

## 1 A Portuguese Town in Río de la Plata

In February 1680, don Manoel Lobo, governor of Rio de Janeiro, founded a Portuguese settlement on the northern bank of the Río de la Plata. This settlement, Colônia do Santíssimo Sacramento, located thirty miles and across the river from Buenos Aires, marked the southernmost commercial and territorial expansion of the Portuguese in the Americas. Colônia was created to reestablish profitable commercial routes between Río de la Plata and Luso-America that had flourished during the Iberian Union (1580–1640). From 1680 to 1777 it served as a profitable entrepôt for transimperial trade. Considered by many a nest of smugglers, it became a wealthy, populous port city and was a hot spot of powerful and long-standing networks of trade between Spanish and Portuguese merchants. From its founding, Colônia's transimperial commerce paved the way for the trade connections that characterized Montevideo's merchant community in the late eighteenth century.

In fact, Atlantic trade and transimperial connections between Luso-American and Spanish American merchants were the main forces behind the development of this Luso-Platine urban center.<sup>1</sup> The vitality of transimperial trade in Colônia allowed for consistent population growth, including free immigrants and a significant contingent of enslaved Africans. By

developing a large slave trade, the town helped meet the demand for enslaved Africans in the Spanish territories across the estuary.<sup>2</sup> As a result, long-standing networks of trade, family, and religion connected Portuguese and Spanish subjects and shaped the region's development on both margins of the Río de la Plata.

In the eighteenth century Colônia do Sacramento, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo formed a port complex.<sup>3</sup> Rather than compete with one another, they played complementary roles. Merchants from Buenos Aires used connections in Colônia to obtain cheap Atlantic products and slaves and to export huge quantities of silver and hides. The growth and maintenance of these transimperial networks linked the region to the Atlantic World and constituted the emergence of an interaction zone, where agents from different empires engaged in multiple commercial, social, and political exchanges. The Portuguese presence in the region epitomizes how transimperial linkages shaped the emerging societies in the borderlands of América meridional.

As a hub of transimperial commerce, Colônia shaped the patterns of trade that characterized Río de la Plata for over a century. After the fall of Colônia in 1777, the agents and networks involved in transatlantic trade relocated to Montevideo. It is therefore crucial to examine Colônia as a center for Atlantic trade in order to understand the development of transimperial trade networks and late-eighteenth-century Spanish imperial policies in the region. Transimperial trade was an integral aspect of the historical process by which Río de la Plata became a port complex during the eighteenth century, and it influenced the social, political, and economic processes in the region both before and after the period of Portuguese dominion over Colônia came to an end in 1777.

#### THE GENESIS OF A TRANSIMPERIAL INTERACTION ZONE IN RÍO DE LA PLATA

During the nearly one hundred years of Portuguese control over Colônia do Sacramento, despite the flourishing transimperial commerce, the Luso-Brazilian presence was contested by the Spanish. The entangled development of Buenos Aires and Colônia in the Río de la Plata estuary

led to the formation of porous space where Spanish and Portuguese subjects interacted in many ways: they cooperated in commercial exchanges, developed familial and religious connections, and competed for resources in the countryside.

The founding of Colônia do Sacramento in 1680 was an expression of the strong interest of the Portuguese Crown and merchants to gain access to the profitable Río de Plata markets in silver and hides. Colônia, however, was not the first place where Portuguese merchants explored trade opportunities in Río de la Plata. Since Buenos Aires's second foundation in 1580, the city's inhabitants had been actively involved in direct trade, legal or illegal, with foreign subjects, especially Portuguese traders. Because of its marginal position vis-à-vis Lima, the official port of all Spanish South America, Buenos Aires was always in need of European goods, as well as sugar, tobacco, furniture, and even slaves. As a result, the city's inhabitants were eager for legal and illegal trade with Luso-American, Dutch, British, and French merchants. Foreign merchant ships used diverse strategies and pretexts to land in the port in order to exchange European merchandise for silver and hides. Silver from Potosí was the motor of the region's trade. Merchants in Buenos Aires developed strong commercial networks that covered an extended hinterland including the provinces of Río de la Plata, Chile, and Alto Peru. The merchants of Buenos Aires drained silver from the internal market and used it to participate in transatlantic commerce.<sup>4</sup>

During the Iberian Union, especially between 1580 and 1620, the Luso-Brazilian presence in Buenos Aires shaped the city's merchant community. According to a contemporary observer, it was more important to speak Portuguese than Spanish in order to conduct trade in the city, because Portuguese was the main language of the merchant community.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, between 1580 and 1620 the Portuguese held the *asiento*, the monopoly contract for supplying slaves to the Spanish empire. When the union ended in 1640, Luso-Brazilian merchants lost legal access to the Spanish commercial networks, but Dutch, French, and British traders increased their direct contacts in the region.

