, retained his right to engage in trading activities. Consequently, the commercial partnership between Diago and Cipriano de Melo lasted until the death of the latter in 1813.

Even after the incidents of 1788, Cipriano de Melo continued to be an active member of Montevideo's elite. He founded the city's first theater, known as the House of Comedies, and served as the manager for the Hospital of Charity, an institution owned and operated by the Lay Brotherhood of Saint Francis. During the 1790s, he actively involved himself with the Luso-Brazilian community residing in Montevideo, sponsoring and assisting newly arrived immigrants from Brazil, especially artisans. He also maintained active networks with Portuguese authorities, including granting clearance to Portuguese vessels that arrived in Montevideo transporting Franciscan missionaries.⁴⁶ These facts point to the successful integration of Cipriano de Melo into the city's institutional and social life and highlight the trans-imperial nature of the local society and community institutions.

The 1790s marked the beginning of a phase in which Cipriano de Melo was no longer allowed to engage directly in the Atlantic trade.

⁴⁴ RI. Orden que Remitan los Documentos relativos a la defensa de Dn. Man. Cipriano de Melo 2º. Comandte. De los Resguardos y de Dn. Manuel Diago, Buenos Aires, 1791, AGN, Argentina, Sala IX, Justicia, 31-16-6.

⁴⁵ Probate records of Ana Joaquina da Silva, 1821, Archivo Judicial, Uruguay, caja 203, Civil I. Alex Borucki provided the reference for this record.

⁴⁶ Statement signed by Marques de Aviles, Sevilla, 1799, AGI, Indiferente General, leg. 2466.

Nevertheless, he continued to actively suppress contraband trade in the port of Montevideo, the Merin Lagoon, and the borderland region between Spanish America and Portuguese America. In Montevideo, Cipriano de Melo personally inspected many of the vessels arriving from foreign colonies.⁴⁷ Often these ships carried onboard old acquaintances or business partners and their agents as passengers. In the borderlands with Brazil, Cipriano de Melo initiated several raids, established guards, and deployed canoes to repress contraband in the waters of the lagoon.⁴⁸ In these anti-smuggling operations, Cipriano de Melo counted on the help of Rafael Pinto Bandeira, a Portuguese merchant and official. Bandeira had been accused of monopolizing contraband trade in the area, but these denunciations never ended in a conviction.⁴⁹

The last decade of the eighteenth century witnessed warfare involving Spain and other Atlantic empires. Such recurrent conflict encouraged Spanish officials to pass legislation authorizing trade with neutrals. Between 1795 and 1797, Montevideo's harbor officially was open to vessels originating from Portugal and other friendly nations. As had occurred in the previous decade, Río de la Plata merchants from Montevideo, along with some factions from Buenos Aires, found these years to be full of opportunities for trans-imperial trade. The 1790s, however, marked yet another dispute between groups centered in Buenos Aires and groups in Montevideo. This time, commercial interests divided old allies: Montevideo's authorities and merchants versus the group of Buenos Aires merchants associated with those involved in trade with foreigners.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 20 February 1797, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 34; Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 18 February 1797, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 34; Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 14 December 1799, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 40; Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 23 November 1799, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 40; Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 19 December 1799, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 40; and Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 13 March 1793, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 18.

⁴⁸ Auto de Embarcacion, Montevideo, 9 May 1792, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 18.

⁴⁹ Tiago Luís Gil, "Infiéis transgressores: os contrabandistas da fronteira, 1760-1810" (Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2002).

⁵⁰ Juez de Arribadas, Montevideo, 1794, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 25, exp. 89.

