

## **A Merchant Prince in the Twilight of the Western Sephardic Diaspora: Aaron Lopez and his Business Organization**

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Over the last few decades, scholars have questioned the idea that Sephardic diaspora—and early modern trading diasporas in general—was essentially based on close-knit bonds of kinship, ethnicity, and religion that validated trust and consolidated long-distance relations.<sup>1</sup> Francesca

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On “trading diaspora” concept and the mediation role played by its actors, see the seminal study by Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For a brief overview of critical approaches on Curtin's work, see

Trivellato in particular has explored the mechanisms by which Sephardic merchants cooperated in business with non-Jews and questioned whether their collaborations with partners outside their family, religious, and ethnic groups differed substantially from collaborations with people inside these networks.<sup>2</sup> According to Trivellato, kinship, ethnic, and religious bonds did not per se guarantee long-distance trade, and other factors, such as legal and social discrimination, explain

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Francesca Trivellato, "Jews of Leghorn, Italians of Lisbon, and Hindus of Goa: Merchant Networks and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period," in *Commercial Networks in the Early Modern World*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto and Anthony Molho (Florence: European University Institute, 2002): 66–72. On the cross-cultural nature of trading networks, see, for example, Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91–121; Jessica Roitman, *The Same but Different? Intercultural Trade and the Sephardim, 1595–1640* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 63–110; Évelyne Oliel-Grausz, "Communication, marchandise et religion. Les négociants séfarades au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Commerce, voyage et expérience religieuse. XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 145–59; and the studies published in Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the primal role played by these bonds in commercial strategies.<sup>3</sup> The gradual dissolution of discriminatory barriers and the progressive integration of Sephardic Jews into host societies would therefore reduce the primacy of links based on family, ethnicity, and religion and encourage an increasing diversity of networks among Sephardic merchants. Trivellato's thesis on the "familiarity of strangers" must be read in the temporal context of her case study: a Livornese firm founded in 1704, whose heyday coincided with a moment when the western Sephardic diaspora was experiencing a turning point, as the Sephardic trading networks progressively lost influence and the emigration of conversos from Portugal and Spain fell sharply.

This turning point of the western Sephardic diaspora will be more intelligible if we frame it within the idea of "diasporic cycles," coined by Mathilde Monge and Natalia Muchnik in their overview of early modern diasporas, in which they consider diasporas to be mutable phenomena with a beginnings, middles, and ends. They propose the Judeo-Iberian diaspora as a paradigmatic example of this life cycle, with its emergence after the late fifteenth-century expulsions, its consolidation following the migration of conversos in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries, and its final dissipation "into the Sephardic world of the nineteenth century." As they demonstrate, this temporality is common to other early modern diasporas, which began to experience the first signs of dilution during the eighteenth century, due to the end of persecutions, a more tolerant

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<sup>3</sup> Francesca Trivellato, "Sephardic Merchants in the Early Modern Atlantic and Beyond: Toward a Comparative Historical Approach to Business Cooperation," in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 113–15.

environment, or a simple merger into a larger diaspora.<sup>4</sup> The Ergas and Silvera firm studied by Trivellato thus flourished in a very specific framework, which I here call the “late western Sephardic diaspora.”

The present article uses that same framework and takes as its starting point a case study—the business network of Aaron Lopez, a Portuguese merchant based in Newport, Rhode Island, in the second half of the eighteenth century—which it will use to ask how the dynamics and circumstances of the final phase of the western Sephardic diaspora’s life cycle influenced business structures. The increasing permeability to non-Sephardic and non-Jewish elements and an approach to business patterns that is closer to local models than to those that flourished in the Sephardic Atlantic during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be interpreted as symptoms of this influence.<sup>5</sup>

Newport offers an ideal environment in which to visualize the impact of a broader integration of the Sephardic minority in local business organizations. When Lopez arrived in this port city in 1752, his older brother, Moses Lopez, was already a British citizen. In Newport, he found a place

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<sup>4</sup> Mathide Monge and Natalia Muchnik, *Early Modern Diasporas* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 104–22.

<sup>5</sup> On the “Sephardic Atlantic” concept, see Jonathan Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic: Judeoconvertos, Afroiberians and Amerindians in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 46–73 and Sina Rauschenbach and Jonathan Schorsch, “Postcolonial Approaches to the Early Modern Sephardic Atlantic,” in *Sephardic Atlantic: Colonial Histories and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Jonathan Schorsch and Sina Rauschenbach (Cham: Springer, 2018), 1–20.

where the separation between Sephardim and Askhenazim, and even between Jews and Christians, was less clearly drawn than in London or other European metropolises. The blurring of these boundaries reflected the specific features of colonial Newport and its religious pluralism, but also the particular dynamics of the late eighteenth-century Sephardic Atlantic.

The remarkable quantity of primary sources relating to Aaron Lopez make him the most fully documented Sephardic merchant in the eighteenth-century English-speaking world.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of this voluminous documentation, scattered throughout diverse archives and libraries, such as the Newport Historical Society, the American Jewish Historical Society (New York), or the American Jewish Archives (Cincinnati, Ohio), allows us to trace an accurate picture of the

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<sup>6</sup> The bibliography on Aaron Lopez is also extensive. See, among others, Bruce Bigelow, "Aaron Lopez: Colonial Merchant of Newport," *New England Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1931): 757–76; Morris Gutstein, *Aaron Lopez and Judah Touro: A Refugee and a Son of a Refugee* (New York: Behrman, 1939); Lee M. Friedman, "Aaron Lopez's Family Affairs from 'The Commerce of Rhode Island'," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 35 (1939): 295–304; Lee M. Friedman, "Some Further Sidelights on Aaron Lopez," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 45, no. 4 (1955): 562–67; Stanley Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970); Stanley Chyet, "A Study in Buenafama," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1963): 295–309; Virginia Bever Platt, "Tar, Slaves, and New England Rum: The Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport, Rhode Island, with Colonial North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 48, no. 1 (1971): 1–22; Virginia Bever Platt, "'And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage': The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *William and Mary Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1975): 601–18.

different phases of Lopez's business organization and to question how the strategies he adopted in choosing his correspondents were influenced by the specific dynamics of the twilight of the western Sephardic diaspora as experienced in colonial British America. These dynamics will be explored in the first part of this paper before the evolution of Lopez's trading network over the thirty years he lived in Newport is analyzed, paying special attention to the main actors and nodes that composed this structure. This analysis will culminate in a problematization of the model that shaped Lopez's trading network and his profile as a "merchant-prince" (an epithet coined by Stanley Chyet).<sup>7</sup> Should it be understood as late western Sephardi or as colonial American? I will argue how the deconstruction of this dichotomy can provide us with a more operative framework for analyzing the late western Sephardic diaspora in all its complexity.

### **The Late Western Sephardic Diaspora**

Religious persecution and social segregation were two bedrocks of the western Sephardic diaspora. On the one hand, the repression perpetrated by the Inquisition in Portugal and Spain catalyzed the continuous migration of conversos starting in the early sixteenth century. There were other motivations for migratory movements from Iberia, such as the pursuit of business opportunities, but for most of these exiles, the decision to leave their homelands was triggered by the fear of arrest or the seizure of assets due to inquisitorial prosecution.<sup>8</sup> The formation and

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<sup>7</sup> Chyet, *Lopez*.

<sup>8</sup> On the pursuit of business opportunities as a reason for leaving, see, among others, Wim Klooster, "Communities of Port Jews and Their Contacts in the Dutch Atlantic World," *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 129–45; Daniel Strum, "Resiliência da diáspora e expansão do mercado de agentes ultramarinos no comércio atlântico moderno," *Anais de História de Além-Mar* 14

growth of western Sephardic communities in Europe, the Caribbean, and America were determined by both the exodus of these Iberian exiles and intercommunal migratory movements.<sup>9</sup> Social marginalization and civil discrimination imposed by host societies also nourished inner cohesion and solidarity among Sephardic Jews from different communities, as well as between these and the conversos who remained in Iberia. In addition, a sense of pride in their Iberian origins and the idea of social and cultural distinction in relation to both gentile society and Jews of other ethnic backgrounds also cemented the notion of *Nação* ("nation") as a cross-border community connected by common geographical origins and sharing a common inheritance and converso experience.<sup>10</sup>

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(2013): 145–76; and Cátia Antunes, "Cross-Cultural Business Cooperation in the Dutch Trading World, 1580–1776," in *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900*, ed. Cátia Antunes, Francesca Trivellato and Leor Halevi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150–68.

