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The Agency of Empire: personal connections and individual strategies in the shaping of the French Early Modern Expansion (1686-1746)

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The Agency of Empire

Personal Connections and Individual Strategies in the Shaping
of the French Early Modern Expansion (1686-1746)

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Summary

This dissertation takes the perspective of directors of the French chartered companies operating in Africa and Asia to explore the role of individuals in the French overseas expansion. Studying individual strategies and personal connections aims at going beyond the façade of a centralised and tightly controlled French expansion through trading monopolies granted to overseas companies. The agency of French company directors, in France and overseas, is studied in dialogue with European, Indian or African institutions to understand how individuals overcame the limitations of French chartered companies. The focus on company directors' strategies and personal connections shows how the early modern French empire was shaped by cross-cultural relations and trans-imperial cooperation. Highlighting the dependence of the French chartered companies on local policies, other European empires and private interests is conducive to a re-evaluation of the position of the French empire inside local power dynamics. I argue that French chartered companies left space for directors' agency, in France and overseas to complete the companies' deficiencies through their individual strategies and personal connections.

Throughout this dissertation, I showcase the inter-dependence between institutions and individual agency in the early modern French expansion through two case-studies: the directors of the French chartered companies operating in Pondicherry (Coromandel Coast in India) and those active in Ouidah (Bight of Benin, West African Coast). The choice of case study is meant to bridge the artificial division between the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. The first case-study, Pondicherry became the administrative centre of all French settlements in India in 1701 and was an important textile centre for the French East India Company. The second case study, Ouidah, was chosen for its major role in the French Atlantic slave trade during the first half of the eighteenth century. The study of Pondicherry goes back to the end of the seventeenth century but focuses primarily on the first decades of the eighteenth century. Regarding Ouidah, because of the scarcity of sources, the analysis is pushed further into the first half of the eighteenth century. Finally, I focus on two generations of directors operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah between 1685 and 1719. The dissertation compares how individual agency through personal connections and strategies, shaped the French expansion in Pondicherry and Ouidah during the first decades of each factory (between 1686 and 1746).

By studying French chartered companies, usually portrayed as inefficient and unprofitable in scholarship on European early modern expansion, it soon became apparent

that chartered companies had other motivations and goals than economic profitability or institutional efficiency alone. Highlighting the agency of individual actors of the French expansion in relation to institutions contributes to a better understanding of the expectations of members or employees of French chartered companies. An important contribution of this dissertation is therefore to perceive the role of chartered companies less as economically efficient and more as a space for company servants' agency to stimulate the early empire. The focus on individual agency in shaping the French early modern expansion revises an institutional and path-dependent narrative and presents an expansion based on inter-imperial cooperation, cross-cultural strategies and combination of private interests and institutions.

The approach is also novel as it takes the perspective of company directors in Africa and Asia as well as those in Europe. Multiplying the points of view allows for connections across areas analysis usually studied separately, giving a global perspective to the work. The study of overseas directors' agency combines the existing historiographies revising the position of power of Europeans in Africa and Asia with the necessity to acknowledge strategies on all sides of the cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, the focus on inter-imperial relations instead of exclusively intra-imperial dynamics, challenges the national narratives that have portrayed European expansions as evolving in isolation from each other, with the exception of competitive interactions. Another important contribution to historiography is the reliance of French overseas institutions on their directors' personal connections to integrate local and regional trading networks rather than the opposite. Lastly, the cooperation observed between French private traders and overseas directors refutes the dichotomy opposing French port city merchants' interests to those of the French monarchy and its companies.

Samenvatting:

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de rol van individuen in de Franse overzeese expansie aan de hand van *directeurs* van de Franse geötrooieerde compagnieën die actief waren in Afrika en Azië. . Door de bestudering van individuele strategieën en persoonlijke connecties is het mogelijk om de façade van een gecentraliseerde en strak gecontroleerde Franse expansie door middel van handelsmonopolies te doorbreken. De *agency* van *directeurs* van Franse geötrooieerde compagnieën, in Frankrijk en in het buitenland, wordt bestudeerd in dialoog met Europese, Indiase of Afrikaanse instellingen om te begrijpen hoe individuen de beperkingen van Franse geötrooieerde compagnieën overwonnen. De focus op de strategieën van de *directeurs* en hun persoonlijke connecties laat zien hoe het vroegmoderne Franse

expansie gevormd werd door interculturele relaties en trans-imperiale samenwerking. De Franse geotrooieerde compagnieën waren in hun handelen sterk afhankelijk van lokaal beleid, andere Europese expansies en persoonlijke belangen. Door hier de nadruk op te leggen is het mogelijk de positie van het vroegmoderne Franse koloniale rijk binnen de lokale machtsdynamiek opnieuw beoordelen. Ik beargumenteer dat Franse geotrooieerde compagnieën ruimte gelaten hebben voor de *agency* van de *directeurs* zowel in Frankrijk als in het buitenland omdat zij met hun persoonlijke connecties en individuele strategieën in staat waren om te tekortkoming van de geotrooieerde compagnieën te overkomen.

In dit proefschrift laat ik aan de hand van twee case-studies de onderlinge afhankelijkheid tussen instituties en individuele *agency* zien. De eerste case-study bestudeert de *directeurs* van de Franse compagnie in Pondicherry aan de kust van Coromandel in India. In de tweede case-study wordt gekeken naar de Franse compagnie in Ouidah in de Baai van Benin. De keuze voor deze twee case-studies is gemaakt om de scheiding tussen de Atlantische- en de Indische Oceaan te overbruggen. De eerste case-study, Pondicherry, werd het administratieve centrum van alle Franse nederzettingen in India in 1701 en was een belangrijk textielcentrum voor de Franse Oost-Indische Compagnie. De tweede case-study, Ouidah, is gekozen vanwege zijn belangrijke rol in de Atlantische slavenhandel in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw. De studie van Pondicherry gaat terug tot het einde van de zeventiende eeuw, maar is vooral gericht op de eerste decennia van de achttiende eeuw. Vanwege de schaarste aan bronnen beperkt de analyse van Ouidah zich tot de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw. Tot slot, voor het onderzoek naar de *agency* van de *directeurs* in Frankrijk zelf, concentreert de studie zich op twee generaties van *directeurs* die tussen 1685 en 1719 actief waren in Pondicherry en Ouidah. Het proefschrift vergelijkt hoe individuele *agency* door middel van persoonlijke connecties en strategieën vorm gaf aan de Franse expansie in Pondicherry en Ouidah gedurende de eerste decennia van elke factorij (tussen 1686 en 1746).

De Franse geotrooieerde compagnieën zijn in de historiografie over het begin van de vroegmoderne Europese expansie vaak afgebeeld als inefficiënt en onrendabel. Deze studie laat echter zien dat de *directeurs* van de geotrooieerde compagnieën vaak andere motieven en doelen hadden dan economische winstgevendheid en institutionele efficiëntie. De aandacht voor de individuele actoren van de Franse expansie leidt tot een beter begrip van de verwachtingen van leden en werknemers van Franse compagnieën. Een belangrijke bijdrage van dit proefschrift is daarom dat het een beter inzicht geeft in de rol van instituties voor de

vroegmoderne Europese expansie. Door te laten zien hoe belangrijke individuele actoren waren in het vormgeven van de vroegmoderne Franse expansie is het mogelijk om oudere narratieven te herzien. De Franse expansie werd gecaracteriseerd door inter-imperialistische samenwerking, cross-culturele strategieën en de combinatie van persoonlijke- en institutionele belangen..

Deze studie is vernieuwende omdat ze tegelijk onderzoek doet naar het handelen van de *directeurs* in Afrika, Azië en Europa. Hierdoor is het mogelijk om de verbanden tussen de verschillende gebieden te analyseren, die anders mogelijk verborgen waren gebleven. Daardoor krijgt deze studie een globaal perspectief. Het onderzoek naar de *agency* van overzeese *directeurs* verenigt de bestaande historiografieën die de machtspositie van Europeanen in Afrika en Azië herzien, met de noodzaak om meer aandacht te besteden aan interculturele interacties. Daarnaast wordt het door het inter-imperiale perspectief mogelijke om vraagtekens te zetten bij eerdere nationale narratieven, die de Europese expansie in isolatie van elkaar hebben onderzocht. Een andere belangrijke bijdrage aan de historiografie is dat Franse overzeese instellingen afhankelijke waren van de persoonlijke connecties van hun *directeurs* om lokale en regionale handelsnetwerken te integreren in plaats van andersom. De samenwerking tussen Franse particuliere handelaren en geöctrooïeerde compagnieën, tenslotte, laat zien dat er geen tegenstelling was tussen de belangen van Franse particuliere handelaren en die van de Franse monarchie en haar geöctrooïeerde compagnieën.

Introduction

French early modern chartered companies are often absent from debates about the European expansion. Emphasis on organisational developments, imperial rivalries and, more generally, institutions has directed the discussion towards Anglo-Dutch and Iberian models of expansion, and left little space for alternative ways of engaging with early modern empire. Turning the analytical perspective to individuals as historical actors and their role within European empires allows historians to bring other types of expansion into the debates and offers an opportunity to revise rigid categorisations. As Francesca Trivellato argues, individuals' experiences can be reconstructed in order to understand the connections and contexts "*from the perspective of the actor involved in them, rather than from the point of view of the institutions that created the structures.*"¹ This dissertation intends to probe below the surface of a centralised and tightly controlled French empire to reveal the dynamics centred on individuals and their connections across cultural, religious, ethnic and imperial boundaries. How did individual agency, through personal connections and strategies, shape the French expansion in Pondicherry and Ouidah during the first decades of each factory (between 1686 and 1746)?² Without denying the necessity of institutions, individual actors will be studied in dialogue with chartered overseas companies to understand how they overcame the limitations of these institutions and, how they complemented, cooperated and took advantage of them.

1. Conceptual framework

Connections and chartered companies

The theoretical framework of this dissertation builds on Regina Grafe's argument that early modern institutions were, at their foundations, always informal networks.³ Indeed, while social network analysis has proposed cutting edge solutions to the already well-known shortcomings of new institutional economics, it has generated an opposition between institutions

¹ Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1 January 2011), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>.

² Regarding African and Indian terminology, I follow the spelling on current Anglophone scholarship: Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727-1892*, Ohio University Press (Oxford, 2004); Danna Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance: Traders, Missionaries and Tamil. Intermediaries in Eighteenth-Century French India* (University of Michigan: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 2011); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Friday's Child: Or How Tej Singh Became Tecinkurajan', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 36, no. 1 (1 March 1999): 69–113; Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ Regina Grafe, 'On the Spatial Nature of Institutions and the Institutional Nature of Personal Networks in the Spanish Atlantic', *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no. 1 (2014): 9.

and informal networks.⁴ Driven by the question of understanding how and why merchants from different origins trusted each other in long-distance trade, historians and economists have provided answers in different ways. Avner Greif argues that the development of economic institutions, as well as informal rules such as “*reputation-based institutions*,” enabled merchants to trust each other.⁵ Greif nonetheless asserts the superiority of formal institutions in reducing uncertainty and protecting propriety rights.⁶ Merchant diaspora studies have stressed the importance of a common religion, culture or ethnicity, which would have tightened a network and provided trust in long-distance trade.⁷ Most recently, the network approach has been applied to the very crossing of these boundaries and the close analysis of other ways to ensure trust, such as reputation and correspondence.⁸ The network perspective aims to provide an alternative to the new institutional economic approach to long-distance trade, which lacks significant non-economic and non-market factors. With its apparent distance to early modern institutions, network analysis has enabled the restoration of non-economical elements in the study of overseas commerce and has redirected the focus towards human agency while keeping the global context of intercontinental trade.⁹ Following this historiographical development, I focus on the overlap between human agency and institutions.

Company directors, both in Paris and overseas, take centre stage in this dissertation. The individuals inside chartered companies are perceived as “*social participators in networks*.”¹⁰ I use the conceptual term “network” and borrow concepts of “social network analysis” to refer to individuals and their connections. However, if “social network analysis” shifts the study from individuals themselves to the type of social relationships among them, I focus on the individuals of the networks rather than on the structure of the networks.¹¹

⁴ David Hancock, ‘The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots’ Early-Modern Madeira Trade’, *Business History Review* 79, no. 3 (October 2005): 472.

⁵ Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy Lessons from Medieval Trade*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14;71.

⁶ Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, Reprint edition (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2012), 157.

⁷ For instance Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, California World History Library (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁸ Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 177–94.

⁹ Cátia Antunes and Amelia Polónia, eds., *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016); Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013); Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2015).

¹⁰ Tijl Vanneste, *Commercial Culture and Merchant Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Traders in Global History* (European University Institute: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2009), 4.

¹¹ Vanneste, 5.

Therefore, I use the term “connection” as a “*personal relationship based on common interest or action*”.¹² “Connection” refers to specific individuals and their relationship and does not pose the fact that their connections were themselves interconnected as a *sine qua non*. If members of the groups under study in this dissertation were indeed interrelated at multiple levels and would be, as such, formally part of networks, the relevance of the analysis remains at the level of the nodes, or the individuals, and their connections.

The choice to examine directors of overseas companies as actors of the expansion comes from the role these companies played in the construction of French early modern empire. French chartered companies operating in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean were instrumental in the attempt to form an overseas empire and, therefore, part of a French early imperial design.¹³ According to Anthony Pagden, the term empire finds its origin in the Latin concept *imperium*, understood as authority, and sovereignty and as rule over multiple dominions.¹⁴ Barbara Fuchs further explains the polysemic nature of the word by highlighting the “*internal control of a polity and the external expansion beyond that polity’s original boundaries*.”¹⁵ Philippe Haudrère elucidates the evolution of the concept of empire throughout the early modern period, from its Latin meaning of power to its application to colonial possessions during the eighteenth century.¹⁶ While focusing primarily on French expansion in North America, Gilles Harward’s definition of empire as a “*territory submitted to an enterprise of domination and unification*” can enlighten us on the situation in the West African Coast and in India.¹⁷ Despite the fact that “*empire*” and “*imperial*” can be perceived as a reference to European colonisation in the nineteenth century, they are used in this dissertation to discuss early modern European territorial and mercantile overseas expansion.¹⁸ I thereby follow existing French historiography where the term “first empire” is used to refer to all overseas expansion before 1815.

¹² Hancock, ‘The Trouble with Networks’, 472.

¹³ Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française. T. 1: Le premier empire colonial: des origines à la Restauration* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 86.

¹⁴ Anthony Pagden, ‘Introduction’, in *Theories of Empire, 1450-1800*, ed. David Armitage, An Expanding World ; Vol. 20 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), XVI.

¹⁵ Barbara Fuchs, ‘Imperium Studies: Theorizing Early Modern Expansion’, in *Postcolonial Moves - Medieval through Modern*, ed. Patricia C. Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 72.

¹⁶ Philippe Haudrère, *L’aventure coloniale de la France - L’Empire des Rois, 1500-1789* (Paris: Denoël, 1997), 11.

¹⁷ Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d’en Haut 1660-1715* (Sillery-Paris: PU Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 17. “*L’empire est un territoire soumis à une entreprise de domination et d’unification*”.

¹⁸ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

Inside the typology of European overseas expansion, the French presence on the West African Coast and in India should technically fall into the category of chartered monopolies.¹⁹ Indeed, the monopoly of commerce, colonisation, waging war and engaging in diplomatic treaties in a certain geographical region were granted through a patent letter. However, it also resembled to a royal monopoly in many ways, in the sense that the patent letter was issued by a monarch who also partially benefited from the granted monopoly.²⁰ Louis XIV provided a large part of the initial capital for the chartered companies operating on the west coast of Africa and in India. Additionally, he decided on management strategies and appointed directors through the minister of the Navy. The Dutch and English chartered companies operating in India and Africa, despite major differences in organizations, were less dependent on the government from which they had received their charters than the French.²¹ The hybrid structure of the French companies makes it difficult to place them into Steensgaard's North-Western model characterized by the use of chartered company or Iberian model of empire managed through royal monopolies.²² The challenge of working on an "*uncategorisable*" overseas institution provides an opportunity to break with traditional classifications. Putting aside the focus on economic efficiency would enable further research into the alternative goals of chartered companies or other overseas institutions. With this in mind, the expectations and goals of profitability assigned to chartered companies for its members or employees can be revised.

Agency and cooperation

This research sets out to revise the perceived opposition between personal networks and institutions by studying the agency of individual actors within French overseas companies. The concept of agency is defined here as "*conscious human choice, value, and action*" and "*self-directed action*."²³ One's agency then depends on one's own goals. The

¹⁹ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 7.

²⁰ Antunes and Polónia, 7.

²¹ For a comparative overview of the organization of the Dutch, English and French Companies operating on the West African Coast see Elisabeth Heijmans, Cátia Antunes, and Julie M. Svalastog, 'Comparer les Compagnies de commerce européennes: Les compagnies néerlandaise, anglaise et française sur la côte occidentale d'Afrique au cours du XVII^e siècle', in *Le monde des compagnies. Les premières compagnies dans l'Atlantique 1600-1650 I. Structures et mode de fonctionnement*, ed. Eric Roulet (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2017), 161–87. Regarding the East India Companies see Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976).

²² Niels Steensgaard, 'The Companies as a Specific Institution in the History of European Expansion', in *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime*, ed. Pierre H. Boulle, Leonard Blussé, and Femme S. Gaastra, Comparative Studies in Overseas History; Vol. 3. (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1981), 253; 262.

²³ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: NLB and Verso, 1980), 16; Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 115.

notion therefore emphasises the idea of free will and individuals' independence. However, this notion should be nuanced by understanding the interaction between individual agency and institutions. Individual strategies and connections cannot be studied independently from the institutions that shaped and were shaped by the individuals in question. Institutions are understood here as "*organisations or a set of legal rules that regulate the relationship between individuals, groups and polities (or the state)*."²⁴ The French early modern state and its overseas companies imposed regulation and control over individuals, to which individuals reacted.

I do not aim, therefore, at neglecting the part played by the state and overseas companies in the process of empire-building, but rather to place it in relation to the development of personal connections and the strategies of their agents. The "*complex logistics and substantial financial inputs*" of overseas companies were undeniable.²⁵ However, the monopolies granted to overseas companies by the French state deserve to be questioned. Following the argument made by Amélia Pólonia and Jack Owens, I state that the French overseas expansion was not exclusively based on royal policies and imperial rivalries, but also on individual strategies and personal networks.²⁶ In the case of the English East India Company, the positive effect of private trade of the Company servants for its development and expansion in Asia has been argued by Holden Furber in the 1960s and taken on, more recently by scholars.²⁷ For Søren Mentz, the incorporation of the employees' private trade inside the English Company structure was an crucial factor for its survival.²⁸ Emily Erikson demonstrates that the complementary aspect of private trade and company trade was the key to the English Company's adaptability.²⁹ It gave the English Company a competitive advantage over its counterparts, that the Dutch later applied to their organization at different moments.³⁰ These two East India Companies were "*by essence Early Modern organisations in*

²⁴ Cátia Antunes and Jos Gommans, *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), XVII.

²⁵ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 5.

²⁶ Amélia Polónia and Jack B. Owens, 'Cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Networks in Portuguese Overseas Expansion in the First Global Age, 1400-1800', n.d., <http://www.dyncoopnet-pt.org/working-papers/104-cooperation-based-self-organizing-networks-in-portuguese-overseas-expansion-in-the-first-global-age-1400-1800>.

²⁷ Holden Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 69. Cited in Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757* (Princeton, N.J., [etc.]: Princeton University Press, 2016), 18.

²⁸ Søren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London 1660-1740* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 275.

²⁹ Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 12–13.

³⁰ Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The VOC (Dutch East India Company) and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 20; 73.

the sense that they gave ample room to private entrepreneurship of their servants.”³¹ In line with these arguments, I examine the combination of individual strategy and company structure. However, I use of the concept of “agency” to include but not limit my research to private trade activities. The individual agency of Company directors encompasses their ability to enter in cross-cultural relations, acquire credit, sustain the factories and their position, develop the commerce of the Company and their private trade, combining the Company’s interests and their own.

Their *agency* is apprehended through their individual strategies and connections which more often than not, implied interpersonal cooperative relations. Interpersonal connections of Parisian and overseas directors laid the groundwork for cooperation across imperial and religious boundaries, as well as between chartered institutions and private interests. Cooperation is defined in this research as a “*social process where individuals, groups and institutions act in a converted way to reach common goals.*”³² The cooperative behaviour is enacted because of its beneficial effect on the recipient and is not necessarily beneficial to the actor.³³ This research recognises three types of cooperative behaviour. The cooperation can be, first, mutually beneficial if the actor also benefits from it. Second, it is reciprocal if the recipient and actor take turns benefitting from the cooperation, and finally, it is altruistic if the actor does not benefit from the cooperation in the short and long term.³⁴ The mechanisms to enforce cooperation and discourage defection were linked to the trust built by interpersonal relations and previously fulfilled commitments.³⁵ An additional factor, particularly true in the overseas context, was the strong interdependence that hindered defection. The relevance of cooperation to Parisian and overseas directors is that they combined the cooperation with the state through the nature of their function as chartered Company representatives with

³¹ Chris Nierstrasz, ‘In the Shadow of Companies: Empires of Trade in the Orient and Informal Entrepreneurship’, in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*, ed. Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, European Expansion and Indigenous Response ; v. 21 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2016), 188.

³² Amélia Polónia, ‘Understanding the Role of Foreigners in the Portuguese Overseas Expansion through the Lenses of the Theories of Cooperation and Self-Organisation’, *Storia Economica* 18, no. 2 (2015): 394.

³³ This definition is based on previous adaptation in historical studies of evolutionary biology definition in S. A. West, A. S. Griffin, and A. Gardner, ‘Social Semantics: Altruism, Cooperation, Mutualism, Strong Reciprocity and Group Selection’, *Journal of Evolutionary Biology* 20, no. 2 (2007): 419. Cited in Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 6.

³⁴ West, Griffin, and Gardner, ‘Social Semantics’, 420.

³⁵ Peter Matthias, ‘Risk, Credit and Kinship’, in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth O. Morgan (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

cooperation with private interests in Paris, as well as cooperation across imperial and cultural boundaries through their personal connections.³⁶

Trans-imperial and cross-cultural dynamics

When studying specific places such as Pondicherry and Ouidah, it is paramount to understand how they were connected both inside a region and to a greater system.³⁷ Focusing on individuals' personal connections enables me to re-evaluate the position of the French factories under scrutiny through the lens of interactions across imperial and cultural boundaries. Jeppe Mulich conceptualised the greater attention given to trans-imperial interactions over intra-imperial relations in his work on the Danish West Indies in the early modern period as "*an inter-imperial micro-region*."³⁸ Despite some necessary alterations to adapt it to other contexts, the concept remains relevant to my work because it stresses the autonomy of agents and the role of institutions.³⁹ The perception of the areas under study is deeply altered by changing the perspective to the men-on-the-spot; from the standpoint of national history the areas are perceived as marginal and from the decentralised point of view, they appear as a node in a connected region.⁴⁰ The two case studies, Ouidah and Pondicherry, will therefore not be considered as peripheries of French expansion but rather as "*nodes in world-encompassing networks*."⁴¹

In this dissertation, inter-imperial relations refer specifically to relations across European empires, be they exploited by chartered companies or royal monopolies. For the case studies under scrutiny, the main difference from Mulich's West Indian case study is the pre-existence of trading routes in West Africa and in India that the French had to integrate into, as well as the polities the French had to submit to or interact with. The context of strong state and highly-developed merchant networks inevitably implies that the French had to engage in cross-cultural relations. Peter Burke defines the term culture as "*a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms in which they are expressed*."⁴² These cross-cultural interactions are understood as the political and economic exchange across cultural boundaries. According to Trivellato, cultural boundaries designate both the cultural

³⁶ Richard Drayton, 'Masked Condominia: Pan-European Collaboration in the History of Imperialism, c. 1500 to the Present', *Global History Review* 5, no. N/A (December 2012): 308–31.

³⁷ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 4.

³⁸ Jeppe Mulich, 'Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations: The Case of the Danish West Indies, 1730–1830', *Journal of Global History*, no. 8 (1) (2013): 73.

³⁹ Mulich, 75.

⁴⁰ Mulich, 93.

⁴¹ Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650-1800*, *Atlantic World*, Volume 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 15.

⁴² Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), i.

lines that have to be bridged and the means to overcome these same boundaries.⁴³ Consequently, while a shared understanding was created, actors kept their cultural identity. This distinction made the role of brokers paramount to crossing cultures.⁴⁴

Revisiting the principal agent-problem

The necessity to adopt a decentralised perspective notwithstanding, the study of directors' strategies and connections would be fragmentary if it lacked the analysis of their relations with the mother country. Historians of the early modern long-distance trade have addressed the type of relationship that characterises overseas directors and their principals in the metropolis. Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas define the principal-agent relationship as problematic, where agents' "*hidden action and opportunistic behaviour*" had to be avoided or solved by company managers through the development of control mechanisms.⁴⁵ According to Greif, agency relations among merchants were secured by offering the agent advantages, which would exceed the short term gains the agent could obtain by cheating—for example, a wage high enough to dissuade the agent from being dishonest.⁴⁶ Additionally, merchants could rely on punishment mechanisms in the case of agents' treachery, either through litigation in courts or boycott, in the case of a non-anonymous organisational framework.⁴⁷ For Francesca Trivellato, business correspondence served as reputation checks and allowed safe agency relations, among other purposes. The circulation of information about other merchants' aptitudes, reliability of potential business partners and the honesty of commissioners enabled merchants to avoid courts of justice as much as possible.⁴⁸

Recent works have demonstrated the positive side of "*malfeasant behaviours*" of Company employees.⁴⁹ Erikson demonstrates the mutually-beneficial relationship between

⁴³ Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi, and Catia Antunes, eds., *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

⁴⁴ Toby Green, *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial Western Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', in *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820*, ed. Simon Schaffer et. al. (Sagamore Beach, MA: Watson Publishing International, 2009), 429–40; Richard White, *The Middle Ground Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, 2nd ed., Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "'Giants of an Earlier Capitalism': The Chartered Trading Companies as Modern Multinationals", *The Business History Review* 62, no. 3 (1988): 414.

⁴⁶ Avner Greif, 'Contract Enforceability and Economic Institutions in Early Trade: The Maghribi Traders' Coalition', *The American Economic Review* 83, no. 3 (1993): 867.

⁴⁷ Greif, 868.

⁴⁸ Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 172; 176.

⁴⁹ Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*; Nierstrasz, 'In the Shadow of Companies: Empires of Trade in the Orient and Informal Entrepreneurship'; Meike von Brescius, *Private Enterprise and the China Trade: British Interlopers and Their Informal Networks in Europe, c. 1720-1750* (University of Warwick: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2016).

private traders and the East India Company.⁵⁰ On one hand, private trade within the Company brought necessary vitality, information and adaptation to the Company and, on the other hand, private traders benefitted from the monopoly privileges of the Company framework and exploited it.⁵¹ Following the argument of mutually beneficial principal-agent relationships, French Company principals, be they Parisian directors or French port city merchants, preferred overseas agents to be well-connected and well-informed—even if it meant they engaged in self-interested activities—rather than a compliant agent. Indirect contacts made through their overseas agents enabled principals to have access to otherwise unreachable information. As Mark Granovetter demonstrates, bridging weak ties, or indirect contact, enables one to diversify the sources of one’s knowledge.⁵² However, I argue that for these mutually beneficial principal-agent agreements to take place, they had to be cemented by interpersonal relations between principal and agent.

Furthermore, this contribution transfers the principal-agent debate to the metropolitan setting by studying the agency of Parisian directors. I examine if and how Parisian directors maximised their legitimate access to privileges through their position inside companies.⁵³ Including the metropolitan perspective allows the question of whether the same mutually-advantageous relationship was at play. Could the “*malfeasant behaviour*” of some Parisian directors be useful to other Parisian directors, the minister of the Navy or the Company development?

2. Research question and selection of case studies

The central question of this research is how did directors’ agency shape the French early modern expansion in Pondicherry and Ouidah? I answer this question by exploring how agency manifested itself and the consequences it had on the goals assigned to chartered companies and, more generally, on the French early overseas empire. I hypothesise that French chartered companies and the Navy Council were aware of their own limitations and left space for directors’ agency, both at home and abroad, to be the main drivers of the expansion. Through their individual strategies and personal connections, Parisian and overseas directors complemented the deficiencies of overseas institutions while taking advantage of them. Ultimately, my aim is to uncover, even if partially, the informal nature of

⁵⁰ Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 174.

⁵¹ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 72.

⁵² Mark S. Granovetter, ‘The Strength of Weak Ties’, *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1370.

⁵³ Cátia Antunes, ‘Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis’, *Portuguese Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012): 181.

French early modern expansion in India and on the west coast of Africa. The informality of the French expansion is studied through the interdependence of formal overseas institutions on the one hand, and on individuals' strategies and personal connections on the other.⁵⁴

In order to answer my research question, I propose to study the agency of the overseas and Parisian directors of French chartered companies operating in Ouidah, on the west coast of Africa, and in Pondicherry on the Coromandel Coast. The choice of case study is motivated by the inclination to bridge the distinction between oceanic regions of analysis, such as the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans.⁵⁵ The renewed interest in the dynamics of the "*Atlantic world*" and its linguistic variations—Spanish, Dutch, English or French—has increased the historiographical trend of studying the Atlantic world independently of other regions of the world, such as the Indian Ocean.⁵⁶ However, the direct connection between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans has been demonstrated by scholars working on commodity chains between continents.⁵⁷ The main commodity flows consisted of cotton exports from the Indian Ocean to the "*Atlantic world*" and the import of silver in the opposite direction. Indian textiles have been estimated to account for a third of the commodities used for European trade on the West African Coast during the long eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Other products linked the two regions of the world, such as sugar, indigo, tobacco or maize crops transplanted from one area to the other.⁵⁹ In addition to commodity flows, historians have shown that policy makers in Europe adopted a global perspective and their strategies encompassed the Indian and Atlantic Oceans and beyond.⁶⁰

Furthermore, a separation of the two areas of study appears even more artificial in the case of French overseas companies at the close of the seventeenth century and during the eighteenth. Indeed, the management of the French companies operating in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean overlapped. Many shareholders and directors of the Guinea/Asiento Company

⁵⁴ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 8.

⁵⁵ Amélia Polónia, Ana Sofia Ribeiro, and Daniel Lange, 'Connected Oceans: New Pathways in Maritime History', *International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 1 (1 February 2017): 90.

⁵⁶ For studies on the French Atlantic see among others : Brett Rushforth and Christopher Hodson, *Discovering Empire: France and the Atlantic World from the Crusades to the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Among others: Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, eds., *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (BRILL, 2009).

⁵⁸ The long eighteenth century includes the closing of the seventeenth century in Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, 'The Indian Ocean in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 1–19.

⁵⁹ Parthasarathi and Riello, 12.

⁶⁰ François-Joseph Ruggiu, 'India and the Reshaping of the French Colonial Policy (1759-1789)', *Itinerario* 35, no. 2 (August 2011): 26.

held the same position in the East India Company.⁶¹ The trading monopoly of Company of the Indies formally united two regions of expansion.⁶² Finally, the traditional distinction between European trading companies operating in the Atlantic world and in the Indian Ocean, regarding their ability to gather capital or enforce their exclusive privileges, is not valid in the French case.⁶³ The Atlantic companies were considered unable to protect their area of monopoly and therefore faced difficulties enlarging their funds when compared to the India Ocean trading companies. However, French chartered companies operating in both regions delegated their trading monopoly to private merchants soon after their creation. In addition, both companies faced financial difficulties, in part due to the lack of initial capital.

The choice of analysing two case-studies has been made to allow comparative research. Different generations of historians have advocated comparison in history. The most prominent, among others, were Marc Bloch and Henri Pirenne in the 1920s.⁶⁴ In the comparative method, they saw the opportunity to discover elements that would otherwise be unknown, and the means to verify hypotheses and elaborate on transversal concepts.⁶⁵ After the Second World War, the second generation of *École des Annales* and the appearance of quantitative history promoted comparison as a way to interpret numbers. In the 1970s and 1980s, comparison evolved to being considered as a tool to question heuristic and methodological issues.⁶⁶ Most recently, the new trend of *histoire croisée* indicates a willingness to go beyond the separation of reality necessary for a comparative approach, and appreciate a subject as one “*web of entanglement*.”⁶⁷ According to the proponents of this historiographical perspective, the comparison method’s main challenge is that it is a binary cognitive operation that opposes similarities to differences while being applied to a reality made out of multiple dimensions.⁶⁸ However, despite this difficulty, entangled history

⁶¹ Charles Woolsey Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 101–3; Daniel Dessert and Jean-Louis Journet, ‘Le lobby Colbert: un royaume ou une affaire de famille?’, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 30, no. 6 (1975): 1303–36.

⁶² Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 2e éd. (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005), 1: 33.

⁶³ Steensgaard, ‘The Companies as a Specific Institution in the History of European Expansion’, 451.

⁶⁴ Henri Pirenne, ‘De la méthode comparative en histoire’, *Compte rendu du Ve Congrès international des sciences historiques*, 1923, 19–23; Marc Bloch, ‘Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes’, *Revue de synthèse historique*, no. 46 (1928): 15–50.

⁶⁵ Élise Julien, ‘Le comparatisme en histoire’, *Hypothèses* 8, no. 1 (1 December 2008): 193.

⁶⁶ Julien, 194.

⁶⁷ Jürgen Kocka, ‘Comparison and Beyond’, *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (1 February 2003): 43.

⁶⁸ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Penser l’histoire croisée : entre empirie et réflexivité, Thinking history from contrastive views: between empiry and reflexivity’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58e année, no. 1 (1 February 2003): 10.

followers do not advocate against comparative studies. Instead, they argue that analyses in comparative and entangled history should coexist alongside each other.⁶⁹

Out of the many opportunities offered by a comparative approach, an important one is to question established truths and inherited historiographies by crossing different historiographical traditions, sources and problems.⁷⁰ As Marc Bloch identified, comparison is a way to detect research subjects that would not have been visible otherwise. Aside from this heuristic function, comparison contributes to the description of the subject, as it gains precision by being contrasted.⁷¹ Additionally, comparing different case studies makes alternative possibilities visible and enables historians to test their hypothesis. Consequently, it allows historians to place their case as one among multiple options and widens the scope of possibilities.⁷² The choice of a comparative method has its share of challenges. According to Jürgen Kocka, the more cases in a comparison, the greater the reliance on secondary literature becomes.⁷³ Limiting my research to two case studies, which are both part of the French expansion, makes the analysis feasible both in terms of the number of sources and their language. It is nevertheless necessary to acknowledge multiple and diverse historiographies to contextualise my comparison in a much wider scholarship.

A comparison posits that the objects of the comparison are independent cases linked by the analytical grid of the historian. It is impossible to compare totalities; consequently, only certain aspects are compared. This selection process is more apparent in a comparative analysis; however, it is implicitly present in any historical work.⁷⁴ The choices of units of comparison, or the subject and scale, and factors of analysis are usually the biggest challenges for comparatist historians. The difficulty lies in applying a single analytical grid on two case studies, while still acknowledging their specificities.⁷⁵ My comparison will take directors' strategies and connections as the main units of analysis. The goal is not to simplify Indian and West African societies to fit a comparison, but rather to compare the role these societies played in limiting or encouraging certain strategies and connections from the directors' point of view. Regarding the scale, the area of analysis is not limited geographically but socially, and depends on the connections of the directors under study. Finally, the heterogeneity of

⁶⁹ Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', 43.

⁷⁰ Julien, 'Le comparatisme en histoire', 194.

⁷¹ Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparative History: Methodology and Ethos', *East Central Europe* 36, no. 1 (1 May 2009): 15.

⁷² Kocka, 15.

⁷³ Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', 41.

⁷⁴ Kocka, 43.

⁷⁵ Julien, 'Le comparatisme en histoire', 195–96.

sources is usually a major challenge in comparative studies. In my case, this obstacle is overcome by the fact that both case studies have similar European administrative sources, which enables me to have typologically similar sources. Rather than a problem of heterogeneity, the issue in my comparison is asymmetry, in terms of number of sources available. The West African case study benefits from far fewer sources and led me to prolong the time frame to collect enough material for comparison. Generally speaking, comparing two case studies aims at showcasing a broader experience of the French, and perhaps European, overseas expansion.

In the Indian Ocean, Pondicherry was an obvious choice to study French expansion, as it became the administrative centre of all French settlements in India in 1701. Wedged between the decreasing Gujarat factory of Surat and the rising factory in Bengal, Pondicherry was the most important French settlement in India during the first decades of the eighteenth century. Although the research reaches back to the end of the seventeenth century, the main focus remains on the early eighteenth century. These decades of the history of Pondicherry have been relatively understudied in comparison to the early years of the first East India Company under Colbert (1664-1683) and the later phase, especially the Company of the Indies (1719-1769).⁷⁶ The study of overseas directors starts in 1686, with the first director of Pondicherry, and ends just before the creation of the Company of the Indies in 1719, with the explosion of a scandal that led to the dismissal of the third director.

The second case study, Ouidah, was chosen for its major role in the French Atlantic slave trade during the first half of the eighteenth century. The French presence on the west coast of Africa was concentrated in two regions: Senegambia and the Bight of Benin, also referred to as the Slave Coast. The island of Gorée, off the coast of Senegal, and the fort of Saint Louis in Senegal were the main French slave trading posts in the Senegambia region.⁷⁷ However, according to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, the French fort in Ouidah on the Bight of Benin remained the major site for slave purchases during the eighteenth century. From 1700 to 1750, forty-four French ships listed Saint Louis of Senegal as main place of purchase for enslaved Africans and forty embarked enslaved Africans on the island of Gorée.