The creation of Colônia in 1680 had important implications for Atlantic trade and the regional economy. First and foremost, it marked the expansion of territorial disputes in the Americas between Spain and Portugal. For the Portuguese, Colônia represented an opportunity to reopen access

to the Río de la Plata market—a source of silver, which was always scarce in Portuguese America.<sup>6</sup> For the Spanish, the town was a Portuguese incursion into the Río de la Plata's North Bank (Banda Norte) and, most important, a dangerous and competing hub of Atlantic trade. In a regional context, the creation of Colônia meant that the Portuguese acquired a “monopoly” over one of the region's best natural harbor, which had been used by merchant ships, particularly Dutch, British, and French, involved in direct trade with the region.<sup>7</sup> The historian Zacarias Moutoukias argues that Buenos Aires and Colônia developed complementary rather than competitive roles in the commercial development of the region.<sup>8</sup> Despite the initial aggressive reaction from the elite of Buenos Aires, in the long term Colônia, Buenos Aires, and later Montevideo constituted a single port complex for Río de la Plata.<sup>9</sup>

The Luso-Brazilian presence in the region during the seventeenth century was characterized by intense commercial activities and limited territorial expansion. In the 1680s Colônia was basically a military-commercial factory with few civilian inhabitants. Commercial activities were limited to smuggling with Buenos Aires, an activity controlled by a handful of merchants via their connections with the governors of both regions.<sup>10</sup> However, in the beginning of the 1690s Colônia's population grew and expanded into the countryside (*campana*). From the 1690s until 1705 official colonists (*casais*) were sent from Portugal and from the Portuguese Atlantic islands to develop agricultural production, to exploit feral cattle herds, and to support the commercial activities of the town. By the beginning of the eighteenth century Colônia was engaged in significant agricultural production, including wheat and hides for export.<sup>11</sup> Buenos Aires elites, however, regarded the Luso-Brazilian expansion as an illegitimate advance into Spanish territory. With the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1705, imperial tensions turned to violence when Spaniards and allied Guaraní Indians once more attacked and expelled the Luso-Brazilians from Colônia.

In 1716, after the second Treaty of Utrecht (1715), the Portuguese resettled Colônia with the intention of establishing a commercial entrepôt with a strong defensive military force and a population of permanent settlers to produce food and control the large cattle herds in the countryside. During the first years, the Luso-Brazilian settlement experienced steady growth

based on diversified agricultural production, intense commerce, and exploitation of hides. In the 1720s and 1730s Colônia developed an urban structure and became an important regional market that attracted people from Buenos Aires and from the countryside. During this period, hides, wheat, and other foodstuffs were produced in the Colônia's countryside. The region's wheat and hides were not only sold locally but also transported for sale in Rio de Janeiro and occasionally in Buenos Aires. Within ten miles of the urban center there were at least thirty-one farms that belonged to the inhabitants of the city.<sup>12</sup>

Colônia also provided a safe haven for British vessels and traders. Although British ships were officially forbidden, they docked in Colônia under the pretext of undergoing repairs. Despite the commercial injunctions, Colônia merchants purportedly traded hides, tallow, and silver acquired through contraband trade with Buenos Aires in exchange for British goods. Moreover, four traders of British origin who had naturalized as Portuguese subjects were established permanently in Colônia.<sup>13</sup>

The strength and significance of transimperial trade fueled rapid urban growth in Colônia. A large number of free and coerced migrants arrived in the region, among them a large contingent of Portuguese subjects who progressively settled in Spanish territories on the North Bank and in Buenos Aires. Information regarding population numbers in Sacramento during the eighteenth century is scarce and scattered. I was able to find two "population maps" drawn up by the Portuguese governors in 1722 and 1760, a partial census taken in 1719, an official report of the governor from 1742, two estimations by on-site observers for the early 1730s, and a Spanish census from 1778.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1 shows the demographic changes that took place in Colônia for the whole period of analysis, based on all available data. The demographic data reveal that the pace of population growth in Sacramento in the eighteenth century can be divided into three periods. The first period, 1717–35, is characterized by intense population growth averaging 8 percent per year, reflecting the territorial expansion into the countryside and flourishing trade. The second period, 1737–42, experienced a shrinking population as a result of the great siege and the loss of unrestricted access to the countryside. The loss of the agrarian suburbs affected all Colônia's inhabitants, but it probably had a heavier impact on farmers whose properties

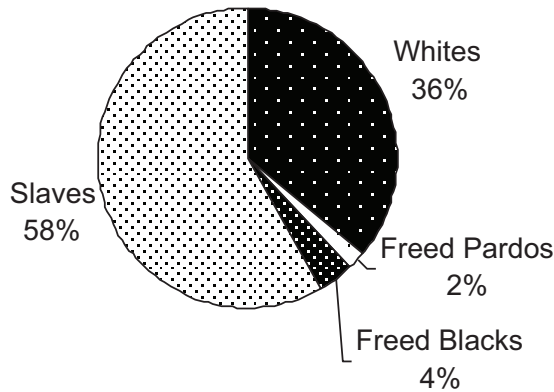
Table 1 Colônia do Sacramento Annual Growth Rate

Year	Population	Annual Growth Rate (%)
1722	1,388	
1732	3,000	8.00
1735	2,600	-4.66
1742	1,956	-4.19
1760	2,712	1.83
1783	290	-9.26

SOURCES: AHU, Colônia do Sacramento, Docs. 86, 513; AHU, Rio de Janeiro, Doc. 7286; Monteiro 1937; Silva 1993; Tula 1931.

were located on the outskirts of the town and outside the city wall. The loss of the agricultural hinterland brought two important consequences for Colônia’s community: Luso-Brazilians became more dependent on the Buenos Aires trade for foodstuffs and hides; and the inhabitants of Buenos Aires could use hides, tallow, pigs, chicken, grain, and other agricultural products together with silver to pay for goods sold by Sacramento traders. The third period, 1742–77, was characterized by steady population growth (1.83 percent per year). The loss of the agricultural lands and the lack of access to the countryside of the Banda Oriental seemed to have been the major factors constraining the pace of Colônia’s expansion. The loss of agricultural lands was in part balanced by the development of the slave trade. Although the town continued to attract immigrants and underwent population growth, many migrants were slaves to be sold in the regional market.