<sup>9</sup> Evelyne Oliel-Grauz, "Networks and Communication in the Sephardi Diaspora: An Added Dimension to the Concept of Port Jews and Port Jewries," *Jewish Culture and History* 7, nos. 1–2 (2004): 61–76.

<sup>10</sup> Among the vast literature on the *Nação*, see Miriam Bodian, "Men of the Nation: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe," *Past and Present* 143 (1994): 48–76; Miriam Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: The Ambiguous Boundaries of Self-Definition," *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 66–80; Yosef Kaplan, "The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and their Relation to the Alien and the Stranger," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel

The interconnection between Sephardim from different locations, and the links between these and Iberian conversos, were formed by complex sets of relations that were social (e.g., kinship and marriage bonds, poor relief), religious (e.g., exchange of liturgical books and ceremonial objects, relocation of rabbis), cultural (e.g., circulation of books and knowledge, translations and publishing), and economic.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the latter dimension, Jonathan Israel considers that the Sephardic and converso diasporas formed what he calls “diasporas within a diaspora,” or two interconnected phenomena boosted by the rise of the early modern maritime empires, whose geographical dispersion bore no comparison to any other trading diaspora.<sup>12</sup> Their zenith in the Atlantic occurred between the mid-seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, overlapping with the apogee of Amsterdam and the Dutch maritime empire. A shift in the balance of power marked by the growth of British and French dominance in Atlantic trade led to a progressive weakening of the Sephardic networks, as they never achieved the same influence in

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(New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 121–45; and David Graizbord, “Between Ethnicity, Commerce, Religion, and Race: The Elusive Definition of an Early Modern Jewish Atlantic,” in *Theorising the Ibero-American Atlantic*, ed. Harald E. Braun and Lisa Vollendorf (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 117–40. I have recently approached this question in Carla Vieira, “The *Nação* Rules: A Comparative Analysis of the Bylaws of Western Sephardic Congregations in the Early Modern Atlantic,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 1399.

<sup>11</sup> Oliel-Grauz, “Networks and Communication,” 61–62.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires (1540–1740)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).



the British and French economic and political structures as they enjoyed in the Dutch world.<sup>13</sup>

According to Israel, although the Sephardic networks maintained part of their importance in worldwide trade during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) represented the beginning of the end of their heyday. The intense conflict before Utrecht created the conditions for the flourishing of a Jewish elite that gained money and social prestige by financing states and their armies. This elite became less relevant in a peaceful Europe. In addition, the change in the politics of alliances after the War of the Spanish Succession separated the Amsterdam-based Sephardic merchants from trade with the Iberian empires, an area in which they had played a decisive role.<sup>14</sup>

A number of circumstances define the late western Sephardic diaspora. Besides the progressive British ascendancy in the Atlantic system, the growing influence of France in Caribbean trade, and the emergence of London as a trade and financial center, the eighteenth century also saw an increasing migration of Jews based in London and Amsterdam to the North American and West Indian colonies, as well as the growing replacement of Amsterdam as the

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, "Jews and Crypto-Jews in the Atlantic World Systems, 1500–1800," in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>14</sup> Israel, *Diasporas*, 567–84.

great metropolis of the Sephardic diaspora with a multipolar system.<sup>15</sup> The decline of the Iberian Inquisition's repression after the 1750s compromised the demographic growth of the Sephardic communities. In contrast, the increasing migration of Jews from central and Eastern Europe made the Sephardim a minority with regard to the whole Jewish population of cities such as London or New York.<sup>16</sup> One of the consequences of these demographic developments was the rapprochement between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, a tendency that emerged early on in the Jewish communities of North America.<sup>17</sup>

The last great migratory flow of conversos from Portugal and Spain in the 1720s–1730s, whose principal destination was London, also determined the *facies* of this late period of the western Sephardic diaspora. Two motives can explain the direction of this movement toward London: London's pivotal position in the worldwide economy and the consolidation of diplomatic and economic relations between Portugal and Britain, which created new

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<sup>15</sup> Evelyne Oliel-Grausz, "Patrocinio and Authority: Assessing the Metropolitan Role of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 67–172.

<sup>16</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History 1656–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 34 and Howard B. Rock, *City of Promises: A History of the Jews in New York*, 3 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1:46.

<sup>17</sup> Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration: 1654–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 58–66.

opportunities for trade and navigation between both kingdoms.<sup>18</sup> The social and economic conditions of these exiles were not homogeneous. On the one hand, a minority of well-established merchants could save their assets (or at least a part of them) from the Inquisition and rebuild their businesses in London, seizing the opportunities created by the favorable conditions of Anglo-Portuguese trade and using British mercantile houses in Lisbon as their agents in the ventures they kept in Portugal and its overseas colonies. On the other hand, the majority of exiles were impoverished men and women who had seen their belongings seized by the Inquisition or were forced to move from Portugal abruptly, leaving almost everything behind. In addition to the sudden and unprecedented demographic growth of the London Jewish community—the members of the Sephardic congregation of London would more than double in about a decade—the economic deprivation of most newcomers challenged its assistance structures and economic subsistence.<sup>19</sup> Emigration to British colonies became the solution found

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<sup>18</sup> Carla Vieira, *Nação entre Impérios. Judeus Portugueses e a Aliança Luso-Britânica (século XVIII)* (Famalicão: Húmus, 2022), 111–28.

<sup>19</sup> Julia R. Lieberman, “Few Wealthy and Many Poor: The London Sephardi Community in the Eighteenth Century,” *Ler História* 74 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/lerhistoria.4614>. The doubled population of London’s Sephardic community is based on the *ketubot* records of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Congregation of London, A. S. Diamond, “Problems of the London Sephardi Community, 1720–1733: Philip Carteret Webb’s Notebooks,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962): 40, 60. Diamond calculated that about 1500 exiles from Portugal arrived in London between 1720 and 1733. In 1720, about 1050 Sephardic Jews lived in London.

by some newcomers, and the growing ascendancy of these colonies in maritime trade made them appealing destinations for merchants pursuing new business opportunities. The migratory flow to London in the 1720s–1730s thus triggered another (smaller) influx directed toward emerging North American port cities. Among these immigrants were the forefathers of some eminent American Sephardic families, such as the Mendes Seixas, the Nunes Ribeiro, and the Lopez.<sup>20</sup>

The context for Jewish settlement in North America made it an exceptional case in the western Sephardic diaspora.<sup>21</sup> From a very early stage, the Sephardim were a minority among the Jewish population of cities such as New York, Newport, or Charleston. Even so, all Jewish congregations that settled in North American cities before the Revolution adopted Sephardic ritual and tradition. The American Sephardim's lingering sense of superiority did not isolate them from other Jews. Intermarriage with Ashkenazim became common and, in contrast to the

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<sup>20</sup> Richard D. Barnett, "Dr. Samuel Nunes Ribeiro and the Settlement of Georgia," in *Migrations and Settlement: Proceedings of the Anglo-American Jewish Historical Conference*, ed. Aubrey Newman (London: Jewish Historical Society of England 1971), 63–100; "Zipra Nunes's Story," in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (New York: KTAV, 1976), 47–61; and Carla Vieira, "Abraham before Abraham: Pursuing the Portuguese Roots of the Seixas Family," *American Jewish History* 99, no. 2 (2015): 145–65.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, "Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts," *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 213–19.

communities of London or Amsterdam, the Sephardic congregations in North America did not exclude Jews of other ethnic backgrounds.<sup>22</sup>

In Rhode Island, both Sephardim and Ashkenazim enjoyed a uniquely tolerant environment despite hesitance to properly apply the Plantation Act of 1740, which allowed the naturalization of foreign-born Jews who resided in British colonies for seven years.<sup>23</sup> The charter of 1663 provided freedom of conscience for all creeds, and this became a turning point in the economic development of the province generally and of Newport in particular, which became, in the words of Michael Hoberman, “a haven of various types of religious misfits.”<sup>24</sup> In 1739, there were

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<sup>22</sup> Faber, *Time*, 65–66; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 18–28; and Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 82–88.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 1:427–35. On the 1740 Naturalization Act, see also Sheldon J. Godfrey and Judith C. Godfrey, *Search Out the Land: The Jews and the Growth of Equality in British Colonial America, 1740–1867* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 15–33 and Holly Snyder, “Rules, Rights and Redemption: The Negotiation of Jewish Status in British Atlantic Port Towns, 1740–1831,” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 147–70.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Hoberman, *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 126.

seven churches in Newport, besides other religious groups without regular place of worship.<sup>25</sup>

Jews were a minority among minorities. A Sephardic Jew attended the same places, had businesses in common, and could take part in the same cultural societies as a Quaker or a Protestant. For instance, Abraham Hart, Abraham Rodriguez Rivera, and Aaron's brother Moses Lopez were among the founding members and benefactors of the Redwood Library in 1747.<sup>26</sup> This was a reality completely opposed to what the Lopez brothers had experienced during their youth.