⁷⁶ Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 2e éd., vol. 1 (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005); Felicia Gottmann, 'French-Asian Connections: The Compagnie Des Indes, France's Eastern Trade, and New Directions in Historical Scholarship', *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 2 (June 2013): 537–52; Elizabeth Cross, 'L'Anatomie d'un scandale: l'Affaire de la Compagnie des Indes révisitée (1793-1794)', in *Vertu et politique: les pratiques des législateurs*, ed. Michel Biard, Philippe Bourdin, and Hervé Leuwers (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 251–66; Marie Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes (1664-1704): Apprentissages, échecs et héritage* (Rennes: PU Rennes, 2016).

⁷⁷ Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au temps de la traite des noirs* (Paris: Hachette, 1998), 257.

⁷⁸ During the same period, 310 French ships came to Ouidah to engage in slave trade. The French presence in Ouidah, consequently, heavily impacted the development of the French West Indies' plantation economies and, more broadly, the French empire. A last point contributing to the choice of these two specific case-studies was their position in a geographical area, the Slave Coast and the Coromandel Coast, where other European factories and settlements were present.

The timeframe of the analysis of directors' strategies and connections in Ouidah begins in 1714 and goes until 1746 due to the scarcity of sources. The starting date matches with the first consistent archival information about overseas directors in Ouidah. The end date corresponds to a major change in African policy regarding the enslaved African supply market, which altered the economic context in Ouidah. In 1746, King Tegbesu (1740-1774) opened the slave trade, which until then had been under royal monopoly, to all African or Eurafrikan private traders.⁷⁹ I judge the change in the economic environment as a pertinent moment to end the analysis because this new factor could affect the strategies of overseas directors in Ouidah. Moreover, stretching the study too far into the eighteenth century would have widened the chronological gap between the two case studies.

Finally, regarding the chronology of the examination of Parisian directors' agency, I focus on two generations of directors operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah between 1685 and 1719. The selection is meant to correspond with the period prior to the Company of the Indies, whose directors have been already thoroughly studied. It matches the timeframe of Pondicherry and less that of Ouidah. This is due to the lower number of sources available for the early years of the factory of Ouidah. The discrepancy has been resolved by referring to the existing secondary literature on Parisian directors of the Company of the Indies.⁸⁰

To undertake this comparison, I have selected six factors of analysis to develop in each chapter. The first examines Parisian directors' motives to invest in chartered companies operating in the two case studies, looking at three aspects in particular: social upward mobility, the institutional attractiveness of companies, and privileged access to markets. Second, the comparison shifts to overseas directors and the context they faced in both factories, as well as their position in local power dynamics, by raising the question of sovereignty. The third comparative factor relates to the role overseas directors played in both

⁷⁸ <http://slavevoyages.org/voyage/search> last consulted on the 12.04.2017

⁷⁹ Robin Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders: The Supply of Slaves for the Atlantic Trade in Dahomey c. 1715-1850', *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 1 (1989): 62.

⁸⁰ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*.

places and the multiple interests they had to navigate. Fourth, I focus on the strategies developed to secure their position as overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah through their relations with local polities and their access to funds. The fifth factor of comparison looks at the ways directors sustained their factories through trans-imperial cooperation. Finally, the sixth factor of analysis centres on the integration of directors into local and regional trading networks as a means to promote the economic growth of their factories while preserving their position as overseas directors.

3. Historiography

European expansion in India and on the west coast of Africa

In the last decades, historians have acknowledged the marginality of European commercial activity in the Indian Ocean until at least 1750.⁸¹ Despite the overrepresentation of European economic activities in available sources, the significance of traditional and overland trading routes to and from India has been asserted. For instance, Ashin Das Gupta estimated the value of the European trade in Surat at the turn of the eighteenth century at only one-eighth of the total trade value.⁸² Following this assertion, it appears logical to scale down the impact that this same European trade had on the Indian economy, since European export was but a small portion of the total and their bullion import to India was far from the largest. Furthermore, the “*sophisticated structure of credit and brokerage*” in India demonstrates that Indian commercial institutions were as efficient as those of the Dutch and the English companies and establishes beyond doubt that Asian merchants were not inferior to Europeans in terms of their “*commercial operations and business acumen*.”⁸³ During the period under study, the French company’s impact the Indian economy was minimal and its reliance on Indian trading networks and brokers was significant.

The early modern period prior to 1750 in India has been qualified by Holden Furber as an “age of partnership” where Europeans and Asians cooperated.⁸⁴ This assertion has since then been nuanced by Ashin Das Gupta who referred to is an age of “balanced blackmail” and was refuted by Sanjay Subrahmanyam.⁸⁵ The latter highlighted the European widespread use

⁸¹ Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau, eds., *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

⁸² Ashin Das Gupta, ‘India and the Indian Ocean in the 18th Century’, in *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, ed. Michael Pearson and Ashin Das Gupta (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136; 140.

⁸³ Chaudhury and Morineau, *Merchants, Companies and Trade*, 8.

⁸⁴ Holden Furber, ‘Asia and the West as Partners Before “Empire” and After’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 4 (1969): 715–16.

⁸⁵ Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 14.

of coercion and armed force during that period naming it the age of “contained conflict”.⁸⁶ If the early presence of the French in Pondicherry saw a relatively limited amount of violent events initiated by the French, it was mainly due to the lack of military means of the Company.⁸⁷ Although the coercive aspect of the French Companies is not the focus of this dissertation, the violence generated by the European expansion in Asia has to be acknowledged.

In Indian historiography, the eighteenth century has a particular position because it corresponds with the so-called “decline” of the Mughal Empire and the roots of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British rule. Although recent works have highlighted the resilience of the Indian economy and polity between the end of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, as the local power holders replaced the Mughal state.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, historians consider the Mughal conquest of the Southern regions of the Karnataka and Coromandel Coast as a politically destabilizing factor in the region that paved the way to European expansion.⁸⁹ Coromandel merchants were affected by the political instability and sought refuge in European settlements while European East India Company, particularly the English but also the French, attempted at asserting greater control over them to access the necessary textiles.⁹⁰ The present research focuses on the early stage of the French presence in India, when they were entirely dependent on intermediaries and well before the European territorial expansion in India. The analysis takes place at the beginning of gradual decrease of Indian merchants shipping in the Coromandel and the increase of English private sector, process that the French will have to navigate.⁹¹

Concerning the West African case, the question of the impact of European slave trade on the West African economic and political development has divided scholars. Robin Law argued that the European demand for slaves by the end of the seventeenth century had profound effects on African societies on the coast, which led to the rise of the new state of

⁸⁶ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 35.

⁸⁷ See the repetitive failures of French royal squadrons sent to Asia in Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, 124.

⁸⁸ Meena Bhargava, *The Decline of the Mughal Empire*, Oxford in India Readings (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2014), xlvii; Parthasarathi and Riello, ‘The Indian Ocean in the Long Eighteenth Century’, 7.

⁸⁹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi etc: Oxford University Press, 1987), 91; Catherine Manning, *Fortunes à faire: The French In Asian Trade, 1719-48* (Aldershot [etc.]: Variorum, 1996), xi.

⁹⁰ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 32.

⁹¹ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 264.

Dahomey.⁹² The consequences of the trade with Europeans were broader than what its size suggests: it had an obvious impact on supply and demand, as well as the monetisation of the economy, as evidenced by the massive importation of cowry shells, and also on the political sphere through the importation of relatively rare European goods and firearms. Although this research will not expand on the impact of European slave trade in Africa or in the development of the plantation economy as such, it intends to study and thereby further highlight the participation of the French in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the following exploitation of human beings.

Another important contribution to the history of Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its impact on Africa is John Thornton's assertion of the active participation of local African communities or individuals in the Euro-African trade.⁹³ This statement has led the way to a better assessment of the balance of powers on the west coast of Africa during the early modern period. Indeed, by stressing the victimisation of Africans, previous scholarly works had simultaneously over-emphasised European dominance. This historiographical turn means, to a certain extent, the co-responsibility of African polities in the slave trade, which remains a contested view. However, making space for African agency in the process has led historians to understand that the power did not lie solely on the European side of the equation. David Northrup reinforces this change in perspective, as the title of his work illustrates: "*Africa's discovery of Europe*."⁹⁴ According to him, African sovereigns in no way feared being conquered by Europeans, and European trading posts were more "*joint African-European ventures than outposts of European powers*."⁹⁵ During the eighteenth century, the African position was strengthened by multiple factors: the increase in demand for enslaved Africans, together with European competition, resulted in the centralisation of the organisation of trade in the hands of the African polities.

In the historiography of West Africa, the kingdom of Dahomey, which Ouidah was part of after 1727, has generated numerous interpretations. During the eighteenth century, contemporary accounts of slave traders attempted to justify their trade by giving a negative description of the Dahomian government, calling them irrational and barbarous, while abolitionists highlighted the responsibility of the European slave trade for that state of

⁹² Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 345.

⁹³ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed., Studies in Comparative World History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁹⁴ David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe: 1450-1850* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹⁵ Northrup, 55.

affairs.⁹⁶ Later, Karl Polanyi and Isaac Ade Akinjogbin, despite providing different interpretations of Dahomian state building, both argued that the Dahomian government was an innovative political and administrative system. Robin Law, on the other hand, shows the continuity between the political and social structures of Dahomey and that of its predecessors, the Hueda and Allada kingdoms. What changed under Dahomian authority was the systematic militarization of the state.⁹⁷ By the mid-eighteenth century, it had managed to consolidate its control over the Hueda and Allada kingdoms by taking the role of coastal middlemen in trans-Atlantic slave export and displacing its violence outwards. Nevertheless, tensions between the Dahomian King and the mixed coastal community remained even at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁹⁸

Closely tied to the assertion of political control of Dahomey over the coastal trading communities, is the question of economic control. Polanyi and Akinjogbin's analysis of the Dahomian commercial organisation argue that the Dahomian-era slave trade in Ouidah was monopolised by the king, excluding all private traders.⁹⁹ Law later limited the royal monopoly in time to 1746 when the King opened the slave trade to private merchants.¹⁰⁰ The control political and commercial control of the Dahomey during the first half of the eighteenth century strengthened the monarchy's position towards European traders. Indeed, there is a consensus among historians that the relations between Europeans and the kingdoms of Hueda and Dahomey were strictly controlled by the latter.¹⁰¹ The slave trade's impact on the African economy should not be underestimated. However, the power in the relationship between Huedas or Dahomians and Europeans clearly laid on the side of the Africans. My study of the French presence in Pondicherry and Ouidah concentrates on the early phase of expansion,

⁹⁶ William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade* (London, 1734); Robert Norris, *Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Akadee, King of Dahomy* (London, 1789); Archibald Dalziel, *The History of Dahomey, an Inland Kingdom of Africa* (London, 1793); John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies* (London, 1735); Frederick Edwyn Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851). Authors cited in Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 2.

⁹⁷ Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 347.

⁹⁸ Law, *Ouidah*, 119–22.

⁹⁹ Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An Analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle: Washington U.P., 1966); Isaac A. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours: 1708-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1967). Cited in Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders', 46.

¹⁰⁰ First Law dismissed the existence of a royal monopoly on slave trade in Dahomey see Robin Law, 'Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise in the Atlantic Trade: The Case of Dahomey', *The Journal of African History* 18, no. 4 (1977): 555–77. He later revised his statement in Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders'.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Kelly characterises Juda under both the Hueda and Dahomian kings as "by a significant degree controlled by African elite" in Kenneth Kelly, 'Controlling Traders: Slave Coast Strategies at Savi and Ouidah', in *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move*, ed. Caroline A. Williams (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 151.

when they were under the control and authority of Asian and African sovereigns and the dependence on Indian and African merchants and intermediaries.

French presence in Pondicherry and Ouidah

The early decades of the French expansion in Asia are known for the challenges and struggles experienced by the first French East India Company (1664-1719) and, particularly, the relative weaknesses of the French settlements when compared to their fellow European companies. The historiography regarding the early French-Asia interactions, much like the early modern French expansion on the West African Coast, suffered from a focus directed towards the colonisation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which deflected attention from earlier developments.¹⁰² Similar to the studies of the French on the West Coast of Africa, the research on “*Eurasian trade does not belong into the fields of colonial or empire studies, nor does it fit into the emerging approach of the Atlantic history.*”¹⁰³ Yet, the recent renewal in the scholarship is common to both areas of analysis.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, there has been an increasing interest in the study of the French expansion in India and West Africa in the last years.

Aside from the thorough study of the second East India Company (1719-1769) by Philippe Haudrère first published in 1989, a number of scholars have been studying the French expansion in India through various perspectives.¹⁰⁵ This includes Holden Furber’s comparative work on European East India Companies, as well as the work of Jacques Weber focused specifically on Indo-French relations.¹⁰⁶ Julie Marquet studied the role of intermediaries in French settlements. She focuses particularly on a family employed by the well-known broker Joseph-François Dupleix (director of Pondicherry 1742-1754), called

¹⁰² Gottmann, ‘French-Asian Connections’, 538.

¹⁰³ Gottmann, 551.

¹⁰⁴ Concerning new research carried out about early French expansion in Africa, see among others: Christina Brauner, *Kompanien, Könige und caboceers, Interkulturelle Diplomatie an Gold- und Sklavenküste im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2015); Jutta Wimmeler, ‘Material Exchange as Cultural Exchange: The Example of West African Products in Late 17th and Early 18th Century France’, in *Cultural Exchange and Consumption Patterns in the Age of Enlightenment: Europe and the Atlantic World*, ed. Veronika Hyden-Hanscho, Renate Pieper, and Werner Stangl (Bochum: Verlag Dr. Dieter Winkler, 2013), 131–51; Benjamin Steiner, *Colberts Afrika: Eine Wissens- und Begegnungsgeschichte in Afrika im Zeitalter Ludwigs XIV.* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie Française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle (1719-1795)*, 4 vols (Paris: Librairie de l’Inde, 1989). In this dissertation, I have used the second edition of the works of Philippe Haudrère dating from 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*; Jacques Weber, ‘Les comptoirs, la mer et l’Inde au temps des compagnies’, in *La percée de l’Europe sur les océans vers 1690 - vers 1790: actes du colloque du Comité de documentation historique de la Marine*, ed. Étienne Taillemite and Denis Lieppe (Paris: Pu de Paris-Sorbonne, 1997), 149–96; Jacques Weber, ed., *Les relations entre la France et l’Inde de 1673 à nos jours* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003).

Ananda Ranga Pillai (1709-1761).¹⁰⁷ Her research explores how colonial authorities relied on local elites; how the members of the local elite became imperative commercial agents for the Company and were given power to socially and legally control their peers.¹⁰⁸ With her study of the French Company country trade in India, Catherine Manning made a contribution to the scholarship by assessing private trade's full importance to French commerce in Asia.¹⁰⁹ Felicia Gottmann followed recent scholarship inspired by the debate about global economic divergence between Europe and Asia on the impact of the East Indian trade on British domestic developments, and led the way to study the effects of the Asian trade on the French domestic market.¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that these scholars worked mostly on the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond, my own research builds on these current studies and takes issue with these new historiographical debates.

While the second French East India Company (1719-1769) and the following colonisation have received a great deal of scholarly attention, the first East India Company has attracted much less interest. The reasons for this are many, but the scarcity of sources in comparison with the amount of documentation available for the second East India Company might have been the main one. This is not only due to sources but, derives from the research topic itself. For instance, institutions in Pondicherry were much more developed in the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, offering more substantial data. However, for the present research, it is precisely this period of early settlement that is most relevant, since it is the moment where we see most clearly the strategies and connections needed to not only infiltrate already dense and varied trading networks, but also to maintain Company settlements in India.

The most detailed and comprehensive work on the first East India Company remains Paul Kaeppelin's book, published in the early twentieth century, although it espouses the traditional national perspective.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, some scholars have taken up the challenge of

¹⁰⁷ The diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai has been edited and translated into English and remains a precious extra-European source for the historian: *The private diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, governor of Pondicherry : a record of matters, political, historical, social, and personal, from 1736 to 1761*, (Madras, 1904-1928).

¹⁰⁸ Julie Marquet, 'Le rôle des intermédiaires dans l'implantation coloniale française : L'exemple de la famille de Tiruvengadam à Pondichéry au XVIIIe siècle', *Encyclo. Revue de l'école doctorale*, 2014, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Manning, *Fortunes à faire*.

¹¹⁰ Maxine Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, no. 182 (2004): 85-142.

¹¹¹ Paul Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes orientales et François Martin: étude sur l'histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l'Inde sous Louis XIV (1664-1719)* (Paris: Challamel, 1908). Ray's work on the East India Company was inspired by Kaeppelin's book and has the advantage of being accessible to a non-

studying the early French settlements. Most recently, Marie Ménard Jacob's published dissertation retraces the daily life of officials in the French settlements in India from 1664 to 1704.¹¹² Despite the lack of engagement with current historiographical debates her book sheds light on important issues, such as the disconnect between the directors of the Company in Paris and the reality of the trade and settlement in India. Most importantly, Danna Agmon revealed how local actors exerted some control over the development of Pondicherry in the early eighteenth century, which posed a significant challenge to French authorities. She focused on the strategic participation of local inhabitants in the administrative and political work of colonial governance.¹¹³ Furthermore, she argues against the study of the institutional structure of the French East India Company and insists on emphasising the exchanges and conflicts that took place.¹¹⁴ It is this trend of scholarly work which includes a focus on actors and their agency rather than exclusively that of institutions that I follow in my research.

The bulk of the scholarship on the French presence in West Africa during the early modern period has been directed towards the Senegambian region. Boubaccar Barry is among historians who have dedicated their work to this region, and James Searing specialised in the slave trade in the Senegal River valley.¹¹⁵ The recent historiographical renewal has also mostly shown interest for the Senegambian settlements, with, among others, the work of Benjamin Steiner and Jutta Wimmmler.¹¹⁶ As for the subject of this research, the Bight of Benin, studies of the French factory have been scarcer. They are often tied to bigger studies regarding French involvement in the slave trade, which are not nearly as developed and thoroughly studied as other Europeans.¹¹⁷ While Gaston Martin studied the annual volume of the slave trade of Nantes merchants who were mainly active in the Bight of Benin, Jean Meyer clarified the financial complexity and profitability of their business during the second

francophone audience: Aniruddha Ray, *The Merchant and the State: The French in India, 1666-1739* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2004).

¹¹² Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*.

¹¹³ Danna Agmon, 'The Currency of Kinship: Trading Families and Trading on Family in Colonial French India', *Eighteenth - Century Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 137–155.

¹¹⁴ Danna Agmon, 'Striking Pondichéry: Religious Disputes and French Authority in an Indian Colony of the Ancien Régime', *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (20 June 2014): 440.

¹¹⁵ James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860*, African Studies Series ; 77 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, African Studies Series ; 92 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁶ Among others: Wimmmler, 'Material Exchange as Cultural Exchange: The Example of West African Products in Late 17th and Early 18th Century France'; Steiner, *Colberts Afrika*.

¹¹⁷ According to Robert Stein, it would be the rather shameful history of French abolition (slavery was abolished during the French revolution and re-established under Napoleon until 1848) which would have prevented the French from having the same interest as the British in Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison ; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), xv.

half of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁸ Robert Stein's sweeping overview of the French slave trade during the eighteenth century covers the period studied in this dissertation, even though his section on Ouidah is limited.

Concerning the French presence in the Bight of Benin, Simone Berbain's general overview of the French fort in Ouidah during the eighteenth century provides facts and details about the French side of the organisation of the trade¹¹⁹. Similarly, the work of Sarah Frioux-Salgas, relating the position of the French to the geo-political conflicts on the Slave Coast at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, addresses some obscure sides of the understudied French fort in Ouidah.¹²⁰ The works of Robin Law, despite focusing on the African end of the trade, remain the most thorough and relevant studies of the French in Ouidah during the pre-colonial period. Both his work on the Slave Coast in general and of Ouidah are illuminating and have been of major significance to the present study. Indeed, they made it possible to understand the Hueda and Dahomian societies, and focus as much on the organisation of the slave trade and its impact on the African societies as on internal societal evolutions, such as the growth of merchant groups within the Dahomian society.¹²¹

Additionally, the strong connections and intense contacts of the Bight of Benin with the other side of the Atlantic, mainly Bahia in Brazil, have generated another relevant historiography relating to the interactions between Brazilians, other Europeans and Dahomians. The pioneering work of Verger, which offers a very detailed and thorough insight into the connections between the French in Ouidah and the Brazilians, will be of major importance.¹²² Filipa Ribeiro Da Silva and David Richardson have deepened the south Atlantic as an area of research through their edited volume on slave trade in the south Atlantic.¹²³ Most recently, Roquinaldo Ferreira's current study of the British-Brazilian relationship in the Bight of Benin will probably contribute to the understanding of this

¹¹⁸ Gaston Martin, *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle: l'ère des négriers (1714-1774)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Karthala Editions, 1993); Jean Meyer, *L'armement nantais dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1969); Dieudonné Rinchon, *Les armements négriers au XVIIIe siècle d'après la correspondance et la comptabilité des armateurs et des capitaines nantais* (Bruxelles: J. Duculot, 1956).

¹¹⁹ Simone Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs au golfe de Guinée. Le comptoir français de Juda au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Larose, 1942).

¹²⁰ Sarah Frioux-Salgas, *Les Français dans les conflits géo-politiques de la Côte des Esclaves à la fin du XVIIIe siècle début du XIXe siècle (Les compagnies françaises dans le royaume de Juda de 1671 à 1733)* (Université Panthéon Sorbonne: Unpublished Master Thesis, 1999).

¹²¹ Law, *Ouidah*.

¹²² Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres: entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris-Den Haag: Mouton, 1968).

¹²³ David Richardson et Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange: Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867*, Atlantic World: Europe, Africa and the Americas, 1500-1830, Volume 30 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015); Mariana P. Candido, "South Atlantic Exchanges: The Role of Brazilian-Born Agents in Benguela, 1650-1850," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 50, no. 1 (October 29, 2013): 53-82.

specific region. The present research integrates the ongoing debate about the south Atlantic to the narrative of the French presence in Ouidah.

The approach pursued in my dissertation attempts to incorporate the latest historiographical developments in West African and Indian history by re-evaluating the position of the French in local power dynamics. Stressing the necessity to adjust to non-European rules inverts the traditional narrative of European overseas expansion, which exaggerates the ability of Europeans to impose their own rules.¹²⁴ Additionally, it allows me to acknowledge the multitude of interests at stake in contact zones and contradict the binary vision of homogenous French interests on one hand and Mughal or Dahomian interests on the other. Inspired by the scholarly works centred on individuals rather than institutions, I aim to challenge the traditional national narrative of French overseas expansion by showcasing the cooperation across imperial boundaries. Furthermore, by adapting the principal-agent theory, I demonstrate the mutually-beneficial relationship between private merchants and chartered companies. Finally, I highlight the agency of Parisian directors, because the historiography has tended to picture them as deprived of their own agency and submissive to the will of minister of the Navy and the King.

4. Sources

The sources used in this research are overwhelmingly institutional, in the sense that they have been produced by the French royal administration and the chartered companies under scrutiny. Nevertheless, a critical examination of these institutional sources provides new insights into individuals acting as drivers of the early modern French expansion.¹²⁵ Concerning Pondicherry, I have used the letters to and from the East India Company directors, as well as those exchanged between the minister of the Navy and the Company directors.¹²⁶ The same set of sources is used for Ouidah: letters of the Asiento Company and the Company of the Indies directors to and from directors of the fort in Ouidah.¹²⁷ Additional information about the directors was found in the *colonial personnel files*.¹²⁸ On the diplomatic relations between the directors of Pondicherry and Indian sovereigns I have consulted the

¹²⁴ Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

¹²⁵ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 9.

¹²⁶ Archives nationales d'outre-mer (hereafter, ANOM) *série B correspondance au départ* ; ANOM *série C1 administration en France* ; ANOM *Série C2 correspondance à l'arrivée*.

¹²⁷ ANOM *Série C6 Sénégal Ancien*

¹²⁸ ANOM *Série E, personnel colonial ancien (XVIIe-XVIIIe)*

edited letters exchanged between Pondicherry and Indian rulers.¹²⁹ Additionally, the creation of a Sovereign Council in Pondicherry in 1701, provides historians with information about the daily management of the settlement.¹³⁰ Regarding the metropolitan administration of the Asiento Company, the little evidence that has survived can be found in the “*various documents*” series of the French overseas archives, which has a section on commercial companies and in the *archives départementales de Loire Atlantique* in Nantes.¹³¹ Other institutional sources concerning both factories are the archive of the ministry of the Navy and printed patent letters with royal edicts regarding the companies.¹³² Additional information about Company directors has been found in printed sources listing the assets of people sentenced by the Chamber of Justice in 1716 and in the archive of the French King’s Councils.¹³³

Acutely aware of the possible shortcomings of a study relying exclusively on French institutionally-produced sources, I have diversified the set of sources in two different ways. First, I have added information from non-institutional sources, such as notarial archives, private correspondence and contemporary travel accounts. Among the notarial deeds used, a relevant example is the inventory adjacent to the bankruptcy papers of one of the directors of the East India Company and Guinea Company.¹³⁴ The private correspondence of Saint Malo merchant Magon de la Balue in the *archives départementales d’Ille-et-Vilaine* in Rennes was insightful.¹³⁵ Travel accounts have been particularly helpful for the case of Ouidah, among others the *Voyage du Chevalier Desmarchais en Guinée, isles voisines et à Cayenne fait en 1725, 1726 et 1727* by Jean-Baptiste Labat.¹³⁶ Labat’s work was based on two travel accounts made by Desmarchais on his voyages to the Slave Coast for French chartered companies, the

¹²⁹ Alfred Martineau, *Lettres et conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry avec différents princes hindous, 1666 à 1793* (Pondichéry: Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, 1911).

¹³⁰ *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Souverain de Pondichéry* (Pondichéry: Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, 1913).

¹³¹ ANOM série F *Documents divers* in particular: F2a7-11 *compagnies de commerce* and archives départementales de Loire Atlantique (hereafter, ADLA), *Cours et Jurisdiction d’Ancien Régime* C739-742.

¹³² Archives nationales (hereafter, AN) *Fonds de la Marine* (hereafter MAR) série B: *service général* and Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres, édits, déclarations, arrêts, réglemens et autres pièces concernant la Compagnie des Indes orientales établie au mois d’août 1664*, 4 vols (Paris, 1755).

¹³³ Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter BNF), *Département des manuscrits, Français* (hereafter ms. fr.) 7584 “*Déclarations des personnes sujettes à la chambre de justice de 1716*”, 1716 and AN Série E *Conseil du Roi*.

¹³⁴ AN *Minutier central des notaires de Paris* (hereafter, MC) MC//ET/CV/915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787.

¹³⁵ *Archives départementales d’Isle-et-Vilaine* (hereafter, AD I-et-V), 1 F 1897 (12 September 1717 to 19 March) and 11J3 (17 August 1711 to 15 March 1717).

¹³⁶ Jean-Baptiste, Labat, *Voyage du Chevalier Desmarchais en Guinée, isles voisines à Cayenne, fait en 1725, 1726, 1727* (2nd edition, 4 vols, (Amsterdam, 1731).

first from 1704 to 1706 and the second in 1724 to 1726.¹³⁷ Aside from Desmarchais' travel accounts, Labat relied on a number of other sources.¹³⁸ However, regarding the section about Ouidah, Desmarchais's contribution was never altered in the nature of its content, even if Labat amplified it.¹³⁹ The travel account of William Snelgrave, dated from 1734, provided another perspective on the dynamics in Ouidah.¹⁴⁰ Concerning Pondicherry, the diary of overseas director François Martin has been a major source of information, as well as the Venetian merchant Niccolo Manucci's *Storia do Mogor* about Mughal India from 1653 to 1708.¹⁴¹ Manucci's work provided rare information on Pondicherry directors, which did not emanate from the directors themselves.

Second, I have cross-referenced information from French Company sources with English and Dutch Company sources. The Indian office records from Fort Saint George in Madras and Fort Saint David in Cuddalore give insight into the Anglo-French relations on the Coromandel Coast from the English perspective.¹⁴² Similarly, documents in the archive of the Dutch East India Company regarding the affairs on the Coromandel Coast enrich the present work with an additional point of view on the French directors in Pondicherry.¹⁴³ Concerning the second case study, the treasury records of the African companies in the British National Archives contains letters from some English factors in Ouidah such as William Baillie, who

¹³⁷ *Journal de navigation du voyage de la coste de Guinée, isles de l'Amérique et Indes d'Espagne sur le vaisseau du Roy le Faucon François, armé par l'ordre de Sa Majesté pour la Royale Compagnie de l'Assiente par le sieur Desmarchais 1704-1706*. The manuscript is kept at the British Library Collection Area: Western Manuscripts [hereafter BM] (Add MSS 19560) *Compagnie des Indes. L'Expedition. Journal de navigation du voyage de Guinée, isles de l'Amérique par le Chevalier Desmarchais, capitaine commandant la fregatte de la Compagnie des Indes nommé l'Expedition avec plusieurs renseignements sur les différentes nations qui habitent la coste d'Afrique et Guinée, enrichy de plusieurs figures. Le voyage commencé le 6 aoust 1724 et finy le dix-sept juin 1726*. The manuscript is kept at the BNF, ms. fr. 24 223 in Jean-Claude Nardin, 'Que savons-nous du chevalier Des Marchais', in *De la traite à l'esclavage: Actes du colloque international sur la traite des Noirs*, ed. Serge Daget, vol. 1 (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1988), 331; 337.

¹³⁸ The sources of Labat are listed Karine Delaunay, *Voyages à la Côte de l'Or (1500-1750): étude historiographique des relations de voyage sur le littoral ivoirien et ghanéen* (Paris: AFERA, 1994), 36. Although the author focuses on the Ivory and the Gold Coasts she gives an appreciation of the borrowed material of Labat in his *Voyage du Chevalier Desmarchais*: Olfert Dapper, *Naykeurige Beschrijvinge Der Afrikaensche Gewesten*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam, 1676); Nicolas Villault de Bellefond, *Relations des Costes d'Afrique appelées Guinée; avec la description du pays, moeurs et façons de vivre des habitants, des productions de la terre et des marchandises qu'on en apporte, avec les remarques historiques sur ces costes, le tout remarqué par le Sieur Villau (...) dans le voyage qu'il a fait en 1666 et 1667* (Paris, 1669).

¹³⁹ Nardin, 'Que savons-nous du chevalier Des Marchais', 344.

¹⁴⁰ Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*.

¹⁴¹ François Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin, fondateur de Pondichéry (1665-1696)*, 3 vols (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931); Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, or, Mogul India, 1653-1708*, trans. William Irvine, 4 vols (Calcutta: Indian Editions, 1965).

¹⁴² British Library, Indian Office Records (hereafter, IOR) IOR/G/19/35 (1703-1704); IOR/P/ 239/ 85 (1708-1709).

¹⁴³ National archive of the Netherlands (hereafter, NL-HaNA), Archive of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter, VOC) 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216.

was in regular contact with the French directors that feature in this study.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, documents in the Dutch West India Company archives about the Guinea Coast and the Dutch fort of Elmina on the Gold Coast have been researched.¹⁴⁵ The Portuguese and Brazilian archives used in this work are cited from Pierre Verger's thorough study on the connections between *Bahia dos Todos os Santos* and the Bight of Benin.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the notarial archive in Amsterdam enabled me to trace some of the directors' contacts in The Netherlands.¹⁴⁷

As my final main source of information, I made use of the online Transatlantic Slave Trade Database for complementary contextual information on individuals and companies trading in Ouidah.¹⁴⁸ The database has opened an array of new opportunities for research in transatlantic slave trade and beyond.¹⁴⁹ As with any quantitative tool, it has its limits. The rigidity of the search fields, the reliance on secondary literature for the collection of information and the debatable estimates are the main criticisms of the TSTD.¹⁵⁰ However, for the French slave trading ships, the great majority of the data comes from the *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle* compiled by Jean Mettas, on primary sources, which is accurate.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, in order to keep the figures as close to the reality as possible, I will use the number of ships as much as possible rather than the number of enslaved Africans shipped across the Atlantic, as the latter are estimates.

The chapter division of this research follows the different factors of analysis. The first chapter starts by giving an overview of the French chartered companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah, before establishing the different forms the agency of Parisian directors could take. Chapter two transfers the focus from a metropolitan to overseas setting. It sets the scenes of the two factories and places them within local power relations. In chapter three, I flesh out the role of overseas directors as multi-lateral go-betweens by presenting the diversity of interests they had to navigate. The fourth chapter asserts the agency of overseas

¹⁴⁴ British national archives (hereafter TNA), Treasury records T70/1475 Letters of William Baillie, Whydah, 1716-9.

¹⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, Nederlandse Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea 1658-1872 (hereafter Kust van Guinea), 1. 05. 14, inv. no. 89.

¹⁴⁶ Arquivo Público da Bahia (hereafter APB), number 23 and 27, and Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU) S. Tomé, Caixa 6, in Lisbon: see Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*.

¹⁴⁷ Stadsarchief Amsterdam (hereafter, SAA), notarieel archief (hereafter NA) 7997/227.

¹⁴⁸ www.slavevoyages.org last consulted 07/09/2017.

¹⁴⁹ David Eltis, *Extending the Frontiers. Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Julie M. Svalastog, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Qualitative Possibilities and Quantitative Limitations* (King's College London: Unpublished Master Thesis, 2012), 14, 39.

¹⁵¹ Jean Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 2, Bibliothèque d'histoire d'outre-mer. Nouvelle série, Instruments de travail ; 1-2 (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Ostre-mer etc, 1979).

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directors in their attempts to secure their position as multi-lateral go-betweens by interacting with local polities and acquiring basic funds. In chapter five, I explore the role played by overseas directors' strategies and connections to sustain the factories, with a particular focus on their ability to enter and maintain trans-imperial cooperation. The last chapter is devoted to overseas directors' use of their connections to integrate into local and regional trading networks for the economic development of the factories. In addition, it shows the interplay of interests between overseas directors and private merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah who acted as second principals. Connecting overseas directors with metropolitan merchants turns the study back to the agency of metropolitan-based actors of the expansion, coming full circle.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: When principals become agents

1. Introduction

French chartered companies of the late seventeenth century are traditionally depicted as inefficient and poorly managed. For instance, the first East India Company is described by Philippe Haudrère as an “*economic failure but a relative political success*.”¹⁵² The king’s strong influence on companies’ management is often blamed for the chartered companies’ recurrent failures.¹⁵³ The companies’ dependence on royal support for both capital and ships bound their fate to the European dynastic wars. Consequently, company in Paris granted licenses or outsourced their trading privileges to private merchants. As early as 1912, Steward Mims argued that the bankruptcy of the West India Company (1664-1674) ten years after its creation should not be seen as a failure. Rather, it should be viewed as an indication of the progress made by private traders, which allowed them to take over the trade.¹⁵⁴ In the 1930s, Charles Cole stressed this point by stating that while shareholders did not profit from the companies, chartered companies enabled worldwide trade for French merchants.¹⁵⁵ In the 1980s, Pierre Boule took the argument further, maintaining that “*Ancien Régime commercial companies were created to be plundered from above and from below*.”¹⁵⁶ The failure of these companies, Boule writes, enabled the development of French colonial commerce by paving the way for private traders.

While I agree with Mims, Cole and Boule, a question arises: why would someone invest in a company that ultimately enabled private merchants to take over colonial trade? As will be shown, metropolitan directors and shareholders had a limited role in the management of the companies; ultimately, decisions were in the hands of the minister of the Navy. Directors are therefore usually portrayed as creatures of the minister of the Navy, who

¹⁵² “*En définitive la Compagnie des Indes orientales de Colbert est un échec économique et un relative succès politique*” in Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1: 26.

¹⁵³ Kenneth Banks, ‘Financiers, Factors and French Proprietary Companies in West Africa, 1664-1713’, in *Constructing Early Modern Empires: Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500-1750*, ed. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and L. H. Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 80; Glenn Joseph Ames, ‘Colbert’s Indian Ocean Strategy of 1664-1674: A Reappraisal’, *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 3 (1990): 540–43.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart L. Mims, *Colbert’s West India Policy*, Yale Historical Publications. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912), 181.

¹⁵⁵ Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism*, 131.

¹⁵⁶ Pierre H. Boule, ‘French Mercantilism, Commercial Companies and Colonial Profitability’, in *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime*, ed. Leonard Blussé, Femme S. Gaastra, and Pierre H. Boule (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1981), 117.

contributed to the companies forcefully.¹⁵⁷ In this narrative, the state is portrayed as predatory and its subjects' agency is apparent exclusively in opposing the state, through tax evasion or smuggling.¹⁵⁸ However, metropolitan directors should not be seen as a monolithic group devoid of individual agency. Changing perspective, by exploring the ways in which the directors' agency manifested itself, may provide a different understanding of the French chartered companies for this period and question pre-conceptions about their efficiency, or lack thereof. This chapter therefore inverts the traditional role of principal and agents in chartered companies, where the principal, or, in this case, metropolitan directors, send agents abroad who can potentially take advantage of their position for the director's own interests. Here, metropolitan directors are studied as agents of the companies to understand the benefits they reaped from investing in these seemingly unprofitable companies.

The chapter starts with an overview of the chartered companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah. The next section clarifies the social origins of the metropolitan directors of the companies, to better understand their investment motivation. The chapter then examines a few arguments put forward in the existing historiography: first, the role played by patronage systems linking the directors to the King and the minister of the Navy and, second, the tools at the disposal of the minister to effectively force individuals to invest. In addition to these factors, a closer look at the profit expectation further investigates why directors invested in these companies, in two ways. First, I investigate if these companies could have been safe investments for their directors from an institutional perspective. Second, I explore alternative factors that made these companies an attractive investment for the directors.