During the mid-1790s, obvious signs of the rupture of the alliance—between Montevidean traders and the non-monopolistic merchants of Buenos Aires—and of the dispute for the primacy on trans-imperial trade appeared for the first time. As the head of the agency in charge of repressing contraband, Cipriano de Melo performed a series of confiscations that targeted the vessels and crews of the *porteño* merchants involved in trans-imperial trade. The lawsuits, combined with the contraband confiscations generated in the 1790s, testify to the split between the Montevidean faction comprised of Francisco Maciel, Cipriano de Melo, and Melchor de Viana from Montevideo, and the faction comprised of Tomás Antonio Romero, Pedro Duval, and José de Maria, among others, from Buenos Aires.⁵¹

The monopoly enjoyed by Montevideo's harbor authorities over trans-Atlantic arrivals laid at the root of the conflict between the mercantile factions involved in trade with Portuguese and Anglo America. In the 1790s, the mercantile community of Buenos Aires already was internally divided, with a clear split between the merchants who opposed trade with neutrals and those in favor of such practices.⁵² As a result, for different reasons, mercantile factions in Buenos Aires initiated a lawsuit in which merchants, with the support of the Consulado de Comercio, argued against the position of Montevideo as the privileged port city in the Río de la Plata.⁵³ This time, however, the most visible targets from among the Montevidean authorities were Cipriano de Melo and the new viceroy of Río de la Plata, Don Antonio Olaguer y Feliú, himself a former governor of Montevideo.

The main incident that solidified the separation of these once allied merchants from Buenos Aires and Montevideo involved the primacy of Montevideo as a mandatory port of call in the region. The *porteño* group decried the excesses of the viceroy and of the Comandante del Resguardo Cipriano de Melo, who, they argued,

⁵¹ Dna. Maria del Carmen vs. Dn. Miguel de Fleytas, Montevideo, 19 September 1794, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 22. In this case, Cipriano de Melo testified against Miguel de Fleytas, who worked for Tomás Antonio Romero. Decomiso de Pedro Duval, Casimiro Necochea, Miguel Josef Fleytas, et alii, Montevideo, 22 February 1800, AGN, Uruguay, Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, caja 46.

⁵² Viviana Grieco, "Socializing the King's Debt: Local and Atlantic Financial Transactions of the Merchants of Buenos Aires, 1793-1808," *The Americas* 65:3 (2009):321-50.

⁵³ Statement signed by Josef [sic] de Maria, Buenos Aires, 1798, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346. The merchant defended trade with neutrals but argued against the primacy of Montevideo.

"threatened the primacy of the Capital Buenos Aires" and imposed "miserable losses" to free trade.⁵⁴ The group of businessmen from Buenos Aires, represented by Juan de Aguirre, José de Maria, and Pedro Duval, complained about the enforcement of the policy that stipulated that all ships from foreign colonies must harbor first in Montevideo.

The pivotal episode in this conflict was the refusal of entry into the port of Buenos Aires of two ships coming from the Isla Mauricio and from Pernambuco in Portuguese America. Don Pedro Duval and Don Juan de Aguirre, two powerful merchants in Buenos Aires and both members of the Consulate of Commerce, owned the ships at the center of the dispute. The merchants complained that their ships, loaded with perishable cargo and slaves, had been denied safe harbor in Buenos Aires due to the decree by Viceroy Olaguer y Feliú that required all trans-Atlantic trade to be conducted through the port of Montevideo. Moreover, the merchants petitioned the viceroy to designate an officer to inspect the ships, without their having first to sail back to Montevideo. Viceroy Olaguer y Feliú chose the Comandante del Resguardo of Montevideo, Cipriano de Melo, to perform the task. Cipriano de Melo, however, was not in Buenos Aires, and, consequently, the ships were forced to sail out of Buenos Aires.⁵⁵

In an attempt to circumvent a return to Montevideo, Duval and Aguirre directed their ships to sail to Colônia do Sacramento, a port under the jurisdiction of the *porteños*, and then to return to the harbor of Buenos Aires under the guise of ships arriving from another Spanish port. This maneuver did not produce the expected result, however, and the ships eventually departed for Montevideo. The merchants complained that such rules not only impeded the shipment of their cargo, but also had caused damages and the death of a number of slaves when the ships were caught in a storm while sailing to Montevideo.⁵⁶ The merchants also argued that Buenos Aires should be allowed to receive slave ships, not only because the city provided the capital to

⁵⁴ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Eranjeras, Buenos Aires, 1797, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁵⁵ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Eranjeras, Buenos Aires, 1797, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁵⁶ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Eranjeras, Buenos Aires, 1797, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

finance such expeditions, but also because the port had better logistics for the disembarkation of slaves.