## **Building an Atlantic Trade Network**

### *Early Years (1752–61)*

Aaron Lopez arrived in Newport in October 1752 with his wife Ana/Abigail, his daughter Catarina/Sarah and his young brother Gabriel/David. They came directly from Portugal.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no written evidence in which Lopez expressed his first impressions of this diverse and tolerant port city. We only can imagine the amazement of a twenty-two-year-old

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<sup>25</sup> Morris A. Gutstein, *The Story of the Jews of Newport* (New York: Bloch, 1936), 49, quoting John Callender, *An Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode-Island* (1739).

<sup>26</sup> Morris A. Gutstein, "A Newport Ledger, 1760–1770," *Publications of the American Jewish History Society* 37 (1947): 167.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Gomez mentioned a letter dating October 22, in which Lopez informed him about his arrival in Newport. Daniel Gomez to Lopez, New York, October 30, 1752, Daniel Gomez letters (SC-4114), American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter AJA).

merchant who had spent his entire youth listening to stories of relatives and friends persecuted by the Inquisition and fearing a similar fate for himself. One of these relatives was his own father, Diego José Lopez Ramos, a merchant from Osuna, Spain, who had moved to Portugal as a child.<sup>28</sup> Ramos was arrested by the Inquisition of Évora on October 20, 1720.<sup>29</sup> At the time, he was the beneficiary of the tobacco *estanco* (“contract”) in Beja, in southern Portugal. After a trial that lasted for more than three years and ended with a harsh sentence—prison, penitential garment, and forced labor in the galleys for five years—that was mitigated only by his poor physical condition and ailments, Ramos tried to reconstruct his life and business career. In the following years, he was in constant movement across southern Portugal. He ended up returning to Beja, where he married Filipa Micaela Rosa on January 18, 1728.<sup>30</sup> The subsequent (known) destination of the couple was Setúbal, about twenty-five miles south of Lisbon, where their

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<sup>28</sup> Rui Miguel Faísca Rodrigues Pereira, “The Iberian Ancestry of Aaron Lopez and Jacob Rodriguez Rivera of Newport,” *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 14, no. 4 (2006): 559–80. Pereira was able to reconstruct the genealogy of Aaron Lopez based on a letter written by his wife, Sarah Lopez. See the transcription of this letter in Max J. Kohler, “The Lopez and Rivera Families of Newport,” *Publications of the American Jewish History Society* 2 (1894): 101–6.

<sup>29</sup> Trial no. 1647 (Diogo José Ramos), Inquisition of Lisbon, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal.

<sup>30</sup> Rui Miguel Faísca Rodrigues Pereira and Maria Manuela Pereira, “By the Second Wife of My Husband’s Father Who Was of the Lopez Family. A descoberta da família materna de Aaron Lopez,” *Raízes & Memórias* 34 (2017): 11.

second child was born on August 6, 1730 and named Duarte Lopes Rosa.<sup>31</sup> Twenty-two years later, this child would adopt a new name: Aaron Lopez.

Lopez's life before moving to Newport is completely obscure, as are the reasons that motivated him to leave Portugal. In the late 1740s and the early 1750s, there was a small wave of Inquisition imprisonments, but these were concentrated in the interior of Portugal and not related to Lopez or his family. The pursuit of new business opportunities may have been a more effective reason for leaving than fear of the Inquisition. In fact, Newport was then a flourishing trade center and an attractive spot for a young merchant at the beginning of his career. The presence of his brother in Newport was an even stronger motivation for Duarte/Aaron's move there.

It is likely that Aaron and his half-brother Moses had never met in person before 1752. Moses (born José Lopes) was the first son from Ramos's first marriage, to Rosa Margarida, and he had moved to England before Aaron's birth (see Lopez's genealogy in figure 1). Moses had been in London since at least September 1725, the date of a list delivered to the Inquisition of Lisbon exposing New Christians in Portugal who kept contact with Portuguese Jews in London, in which Moses was identified as the recipient of a bill of exchange sent by his father.<sup>32</sup> In the 1730s, he moved to New York, where Rivera, his uncle, was already a well-established

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<sup>31</sup> This information on Aaron Lopez's birth, as well as the identity of his mother, was recently unveiled by Pereira and Pereira, "By the Second Wife."

<sup>32</sup> *Caderno 6.º de Ordens do Conselho Geral* (book 6 of the orders of the Inquisition's General Council), book 155, fol. 484, Tribunal do Santo Oficio, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal.



merchant.<sup>33</sup> The destinies of Rivera and Moses Lopez had become interconnected since then. Moses married Rivera's daughter, Rebecca, and both families moved to Newport by the late 1740s. Even before this move, Lopez and Rivera had attained British naturalization in 1741.<sup>34</sup> In Newport, Rivera's son, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, was a pioneer in the manufacture of spermaceti candles and, together with Moses Lopez, he played a decisive role in making this city one of the principal supply markets for this product.<sup>35</sup> The success of their business was supported by a solid network that included the Jewish mercantile group of New York and the whaling entrepreneurs of Providence and Boston. Aaron Lopez initiated his career after moving to Newport by operating within this close family milieu and capitalizing on the business networks of his brother Moses and the Riveras, as well as the reputation they had earned among their peers over the years. Beyond his own behavior and attitudes, then, the origins of Aaron Lopez's *buenafama* lie in his family background.<sup>36</sup>

<place figure 1 here>Figure 1. Genealogy of the Lopez Family

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<sup>33</sup> Faber, *Time*, 18. Abraham Rodriguez Rivera was a brother of Moses Lopez's mother, Rosa Margarida; see Pereira, "Iberian Ancestry," 578–79.

<sup>34</sup> Chyet, *Lopez*, 20–21.

<sup>35</sup> Max J. Kohler, "The Jews of Newport," *Publications of the American Jewish History Society* 6 (1897): 61–90 and Richard C. Kugler, "The Whale Oil Trade: 1750–1775," *Old Dartmouth Historical Sketch* 79 (1980): 155–56.

<sup>36</sup> Chyet, "Study," 295–309.

Among Aaron Lopez's first correspondents were members of the Jewish elite of New York acquainted with his brother, such as Jacob Franks, David Jesurun Junior, Naphtaly H. Myers, and Hayman Levy, as well as Daniel, Moses, and Benjamin Gomez, sons of Lewis Moses Gomez.<sup>37</sup> The familiar tone of the letters received from the Gomez brothers shows that their relationship dated from before Aaron's arrival in Newport. Daniel Gomez refers to Aaron's brother, David, as "my ayjado" ("my godson"), Benjamin Gomez calls Aaron's wife "prima" ("cousin"), and Moses Gomez mentions "la buena affecton, y amistad que tiene vmd a my persona" ("the good affection and friendship you have for me").<sup>38</sup> Daniel Gomez ran a well-founded mercantile enterprise that extended from a regional base to long-distance trade in the Caribbean and Europe.<sup>39</sup> Such trading potential did not go unnoticed by Aaron Lopez and soon their relationship

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<sup>37</sup> Jacob Franks and Naphtaly H. Myers to Lopez, New York, 1753-1754, Aaron Lopez Papers (P-11), box 14, folders 12, 13; and Hayman Levy to Lopez, New York, December 27, 1762, box 14, folder 19, doc. 29, American Jewish Historical Society, New York (hereafter AJHS). David Jesurun Junior to Lopez, New York, August 21, 1754, Aaron Lopez papers (M-231), box 1, folder 1, AJA. See references to Gomez brothers' letters below.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Gomez to Lopez, New York, October 30, 1752, Daniel Gomez letters (SC-4114); Moses Gomez to Lopez, New York, November 3, 1752, Moses Gomez letters (SC-4133); and Benjamin Gomez to Lopez, New York, May 28, 1753, Benjamin Gomez letters (SC-4111), all AJA.