While the number of total inhabitants of the town in 1760 was similar to that of the population of the early eighteenth century, the demographics had radically changed. Figure 1 shows that the free population of Colônia now represented 42 percent, almost half of the approximately 80 percent in the 1720s. Race distribution also shifted dramatically. Whites made up only 36 percent of the population, while *pardos* (people of mixed race) and blacks constituted 64 percent. Colônia had changed from a predominantly white settlement to a predominantly black and mestizo town.



*Figure 1.* Colônia do Sacramento's Population According to Race and Status, 1760.

Analysis of Colônia's baptismal records in the last years under Portuguese rule reveals that a large number of enslaved Africans bore children there. From November 1774 to January 1776, the priest of Colônia's Matriz Church recorded the baptisms of free persons and slaves in the Fifth Book of Baptisms, providing a rare glimpse of the demographic composition of Colônia in the last years under Portuguese rule. This snapshot into the family life of Colônia illuminates the diverse characteristics of society, which developed in tandem with the processes unfolding in Buenos Aires, thus revealing the intricate connections that crossed imperial boundaries in the region.

The place of origin of mothers bearing children in Colônia reveals a significant level of creolization of the population, an active inflow of Africans, and the existence of family networks connecting Buenos Aires to Colônia. Between November 1774 and January 1776, 43 percent (31 cases) of women bearing children in Colônia were free, 49 percent (35) were slaves, and 9 percent (6) were freed black and freed pardas. Half of all women bearing children between 1774 and 1776 were originally from Colônia. Women from West Africa (Angola, Congo, Benguela) constituted 28 percent of the baptisms, while Costa da Mina was the origin of 9 percent. Portuguese America was the origin of 9 percent of child-bearing women (Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Rio Grande), and 3 percent (2 cases) were from Buenos Aires.<sup>15</sup> The high number

of mothers born in Colônia attests to the creolization of Luso-Brazilian society in Rio de la Plata.<sup>16</sup> The prevalence of Colônia-born women in the parish records indicates the long-term presence and settled nature of Luso-Brazilian families in the town. Moreover, the records show that roughly 20 percent of the slaves giving birth in Colônia were residents of the city with long-standing connections in the community. The origin of godparents indicates clearly the rootedness of the African-descended community. Slaves owned by different Colônia residents were listed as godparents of each other's children. In one case, the mother was listed as the granddaughter of an Angolan slave of Jeronimo de Ceuta Freyre, a merchant in town in the 1720s and 1730s.<sup>17</sup> The existence of the Brotherhood of Rosário and a freed-mestizo militia battalion further attests to the significant presence of slaves in Colônia's social life in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> In the majority of the baptismal records, there are no references to personal connections among slaves, and the godparents often are labeled simply as "witnesses." These data suggest that most slaves had arrived in Colônia recently or constituted a transient population. The role of Colônia as a regional slave-trade center had an impact on the demography of the entire Río de la Plata estuary.<sup>19</sup>

The high proportion of slaves suggests that Colônia's residents acquired slaves and reexported them to Spanish territories. Since the second quarter of the eighteenth century, slave ships from Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Africa entered Colônia's harbor. While Portuguese authorities established a tax to accrue on the slaves sold to Buenos Aires, Spanish authorities continuously confiscated slaves from the Portuguese vessels in the estuary under the guise of suppressing contraband. Thus Colônia's slave trade not only affected the demography of the Luso-Brazilian town but also shaped that of the region, including the Spanish colonies in South America. Furthermore, the trade in slaves shaped the institutional and commercial development of Colônia.

Because this Luso-Brazilian outpost in Río de la Plata did not include extensive agricultural territory after 1737, the large population of slaves lived in a relatively confined urban space. Administrative records indicate four main uses of slave labor in Colônia during the period: limited agricultural production, domestic service, artisanal and other wage labor, and port work as stevedores. Although the agricultural area available for agrarian production was reduced, the use of slaves in rural activities



clearly developed. During the 1760s tithe records indicate significant production of *frutos do país* (local goods, fruits, grain) and fish. The former usually amounted to around 50\$000 reis (rs) (7 pesos) and the latter around 300\$000 rs (400 pesos).<sup>20</sup> These values suggest that such products played an important role in providing the day-to-day food supply of Colônia. The use of domestic slaves was also important, especially considering that slave ownership accorded status. Skilled wage-earning slaves were also a source of income for families or widows in the town.<sup>21</sup> Finally, slaves performed the heavy work of unloading and loading cargo at the port's docks.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, domestic slavery, foodstuff production for the local market, and urban or port labor do not seem to explain why almost half of Colônia's inhabitants were enslaved in 1760. The commercially oriented community's strong connection with Rio de Janeiro—the largest slave port of South America—and the prevalence of slaves from Angola, Congo, and Benguela in the city suggest that it was a center of active slave trading networks. I suggest that the bulk of the slave population in Colônia was eventually sold to the Spanish American colonies.