The merchants Pedro Duval and José de Maria called the Comandancia de Resguardo officers "bad and unfaithful bureaucrats" and declared that the authorities in Montevideo, including the viceroy, wanted to maintain the monopoly over both trans-imperial and contraband trade.⁵⁷ Implicit in the accusation, the merchants suggested that illicit trade did not occur in Buenos Aires. Moreover, the *porteño* merchants and their allies argued that the extension of the authority of a Montevidean official, in this case Cipriano de Melo, to Buenos Aires constituted a serious offense to the bureaucrats of the vice-regal capital. In their estimation, the change would "represent the influence of Montevideo over Buenos Aires." They also claimed that Viceroy Olaguer y Feliú spent more time in Montevideo, where he kept his home, than in Buenos Aires.⁵⁸

Moreover, José de Maria also alleged that Viceroy Olaguer y Feliú had failed to honor the licenses for trans-imperial trade granted by the former viceroy and that such measures unfairly targeted Buenos Aires merchants.⁵⁹ In addition, José de Maria stated that Viceroy Olaguer y Feliú associated closely with a certain "Melo" to whom he gave more authority than was legal.⁶⁰ José de Maria and Pedro Duval stated that they did not want to "mention the details of Feliú's presence in Montevideo in order to refrain from reproducing rumors and from demonstrating a lack of 'decorum'" and to avoid the provocation of further unrest among the people in the streets of Buenos Aires.⁶¹ Such statements made clear the division between the communities of the two port cities: even though the conflict started as a political and economic question, the merchants utilized their vertical and horizontal networks

⁵⁷ The original Spanish reads: "malos y infieles servidores." Statement signed by Pedro Duval, Buenos Aires, 30 April 1798, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁵⁸ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Etranjeras, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346; and Statement signed by Pedro Duval, Buenos Aires, 30 April 1798, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁵⁹ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Etranjeras, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁶⁰ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Etranjeras, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

⁶¹ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Etranjeras, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

to mobilize people beyond the strict confines of the mercantile community.⁶²

The dispute culminated with the attempt of the mercantile community of Montevideo to create their own Consulado de Comercio, while the merchants of Buenos Aires made an effort to authorize the port of Ensenada de Barragán, a bay south of Buenos Aires, as a trans-Atlantic port. The initiative of the merchants of Buenos Aires proved temporarily successful. From 1801 to 1802, the port of Ensenada de Barragán was declared to be a physical extension of the port of Buenos Aires, and it opened to Spanish vessels navigating trans-Atlantic routes. However, restrictions continued to exclude foreign vessels. Despite the rejection by the Council of the Indies for the creation of a new Consulado de Comercio in Montevideo, the members found valid the arguments in favor of the return to primacy of the port of Montevideo.⁶³ After 1802, Montevideo thus resumed its role of primary port of call for trans-Atlantic voyages in the Río de la Plata estuary. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new balance of power had been created in the Río de la Plata. Although they continued to conduct business together, the communities of merchants from Montevideo and Buenos Aires clearly had different interests.

Cipriano de Melo had been an active protagonist in many of the conflicts generated by the emergence of Montevideo as a regional center of power. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, Cipriano de Melo's actions did not have the same results as in the previous decades. Nonetheless, he maintained his networks and influence in the region. In 1809, the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost captaincy of Brazil, sent Cipriano de Melo boxes of sweets in reciprocation for the Portuguese newspapers he had received earlier. The governor thanked Cipriano de Melo, saying that he had not been able to find a Portuguese gazette in months. While minor, this

⁶² Hugo Raúl Galmarini also reports that the conflict between monopolist merchants and non-monopolist merchants in the Consulado de Comercio also affected the people on the streets of Buenos Aires. These examples show that in late-colonial Río de la Plata, social factions were composed of individuals of different classes and social status. Hugo Raúl Galmarini, *Los negocios del poder: reforma y crisis del estado, 1776-1826* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2000), 53.