2. French chartered companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah

French chartered companies operating on the west coast of Africa and in India during the period under scrutiny originated from the overseas companies chartered by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1664: the *Compagnie des Indes orientales* and the *Compagnie des Indes occidentales*. The King granted earlier French companies exclusive privileges to trade on the west coast of Africa and in India, such as the *Compagnie des Moluques* (1611) or the

¹⁵⁷ "In seventeenth and eighteenth century France the great financial potentates who acted as *Fermiers Généraux* of the Kingdom were often put under contribution by ministers who wished to found companies." in Emile Coornaert, 'European Economic Institutions and the New World; the Chartered Companies', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, ed. E. Rich and C. Wilson, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 243.

¹⁵⁸ Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, 'A Stakeholder Empire: The Political Economy of Spanish Imperial Rule in America', *The Economic History Review* 65, no. 2 (1 May 2012): 613.

Compagnie du Cap Vert et Sénégal (1659), among others.¹⁵⁹ However, the “Colbertian” companies had specific characteristics that affected and shaped their successors. First, the initiative to charter overseas trade in 1664 came from Louis XIV and his minister, Colbert. Colbert was an *intendant des finances*, and named the *contrôleur général des finances*, or minister of Finance in 1665. By 1669, he combined the function of minister of Finance with the position of *secrétaire d’État à la Marine* or secretary of state for the Navy. Aside from the *Conseil d’en haut*, or High Council, the king’s government relied on the secretary of state for War, the Navy, Foreign affairs, Finance and the *Maison du Roi* who might or not take part in the *Conseil d’en haut*.¹⁶⁰ The secretaries of state are called minister when they take part in the *Conseil d’en Haut*, which was the case for Colbert, the minister of the Navy. From 1664 onwards, the fate of the French “privileged companies” active on the west coast of Africa and in India was tightly linked to the minister of the Navy.¹⁶¹ The main goal of these companies was to compete with the Dutch on an intercontinental scale. To do so, Colbert thought it strategic to make use of tools similar to those of his enemies and aimed to reproduce the structure of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and West India Company (WIC). However, the companies predominantly followed the Dutch model only in theory, as the management of the companies was overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of the minister of the Navy. In 1720, the government centralised the management of chartered companies under the minister of Finance, John Law, for six months. Even after the reorganisation of the companies, the influence of the minister of Finance remained prominent.¹⁶²

Second, the French East and West India Companies’ patent letters served as a model for the following companies, founded at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The King granted both companies similar charters, although for different areas of the world.¹⁶³ The East India Company received the privilege for fifty years of exclusive trade from the Cape of Good Hope to India and the South Sea.¹⁶⁴ The West India Company was granted a forty-year monopoly on trade in French America, the French West

¹⁵⁹ Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism*, 117–18. Coornaert, ‘European Economic Institutions and the New World; the Chartered Companies’, 238. Banks, ‘Financiers, Factors’, 87.

¹⁶⁰ Guy Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men: The International Bankers of Louis XIV’s France*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Finance (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 17.

¹⁶¹ Jean-Baptiste Colbert (in office 1669-1683); Jean-Baptiste Antoine Colbert, Marquis of Seignelay (in office 1683-1690); Louis Phélypeaux, Count of Maurepas (1687) and Count of Pontchartrain (1699) (in office 1690-1699); Jérôme Phélypeaux, Count of Pontchartrain (in office 1699-1715); Louis-Alexandre de Bourbon Count of Toulouse, chief of the Navy under the polysynody of the Regent (in office 1715-1718).

¹⁶² Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIII^e siècle*, 1:151.

¹⁶³ The patent letters of the companies are in BNF: Collection des actes royaux: n° 767, *Déclarations du Roy l’une, portant établissement d’une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales* and n°756, *Edit ... pour l’établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales*.

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Bonnassieux, *Les grandes compagnies de commerce* (Paris: Plon, 1892), 259.

Indies, and the west coast of Africa, including the slave trade.¹⁶⁵ The King also granted the companies full and perpetual property rights to all territories conquered and colonized by the companies within their concession: the Company was the suzerain over all aforementioned lands, with no other obligation beyond acknowledging the king as sovereign. Louis XIV gave them the right of “*seigneurie, proprietary and justice*” in all the territories they conquered.¹⁶⁶ Similar to other European chartered companies, the French companies could sign peace treaties and alliances with local rulers, in the name of the King.¹⁶⁷ With these privileges came tax exemptions and the right to store foreign merchandise in France for re-export free of tax. The companies’ headquarters were in Paris, where nine directors elected for each company, worked. It is worth noting that the location of the headquarters excluded members of merchant communities in port cities, for whom it was not economically advantageous to relocate to the capital.

Third, Colbert designed the companies as joint-stock companies, which also followed the Dutch model. The predicted necessary starting capital was fifteen million *livres* for the East India Company and eight million for its western homologue.¹⁶⁸ The second and third articles of their charters stated that all Frenchmen were allowed to invest in the companies, just as all foreigners. The capital was divided into shares of 1,000 *livres* each. The minimum amount one could invest in the companies was thus 1,000 *livres*. In this, the French companies differed from their Dutch counterparts, which had no required minimum investment to be shareholder of the WIC or the VOC.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, unlike the VOC and the WIC, the existence of a minimal investment kept minor shareholders away from the French companies.

Despite Colbert’s active attempts to attract capital from provincial districts, the majority of the shareholders and directors were from the king’s entourage.¹⁷⁰ The companies’ location in Paris and the minimum investment rule played a role in this but, more importantly,

¹⁶⁵ Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism*, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Article 28 East India Company patent letter and article 20 of the West india Company patent letter in BNF collection des actes royaux n°756, *Edit ... pour l’établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales* and BNF collection des actes royaux n° 767, *Déclarations du Roy l’une, portant établissement d’une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*.

¹⁶⁷ Article 36 of the East India Company patent letter and article 30 of the West India Company patent letter in BNF collection des actes royaux n°756, *Edit ... pour l’établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales* and BNF collection des actes royaux n° 767, *Déclarations du Roy l’une, portant établissement d’une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*.

¹⁶⁸ Dessert and Journet, ‘Le lobby Colbert: un royaume ou une affaire de famille?’, 1313.

¹⁶⁹ Henk den Heijer, *De geotrooieerde compagnie: de VOC en de WIC als voorlopers van de naamloze vennootschap* (Amsterdam : Deventer, 2005), 70–73.

¹⁷⁰ Dessert and Journet, ‘Le lobby Colbert: un royaume ou une affaire de famille?’, 1315.

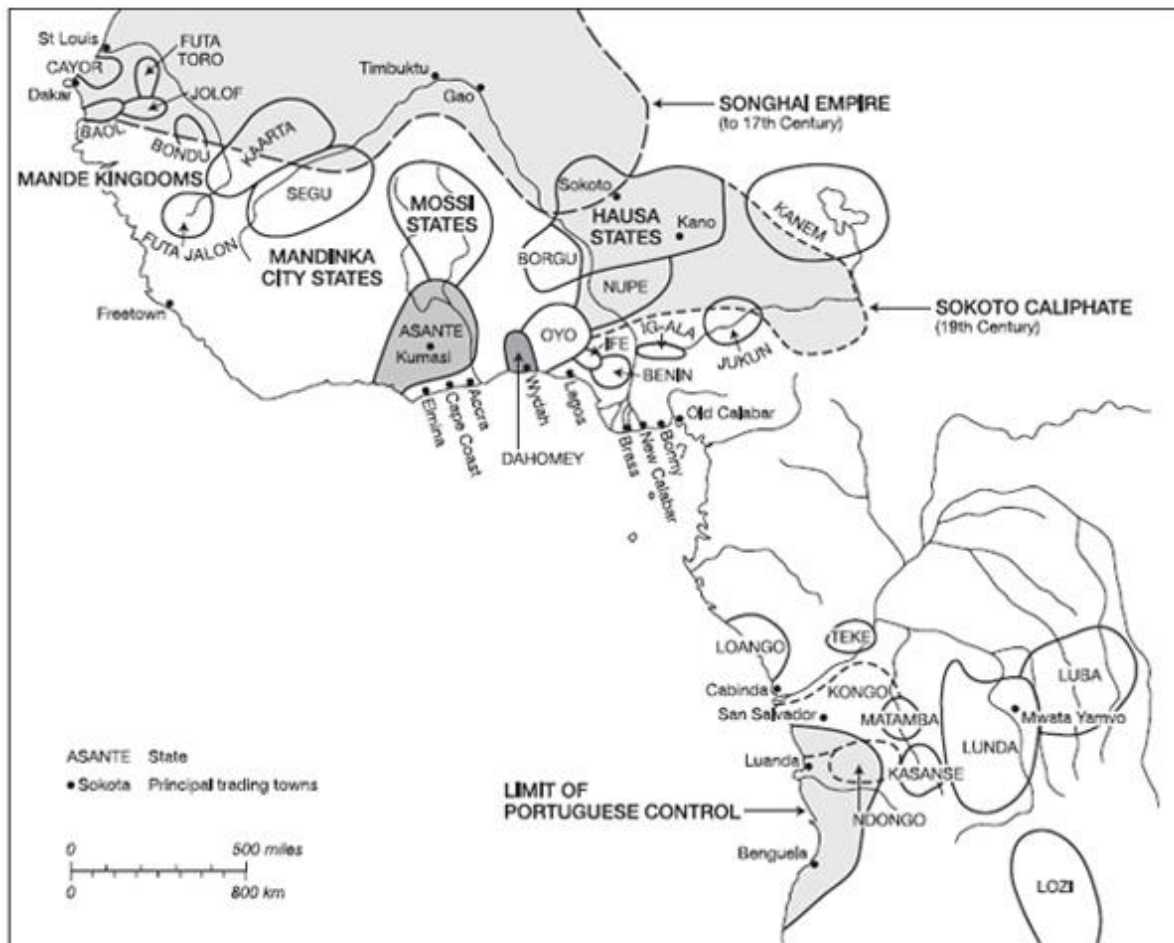
merchant communities distrusted companies controlled by the king. Indeed, no merchants invested in the company and joined the directors in Paris. General assemblies of shareholders, where directors could be elected, scarcely took place and by 1668 the King and his minister chose the directors themselves. Officials, chosen by Colbert, controlled the accounts. More generally, the management of the commercial strategies lay solely with the government; Colbert and his collaborators decided how to use the capital, which associates to recruit, and how to sell commodities.¹⁷¹

In 1685, Jean-Baptiste Antoine Colbert, marquis de Seignelay, who succeeded to his father as the minister of the Navy, reorganised the East India Company and created the Guinea Company. The West India Company had declared bankruptcy in 1674, ten years after its creation. At the time, the Senegal Company took over the exclusive privileges to trade, first only on the Senegambian region and then to the whole west coast of Africa in 1681.¹⁷² In 1685, the government divided the exclusive privileges to trade on the west coast of Africa into two regions: the Senegambian region fell under the monopoly of the Senegal Company, and the region south of the Sierra Leone River to the Cape of Good Hope was granted to the newly-founded Guinea Company.

¹⁷¹ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1: 25.

¹⁷² Abdoulaye Ly, *L'évolution du commerce français d'Afrique noire dans le dernier quart du XVIIe siècle: la compagnie du Sénégal de 1673 à 1696* (Bordeaux; Metz: Karthala, 1955).

Figure 1.1. West African states and principal trading towns



Source: James Walvin, *Atlas of Slavery* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), map 33.

Not only were the East India Company's reorganisation and the Guinea Company's creation simultaneous, they also had similar structural features. The initiative for their reform and creation, respectively, came from Seignelay. Their patent letters granted them privileges similar to their predecessors.¹⁷³ The Guinea Company, for instance, received the bounty of thirteen *livres* for each enslaved African taken to the West Indies, the same bounty previously granted to West India Company. In exchange for their privileges, the directors committed to supplying 1,000 enslaved Africans to the French West Indies annually.

In the reorganisation of the East India Company, Seignelay created a system in which twelve investors provided four-fifths of the capital. Seignelay named himself the main director, and acted as the link between the Company and Louis XIV.¹⁷⁴ Seignelay chose

¹⁷³ ANOM F2a11: *Déclaration du Roy pour l'établissement d'une compagnie sous le titre de la Compagnie de Guinée*, Paris, 1685, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 194–95.

eleven other directors, because they had invested more than 30,000 *livres* and committed to paying back their shares to former shareholders. The rest of the capital came from eighty-eight former shareholders who remained in the company. As for the Guinea Company, Seignelay appointed ten directors. The East India Company's reform occurred at the fourth general assembly in twenty years. The previous assemblies were held in 1664, 1668 and 1675, and frequency did not increase after the reorganisation.¹⁷⁵ Directors mainly called assemblies when capital had to be increased. With Seignelay as executive director, both companies came under the sole direction of the royal government.

In 1701, the King granted the Guinea Company the Spanish Asiento (monopoly of slave supply to Spanish America) and the Company reorganised. Unlike any other chartered company before it, it included both the Spanish King and the French King as shareholders, for one quarter of the total capital each, which amounted to 100,000 *livres*.¹⁷⁶ The Spanish and French king, thus, provided half of the starting capital. The Kings co-invested in this new Asiento Company due to the dynastical link between the two monarchies, forged when late Spanish King Charles II designated Louis XIV's grandson, Philip of Anjou, as heir to the Spanish throne in November 1700.¹⁷⁷ The remaining half of the starting capital was provided by the fifteen newly appointed shareholders of the Company. Although it still functioned under the tight control of minister of the Navy Seignelay, the Company gained some freedom to organise its operations.

While earlier companies had granted licenses allowing private merchants to trade in their area of monopoly in exchange for a tax, the licensing system reached its zenith with the East India Company and the Asiento Company at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Between December 1708 and February 1712, the East India Company signed five contracts with the Saint Malo merchants' partnership, granting them access to the Indian trade. The Company limited these permissions by restricting the number of ships and the license period. The contracts of 1712 and 1714 granted the monopoly and privileges of the Company for two

¹⁷⁵ Philippe Haudrère, 'Les actionnaires de la première Compagnie française des Indes orientales, 1664-1684', in *Les Français dans l'océan Indien (XVIIe-XIXe siècles)*, éd. par Philippe Haudrère (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 35.

¹⁷⁶ ANOM F2a7: Article 28 of the Asiento treaty: "*Comme le traité se fait et s'accorde particulièrement en vue du service que nos majesté très chrétienne et catholique peuvent en recevoir et de l'avantage de leurs finances, il a été réglé que leurs majestés y seront intéressées pour la moitié et chacune d'elles pour un quart, ainsi qu'il a été convenu [...] un million faisant le quart de quatre millions de livres tournois.*"

¹⁷⁷ This included the kingdoms of Castile, Aragon (including Catalonia), Naples and Sicily; the Duchy of Milan, the lands of the Spanish Netherlands corresponding pretty much to present-day Belgium; the entire Spanish empire overseas in the Americas, the Philippines and the coast of North Africa in Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 13.

and then ten years, respectively, to a specific partnership of Saint Malo merchants, also referred to as the Saint Malo East India Company.¹⁷⁸ Inside the Saint Malo East India Company, eleven of the nineteen shareholders were from Saint Malo and they owned eighty-five percent of the invested capital. These eleven Malouin shareholders comprised the Saint Malo East India Company's board of directors. It goes without saying that the general quarters of the Saint Malo East India Company were based in Saint Malo.

The last two contracts stated that the Saint Malo East India Company could use the East India Company's infrastructures in India, including the settlements and employees' services overseas. In turn, they paid for the monopoly to trade in India and the use of the East India Company's infrastructures with ten percent of the return profit, a value paid directly to the Company. The Saint Malo merchants kept an agent in Pondicherry from 1717 onwards. Formally, the directors of the East India Company remained in charge of the settlements and personnel in India. In this sense, the Saint Malo East India Company did not replace the East India Company, but superimposed itself onto a pre-existing structure. The main advantage of chartered companies like the French East India Company was that they internalized transaction costs through a vertical integration of the different stages of the commodity chain from France to India.¹⁷⁹ However, the chartered companies' hierarchical structure and centralised decision-making process made them slower to adapt to local market conditions than private merchants.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, the East India Company was not better established in the European commercial networks than port city merchants. Lastly, the need for specialised human capital was harder to fulfil for French chartered companies based in Paris, than for private firms based in port cities.¹⁸¹

The contracts between the East India Company and the Saint Malo merchants appear to have been mutually beneficial. On one hand, the East India Company directors had the security of receiving regular profits without investing in voyages. On the other hand, Saint Malo merchants benefitted from the Company's monopoly and infrastructure overseas, while maintaining the flexibility to respond to the local markets. Saint Malo merchants complemented the weaknesses of the East India Company by using their experience in overseas trade, their Europe-wide network to obtain the necessary commodities and their

¹⁷⁸ André Lespagnol, 'Négociants et commerce indien au début du XVIIIe siècle : l'épisode des "Compagnies malouines" 1707-1719', *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 86, no. 3 (1979): 430.

¹⁷⁹ Carlos and Nicholas, 'Giants of an Earlier Capitalism', 415.

¹⁸⁰ Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 322.

¹⁸¹ Carlos and Nicholas, 'Giants of an Earlier Capitalism', 410–11.

access to skilled human resources. In turn, the East India Company offered a monopolistic position and an overseas infrastructure to Saint Malo merchants that they would have not have access to otherwise.

Regarding the Bight of Benin, the King abolished the Asiento Company's monopoly in 1713 and opened the trade south of the Sierra Leone River to French private traders from five specific port towns: Nantes, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Le Havre and Saint Malo. They paid a tax to the king for each enslaved African transported to the French West Indies upon their return to France. The king entrusted the task of collecting the tax to Royal Navy *intendants*, representatives in major port cities. However, private merchants did not always have certificates that declared how many enslaved Africans they had sold and where.¹⁸² The *intendant* in Nantes, Bigot de la Mothe, had to wait for an official list of the enslaved Africans brought to Saint Domingue and Martinique from the colonial administration of the islands before requesting the tax from private merchants. Even then, major Nantes merchants managed to negotiate a thirty-percent discount of their taxes and a delay of payment of three to six months.¹⁸³ The *intendant* complained that the court of admiralty did not enforce the rules strictly enough. The tolerance towards private slave traders reveals the dependence on merchants for the slave supply in the French West Indies.

The trading monopolies in India and on the west coast of Africa south of the Sierra Leone River were finally united under the Company of the Indies in 1719 and 1720.¹⁸⁴ Regarding the trading monopoly on the Bight of Benin, the Company of the Indies followed the same strategies as its predecessors and distributed licenses to private merchants. The Company granted licenses in exchange for a tax of twenty *livres* for each enslaved Africans brought to the French West Indies. Apart from a small interlude between 1723 and 1725, when the Company attempted to keep the exclusive privileges for itself, the trade to Ouidah remained open to licensed private traders.¹⁸⁵ Now that the institutional frame has been discussed, the following section will focus on the directors of these companies.

¹⁸² AN MAR B/3/280, Bigot de la Mothe to the minister of the Navy, 31 March 1722.

¹⁸³ Montaudouin, Delaunay-Montaudouin, Delavolvetiere-Montaudouin, Michel, Groux, Morlay Booseny, Shiell, among others.

¹⁸⁴ ADLA *Chambre de commerce*: C738 document n°26: *Arrest du Conseil d'Etat du Roy qui Accorde et Réunit à perpétuité à la Compagnie des Indes le Privilège Exclusif pour le Commerce de la Côte de Guinée du 27 septembre 1720.*

¹⁸⁵ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1: 104-105.

3. Who were the metropolitan directors?

A great majority of the directors of the reorganised East India Company (1685-1719) and the Guinea/Asiento Company (1685-1713) were what contemporaries called financiers. Unlike the current understanding of the term, early modern French financiers handled the revenues of the French state.¹⁸⁶ The name comes from the fact that they not only collected revenues, but also provided the king with credit.¹⁸⁷ They were therefore crucial to the function of the monarchy's financial and fiscal system. The dual fiscal and financial characteristics were intrinsic to the term financier, which therefore will be used throughout this work. Financiers were primarily revenue collectors; as John Francis Bosher notes, "*they collected, invested or managed royal funds.*"¹⁸⁸ The monarchy's indirect revenues consisted of taxes on the consumption and circulation of products like *gabelles*, *aides* and *traites*.¹⁸⁹ The monarchy farmed out these taxes, together with the royal domain revenues, through the centralised institution of the *Ferme Générale*, or General Farm. Estimates place the percentage of crown's revenues originating from the general farms at fifty-four percent in 1685, fifty-one percent a decade later and forty-seven percent in 1739.¹⁹⁰ To become a *fermier général*, one had to enjoy the favour of the king or benefit from a powerful network of connections, either at court or among the ministers.¹⁹¹ Direct revenues such as the *taille* were collected by venal office holders called *receveurs*, or receivers. The *receveur général* collected the money from the receivers and transferred it to the royal treasury or kept it available for the royal administration in the provinces.¹⁹² This system also relied on *receveurs*' capacity to advance money to the king. The last type of financiers was the *traitant*, or contractor, who administered the revenues of the *affaires extraordinaires*. Among these extraordinary revenues, the money raised from the selling of offices was the most important source of income and the preferred activity of the contractors.¹⁹³ According to Guy Rowlands, of all the European countries, this phenomenon was most widespread in France. Individuals found

¹⁸⁶ Yves Durand, *Les fermiers généraux au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971), 64.

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 719.

¹⁸⁸ John Francis Bosher, 'Chambres de Justice in the French Monarchy', in *French Government and Society 1500-1850: Essays in Memory of Alfred Cobban*, ed. Alfred Cobban and John Francis Bosher (London: Athlone Press, 1973), 23.

¹⁸⁹ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Durand, *Les fermiers généraux au XVIIIe siècle*, 75.

¹⁹¹ Durand, 78–115.

¹⁹² Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 24.

¹⁹³ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 25. Françoise Bayard, *Le monde des financiers au XVIIIe siècle*, Nouvelle bibliothèque scientifique. (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 167.

offices attractive due to the privileges they offered, such as tax exemptions, social status or profit margin.¹⁹⁴

Aside from their role as tax collectors, financiers provided short-term loans to the crown.¹⁹⁵ In order to offer the necessary credit for the monarchy's expenses, financiers would either use the surplus collected money or make a loan themselves. Their personal access to credit was secured, in turn, by the public knowledge of their link to the crown, either through a contract or by holding an office.¹⁹⁶ In short, at the close of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, individuals called financiers were either *officiers comptables*, or receivers and receivers general, or general farmers and contractors involved in the monarchy's revenue collection. The crown's budget and power depended on their loans.¹⁹⁷ The vast majority of them, even general farmers, held an office at some point during their life, mostly receivers of finance but also secretaries of state.¹⁹⁸ Another important characteristic of financiers under Louis XIV was that, according to Dessert's estimates, half of them were ennobled while in office, mainly as secretary of the king.

The majority of the East India Company and Guinea-Asiento Company directors built their career within the hierarchy of office-holders. Among the financiers who appear in the records of both the East India Company and the Guinea Company, Hugues Mathé de Vitry la Ville began his career as Champagne's receiver of finance and then took on a chancellery office, while Robert Parent acted as a receiver of finance for the marquisate of Louvois before he became general farmer in 1693.¹⁹⁹ Among the directors of the Guinea Company (1685-1701), Bertrand Ruau-Palu started as councillor in the bailiwick of Tours and rose to a general farmer in 1674. Similarly, Louis Carrel began as a clerk of finance and became receiver general of finances for Paris, and Jean-Baptiste de Lagny des Bugaudières started as controller of the *fermes de traites* in Dunkirk and was then promoted to a general farmer in 1680. Additionally, Claude Dumas started as lawyer at the parliament of Paris and became general farmer in 1692, while Jean Gayardon was a receiver general of finance in Soissons and became general farmer of the domains and the *gabelles*.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 23.

¹⁹⁵ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 24. For long term debt the crown relied on annuities called *rentes*.

¹⁹⁶ Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 28.

¹⁹⁷ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 78.

¹⁹⁸ Daniel Dessert estimated the number of financiers holding an office to eight tens among which half held an *office comptable* under Louis XIV. Dessert, 90.

¹⁹⁹ Dessert, 579-580; 588-589; 643-644; 662-663.

²⁰⁰ Dessert, 552; 586-587; 615; 661-662.

As for the directors of the East India Company (1685-1719), Nicolas de Frémont was clerk of the *chambre des comptes* of Montpellier and became the guard of the royal treasury in 1689, and Louis Philippe Desvieux began his career as lawyer and progressed to become one of the king's secretaries. Regarding the individuals who were directors of both the East India Company and the Asiento Company (1701-1713), Moise Augustin Fontanieu started as a bank teller of the banker Antoine Crozat in Toulouse and became general treasurer of the Navy and general controller of the crown's chattels in 1711, while Etienne Landais inherited the office of treasurer of artillery.²⁰¹ Among their fellow investors in the Asiento Company, Vincent Mayon acted as lawyer at the parliament of Paris before he became farmer general from 1691 to 1717.²⁰² Pierre Thomé and Samuel Bernard both worked as bankers in Paris, the first became farmer general in 1691 and the latter the official banker to the king and secretary of the king.²⁰³ Some directors were exceptions to the general rule, such as Jean-Baptiste Du Casse, who was not a financier and made his career through the Navy.²⁰⁴

Last but not least, some directors of the Asiento Company also took part in the East India Company sub-contract with the Saint Malo merchants. The aforementioned Fontanieu held shares in the Saint Malo sub-contract and Antoine Crozat was one of the directors of the Saint Malo East India Company.²⁰⁵ The latter started as banker in Toulouse and became the King's general treasurer.²⁰⁶ Among the directors of the companies operating in India and on the Guinea Coast, only three were born to noble families: the Vitry-la-Ville and de Frémont families were members of the nobility since the early sixteenth century at least, however, for Gayardon the origin of his nobility is unclear.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Dessert, 575; 586-588; 618.. Thierry Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: SPM, 2011), 900.

²⁰² Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 628; 645. Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, 573.

²⁰³ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 532; 697. They were involved in remittances for the King: Thomé to Lyon and Bernard abroad. About Samuel Bernard see Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*.

²⁰⁴ Philippe Hrodej, *L'amiral Du Casse: l'élévation d'un Gascon sous Louis XIV*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie de l'Inde, 1999), 661.

²⁰⁵ André Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1997), 672.

²⁰⁶ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 565-66. Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, 576.

²⁰⁷ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 587-88. The complete genealogy of Vitry-la-Ville is given in A.N. E 436 A f°424, 5 February 1671.

Figure 1.2. Table of the directors of the Guinea/Asiento and East India Companies (1685-1719)

Guinea (1685-1701)	East India (1685-1701)	Asiento (1701-13)	East India (1701-19)	Saint Malo sub-contract (1714-19)
Carrel	Céberet	Bernard	Bercy	<i>Directors</i>
Céberet	Delisle	Crozat	Champigny	Beauvais Le Fer
Dumas	Desvieux	Doublet	Chaperon	Crozat
Gayardon	de Frémont	Du Casse	Desvieux	De Carman Eon
de Lagny	Le Brun	Fontanieu	Dodun	De La Chappelle M.
Parent	Morel de Boistiroux	Foucherolles	Fontanieu	Du Colombier Gris
Rolland	Parent	Jongleur	Hébert	Du Fougeray Nouail
Ruau du Palu	Pocquelin	Landais	Helissant	Duval Baude
Seignelay	Seignelay	Legendre	de Lagny (son)	Gaubert
Vitry-la-Ville	Soullet	Mayon	Landais	La Saudre Le Fer
	Tardif	Pontchartrain	Lefebvre	Locquet de Grandville
	Vitry-la-Ville	Ponthon	Mercier	Magon de la Balue
		Rasle	Peletier	Magon de la Lande
		Saupin	Peyronnie	<i>Shareholders (selection)</i>
		Thomé	Pontchartrain	Fontanieu
		Vanolles	Sandrieu	Hardancourt
			Soullet	Jourdan de la Salle
			Tardif	Tardif

Sources: ANOM F2a7, Acte de Société, 26 March 1702 ; List of the directors and their investments in Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres, édits, déclarations, arrêts, réglemens et autres pièces concernant la Compagnie des Indes orientales établie au mois d'août 1664* (Paris, 1755), 1: 439.; ANOM F2a11, Guinea Company directors, 9 July 1701; Directors and shareholders are listed in ANOM C2 9, general assembly, 24 January 1702; Morel de Boistiroux was replaced by de Lagny after his death in Paul Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes orientales et François Martin: étude sur l'histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l'Inde sous Louis XIV (1664-1719)* (Paris: Challamel, 1908), 193. The list of directors and shareholders of the Saint Malo Company in André Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1997), 672.

CHAPTER 1: WHEN PRINCIPALS BECOME AGENTS

4. Upward social mobility and the Chamber of Justice

Could investment in chartered companies, even if it appeared unprofitable, enable one to access a higher social position in French early modern society? Even if a minority of financiers already had titles, their future contracts and career relied on their relationship with the king and his ministers. The king needed financiers to manage revenue, but they depended on him to rise in the fisco-financial system.²⁰⁸ Three different types of individuals could access the prestigious positions in the French financial hierarchy, such as farmer general or receiver general: financiers who achieved an outstanding career, beneficiaries of the king's protection and lastly, the *enrichis* who made their fortune in banking, commerce or overseas trade.²⁰⁹ Vitry-la-Ville, for instance, could hope for a promotion as tax farmer, if he followed the example of his fellow Guinea Company investor, Bertrand Palu du Ruau, who was rewarded with a position of general farmer in 1674 for his service overseas as a director of the West India Company.²¹⁰ Furthermore, financiers depended on these royal contracts to further enhance their credit and, therefore, borrow capital to supply the king.²¹¹ For this reason, they had to, at times, take on relatively unprofitable contracts in order to gain access to privileges.

However, it was the wealth rather than dubious investment that offered possibilities of ennoblement. It comes with no surprise that the two wealthiest bankers of Louis XIV's time – Samuel Bernard and Antoine Crozat – were granted nobility titles. Bernard was awarded with nobility in 1699, as well as the title of *chevalier de l'Ordre de Saint Michel* in 1702.²¹² In the case of Crozat, the profit he made in France and abroad facilitated his social ascension. His wealth enabled him to lend three million *livres* to the King in 1715 without interest and obtain, in return, the office of great treasurer of the *Ordre du Saint Esprit*.²¹³ This ascendancy was the supreme ambition of members of the high aristocracy in France.²¹⁴ He became the marquis of Chatel in 1714, and Moÿ in 1722.²¹⁵ However, such careers do not represent the

²⁰⁸ Herbert Lüthy, *La banque protestante en France de la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes à la Révolution* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1959), 1: 109.

²⁰⁹ Thierry Claeys, *Les institutions financières en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: SPM, 2011), 108.

²¹⁰ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 661–62.

²¹¹ Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 28.

²¹² Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 645.

²¹³ Roman d'Amat, *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, vol. 9 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1961), col. 1310. 'Liste alphabétique des noms des chevaliers reçus et non reçus, des officiers commandeurs et des officiers non commandeurs de l'ordre du Saint-Esprit', *Annuaire-bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France*, no. 2 (1863): 162.

²¹⁴ The importance he attached to the belonging of the order is noticeable in the most famous portray made of him where he proudly wears the chain of the order. Portrait d'Antoine Crozat (1655-1738), portant le collier de l'Ordre du Saint-Esprit by Alexis Simon Belle, Musée national du château de Versailles.

²¹⁵ Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, 572.

majority of the metropolitan directors investing companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah.

Investments in overseas companies are difficult to disentangle from the other investments financiers used to build their career and acquire nobility or other honorific titles. For instance, by closely analysing the other activities of the directors, it appears that many of them were contractors for the provisioning of Louis XIV's armies. Vitry-la-Ville, Parent, Pallu du Ruau and Dumas were contractors for the provisioning of the armies and the navy.²¹⁶ In the next generation of shareholders, Mayon, Bernard, Thomé and Legendre also provisioned the armies, mainly during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697).²¹⁷ Lastly, Crozat was *munitionnaire des guerres* at the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) under the name of Narcis.²¹⁸ Therefore, it is hazardous to conclude that the financiers' careers and ties of patronage with the king and his ministers relied on their investment in the companies alone. Rather, their investment in chartered companies is one of the many contracts and investments in the French financial system that could boost their professional success.

The financiers' ties to the king and his ministers were a double-edged sword. The king held the power to start an investigation into their management of the crown's funds, through the exceptional institution called "*Chambre de Justice*." The Chamber of Justice was a "*sovereign tribunal or commission of the Royal Council temporarily established to search out those who have embezzled royal funds.*"²¹⁹ It first appeared in the sixteenth century and took place four times over the next century; the crown announced two additional chambers in the first half of the seventeenth century, although these were never put into practice.²²⁰ A Chamber of Justice took place at the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign, in 1661, and another after his death, in 1716.²²¹

Since all financiers were involved in tax collection for the king, he was entitled, through the Chamber of Justice, to ask financiers to show their account books. This was problematic not only for their prospective embezzling activities, but primarily because their

²¹⁶ Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*, 643-644; 662-663. Parent made sixteen treaties during the Nine Years' War.

²¹⁷ Dessert, 532; 628; 645; 697.

²¹⁸ Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, 576.

²¹⁹ *Encyclopédie méthodique: Jurisprudence*, vol. 2 (Paris: Panckoucke, 1783), 436. Cited in Bosher, 'Chambres de Justice', 20.

²²⁰ Bosher, 'Chambres de Justice', 22.

²²¹ More about the Chamber of Justice of 1661 in Daniel Dessert, 'Finances et société au XVIIe siècle : à propos de la chambre de justice de 1661', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 29, no. 4 (1974): 847-82.

books contained their state of solvency. Since financiers provided short-term loans to the king, they borrowed from each other and relied on the public knowledge of their contract with the crown to ensure their creditworthiness. However, open insolvency could lead to a whole chain of bankruptcies.²²² Aside from this major problem, the examination of a financier's account books would inevitably lead to a condemnation of the financier.²²³ Despite the fact that some benefitted from exemptions because of their direct relationship with the great noble families, many considered the Chamber of Justice to be the Louis XIV's most impressive weapon against his creditors.²²⁴ Indeed, every Chamber of Justice enabled the crown to cancel part of its debts and revoke some of the numerous venal offices. As Boshier pointed out, the Chamber of Justice was a "*royal business institution disguised as a court law*."²²⁵ It was, in effect, a financial and political institution and a mean to enact political purges.

Even if its arbitrary character has been contested by some historians recently, it is clear that the chamber could be a tool to force financiers into investing in chartered companies.²²⁶ Colbert used this strategy to find shareholders for the West India Company during its creation in 1664. The crown tax-farmed the collection of fines owed by those sentenced in the Chamber of Justice to financier Pierre de Champagne. The contract made with Pierre de Champagne stated that in addition to their fine, the sentenced financiers had to invest two million *livres* in the West India Company.²²⁷ In total, eleven percent of the company's investors were financiers sentenced at the Chamber of Justice. With this statistic in mind, did later chambers of justice also coerce financiers into investing in overseas companies?

The crown had used the announcement of an upcoming Chamber of Justice as a threat in the past, however, there is no historical evidence that such an announcement was made between 1661 and the last Chamber of Justice in 1716. The threat could have been made informally; to use Herbert Lüthy's words: "*it was enough to discreetly raise the threat of a Chamber of Justice*."²²⁸ However, this remains highly hypothetical. It is even more difficult to assess what role these threats played in financiers' investments in the chartered companies. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that, owning shares and serving as directors in

²²² Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 25.

²²³ Boshier, 'Chambres de Justice', 36.

²²⁴ Boshier, 27.

²²⁵ Boshier, 31.

²²⁶ For a reappraisal of the chamber of justice see: Erik Goldner, 'Corruption on Trial: Money, Power, and Punishment in France's "Chambre de Justice" of 1716', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 17, no. 1 (2013): 5–28.

²²⁷ Dessert and Journet, 'Le lobby Colbert: un royaume ou une affaire de famille?', 1317.

²²⁸ "[...] et en dernière instance il suffisait de soulever discrètement la menace d'une chambre de justice [...] pour amener les plus récalcitrants à plus de compréhension" in Lüthy, *La banque protestante en France*, 1: 109.

multiple overseas companies did not protect financiers from being fined at the Chamber of Justice in 1716. Indeed, Landais, de Lagny, Mayon, Ponthon, Fontanieu and Crozat were all sentenced by the Chamber of Justice.²²⁹ They had all been directors of the Asiento Company and all were directors or shareholders of multiple other overseas companies (see figure 1.2 and 1.3). Interestingly, the Chamber of Justice of 1716 allowed some financiers with shares in overseas companies to pay their fine in company shares. The Chamber of Justice condemned Crozat to the highest fine, 6,600,000 *livres*, which an edict halved in 1718 and was entirely paid in shares of the Mississippi Company.²³⁰ Historians should not underestimate or disregard the Chamber of Justice as a method to apply pressure. Yet, asking how the minister of the Navy pressured his entourage into investing in “his” companies will only reinforce the limited, traditional narrative of an almighty minister of the Navy, who was able to force financiers into overseas enterprises.

It is essential to contextualise the financiers’ investment in chartered companies within the fiscal-financial system in which they took part. Opportunities for upward social mobility inside the hierarchical system do not explain why many shareholders invested in not one, but multiple “unprofitable” companies. Among the directors of the Guinea Company, Vitry-la-Ville held shares in the East India Company, the tax farm of Canada and the *Compagnie du Bastion de France*. Parent was a director of the reorganised East India Company (1685) and Carrel was a tax farmer for the *Domaine d’Occident*. Dumas invested in the first East India Company (1664) and the Senegal Company, as well as the tax farm of Canada, and Pallu du Ruau served as a director of the West India Company. Among the directors of the East India Company reorganised in 1685, de Frémont took part in the West India Company and invested in the *Compagnie du Nord*, Fontanieu invested in the Asiento Company as well as the sub-contract of the Saint Malo East India Company.