Colônia's role as an outpost for the Atlantic slave trade had deep roots. In the 1740s Portugal collected a tax of 750\$000 rs (10 pesos) per slave sold to Buenos Aires, an undeniable sign of the existence of an enduring and well-organized regional slave trade route.<sup>23</sup> For the year 1745, the total revenue produced by this tax amounted to 3:262\$500 rs (4,293 pesos), which was equivalent to the sale of 435 slaves to the Spanish American dominions.<sup>24</sup> In 1746, on behalf of local merchants, Governor Antonio Pedro de Vasconcelos petitioned the king and the Overseas Council for the abolition of the tax, arguing that it was illegal since it was created without proper royal license. Furthermore, Vasconcelos lamented that the tax imposed on traders in Colônia undercut their competitiveness with the prices slave traders offered in Buenos Aires.<sup>25</sup> According to the Portuguese governor, the tax added 10 percent to the price of a slave in Colônia and drove Buenos Aires traders away from purchasing slaves there, which involved greater risk due to the trade's illegality. Based on these arguments, the tax was nullified.

There are records from the late 1740s of Colônia merchants operating directly in the slave trade from Africa or of slave vessels crossing the Atlantic from the African coast to Colônia. In 1746, Manoel Pereira do Lago a prosperous merchant, a militia captain, and the *almoxarife da*

Table 2 Slaves Disembarked in Colônia from Africa

Year	Total Slaves	Children	Children %
1748	386	2	0.5
1749	409	77	18.8
1749	452	65	16.0
1749	407	61	15.0
Total	1,654	205	12.4

SOURCE: *Voyages-Online Slave Trade Database.*

*Fazenda Real* (royal treasurer), petitioned the king to send a slave vessel to the African coast to acquire slaves for Colônia.<sup>26</sup> Four slave vessels arrived in Colônia in 1748–49, and a total of 1,654 slaves disembarked.<sup>27</sup> These numbers suggest that the arrival of slave vessels would have had a strong influence on the town’s demography, because the number of slaves arriving in this period roughly doubled the town’s population.

The number of slaves that arrived from Bahia between 1760 and 1770 also suggests Colônia’s role as a regional distribution center for the Luso-Brazilian slave trade. The town received 211 slaves from Bahia (208 Africans and 3 Creoles)—1.2 percent of the total number of slaves exported from Bahia in the period. Although the number is low, one must remember that the main commercial connection in Colônia was with Rio de Janeiro rather than Bahia. Furthermore, compared to other politically peripheral regions of Brazil, such as Rio Grande do Sul (0.3 percent), Colônia imported almost four times as many slaves from Bahia and close to the same number as the entire Mato Grosso region (1.2 percent) (table 2).<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most important slave trade carried out in Colônia was the one with Rio de Janeiro. Important information about the practice of Rio de Janeiro providing slaves to Colônia appears in a letter from the viceroy of Brazil to the king regarding the sale of slaves to the Spanish colonies in 1780. In this letter, Viceroy Vasconcelos justified the sale of ninety slaves to be shipped to Montevideo in 1780 by referring to the well-known slave trade to Colônia since the mid-eighteenth century.

A similar resolution [of selling slaves], in truth, went against the prohibition of selling slaves for areas that are not under the dominion of Your Majesty, passed on October 14, 1751. However, after the publication of this resolution, practices to the contrary had been common. From Colônia and other locations of this government, slaves always had been exported to Spanish dominions without any action against such trade by the authorities, and this is because such laws had been enacted only to satisfy Foreigners who complained about contraband of slaves.<sup>29</sup>

Colônia's last Portuguese governor, Francisco José da Rocha, offered more conclusive evidence of the scale and methods practiced in the Luso-Brazilian port. Rocha reported to the Overseas Council that Spanish Coast Guard vessels constantly attacked Portuguese boats in the Río de la Plata, "stealing" slaves under the pretext that they were being smuggled into Spanish dominions. According to the data gathered by the governor, the Spaniards confiscated more than a thousand slaves between 1765 and 1775. Usually the confiscations occurred while Portuguese boats were fishing in the River Plate. Each of these ships carried between six and fifteen slaves and between one and three free sailors.<sup>30</sup> Most of the confiscated "fishing" ships and slaves belonged to merchants and officers of Colônia.

Colônia's role as a regional center for the slave trade is also evidenced in a 1766 treatise on how to suppress contraband trade between that city and Buenos Aires.<sup>31</sup> According to the observations presented to the Council of the Indies, a slave in Colônia do Sacramento was sold for 100 to 120 pesos, a clandestine slave would sell in Buenos Aires for 180 to 200 pesos, and the cost of a "legal" slave in Buenos Aires could vary from 300 to 500 pesos.<sup>32</sup> The Spanish bureaucrat who wrote this "anti-contraband" memorial emphasized the need to eliminate taxes on all branches of trade as a means to curb the intense flow of contraband goods, silver, and enslaved people between the two towns. According to the anonymous Spanish bureaucrat, "All live off the clandestine commerce with the Province of Río de la Plata and the ones in the interior of Chile and Tucuman. From Colônia they obtain all products from Europe, food delicacies from Portugal, goods from Brazil, sugar, tobacco, *aguardiente de caña* (cane alcohol), and a large number of slaves."<sup>33</sup>

## COLÔNIA'S MERCHANT ELITES

Colônia's mercantile community established familial and business connections with merchants and authorities from Buenos Aires.<sup>34</sup> In addition to kinship, business, and political networks, religious connections provided institutional stability for merchants to operate against mercantilist laws. The emergence of a regional elite with multilayered networks involving merchants and authorities from both empires during Colônia's era paved the way for the type of commercial arrangements that characterized Montevideo's role in the Río de la Plata port complex after 1777.