⁶³ Representacion del Real Consulado contra el Comercio de Frutos de esta Provincia con las Colonias Etranjeras, AGI, Buenos Aires, Gobierno, leg. 346.

episode does demonstrate that Cipriano de Melo continued to nourish his important trans-imperial connections.⁶⁴

When the movement for independence began, Cipriano de Melo supported the Junta de Montevideo and the Portuguese invasion of the city. However, in 1813, Cipriano de Melo died in the comfort of his home, while Montevideo was under military siege by troops sent from Buenos Aires.⁶⁵ By the time of his death, more than 37,000 pesos from his business associates in Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro remained to be collected. Of this total, 36,000 pesos related to trade activities, and 1,000 pesos pertained to a loan extended to a Portuguese artisan who Cipriano de Melo had helped to establish in Montevideo. The total capital amassed by Cipriano de Melo in his lifetime amounted to more than 186,000 pesos.

The life story of Cipriano de Melo and his connections beyond imperial limits—ranging from Alto Perú, to Rio de Janeiro, to Africa, and to Europe—exposes the fluidity of political boundaries during the late eighteenth century. Moreover, Cipriano de Melo's case illuminates the significance of trans-imperial networks for peripheral regions and demonstrates how the manipulation of trans-imperial resources, together with imperial legislation, enabled local groups to improve their status within the imperial system. Improved status, in turn, was used to gain autonomy in relation to the regional centers of power.

The political and economic conflicts in which Cipriano de Melo participated were in large part disputes between the opposing political and commercial interests of the vice-regal capital of Buenos Aires and the growing provincial capital of Montevideo. Indeed, the Bourbon reforms and the trans-imperial networks connected to Portuguese and Anglo America constituted the roots of Montevideo's emergence as a regional center. Montevideo's society developed a greater sense of its own economic, political, and cultural identity within the realms of the Spanish empire by manipulating the imperial discourse and new legislation to their advantage and further benefited from the social and economic capital that they transferred from Colônia do Sacramento.

⁶⁴ Carta de Diogo de Souza a Manuel Cipriano de Melo, Porto Alegre, 1810, Arquivo Histórico do Rio Grande do Sul (hereinafter cited as AHRGS), A1.06; and Carta de Diogo de Souza a Manuel Cipriano de Melo, Porto Alegre, 1810, AHRGS, A1.02.

⁶⁵ Bentancur, *Don Cipriano de Melo*, 126-27. Cipriano de Melo's house actually is located in the Ciudad Vieja of Montevideo and currently serves as the Museo Casa de Lavalleja.

Within the last twenty years, historians of Latin America have called for the insertion of a "middle period" between the traditional "colonial" and "modern" divisions typically used to differentiate the historical periods highlighted herein. This interpretation emphasizes the importance of regional processes during the roughly one-hundred-year period, stretching from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, by focusing on how regional communities resisted centers of imperial power and created local social coherence and cultural autonomy within the realms of empires. A discussion of Cipriano de Melo's life, whose experiences many of his contemporaries shared, adds a new layer of understanding of the creation and maintenance of these regional communities. Moreover, processes of regional identity formation often are described as inward-looking; however, following the threads of trans-imperial and trans-national networks of family, trade, and information, also turns our attention outward.

Cipriano de Melo's networks, trans-imperial connections, and manipulation of imperial laws expose some of the limits of—and possibilities in—the current state of research on the Atlantic World. While historians are correct in talking about an "Atlantic World" in the singular form, these scholars tend to break the subject down further into sub-categories—such as "North Atlantic," "Black Atlantic," "Spanish Atlantic," and others—defined mostly by imperial political boundaries. However, Cipriano de Melo's story reminds scholars to overcome geographical, linguistic, and archival limitations in the analysis of the "Atlantic World" and instead to seek to follow human interactions uncontained by them. His biography suggests that scholars should turn greater attention toward connecting the different "Atlantics" into a more unified, interlaced, and complex Atlantic World.