Figure 1.3. Table of the shareholders of the Asiento Company and their investments in the Saint Domingue Company and the Royal South Sea Company.

Asiento Cie (1701)	St Domingue Cie (1698)	South Sea Cie (1698)
Crozat	Crozat	Crozat
Fontanieu		
Legendre		Legendre

²²⁹ BNF ms. fr. 7584, “Déclarations des personnes sujettes à la chambre de justice de 1716” f°17; 20; 104; AN E//937/A f°189, arrêt du conseil d’État, 12 November and Claeys, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers*, 576–77.

²³⁰ Claeys, 576–77.

Bernard	Bernard	Bernard
Mayon	Mayon	
Thomé	Thomé	
Vanolles	Vanolles	Vanolles
Du Casse	Du Casse	
Jongleur		
Ponthon		
Doublet		
Landais	Landais	
Saupin		
Foucherolles		

Source: ANOM F2a7, 28 mars 1702: *Acte de société* and Jacob M. Price, *France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 55.

By taking part in the Asiento Company, Fontanieu joined the core of an interest group led by Crozat. Indeed, the Asiento Company, the tobacco farm (1697) and the Saint Domingue Company (1698) were one and the same interest group.²³¹ The *Compagnie Royale de la mer du sud*, or South Sea Company (1698) can be included in this portfolio (fig. 1.3.).²³² Additionally, Landais and Fontanieu were among the East India Company investors. By 1701, Landais had shares in the *Compagnie de Chine*, led by the Malouin merchant Danycan de L'Épine, and Fontanieu had shares in the Saint Malo East India Company sub-contract in 1714 (fig. 1.2.). Lastly, Crozat was director of the same Saint Malo sub-contract, in addition to his monopoly over Louisiana.

Were these multiple investments motivated exclusively by the potential for social progress within the fiscal-financial system? It is more likely that financiers expected to make a profit in these companies. Incentives linked to an investment's profitability do not exclude additional motivation in the form of potential social upward mobility; both incentives complement each other, as an investment in royal revenue collection.²³³ In the case of the

²³¹ Jacob M. Price, *France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 55. Additionally when Pontchartrain writes to the directors regularly calls them “the directors of the Asiento and Saint Domingue Companies.” ANOM B//28 f°17, letter of Pontchartrain to Bernard, 3 March 1706 and f°36, letter of Pontchartrain to Bernard, 7 April 1706.

²³² The South Sea Company was merged with the China Company in 1701, see: Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 1:27.

²³³ Boshier, ‘Chambres de Justice’, 23.

chartered companies, however, historians have failed to acknowledge the potential profitability of the financiers' investment.

5. Safe investment? Institutional factors

Despite royal control, the chartered companies under scrutiny possessed attractive factors for investors. First, companies benefitted from access to the royal treasury for its capital. In the case of the East India Company, the royal contribution was supposed to be three million *livres* and was increased to four and a half million *livres*.²³⁴ Second, the Company enjoyed the support of the Royal Navy. The East India Company, for instance, made use of thirty-nine Royal Navy ships.²³⁵ Could chartered companies have been a safe investment, where shareholders and directors profited from royal support and enjoyed dividends—even if irregular and arbitrary—while benefitting from institutional advantages inspired by the Dutch East India Company joint-stock model? Historians have acknowledged the irregular and deeply arbitrary nature of the distribution of dividends in the French chartered companies. Indeed, the dividends were rarely in sync with the profits of the companies.²³⁶ Nevertheless, there were dividends and if the companies respected the protection of investors and directors, the companies could appear as a safe and even profitable investment. What were these rights and were they respected? This section analyses French overseas companies operating on the Bight of Benin and in India between 1685 and 1718 in detail, by investigating the institutional factors that framed these companies, such as limited liability, entity shielding and transferability of shares.

First generation (1685-1701)

When a chartered company failed, what happened to the directors and shareholders? Did the king's control over the companies make it a safer investment? To answer these questions, it is relevant to analyse the arc of first companies, which could have set a precedent in the minds of future investors. This section begins with an examination of Colbert's West India Company, which was declared bankrupt in 1674, before moving on to the Guinea/Asiento companies and East India companies that are at the core of this research.

²³⁴ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1:26.

²³⁵ Haudrère, 1:26.

²³⁶ In 20 years the shareholders received 35% of their invested capital. Their shares can be traded but at a much lower price than their nominal value in Haudrère, 'Les actionnaires de la première Compagnie française des Indes', 35.

The cessation of the West India Company was officially implemented ten years after its creation, in 1674, even though it had already stopped all activities two years prior.²³⁷ Louis XIV appointed his councillors and a former director of the company to administrate the process of liquidation. The King took full responsibility for all debts. These debts encompassed the capital invested, the dividends of the shares and “*other debts*.”²³⁸ In order to pay the Company’s debt, the King resorted to farming out the right to collect taxes and duties in the French West Indies and New France, which became the *Domaine d’Occident*. The tax-farmer in the *Domaine d’Occident* paid 350,000 *livres* to the King annually, who kept 150,000 *livres* for the Company’s debts.²³⁹ Article five of the West India Company’s patent letter guaranteed the protection of the director’s personal property from creditors of the Company.²⁴⁰ The fact that the King took full responsibility for the debt meant that the Company could respect the limited liability of shareholders and directors.

As for the East India Company, article twelve of the charter provided the same limited liability to shareholders.²⁴¹ Additionally, one of the first articles guaranteed the shareholders that “*no directors or shareholders would be forced to provide any funds beyond the capital they already invested in the Company at its creation.*”²⁴² However, the Company suffered financial difficulties as early as 1671 and, for the first time in seven years, Colbert held a general assembly with the directors to seek more funds in 1675. By then, the King had invested four million *livres* in the East India Company and Colbert asked shareholders to increase capital to at least 8,000 *livres* each. The assets of the Company were conveyed in an optimistic light to keep the trust and credit of the shareholders. In 1682, Colbert resorted, out of necessity, to opening the trade to private merchants through licenses issued by the Company. Colbert limited the opening of the trade to a period of five years and stipulated that

²³⁷ Mims, *Colbert’s West India Policy*, 176.

²³⁸ BNF Conseil d’Etat, n°891, 22 February 1685: *Arrêt du conseil d’État qui ordonne que les Srs Morel de Boistiroux et Mesnager*, 4-5: “*Tant au payement des interests des actions, qu’au remboursement des pertes souffertes par les interessés sur la vente des sucres et effets qui leur ont esté cédé pour le payment du capital de leurs actions et autres dettes*”.

²³⁹ BNF Conseil d’Etat, n°891, 22 February 1685: *Arrêt du conseil d’État qui ordonne que les Srs Morel de Boistiroux et Mesnager, directeurs du domaine d’Occident*.

²⁴⁰ BNF Collection des actes royaux, n°767, *Déclarations du Roy l’une, portant établissement d’une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*. Article 5.

²⁴¹ BNF collection des actes royaux n°756, *Edit ... pour l’établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales*. Article 12.

²⁴² BNF collection des actes royaux n°767, *Déclarations du Roy l’une, portant établissement d’une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*. Article 2: “*Les directeurs ny les Particuliers Interressés ne pourront estre tenus pour quelque chose ou prétexte que ce soit, de fournir aucune somme au delà de celle pour laquelle ils se seront obligés dans le premier établissement de la Compagnie, soit par manière de supplément ou autrement*”.

merchants used the Company's ships.²⁴³ The fact that the shareholders were asked to increase their investment, despite the second article of the patent letter, and the fact that the decision to open the trade to private traders came from the minister of the Navy demonstrates that the first East India Company did not prioritise shareholders' and directors' rights.

The appointment of Colbert's son, Seignelay, as the new minister of the Navy made the link between the Company and the government even clearer. The financial state of the Company had worsened and private traders had played an essential role in financing the latest expedition to India in 1684. Furthermore, the Company's trading post at Surat in Gujarat was deeply in debt to local merchants and authorities. Seignelay asked all shareholders to increase their share by one-fourth or they would be dismissed from the company with only a fourth of their investment repaid to them. Only one-eighth of the shareholders accepted this request. Seignelay must have counted on this definitive refusal, because he declared that the company had to be reorganised into a new structure. Kaeppelin qualified this process as an informal liquidation of the Company.²⁴⁴ Once again, the Company neglected the rights of shareholders.

Regarding the Guinea Company shareholders' rights, the creation of the Company itself illustrates Seignelay's arbitrary attitude toward proprietary rights. Contextually, the Guinea Company's creation was part of a larger financial scheme that pitted the Senegal Company interest group against another group of financiers who sought access to both the west coast of Africa and the tax farm of the *Domaine d'Occident*. According to Abdoulaye Ly, holding monopoly to the West African trade and the tax farm of the *Domaine d'Occident* would have enabled either syndicate to rig the accounts, embellish the number of enslaved Africans deported to the French West Indies and claim more bounties, at thirteen *livres* per enslaved African.²⁴⁵ The privileges of the Senegal Company included, after 1681, the monopoly of trade on the whole of West Africa for twenty-three years, which corresponded to the remaining years of the exclusive privilege initially granted to the West India Company in 1664. The King claimed a breach in contract, as the Senegal Company did not deliver the number of enslaved Africans it promised. Despite the strong opposition of the Senegal Company directors, the King granted the other group of financiers, also chosen by the King, access to half of the region under the Senegal Company monopoly, from the Sierra Leone River to the Cape of Good Hope.²⁴⁶ With the trade in West Africa split between the two

²⁴³ Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 129–34.

²⁴⁴ Kaeppelin, 140–46.

²⁴⁵ Ly, *L'évolution du commerce français d'Afrique noire dans le dernier quart du XVIIe siècle*, 185.

²⁴⁶ Ly, 189–90.

interest groups, by 1687 the *Domaine d'Occident* was allocated, together with the *gabelles* and tobacco farms, to a different financier called Pierre Domergue.²⁴⁷

In neither the East India Company's reorganisation nor the creation of the Guinea Company, was the limited liability of shareholders and directors at stake. However, there was no benefit in limited liability if the King allowed the minister of the Navy to arbitrarily ask for more funds to the directors and shareholders, under penalty of being excluded from the Company. The shareholders' rights, specified in the East India Company's charter in 1664, particularly article two, and in the charter of the Senegal Company in 1681, were not respected. The manner in which Seignelay reorganised the East India Company and founded the Guinea Company did not bode well for the rights of shareholders. Yet two of them, Vitry-la-Ville and Parent, invested in both companies in 1685. On an institutional level, were there benefits in investing in these companies?

Vitry-la-Ville was director of both the East India Company and Guinea Company. In the former, he invested 238,000 *livres*: 60,000 *livres* in his name and the rest in the name of his associates.²⁴⁸ In the latter, he invested 4,000 *livres*, as stated in his inventory.²⁴⁹ In 1687, Vitry-la-Ville was declared bankrupt. The East India Company's charter guaranteed the protection of its stocks: "*the assets of the Company cannot be seized by the creditors of any shareholders for personal debts.*"²⁵⁰ Rules protecting the companies' assets against directors' personal creditors are defined as entity shielding.²⁵¹ However, no later than July 1687, Vitry-la-Ville's major creditors asked the King to pay back the "*assets of Mathé de Vitry-la-Ville in the East India Company and Canada Domains.*"²⁵² Simultaneously, Vitry-la-Ville also owed money to the King, and the aforementioned assets were intended to serve as repayment of these debts, which led to a conflict of interest between the creditors and the King.²⁵³

The King's solution to this conflict was that private creditors were to have priority in reimbursement, with the value of the assets of Vitry-la-Ville in the East India Company and in

²⁴⁷ BNF *Bail des gabelles, droits de sortie et d'entrée, tabac, domaine d'Occident et autres droits y joints fait à Pierre Domergue le 18 mars 1687*, Paris, 1691.

²⁴⁸ ANOM C2 6 f°46, *Etat de la répartition* 1687.

²⁴⁹ AN MC//ET/CV/915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787.

²⁵⁰ BNF Collection des actes royaux n° 767, *Déclarations du Roy l'une, portant établissement d'une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*. Article 22: "*Ne pourront estre saisis les effets de ladite Compagnie par les créanciers d'aucuns des intéressés pour raison de leurs particulières*".

²⁵¹ Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci et al., 'The Emergence of the Corporate Form', *CEPR Discussion Paper*, no. DP11062 (January 2016): 7.

²⁵² AN E//569/A f°93 and f°102, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 5 July 1687.

²⁵³ AN E//673/A f°155, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 4 March 1698.

the tax farm of Canada; the payment was supposedly made in 1702.²⁵⁴ Since there was no clear rule regarding reimbursement priorities in the case of debts, in this instance, the priority given to private creditors over the King has to be placed in the context of mutual dependency, which characterised the relationship between the King and his financiers. Financiers' private creditors were often financiers themselves, and the King, who depended on them for his future credit, may have chosen to give them priority in order to negotiate a further loan.²⁵⁵ The shares of Vitry-la-Ville in the East India Company did not benefit from any protection, as both his creditors and the King asked to be paid back with these shares. The rules regarding the Company assets' entity shield were not put in practice.

Similarly, article four of the charter of the Guinea Company stated that "*the assets of the company, or the capital invested in them or its profits cannot under any circumstances be seized for our [the king's] affairs; and in case of seizure made on the request of private creditors of one of the shareholders, the decisions will be in the hands of the general treasurer of the company depending on the general assembly where the repartition of the shares will be decided among the associates.*"²⁵⁶ Despite the fact that the patent letters were theoretical, and practice rarely followed the theory, the case appears to have been different regarding entity shielding. In 1706, nearly twenty years after his bankruptcy, one of Vitry-la-Ville's creditors asked the King to pay him with Guinea Company shares – estimated at 4,000 *livres* in his inventory. The creditor was Claude Alexandre Voullan, who bought out Vitry-la-Ville's last debts to the King in 1700 and expected to be rewarded for having done so. Disappointed, Voullan asked to be reimbursed with the assets owed to Vitry-la-Ville by the Guinea Company. Voullan understood the rules protecting the assets he asked for: "*the fund that Mathé de Vitry-la-Ville in the former company [Guinea Company] on which there cannot be any privileged creditor.*"²⁵⁷ The King's answer does not give a clear idea of what happened to these shares; he replied that he would let the creditor know in a month.

The King and the minister of the Navy did not respect the protection of the Company's stock against creditors of the shareholders and directors consistently enough for this to be an

²⁵⁴ AN E//649/A f°225, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 17 March 1696; E//738 B - 739 A f°108, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 27 November 1703.

²⁵⁵ Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*, 25.

²⁵⁶ ANOM F2a11, *Déclaration pour l'établissement de la compagnie de Guinée* 1685, 7: "*Ne pourront les effets de ladite Compagnie, ni le fonds des intéressés en icelle, tant en principal que profits, estre saisis pour nos deniers et affaires, ni sous quelque autre prétexte que ce soit [...] en cas de saisies et arrests qui pourroient ester faites à la requeste des Créanciers particuliers d'aucuns des intéressés, elles tiendront entre les mains du Caissier general de ladite Compagnie*".

²⁵⁷ AN E//775/B f°155, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 28 December 1706: "*fond que le sr Mathé a eu dans la dite ancienne compagnie sur lequel fond il n'y ny ne peut avoir aucun créancier privilégié*".

incentive for investors. This is evident in Vitry-la-Ville's investments; Vitry-la-Ville owned considerably more shares, a value of 250,000 *livres*, in the East India Company, which did not respect the clause regarding entity shielding, than in the Guinea Company, where his shares valued 4,000 *livres*.

The last factor that could have played a role in financiers' investment strategies was the transferability of shares they owned in companies. The transferability of shares enabled shareholders to use them as a replacement for invested money.²⁵⁸ Given the scarcity of monetary stock in early modern Europe, the ability to trade shares could have attracted directors.²⁵⁹ The charter of the West India Company (1664) had an article guaranteeing the transferability of shares: "*the shareholders of the Company can sell, give and transport their shares to whom and how they see fit.*"²⁶⁰ However, the clause cannot be found in the charter of its successor, the Guinea Company of 1685. Strangely enough, the first East India Company's charter, written in the same year as the West India Company and sharing most of its clauses, does not include any article about transferability. Nevertheless, in Vitry-la-Ville's inventory, some of his East India Company shares amounting to 30,000 *livres* each were "*engagées*" to Rolland, a fellow company member to whom he owed 20,000 *livres*.²⁶¹ Could the value of these shares have been used as collateral? The evidence is not strong enough to make it a major investment incentive.

Second generation (1701-1718)

The reorganisation of the East India Company in 1685 did not stop the company's downfall. It was in such dire straits by 1702 that the King offered to lend 850,000 *livres* on the condition that the shareholders would increase their share by fifty percent.²⁶² Once again, the King breached article two of the East India Company charter, which guaranteed that shareholders would not be forced to increase their capital. Furthermore, when a director died, as happened with de Lagny, his son and his widow had to pay the additional fifty percent to the Company's capital.²⁶³ By 1708, the directors of the East India Company were desperate to

²⁵⁸ Dari-Mattiacci et al., 'The Emergence of the Corporate Form', 9.

²⁵⁹ Carlo M. Cipolla, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe. 2: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. (London: Collins/Fontana, 1974), 530.

²⁶⁰ BNF Collection des actes royaux n°756, Edit ... pour l'établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales, article 7: "*Les interessez en ladite Compagnie, pourront vendre, cedder & transporter les actions qu'ils auront en icelle, à qui & ainsi que bon leur semblera*".

²⁶¹ AN MC// ET/ CV/ 915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787: "*J'ay encore des actions aux Indes de 30 000 livres chacune mais elles sont engagées à M. Rolland le Chinard, mes créanciers auront lesdits commin comptes*".

²⁶² ANOM C2 9 f°39, 14 April 1703, East India Company directors.

²⁶³ AN E//721/A f°65, *arrêt du conseil d'État*, 13 June 1702.

start the liquidation process. At this point eleven directors signed the letters sent to India: Desvieux, Souillet, Tardif, Hélicissant, Peyronnie, Bercy, Champigny, Lefevre, Sandrieu, Peletyer and Foucherolles.²⁶⁴ In October 1708, they sent a collective letter to the minister of the Navy, Jérôme Phélypeaux, count of Pontchartrain, asking for help against the “ruthlessness” of the Company’s creditors.²⁶⁵ They explained that some of the “*creditors have already seized the possessions of multiple directors, have assaulted one of them, and the same creditors will exert pressure on the assets of the heirs of the directors and shareholders who have passed away.*”²⁶⁶ A few months later, they added details to their grievances: “*the charges and assets of Desvieux and Mercier have been seized, the proprieties of Souillet and Tardif have been taken and they do not dare to leave their house by fear of imprisonment,*” ending with “*we have consumed our wealth and our families.*”²⁶⁷ The limited liability clause of East India Company directors could not have been more obviously breached. Pontchartrain found some solutions to pay the most pressing creditors and, in 1708, granted licenses to private traders to engage in commerce in the Company’s area of exclusive privilege.

The first Guinea Company’s end was similar to its creation; the King granted its privileges to a new group of directors under the pretext of negotiating a bigger contract: the Spanish Asiento. The French and Spanish kings signed the treaty granting the Asiento to a French chartered company on 14 September 1701. According to the treaty, the new “*asientist*” benefitted from exclusive rights to bring a total of 48,000 enslaved Africans to Spanish America over ten years.²⁶⁸ The company formed only a few months later and took the name Asiento Company. The minister of the Navy, Pontchartrain, initially considered granting the monopoly to the *Compagnie de Saint Domingue*, which had been created in 1698 and received privileges from Louis XIV to trade enslaved Africans on the French island of Saint Domingue. The Company’s mission was to promote the newly acquired island after the

²⁶⁴ ANOM C2 13 f°11, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 18 March 1708.

²⁶⁵ ANOM C2 13 f°84, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 2 October 1708: “*La situation violente dans laquelle se trouve la compagnie des indes orientales par les poursuites rigoureuses de ses créanciers ne permettant pas aux directeurs de garder le silence*”.

²⁶⁶ ANOM C2 13 f°84, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 2 October 1708: “*Quelques-uns de leurs créanciers ont déjà fait saisir réellement les biens de plusieurs directeurs on a attenté à la personne de l’un d’eux et les mêmes créanciers vont exercer leurs contraintes sur les effets des héritiers des décédés, tant actionnaires que directeurs*”.

²⁶⁷ ANOM C2 13 f° 108, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 1708: “*On a saisi réellement les charges et les biens des srs. Desvieux et Mercier, on a exécuté les meubles de Souillet et Tardif, les uns et les autres sont obligés de garder leurs maisons, ce n’en osent sortir crainte d’estre traînés en prison. [...] Nous avons épuisé nos fortunes et nos familles*”.

²⁶⁸ ANOM F2a7: Article 19 of the Asiento treaty.

Treaty of Rijswijck in 1697, the sugar industry and trade with the Spanish empire.²⁶⁹ Among the directors were Crozat, Bernard, Mayon, Thomé, Vanolles, Du Casse and Landais.

However, this Company suffered a competitive disadvantage; unlike the Guinea Company, it had not been granted the right of *entrepôt*, or the exemption of taxes on the storage of foreign merchandise necessary for its trade in the French ports, and, most importantly, it did not benefit from an exemption on half of the taxes levied on imported goods from the French West Indies.²⁷⁰ Crozat and his partners threatened not to take over the Asiento enterprise if they were not granted the Guinea Company's special privileges. On 12 September 1701, Pontchartrain sent the Guinea Company's act of abrogation to the minister of Finance.²⁷¹ The act stated that the Guinea Company failed to meet the conditions under which the privileges had been granted—the Company had not brought the promised number of enslaved Africans to the French West Indies. The act of abrogation only mentioned eight of the Asiento Company investors: Mayon, Bernard, Crozat, Thomé, Vanolles, Landais, Le Gendre D'armigny and Foucherolles would benefit from the same privileges as the Guinea Company.²⁷² On 19 October 1701, Louis XIV appointed Pontchartrain as director of the Asiento Company.²⁷³ The argument that the Guinea Company failed to meet the conditions of their charter, which mirrored the edict granting the Guinea Company part of the Senegal Company's privilege in 1685, was enough for the King to appoint these new directors. Next to the Asiento treaty between the French and Spanish Kings, the new group of directors signed a separate notarial deed, the *acte de société*, in March 1702.²⁷⁴

Despite the access to the tax-exemption privilege of the Guinea Company, the Asiento Company started accumulating debts immediately after its creation. By 1704, creditors asked the directors to add a total of 2,000 *écus*, or 6,000 *livres*. Two-thirds of the directors agreed, but delayed their payment. Creditors showed their impatience and directors were “under

²⁶⁹ Erin M. Greenwald, *Marc-Antoine Caillot and the Company of the Indies in Louisiana: Trade in the French Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 97.

²⁷⁰ Since the *arrêts* of 1682 and 1684, the measures against the entry of colonial sugar in the metropolis had increased and in 1698, sugar refined in the West Indies had been assimilated to foreign sugar which meant an increase in taxes. Only the raw sugar imported for metropolitan refinery benefited from relatively low taxes. Claude-Frédéric Lévy, *Capitalisme et pouvoirs au siècle des Lumières, t. 1: les fondateurs, des origines à 1715* (Paris-Den Haag: Mouton, 1969), 161.

²⁷¹ ANOM F2a11, July 9 1701: *Édit de subrogation de la Compagnie de Guinée*: “Sa majesté estant en son conseil a subrogé et subroge de leur consentement, les srs Mayon, Crozat, Thomé, Bernard, Vanolles, Landais, Legendre D'armigny et Foucherolles, au privilège accordé par l'édit du mois de février 1685”.

²⁷² Despite the strong opposition of the “*Cinq grosses fermes*” the edict of the 28 October allowed the Asiento/Guinea Company the right of *entrepôt*.

²⁷³ ANOM B//24 F210: “*Arrest qui nomme Pontchartrain directeur pour le Roy dans la compagnie de l'Assiente et en son absence M. Des Haguais à Fontainebleau le 19 octobre 1701.*”

²⁷⁴ ANOM F2a7, 28 mars 1702: *Acte de société*.

attack from all sides.”²⁷⁵ In the *acte de société*, no clause guaranteed the limited liability of the directors. Additionally, the notarial deed prevented transferability of shares without unanimous consent of the directors, including Pontchartrain.²⁷⁶ In many respects, this *acte de société* corresponds with the traditional *societas*, which was a private contract of partnership without limited liability or entity shielding, and shares were transferable under the condition that all partners agreed.²⁷⁷ However, the contract binding the Asiento Company directors differed from traditional Roman partnership laws in two important ways.

First, the fundamental rule of “*exit at will*” for individual partners of the *societas* did not apply to the Asiento directors.²⁷⁸ A change in director would not provoke the dissolution of the contract. In the event of the death of a partner, his shares would be inherited by his heir. The latter was to keep updated on the past and current activities of the Company, without being allowed to attend the meetings.²⁷⁹ Second, each individual partner was not allowed to “*force the liquidation of the partnership.*”²⁸⁰ Rather, in 1705 and 1707, Pontchartrain asked directors to increase their share, while the King lent them ships to keep the Company afloat.²⁸¹ By that time, the Company had accumulated 1,600,000 *livres* of debt and creditors immediately took the profit. However, in 1708, the directors refused to increase their capital in the Company and the only solution appeared to be sub-contracting part of their treaty. However, sub-contracting attempts were not successful due to complaints from the Spanish authorities about French traders smuggling.²⁸²

Limited liability, entity shielding, transferability of shares and, more generally, the rights of shareholders and directors, when they were stated in the Companies charters, were not respected. These institutional factors could not have been an incentive to invest in these companies. What else could have made these companies attractive?

²⁷⁵ ANOM F2 7, 20 September 1704: “*Nous sommes assaillis de toutes parts*”.

²⁷⁶ ANOM F2a7, 28 mars 1702: *Acte de société*, article 10.

²⁷⁷ Dari-Mattiacci et al., ‘The Emergence of the Corporate Form’, 15.

²⁷⁸ Dari-Mattiacci et al., 2.

²⁷⁹ ANOM F2a7, 28 mars 1702: *Acte de société*, article 11.

²⁸⁰ Dari-Mattiacci et al., ‘The Emergence of the Corporate Form’, 2.

²⁸¹ ANOM F2a8, letter of Arnoul to Pontchartrain, 21 February 1705 and AN/MAR/B2/199, letter of Pontchartrain to the directors of the Asiento Company, 28 December 1707.

²⁸² Four main attempts were made: in 1702 with Danican de l’Épine and Natales Stephanini in ANOM B//24 Pontchartrain to Des Haguais, 4 October 1702; in 1707 with la Chipaudière Magon and de la Boulaye in ANOM F2a8, 1709 *Mémoire sur le refus que font MM.de La Boulaye*; in 1707 with the Saint Domingue Company in AN B2//198 letter of Pontchartrain to the directors, 31 August 1707; in 1707 with an inhabitant of Martinique called Chourio in ANOM F2a8 f°25, Copy of the treaty made in Saint, 25 November 1707.

6. Informal profits: personal market access

While opportunities for upward social mobility played a role in the financiers' investments in multiple overseas chartered companies, it appears to be only part of the explanation. Given that profit and social progress were tightly intertwined in the careers of financiers, the expectation of profit, or at least of safe investment, should not be dismissed. However, as shown in the previous section, institutional factors did not increase the attractiveness of these chartered companies. While Companies' formal profits do not appear to be a strong motivation for directors, the same cannot be said for informal profits. In his extensive study of the Company of the Indies, created in 1719, Philippe Haudrère notes that some directors used their position to obtain private access to markets, with limited or no competition.²⁸³ Did the directors of the Guinea/Asiento and East India Companies use their position as directors to engage in private trade through the Company's infrastructure?

Guinea and East India Companies director: Vitry-la-Ville

Among the directors of the reorganised East India Company and the Guinea Company in 1685, Vitry-la-Ville provides a unique insight into the private economic activities of directors thanks to the inventory of his assets, made after his bankruptcy. Before becoming a director in the East India Company, Vitry-la-Ville benefitted from the opening of the East India trade to private businessmen, through licenses, by royal edict in January 1682. To have access to the Indian market, the crown required businessmen to use the Company's ships and pay ten percent on the commodities brought both to and from India.²⁸⁴ Together with Jean-Baptiste Pocquelin, an East India Company director, Vitry-la-Ville invested 107,000 *livres*, sent to India on a Company ship in October 1682.²⁸⁵ Vitry-la-Ville and Pocquelin also asked if they could take advantage of the Company's infrastructure in India, such as factors and trading posts, and offered to pay for this service.²⁸⁶

Vitry-la-Ville and Pocquelin formed a partnership, which apparently worked well because they sent an additional 125,109 *livres* on the *Blampignon* in February 1683, and sent no less than 100,000 *livres* on each of the three Company ships departing for India in November of the same year.²⁸⁷ In January 1684, the Company paid them 254,590 *livres* on the

²⁸³ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1:140. It was the case of Gabriel Michel, director of the India Company, who signed contracts of slave supplies for his own private company based in Nantes on terms which were not profitable to the India Company.

²⁸⁴ ANOM C2 5, East India Company directors, 17 November 1682.

²⁸⁵ ANOM C2 5, East India Company directors, 16 October 1682.

²⁸⁶ ANOM C2 5, East India Company directors, 21 January 1682.

²⁸⁷ ANOM C2 5, East India Company directors, 27 February 1683 and 17 November 1683.

first part of their cargoes and 440,720 *livres* for the rest of the goods in November 1684.²⁸⁸ Despite the fact that the cost of the initial investment still had to be deducted from the amount they received from the Company, the partnership was profitable. Strangely enough, it seems that the Company only gave the license to this particular partnership of Vitry-la-Ville and Pocquelin.²⁸⁹ Pocquelin's position as director of the East India Company since its creation in 1664 probably facilitated the access to the market under monopoly.²⁹⁰

Additionally, the inventory of Vitry-la-Ville sheds light on other commercial activities besides the capital invested in companies. His assets were evaluated at 2,896,246 *livres*, among which 574,000 *livres* were shares of overseas companies and the Canadian tax farm.²⁹¹ His investment in the East India Company, as previously stated, amounted to 268,000 *livres*, 60,000 *livres* in his name and the rest in the name of some of his associates, and he invested 4,000 *livres* in the Guinea Company. At the time of the inventory, Vitry-la-Ville still had 250,000 *livres* in textiles in a warehouse in Rouen, mentioned in the sources as “*painted textiles*.”²⁹² These textiles are referred to, in the notarial minutes of the management of his bankruptcy, as belonging to Vitry-la-Ville for his own account.²⁹³ It can be safely assumed that these textiles came from India; all of the Company ships that carried Vitry-la-Ville's commodities in the early 1680s arrived in Rouen, and painted textiles were one of the major Indian commodities brought back to France. Additionally, Vitry-la-Ville had 35,000 *livres* in corals, probably from his involvement in the *Compagnie du Bastion de France* because corals came mostly from the Mediterranean, which was on the way to Surat and Siam.²⁹⁴ Corals, in addition to precious metals, were an important commodity for the trade in India.²⁹⁵ It made sense, from an economic perspective, for Vitry-la-Ville to be simultaneously an important shareholder of the *Compagnie du Bastion de France*—he owned one-fourth of the company—and a director of the East India Company, since commodity chains connected the two markets through corals, among other things.

²⁸⁸ ANOM C2 5, East India Company directors, 5 January 1684 and 16 November 1684.

²⁸⁹ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*. Appendix: *table de la navigation des Français aux Indes de 1665 à 1720*.

²⁹⁰ Pocquelin appears as a director of the company in 1664 Dufresne de Francheville, *Histoire de la Compagnie des Indes avec les titres de ses concessions et privilèges* (Paris, 1738), 177.

²⁹¹ AN MC// ET/ CV/ 915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787: *Ferme du Canada* : 220 000 *Indes orientales* : 60 000 (178 000 in the name of his associates) *Bastion de France* : 100 000 (extra loan of 190 000) *Société de Guinée*: 4 000

²⁹² AN E//649/A, *arrêt du conseil d'État*.

²⁹³ AN MC// ET/ CV/ 915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787.

²⁹⁴ AN MC// ET/ CV/ 915, *Direction de Vitry la Ville*, 24 March 1787.

²⁹⁵ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, 261.

Did similar links exist between the Guinea Company and the East India Company? Indian textiles were essential commodities to the West African trade. Were the painted textiles in Rouen aimed at the African markets? Were the 8,000 *livres* that Vitry-la-Ville owned in commodities on the “Gold Coast” made up of cowry shells or textiles he had from India? We cannot know for sure, because the inventory does not specify the type of commodity in question, but it is probable. The last confirmation of his private business as director of chartered companies is the bottomry loan, a contract that combined credit and insurance, he made for 4,000 *livres* to Du Casse. Du Casse was one of the founders of the Guinea Company, a future governor of Saint Domingue and, most importantly, the negotiator of the Spanish Asiento in 1701. He was a key figure in the nascent French slave trade and his voyage, insured by Vitry-la-Ville, was probably to Saint Domingue via West Africa.²⁹⁶ Vitry-la-Ville, through a bottomry loan, indirectly contributed to Du Casse’s private enterprise and enabled Du Casse to trade privately in the region under the Guinea Company’s monopoly. Vitry-la-Ville was not the only one involved in private trade through the Company; the official archive includes a record of another director, Le Brun, who asked the Company official in Pondicherry to sell emeralds for his private profit.²⁹⁷

Asiento Company directors: Legendre, Du Casse and Bernard

Declarations of the financiers under investigation by the Chamber of Justice in 1716 constitute a significant source of information about the directors of the Asiento and East India companies’ assets between 1701 and 1716. In his declaration to the Chamber of Justice in 1716, Landais stated that he made 200,000 *livres* of profits in multiple “*sociétés d’armement et de marchandises*” in 1697.²⁹⁸ A year later he became director of the newly created Saint Domingue Company (1698), where he owned shares worth 3,300 *livres*, the South Sea Company (1698), where he possessed 34,000 *livres* in shares and the China Company (1698) in which he invested 2,000 *livres*. The South Sea Company was created in 1698 for illicit trade to the coasts of South America in the Pacific Ocean.²⁹⁹ That same year, a Parisian partnership called the China Company was granted exclusive privileges to trade to China.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Du Casse took also part in the Compagnie de Saint Domingue and was made governor of Saint Domingue in 1691. He became a major actor in the negotiation of the Asiento contract (contract of slave supply to the Spanish Americas) in 1701.

²⁹⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°11, letter of Martin, 2 February 1701.

²⁹⁸ BNF ms. fr. 7584, “*Déclarations des personnes sujettes à la chambre de justice de 1716*” f°20 : Landais “*En 1694 il entra dans plusieurs sociétés d’armement et de marchandises où il se trouva avoir gagné en 1697 200 000 livres*”.

²⁹⁹ Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1:56.

³⁰⁰ The partnership included Jean Jourdan de Grancé and Etienne Demeuves, in Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1:27.

Therefore, it is no surprise to see Landais as one of the directors of the Asiento Company and the East India Company in 1701.³⁰¹

Landais' investments in overseas companies formed twelve percent of his total declared wealth in 1716, of which he invested a quarter in the East India Company.³⁰² His shares in the East India Company amounted to 25,517 *livres* and appear in the documents of the Chamber of Justice. But there are no traces of his assets in the Asiento Company, as the latter was dissolved in 1713, a few years before the Chamber of Justice took place. Nevertheless, an estimate of his investment can be made from the private contract signed by all partners in the Asiento Company. The fifteen signing parties were to provide half of the total capital, or two million *livres*, equally, which would amount to around 133,300 *livres*.³⁰³ The diversification of the portfolio and the amount of funds invested point towards prospective profits as a motivation to invest. Indeed, George Scelle admits that “*it is improbable that the directors did not get any profit out of the [Asiento] enterprise.*”³⁰⁴ Where did this profit come from?

Smuggling provided a possible source of profit for the Asiento Company directors. In 1704, Spanish officials discovered private merchandise on board the ship *L'Hirondelle*. Several individuals owned this private merchandise, among them director of the Asiento Company, Legendre d'Armigny. The Company sent Legendre to Spanish America to check on local agents from 1702 until 1704.³⁰⁵ During this mission, he loaded some silver *vaisselle* and 200 *écus*, or 600 *livres*, of Chinese textiles on the aforementioned Asiento Company ship for his own benefit. This was not a large personal cargo, but it cannot be determined if he declared everything because the penalties were negligible. Additionally, the shipment included 17,000 to 18,000 *écus*, or 51,000 to 54,000 *livres*, worth of cochineal for the account of Parisian traders.³⁰⁶ Historians have acknowledged that Asiento Company directors made their profit not on the slave trade to Spanish America, but on the commerce of French merchandise, legally or otherwise.³⁰⁷ In 1709, the Company directors even attempted to

³⁰¹ ANOM C2 9 f°27, the directors of the East India Company, 24 January 1702.

³⁰² Total assets: 1 483 905 *livres* among which 139 627 *livres* in overseas Companies investments.

³⁰³ ANOM F2a7 Article 2 of the Asiento treaty.

³⁰⁴ Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille*, 444. “Il n'est pas probable que les directeurs n'aient tiré aucun bénéfice de l'entreprise”.

³⁰⁵ ANOM F2a7 “*Procès-Verbal de Legendre d'Armigny sur sa gestion aux Indes Occidentales dans la tournée qu'il y a fait en 1702, 1703 et 1704 pour l'assiette royal des nègres*”.

³⁰⁶ Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille*, 387–88.