According to the Argentine historian Fernando Jumar, the development of Colônia as a commercial entrepôt in the Río de la Plata port complex had a profound impact on all sectors of Buenos Aires society. It allowed wealthy merchants and small traders to participate in transimperial trade.<sup>35</sup> Smuggling operations in Colônia were commonplace, often involving merchants and colonial authorities and varying from large transactions involving bribes and thousands of pesos to smaller deals worth as little as 700 pesos. The latter was the case of a transaction involving the Spanish petty trader Nicolas Careense and a Portuguese identified only as don Cristobal. The transaction was settled in Colônia and was worth 1,400 pesos. Careense paid the Portuguese don Cristobal 700 pesos in Colônia and arranged the delivery of the goods at night on the island of Martin Garcia, when he paid the remaining 700 pesos.<sup>36</sup>

The reestablishment of Colônia do Sacramento and the rapid development of a local Luso-Brazilian merchant community reveals the willingness of both communities to create trade connections beyond imperial limits. Between 1717 and 1722 only thirteen individuals identified themselves as merchants in the general census conducted by the local authorities. A few decades later 116 individuals were directly involved in trade.<sup>37</sup> Almost two-thirds of these individuals were identified as merchants (*homens de negócios*). Many of these merchants were also involved in the military under the Portuguese administration.

The deep connections between merchants and authorities in Colônia are exemplified by one of the most important families in the town during the eighteenth century, the Botelhos. Manuel Botelho de Lacerda was born in Vila de Murça, Portugal. In 1705 he served in the Portuguese army in Spain's

borderlands. During the following years, Botelho carried out an exchange of prisoners with Spain and brought back more than six hundred freed soldiers to Portugal. In 1712 Botelho was in Portuguese America serving as *sargento-mor* (sergeant major) of the fort of Santa Cruz in Rio de Janeiro. Also in Rio de Janeiro, he earned the position of *sargento-mor* of an infantry garrison (*terço*). Botelho was redeployed to Colônia with this rank 1718. During his first two years in Colônia, Manuel Botelho supplied his garrison with 2,000 cruzados from his own estate to purchase food and pay salaries.

Botelho's position in Colônia's administration, responsible for official contacts with Buenos Aires, guaranteed him privileged channels to conduct trade with that city. In 1720 Botelho went to Buenos Aires for two months to negotiate the restitution of an amount of silver confiscated from the wreck of the Portuguese ship *Caravela* in the Río de la Plata. When Antonio Pedro de Vasconcelos (r. 1722–49) arrived in Colônia as the new governor in 1722, Botelho became one of his main advisers. Botelho was responsible for integrating the new governor into the legal and illegal local networks and advising him on the commercial dynamics of Río de la Plata. In 1725 Botelho traveled to Portugal via Rio de Janeiro to take care of personal business. While his interests were not restricted to the Río de la Plata port complex, his role in the Río de la Plata networks was precisely what allowed him to extend its business in other commercial centers in the Atlantic, such as Rio de Janeiro.

By the late 1720s Botelho accumulated key positions in the local power structure. In 1729 he was once again in Buenos Aires on an official mission under orders from Governor Vasconcelos. In the same year Botelho took office as Colônia's judge of customs. As a military and fiscal authority he earned social prestige, fiscal exemptions, and privileges that permitted him to act with more freedom in his own economic activities. As the official responsible for the contacts between the Buenos Aires and Colônia governments he had free access to Spanish American merchants. Further, as Colônia's judge of customs Botelho determined the legality of goods imported and exported from the Portuguese town. These positions granted him (and his partners) an extremely privileged position regarding commercial operations in the estuary.

The commercial advantages of holding offices in the colonial administration surfaced when a corruption scandal emerged. In 1734 Joseph Meira da

Rocha, a merchant resident in Colônia and an agent of the powerful Lisbon merchant house of Francisco Pinheiro, presented a series of denunciations against Botelho and the governor.<sup>38</sup> According to Meira da Rocha, the governor and his higher-ranking officers received bribes of around 4800\$000 rs (6,315 pesos) to allow English ships to enter Colônia's harbor.<sup>39</sup> Meira da Rocha also denounced the "great scandal of the numerous dinners and banquets" where the principal merchants and authorities of Colônia socialized with Vasconcelos and British officers and merchants.