<sup>39</sup> Holly Snyder, "'Under the Shadow of your Wings': Religiosity in the Mental World of an Eighteenth-Century Jewish Merchant," *Early American Studies* 8, no. 3 (2010): 588-601. See

became not exclusively personal. For instance, on November 15, 1753, Daniel recorded the reception of six boxes of spermaceti candles from Lopez, which he struggled to sell in New York.<sup>40</sup>

Lopez was far from alone in relying on strong ties, in particular family bonds, in order to start a mercantile career, as this was common in the Sephardic diaspora. The same strategy ruled other Atlantic trading diasporas, from the Ashkenazim in colonial America to the Scots in the Madeira trade, for instance.<sup>41</sup> Broadening the spectrum, such dynamics prevailed among the British-Atlantic trading community in the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Lopez's family milieu determined

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also Leon Huhner, "Daniel Gomez, a Pioneer Merchant of Early New York," *Publications of the American Jewish History Society* 41, no. 2 (1951): 107-25.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Gomez to Lopez, New York, November 15, 1753, SC-4114, AJA.

<sup>41</sup> Toni Pitock, "'Separated from Us as Far as West is from East': Eighteenth-Century Ashkenazi Immigrants in the Atlantic World," *American Jewish History* 102, no. 2 (2018): 173–93 and David Hancock, "The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots' Early-Modern Madeira Trade," *Business History Review* 79, no. 3 (2005): 467–91.

<sup>42</sup> See, among others, John Price, *Perry of London: A Family and a Firm on the Seaborne Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Sherrylynn Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760–1810: Men, Women, and the Distribution of Goods* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109-41; and Sophie H. Jones and Siobhan Talbott, "Sole Traders? The Role of the Extended Family in Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Business Networks," *Enterprise and Society* 23, no. 4 (2022): 1092–1121.

the choice of his first core business, the whaling trade, which he combined with the retail trade of local commodities and goods coming from the Caribbean and Europe acquired in Newport.<sup>43</sup>

Even early in his career, however, he did not limit his network of correspondents to family and ethnic-religious circles. For instance, the firm Charles Willing & Sons was his intermediary in Philadelphia from 1754, at a time when the Jewish community in this city was still small.<sup>44</sup> Shortly afterward, Lopez developed his operations in the northern whaling markets, supported by the mediation of another Protestant correspondent, Henry Lloyd. Lloyd was an experienced merchant with a high level of expertise in the behavior of New England markets and became Lopez's agent in Boston as early as 1755.<sup>45</sup> Lopez consigned him whale products such as spermaceti oil and head matter in exchange for a wide variety of goods of diverse provenance, including the then-interdicted Bohea tea, which Lopez encouraged Lloyd to smuggle into the colonial markets.<sup>46</sup> In return, Lloyd also provided Lopez with whale products he acquired from

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<sup>43</sup> See bill of lading, M-231, box 1, folder 7, AJA.

<sup>44</sup> Willing & Son to Lopez, Philadelphia, 1753-1754, P-11, box 14, folder 12, docs. 3 and 4, AJHS.

<sup>45</sup> "Correspondence of Boston and Newport Merchants, 1732–1766," Baker Library, Harvard Business School, [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:452515455\\$3i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:452515455$3i) includes letters exchanged between Lloyd and Lopez since August 1755.

<sup>46</sup> Chyet, *Lopez*, 26.

Nantucket whalers.<sup>47</sup> So it was through the agency of a non-Jewish merchant that Lopez began a new phase of his business, which had Boston as its main hub.

Lopez's business grew slowly before the early 1760s. Nevertheless, he was able to consolidate his trade in the crucial ports of British America. In New York, a great number of his transactions after 1760 were operated by Levy & Marache, the Jewish society formed by Levy and Solomon Marache.<sup>48</sup> In Charleston, Lopez could count on the collaboration of the Sephardic merchant Isaac da Costa as early as 1755. This collaboration continued during Costa's partnership with Thomas Farr (Costa & Farr) between 1761 and 1762.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Constructing an Atlantic Trading Network, 1762–68*

The year 1762 was a turning point for Lopez, both personally and professionally. On May 14, he lost his wife. Three months later, he married again to Sarah Rivera, a daughter of Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, who had become his partner in several business enterprises. There is evidence that Lopez collaborated with Rivera on slave ventures as early as the mid-1750s.<sup>50</sup> In 1760, both

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<sup>47</sup> *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726–1800*, 2 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914) 1:68–72.

<sup>48</sup> Levy and Marache to Lopez, New York, 1760, P-11, box 14, folder 17, AJHS. See also bills of lading, *Hanover*, Captain Stephen Wanton, July 26, 1760; *Harlequin*, Captain William Gardner, March 17, 1761; sloop captained by Joseph Cozzens, February 13 and April 23, 1761; and *Newport Packet*, Captain Isaac Lawton, April 13, 1761, all M-231, box 1, folder 7, AJA.

<sup>49</sup> Da Costa & Farr to Lopez, Charleston, 1761-1762, P-11, box 14, folders 18 and 19, AJHS; and Isaac da Costa letters (SC-2511), AJA.

<sup>50</sup> Platt, ““And Don’t Forget,”” 602.

invested in the cargo of a brigantine, the *Grayhound*, which was bound to Jamaica. The same vessel undertook a slaving voyage in that year, also on account of Lopez and Rivera.<sup>51</sup>

Rivera was then a British subject, but Lopez had not yet become one. The Navigation Acts forbade foreign-born individuals from trading as merchant shippers and thus from freighting goods from the colonies to England. This prohibition limited Lopez in expanding his trade to the Atlantic. After the Plantation Act of 1740, naturalization became a solution to overcome this hurdle but, as David Sorkin notices, there was “a gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* situation,” and the act was not applied equally in all British colonies.<sup>52</sup> Lopez suffered the consequences of this inconsistency. In 1761, he decided to apply for British naturalization before both the Superior Court at Newport and the General Assembly. Both petitions were rejected. The General Assembly argued that, despite the 1740 act, no Jew should be admitted to the full rights granted to British subjects in Rhode Island, since it contradicted the colony’s Christian foundations, while the Superior Court based their decision on the supposed overpopulation of Rhode Island.<sup>53</sup> Lopez did not give up, however. He decided to move to Swansea, Massachusetts and submitted a new petition to the Superior Court of Judicature at Tauton in October 1762. This

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<sup>51</sup> Accounts of the *Grayhound*'s voyage in 1760, P-11, box 1, folder 20, AJHS.

<sup>52</sup> David Sorkin, “Is American Jewry Exceptional? Comparing Jewish Emancipation in Europe and America,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (2019): 187.

<sup>53</sup> For the way in which Rhode Island circumvented the 1740 act, see Snyder, “Rules, Rights and Redemption,” 153.

second attempt was successful, and as a natural-born subject of the Kingdom of Great Britain, Lopez returned to Newport to begin a new stage of his career.<sup>54</sup>

Shipbuilding and freight transport were the areas in which Lopez chose to expand his business across the Atlantic, and Bristol, an emerging but less competitive market than London, became the center of his operations in Europe.<sup>55</sup> Again, he relied on a non-Jewish agent to widen his business organization—namely, a young man whose reputable parentage was enough reason for Lopez to entrust him with the representation of his interests: Henry Cruger Jr., the son of Henry Cruger, a distinguished New York merchant. From 1763 on, Lopez's ships, built and loaded in Newport, were consigned to Cruger with instructions to sell both cargo and vessels in Bristol. In 1765 alone, Lopez dispatched five vessels to the British port loaded with spermaceti oil, lumber, tar, pitch, and other sundries.<sup>56</sup>

Bristol was not the only British port where Lopez's vessels docked in these years. Also in 1765, Lopez sent the sloop *Three Sallys* to Cork, with a cargo of New England rum, wood, and

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<sup>54</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna and David G. Dalin, *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), 57–59. Petition of Aaron Lopez and Isaac Elizer before the Superior Court at Newport, P-11, box 14, folder 39, doc. 14; and Aaron Lopez's Oath of Allegiance, P-11, box 14, folder 39, doc.18, AJHS.

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Morgan, "Shipping Patterns and the Atlantic Trade of Bristol, 1749–1770," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 506–38.