³⁰⁷ “*Le produit des cargaisons ne proviendra pas toujours de la vente des nègres mais de marchandises dont l'interdiction sous peine de la vie ne fera reculer personne*” in Hrodej, *L'amiral Du Casse*, 2:293.

negotiate the legalization of the commerce of goods to Spanish America when the Spanish King asked for a new loan, but without success.³⁰⁸

It was also possible for directors to make profits with the Asiento through provisioning. In 1704, Philip V of Spain granted the Asiento Company the right to have warehouses in the main Spanish American ports, to store the ammunitions and weapons necessary to protect them, construction material for the reparation of ships, as well as food supplies and other provisions for crews and enslaved Africans; if the foodstuff was expiring it could be sold, but it would still be subject to tax.³⁰⁹ The Company had obtained the perfect pretext to sell merchandise in Spanish America. In 1706, Du Casse went further and negotiated a contract for provisioning army clothes and weapons to the soldiers in Spanish America for 100,000 *piasters*, under the condition that half of the profit would be shared with the Spanish king.³¹⁰ The Company made another contract with Spain the same year, for the provisioning of ammunition and all merchandise needed to defend Buenos Aires.³¹¹ Additionally, Samuel Bernard, a banker and director of the Asiento Company, had his own method of enjoying the Asiento Company's privileges.³¹² He attended Company assemblies very rarely, but asked to be informed about the sales of the returning cargoes.³¹³ Unlike the East India Company, the Asiento Company held private sales rather than regular public sales. Bernard was among the wealthiest men in France at this point and bought whole cargoes of indigo and cochineal when the ships arrived in France.³¹⁴ He was not the only director to also be an important client; when Bernard's contract was cancelled in 1706, the director Crozat took it over.³¹⁵

Asiento Company and the Saint Malo sub-contract director: Crozat

In order to understand the full extent of how Crozat reached the position to make private profit through chartered companies, analysis must go back a few years earlier. In 1697, the East India Company was on the brink of being liquidated and the minister of the Navy appointed new directors to replace two directors who had died: the minister chose de la

³⁰⁸ AN MAR/B/3/175, 31 December 1709.

³⁰⁹ Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille*, 361.

³¹⁰ Scelle, 367.

³¹¹ ANOM F2a7: "1706 Délibération du consulat et du commerce d'Andalousie sur la proposition de la compagnie de l'Assiente pour envoyer des munitions à Buenos Ayres".

³¹² About Samuel Bernard see Rowlands, *Dangerous and Dishonest Men*; Price, *France and the Chesapeake*.

³¹³ ANOM B//28 f°17, letter of Pontchartrain to Bernard, 3 March 1706.

³¹⁴ ANOM B//28 f°36, letter of Pontchartrain to Bernard, 7 April 1706.

³¹⁵ ANOM B//28 f°36, letter of Pontchartrain to the directors of the Saint Domingue Company and Asiento Company, 7 April 1706.

Touche, one of his agents, and Langlois, the general receiver of finances of Champagne.³¹⁶ Aside from these two, Pontchartrain also appointed Bernard and Crozat as directors.³¹⁷ After analysing the Company's accounts, Bernard and Crozat proposed to liquidate the Company and create a new one. They offered a starting capital of three million *livres*.³¹⁸ They threatened to leave if the Company directors refused to start the process of liquidation. They knew that the Company would have difficulties reimbursing their shares of 60,000 *livres* each if they left. However, the sales of 1697 enabled the directors to pay off their most pressing debts and to reimburse Crozat and Bernard.³¹⁹ Their attempt to take over the East India Company had failed. Nevertheless, other opportunities would appear.

At this point in time, Crozat and Bernard acted as administrators of the tobacco tax-farm with Mayon and Thomé.³²⁰ Similar to Landais, they became directors of the Saint Domingue and South Sea Companies. As mentioned above, when Pontchartrain made the plans for negotiating the Spanish Asiento, he first thought of granting the privileges to the Saint Domingue Company. In order to receive the same tax exemption as the Guinea Company, Crozat and his partners in the Saint Domingue Company—Bernard, Mayon, Thomé, Vanolles, Du Casse and Landais—used the same tactic that the East India Company had benefited from a few years before. Crozat offered to advance 400,000 *livres* of slave trading commodities and even proposed to prepare the first expedition to Spanish America. However, if the negotiations of Du Casse failed that summer 1701, Crozat wanted to secure his access to the markets and have the privilege of providing enslaved Africans to the French West Indies, which had been exclusively granted to the Guinea Company.

Because of the advance that Crozat offered to make for the first voyage, Pontchartrain replaced the Guinea Company directors with the new group of financiers. Pontchartrain aimed to have twenty associates, in order to raise enough starting capital and to attract investors from outside of the “Crozat group.” However, during the next months, the number of associates reached fifteen, in large part thanks to Crozat, who brought in three new investors: another brother-in-law, Louis Doublet, as well as Le Jongleur and Ponthon. His other brother-in-law, Legendre d'Armigny, was already among the eight initial investors, along with

³¹⁶ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 351.

³¹⁷ “Ce ministre fit choix pour directeurs des sieurs Bernard et Crozat avec le ceremonial ordinaire” in Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres*, 1: 610.

³¹⁸ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 352.

³¹⁹ Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres*, 1: 635-636.

³²⁰ In 1697, Pontchartrain transferred the tobacco monopoly from the united farms to the Bernard-Crozat-Mayon partnership, see: Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1:54; 100.

Bernard, Mayon and Thomé, who were his partners in the tobacco monopoly.³²¹ When the private notarial deed created the Asiento Company on 10 November 1701, all of the directors were part of the “*Crozat group*,” either through family ties or as former business partners.

The presence of Crozat in the directorship of all these companies strengthened his bargaining position and enabled him to take advantage of the French Asiento for his own interests. As a member of the Asiento Company, Crozat strongly advocated against sub-contracting and argued for the Company to exploit alone the treaty of the Asiento. However, other Company directors were reticent to shoulder sole responsibility for both trading monopolies: the slave supply for both the Spanish Americas and the French West Indies. The directors ultimately decided that the Company would grant licenses to private merchants for trade in the French West Indies. Nonetheless, in 1708, René Montaudouin, a Nantes slave trader, lodged multiple complaints and denounced the Asiento Company directors’ refusal to grant him the licenses to sell enslaved Africans from the Slave Coast to the French West Indies.³²² The minister of the Navy re-established the requirement that the Company grant licenses to all port city merchants who requested one, to prevent any further delays. To compensate for the maintenance of the trading fort in Ouidah on the Slave Coast, Pontchartrain allowed the directors to charge twenty-four *livres* per enslaved African brought to Saint Domingue and ten *livres* for those brought to Martinique and the Windward Islands.³²³ The War of the Spanish Succession, and a lack of cooperation from the Asiento directors, made Pontchartrain’s plan to license out the slave trade to the French West Indies difficult. In 1709, the King granted Montaudouin a license to supply slaves to Martinique, Saint Domingue and Cayenne, and Pontchartrain wrote explicitly to the directors that they should not raise obstacles to Montaudouin’s expeditions.³²⁴

However, it was the slave supply to Spanish America that specifically interested the directors, particularly Crozat. After the multiple failures of the sub-contracts, Crozat fitted out ships for Spanish colony Tierra Firme in 1708 at his own cost.³²⁵ In the *acte de société* of 1702, a clause forbade any partners to trade privately directly or indirectly on the west coast of Africa “*without the written bill of lading from the whole company*,” under penalty of

³²¹ Price, 1:55.

³²² ANOM B//31 f°63, letter of Pontchartrain to the directors of the Asiento Company, 2 May 1708.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ ANOM B//31 f°411-413, letter of Pontchartrain to Luçansay, the Asiento directors and Montaudouin, 27 February 1709.

³²⁵ Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Les financiers de Languedoc au XVIII siècle* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1970), 116.

expulsion from the partnership.³²⁶ Thus, Crozat must have had the approval of the other directors, or at least of Pontchartrain, to send his private ship; the minister of the Navy and his agents considered Crozat the most aware and well-informed of the directors.³²⁷ That same year, Crozat, together with his Saint Malo partner, Magon de la Lande, sent two ships to the Indian Ocean, according to the contract they signed with the East India Company in December 1708. In April 1709, the East India Company granted another license to Crozat, Magon de la Lande, Beauvais le Fer and other Saint Malo merchants. Between 1710 and 1711, Crozat was involved in two other licensed enterprises.³²⁸

By 1710, the French King forbade the export of piasters from France; this constituted a second economic blow to the East Indian trade, after the prohibition on the domestic trade of painted textiles.³²⁹ As director of the Asiento Company and sub-contractor of the East India Company, Crozat sought to take advantage of his position and asked permission to acquire piasters directly at the source: the South Sea. Crozat made it clear that if he did not receive this permission, he would abandon all shipping to the East Indies. Under pressure, the East India directors supported Crozat's demand to the minister of the Navy.³³⁰ In March 1711, Crozat fitted out a ship that conducted trade in Vera Cruz, as authorised by Philip V.³³¹

This exceptional authorisation provoked reactions from Spanish merchants, while Pontchartrain wrote that "*since he [Crozat] had obtained the permission from the Spanish King, Spanish merchants should not complain that Crozat would trade there.*"³³² When the ship came back in June 1712, it brought a cargo of more than two million piasters, with one-fourth designated for the Spanish king, as well as boxes of cochineal, vanilla and indigo.³³³ Probably encouraged by the profits, Magon de la Chipaudière and Crozat fitted out another ship in July 1712: *Le Griffon*, belonging to the French King.³³⁴ Also in 1712, the East India Company granted to the Saint Malo merchants trading privileges for two years, without limitation on the number of ships, in exchange for ten percent of their profit. The profit rate of

³²⁶ ANOM F2a7, 28 March 1702: *Acte de société Article 6: "sans le connoissement par écrit de toute la compagnie"*.

³²⁷ ANOM F2a7, letter of Arnoul, 4 March 1706 and ANOM B//28 f°270, letter of Pontchartrain to Crozat, 14 August 1706.

³²⁸ Lespagnol, 'Négociants et commerce indien', 433.

³²⁹ Lévy, *Capitalisme et pouvoirs au siècle des Lumières, t. 1: les fondateurs, des origines à 1715*, 398.

³³⁰ ANOM C2 14 f°77-78, letter of the directors of the East India Company to Pontchartrain, 15 December 1710.

³³¹ Lévy, *Capitalisme et pouvoirs au siècle des Lumières, t. 1: les fondateurs, des origines à 1715*, 414.

³³² Lévy, 414.

³³³ Lévy, 415.

³³⁴ ANOM F2a9, *Extrait du traité fait avec le sieur de la Chipaudière Magon*, 9 July 1712.

the Saint Malo partnership during the two-year treaty has been estimated at 176 percent.³³⁵ Crozat still appeared as an important investor, but his partners, Magon de la Lande and Beauvais le Fer took the lead on the enterprise. Instead, Crozat directed his attention towards his newly granted exclusive privileges over Louisiana in 1712.³³⁶

Crozat nevertheless continued his involvement in ventures to the South Sea. In July 1712, three ships arrived in Saint Malo from the South Sea; Beauvais Le Fer, one of Crozat's partners in the East India sub-contract, owned one of them.³³⁷ In January 1713, Crozat fitted out one last ship for the Asiento Company; because "*old gunpowder for slave trade*" is registered among its cargo, he probably intended to carry slaves.³³⁸ He became a director of the Saint Malo East India Company sub-contract in 1714, which granted the privileges of the East India Company for ten years against ten percent of their profit.³³⁹ While Magon de la Lande appeared as the main investor with 657,000 *livres*, followed by Beauvais le Fer with 540,000 *livres*, Crozat remains an important contributor with 300,000 out of a total 4,250,000 *livres*.³⁴⁰ The average profit of the Saint Malo merchants amounted to more than one hundred percent per venture to the Indian Ocean from 1709 until 1719.³⁴¹ In the case of Crozat the direct connection between his investments in the West and the East appear clearly through the commodity chain of silver.

Asiento, East India Companies director and Saint Malo East India Company shareholder: Fontanieu

The fact that Crozat, Bernard, Du Casse or Legendre appear more as businessmen rather than "men of the minister", does not make them exceptional. One of their fellow directors in both the Asiento Company and the Saint Malo East India Company, was considered the "*eye of the government*" and still enjoyed his position as director for his own benefit.³⁴² Moïse Augustin Fontanieu was *receveur general* of La Rochelle, general treasurer of the Navy and secretary to the King.³⁴³ The list of condemned at the Chamber of Justice in 1716 contains detailed information about his affairs. He declared that he made most of his

³³⁵ André Lespagnol, 'Cargaisons et profits du commerce indien au début du XVIIIe siècle - Les opérations commerciales des Compagnies Malouines 1707-1720', *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 89, no. 3 (1982): 346.

³³⁶ Greenwald, *Marc-Antoine Caillot and the Company of the Indies in Louisiana*, 22.

³³⁷ Lévy, *Capitalisme et pouvoirs au siècle des Lumières, t. 1: les fondateurs, des origines à 1715*, 413–14.

³³⁸ Lévy, 446.

³³⁹ ANOM C2 14 f°206: Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants, 1717.

³⁴⁰ Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 672.

³⁴¹ Lespagnol, 'Cargaisons et profits du commerce indien', 346.

³⁴² Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 664. He became director of the Asiento company in 1710. ANOM E 186, personnel file of Fontanieu.

³⁴³ BNF ms. fr. 7584, "Déclarations des personnes sujettes à la chambre de justice de 1716" f°17: Fontanieu.

wealth in overseas trade and was involved in the trade of brandy. He invested 42,397 *livres* in the East India Company and 126,127 *livres* in the former East India Company. Additionally, he owned shares worth 13,500 *livres* in the Asiento Company. His declared wealth in 1716 amounted to 1,483,905 *livres*, twelve percent of which consisted in overseas company's shares.

Moreover, he had private, unspecified goods in La Rochelle valued at 13,500 *livres*, 16,750 *livres* worth of indigo and 17,139 *livres* worth of tobacco, as well as merchandise in Martinique amounting to 10,182 *livres*. The fact that most of the ships under the Asiento Company left from La Rochelle, where Fontanieu had 13,500 *livres* worth of merchandise, gives us some clue to how chartered companies could be economically attractive to financiers. Amongst other commodities, brandy was a valuable good in the slave trade and Fontanieu was involved in both trades. Furthermore, he was a director of the East India Company and owned 12,698 *livres* and fifteen *sols* worth of diamonds and precious stones.³⁴⁴ Diamond trade was perceived by Europeans trading in Asia as the safest way to remit their money to Europe.³⁴⁵ Indeed, diamonds were easy to transport and the demand in diamonds in Europe was high, which made it an attractive commodity for private trade.³⁴⁶

Analysis of East India Company directors and the Saint Malo sub-contractors' interests should not treat them as diametrically opposed; they overlapped as some individuals were present in both sides. Indeed, in addition to his investment in the East India Company, Fontanieu took part in the Saint Malo sub-contract of 1714, where he invested 100,000 *livres*.³⁴⁷ By that point, the Asiento Company had been dissolved, but Fontanieu maintained a close correspondence with a Saint Malo merchant, and one of the directors of the Saint Malo Company, Magon de la Balue as a way to dispatch ships to Buenos Aires.³⁴⁸ The Saint Malo Company must be set apart from chartered companies like the Guinea/Asiento Company and the successive East India Companies. It was overwhelmingly merchant-based, and the crown's involvement in its management was limited. Nevertheless, even there directors used their position to develop private trade.

³⁴⁴ BNF ms. fr. 7584, "*Déclarations des personnes sujettes à la chambre de justice de 1716*" f°179 (Additions aux déclarations): "*Le sieur Fontanieu ancien trésorier de la marine déclare qu'il a en diamant et pierreries 12 698 livres 15 sols*".

³⁴⁵ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, 260.

³⁴⁶ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 110.

³⁴⁷ "*Acte de Société du 1^{er} mars 1717*" in Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 672.

³⁴⁸ A.D. I.-et-V., 1 F 1897, Correspondence of Magon de la Balue.

Saint Malo sub-contract director: Magon de la Balue

The Saint Malo Company sub-contract enjoyed full autonomy of management. The minister of the Navy did not interfere in the choice and recruitment of directors and shareholders.³⁴⁹ It qualified as a “*fake joint-stock company*” because the number of shareholders was limited to nineteen, twelve of whom were directors.³⁵⁰ This implied a significant investment from each of the shareholders. However, each of them worked with sub-shareholders in other port cities, who themselves had sub-shareholders. This broadened the number of stakeholders and the geographic base of the company. The subscription to the shares of the company was not public, but private. André Lespagnol illustrates the shareholding mechanism through the example of Magon de la Balue, who left an impressive personal archive. The Magon family was a rich and noble family from Saint Malo.³⁵¹ The two brothers, Magon de la Lande and Magon de la Balue were directors of the Saint Malo East India Company, the first had 657,000 *livres* of investment and the second invested 322,000 *livres* out of 4,250,000 *livres* of total capital. Out of the 322,000 *livres* invested by Magon de la Balue, only 54,500 *livres* came from his personal contribution. Twenty-one “*intéressés*” invested the rest of the money.³⁵² Among these twenty-one sub-shareholders, four lived in Saint Malo, seven in other towns across Brittany and nine in other cities in France—Paris, Lyon and Marseille, among others—and the last sub-shareholder was from Amsterdam.³⁵³

Aside from appreciating the geographical scope of shareholders in the Saint Malo East India sub-contract, Magon de la Balue’s correspondence sheds light on his private business within the sub-contract Company. For instance, he corresponded with the general secretary of the East India Company, Hardancourt, to ask him to sell coffee on his behalf.³⁵⁴ Hardancourt was among the shareholders of the Saint Malo sub-contract (fig. 1.2.). De la Balue states his private business explicitly at the end of the letter: “*I write this private letter so that it does not get confused with the affairs of the company, consequently, could you open for me a small*

³⁴⁹ Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 677.

³⁵⁰ “*Une fausse société par actions*” Lespagnol, ‘Négociants et commerce indien’, 441.

³⁵¹ Durand, *Les fermiers généraux au XVIIIe siècle*, 259. Lespagnol, ‘Négociants et commerce indien’, 437.

³⁵² Lespagnol, ‘Négociants et commerce indien’, 446.

³⁵³ Lespagnol, 448.

³⁵⁴ Boyvin (Louis) d’Hardancourt (1674-1758) succeeded to his father as general secretary of the East India Company in 1699, between 1710 and 1712 he was dispatched in the Indian Ocean to control the factories of the Company. In 1718, he became director of the *Compagnie de l’Occident* and of the Company of the Indies until 1743. See: Philippe Haudrère, ‘L’origine du personnel de direction générale de la Compagnie française des Indes, 1719-1794’, *Revue française d’histoire d’Outre-Mer* 67, no. 248–249 (1980): 343.

private account for this and I will do the same here.”³⁵⁵ The casual demand for a division of accounts between private and company-related business shows that this was a common arrangement.

Magon de la Balue also exchanged regular letters with a Portuguese Sephardim merchant from London called John Mendes da Costa Junior. Although this correspondent does not appear in Lespagnol’s list of de la Balue’s sub-shareholders, he was probably a shareholder by proxy of the Saint Malo East India sub-contract. Indeed, de la Balue asked Mendes da Costa if he wanted to receive “*the share of his interest in the Company*,” adding that all shares would be signed by all directors.³⁵⁶ Mendes da Costa appears to have had stakes in the Saint Malo Company; de la Balue informed him of the details of their negotiations with the Regent about the abrogation of their privileges in 1719. Only five years after the ten-year sub-contract was signed, the East India Company merged with John Law’s *Compagnie d’Occident*, and the Saint Malo sub-contract was revoked. Magon de la Balue explained to Mendes da Costa that they were negotiating the same deal with the Law’s new Company that they had with the former East India Company.³⁵⁷ Aside from his stakes in the Saint Malo Company, Mendes da Costa served as contact for the Saint Malo agents and captains in India who sent some of their letters to Europe on English ships.³⁵⁸

In addition to Mendes da Costa, de la Balue started a correspondence with a Madras merchant, Henry Lapostre, in 1715. On the recommendation of his brother Magon de la Lande, de la Balue sent two boxes of *pignes* to Lapostre on the Saint Malo Company ships, so Lapostre could buy diamonds on his behalf.³⁵⁹ *Pignes* were a type of silver smuggled from Spanish America by Saint Malo merchants. They were contraband goods as no taxes were paid on them to the Spanish King.³⁶⁰ The *pignes* he sent were, according to de la Balue, of

³⁵⁵ A.D. I.-et-V., 1 F 1897, Magon de la Balue to Hardancourt in Paris, 8 June 1718 “*Je vous écris cette lettre particulière pour ne point confondre cela avec les affaires de la compagnie ainsi ouvrez moi un petit compte particulier pour cela et j’en faire de même de mon côté*”.

³⁵⁶ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Jean Mendes Dacosta Junior in London, 3 March 1717: “*Vous aurez agréable de me mander sy vous voulez que je vous envoie l’action de votre intéres dans notre compagnie les dittes actions seront signées de tous les directeurs*”.

³⁵⁷ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Jean Mendes Dacosta Junior in London, 19 June 1719.

³⁵⁸ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Jean Mendes Dacosta Junior in London, 3 March 1717.

³⁵⁹ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Henry Lapostre à Madras, January 1715.

³⁶⁰ “*Sorte d’argent poreuse et légère, et sont ces sortes de Pignes que les mineurs tachent de vendre en cachette aux vaisseaux étrangers qui vont dans la mer du Sud, et qui ont fait faire de si grands profits aux négocians qui se sont hazardés dans les dernières guerres à ce commerce de contrebande. [...] Les pignes ne payent point le quint du Roi, aussi sont-elles marchandises de contrebande*” in Jacques Savary Des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce: contenant tout ce qui concerne le commerce qui se fait dans les quatre parties du monde...*, vol. 3 (Paris: Veuve Estienne, 1741), col. 874; 924.

very good quality. As smuggled goods, the quality could vary.³⁶¹ In his dictionary of commerce, Jacques Savary warned the buyer of such commodities against the bad quality of the silver in *pignes*, which could be made heavier by sand or iron filling.³⁶² De la Balue referred to a report from his brother to determine the quality of the diamonds Lapostre should buy. Additionally, de la Balue gave detailed instructions as to how the diamonds should be shipped back to France: either through the two Saint Malo ships that brought the *pignes* or, if Lapostre deemed it better to wait for a better price, he could send the merchandise back on a ship coming later to Pondicherry.³⁶³ It was a first attempt for de la Balue, who was counting on developing his diamond trade by sending greater amounts of merchandise.

In 1716, de la Balue instructed Lapostre to send the diamonds on English ships if there were no French ships in India: “*please send them on the first English ships coming to Europe, pay the ordinary freight of two percent and address them to a trustworthy man in London.*”³⁶⁴ This trustworthy man in London appeared to be, at least on one occasion, the aforementioned Mendes da Costa. In 1717, de la Balue told Mendes da Costa that he was waiting for a considerable shipment of diamonds from India and that he had given orders to send some to London. De la Balue’s did not intend for Mendes da Costa to channel the diamonds back to France, but rather to attempt to sell them in England if the selling conditions were favourable.³⁶⁵ Lapostre’s brother, who was involved in the English South Sea Company, acted as another contact for de la Balue’s diamonds in London.³⁶⁶ Despite some restrictions on privately sent commodities, London was still the most attractive city to sell private shipments.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, personal connections used as commissioners in London were needed to avoid negligence or treachery. The system of remittance of privately earned goods was based on inter-personal mutual trust.³⁶⁸ In this case, correspondence between Magon de la Balue in Saint Malo, Lapostre in Madras and Mendes da Costa or Lapostre’s brother in London sustained that inter-personal trust.

³⁶¹ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Henry Lapostre at Madras January 1715: “*Je vous prie de faire attention que les pignes que je vous envoie sont d’une très bonne qualité*”

³⁶² Savary Des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*, 3:3: col. 847.

³⁶³ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Henry Lapostre at Madras, January 1715.

³⁶⁴ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Henry Lapostre at Fort Saint Georges Madras, 2 September 1716: “*je vous prie de les remettre par les premiers vaisseaux anglois qui viendront en Europe en payant le fret ordinaire qui est de 2% et vous les adresserez à quelqu’homme de confiance à Londres*”.

³⁶⁵ A.D. I.-et-V., 1F 189,7 Magon de la Balue to Mendes Dacosta Junior in London, 12 September 1717.

³⁶⁶ A.D. I.-et-V., 1F 1897, Magon de la Balue to Lapostre in London, 24 April 1718.

³⁶⁷ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 153.

³⁶⁸ Mentz, 87.

De la Balue was far from an isolated case within the Saint Malo Company. Indeed, he indicated both his private business and that of his partners when he wrote in a letter to “*please act with me as you do with Crozat and Magon de la Lande, I will send you considerable funds on the first ships leaving from France to India.*”³⁶⁹ Aside from the formal profits of the Saint Malo East India Company, directors enjoyed informal profits through their personal contacts on the Coromandel Coast. Their personal businesses, as illustrated by de la Balue’s case, crossed not only oceans but also imperial boundaries.

7. Conclusion

Given that directors could hardly control their investment and companies proved unprofitable from an economic standpoint, there is, at first sight, no apparent reason why chartered trading companies attracted investors. Why did directors take part in these enterprises? The fact that most directors were financiers must have played a role in their involvement in the chartered companies. Their investments acted as steps towards upward social mobility, through a career in offices or tax-farming contracts. As such, directorships in chartered companies are difficult to dissociate from other investments in the crown’s revenues. Even if methods of pressure, such as the Chamber of Justice, were not used in the case under scrutiny, the importance of patronage ties interlinking financiers and the king should not be underestimated. The interdependency characterising the relationship between chartered company directors and the king, the first for their future contracts and the latter for short-term loans, partly explains the large presence of financiers in the companies’ boards of directors.

The additional incentive could have been the perception of the chartered companies as safe investments. Although their predecessors were not examples of profitable enterprises, the King took full responsibility for the bankruptcy of the West India Company and the East India Company provided some dividends, even if they were irregular and arbitrary. If the institutional structure protected shareholders and directors from creditors, and enabled investors to exchange and trade their shares while benefitting from the help of the royal treasury and the Royal Navy, as stated in their charter, the companies could have appeared to be safe investments. However, as has been shown, the presence of these investors’ rights in the company charter was arbitrary and, even if they were part of the patent letter, this did not

³⁶⁹ A.D. I.-et-V., 11J3, Magon de la Balue to Henry Lapostre at Fort Saint Georges Madras 2 September 1716: “*je vous prie de faire comme moi comme vous faites pour Crozat et de La Lande Magon je compte vous faire venir des fonds considérables par les premiers vaisseaux qui partirent de France pour les indes*”.

mean they were respected. Crucially, limited liability for directors was non-existent. Directors investing in chartered companies must have had other motivations for investment, rather than an expectation of formal profits.

I argue that being director of chartered companies provided private business with access to markets under monopoly. Financiers used these companies, rather than the other way around. Private business could take place in different ways, be it through smuggling like Legendre, contracting the provisioning like Du Casse or buying the whole company cargo when it arrived in France, as Bernard did. Although companies handed out licenses to private traders throughout most of their existence, the access to these licenses could still be restricted to privileged businessmen who frequently were directors of the companies themselves. Vitry-la-Ville and his partner Poquelin illustrate this machination, as does Crozat during the Asiento Company attempts at sub-contracting. Additionally, Fontanieu, as director of the East India Company, invested in the Saint Malo sub-contract.

The investment in multiple colonial enterprises, although risky and controlled by the state, made it possible for directors to connect these markets by controlling both sides of the commodity chain. Vitry-la-Ville and Fontanieu, who were both directors of companies operating in the Indian Ocean and on the west coast of Africa, among other companies, show how these different investments were connected. The diversification of investment in multiple chartered companies also enabled directors to gain a strong bargaining position. The case of Crozat is particularly telling, because he used his presence in different boards of directors as a way to pressure the minister of the Navy. After a failed attempt with the East India Company in 1698, Crozat managed to secure his access to the Guinea Company privileges and tax exemptions in 1701. Most strikingly, he successfully threatened to put an end to the licensed voyages to the East Indies in 1710 if he was not allowed direct access to piasters in Spanish America.

Historical evidence of directors conducting private trade inside the Company structure is scarce, but the inventory of Vitry-la-Ville and Fontanieu's declaration to the Chamber of Justice shed light on their private business. The list of their assets includes privately-owned merchandises in the monopoly area of the chartered companies they managed. This phenomenon is not restricted to chartered companies. At least three directors of the sub-contracting company based in Saint Malo, Magon de la Balue, Crozat and Magon de la Lande, operated a private business in diamonds on the Coromandel Coast. Their diamond trade was based on their personal connections in India and London.

CHAPTER 1: WHEN PRINCIPALS BECOME AGENTS

This chapter has examined, in detail, the various forms of agency of metropolitan directors. However, metropolitan directors were not the only directors whose agency shaped early modern French expansion. To reach a fuller assessment of the role played by individuals' agency in the expansion, one should not limit the analysis to the metropolitan sphere. Rather, one must include directors sent overseas, as they were also actors of the expansion. The following chapters are devoted to overseas directors, to how their agency manifested itself and how it affected the French expansion in Pondicherry and Ouidah.

Chapter 2: Pondicherry's and Ouidah's political context

1. Introduction

The sovereign rights granted by European rulers to the English and Dutch East India Company such as the capacity to wage war, sign diplomatic treaties, administer justice and collect taxes have led historians to perceive these companies as “*a form of early modern government*.”³⁷⁰ The French king granted similar sovereign rights to the chartered companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah: for instance, proprietary rights over the land they conquered, administration of justice and the authority to sign treaties and alliances with local rulers.³⁷¹ However, the Company could not simply rely on French sources of sovereignty in an overseas context; their overseas authority depended on the delegation of sovereignty of local rulers. What political context did overseas directors face in of Pondicherry and Ouidah? What was the scope of their authority and jurisdiction in practice?

The French forts and factories in Pondicherry and Ouidah were in tributary relations with local rulers during the period under study. This is less obvious in Pondicherry, because the Company exercised jurisdiction, administrative and judicial rights over the settlement. Nevertheless, the Marathas or the Mughals delegated these sovereign powers and to maintain them, the Company depended on the confirmation of official documents issued by the local ruler such as *farmans* under the Mughals. In the case of the French fort in Ouidah, the kings of Hueda and Dahomey held jurisdiction over the French fort but allowed the director to administer justice to employees of the fort. The Company had no tax collection rights or territorial domination. Additionally, rulers used a similar strategy to assert their sovereignty over the French trading companies in the settlement of Pondicherry and the trading fort in Ouidah. How did this situation come about and what were the implications for the company and its servants overseas?

This chapter sets out to answer these questions by providing an overview of the political context in Pondicherry and Ouidah in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It starts with the political environment faced by French directors in Pondicherry and

³⁷⁰ Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6; Erik Odegard, *Colonial Careers. Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and Career-Making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire* (Leiden University: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2017), 12.

³⁷¹ Article 21, 23, 24, 30, 33 of the West India Company patent letter in BNF Collection des actes royaux n°756, *Edit ... pour l'établissement de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales* ; Articles 28, 29, 31, 36 of the East India Company patent letter in BNF Collection des actes royaux ; n°767, *Déclarations du Roy l'une, portant établissement d'une compagnie pour le commerce des Indes Orientales*.

Ouidah. The second section is devoted to the foundation and management of the two factories. Lastly, the chapter looks at the question of sovereign rights such as tax collection, judicial prerogatives and the coining of money as a way to draw parallels between the situations of French overseas directors of the factories in Pondicherry and Ouidah. Furthermore, it will be shown how the interconnected trade between the markets in Pondicherry and Ouidah, provides additional relevance to the joint study of both factories in this dissertation. A thorough understanding of the political and jurisdictional position of overseas directors in the two factories generates a solid base for the evaluation of the role of their agency in the French overseas expansion.

2. Political guidelines and the French presence in Pondicherry and Ouidah

Pondicherry and the Coromandel Coast

The region around Pondicherry witnessed frequent political changes which the overseas directors would have to navigate. Pondicherry is situated on the Coromandel Coast, which approximately covers the modern Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The Coromandel Coast was not politically unified, but there was a strong economic connection between the numerous ports along the coast, mainly through the coastal trade.³⁷² By the time the East India Company established a trading fort in Pondicherry in 1674, southern India had seen the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire and the division of power among Telugu and Tamil Nayaka kingdoms: mainly Madurai, Tanjavur, Senji (spelled Jinji on the map below), Ikkeri and Mysore.³⁷³ By 1674, the Nayaka of Senji had been conquered by the sultanate of Bijapur. The sultanate of Bijapur was in turn a tributary to the Mughal emperor since 1636, and just like the sultanate of Golkonda, it was a unique combination of “*Indic and Islamicate traditions with an Iranian overlay*”.³⁷⁴ The trading fort of Pondicherry was established on the invitation of Sher Khan Lodi, governor of Cuddalore for the sultan of Bijapur. In 1677, the territories between the “*Golkonda-Bijapur boundary of 1655*” (marked on the map on figure 2.1.) and the Colderoon River were in turn conquered by the Maratha leader, Shivaji in 1677.³⁷⁵

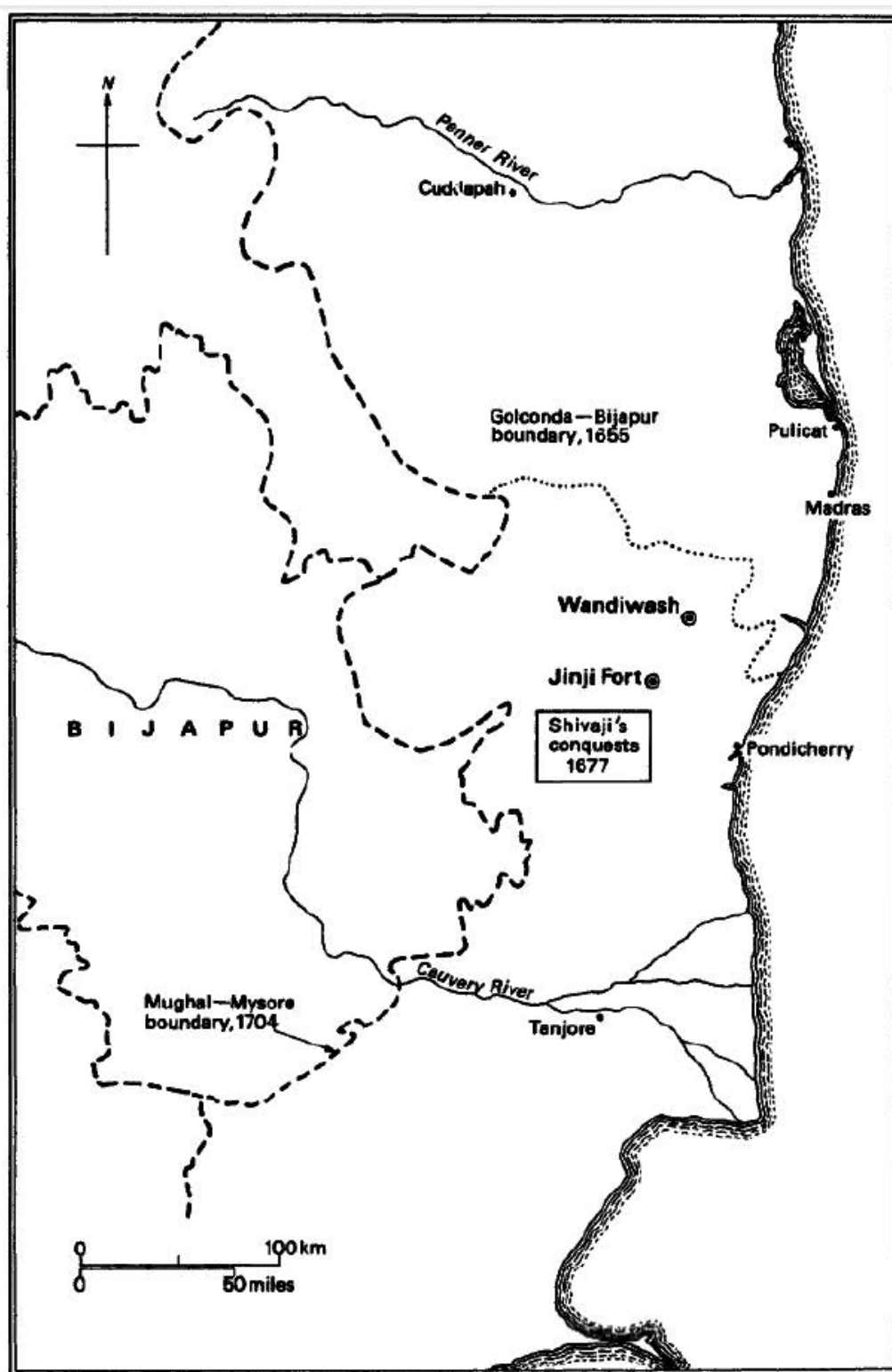
³⁷² The name Coromandel comes from *Cholamandalaman*, referring to the former Chola Empire, see Radhika Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast: Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2012), 8.

³⁷³ Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, The New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 130–31. The nayakas had emerged as independent polities during the early sixteenth century when the Vijayanagara monarchy still ruled.

³⁷⁴ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 175.

³⁷⁵ Golkonda was re-named *Dar-al Jihad* turning into ‘Hyderabad’ under the Mughals.

Figure 2.1. Map of the eastern coast of South India, 1707



Source: Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire: Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes, Bibliography and Index* (Delhi [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1982), Map 16A.