Portuguese authorities seemed to be aware of Vasconcelos's and Botelho's possible involvement in fraudulent activities. In a letter to the Overseas Council, Rio de Janeiro governor, Gomes Freire, to whom Colônia's authorities were subordinated, reported that "the Royal Treasury had suffered with great mismanagement by the Governor and by the Field Marshal, who is Judge of Customs [Manoel Botelho]."<sup>40</sup> Allegedly, the governor and his allies were not only involved in illegal activities, but had also sent "huge sums" to Europe through the Portuguese Jesuits of Colônia and Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, Rio de Janeiro's governor, Gomes Freire, advised the Overseas Council against prosecuting the governor or Botelho since their absence from Colônia's government would generate more drawbacks than benefits for the Crown. Vasconcelos and his officers were respected for leading the successful military resistance against the Spanish siege of 1735–37. Moreover, Gomes Freire considered it fundamental to maintain the current architecture of authority and commercial activities in the town because of the government's strong connections with mercantile factions in both Colônia and Buenos Aires.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, Colônia's merchants and authorities were deeply involved in legal as well as illegal commercial enterprises. For example, Manoel Pereira do Lago, who sent ships to Africa, and José Pereira da Costa, who exported goods to Buenos Aires and Chile, both held the office of Royal Treasurer.<sup>42</sup> The governor was the most central and visible participant in the scheme, followed by his loyal and wealthy mestre do campo and judge of customs, Manoel Botelho de Lacerda.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the conflict with Meira da Rocha, Botelho's rise to local prominence continued in the 1730s and 1740s. During the great siege of 1735–37 Botelho was interim governor of Colônia and provided loans to the Crown to pay for the costs of the war. And when ill health forced Vasconcelos to tem-

porarily leave office in 1743, Botelho governed in his place. Botelho's reputation also granted him influence over larger institutional networks.<sup>44</sup> In the early 1740s Botelho's daughter, Rita Botelho Trindade, married an English businessman named João Burrish who resided in Colônia.<sup>45</sup> Botelho thus acquired ties to the British mercantile community in the region and overseas. This a connection was especially important given that the British had lost direct access to the region in 1737. After 1740 it became common for ships carrying both Portuguese and British flags to enter Colônia's harbor.

By the late 1740s Manoel Botelho was head of the most distinguished and powerful family in Colônia do Sacramento. His social and political position allowed him to obtain privileged positions for the members of his family in Colônia and elsewhere in Portuguese America. Manoel's son, Constantino Botelho, was named captain of the infantry *terço* in which Manoel was *mestre de campo*. It is noteworthy that military positions not only meant prestige and social status but also granted legal privileges and commercial exemptions. In the 1750s Constantino moved to Rio de Janeiro, where he eventually married the daughter of a wealthy merchant who had previously been Rio de Janeiro's *provedor* (superintendent) of the Royal Treasury. Four other relatives and siblings followed Constantino to Rio de Janeiro and also married into well-placed local families: his brother, Jose Botelho de Lacerda, as well as Ana Teresa da Felicidade and José Manuel Burrish, children of Rita Botelha and João Burrish. It is noteworthy that Constantino's daughter also married into an affluent family in Rio, attesting to the successful maintenance of the status his father acquired in Colônia.<sup>46</sup> Locally, Manoel Botelho's other son, Antonio, was excused from a subaltern position in the military service because of the influence and the merits of her father.

Botelho's privileged position also shaped his family's active participation in Colônia's religious life. In the late 1720s and early 1730s Botelho sponsored the construction of a chapel devoted to Santa Rita. The images, *alfaias* (ornaments), and silver objects used to decorate the chapel's interior were purchased in Buenos Aires.<sup>47</sup>

However, the Botelho family picture is not complete without mention of Manoel Botelho's brother, the captain Pedro Lobo Botelho, who also lived in Colônia. In the late 1740s the governor of Buenos Aires, Joseph de Andonaegui, referred to him as a "person of great character who deserves

the most distinguished treatment.”<sup>48</sup> Pedro Lobo acted as interlocutor between the governors of Colônia and Buenos Aires. This privileged position in the transimperial circuits of power continued at least until 1753. When the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and the captaincies of the south, Gomes Freire Andrade, count of Bobadela, visited Colônia, Pedro Lobo Botelho was mentioned as the “captain ambassador” of Colônia in Buenos Aires.

The wealth and status accumulated during the first half of the eighteenth century were enough to guarantee privileged social status in the decades that followed. Even after the change of governors and suffering from various physical ailments, Manoel Botelho continued to occupy positions of prestige in public and religious ceremonies. During the celebration of the inauguration of the king dom José I, Manoel Botelho sat beside Governor Luis Garcia of Bivar during all the public festivities.

Transimperial networks surpassed the mere involvement of isolated merchants and colonial authorities. The long-standing connections between Luso-Brazilians and Spanish Americans were not only based on commerce and governmental authority. The case of Botelho de Lacerda and family illustrates the deep connections between merchants and authorities in Colônia and Buenos Aires. The advantages offered by controlling key offices enabled the Botelho family to establish enduring commercial connections with Buenos Aires. Transimperial trade allowed the family to gain positions of influence and power in Colônia and to integrate the family into Rio de Janeiro society. This pattern of commerce, involving transimperial interactions and connections between merchants and authorities, continued in the following decades, even after the fall of Colônia, with its relocation to Montevideo.