<sup>56</sup> Bill of lading of the ship *America* (1765), P-11, box 3, folder 2, doc. 22, AJHS; *Commerce*, 1:117–39; and Bigelow, "Aaron Lopez," 760.

spermaceti oil to be delivered to the company Lane, Benson & Vaughans.<sup>57</sup> In London, William Stead managed the sale of Lopez's goods and vessels from at least 1764.<sup>58</sup> After 1767, George Hayley, who had been recommended to Lopez by a correspondent in Boston, became his main contact in London. Hayley's collaboration continued from 1769 to 1774 in partnership with Edmund Hopkins.<sup>59</sup> Thus, although Lopez's first correspondents in London had been Jews—Myers and Hart, from whom he ordered books and liturgical objects from 1753—he preferred Christian merchants as agents when he started to carry out regular operations there.<sup>60</sup>

In the mid-1760s, British markets were suffering a period of stagnation triggered by nonimportation agreements, and Lopez's vessels faced severe difficulty finding profitable opportunities in England. For this reason, they often returned to Newport with a new cargo instead of ending their journey in Bristol or London. Sometimes, the vessels did not return directly to Rhode Island. For instance, on November 18, 1766, Captain Jeremiah Osborne was

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<sup>57</sup>Invoice of merchandise shipped on board the sloop *Three Sallys* for Cork, P-11, box 5, folder 9, doc. 4, AJHS.

<sup>58</sup>Accounts of William Stead, P-11, box 11, folder 13, AJHS.

<sup>59</sup>*Commerce*, 1:181 (Osborne to Hayley, February 14, 1767) and invoice of eleven bundles of hemp shipped on board the brigantine *Susannah*, consigned from Hayley to Lopez, February 20, 1767, P-11, box 11, folder 8, doc. 1, AJHS.

<sup>60</sup>Myers to Lopez, November 16, 1753, P-11, box 14, folder 12, doc. 16 (shortly after this letter, Myers went to New York) and Hart to Lopez, April 4, 1757, folder 15, doc. 3., both AJHS.



instructed to take the ship *America* to London to get a load of coal for the Lisbon market and then proceed to the Portuguese port, where he would deliver it to Mayne & Co.<sup>61</sup>

The relation of Lopez with this British company, which was headed by Robert Mayne and had had a base in Lisbon since the early 1750s, probably dated back to before his move to Newport.<sup>62</sup> On May 24, 1753, Charles Willing informed Lopez that his son was on board a ship to Portugal and carrying a letter in response to “Mess.<sup>rs</sup> Mayne Burn & Mayne of Lisbon,” adding that he would “perhaps see your Friends” there.<sup>63</sup> The closeness of the Maynes with Lopez’s family was also reflected in the assistance they gave to the flight of his cousin Diogo

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<sup>61</sup> Instructions to Jeremiah Osborne, captain of the ship *America*, bound to Lisbon, November 18, 1766, P-11, box 3, folder 3, doc. 28, AJHS.

<sup>62</sup> Lúcia Lima Rodrigues and Russell Craig, “Teachers as Servants of State Ideology: Sousa and Sales, Portuguese School of Commerce, 1759–1784,” *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 20 (2009): 391.

<sup>63</sup> Willing & Son to Lopez, Philadelphia, May 24, 1753, P-11, box 14, folder 12, doc. 3, AJHS.

Carvalho de Lucena, *alias* James Lucena, from Lisbon to London at the end of 1757.<sup>64</sup> Lucena did not last long in London, and by 1760, he joined Lopez in Newport.<sup>65</sup>

Mayne & Co. became Lopez's principal agent in Lisbon. The decision to choose a British mercantile house to represent his business in Portugal was not surprising. Actually, the same option was prevalent among Jewish merchants in London and colonial America.<sup>66</sup> As Trivellato notes, even Livornese Sephardic merchants preferred to deal with Italian mercantile houses based in Lisbon rather than with Portuguese New Christians.<sup>67</sup> The fact that the Inquisition, with its policy of seizing the assets of those accused of heresy (namely, of "judaizing"), was still active in Portugal discouraged the choice of New Christian merchants as intermediaries.

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<sup>64</sup> Martinho de Melo e Castro to Luís da Cunha, London, February 20, 1758, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros (Foreign Affairs Office), cx. 690, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal. On the family connection between Aaron Lopez and James Lucena, see Pereira and Pereira, "By the Second Wife." See also Laura Arnold Leibman, *Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life* (London: Vallentine Mitchel, 2013), 246.

<sup>65</sup> Levy and Marache to Lopez, June 16, 1760, P-11, box 14, folder 17, doc. 1, AJHS.

<sup>66</sup> Vieira, *Nação entre Impérios*, 39–44 and Tijl Vanneste, "Money Borrowing, Gold Smuggling and Diamond Mining: An Englishman in Pombaline Circles", *e-Journal of Portuguese History* 13, no. 2 (2015): 80–94,  
[https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese\\_Brazilian\\_Studies/ejph/html/issue26/pdf/v13n2a05.pdf](https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue26/pdf/v13n2a05.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Trivellato, *Familiarity*, 215.

Lopez consigned commodities such as coal, corn, flour, rice, or spermaceti candles to Mayne & Co. in exchange for salt, fruit and "Lisbon wine," the latter a forbidden but much in demand item in Newport that he did not hesitate to trade, flouting rules and risking seizures.<sup>68</sup> But merchandise was not the only thing shipped from Lisbon to Newport in Lopez's vessels. When the *America* arrived in Lisbon in April 1767, besides exchanging the cargo carried from England, Captain Osborne had another plan to execute: taking Lopez's brother Miguel (later, Abraham Lopez) and his family on board. Mayne actively collaborated in this mission, as Osborne reveals in a letter on April 17: "I understand per Mr. Mayn your friend our of the Cuntry [*sic*] wrote him, some time past respecting a passage to your place: we shall endeavour to conduct that affair with discession (*sic*)."<sup>69</sup>

At the time of his brother's arrival in Newport, Aaron Lopez was planning to take his trading strategy in a new direction. The demand for products from the West Indies was growing in European markets, a development Cruger constantly addresses in his letters.<sup>70</sup> In addition, a more favorable legislative framework after the amendments of the Sugar and Stamp Acts encouraged investments in the Caribbean.<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that Lopez already traded in Caribbean products, which he acquired in Newport and other North American markets. In Providence, for

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<sup>68</sup> Joshua Hart to Lopez, Charleston, December 3, 1772, P-11, box 14, folder 2, doc. 2, AJHS. The direct commerce of Portuguese wine to British colonies was forbidden, except for wine produced in the Atlantic islands (Madeira and Azores).

<sup>69</sup> *Commerce*, 1:199.

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, *Commerce*, 1: 125-26 (Cruger to Lopez, October 4, 1765).

<sup>71</sup> Bigelow, "Aaron Lopez," 761.

instance, Nicholas Brown & Co. provided him with West Indian rum and sugar in exchange for wood cards, nails, wire, and other hardware articles.<sup>72</sup> His vessels had also been sailing to Jamaica since at least 1766, where he had as correspondents two Sephardic merchants, Abraham Lopez Parra and Isaac Pereira Mendes.<sup>73</sup> Lopez was nonetheless aware that the consolidation of his trading position in the Caribbean depended on the settlement of a full-time factor in Jamaica. In 1767, after Parra refused to assume this role, Lopez ended up entrusting it to his son-in-law, Abraham Pereira Mendes, the younger brother of Isaac Pereira Mendes.<sup>74</sup> He seemed the right person for the right place; he was born and raised in Jamaica, his brother was a reputable and well-connected merchant on the island, and kinship ties, strengthened by his marriage with Lopez's daughter Sarah, completed the seal of trust. Yet these superficial qualities soon became a source of disappointment for Lopez. Abraham's inexperience, difficulty in collecting payments from the planters, and erratic behavior seriously compromised the success of Lopez's investments in Jamaica. In 1769, Lopez decided that there was no solution other than to replace his agent.<sup>75</sup> His transactions in Jamaica were then assumed by Captain Benjamin Wright, a New

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<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Brown & Co. to Lopez, September 15, 1766, John Carter Brown Library Collection (MS-435), box 2, folder 4 and Brown & Co. to Lopez, August 17, 1767, box 3, folder 2, both AJA.

<sup>73</sup> Instructions to John Hyer, captain of the sloop *Industry*, bound to Kingston, June 27, 1766, P-11, box 4, folder 20, doc. 18, and records on the voyage of the sloop *Swansey*, Frances Bradfeeld captain, bound to Kingston, box 5, folder 2, docs. 7, 9, 10 and 27, both AJHS.

<sup>74</sup> *Commerce*, 1:174–75 (Abraham Lopez to Aaron Lopez, November 16, 1766).

<sup>75</sup> Friedman, "Aaron Lopez's Family Affairs," 295–304.