When the area was ultimately seized by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1698, these territories became part of the Mughal province Hyderabad (formerly Golkonda).³⁷⁶ The province was divided in two and Pondicherry was situated on the southern section.³⁷⁷ In 1699, the region was ruled by the *faujdar* (Mughal military general) Da'ud Khan Panni who soon succeeded Zul'fiqar Khan as Mughal provincial governor based in Arcot. Zul'fiqar Khan and Da'ud Khan Panni were administrators not yet *nawabs* in the sense of rulers and it is their successor, Sa'adatullah Khan which is usually regarded as the first *nawab* of Arcot (also called governor of Karnataka).³⁷⁸ Aurangzeb appointed Sarup Singh, a Bundela Rajput, to command the fort of Senji in 1700 but he remained under the authority of the *nawab* of Arcot.³⁷⁹

Figure 2.2. Table of political authorities and governors of the Deccan in Pondicherry (1674-1717)

Dates	Political authorities	Representatives
1674-1677	Bijapur ruler – Sikandar Adil Shah	Sher Khan Lodi
1677-1687	Maratha ruler – Shivaji	
1687-1707	Mughal ruler – Aurangzeb	Zu'lfikar Khan Da'ud Khan Panni
1707-1712	Mughal ruler – Bahadur Shah	Da'ud Khan Panni
1712-1713	Mughal ruler – Jahandar Shah	Sa'adatullah Khan
1713-1717	Mughal ruler – Farrukhsiyar	Sa'adatullah Khan

Source: Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*, The New Cambridge History of India. 2, Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism; 4 (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1993). John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India. 1, The Mughals and Their Contemporaries; 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Friday's Child: Or How Tej Singh Became Tecinkurajan', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 36, no. 1 (1 March 1999): 74.

³⁷⁶ Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire: Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes, Bibliography and Index* (Delhi [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1982), 64.

³⁷⁷ John F. Richards, 'The Hyderabad Karnatik, 1687—1707', *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (March 1975): 242.

³⁷⁸ N. S. Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic Under the Nawabs* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984), 2.

³⁷⁹ Chidambaram S. Srinivasachari, *A History of Gingee and Its Rulers* (Annamalainagar: University of Annamalainagar, 1943), 355. The term "Carnatic" is misleading as it originally referred to Karnataka, on the western side of the Indian sub-continent but was used by the rulers Bijapur and Golkonda for their conquest in the Deccan (the territories above the Ghats and the coastal section). Under the British, it came to refer exclusively to the coastal region "Hyderabadi Karnataka" in Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic Under the Nawabs*, 7.

In 1707, Aurangzeb passed away and for the following decades political instability at the Mughal court created a power vacuum.³⁸⁰ Maratha rulers, other local inland rulers and former Mughal officials took advantage of the imperial weakness to strengthen their power locally. Therefore, when Da'ud Khan Panni left for Gujarat in 1711, his *diwan* (fiscal officer) Sa'adatullah Khan succeeded him as *nawab* of Arcot and reached a certain degree of political autonomy.³⁸¹ Sarup Singh, commander of Senji, also gained independence and avoided the tribute to the Mughal emperor.³⁸² At last, in 1714, Sa'adatullah Khan conquered Senji and made it his head-quarters.

Ouidah and the Bight of Benin

The French fort in Ouidah is situated on the Bight of Benin, also known as the Slave Coast, between the river Volta and Lagos. It was part of the kingdom of Hueda, which paid tribute to the kingdom of Allada. Contemporary observers described the kingdom of Hueda as a populous and fertile land; thanks to its arable nature, agriculture was a major economic activity.³⁸³ The Hueda capital, Savi, held a market every four days, which attracted between four thousand and five thousand people from the region and beyond. Transactions were facilitated by the widespread use of cowry shells.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 247.

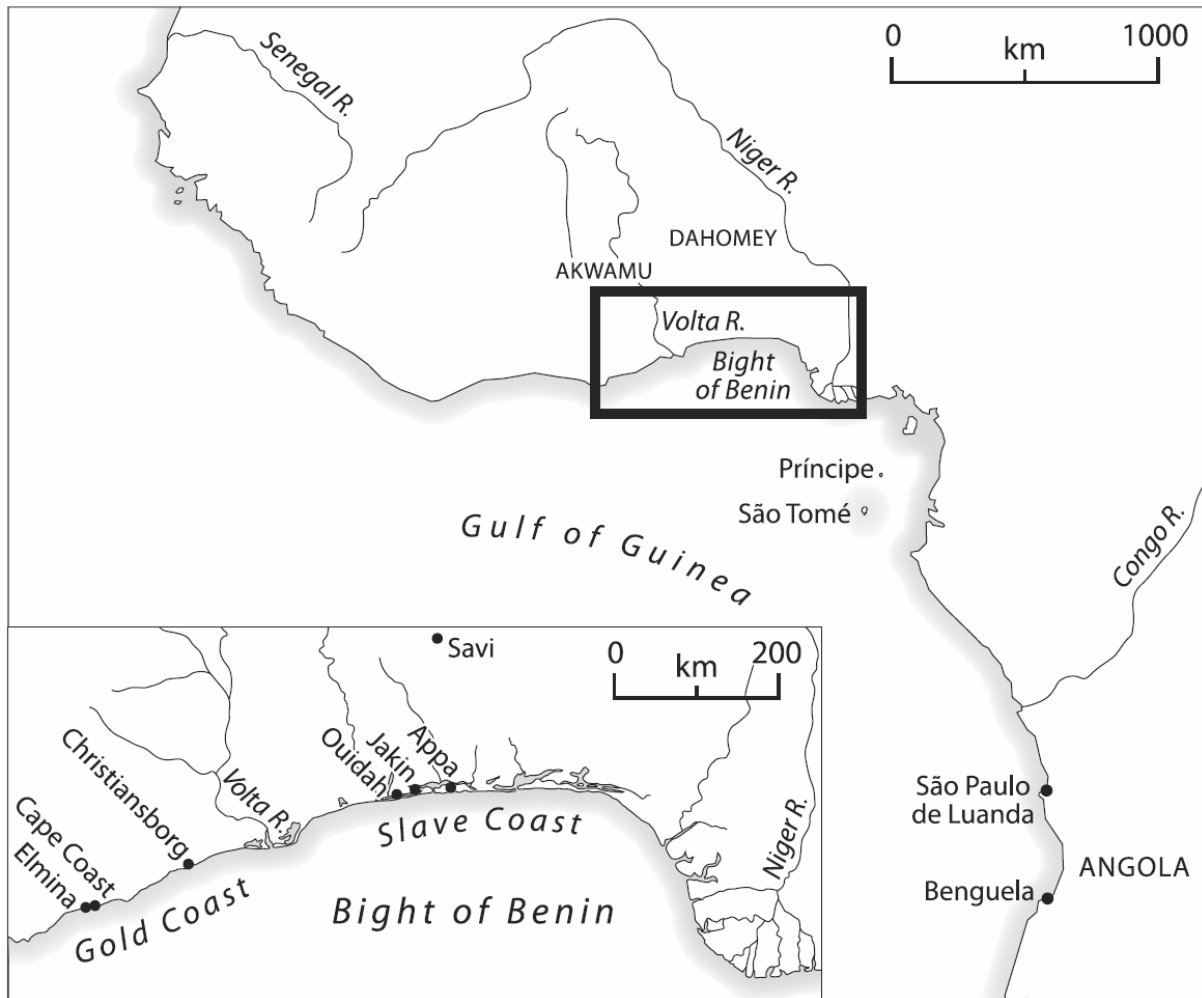
³⁸¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Trade and Politics in the Arcot Nizamat (1700-1732)', in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 365–73; Richards, 'The Hyderabad Karnatik, 1687—1707', 260.

³⁸² Chidambaram S. Srinivasachari, *A History of Gingee and Its Rulers*, 367.

³⁸³ Estimation of the population of Hueda is of 100 000 people in Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 59.

³⁸⁴ Cowry shells were called *bouges* in French sources and *akue* in local language. The cowrie shells were used in units of 40: a galina equaled to 200 cowries and 20 galinas made a cabess in Law, 47–48.

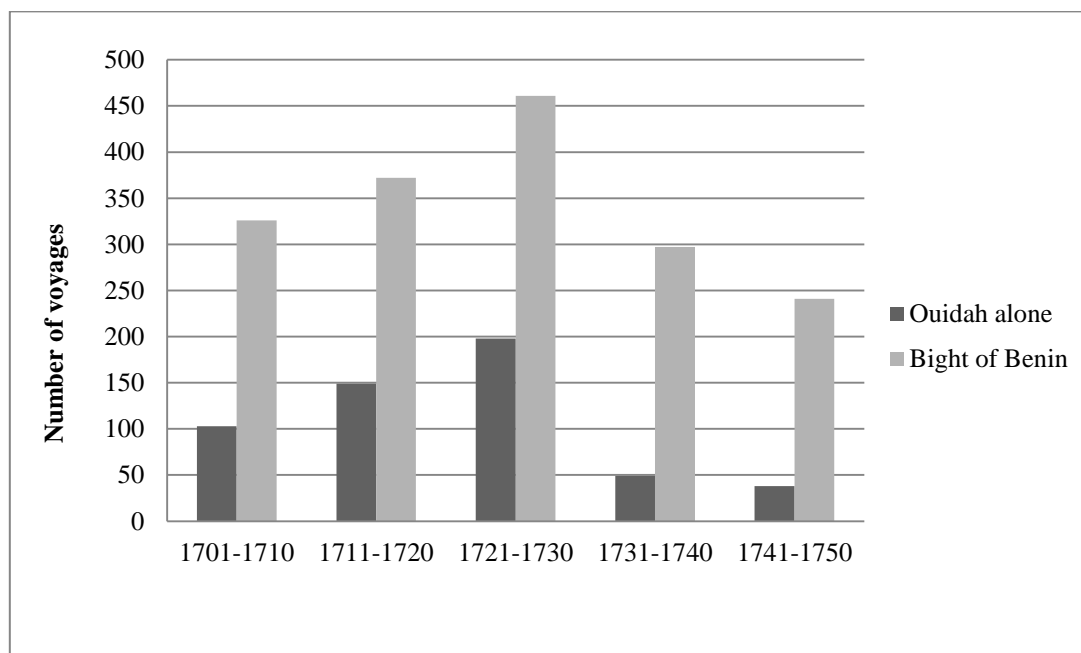
Figure 2.3. Map of the Bight of Benin



Source: Roquinaldo Ferreira, 'From Brazil to West Africa: Dutch Portuguese Rivalry, Gold Smuggling, and African Politics in the Bight of Benin', in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, ed. Michiel Van Groesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81.

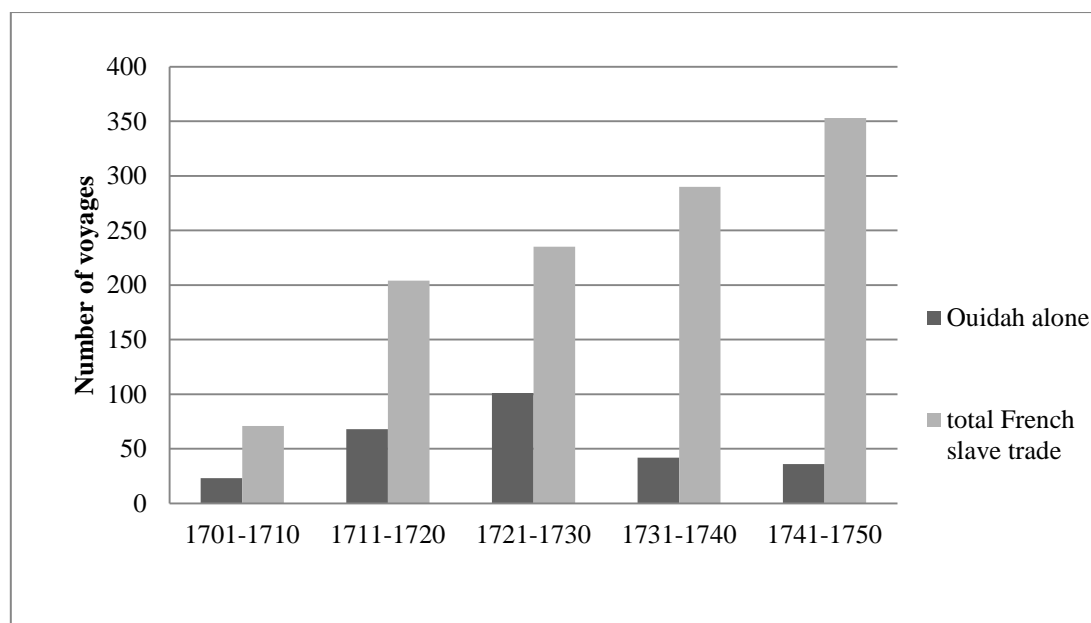
Ouidah, where multiple European forts were situated, was a major slave-trading hub during the eighteenth century. Between 1700 and 1750, a total of 1,697 European ships sailed to the Bight of Benin to engage in slave trade. In Ouidah alone, the number of European ships amounted to 537. As presented on figure 2.4., numbers of ships trading in Ouidah vary across the decades, starting with 103 in the 1700s, peaking at 198 during the 1720s and dropping to thirty eight in the 1740s. The centre for trade shifted from Allada to the kingdom of Hueda in the late seventeenth century, until the late 1720s when the hinterland kingdom of Dahomey conquered Hueda. This provoked a decrease in European slave trade in Ouidah, which is noticeable in figure 2.4. Numbers regarding French ships engaging in slave trade in Ouidah follow the same trend as European ships. As is shown in figure 2.5., the French slave trade in Ouidah peaked in the 1720s when forty two percent of the total French shipping to the west coast of Africa passed by Ouidah.

Figure 2.4. Graph of European slave trade voyages to the Bight of Benin during the first half of the eighteenth century



Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: <http://slavevoyages.org/> last consulted 10/04/2017.

Figure 2.5. Graph of French slave trade voyages to the west coast of Africa during the first half of the eighteenth century



Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: <http://slavevoyages.org/> last consulted 10/04/2017.

At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the exacerbated competition between the coastal kingdoms of the Slave Coast resulted in unrest between Allada and Hueda. As the kingdom of Allada weakened, the coastal kingdoms of

Hueda and Great Popo on the western Slave Coast increasingly asserted their independence. These wars, and the increase in war captives, stimulated the sale of enslaved Africans to Europeans trading in the different kingdoms. The Europeans, in turn, contributed to the unrest by selling firearms to the warring kingdoms. Additionally, a change in military organisation took place during this period, through the recruitment of mercenaries from the Gold Coast and Little Popo. Hiring mercenaries increased the military power of wealthy kingdoms that could afford to pay foreign professional armies.³⁸⁵

When Amar became King of Hueda in 1703, he ceased acknowledging the Allada king as overlord of Hueda, which worsened conflicts between Hueda and Allada.³⁸⁶ As revenge, the latter forbade Europeans from trading in the Hueda kingdom. The same scenario occurred with King Huffon (1708-1733), Amar's successor, whose refusal to pay tribute to Allada resulted in repetitive trade restrictions on Hueda. After a period of peace from 1710 to 1711, Allada reaffirmed the blockade in 1712, lifted it again in 1713-1714. However, in 1714, strong internal divisions between King Huffon and his chiefs encouraged the Allada King to seek revenge. When King Huffon died in 1717, the tension between the two powers eased but relations remained conflictive until the Dahomey kingdom conquered Allada in 1724. The kingdom of Hueda shared the same fate as Allada; it was conquered 1733, after six years of war.³⁸⁷

Figure 2.6. Table of political authorities in Ouidah

Dates	Political authorities	Representative
1703-1708	Hueda King Amar	Yevogan (title)
1708-1727/33	Hueda King Huffon	Assou
1727/33-1740	Dahomian King Agaja	Alligny
1740-1774	Dahomian King Tegbesu	Yevogan (title)

Source: Law, *The Slave Coast*, 206-7.

The Hueda and Dahomey administration had a considerable amount of office holders. During the Hueda period, chiefs acted as directors of one of the twenty-six provinces in the kingdom. The highest chiefs were *Gogan* and *Aplogan*—*gan* meaning chief—who governed

³⁸⁵ Law, 226–31.

³⁸⁶ Law, 252–59.

³⁸⁷ Law, 272.

Paon and Gome in the north of the kingdom. *Yevogan* was the chief of the white men, *Yevo* meaning white, who was responsible for all the dealings with Europeans and was assisted by Agou, the interpreter. *Yevogan* and Agou shared the custom duties levied on the trade of the Europeans. After the 1690s, however, new offices of interpreter appeared. Portuguese was no longer the *lingua franca* of trade.³⁸⁸ Captain Tom, an immigrant from the Gold Coast and former employee of the Royal Africa Company, became the interpreter and, more generally, the main intermediary for the English. Captain Assou, who supposedly learned French specifically for the job, acted as the interpreter for the French. The specialization of the officials who dealt with Europeans, from “*captain of the white men*” to a captain for each nation, indicates the Hueda kings’ drive to tightly control and monitor relations with Europeans. There were still other offices related to the organisation of the trade with Europeans. The sand captain was responsible for the landing of ships because the Slave Coast was difficult to access. The captain of the slaves handled the embarkment of the slaves, whilst the prison captain guarded slaves waiting to be sold.³⁸⁹

In Hueda and Dahomey, kingship was hereditary and, theoretically, the king designated his own heir. When this did not happen, the line of succession followed the rule of male primogeniture. However, in some instances, high officials had a say in the matter. The successor only became the formal king of Hueda, with full regal authority, if he received a specific sword. King Huffon, who took the throne as a minor in 1708, did not receive the sword and the beginning of his reign appears to have suffered from judicial and administrative weakness. King Huffon failed to enforce royal authority and chiefs solved conflicts without his endorsement.³⁹⁰ During the Dahomian rule, the king showed himself only rarely, on public occasions. During audiences, visitors had to prostrate themselves on arrival; the only exception to this was the great priest, who could remain standing in the presence of the king. Protocol prohibited visitors from wearing silk or shoes in his presence, and only the king and his entourage could wear red cloth.³⁹¹ The king had a monopoly over death penalty, but shared both his judicial and financial prerogatives with his main chiefs. The two main administrative officials were the *Migan* and the *Mehu*. European factors had no say in the appointment of their respective captain, although they could report complaints to the King. The Dahomey organised the administration of European trade in similar manner to Hueda,

³⁸⁸ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 61.

³⁸⁹ The terms “captains” and “cabéchères” are used interchangeably in Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 206–7.

³⁹⁰ Law, 86–90.

³⁹¹ Law, 78.

with captains for each nation: Alligny, Nançou and Zouglas acted as the captains of the French, English and Portuguese trading nations. In 1733, a main *Yevogan*, who had agents in Ouidah, replaced these three officials. During Tegbesu's reign (1740-1774), new administrative reforms arose. In 1746, Tegbesu executed the royal officials in charge of the European trade in Ouidah because they took advantage of their position and engaged in private trade.³⁹² The *Mehu* and *Migan* appointed new men to conduct the trade relations with Europeans. The *Yevogan* remained the political governor of Ouidah, while his commercial prerogative was transferred to the *Akhigan*, or the captain of trade, and two principal royal traders, the *Coki* and the *Bonyon*.³⁹³

The conquered kingdom of Hueda remained difficult for Dahomian kings to control. Decades of Euro-African trade, and the contacts generated by that trade, created a specific community set apart from the rest of the Dahomey kingdom. The exiled King Huffon and his captain Assou stayed on a nearby island and repeatedly attempted to retake their former kingdom. In order to increase their authority in the coastal region, King Agaja of Dahomey moved his capital from the Abomey plateau to Allada. Nevertheless, the Hueda people remained a military threat to the Dahomey. In 1747, raids south of Ouidah killed many Dahomian soldiers but the garrison under the command of general "*Cockavo*", the highest military officer in Ouidah, stopped them shortly thereafter.³⁹⁴ Furthermore, the neighbouring kingdom of Oyo regularly challenged Dahomian authority. Dahomey became a tributary to Oyo in 1748 and the two kingdoms achieved peace, although the struggle with the exiled Hueda carried on.³⁹⁵ During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Slave Coast was the scene of recurrent conflicts. Clashes emerged between the coastal kingdoms of Allada and Hueda, and later on between the Dahomey and Hueda during and after the conquest of 1727 to 1733. After the conquest, political unrest ensued due to the highly militarized nature of the state, the slave raids initiated by the Dahomey kingdom and confrontations with the interior kingdom of Oyo.

Generally speaking, overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah faced frequent political unrest. The struggle between the Mughal Empire and the Marathas in the region around Pondicherry, as well as the confrontation between the various kingdoms in Ouidah had an impact on overseas directors' strategies. However, the conflicts in the two regions did not

³⁹² Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders', 52.

³⁹³ Law, 'Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise in the Atlantic Trade', 563–64.

³⁹⁴ Law, *Ouidah*, 59.

³⁹⁵ Law, 63.

hinder their economic dynamism. In the case of the Bight of Benin, the regular markets that took place in the Hueda capital, attracting both local and foreign African traders, reflect this commercial vitality. In the case of the Coromandel region, the coastal commerce and the strategic position of the Coromandel Coast within the intra-Asian trade networks were auspicious factors for a good commercial environment, despite the political conflicts.³⁹⁶ An important difference between the political systems faced by the French in Pondicherry and Ouidah was the more centralized nature of the Dahomey state after the conquest of the Hueda kingdom, compared to the weakened state of the Mughal Empire after the conquest of the Deccan. This distinction is worth noting, because it affected the evolution of the French factories and forts in the two regions.

3. The French fort and factory in Pondicherry and in Ouidah

Pondicherry

Pondicherry was not the first trading post of the French in India, but it became the most important. The first factory of the French East India Company was in Surat, in Gujarat. François Caron founded the French factory in Surat in 1666; a Brussels-born Huguenot who had acquired extensive experience in the service of the Dutch VOC in Japan, Caron later served as director of the Company in India from 1667 to 1673.³⁹⁷ Three years later, another foreign director of the Company, the Armenian Marcara, initiated the creation of a trading post in Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast. The nearby Golkonda kingdom, and its connections to the Rakhine state and Bago (or current-day Myanmar) Siam and the Moluccas, made this Indian port an attractive, dynamic economic centre to the early East India Company.³⁹⁸ However, the Company looked for another possible establishment on the coast, which could become a “*French Batavia*.” After failed attempts to establish trading posts in Ceylon and then at San Thomé de Meliapour, the Company accepted Bijapur general Sher Khan Lodi’s invitation to establish a trading post in Pondicherry in 1674.³⁹⁹ This invitation was part of a geo-political strategy. When the French tried to conquer San Thomé, it was

³⁹⁶ Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast*, 8.

³⁹⁷ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 34–38.

³⁹⁸ Weber, ‘Les comptoirs, la mer et l’Inde’, 151.

³⁹⁹ Marguerite V. Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry, 1674-1815: histoire d’une ville coloniale française* (Pondichéry: Imprimerie Moderne, 1936), 3; Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 207. For more information on the first Company attempts on the Coromandel Coast and the “*Escadre de Perse*” see Ames, ‘Colbert’s Indian Ocean Strategy’.

under the domination of the King of Golkonda, who benefitted from Dutch support. Bijapur was an old enemy of Golkonda, and sought allies against the Dutch Golkondan alliance.⁴⁰⁰

Pondicherry was relatively well-situated, with the river Ariancoupam to the south that served as a natural protection for ships even if the factory had mediocre access to the sea.⁴⁰¹ The river Oupar, flowing from east to west and then from north to south before reaching the Ariancoupam, formed a natural border of the settlement. It was six *lieues*, or around twenty-four kilometres, away from Golkonda and near Senji.⁴⁰² Additionally, the settlement was well-connected to other European settlements on the Coromandel Coast with the English in Madras to the north, the Portuguese in Portonovo, the Danes in Tranquebar to the south and the Dutch in Nagapattinam and Ceylon.

Figure 2.7. Map of Pondicherry in 1716



Source: BnF, MS-6432 (1BisA), Denis Denyon (Company ingeneer in Pondicherry), *Plan des ville et fort Louis de Pondichéry*, 1716.

Most importantly, the location provided good quality cotton and indigo, as well as saltpetre, and became famous for its painted textiles. The quality of the textiles from Pondicherry threatened the French metropolitan market and, in January 1688, led to a prohibition on the importation of “*painted textiles*” in France, except as a re-export to Africa

⁴⁰⁰ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 92.

⁴⁰¹ Weber, ‘Les comptoirs, la mer et l’Inde’, 152.

⁴⁰² Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 4.

for slave-trading purposes.⁴⁰³ Despite the ban, these textiles represented half of the Company's sales at the end of the seventeenth century. According to the estimates of Jacques Weber, in 1691 the profits reached 300 percent for silk, 400 percent for cotton, 420 percent for pepper and 1,500 percent for saltpetre. In a document sent to the Company directors in Paris, the overseas director of the French fort in Ouidah listed the main commodities necessary for slave trade, which were overwhelmingly Indian textiles: textiles called *indiennes*, pieces of *Pondichéry* fabric, brandy, gunpowder, firearms, textiles called *salempouris* and a textile from Bengal called *guinée bleue*.⁴⁰⁴ In 1680, the settlement's fortifications were limited to two bastions with eight artillery pieces. A few years later, the Company placed four cannons in the centre of the fort, and eighteen faced the east to the sea.⁴⁰⁵ The fort served as the centre that other buildings gathered around: warehouses, some residences for French merchants and, along the street leading to the bazaar, Indian merchants' and workers' houses. In 1688, the Capuchins built their church and members of the *Missions Étrangères* created a home, as well. Three years later, the Jesuits constructed their own church. The Dutch took the settlement during the Nine Years War (1688-1697) and then handed it back to the French as part of the peace negotiations in Rijswijk.⁴⁰⁶ The Dutch period of Pondicherry brought some improvement to the fortification of the settlement.⁴⁰⁷ In March 1699, the director and his men returned to Pondicherry.

Aside from the director, the Company employees were French merchants, Indian brokers, scribes and translators in Persian and Telugu, as well as a garrison. Since the beginning of the settlement, the garrison was overwhelmingly Indian. In the 1680s, there were one hundred European soldiers and 600 Topaz. Europeans used the term Topaz to qualify Asians from diverse castes and nations, who converted to Christianity.⁴⁰⁸ The garrison also included Lascarins, which referred to Indian soldiers. However, individuals categorized as Lascarins in European sources could vary, and there is no consistency across time or space.⁴⁰⁹ In the 1710s, the population of the garrison was less than half of what it had been in the

⁴⁰³ Weber, 'Les comptoirs, la mer et l'Inde', 154.

⁴⁰⁴ ANOM C2 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743: "Voici ce que l'on donne pour la traite des captifs à Juda; 2 ancres d'eau de vie, 2 pieces Indiennes 2 pièces de Pondichéry, un baril de poudre, 4 fusils, 1 pièce de salempouris blanc 1 guinée bleue".

⁴⁰⁵ They were more display than real defence since they could not reach the sea and were not effective against ships. Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 40.

⁴⁰⁶ ANOM C2 64 f°93, lettre de Martin, 1 October 1693.

⁴⁰⁷ ANOM C2 65 f°25, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699. On the fortification of Pondichéry see Jean Deloche, *Le vieux Pondichéry (1673-1824) revisité d'après les plans anciens* (Pondichéry-Paris: Institut Français de Pondichéry ; École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005).

⁴⁰⁸ Raphael Bluteau, *Vocabulario Portuguez e Latino*, vol. 8 (Coimbra, 1712), 201.

⁴⁰⁹ Matthias van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld: globalisering, arbeid in interculturele ontmoetingen tussen Aziatische en Europese zeelieden in dienst van de VOC, 1600-1800* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 183; 246.

1680s, but the proportion of Indian soldiers remained high. In the expenses sheet of 1713, Director Dulivier noted 327 soldiers, comprised, in part, of ninety-six Topaz and 106 Lascarins.⁴¹⁰ The reason for the high number of Topaz and Lascarins was mainly due to the small number of European soldiers sent by the Company. As an additional advantage, it cost less to hire Indian soldiers. A Topaz soldier, at six *livres* a month, earned half of what a European soldier earned and a Lascarin earned half that again, at three *livres* a month. The difference in salary could be explained by different factors such as religion, class, origin or all three together. However, the sources do not point to a specific factor and the subject needs further research.

In addition to the production of good quality textiles, Pondicherry emerged as the centre of the French presence in India for three other reasons. First, the development of the trade in the factory of Ougly and later Chandernagor in Bengal, and the re-establishment of the trade in Masulipatnam shifted the position of the French in India to the east, which made Pondicherry geographically central. Second, the debts in Surat increased as a result of the trade coming to a standstill in Gujarat, provoked by the disintegration of central Mughal authority generating unsafety the roads. By 1700, the factory replaced Surat as the administrative centre of the French trade settlements in India. The town of Pondicherry expanded during the first years of the eighteenth century and by 1706 it reached 30,000 inhabitants.⁴¹¹ In addition to the town itself, local rulers granted the Company multiple nearby villages, mostly inhabited by weavers. By 1706, the Company exercised jurisdiction over five villages: Kalapat, Ulkarai, Murungapakkam, Pakkamodiampet and Kalatikupam.⁴¹²

As administration centre for all French settlements in India, Pondicherry was granted a sovereign council, also called superior council, by patent letter in February 1701. Sovereign councils were judicial institutions in the French colonies, similar to the French parliaments in the metropolis. The council's purview was judicial and administrative. Pondicherry's Sovereign Council, in particular, had more latitude, participating in governance and commercial tasks.⁴¹³ The Company's charter granted it the right to administer justice. The court consisted of merchants from the Company, and this demonstrates the leniency of the French King towards merchant colonial administration in the early French overseas context, probably due to the lack of means. The patent letter stated that "*the said council would be*

⁴¹⁰ ANOM C2 69 f°51, state of the expenses in 1713 and f°144 state of the expenses in 1715.

⁴¹¹ Weber, 'Les comptoirs, la mer et l'Inde', 156.

⁴¹² Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 93.

⁴¹³ *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, Introduction.

composed of the directors general of the Company, if they are present in the town and fort of Pondicherry, or of their director general in the factory, and of merchants of the Company residing in the factory, to give justice in the name [of the Company]."⁴¹⁴ The patent letters appointed Director Martin and three merchants of the Company to sit in the council, on the recommendation of the directors in Paris.⁴¹⁵ In 1715, instructions to Director Dulivier specified that the council was to meet at least twice a week and sign the accounts of the Company monthly.⁴¹⁶

Besides the Company judicial institution, a pre-existing Indian court, the *Chaudrie*, or Choultry, ruled on disputes between Indian inhabitants. The simultaneous operation of the Sovereign Council and the *Chaudrie* led to a plural legal landscape. The East India Company, like any other foreign power acquiring territory, had to make strategic decisions regarding how they exercised their legal control as a method to maintain social order.⁴¹⁷ In Pondicherry, similar to the English approach in Madras, Company administrators kept existing legal institutions and added their own. The *Chaudrie* took place every Monday and Friday at the market place, or *grand bazaar*, and three judges, all Company employees, presided over the court.⁴¹⁸ By the early eighteenth century, the local court was a mixture of Indian and French law. In its efforts to control the *Chaudrie*, the East India Company adapted to pre-existing legal frameworks that created, in practice, a composite legal institution.

The French fort in Ouidah

The main French factories on the West African coast concentrated around the Senegal River valley and in the Bight of Benin. The French did not establish a trading post on the Gold Coast, unlike the other main European trading companies. The factory and fort on the Bight of Benin was therefore the only French trading post south of the Sierra Leone River.⁴¹⁹ This is significant because the Bight of Benin, along with the Gold Coast, were the major

⁴¹⁴ "Lettres Patentes portant Etablissement du Conseil Souverain de Pondichéry : Ledit Conseil sera compose des Directeurs Généraux de la Compagnie, au cas qu'il s'en trouve en ladite Ville et Fort de Pondichéry, et en leur absence de leur Directeur général de leur Comptoir de Pondichéry, et des Marchands pour ladite Compagnie, résidens dans le Comptoir, pour rendre en notre Nom la Justice, tant Civile que Criminelle" in Dufresne de Francheville, *Histoire de la Compagnie des Indes avec les titres de ses concessions et privilèges*, 280–82.

⁴¹⁵ François de Flacourt, Pierre le Pheliponnat de Chalonge, Claude de Boyvin d'Hardancourt.

⁴¹⁶ ANOM E 152, Personnel file of Dulivier : "instructions de la Compagnie 1715".

⁴¹⁷ Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

⁴¹⁸ Jean-Claude Bonnan, *Jugements du tribunal de la chaudrie de Pondichéry: 1766-1817*, vol. 1 (Pondichéry, 1999), iii–iv.

⁴¹⁹ About the attempts of settlement on the Gold Coast and in Issiny see Paul Roussier, *L'établissement d'Issigny, 1687-1702. Voyages de Ducasse, Tibierge et d'Amon à la côte de Guinée. Publiés pour la première fois et suivis de la relation du voyage du royaume d'Issiny du P. Godefroy Loyer* (Paris: Larose, 1935).

areas to purchase slaves for French slave traders during the first half of the eighteenth century; out of 1,049 ships, 486 ships sailed to the Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast, which accounts for forty-four percent of all slave trade voyages.⁴²⁰ After an expedition in 1669 by d'Elbée and Hendrik Carloff, the Guinea Company established the factory in Offra, in the kingdom of Allada.⁴²¹ However, the French trading post on the Slave Coast changed soon after. In 1671, Carloff returned to Allada as escort to Matteo Lopes, the ambassador of the kingdom of Allada, and heard that the Dutch hindered the French slave trade in Offra.⁴²² The Company transferred the factory to the nearby kingdom of Hueda in the same year.⁴²³ Jean-Baptiste Ducasse, who visited the coast on behalf of the Guinea Company from 1687 to 1688, mentioned the trading lodge at the capital of the Hueda kingdom, Savi.⁴²⁴

When the original French factory in the Hueda kingdom burned down in 1703, the Company factor recommended building a new one nearer to the sea; at the original location, it was impossible to transport merchandise from the ships to the trading lodge in Savi in a day. When Jean Doublet, the French corsair appointed by the Asiento Company to undertake a slave trade voyage arrived, he negotiated with the King of Hueda to build a fort closer to the seashore.⁴²⁵ Despite this, the new fort remained separated from the sea by a lagoon and a river. To the Company's disadvantage, the lagoon kept the fort at a considerable distance from the sea. It made the use of canoemen necessary for the transport of merchandise to the fort. The Company built the fort in the village of Glehue, which roughly translates to field house, and they therefore named the fort *Saint Louis en Gregoy*, situated approximatively three and a half kilometres from the coast.⁴²⁶

The fort was one hundred metres long and eighty metres wide and its walls were made of dry mud and straw, which were difficult to maintain during the rainy season; its roof was

⁴²⁰ Numbers from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: <http://slavevoyages.org/> last consulted on the 05/07/2017.

⁴²¹ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 38. For more information on Hendrik Carloff see Kaarle Wirta, 'Rediscovering Agency in the Atlantic: A Biographical Approach Linking Entrepreneurial Spirit and Overseas Companies', in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, ed. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 118–29.

⁴²² About the embassy of Matteo Lopes see Christina Brauner, 'To Be the Key for Two Coasters: A West African Embassy to France (1670/1)', *IFRA-Nigeria e-Papers Series*, no. 30 (2013): 1–27.

⁴²³ The factory was first built half way between the coast and the capital but after an attack from neighbouring kingdoms, it was destroyed: see Frioux-Salgas, *Les Français dans les conflits géo-politiques de la Côte des Esclaves*, 23.

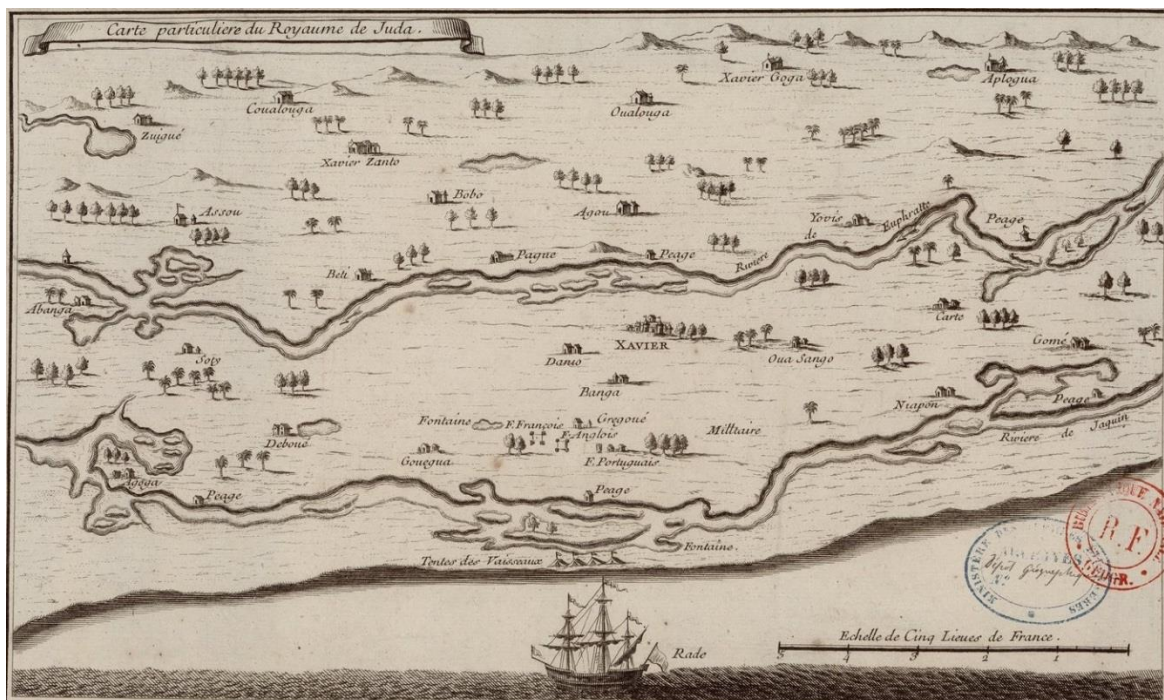
⁴²⁴ Roussier, *L'établissement d'Issigny*, 14.