This interlocked community of merchants on both margins of the Río de la Plata counted other institutional opportunities for socialization. If bureaucratic positions were instrumental in conducting trade in the region, religious institutions also provided an effective platform to support transimperial trade. Merchants from both urban centers were active members of the same lay confraternities, especially the Franciscan brotherhood. Participation in religious activities in general and in lay brotherhoods in specific not only provided an institutional avenue across the estuary but also ensured the existence of links of solidarity, trust, and trade among merchants.<sup>49</sup> Religious orders were actively involved in the long-distance



financial transactions. Both Franciscans and Jesuits were charged, at different times by both Spanish and Portuguese authorities, with sending silver to Europe on behalf of local merchants.<sup>50</sup> The cross-border associations created by merchants illustrate the extent to which transimperial trade had come to define the mercantile communities of Río de la Plata.

The analysis of Colônia's urban life is especially revealing of the social relevance of participation in religious organizations. Formal property titles in the rural area surrounding the city were unavailable because of the official territorial limit, a *tiro de canhão* (cannonball shot). As a result, the traditional relation of landownership and status found in other parts of Portuguese America (e.g., Rio de Janeiro, Bahia) was not present in the region.<sup>51</sup> Therefore city life concentrated on the most important and prestigious activities, and the urban environment was the primary theater to display social status. In other words, the absence of formal titles of landownership meant more importance was attached to the representation of power through architecture, religious activities, officeholding, and participation in community life. Participation in religious brotherhoods was especially appealing to the mercantile elites, who could not only display their status and wealth but also enjoy the financial and commercial benefits of membership.<sup>52</sup> During the colonial period, these institutions were in charge of charity, poor relief, care for the sick, and burial of the dead. In addition, members of lay brotherhoods counted on mutual aid, and these institutions frequently supplied credit at the local level.<sup>53</sup>

In 1722, just five years after the reestablishment of Colônia by the Portuguese, seven religious brotherhoods had been created in the town, attesting to the importance of religious patronage and membership in religious orders.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Colônia's principal authorities and merchants were patrons of the churches and chapels.<sup>55</sup> For example, Manoel Botelho de Lacerda's chapel dedicated to Santa Rita was constructed in the style of the chapel in Rio de Janeiro and was blessed by a priest from Rio de Janeiro the next year, 1723.<sup>56</sup> In the following decades Botelho bought several religious images and artifacts in Buenos Aires to display at his chapel. Those images were blessed by the bishop of Buenos Aires and were acquired from the Franciscans and from the Religiosos do Carmo in the same town.

The use of images in a Portuguese chapel blessed by a Spanish priest only became a fact of any consequence in 1748, when the bishop of Rio de Janeiro

threatened to excommunicate the residents who attended masses celebrated in the chapel in Colônia. The reason for such an extreme measure was that the religious images and apparatus were blessed by religious men from a bishopric outside the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Rio.

Public celebrations and religious festivals also provided opportunities for sociability between Spanish and Portuguese elites. To celebrate the marriage of Portuguese prince Don Joseph and the *infanta* Maria Anna in the early 1730s, plays and parades took place in the streets of Colônia for a whole week. Social status and hierarchy were rigidly reproduced, and each person, authority, and corporation had its specific role to play.<sup>57</sup> The participation of the Jesuits was also emphasized in the course of the pageantry, highlighting the honors and distinctions that this order enjoyed. During these occasions, authorities and merchants from Buenos Aires participated in public festivities in Colônia and occupied honored positions.<sup>58</sup> The festivals allowed the elite of both cities to strengthen their personal and commercial relationships while displaying a common understanding of social hierarchy.

Brotherhoods enjoyed an important role in the religious life of Colônia. Between 1760 and 1777 there were a total of ten religious brotherhoods in Colônia: three third orders and seven fraternities. In 1760 at least two brotherhoods petitioned Lisbon to formalize a new altar and a new chapel.<sup>59</sup> The Irmandade das Almas (Brotherhood of the Almas) petitioned for an altar in the Matriz church, and the Third Order of Carmo asked to remodel a chapel for its use.<sup>60</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth century the brotherhoods of São Francisco and Carmo were the two most important in Colônia. Most of the town's elites belonged to one of these third orders. Out of one hundred death records examined, twenty-four people were buried in the Franciscan habit, fifteen in the Carmo habit, and only one person in the Boa Morte habit.<sup>61</sup> Brotherhoods also gained prominence in the community by escorting the dead in processions prior to burial.<sup>62</sup> Of one hundred records, only thirty-four people did not receive this honor: twenty-five babies, three poor seamen who did not reside in town, two Indians born in Spanish America, and one person simply listed as "poor."

In comparing data from other parts of Iberian America, Colônia's *cofrades* (lay brotherhoods) reflected the central role of commerce articulat-

ing society, attested by the importance of the Franciscans. Saint Francis was the patron saint of merchants. In Minas Gerais during the eighteenth century, São Francisco and Carmo were ranked in the sixth and thirteenth positions respectively.<sup>63</sup> In Buenos Aires merchant membership was most prominent in the brotherhood of São Francisco. Socolow found that 42 percent of the city's merchants belonged to the São Francisco brotherhood in the late eighteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Colônia do Sacramento's elites shared the same preference for religious brotherhoods.