England mariner who had been at the service of Lopez since at least 1767, when he commanded his ship *America* to Savanna la Mar, Jamaica.<sup>76</sup> Wright became an essential element for the consolidation of Lopez's trade in Jamaica, not only because of his successful efforts in correcting the problems caused by Mendes, but also because he was able to provide Lopez with timely and thoughtful information on the state of the Caribbean markets.

#### *Apogee, 1769–74*

Benjamin Wright, a Presbyterian, ensured the turning point of Lopez's trade in the Caribbean. After the disappointing choice of an agent within his close family circle, it was again a non-Jewish intermediary who marked a new phase in Lopez's business organization. Although his trade still included a diversity of markets, products, and correspondents, there was a clear concentration of efforts in the West Indies. Kingston and Savanna la Mar were the ports most visited by his vessels, but his commercial activity also extended to Barbados and the Dutch and French colonies in the Caribbean area.

From his first years in America, Lopez had kept contact with the Jewish communities of Barbados, Curaçao, St. Eustatius, and Suriname.<sup>77</sup> It is very likely that these contacts and his entrance into the Caribbean Sephardic networks would have been facilitated by his close connection to Daniel Gomez, who had strong kinship and commercial ties to leading Sephardic families in the West Indies.<sup>78</sup> Among Lopez's first correspondents in the West Indies were Isaac

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<sup>76</sup> Lopez to Benjamin Wright, Newport, November 6, 1767, P-11, box 3, folder 5, doc. 33, AJHS.

<sup>77</sup> Isaac Fernandes to Lopez, Barbados, May 10, 1753, P-11, box 14, folder 12, doc. 2, AJHS.

<sup>78</sup> Snyder, "Under the Shadow," 588–89.

Fernandes in Barbados, E. H. Coutinho in Suriname, David Haim del Valle in Curaçao, and Samson Mears in St. Eustatius. In Mole-Saint-Nicholas, Hispaniola, his contact was Manuel Rodrigues, probably a Portuguese merchant.<sup>79</sup> Later, in 1773, when Lopez decided to create a branch in Fort-Dauphin (Saint-Domingue), he asked Abraham Sarzedas, then based in Mole-Saint-Nicholas, to head it, but Sarzedas declined the offer, suggesting that his nephew take the position.<sup>80</sup>

Lopez's Atlantic business was mainly framed on the rum-for-captives trade, although slave trade occupied a far less significant part of his business strategy than the transaction of rum and other sugar products.<sup>81</sup> As noted above, Lopez started in the slave trade in partnership with Jacob Rodriguez Rivera even before obtaining naturalization. Over the following years, Lopez continued to invest in joint ventures with his father-in-law. Their voyages had as final destinations Jamaican and other ports in the Caribbean area, where enslaved people were sold to sugar planters in exchange for their produce, in particular the molasses that fed the rum distillery industry in Rhode Island. However, as Virginia Platt demonstrates, the slave trade itself was

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<sup>79</sup> Rodrigues was probably the same "Emanuel Rodveros" who addressed a letter from Monte Christi, Hispaniola, to Lopez on March 29, 1764, M-231, box 1, folder 1, AJA.

<sup>80</sup> Abraham Sarzedas to Lopez, Mole Saint-Nicolas, Hispaniola, March 12, 1773, P-11, box 14, folder 29, doc. 4, AJHS.

<sup>81</sup> Sean M. Kelley, "American Rum, African Consumers, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *African Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2018): 1–29. See also Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700–1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

never a core business for Lopez. Of the nearly two hundred of Lopez's vessels that set off from Newport between 1761 and 1774, only fourteen were directed to the coast of Africa and, according to Platt, less than half of them turned a profit.<sup>82</sup> Such mediocre results would have limited his engagement in the slave trade and encouraged him to focus on a single element of the rum-for-captives trade: the rum itself. The instructions he gave to captains sailing to Caribbean ports were clear with regard to his key demand: "good molasses."<sup>83</sup> Besides providing the New England manufacturers, Lopez also managed his own rum distilleries, whose product was sold to

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<sup>82</sup> Platt, "'And Don't Forget,'" 616–18. Although it was not his core business, Aaron Lopez's participation in the slave trade has been the facet of his business model most thoroughly explored by historiography. See, among others, Platt, "Tar, Slaves, and New England Rum," 1–22; Elaine F. Crane, "'The First Wheel of Commerce': Newport, Rhode Island and the Slave Trade, 1760–1776," *Slavery and Abolition* 1 (1980): 178–98; Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*; Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735–1774," *New England Quarterly Review* 55, no. 2 (1982): 229–53; Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 131–42; and Rachel Chernos Lin, "The Rhode Island Slave-Traders: Butchers, Bakers and Candlestick-Makers," *Slavery and Abolition* 23, no. 3 (2002): 21–38.

<sup>83</sup> See, for instance, instructions to Benjamin Wright, captain of the ship *America*, bound to Savanna la Mar, Jamaica, November 6, 1767, P-11, box 3, folder 5, doc. 33; John Peters, captain of the brigantine *Industry*, bound to The Mole, Hispaniola, December 29, 1769, P-11, box 2, folder 6, doc. 29; and Nathaniel Hathaway, captain of the brigantine *Charlotte*, bound to Paramaribo, Suriname, May 29, 1771, P-11, box 1, folder 11, doc. 43, all AJHS.

other merchants—among them, slavers—or sent to Europe and the West Indies. Other items completed the cargoes to Jamaican and other Caribbean ports: spermaceti candles and oil, tallow, rum, wood, cloth, hardware, rice, grain, fish, sheep, hogs, and horses, and even kosher beef, tongues, and cheese for local Jewish communities.<sup>84</sup>

The West Indies trade developed by Lopez mirrored the cross-imperial nature of his business activity and the enlargement of his network to include merchants operating in the Caribbean area, as well as firms based in major European metropolises. Besides London, Lopez also had had correspondents in Amsterdam since the early 1760s—namely, the British firm John Turner & Son. His operations in the Netherlands became more regular in the 1770s due to the agency of Daniel Crommelin, a New York merchant who had moved to Amsterdam in his youth and founded a family firm whose success was built on investing in North American trade.<sup>85</sup> How Lopez made contact with him is not well known, but his good friend Daniel Gomez kept businesses with Crommelin from 1752.<sup>86</sup> Since at least 1767, the firm Daniel Crommelin & Son

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the bills of lading of the brigantines *Industry*, bound to Mole-Saint-Nicholas, in 1769, and *Charlotte*, bound to Suriname, in 1771, respectively, P-11, box 2, folder 6, doc. 30, and box 1, folder 11, doc. 50, AJHS.

<sup>85</sup> Invoice of six chests of tea shipped by John Turner & Son, Amsterdam, September 1, 1760, P-11, box 11, folder 2, doc. 1, AJHS; and bill of lading of the brigantine *Charlotte*, whose cargo was consigned to Daniel Crommelin & Sons, May 31, 1771, M-231, box 1, folder 7, AJA.

<sup>86</sup> "Gomez Ledger," *Publications of the American Jewish History Society* 27 (1920): 245.



negotiated with Lopez, supplying him with European and Asian goods (earthenware, cloth, Bohea tea) in exchange for lumber, spermaceti candles, rice, coffee, and other commodities.<sup>87</sup>

Lopez's choice of non-Jewish merchants to represent his business in London and Amsterdam, two centers of the western Sephardic diaspora, does not tally with the strategies of contemporary Sephardic merchants and commercial houses based in other cities, such as the Ergas and Silvera houses in Livorno or the Gradis family in Bordeaux, for instance, whose representation in Amsterdam and London was headed mainly by Sephardic correspondents.<sup>88</sup> An order addressed in 1772 to Crommelin—and not to a member of the Sephardic congregation—to acquire a set of Jewish liturgical books and objects reveals the weakness of Lopez's connection to the Jewish community of Amsterdam.<sup>89</sup>

The specificities of Lopez's business can explain, in part, the option for non-Jewish correspondents in London and Amsterdam. On the one hand, the main items he traded in Europe (whaling products, lumber, rum) did not match the traditional areas of specialization of Jewish merchants in both cities; rather, they were some of the most common commodities exported by

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<sup>87</sup> Several examples of this correspondence can be found in P-11, box 14, folders 26–29, AJHS.

<sup>88</sup> Trivellato, *Familiarity*, 210–14 and Richard Menkis, "The Gradis Family of Eighteenth Century Bordeaux: A Social and Economic Study" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1988), 161–69.