⁴²⁵ Together with other vessels fitted out for trade in the West Indies they formed a fleet of 46 ships commanded by Guymont Du Coudray until they went separate ways: see Jean Doublet, *Journal du corsaire Jean Doublet de Honfleur, lieutenant de frégate sous Louis XIV*, ed. Charles Bréard (Paris: Perrin, 1887), 254.

⁴²⁶ Frioux-Salgas, *Les Français dans les conflits géo-politiques de la Côte des Esclaves*, 27.

easily flammable.⁴²⁷ It became mainly an *entrepôt* and the director stayed in the trading lodge in Savi with representatives of other European nations, except for the English, who lived in the English fort. In addition to the trading fort in Ouidah, the overseas director negotiated the creation of a trading post in Jakin, in Allada. In 1727, directors negotiated a new French trading station in Grand Popo, west of the Hueda kingdom.⁴²⁸ The fort in Ouidah remained the main centre of the French presence on the Slave Coast and the personnel in Jakin and Grand Popo fell under the authority of the director of the fort in Ouidah. The English Royal African Company also kept a lodge in Savi from 1682, and built a fort nearer to the seashore by the end of the seventeenth century. The Dutch West India Company only maintained a factory in Savi between 1703 and 1727.⁴²⁹ The Portuguese built the fort of Sao Joao Baptista de Ajudá in 1727.

Figure 2.8. Representation of the Kingdom of Hueda and the European forts in 1725-1727



Source: BnF, département Cartes et plans, GE DD-2987 (8227): Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du chevalier Desmarchais en Guinée*, 2: 9.

Until the construction of the fort in 1704, there had only been one French factor at the trading post in Hueda. After the building of the fort, the number of personnel in the factory increased. By 1716, the fort maintained a director, a vice-director, a book keeper and a storekeeper. Additionally, it housed a surgeon and a priest, as well as enslaved Africans at the

⁴²⁷ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 56.

⁴²⁸ Berbain, 52.

⁴²⁹ Law, *Ouidah*, 34–35.

service of the French fort. A small French garrison patrolled and lived in the fort for the security of the personnel and merchandise of the Company. The number of employees effectively present and able to work could vary greatly, since Europeans succumbed to diseases – especially smallpox – and their life expectancy was low. The Company did not always replace the diseased and directors often had to face personnel shortages; therefore, many employees accumulated skills for different roles. For this reason, the Company recommended sending employees already acquainted with the conditions of the West African coast. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the number of metropolitan personnel decreased steeply: the trading station began with around thirty French employees and by 1720 there were approximately eleven.⁴³⁰ Regular geo-political conflicts in the region and the African monarchy's tight control over European employees also accounted for the high mortality of French employees, or their early return to France.

An alternative solution to adequately staffing the garrison and the fort at a low cost was to have enslaved Africans, who did not face similar environmental challenges, at the service of the fort. These Africans were called *acquérats*, in reference to the name of a people further inland where these specific slaves supposedly originated.⁴³¹ Their tasks centred on the maintenance and protection of the fort. Categorised as slaves of the Company or of the French king, they were legally considered moveable assets.⁴³² They could not be sold to European slave traders.⁴³³ In 1714, the director estimated their number at 160, including men, women and children.⁴³⁴ However, information about the *acquérats* is scarce. In the instructions sent to Bouchel in 1716, the Company devoted a specific article to the enslaved Africans of the trading post: “*there are 2,190 livres allocated for the food of the forty slaves of the fort and factory and an amount of 400 livres for the textiles needed for the slaves of the fort and factory.*”⁴³⁵ At the end of a list of wages in 1718, there is also a mention of more than twenty slaves of the fort.⁴³⁶ After 1720, under the Company of the Indies, the budget sent to the Company allocated 13,000 *livres* to feed the *acquérats* and additional 1,000 *livres* for the

⁴³⁰ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 8.

⁴³¹ The exact origin of the *acquérats* is not identified. According to Robin Law they could be from Kuare (or Kabre) at the North-West of Dahomey, see: Law, ‘Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders’, 49.

⁴³² ANOM C6 25, Documents about the Fort of Juda on the Guinea Coast, 1714.

⁴³³ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 63.

⁴³⁴ ANOM C6 25 documents about the Fort of Juda on the Guinea Coast, 1714.

⁴³⁵ ANOM E 43, personnel file of Bouchel: “*Il doit estre entretenu au fort et comptoir de Juda 40 nègres pour la nourriture desquelles il est employé une somme de 2 190 et une somme de 400 livres pour les toilles nécessaires aux nègres de fort et comptoir*”.

⁴³⁶ ANOM C6 25, documents untitled, around 1718.

acquérats' brandy.⁴³⁷ The same budget lists the total wages of European employees at 9,300 *livres*. From this data, we can conclude that *acquérats* still far outnumbered the European employees after 1720.

Despite their geographical distance, the political situations in Pondicherry and Ouidah share certain key features. Both factories and forts operated in close proximity to other European representatives. On the Coromandel Coast, the English established a settlement in Madras, the Danish in Tranquebar and the Dutch in Nagapattinam. In the town of Savi and later in Ouidah the English and Portuguese had trading stations alongside the French, the Dutch traded in nearby Jakin, and beyond this, the Dutch, English and Danish maintained trading forts along the Gold Coast. Climatic, financial and political conjunctures forced directors at both factories to hire predominantly Indian and African employees and soldiers. Local workforce outnumbered European employees.

The aim here is not to argue that both trading forts were similar in all ways. Enough obvious differences contradict that claim. First, if one considers the demography of the two case studies, it quickly becomes clear that the two forts were vastly different. While Pondicherry grew from 30,000 inhabitants in 1705 to more than 60,000 in 1718, the fort in Ouidah remained a trading post with barely more than ten European employees and an African population that could reach 160. The factories' differences are also clearly demonstrated in their annual budget; while Pondicherry's budget reached 79,008 *livres* in 1715, the Company allotted their fort in Ouidah 25,850 *livres* before 1720 and this stretched to 42,320 *livres* after 1720. Second, the socio-political status of the two establishments differed greatly. Pondicherry developed into a colony with a sovereign council from the French king, while the French fort of Ouidah did not even maintain a council of Company employees before 1748.

The differences notwithstanding, from the point of view of overseas directors, the situation in Pondicherry and Ouidah counted a number of similarities. Though the King granted sovereignty to the director of Pondicherry and his council, it remained a delegation of sovereignty from the French king. The greater size, the relative commercial autonomy and greater delegation of French sovereignty in Pondicherry, as opposed to the French fort in Ouidah, does not imply independence from Indian political authorities, as will be shown in the following section.

⁴³⁷ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 59.

4. Sovereign powers

The sovereign rights delegated by local rulers to the Company in Ouidah and Pondicherry seem, at first glance, diametrically different. Pondicherry developed into a town that could rule itself, while the fort in Ouidah remained a factory under African authority and jurisdiction. While the Company governed the population of Pondicherry, the settlement was not necessarily firmly established.⁴³⁸ The situation of Pondicherry is regularly assimilated to that of the English East India Company settlement in Madras, both settlements are therefore described as “*on their way to become independent*” from local political rulers.⁴³⁹ However, one should not overlook the weak financial and commercial situation of the French East India Company, limiting greatly their political influence “*despite the autonomy which Mughal weakness afforded the settlement*”⁴⁴⁰. This section explores further this issue by looking into the existence or absence of tributary relationships with local authorities, the control over tax collection rights, judicial prerogatives and the rights to coin money in both places.

Tributary relations and delegation of sovereign powers

Similar to other European settlements on the Coromandel Coast, privileges and rights were granted to the French by an official document promulgated in the name of the local ruler, such as the *farman* under the Mughals.⁴⁴¹ Settlements like Pondicherry depended on these grants, which were regularly renegotiated through diplomatic relations and sums of money and presents.⁴⁴² When Shivaji conquered Sher Khan's territory, François Martin, the first overseas director of Pondicherry, did not yet have a formal act guaranteeing the Company's right of establishment in Pondicherry.⁴⁴³ In July 1677, Shivaji agreed to grant a formal act that ensured French safety in Pondicherry as well as tax exemptions and the right to trade, excluding all other European trading nations.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁸ Marquet, ‘Le rôle des intermédiaires’, 19.

⁴³⁹ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 264.

⁴⁴⁰ John F. Richards, ‘European City-States on the Coromandel Coast’, in *Studies in the Foreign Relations of India: Prof. H.K. Sherwani Felicitation Volume*, ed. P.M. Joshi and M.A. Nayeem (Hyderabad: State Archives, 1975), 513.

⁴⁴¹ The term *farman* was used by the French to refer to official documents and dispensations from any local rulers, not exclusively Mughal. The same was true for the English East India Company Stern, *The Company-State Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India*, 13.

⁴⁴² Stern, 13; 50.

⁴⁴³ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 23.

⁴⁴⁴ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 108. The exact terms of the grant have been transcribed in Abbé Guyon, *Histoire des Indes orientales, anciennes et modernes* (Paris: Chez la veuve Pierres, 1744), 220–28. “Traduction du Caoul ou Firman de Ragarnat Pendit, Général pour le Raïa Sivagy dans le Carnate A la Roïale Compagnie de France établie à Pondichéry”

When Aurangzeb conquered Bijapur in 1686 and Golkonda in 1687, the new Maratha leader, Rajaram, in need of money, took refuge in Senji.⁴⁴⁵ The Company took advantage of the situation and negotiated a loan of 6,000 *characas*, approximately 16,000 *livres*, to Rajaram at an interest rate of eighteen percent in exchange for tax collections rights in Pondicherry and the territories under the Company's jurisdiction, until the Prince repaid the debt.⁴⁴⁶ A *farman* confirmed this agreement on 7 June 1690, granting protection to the Company from its enemies.⁴⁴⁷ Given that the usual interest rate in India during this period was ten percent and five to eight percent in France, Martin expected Rajaram not to repay his debt.⁴⁴⁸ The loan was a step towards acquiring tax collection rights in Pondicherry, while remaining under the protection of Rajaram.

However, the protection offered by Rajaram was not effective for long. In 1693, forced by another poor financial situation, Rajaram proposed a new deal to the French: either to lend him 6,000 pagodas or to buy the proprietary rights to Pondicherry outright.⁴⁴⁹ The French had felt threatened by the Dutch since the beginning of the Seven Years' War (1688-1697) and therefore did not want to incur debts to help him nor lose his tenuous protection. Later that same year, the Dutch gave Rajaram the financial aid he needed, conquered Pondicherry and bought it for 50,000 pagodas, or approximately 425,000 *livres*.⁴⁵⁰ As mandated by the Rijswijck peace treaty of 1699, the Dutch handed Pondicherry and "*the lands, rights and privileges acquired from the Princes and inhabitants of the country*" back to the French.⁴⁵¹ The latter paid 16,000 pagodas, about 136,000 *livres*, to the Dutch for the fortification works they had made and the pieces of lands they had acquired during their occupation of Pondicherry.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁵ John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India. 1, The Mughals and Their Contemporaries; 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 225.

⁴⁴⁶ Martineau, *Lettres et conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry*, 6–7. Jinji, 7 June 1690: "*Lettre de Ram Raja, Seigneur des terres de Gingy, etc, à Monsieur Martin, Directeur Général de la Compagnie de France, relative à un emprunt de 6 000 characas fait à la compagnie*" and "*Reçu de Ram Raja de 6 000 characas empruntés à la compagnie*." (these documents were translated from Maratha language on the 16 February 1741). Currency equivalence: 1 pagoda = 8 *livres 10 sous*; 1 fanon = 4 *sous*; 1 rupee = 30–33 *sous* in Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 540–41.

⁴⁴⁷ Martineau, *Lettres et conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry*, 5. Jinji, 7 June 1690: "*Lettre de Ram Raja, Seigneur des terres de Gingy, à Monsieur Martin, Directeur Général, accordant protection à la Compagnie française*." (this document was translated from Maratha language on 16 February 1741).

⁴⁴⁸ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 279; Sidney Homer, *A History of Interest Rates*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 128; 168.

⁴⁴⁹ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 48.

⁴⁵⁰ Guyon, *Histoire des Indes orientales, anciennes et modernes*, 234.

⁴⁵¹ Guyon, 245. "[...] pour en disposer comme il lui plaira, comme aussi des terres, droits et privilèges qu'elle a acquis tant du Prince que des Habitans du pays".

⁴⁵² Guyon, 246.

In 1697, Aurangzeb's conquest of Senji threw the grants acquired from the Marathas into uncertainty. Indeed, the new ruler did not recognize the transaction made between Rajaram and the Dutch over Pondicherry and the subsequent transfer to French control. The East India Company faced strong opposition from Mughal authorities, regarding the building of fortifications on Mughal territory without permission.⁴⁵³ The declaration of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) in Europe incited the overseas director to fortify Pondicherry to be able to face the Dutch. The overseas director reported that "*the Mughal assumed that the kingdom of Capitat where Pondicherry is situated is his, he has fortresses West and South of us and we are landlocked in his territories,*" adding that it was clear, however, that "*Pondicherry was owned by the company, that it had been granted and even bought.*"⁴⁵⁴ Despite the director's beliefs and the contractual property transaction between the Marathas and the Dutch, the settlement remained under the authority of the Mughals.⁴⁵⁵ This situation is confirmed by the fact that the overseas director bestowed a "gift" of 10,000 rupees, approximately 15,000 *livres*, to the general Da'ud Khan Panni, to further fortify the settlement.⁴⁵⁶ Similar to other Europeans on the Coromandel Coast, such as the English in Madras, the French had to renegotiate their privileges regularly.⁴⁵⁷ When there was a change of ruler, the French ran the risk that the new authorities would not recognize the privilege and transactions passed with the former ruler.⁴⁵⁸ If the terms did not suit the new ruler, his army could threaten to blockade the settlement as happened to Madras in 1701.⁴⁵⁹ Without access to food supplies or textiles from the hinterland, the settlement could neither feed its population nor maintain its purpose, trading.

Additionally to the payments in different forms for *farmans*, the East India Company paid tribute to Da'ud Khan Panni. In 1701, after two years of absence, the Mughal representative collected tribute from coastal regions. He started in Tanjavur then traveled to Cuddalore, where the English offered tributary presents. The representative arrived in nearby

⁴⁵³ According to Richards this was not an unreasonable argument, see: Richards, 'European City-States on the Coromandel Coast', 512.

⁴⁵⁴ ANOM C2 67 F°252, letter of Martin, 19 February 1703: "*Le Mogol prétend que tout le royaume du Capitat, où Pondichéry est renfermé est à luy, il a des forteresses à l'ouest et au sud de nous, et nous sommes comme enclavés dans ses terres [...] Pondichéry et les lieux qui en dépendent sont à votre compagnie, qu'ils vous ont été cédés et meme bien achetés*".

⁴⁵⁵ Martineau, *Lettres et conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry*, 3. "Paravana de Timagy Quechoa, Soubab de Gingy, autorisant la Compagnie française à batir une forteresse à Pondichéry" (this document was translated from Maratha language on 16 February 1741).

⁴⁵⁶ Richards, 'European City-States on the Coromandel Coast', 512.

⁴⁵⁷ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 85-89.

⁴⁵⁸ V.G. Hatakhar, *Relations between the French and the Marathas (1668-1815)* (Bombay: T.V. Chidambaran Register University of Bombay, 1958), 53.

⁴⁵⁹ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 88.

Pondicherry before going to Sadras, for the tribute from the Dutch.⁴⁶⁰ The overseas director sent presents to Da'ud Khan “*according to the ordinary custom.*”⁴⁶¹ What was described as gifts in the European sources was in practice a tribute from the political perspective of the Mughals.

The East India Company enjoyed tax collection rights in Pondicherry and the right to tax farm these revenues over the territories it had been granted. There were different types of revenue: the first type was the duty on the sale of tobacco, *bétel*—a type of leaf mixed with lime areca nuts masticated for its tonic virtues—and *arrack*, a palm alcohol.⁴⁶² The second source of revenue was the duty on commodities, particularly rice, entering Pondicherry and adjacent territories. The last type of revenue was land revenue from the territories that belonged to the Company. The Company farmed most of the revenues out to Indian merchants.⁴⁶³ In 1714, the lease for the revenue of a village or small rural community called an *aldée*, from the Portuguese *aldeia*, amounted to 340 pagodas a year, around 2,890 *livres*, and could be auctioned to Christians or non-Christians.⁴⁶⁴ In 1705, the total Company revenues in Pondicherry amounted to 33,717 *livres*.⁴⁶⁵ By 1710, the revenues of Pondicherry had increased to 42,553 *livres*.⁴⁶⁶ However, these revenues still did not cover all the expenses of Pondicherry.

Regarding the right to exercise justice, the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry, created in 1701, was entitled to dispense justice to all the inhabitants of the Company's settlement. As for the right to mint coins, which would provide the Company with another sovereign right and greater economic strength in the region, the French were only allowed to mint pagodas in Pondicherry, not rupees. The *nawab* of Arcot granted the Company the right to mint pagodas and *fanams*, the local currencies used on the Coromandel Coast, in 1700.⁴⁶⁷ The pagoda was a gold coin of a standard gold content, while the *fanam* varied locally.⁴⁶⁸ In Pondicherry, twenty-six *fanams* made a pagoda. However, to make rupees, the Company had to send silver

⁴⁶⁰ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 3: 394-395.

⁴⁶¹ ANOM C2 66 f°7, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁴⁶² ANOM C2 66 f° 6, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁴⁶³ Marquet, ‘Le rôle des intermédiaires’, 21.

⁴⁶⁴ ANOM C2 69 f°88, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714.

⁴⁶⁵ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 60.

⁴⁶⁶ ANOM C2 69 f° 7, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

⁴⁶⁷ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 203.

⁴⁶⁸ The standard pagodas on the Coromandel was 52 4/5 grains weight and 20.7 carat gold in Arasaratnam, 296; 300.

to the mint of the *nawab* of Arcot.⁴⁶⁹ There, silver was transformed into rupees against seven percent of the value. On multiple occasions, the Company tried to obtain the permission to mint rupees in Pondicherry, to avoid the minting tax and achieve independence from the *nawab*.⁴⁷⁰ This right would only be granted to them in 1735. Thus, despite the fact that the French acquired tax collection rights over Pondicherry and its territories, as well as a judicial prerogative, the French remained dependent on local authorities for their privileges through tribute. The statement of the historian Labernadie that by 1699 the French were in “*total possession of Pondicherry, including the territory itself*” deserves to be nuanced. If the French were *de facto* independent, the overlordship of the Mughals remained *de jure*.⁴⁷¹ From the perspective of the Mughals, the right of the French over territory was based on principles of suzerainty rather than sovereignty.⁴⁷² Additionally, one should not underestimate the relative military weakness of the French at this stage of their expansion which made them vulnerable to attacks and blockades of the Mughals.

In Ouidah, the Asiento Company had no territorial domination over their fort and factory. Studies on European forts on the Gold Coast have argued convincingly that the building of fortification did not imply the domination of territories. Rather, European forts were aimed at achieving exclusive commercial and political alliances with African sovereigns “*from whom they leased the land on which they built*”.⁴⁷³ In the case of the Dutch, for instance, it has been asserted that the WIC did not own any territory in West Africa, even where the WIC could exercise sovereign rights on behalf of the States General.⁴⁷⁴ It was not before the late nineteenth century that European territorial domination on the Gold Coast became a reality.⁴⁷⁵ While European territorial domination on the Gold Coast in the early modern period is rightfully questioned, the situation of power of Europeans in Ouidah was even weaker. Indeed, they could not even aim at exclusivity in political and commercial dealings with the Hueda and Dahomey kings as they were multiple European factors in Ouidah. The French governor, together with the English, Dutch and Portuguese

⁴⁶⁹ Philippe Haudrère, ‘La monnaie de Pondichéry au XVIIIe siècle’, in *Les relations entre la France et l’Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2002), 40.

⁴⁷⁰ Haudrère, 42; 54.

⁴⁷¹ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 59.

⁴⁷² Similarly to the WIC in Elmina on the West African Coast. Hendrik Jacob den Heijer, ‘Met Bewillinghe van de Swarte Partij: Nederlands Recht Op de Goudkust in de Zeventiende Eeuw’, *Pro Memorie : Bijdragen Tot de Rechtsgeschiedenis Der Nederlanden* 5, no. 2 (2003): 257.

⁴⁷³ John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu and Victoria Ellen Smith, *Shadows of Empire in West Africa: New Perspectives on European Fortifications* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 4.

⁴⁷⁴ Heijer, ‘Met Bewillinghe van de Swarte Partij: Nederlands Recht Op de Goudkust in de Zeventiende Eeuw’, 362.

⁴⁷⁵ Osei-Tutu and Smith, *Shadows of Empire in West Africa*, 5; Heijer, ‘Met Bewillinghe van de Swarte Partij: Nederlands Recht Op de Goudkust in de Zeventiende Eeuw’, 362.

representatives residing in Ouidah, remained under the authority of the Hueda and Dahomian kings.

The kings exerted this strict control in different ways. Firstly, the king of both African kingdoms appointed a specific royal official for all interactions with the French. Furthermore, the use of space played an important role in controlling European activities. Under the Hueda kings, before 1727, the Company had a factory at the capital, next to other Europeans, where the director and the employees resided. Kenneth Kelly interpreted this grouping of all the Europeans together in the same compound in the capital as the most effective way of exerting control over the European trading nations.⁴⁷⁶ The European compounds could not be fortified or made defensible in any way. This was also the case in Allada, where the French first established a trading post, because the King forbade the construction of a fort. The French fort built closer to the seashore remained a warehouse for goods.

Figure 2.9. Representation of the European factories in Savi in 1725-1727



Source: BnF, département Cartes et plans, GE DD-2987 (8233): Labat, 2: 40.

⁴⁷⁶ Kelly, 'Controlling Traders', 151.

After the Dahomian conquest, the Dahomey destroyed the capital of Hueda and Company agents moved to reside in the fort. However, the control over Europeans remained unchanged and it can be argued that their situation even deteriorated. A Company director went so far as to say that he was a “*slave of this king and abandoned to his good will, being on his land from which we cannot today leave without his permission.*”⁴⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, the fort walls were a mix of dry mud and straw that made it extremely difficult to defend. Furthermore, even if the fort was closer to the coast than the former trading lodge in Savi, it remained three and half kilometres away from the coast. Contrary to Cape Coast Castle or Elmina, European ships could not reach the fort directly to provide ammunition and food supplies. If conflict arose, enemy forces could easily starve the French fort in Ouidah into surrender.

European representatives in Ouidah paid a tribute to the king of Hueda and, later, Dahomey.⁴⁷⁸ In addition to the tribute, Europeans paid taxes on transactions to the king. Hueda and Dahomian kings shared the right to levy taxes through their main officials.⁴⁷⁹ The king taxed exports of enslaved Africans in two ways. He collected the first duty through the customs paid by the European buyers to be allowed to trade called “the opening of the trade”. The opening of the trade meant that French captains visited the prisons to buy enslaved Africans and that they had “*to bring a bottle flask of brandy and to mark a slave for the King, a slave for captain Carter and a slave to captain Agou*”.⁴⁸⁰ The French captains then unloaded their merchandise and had to “pay the following presents”: some *eau-de-vie* to the King, some *eau-de-vie* or some indigo to Captain Carter, captain Agou, captain Assou and other middlemen.⁴⁸¹ When the trade was over, the French captains gave to captain Assou one iron bar for each man and half iron bar for each women he sold, an enslaved African for some merchandise to the King and another enslaved African to Agou for his interpret tax, another slave to the man that brought the captives and to the man who brought merchandise. The use of both terms “pay” and “presents” in the same sentence shows how the gift giving inside the

⁴⁷⁷ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733 : “*me regardant comme esclave de ce Roy et livré à son caprice étant sur sa terre d’où l’on ne peut aujourd’hui sortir que par sa permission*”.

⁴⁷⁸ Christina Brauner, ‘Connecting Things: Trading Companies and Diplomatic Gift-Giving on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 4 (5 July 2016): 416–17.

⁴⁷⁹ Under the Hueda kings, the tax rate on all transactions made at the market of Savi was of 1/20 of the value of the commodities. The taxes on market transactions were collected by a royal official, “the captain of the market”. The King levied also taxes on production and on inheritance. Anyone entering the kingdom and crossing the river had to pay a toll (2 cowrie shells a person). Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 49.

⁴⁸⁰ ANOM C6 25 Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast 1722: “*un flacon d’eau de vie et sont obligés de marquer un captif au roy, un au capitaine carte et un au capitaine agou*”.

⁴⁸¹ ANOM C6 25 Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast 1722: “*ils doivent payer les présents qui suivent*”.

trading process are hard to distinguish from mere customs. As the “gifts” were regular (every slave trading session), of a set value to specific actors and forced, there are little doubts that they were in practice custom duties. The African king levied a second tax on the transaction of enslaved Africans.

By 1705, the first customs fee for opening the trade was the value of ten slaves in goods, and this stayed stable in 1720.⁴⁸² The price of slaves increased drastically between the close of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, and the duty on the transaction was one-eightieth of their price in the 1720s.⁴⁸³ By 1718, the Hueda king extended his right to collect taxes to dealings among Europeans, making them pay the same duty as the African traders.⁴⁸⁴ The only duty the overseas directors were entitled to levy was the three *livres* per enslaved African sold to French captains during the Asiento Company administration, until 1713.⁴⁸⁵ These three *livres* were part of the tax French private traders paid in exchange for their license. After 1713, private traders paid the duties on the slave-trade voyages in France upon the ships' return.⁴⁸⁶ Regarding the administration of justice in Ouidah, the judicial power was also in the hands of the king and his officials. Despite this, private individuals customarily enforced justice, including the death penalty. Unlike the Hueda kings, Dahomey kings upheld the monopoly of justice.⁴⁸⁷ Although French Company employees remained under of the Hueda or Dahomey King's jurisdiction, disputes among French Company employees or merchants were often dealt by the French director.⁴⁸⁸ The Company had given “*absolute authority*” to the director over the factors of the fort and the garrison.⁴⁸⁹ Despite the limited scope, the African kings and the Company outsourced *de facto* their jurisdiction over fort employees to the overseas director.

Asserting sovereignty

Rulers on the Coromandel Coast actively tried to attract European traders to compete with their neighbours. The initiative for the settlement in Pondicherry came from the governor of the region, Sher Khan Lodi, who encouraged the French emissary to establish a trading

⁴⁸² Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 209.

⁴⁸³ Law, 210.

⁴⁸⁴ Law, 210.

⁴⁸⁵ ANOM E 145, Personnel file of Ducoulombier.

⁴⁸⁶ ANOM E 43, Personnel file of Bouchel.

⁴⁸⁷ Robin Law, ‘Finance and Credit in Pre-Colonial Dahomey’, in *Credit, Currencies and Culture. African Financial Institutions in Historical Perspective*, ed. Endre Stiansen and Jane I. Guyer (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999), 32–33.

⁴⁸⁸ “*Europeans were clearly subject to local jurisdiction*” in Law, *Ouidah*, 108.

⁴⁸⁹ ANOM E 145, Personnel file of Ducoulombier: “*instructions article 4 : il se fera reconnoitre en qualité de directeur et aura le commandement absolu sur tous les commis de la compagnie qui sont dans le comptoir et fort de Juda, et sur tous ceux qui pouront y aller par la suite*”.

station on his land.⁴⁹⁰ When the Dutch complained about the French presence, Sher Khan allegedly replied that if they were neighbours in Europe, the Dutch and the French would be neighbours again in India.⁴⁹¹ Additionally, local rulers required the French to observe neutrality. Shivaji had guaranteed French security in Pondicherry on the condition that they remained neutral under penalty of being expelled.⁴⁹² When Aurangzeb conquered Golkonda and Bijapur, the emperor forbade war and conflict among Europeans on his territories.⁴⁹³ At times, local sovereigns solicited their support against European or indigenous enemies but they were not supposed to engage in warfare otherwise. This forced neutrality among European representatives remained after the death of Aurangzeb; in 1710, the overseas director reported that the Mughal ruler did not tolerate attacks between European nations on his land.⁴⁹⁴ However, recurrent succession wars and Maratha raids in the Deccan challenged the authority of the Mughal emperor during the early eighteenth century. Therefore, Mughal rulers' assertion of sovereignty over Europeans through forced neutrality did not always take place in practice.

Regarding the Hueda and Dahomey kings, their strategy for generating competition among Europeans while controlling relations between them was more striking. The Hueda kings attracted European traders by offering lower customs for the opening of the trade than those in the neighbouring state of Allada. In the 1660s and 1670s, the customs related to the opening of the trade in Allada have been estimated to be the value of between fifty and one hundred enslaved Africans in goods, compared to approximately fourteen enslaved Africans in Ouidah, with an additional twelve to pay the canoemen, in 1687.⁴⁹⁵ By 1705, the Hueda king reduced the opening of the trade's customs to the value of ten slaves in Ouidah and this rate stayed stable until 1720.⁴⁹⁶ The customs were a fixed value for each ship coming to trade, whatever its size. Consequently, the Allada kingdom lowered its customs to the value of fifteen enslaved Africans. At first, the competition between the Allada and Hueda kingdoms benefitted European traders, because it dramatically reduced the cost of acquiring enslaved Africans on the Slave Coast. However, as soon as Europeans established themselves in a specific place, the situation reversed and the king and his captains could take advantage of the

⁴⁹⁰ A later example of such initiative was the nayak of Madura offering to the French to settle anywhere on his land depending on the advantages the French would find in the early years of the eighteenth century in ANOM C2 66 f°163, diary of Martin, 16 August 1702.

⁴⁹¹ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 5.

⁴⁹² Hatalkar, *Relations between the French and the Marathas*, 16.

⁴⁹³ ANOM C2 68 f°265, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

⁴⁹⁴ ANOM C2 69 f°5, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

⁴⁹⁵ Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 208.

⁴⁹⁶ Law, 209.

competition among Europeans. This was particularly evident in Ouidah, where the English, French, Dutch and Portuguese were held in a situation of competition. Additionally, the Hueda king made sure that the port of Ouidah, was open for Europeans traders as early as 1681.⁴⁹⁷ Even though the Portuguese did not have a trading lodge at the capital, the Hueda king provided them with a shop and, during wartime, he guaranteed them his protection.

King Amar of Hueda initiated a treaty of neutrality and made the representative of each European nation sign it in the presence of his royal officials. The treaty forbade any hostilities among Europeans, both in the Hueda territory and in sight of the shore. It is not a coincidence that King Amar forced the Europeans to sign the treaty at the beginning of the eighteenth century; it was the start of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713) in Europe, which pitted the French against the Dutch and English. When the French seized a Portuguese ship on the shore in 1704, King Amar insisted on renewing the treaty.⁴⁹⁸ This renewed version, transcribed by Jean-Baptiste Labat, took the form of a written contract with six articles that provided penalties for possible breaches to the treaty, usually a fee of eight male slaves paid to the offended European nation. The treaty also closely regulated the Europeans' conduct during wartime in Europe, imposing a rule that ships could only leave the shore one by one, with an interval of twenty-four hours.

This treaty of neutrality enabled the King of Hueda to further distinguish his kingdom from that of his neighbour, the King of Allada, by making the commercial space in Ouidah attractive and safe for Europeans, even in times of war in Europe. While, in certain instances, the royal authorities imposed neutrality on the French in Ouidah, in other instances, the French chose neutrality, motivated by local political and military events. For instance, during the wars between the Hueda and the Dahomey, the French refrained from taking part in the conflict, even when the Hueda king and his captain, Assou, encouraged the Company to ally with them. The control of Ouidah changed multiple times during the Dahomian Wars, and the sentence for disloyalty was death.⁴⁹⁹ The Company was in a fragile position, militarily speaking. Their fort was built from local material that did not resist bad weather and provided no real protection against attacks. The roof could burn very easily during wartime. The cannons intended to defend the fort suffered from the humidity; they became rusty and barely

⁴⁹⁷ Law, 152.

⁴⁹⁸ The renewed version of the treaty is given in Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du chevalier Desmarchais en Guinée et isles voisines et a Cayenne. Fait en 1725, 1726 et 1727* (Paris, 1730), 29–30.

⁴⁹⁹ The English factor Testefol had taken sides with the Hueda kings in 1729 and had been sentenced to death by the Dahomians.

usable.⁵⁰⁰ When the Hueda kings attempted to retake Ouidah in 1743, Europeans stayed neutral, or at least did not cooperate with the former kingdom. They must have feared that the reconquest would be short-lived and that, given their vulnerable military position, their interests would be better protected if they stayed neutral.⁵⁰¹

African and Indian rulers tried to impose rules of neutrality on the different European companies to protect the trade and also to maintain their sovereignty. Local sovereigns attempted at curtailing European interference in local politics to suit their agenda and not the opposite. Disturbance of law and order within their borders would be a breach to their sovereignty. Additionally, conflicts between Europeans often involved alliances with local armies and led to European interference in local politics as a way to get the necessary military support. European interference generated political destabilization, which could threaten the local rulers' authority.

5. Conclusion

On the Coromandel Coast, the local elite and Marathas raids challenged the Mughal emperor's authority ever since the start of the Mughal expansion to the Deccan. The political instability on the Coromandel Coast did not start with the death of the emperor Aurangzeb, and was already noticeable before the Mughal conquest and its recurrent political changes. As for Ouidah, despite the repetitive attempts of the exiled Hueda to re-take their kingdom, the Dahomey managed to establish some authority over the newly-conquered coastal kingdoms of Allada and Hueda. The price for this assertion of authority was moving the Dahomey capital from the Abomey plateau to Allada, and becoming a tributary to the Oyo kingdom in 1748 in exchange for secure inland borders. While both the Mughal Empire and the Dahomey kingdom were centralized states, the smaller geographical territory covered by the latter and the local administrations' proximity to the centre of power engendered a stronger control over officials and European trading nations. In this, the Dahomey conquest was not a breaking point, but rather a continuation of the Hueda administration that already exerted strict control over European trade.

The different types of political authority exercised in the two regions affected the development of the French settlement of Pondicherry and fort in Ouidah. From the start of their establishment, local rulers delegated the East India Company and the Guinea Company

⁵⁰⁰ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 56.

⁵⁰¹ Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 130.

different rights. Pondicherry soon developed into a settlement administrated by the East India Company, while the fort of Ouidah remained a trading post under the authority and jurisdiction of the African kings. The political situation on the Coromandel Coast allowed for a growing delegation of sovereign powers to European settlements. The East India Company governed over the settlement, acquired the right to collect taxes, outsource said tax collection and received the right to mint the regional currencies. Finally, the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry maintained jurisdiction over all inhabitants of the settlement. While the Guinea and, later, the Asiento Company had been delegated the same sovereign powers as the East India Company in theory, it evolved differently in practice. The Hueda and Dahomey kings governed the French fort of Ouidah, and allowed overseas directors to have jurisdiction over their employees of the fort of Ouidah. The tax collection was controlled by the African administration.

Nevertheless, all sovereign powers delegated to the French in Pondicherry depended on a grant issued by political authorities. This delegation made the East India Company in Pondicherry a tributary to the Mughal emperor. The terms of the grant were renegotiated every time the ruler changed. The military vulnerability of the French in Pondicherry, and their dependence on foodstuff from the hinterland to survive made it a very efficient way of asserting royal authority over them. On the whole, the territorial rights of the Company on Pondicherry and its surroundings were based on suzerainty relations with Mughal officials. In this sense, the situation of the French in Pondicherry during the early years of the settlement draws some parallels to the situation in Ouidah. There, the African kings also established clear tributary relations with the trading companies. The fort was not defensible and, if blockaded, did not have direct access to supplies from ships. Both Pondicherry and the French fort in Ouidah were militarily dependent and could be starved into surrender. Additionally, Indian and African rulers attempted to control relations between the French and other Europeans by forcing them into a state of neutrality. Although, in practice it was less effective in the Indian case, the assertion of sovereignty over Europeans was present in both contexts.

The implementation of the sovereign powers delegated to the trading companies by the French King depended on the jurisdictions granted to them on the local level. Though it took different forms in Pondicherry and Ouidah, there are a number of features shared by the two. In particular, the tributary relations and the military vulnerability of the French trading companies shaped their relations to local rulers. Good relations with political powers formed the foundation of the settlement and factory's development but overseas directors dealt with

more actors than the political authorities. The next chapter demonstrates that they had to manage various interests to be able to develop trade.

Chapter 3: Overseas directors as multilateral go-betweens

1. Introduction

The scholarship on go-betweens in early modern encounters has focused on the role of local interpreters, skilled cultural brokers and mestizos who mediated between different cultural worlds.⁵⁰² Philip Curtin, the pioneering historian on cross-cultural trade, defined a cultural broker as a member of a commercial community who lived as an alien in another town that was important to the life of his or her home community.⁵⁰³ The broker learned the language, the customs and the commercial habits of the host society and could thereby facilitate trading relations between his or her community of origin and the host society. It has been thoroughly demonstrated that translators, middlemen, and cultural and commercial brokers' ability to interpret multiple cultures and societies held important power. I argue that overseas directors can be perceived as a type of go-between although not on the same degree as brokers or translators. Additionally, instead of understanding the concept of go-betweens as "*third parties in dyadic relationships*" – which implies the existence of two homogeneous groups that meet via an intermediary – I further argue that the challenge faced by overseas directors was to navigate a multiplicity of actors, communities and divergent interests.⁵⁰⁴ If the two sides of the "*dyadic relationship*" were not homogenous, how did the diversity of actors and interests affect the agency and overseas directors' ability to make decisions? This chapter explores the role of overseas directors as multilateral go-betweens: individuals mediating between an array of actors and communities exercising their own agency. Understanding the position of overseas directors within this entanglement of interests sheds light on how the agency of overseas directors was limited, challenged or stimulated.