The connections between Franciscans in Buenos Aires and Portuguese America is revealed in greater detail by a conflict opposing the governor of Buenos Aires, Pedro de Cevallos (r. 1757–66), and the superior Franciscan brother between 1761 and 1763. In the early 1760s, the arrival of Pedro de Cevallos as the new governor of the provinces of Rio de la Plata provoked changes in the political and social dynamics of the estuary. In 1761 the governor enacted a *bando* (decree) expelling all Portuguese Franciscan brothers from Buenos Aires and forbidding the Franciscan order from hosting Portuguese subjects. This measure was motivated by the “excesses” of the “large number of Portuguese from Colônia and Rio de Janeiro bearing the Franciscan habit.”<sup>65</sup> The governor justified this measure as crucial to repressing contraband trade, stating that the Franciscans “were responsible for moving large quantities of silver for many merchants of Colônia, and from there exporting it to Rio and Lisbon.”<sup>66</sup> Cevallos also cited specific cases of Franciscans involved with commercial enterprises in Cônia and Buenos Aires during the 1750s, emphasizing the losses caused to the Real Hacienda by the illegal export of silver.<sup>67</sup>

According to Cevallos, the Franciscans in Buenos Aires were “protectors” of Portuguese subjects and promoted the “intermingling of Spaniards and Portuguese,” against the interest and regulations of the Spanish Crown. According to Cevallos, the Franciscan order counted approximately 350 members in Río de la Plata Province, and forty-five of them were Portuguese. As a result, in addition to their expulsion, the governor petitioned the Council of the Indies to forbid the membership of Portuguese subjects in the Franciscan brotherhood in Río de la Plata. This petition was denied, however; the Franciscan superior argued that the Franciscan order had a mandate to convert indigenous people and all other people in the *fronteras* according to the Council of Trent. Moreover, the superior

reminded the council that expelling members of the order was “against the Laws of the Religion.”<sup>68</sup>

Religious networks provided official pretexts for social and economic interactions across imperial limits. The participation of Spanish and Portuguese subjects in religious festivals and the acquisition of sacred art across formal imperial boundaries evinced the reality of intercultural fluidity and extensive cross-cultural interactions in Rio de la Plata. Often these transimperial connections persisted in violation of the regulations and interests of the colonial centers of power (namely Rio de Janeiro and Lima). Furthermore, religious orders and lay brotherhoods provided an institutional channel for transimperial interactions. The presence of Portuguese friars and lay brothers among the Franciscans in Buenos Aires and their involvement in commercial activities in *Côlonia* reveals the strength of transimperial networks connecting the merchant communities of Portuguese and Spanish America.

#### THE FINAL YEARS UNDER PORTUGUESE RULE

During the eighteenth century, transimperial trade fueled *Colônia do Sacramento*’s demographic, economic, and social development. The town’s growth was crucial in creating a space in which subjects of both Iberian empires interacted. The Portuguese colony played a crucial role in the incorporation of the *Banda Norte* into Atlantic circuits of trade. Moreover, the growth of the Luso-Brazilian urban center was intimately connected with the economic, political, and commercial development of Buenos Aires based on strong networks of trade, family, and authority that crossed imperial boundaries. In addition, the active slave trade in *Colônia* provided Spanish Americans with access to cheap labor and shaped the demographics of Buenos Aires and other regions in the interior of Spanish South America. Transimperial religious networks supported these commercial connections and provided additional legal pretexts for Spanish and Portuguese subjects to cross imperial borders. Religious festivals and the existence of third order chapters and brotherhoods provided relatively protected channels for transimperial interactions. Both Jesuits and Franciscans were deeply connected to merchants and authorities on both

sides of the Rio de la Plata and used their privileged networks of communication and transportation to facilitate contacts and export silver.

By 1775 rumors of possible political changes in Rio de la Plata already informed Portugal's political strategies in the region. Between 1775 and 1777 Portuguese diplomats were increasingly aware of Spain's intentions to create the new viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata. As a result, when don Pedro de Cevallos attacked Colônia for the second time, the population was neither able to resist a military siege nor prepared to do so. Colônia's governor, Francisco José da Rocha (r. 1775–77), had instructions not to fight the viceroy's troops but instead to abandon the town. This time, unlike previous moments of distress, the Portuguese in Rio de la Plata could not count on strong British support. England was busy suppressing the revolution of its thirteen North American colonies and unwilling to engage in a conflict with the Spanish empire that could undermine British positions in North America. As a result, in the winter of 1777 the Portuguese population was expelled from Colônia for the last time.<sup>69</sup>

In 1778, one year after the destruction of the Portuguese imperial project in Río de la Plata, Spanish free trade laws opened the ports of Montevideo and Buenos Aires to the Atlantic market. These changes triggered a reconfiguration of the Río de la Plata port complex. In the following decades, Montevideo became the main Atlantic port in the estuary and the chief center of transimperial interaction. Although the Portuguese empire was expelled from the region, Portuguese subjects and transimperial networks endured. The logistics, methods, and networks developed in Colônia do Sacramento would shape the dynamics of trade unfolding in Montevideo. Although Buenos Aires was the main political and economic center of the region, Montevideo emerged as the main hub for transimperial trade, benefiting from the extensive connections, experience, and human resources provided by Luso-Brazilian traders who previously operated from Colônia. Despite the desire of Buenos Aires elites to have direct control over transatlantic shipping, Montevideo became the viceregal capital's principal deep-water port. Moreover, patterns of transimperial trade, which developed during the century-long Portuguese presence on the North Bank, eventually became the defining character of commerce in the Banda Oriental.