<sup>89</sup> Invoice of a box of liturgical books and objects shipped by Daniel Crommelin & Sons on board de Vrow Judith, September 1, 1772, P-11, box 14, folder 28, doc. 8, AJHS.

New England merchants.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, mercantile houses such as those headed by Hayley and Crommelin had focused on North American trade and managed operative networks of correspondents in these markets. The selection of non-Jewish correspondents in London and Amsterdam was thus pragmatic and followed the patterns of the colonial American mercantile group. Yet it is also reasonable to question whether this option mirrors the loss of influence of the Sephardic mercantile groups of London and Amsterdam in the Atlantic or their progressive detachment from their coreligionists living in North America.<sup>91</sup> It is notable that Lopez's correspondence with members of the Sephardic communities of London and Amsterdam, even his personal correspondence, is scarce compared with the letters he exchanged with his brethren in the West Indies.

At the apogee of Lopez's Atlantic business, his trading network was more and more diverse in terms of correspondents, markets, and goods. Besides the Caribbean area, Lopez also

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<sup>90</sup> Marian Mathison Desrosiers, "Private Lives and Public Spaces: Newport Merchant John Banister and Colonial Consumers," *Newport History* 83 (2014): 1–29; Marian Mathison Desrosiers, *John Banister of Newport: The Life and Accounts of a Colonial Merchant* (Jefferson, : McFarland, 2017); and Lin, "Rhode Island Slave-Traders," 21–38.

<sup>91</sup> Further evidence of this detachment is found in the letters exchanged between the *Mahamad* of London and other Jewish congregations whose copies were attached to the *Mahamad* minute book for the years 1750 to 1775. Out of a total of nearly 150 letters, only five were exchanged with North American communities: three with Newport and two with New York. Minute book: the Mahamad (1750-1775), LMA/4521/A/01/03/002, The Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

consolidated his position on the North American coast. James Lucena, his cousin, had been in Savannah, Georgia since the late 1760s, managing the supply of vessels bound to the Caribbean that stopped there and providing precious information on the Southern markets.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, Lopez increased his investment in voyages to North Carolina; in 1770 alone, five ships docked in New Bern.<sup>93</sup> His operations in the north, particularly in Newfoundland, Gaspé, and Quebec, also increased starting in the late 1760s. In 1769, Lopez dispatched three vessels to Quebec, whose goods were consigned to the firm Werden & Mercier.<sup>94</sup> Quebec became an important supply market of wheat and dry fish, both highly sought-after commodities in the Caribbean markets but also in Europe, particularly in the Iberian Atlantic and the Mediterranean area. Besides Lisbon, Lopez's vessels also arrived in Madeira, Cadiz, Tenerife, Gibraltar, and

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<sup>92</sup> *Commerce*, 1:242 (Lucena to Lopez, Savannah, June 28, 1768); Lucena to Lopez, Savannah, February 9, 1771, RD-460, AJA; Lucena to Lopez, Savannah, January 19, 1771, SC-7538, AJA; letters from Lucena to Lopez in 1771 and 1772, P-11, box 14, folder 4, doc. 2, and folder 5, docs. 1, 3, 4, 7, AJHS.

<sup>93</sup> Documents of Lopez's ships *Industry*, *Priscilla*, *Speedwell* and *Eleanor*, bound for New Bern, respectively, P-11, box 4, folders 26, 34 and 41, and box 5, folders 17 and 19, all AJHS. See also Platt, "Tar, Staves, and New England Rum," 1–22.

<sup>94</sup> Instructions to John Peters, captain of the brigantine *Industry* bound to Quebec, August 18, 1769, P-11, box 2, folder 6, doc. 13; instructions to Jonathan Wheeler, master of the brigantine *Sally* bound to Quebec, September 12, 1769, box 2, folder 18, doc. 17; and account of the brigantine *Priscilla*'s cargo, bound to Quebec, July 26, 1769, box 4, folder 33, doc. 3, all AJHS.

North Africa.<sup>95</sup> For instance, on December 17, 1773, Lopez instructed Captain William Bourk to command the brigantine *Charlotte* straight to Gibraltar, where he was to deliver his cargo to the firm Robert Anderson & Co. He was then to proceed to Tétuan in order to invest the net proceeds in a cargo of mules to be dispatched to Jamaica and exchanged for molasses. Sixty animals were acquired, of which fifty-eight survived the trip and were sold to Jamaican planters in Savanna la Mar.<sup>96</sup>

### *Decline, 1775–82*

This vibrant era of horses, rum, spermaceti candles, and so many other commodities crossing the Atlantic was interrupted by the outbreak of the American Revolution. Lopez could not avoid confiscations of cargoes and ships, as well as the depreciation of the currency and the difficulties in obtaining credit, insurance, and letters of exchange. A letter sent by Mayne & Co. on June 10, 1775 described the adversities experienced in Atlantic trade at the time. The firm was reluctant to send Captain Zebadiah Story to Newport because “by the late measures taken by the British Parliament” there were serious restrictions to trade, and they found it wiser to expect that “all differences are settled.”<sup>97</sup> In February 1776, Story was still in Malaga, whence he wrote to Lopez

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<sup>95</sup> Bill of lading for the brigantine *Venus*, bound to Madeira, Lisbon, and Gibraltar, P-11, box 5, folder 31, doc. 16, file 30 and letter from Timerman and Romero to Lopez, Cadiz, September 24, 1774, box 14, folder 30, doc. 17, AJHS.

<sup>96</sup> Documents of the voyage of the brigantine *Charlotte*, William Bourk captain, to Gibraltar, 1773-74, P-11, box 1, folder 13, docs. 53, 70, 76, AJHS.

<sup>97</sup>Mayne & Co. to Lopez, Lisbon, June 10, 1775, RD-501, AJA.

expressing his concern with regard to the security of his family in Newport.<sup>98</sup> Another of Lopez's vessels, the *Leviathan*, had been detained off the coast of Brazil with its captain, Thomas Lothrop, and crew imprisoned in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>99</sup> Such a grievous voyage did not discourage Lopez from undertaking a new venture in the South Seas. In 1775, in partnership with Francis Roth, he invested in a whaling fleet of thirteen vessels destined for the southern Atlantic.<sup>100</sup> The instructions he gave to Thomas Folger, the captain of the ship *Lydia*, warned him to avoid the Brazilian coast and sail as directly as possible to the Falkland Islands, where the vessels would assemble. The voyage was planned to last eighteen months and, on the way home, Folger should stop at St. Eustatius to receive new directions.<sup>101</sup> However, the venture did not go as expected.

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<sup>98</sup> *Commerce*, 2:38–39.

<sup>99</sup> Documents of the whaling voyage of the brigantine *Leviathan*, Thomas Lothrop captain, to the Coast of Africa, P-11, box 2, folder 8, AJHS; and Lothrop to Lopez, Rio de Janeiro, December 11, 1774, M-231, box 1, folder 1, AJA. This letter is published in Stanley Chyet, "From a Prison in Brazil—1774," *Americas* 35, no. 4 (1979): 574–80. On September 26, 1775, Mayne & Co. wrote that they were informed that Captain Lothrop and his mate had died of smallpox in prison (*Commerce*, 2:31). On the *Leviathan* voyage, see also Dauril Alden, "Yankee Sperm Whalers in Brazilian Waters, and the Decline of the Portuguese Whale Fishery (1773–1801)," *Americas* 20, no. 3 (1964): 267–88.

<sup>100</sup> Petition of Francis Roth and Aaron Lopez to Lord North, First Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, received on January 10, 1776, Bermuda and Jamaica Materials (MF-578), AJA.

<sup>101</sup> Instructions to Thomas Folger, captain of the ship *Lydia*, bound to Falkland Islands, 1775, Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection, Arc.MS.56., University of Pennsylvania Libraries,

The fate of the *Lydia* is unknown, but at least five whalers were seized by the British army near the Azores.<sup>102</sup>

Lopez's instructions to Folger illustrate how, on the eve of the Revolutionary War, his Atlantic business involved an increasing number of non-Jewish correspondents. In a list of "friends" to be contacted in case "any material accident happens," only one was a Jew—Mears in St. Eustatius—while the others were houses run by Christian merchants, most of them British: Blackburn, Sanches, Burrows & Co. in Madeira, Mayne & Co. in Lisbon, Livingston & Turnbull in Gibraltar, Mahony & Woulfe in Tenerife, Duff & Welch in Cadiz, and John Thompson & Co. in Barbados.<sup>103</sup>

Much changed after this last great enterprise. Shortly before the occupation of Newport by the British army, Lopez moved to Providence and later to Leicester, Massachusetts. Far from the center of operations, his business drastically slowed down, but it did not stop.<sup>104</sup> In 1776, at least

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Philadelphia. The same instructions were repeated to other Lopez's vessels; see Chyet, *Lopez*, 145–48.

<sup>102</sup> *Commerce*, 2:40 and petition of Roth and Lopez to Lord North, MF-578, AJA.

<sup>103</sup> Instructions to Thomas Folger, 1775, Kaplan Collection, Arc.MS.56, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Philadelphia.

<sup>104</sup> The impact of the war on American trade networks was not necessarily negative, but it was transformative, as it contributed to the increase of inequalities within the mercantile group; see Tom Cutterham, "The Revolutionary Transformation of American Merchant Networks: Carter and Wadsworth and Their World, 1775–1800," *Enterprise and Society* 18, no. 1 (2017): 1–31.

five of his vessels sailed to New Haven, Charleston, Jamaica, Suriname, and Hispaniola and carried out whaling voyages.<sup>105</sup> Lopez's correspondence reveals that his links to Europe were maintained during his exile in Leicester, in particular those with Daniel Crommelin & Sons of Amsterdam and Hayley in London. The letters he exchanged with his correspondents in Newport (Moses Seixas and Abraham Pereira Mendes), Norwalk (Mears), Philadelphia (Moses M. Hays, Samuel Cowperthwait, and William Gibbs), New York (Henry Hart) and Boston (David Lopez Jr., James Swann, and Jonas Phillips) are also evidence of his efforts to keep the business alive even in a harsh environment.<sup>106</sup>

These efforts were not entirely successful, however. In the late 1770s, Lopez had to downsize his operations to a regional scale and narrow his business organization to a strict circle in which close kin gained a special prominence. His son, Joseph Lopez, and his nephew, David Lopez Jr. (Moses Lopez's son) became his main agents in New England ports, managing transactions and providing information on the state of the markets.<sup>107</sup> After all, enhancing the role of family bonds

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<sup>105</sup> These include the brigantines *Charlotte* and *Fox*, the sloops *Sally* and *Three Friends*, and the schooner *Sally*. See, respectively, Captain William Haydon to Suriname, P-11, box 1, folder 15, doc. 1; Captain Silas Buckley in a whaling voyage, box 1, folder 19, doc. 2; Captain Benjamin Allen to Fort Dauphin, Hispaniola, box 4, folder 39, doc. 1; Captain Benjamin Sisson to Charleston, box 5, folder 6, doc. 22; and Captain Lavis Sisson to New Haven, box 5, folder 24, doc. 28, all AJHS.

<sup>106</sup> Lopez's letters from 1777 to 1782, P-11, box 14, folders 33-37, AJHS; and James Swan letter (SC-12177) and Samuel Cowperthwait letters (SC-2524), both AJA.

<sup>107</sup> Lopez's letters from 1779 to 1782, P-11, box 14, folders 34-37, AJHS.

as a support for business organizations in moments of crises or decline was a relatively common and almost logical strategy.<sup>108</sup>

The first signs that the end of the war was imminent brought new hope of an upturn and expectation that it would be possible to open trade in new markets and with new correspondents. Lopez's business with Amsterdam was slowly recovering through the intermediation of Crommelin & Sons and Charles Sigourney.<sup>109</sup> In December 1780, he began corresponding with Joseph Gardoqui from Bilbao, whose trade with North America had been consolidated during the Revolution.<sup>110</sup> From Flanders, a mercantile house in Ostend addressed a letter to Lopez on May 19, 1783, offering its trading services and calling for his intercession with other commercial houses in the United States.<sup>111</sup> But the letter came too late. Lopez had died the year before.

## Conclusion

The diversity of Aaron Lopez's correspondents and the pragmatic criteria used to select them show how a Sephardic merchant could manage his business strategy in a framework with few strictures regarding his religious and ethnic background. The expansion of his long-distance trade was based not only on working with collaborators within the Jewish group, but also on

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<sup>108</sup> Haggerty, *British-Atlantic Trading Community*, 110.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Sigourney letter, 1781 March 6 (RD-737), AJA.

<sup>110</sup> *Commerce*, 2:129–30. On the Gardoqui house, see Reyes Calderón Cuadrado, *Empresarios españoles en el proceso de independencia norteamericana. La Casa Gardoqui e Hijos de Bilbao* (Madrid: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales Francisco de Vitoria—Unión Editorial, 2004).

<sup>111</sup> T'huys, Verbeke to Lopez, Ostend, May 19, 1783, P-11, box 14, folder 37, doc. 7, AJHS.



developing contacts with merchants from different backgrounds. Each option was taken and managed according to the circumstances and opportunities of the moment. Thus, non-Jewish agents such as Lloyd, Cruger, and Wright eventually played a central role in the evolution of his business at a time when the Sephardic networks no longer had the influence in Atlantic trade that they once did. The multilayered nature of Lopez's business organization, defined by the diversity of areas of activity, agents and markets, also matches the profile of other great Newport (non-Jewish) merchants such as John Bannister or Christopher Champlin.<sup>112</sup> Lopez even shared with them the same agents in European markets. For instance, Hayley & Hopkins also represented Champlin's business interests in London.<sup>113</sup>

So the question of whether Aaron Lopez's business organization exemplifies the experience of a late western Sephardic businessman or is merely typical of a colonial American merchant is a very intricate one and may ultimately be pointless. Three points should be taken into consideration here. First, the volume of studies on Sephardic merchants and mercantile houses in the second half of the eighteenth century is not significant enough to provide a clear picture of points in common, let alone allow us to devise a typical model for Sephardic merchant experience in this period. Nevertheless, a few case studies, such as Trivellato's research on the Ergas and Silvera firm in Livorno or Richard Menkis's approach to the house of Gradis in Bordeaux, have revealed some common denominators, in particular the increasing diversity of

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<sup>112</sup> Desrosiers, *John Banister* and George Joseph Lough Jr., "The Champlins of Newport: A Commercial History" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1977).

<sup>113</sup> *Commerce*, 1:251–52, 282–83.

the commercial networks.<sup>114</sup> Second, the primordial place attributed to kinship, ethnic, and religious affinities in business structures, which historiography has identified as the cornerstone of the Sephardic trading diaspora in the early modern period, is shared by other trading diasporas and even the broader British-Atlantic trading community. Lopez indeed supported his business in the family milieu at the start of his career and also at times of distress but, as we have seen above, this strategy was also followed by Scottish merchants in Madeira or the Perry of London, just to give two examples.<sup>115</sup> Third, it is essential to embrace the complexity of Lopez's character, even beyond his role as a businessman. On the one hand, he took part in gentile organizations, his philanthropy was directed to individuals and institutions both inside and outside the Jewish world, and his circle of friends included both Jews and Christians. On the other hand, Lopez married twice to Sephardi women, his closest trading partners were his relatives, and he never broke his bonds with Portugal. He was both a colonial merchant prince and a Portuguese Jew. As a consequence, his business organization was fashioned through both colonial American and Atlantic Sephardic networks. This combination is actually not a contradiction at a time in which the idea of the *Nação* as a worldwide network linked by a common background, culture, and/or religion, whose identity was consolidated in contrast to the Christian majority and other Jewish groups, was to progressively fade and give way to a broader integration in the host societies and the assimilation of their culture, values, and lifestyles. The increasing removal of segregation measures that profoundly impacted the late western Sephardic diaspora made the idea of the Spanish-Portuguese Jews as a nation apart outdated.

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<sup>114</sup> Trivellato, *Familiarity* and Menkis, "Gradis Family."

<sup>115</sup> Hancock, "Trouble" and Price, *Perry*.

Lopez was born a Portuguese New Christian, whose waters of baptism, in the eyes of the Inquisition and the Catholic society, did not wash away the stain of the “Jewish blood.” He escaped persecution and ostracism and found a new beginning in a diverse and dynamic port city. He became a British subject, albeit not without some struggle, and ended up embracing the patriot cause. Lopez died both “a merchant of eminence of polite and amiable manners” and “a valuable Pillar to the Jewish Society,” as the epitaph on his tombstone states, supposedly written by his good friend the Congregationalist minister Ezra Stiles.<sup>116</sup> In a nutshell, Lopez died as he had lived his last thirty years: an American-Portuguese Jewish merchant prince.

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<sup>116</sup> Kohler, “Jews of Newport,” 75.