Alida Metcalf applies the concept of the go-between to the context of early modern encounters in Brazil. In doing so, she delineates a typology of go-betweens: physical intermediaries that create material ties between worlds, transactional intermediaries who "*facilitate social interactions between worlds*" and finally, representational intermediaries who represent the other through drawing or writing. Overseas directors could be any and all of these different types, depending on the political, diplomatic and commercial tasks they had to perform on behalf of chartered companies or the Navy Council. While it is clear that

⁵⁰² Metcalf, *Go-Betweens*, 7. Green, *Brokers of Change*; Simon Schaffer, *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009).

⁵⁰³ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.

⁵⁰⁴ Metcalf, *Go-Betweens*, 2.

overseas directors were a less accomplished go-between than commercial brokers or translators, in the sense that they did not fully understand the Indian or African host cultures and they did not speak the local languages, nevertheless, their understanding, even if mediocre, was crucial for the Companies' trade and French expansion. Furthermore, like Metcalf's concept of go-between, overseas directors could take advantage of their position for their own benefit.⁵⁰⁵ However, overseas directors had their own agendas, which were both enabled and limited by their function as multilateral go-betweens.

This chapter starts with an assessment of overseas directors' functions in general and then presents the specific directors under scrutiny in this thesis. The second section focuses on communities within the settlement of Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah to showcase their agency. The following section explores the bargaining power of key actors of the Indian and African trade organization on the Coromandel Coast and the Slave Coast, who interacted with overseas directors. The fourth section is devoted to the orders coming from Paris and their applicability to overseas contexts. Finally, I discuss the goals of ship captains who went to Pondicherry and Ouidah and how they added to the tangle of varied interests in the factories. The use of the concept of go-between to qualify the situation of overseas directors aims at exploring the effects of the local and metropolitan sides of the story.

2. Directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah

Directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah were either appointed directly from France or worked their way up the hierarchy in the Indian and African factories. The motivation to enter into the service of the Company stemmed from expectations of economic and social improvement.⁵⁰⁶ The Company offered two principle ways to economic amelioration: career advancement and self-enrichment.⁵⁰⁷ Both involved an overseas experience; opportunities for career development required experience in one or multiple overseas factories and occasions for self-enrichment arose mostly, although not exclusively, overseas. Directors of Pondicherry earned 6,000 *livres* per annum until 1719.⁵⁰⁸ Guillaume André Hébert (1708-1713, 1715-1717), a Parisian director dispatched to control the Company's factories in India, was the

⁵⁰⁵ Metcalf, 3.

⁵⁰⁶ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 583.

⁵⁰⁷ Greenwald, *Marc-Antoine Caillot and the Company of the Indies in Louisiana*, 39.

⁵⁰⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°51 and f°144: state of expenses in 1713 and 1715; ANOM E 152, Personnel file Dulivier "*La compagnie règle les appointements de Mr. Dulivier à six mil livres par an*"; Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 144.

exception to this rule at 10,000 *livres* annually.⁵⁰⁹ In contrast, the directors in Ouidah received a wage of 4,000 *livres* a year.⁵¹⁰ This wage gap is due to the status of Pondicherry as administrative centre of the French in India. Directors in Saint Louis in Senegal, a center of the French expansion on the west coast of Africa, earned the same wage as those of Pondicherry. In Ouidah, a mere trading station similar to Ougly in Bengal, directors earned less. The gap widened under the administration of the Company of the Indies in 1722, while directors in Pondicherry earned 15,000 *livres* annually, those in Ouidah only earned 3,000 *livres* annually.⁵¹¹

Figure 3.1. Table of the French directors in Pondicherry

Dates	French directors in Pondicherry
1674-1707	François Martin
1707-1708	Pierre Dulivier (interim)
1708-1713	Guillaume André Hébert
1713-1715	Pierre Dulivier
1715-1717	Guillaume André Hébert

Sources: ANOM E 152, Personnel file Dulivier and Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*.

Regarding social advancement, the East India Company charter promised “expressions of honours which would pass to their posterity” to those who served the company well.⁵¹² For instance, François Martin (1674-1707), the first director of Pondicherry, received letters of nobility in 1692 and the Cross of *Saint Lazare* in 1701 as signs of gratitude for his service to King Louis XIV.⁵¹³ The Cross of *Saint Lazare* made one a knight of the Order of *Saint Lazare et Notre Dame du Montcarmel*. Membership in a royal order was one among many types of rewards the monarchy bestowed upon subjects to ensure their loyalty.⁵¹⁴ In theory, only French Catholic nobles could be appointed to the Order of *Saint Lazare et*

⁵⁰⁹ ANOM E 152, Personnel file Dulivier, 4 January 1711 : “Monsieur Hébert appointment compris les droits de présence a raison de 10 000 livres par an”.

⁵¹⁰ ANOM E 145, Personnel file Ducoulombier, 24 July 1710: “La compagnie accorde au dit sr. Ducoulombier pour ses appointements la somme de 4 000 livres par an”; ANOM E 43, Personnel file of Bouchel: “Appointements 4 000”.

⁵¹¹ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 8; Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 608. audrière, 608. Ibid., 608.

⁵¹² “A ceux qui se seront bien acquittés desdits emplois, de leur donner des marques d’honneur qui passeront jusqu’à leur postérité” in Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 33.

⁵¹³ ANOM C2 69 f° 14, letter of Denyon, 26 February 1715.

⁵¹⁴ Bernard Barbiche, *Les institutions de la monarchie française à l’époque moderne: XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 42.

Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, but some exceptions were made towards foreigners and commoners.⁵¹⁵ Martin, a commoner, achieved upward social mobility through his service in India.

The social reward granted to Martin became the standard for directors in Pondicherry. Directors in Paris petitioned the French king for it on behalf of Martin's successors. For Hébert, they argued that the "*lettres de noblesse*" granted to Martin gave him authority over the garrison.⁵¹⁶ They made the same demand for Pierre Dulivier (1713-1715) requesting "*permission to the King for the Cross of Saint Lazare, M. Martin and M. Hébert who preceded him in this government received it [...] and it is important for the good of the company that sir Dulivier would receive the same honours as his predecessors, he has been serving the company for 15 years in India and returns there to serve as general.*"⁵¹⁷ The personnel files of Hébert and Dulivier do not mention whether they received letters of nobility as Martin did. However, their files show that they were both granted the title of knight of the Order of *Saint Lazare and Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel*.

Martin's career illustrates the economy of rewards that the East India Company used to attract employees. His long directorship and paramount role in the establishment of the French presence in Pondicherry make Martin an essential character of the beginnings of the French in India.⁵¹⁸ Born in 1634, Martin entered the East India Company as an under-merchant in 1665, a year after its creation.⁵¹⁹ After three years in Madagascar, he was promoted to merchant of the Company and sent to Surat. From there, the company commissioned Martin and another merchant of the Company to establish a factory in Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast. During Martin's stay there, Dutch admiral Rijcklof Van Goens decimated the French Squadron of de La Haye and the employees of the East India Company took refuge in Pondicherry. Despite a promotion to second councillor in the Sovereign Council of Surat in 1675, Martin stayed in Pondicherry. In 1681, he returned to

⁵¹⁵ The order of Saint Lazare dated from the Twelfth Century and the order of *Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel* was created in 1608. The two orders were united in 1668 in Barbiche, 44.

⁵¹⁶ ANOM C2 13 f°114, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 1 January 1709: "*Monseigneur a eu la bonté de faire accorder par le Roy à M. Martin des lettres de noblesse, cette distinction luy a donné beaucoup de relief parmi les officiers de la garnison*".

⁵¹⁷ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, Mémoire 1713: "*Demander la permission au Roy pour la Croix de St Lazare, Mrs Martin et Hébert qui l'ont précédé dans ce gouvernement l'ont eüe [...] il est important pour le bien de la compagnie, que le sr. Dulivier soit revetu des memes honneurs qu'avoient ses prédécesseurs, il y a 15 ans qu'il est aux Indes pout le service de la Compagnie, et s'y en retourne pour y aller remplir celui de general*".

⁵¹⁸ Due to the great amount of information he both sent to Paris and wrote in his personal diary, he benefited from an important place in the literature on the first French East India Company. Introduction of Henri Froidevaux in Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 1: xi-xlii. See also Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*.

⁵¹⁹ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 38.

Surat to replace the director and became director general of the East India Company in India for approximately two years.⁵²⁰ In 1686, Martin became director of Pondicherry, and by 1692 he received a title of nobility for his services in India. After more than forty years at the service of the company in India, Martin died in Pondicherry in 1706. However, this example should not give the illusion of an exclusively meritocratic employment pattern. Rather, the elevation of factors and merchants in the company hierarchy remained highly arbitrary and based on connections with directors in both India and Paris.⁵²¹

The arrival of Martin's official replacement, the Parisian director and investor Guillaume André Hébert (1653-1725), in Pondicherry in 1708 denotes the lack of pattern in the origin of directors of Pondicherry. Hébert was an average investor; in 1701, his promise of investment in the Company amounted to 3,000 *livres* out of a total of 82,000 *livres*, similar to seven out of seventeen other investors contributing to the capital increase that year.⁵²² He first appears as a Parisian director of the Company in 1702, in the minutes of the metropolitan directors' assemblies of the East India Company.⁵²³ In 1706, the Parisian directors dispatched Hébert to control the French settlements in India. The company set Hébert's wage at 10,000 *livres* per year from the 1 January 1706 until the end of his tenure in India, which amounted to 4,000 *livres* more than the director of Pondicherry.⁵²⁴ In their instructions to Hébert of 29 May 1706, the company directors made it clear that if Martin passed away, Hébert would take over the roles of director of Pondicherry and head of the Sovereign Council.

The East India Company directors wrote to the minister of the Navy that "*M. Hébert being director and shareholder, he would be more attentive than anyone else to reform abuses*".⁵²⁵ Appointing one of the Parisian directors and investors in the Company as overseas director supposedly gave some guarantee that the overseas director would do his best to promote the interests of the Company. Indeed, as shareholder, it would be to Hébert's personal advantage if the Company made profits. Hébert's journey to the Indian Ocean took longer than usual because he travelled with two other company ships along the Cape Horn route. In the meantime, Pierre Dulivier, the director of the French factory in Bengal, acted as director of Pondicherry.

⁵²⁰ Ménard-Jacob, 39.

⁵²¹ Ménard-Jacob, 132.

⁵²² ANOM C2 9 f°11, directors of the East India Company, September 1701.

⁵²³ ANOM C2 9 f°27, directors assembly, 24 January 1702 : "*Bercy, de Lagny, Souillet, Desvieux, Tardif, Lefebvre, Hébert, Peletyer, Champigny, Chaperon, Hellissant, Landais, La Peyronnie et Dodun*".

⁵²⁴ ANOM C2 9 f°251, East India Company directors, December 1705.

⁵²⁵ ANOM C2 13 f°114, East India Company directors, 1 January 1709: "*la compagnie se persuade que M. Hébert étant directeur et intéressé sera plus attentif qu'un autre à refformer ces abus*".

It is unclear when Dulivier first arrived to India, but what is sure is that he was in Bengal in 1699 and became director at Ougly two years later.⁵²⁶ After Hébert left Pondicherry in 1713, the metropolitan directors hired Dulivier as director of Pondicherry a second time because of his “loyalty, his affection to our service and his experience.”⁵²⁷ His appointment shows that maintaining a good reputation was as important in France as it was in India. Indeed, although the employees at Ougly criticized his directorship in Bengal, this does not seem to have affected his appointment. Dulivier remained in charge of Pondicherry until October 1715, when Hébert returned with the new title of “*général de la nation française*”, granted by King Louis XIV. It is difficult to determine if the title—and function—were created for Hébert, or if it reflected a reconceptualization of the French in India as a trading nation rather than an empire. The authority given to Hébert lacked clear boundaries and a conflict of interest arose between him and Dulivier, who had been officially appointed as overseas director of Pondicherry by the Parisian directors. Dulivier, finding himself stripped of his authority, asked to return to France by the ships leaving at the end of 1716 or the beginning of 1717.⁵²⁸

In contrast to the wealth of opportunities for advancement in Pondicherry, the social incentive to serve as director of the fort in Ouidah was much smaller. One should not infer from this disparity a clear neglect of the expansion on the West African coast. The size of the factory plays an important role in the difference, as demonstrated by the development of the French settlement in Senegal. The social opportunities and wages of the director general in Senegal were much greater than in Ouidah; like in Pondicherry, the director general of Senegal acted as the head of a Sovereign Council.⁵²⁹ On the other hand, the fort in Ouidah, which was geographically limited by the Dahomey kings, rather than the result of a conscious priority given to the expansion in the East.

⁵²⁶ Dulivier has been described as arriving in Bengal in 1701 however the personal correspondence of the English East India Company Governor of Madras, Thomas Pitt, presents evidence that Dulivier was in Bengal as soon as 1699. BM Add MSS 22842, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 4 June 1700; BM Add MSS 22843, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 23 March 1701.

⁵²⁷ ANOM B/35 f°619, letter of Pontchartrain to the East India Company directors, 6 January 1713: “*Nomination de monsieur Du Livier par les directeurs de la Compagnie des Indes*”.

⁵²⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°182-183, letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716.

⁵²⁹ Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 1:201.

Figure 3.2. Table of the French directors in Ouidah

Dates	French directors in Ouidah
1707-1710?	Derigoin?
1712-1715	Louis Ducoulombier
1716-1723	Nicolas Bouchel
1723-1727	Derigoin?
1727-1729	Houdoyer Dupetitval
1729-1730	Gallot
1730-1731	Mallet de la Mine
1731-1732	Lavigne
1732-1733	Jacques Levet (interim)
1733-1734	Du Bellay
1734-1737	Delisle
1737-1742	Laurent
1742	Levens
1743-1747	Jacques Levet

Sources: ANOM E 145, Personnel file of Ducoulombier; ANOM E 43, Personnel file of Bouchel; ANOM E 285, Personnel file of Levesque; Simone Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs au golfe de Guinée. Le comptoir français de Juda au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Larose, 1942), 8; Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres*, 4: XLI.

The scarcity of information regarding the numerous men who served as French directors in Ouidah is a direct consequence of the restricted size of the factory, and the limited social incentive to fulfil the role. It has proved impossible to trace their family or their early career in France beyond some clues in their personnel files. Most of them never returned to France and, at least seven out of the sixteen directors died in Ouidah, among whom four were killed by Dahomian authorities. Little is known of the career of the directors who survived and, came back to France. The period of their directorship was very short, often a year or two, and only in some rare cases four to six years. The contract for directors sent to Ouidah included a mandatory minimum of three years of service before the employee could go back to France, except in the case of life-threatening situations such as diseases.⁵³⁰ These mandatory years imply that directors quickly wanted to return to France after arriving in Ouidah, such as a director called Derigoin who asked to sail home directly after his three

⁵³⁰ ANOM E 145, personnel file of Ducoulombier: “Instructions, article 2”.

years.⁵³¹ Compared to the thirty-year directorship of François Martin in Pondicherry, the careers of the directors of the fort in Ouidah involved greater risk and a higher death rate. The appeal of the trading station was therefore neither the social advancement nor the salary which, even after the Company of the Indies took over in 1722, was lower than in major factories such as Saint Louis in Senegal or Pondicherry. The remaining options, and the most plausible ones given the high death rate, was either to use the fort in Ouidah as stepping stone towards other more attractive Company employments, or the opportunities for self-enrichment, which will be studied in the following chapters.

Louis Ducoulombier (1712-1715) is the first director of the fort in Ouidah who can be traced consistently in the archives. The first evidence of his involvement in the Asiento Company (1701-1713) date from 1704, when Saupin, a Parisian director of the Company, recommended him as captain for the king's ship *L'Amphitrite*, which was due to sail to the Guinea Coast and Spanish America. Saupin praised Ducoulombier's experience on the Guinea Coast "*where the said Ducoulombier has been multiple times and of which he knows the trade perfectly.*"⁵³² Saupin and Ducoulombier had known each other for twenty years and Saupin "*would gladly pledge for him.*"⁵³³ A few years later, in 1710, Ducoulombier sailed to Porto Bello as second on the Asiento Company ship the *Conventry*, which implies that he was well-acquainted with both the Guinean and the Spanish American trade.⁵³⁴ The Company appointed him director to the fort in Ouidah in 1712 after Director Derigoïn asked to return to France. In order to guarantee his "*zeal and fidelity*" to the affairs of the Company, the Parisian directors granted him part of the tax paid by licensed French traders for each enslaved African.⁵³⁵ Granting a percentage of the tax to an overseas director created an incentive that increased his dedication to the Company's interest, and provided the Company with a convenient method of deterring treacherous behaviour from their agent. However, this did not set a precedent for the following directors.

Little is known about Ducoulombier's successor, Nicolas Bouchel (1716-1723). He probably made his career in Ouidah where he was vice-director under Ducoulombier.⁵³⁶ Bouchel appears to have been well-acquainted with the Asiento Company trade and well-

⁵³¹ ANOM E 145, personnel file of Ducoulombier.

⁵³² ANOM F2A 7, letter of Saupin, 1704: "*aux costes de guinée ou le dit s. Du Coulombier a fait des voyages et dont il connoit parfaitement le commerce*".

⁵³³ ANOM F2A 7, letter of Saupin, 1704 "*il y a 20 ans que je le connois je me rendray volontiers sa caution*".

⁵³⁴ ANOM E 145, personnel file of Ducoulombier.

⁵³⁵ They were granted 30 sols out of the tax of one *écu*. ANOM E 145, Personnel file of Ducoulombier: *instructions article 20*.

⁵³⁶ ANOM B//36 f°207, letter of Pontchartrain to Ducoulombier, 29 June 1714.

connected in France. His personnel files include a petition dating from before 1713, from an individual called Bridou who “*affectionates the sir Bouchel and is protected by Madame de Roye abbess of Saint Pierre of Reims,*” asking that the directorship of Buenos Aires in Spanish America be given to Bouchel.⁵³⁷ The aforementioned Parisian director, Saupin, testified to Bouchel’s “*moral rectitude and abilities.*”⁵³⁸ At the time of the petition, Bouchel was not yet director in Ouidah and had most likely realized that a position as an Asiento Company agent in Spanish America would be lucrative. Instead, he was appointed vice-director of the fort in Ouidah in 1714 and became director after Ducoulombier in 1716. While it is unknown why the Company did not appoint Bouchel to the position in Buenos Aires, but it is nevertheless relevant to know that his interests laid across the Atlantic. Generally speaking, both he and Ducoulombier had previous experience with the trade in Ouidah when they became directors; Ducoulombier sailed multiple trading voyages to Ouidah and Bouchel worked as a company agent there for at least three years before his directorship.

The next director of the fort Ouidah who left some traces in the archive was Houdoyer Dupetitval (1727-1729). The gap in the archives of the Company of the Indies from 1723 until 1728 limits the amount of information about Dupetitval. As his name does not appear in the lists of employees under director Bouchel, he is likely to have been appointed directly from France. All that is known about Dupetitval is that he was killed in Ouidah in 1729. A usurper called Gallot took his function for a year, before Mallet de la Mine (1730-1731) and then Lavigne (1731-1732) became director. The latter was also killed in Ouidah. Early in 1733, the vice-director, Jacques Levet, took over the directorship of the fort for a year until Du Bellay arrived in Ouidah. Du Bellay had no experience with the trade in Ouidah but had gained some knowledge of West Africa during his previous employment as director of Saint Louis in Senegal between 1723 and 1725. The archive does not provide any information regarding the end of his employment in Senegal. The only clue about his former job appears in one of his first letters to the Parisian directors, where Du Bellay demanded the “*same advantages as my former position in Senegal, meaning 15,000 livres a year.*”⁵³⁹ As previously mentioned, the average annual salary for a director of the fort in Ouidah under the Company of the Indies was only 3,000 *livres*.⁵⁴⁰ Considering the high mortality rate of directors who preceded him in

⁵³⁷ ANOM E 43, personnel file of Bouchel: “*Le sieur Bridou Gentilhomme servant du Roi qui affectionne le Sr Bouchel de Soissons et qui est protégé de Madame de Roye abesse de St Pierre de Reims*”.

⁵³⁸ ANOM E 43, personnel file of Bouchel: “*Mr Saupin a une parfaite connoissance de sa droiture de capacité*”.

⁵³⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733: “*Je ne vous demande pour cela, messieur que les memes avantages de mon ancien poste du Sénégal, je veux dire 15 000 livres fixe par an*”.

⁵⁴⁰ See chapter 2.

Ouidah, Du Bellay must have had a strong incentive to accept a position that paid five times less. Were the self-enriching prospects compensating for the decrease in wage? Du Bellay would never know, because he was killed a year after his arrival in Ouidah.

During the period spanning from 1727 to 1734, many directors had succeeded each other, and had seldom survived more than one or two years. Was there a correlation between a lack of experience and short-lived directorships? Although it is impossible to assess the level of experience of directors such as Dupetitval, Mallet de la Mine or Lavigne given the lack of information about them, we can nevertheless assume that a lack of experience was not the decisive factor regarding directors' life expectancy. Rather, the Dahomian Wars (1727-1733) and the following conquest of Ouidah by the Dahomey appear to be the major cause of the extreme mortality rate of directors during this period.

After the death of Du Bellay in 1734, Vice-director Delisle took over the directorship only to die three years later. An individual called Laurent succeeded Delisle and remained in charge for seven years before returning to France.⁵⁴¹ Unfortunately, he did not leave any written traces in the Company's archive. Levens, his successor, had been director of Senegal for seven years, from 1726 to 1733.⁵⁴² Despite this experience, the Dahomian army kidnapped him in June 1742, only a few months after he took office, and forced him to sail back to France. In the meantime, Jacques Levet, who had been sent back to France by King Agaja of Dahomey in 1733, returned to Ouidah as director of the fort in the early 1740s, after the death of Agaja. The gap in the Company archive between 1733 and 1743 prevents us from understanding why the Parisian directors chose Levet to return to Ouidah. It can be assumed that his experience as vice-director and interim director, in addition to his willingness to go back to Ouidah, made him an asset to the Company directors. He remained director of the fort in Ouidah for four years, at which point he was forced once again to sail back to France. The conjunction of peace and Levet's experience with the commercial and political practices in Ouidah explain his relatively long directorship. As the examples of Levens and Levet illustrate, within a few years of the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah, French directors no longer risked their heads when missteps were made; instead they were forced back to Europe.

The employment history of directors in Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah do not appear to form a specific pattern. In Pondicherry, the three directors under study followed

⁵⁴¹ Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres*, 4: XLI.

⁵⁴² André Delcourt, *La France et les établissements français au Sénégal entre 1713 et 1763. La Compagnie des Indes et le Sénégal. La Guerre de la gomme*, Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Afrique Noire (Dakar: IFAN, 1952), 113.

different career paths: Martin rose within the ranks of the Company in India, the Parisian director Hébert was sent directly from France and Dulivier, halfway between the two, was sent to Bengal where he became director before taking over the directorship of Pondicherry. However, they all had one thing in common: the social reward of the Cross of the Order of *Saint Lazare and Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel*, granted to them by the King of France. Similarly to Pondicherry directors, some directors of the fort in Ouidah had experience with the trade on the West African coast, while some had never set a foot on the coast. Bouchel and Levet gained their knowledge through their previous employments in Ouidah, and Du Bellay from his in Senegal. Early in his career, Ducoulombier sailed to Ouidah regularly, and therefore was familiar with the trade on the west coast of Africa. Others, like Dupetival, were most likely appointed directly from France. However, information is lacking for a number of directors of the fort Ouidah. Therefore, correlating the length of a director's career with their previous experience overseas would be drawing hasty conclusions and, most importantly, it would overlook the impact of context, particularly the Dahomian Wars in Ouidah. Now that the overseas directors have been presented according to their incentives to serve the different French trading companies and the potential assets they had to offer to these companies, I will explore how, once appointed, other actors within Pondicherry and Ouidah limited the directors' agency.

3. The bargaining power of actors and communities within the factories

Within the settlement of Pondicherry and the fort Ouidah, directors had to take into account the agency of other key actors of the expansion. First, company employees, be they Indians, Africans, Europeans or of mixed descent, had an advantage over the director. The numbers of skilled merchants and employees overseas was low and this limited the ability of the director to fire them. Acclimatization and knowledge of the trade made actors in overseas settlements precious to the Parisian directors, and to the overseas directors who could not spare skilled employees.⁵⁴³ Martin explicitly stated the shortage of trained employees in Pondicherry: *“in France it is easy to replace employees if they are absent or misbehaving, but here things are different, [...] once employees have acquired necessary knowledge for your business, it is difficult to replace them, besides we cannot reduce the employees to a small number since it is indispensable to have enough employees ready at all times.”*⁵⁴⁴ During the

⁵⁴³ ANOM C2 63 f°56, letter of Martin, 7 April 1686.

⁵⁴⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°254, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: *“en France, où il est facile de remplacer à propos les gens qui manquent, ou que leur mauvaise conduite oblige de relever, mais il y a icy une grande différence, où quand une fois les employés ont acquis les connoissances nécessaires au bien de vos affaires, il n'est pas aisé de*

first decades of the eighteenth century, the Company sent French employees directly to Pondicherry as young, inexperienced men that would acquire knowledge of the trade on the spot.⁵⁴⁵ This system proved problematic; because the Company invested in training these young employees overseas, the cost of firing them implied the extra cost of training new recruits. Moreover, the investment made in training employees from all backgrounds served as an incentive for the overseas director to tolerate some deviations from the code of conduct expected by the East India Company, both economically and socially.

In Ouidah, the difficult climate and political situation made employees as scarce and valuable as in Pondicherry. The private trade among employees was widespread and directors dealt with these transgressions in different ways. Some, like Bouchel, took advantage of the situation and traded privately themselves, while others, like Dupetitval and Levet, attempted to stop all private trade perpetrated by their employees. In extreme cases, employee plots against directors arose, some with dire consequences. Directors could be kidnapped by the African army, which often resulted in the death of the director.⁵⁴⁶ Participating in private trade seems to have been the best option, as Bouchel's directorship lasted the longest in the period under study, but a generalization made from one case would be inadequate here. However, it can be safely concluded that there was little incentive to control employees' private trade, as it could result in the death of the director. Furthermore, the unstable political environment during the Dahomian conquest of 1727 to 1733 made the position of employees of the fort in Ouidah even stronger.

Second, the director's authority could be limited by jurisdictional restrictions. For instance, the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry had no authority to judge any soldier from the garrison.⁵⁴⁷ Director Hébert complained about the high number of soldiers and military officers he could not control.⁵⁴⁸ There were thirteen officers who came from the Royal Navy, or were hired directly by the Company.⁵⁴⁹ In theory, these soldiers stayed in service for three years but in practice they stayed in India for ten to fifteen years. The jurisdictional latitude of the director was limited to the employees of the Company and did not include the garrison. Military personnel, whether Topaz, Lascarins or Europeans, fell under the jurisdiction of their

les bien remplacer, outre qu'on ne peut pas se renfermer à un certain nombre limité, étant comme indispensable d'avoir des personnes prestes dans les occasions qui se rencontrent tous les jours".

⁵⁴⁵ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 132–33.

⁵⁴⁶ Dupetitval and Du Bellay.

⁵⁴⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°132, letter of Boissieux, 2 October 1704.

⁵⁴⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°22, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

⁵⁴⁹ A commander, a major, an engineer, 4 captains, 6 lieutenants and a surgeon in ANOM C2 69 f°51 and f°144, State of the expenses in 1713 and 1715.

commanding officer. In the case of Ouidah, the director had authority over all employees in the fort including the lieutenant, the sergeant and the soldiers, be they Europeans or Africans.⁵⁵⁰ The garrison in the fort of Ouidah, as well as the number of officers, was far smaller than in Pondicherry, which might explain why the director was granted authority over them. The role of the Royal Navy in India also factored into this difference. As will be shown below, the French government sent squadrons of Royal Navy ships to Pondicherry frequently, which was a testament to the French king's ambition to extend European wars into the Indian Ocean.

Members of religious orders also played a significant part in the power relations in Pondicherry. One of the Company's missions was to propagate Christianity in its settlements, but directors did not make this a top priority.⁵⁵¹ Company directors ordered overseas directors "*not to communicate any secret information of the affairs of the company*" to the clergy.⁵⁵² Information was not shared because the East India Company and the different religious orders present in Pondicherry did not constitute a united front. Capuchin fathers, who had previously established a catholic mission in Madras, were the first representatives of religious orders to arrive in Pondicherry.⁵⁵³ The Jesuits arrived in Pondicherry in 1689 as part of the French colonial project in India; patent letters from Louis XIV established them as religious missionaries.⁵⁵⁴ Aside from their religious duties, the French government asked the Jesuits to support the commercial goals of the East India Company.

Nevertheless, conflicts over the non-Christian population of Pondicherry, particularly regarding religious freedom, erupted between the director and the Jesuits. The Capuchins' strong rivalry with the Jesuits regarding their religious jurisdiction led the Capuchins to support the director in these conflicts.⁵⁵⁵ The third religious order in Pondicherry was the *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*. This order aimed to convert non-Christians in Asia specifically and benefitted from the support of Rome and the French king.⁵⁵⁶ During the period under scrutiny, the *Missions Étrangères* had only one representative in Pondicherry who sided with the director and the Capuchins against the Jesuits during these conflicts. All

⁵⁵⁰ ANOM C6 25, 27 June 1733: "*Instructions pour Julien Du Bellay*".

⁵⁵¹ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 48.

⁵⁵² ANOM C2 65 f°31, letter of Martin, 14 September 1699: "*Mrs des missions étrangères et les RRPP Jésuites de ne leur rien communiquer du secret des affaires de votre compagnie*".

⁵⁵³ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 25.

⁵⁵⁴ "Lettres patentes de Louis XIV aux religieux de la Compagnie de Jésus, missionnaires dans les Indes orientales" 1695 in Adrien Launay, *Histoire des missions de l'Inde*, vol. 1 (Paris: Indes savantes: Missions étrangères de Paris, 2000), 456–57.

⁵⁵⁵ ANOM C2 69 f°19, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

⁵⁵⁶ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 28.

aforementioned religious orders received their authority directly from the French king, which gave them considerable power in Pondicherry – particularly the Jesuits, who were the emissaries of Louis XIV.⁵⁵⁷

In contrast to the large religious presence in Pondicherry, there were few religious representatives in the fort of Ouidah during the first half of the eighteenth century. This disparity is due, in large part, to the smaller number of people under French authority in Ouidah, as opposed to those in Pondicherry. In the fort in Ouidah, a priest appears in the fort records on an irregular basis and overseas directors and their employees would go to mass in the Portuguese fort. The only archival evidence of priests in the French fort in Ouidah portrays them more as traders than men of the church. In 1733, the director suspected the fort's chaplain of engaging in private trade and his predecessor had also been deeply involved in a private trade scandal.⁵⁵⁸ The director had to deal with the priest as he would with any other Company employee and could choose whether or not to control private trade.

Overseas directors had to take the agency of one last group of actors into account: the workers. The two main groups of waged labourers in Pondicherry were European, Topaz and Lascarin soldiers and Indian weavers. Both were mobile workforces. If their situation did not suit them, in terms of employment or religious tolerance, they would leave for other production centres or garrisons along the Coromandel Coast. The most apparent displays of Indian weavers' mobility and agency in Pondicherry were four uprisings, between 1701 and 1715, against religious restrictions imposed on the population by the Company councillors and religious orders.⁵⁵⁹ During these uprisings, Indian weavers threatened to leave Pondicherry if the Company did not respect their religious freedom. According to Danna Agmon, the residents had the upper hand over the overseas director and his council on three of the four occasions. The first uprising happened in 1701, and the Capuchins and the director came to the conclusion it was “*better to flatter and tolerate the gentils in their religion, waiting for a better conjuncture.*”⁵⁶⁰

In Ouidah, the vast majority of the workforce within the French fort consisted of *acquérats*, who were in charge of the maintenance of the fort and formed a large part of the

⁵⁵⁷ Agmon, 29.

⁵⁵⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

⁵⁵⁹ Agmon, ‘Striking Pondichéry’, 438.

⁵⁶⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°164, Diary of Martin, 16 August 1702: “*qu’il étoit bon de fléchir, tolerer les gentils dans leur Religion, en attendant une conjuncture plus favorable*”.

military garrison.⁵⁶¹ The limited information regarding the *acquérats* during the first part of the eighteenth century does not allow for detailed interpretation of their agency. Some historians have argued that their status as slaves of the Company – which avoided African jurisdiction and protected them from trans-Atlantic slave traders – attracted free Africans who came to work for the French Company of the Indies.⁵⁶² However, there is no evidence of this during the first half of the eighteenth century. The name “*acquérat*” came from their place of origin, which was not identified but referred to as far in the hinterland.⁵⁶³ The distance from their geographical place of origin implies that they arrived to Ouidah as captives, not of their own will.

However, another group of workers did demonstrate their agency: canoe rowers. Despite the fact that they did not inhabit the fort, they were key waged labourers in the daily life of the fort and for the logistics of the trade in Ouidah. They were essential to the loading and unloading of ships across the rivers that separated the shore from the French fort. Additionally, canoemen transported raw materials to the forts. In 1722, the Company paid the canoemen with a bottle of brandy and ten *galinas* of cowry shells every Sunday, and an extra bottle of brandy for each day they worked.⁵⁶⁴ When their work consisted of loading or unloading ships they were paid the value of seven enslaved Africans, three in cowry shells and four in commodities.⁵⁶⁵

Despite their importance, the Company never managed to employ their own canoemen the way the Dutch and the English did. Canoemen from the Gold Coast had a reputation of being skilled and were in high demand on the Slave Coast. The canoemen hired by the Dutch and the English were from Elmina and Cape Coast Castle.⁵⁶⁶ Because the French lacked access to the Gold Coast, their only solution was to hire canoemen off the English or the Dutch.⁵⁶⁷ But the French were apparently not an attractive employer; the director noted that canoemen only worked for the Company when they had no other employers and, even then, only if they wanted to. When the Company employees reprimanded them for their negligence towards the goods they transported, they simply stopped working for the French. These

⁵⁶¹ See chapter 2.

⁵⁶² Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 63.

⁵⁶³ Law, ‘Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders’, 48.

⁵⁶⁴ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast, 1722.

⁵⁶⁵ According to Law’s estimates, the price of an enslaved African in 1721 was ten British pounds, the price rose steeply during the first decades of the eighteenth century: from £5 in 1713 to £15 in 1727 in Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750*, 174.

⁵⁶⁶ ANOM C2 25, letter of Ducoulombier, 10 August 1714.

⁵⁶⁷ ANOM C2 25, Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast, 1722.

conflicts could delay the loading of the ships, and their subsequent departure, up to twenty days.

In both Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah, directors had to tolerate deviation from the companies' rules regarding private trade and misbehaviours. In Pondicherry, this was due to the scarcity of skilled employees and the cost of training them. In the fort in Ouidah, the risks of alienating the Company employees in an unstable political situation were too high and could lead to disloyalties culminating in the director's death. As for the challenges emanating from the lack of jurisdiction over military personnel and the opposition from religious orders, they were specific to overseas settlements with a sizable population, like Pondicherry. Indeed, authority over a growing population also meant governing over a diverse and mobile population, negotiating with ecclesiastical authorities and sharing jurisdiction with the Royal Navy. The commonality between both factories was their dependence on a highly mobile workforce that had to be attracted by working and living conditions.

4. Dependence on local commercial actors

The monsoons set the rhythm of French trade on the Coromandel Coast, an important factor that affected the company's relationships with commodities suppliers. To reach India, ships departing from Europe used the south-west monsoon winds that blew from April until September and returned to Europe between October and February using the north-east monsoon winds.⁵⁶⁸ In theory, the Company ships that left France in March arrived in Pondicherry between July and September. From Pondicherry, they could sail to Bengal or Surat and then usually return to France in January or February.⁵⁶⁹ Director Martin encouraged the East India Company ships to arrive in June or early July at the latest.⁵⁷⁰ However, in practice, Company councillors never knew when to expect Company ships. They would receive information about the arrival of ships at the Malabar Coast and they tried to have as much merchandise as possible ready in the strict timeframe set by the monsoons.⁵⁷¹ These natural time constraints put the French, along with other Europeans, in a weak bargaining position in relation to their suppliers.

⁵⁶⁸ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 33; Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 1:446.

⁵⁶⁹ Only a minority of ships would return to France from the Coromandel in October. Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 83.

⁵⁷⁰ ANOM C2 63 f°96, letter of Martin and Deslandes, 14 September 1687.

⁵⁷¹ ANOM C2 67 f° 248, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705.

Suppliers

The trade on the Coromandel Coast was organized in such a way that the Company had to rely on Indian merchants for the provisioning of the town of Pondicherry. Furthermore, they supplied the East India Company with textiles. Indian merchants acted as the contacts between the French Company in Pondicherry and the weaving villages in the Karnataka hinterland. On the Coromandel Coast, these merchants were from a community of Telugu-speaking Hindus called Chettys.⁵⁷² Historians have argued that Europeans, in order to raise the necessary capital to supply the French and other East India Companies on the Coromandel Coast, encouraged Indian merchants to form companies, which varied from joint-stock companies to traditional partnerships within a caste group.⁵⁷³ However, there is no evidence of joint-stock enterprises in Pondicherry, unlike in Madras or Nagapattinam. Documents in the Company archive refer to these merchants as “*nos marchands*” with no reference to any shares.⁵⁷⁴ Merchants of the French Company seem to have been part of a partnership without limited liability.⁵⁷⁵ If merchants involved in the partnership failed to fulfil the contract, the Company took possession of the merchants’ personal properties, which served as collateral. However, there is no evidence that the Company applied this sanction.⁵⁷⁶

To create a contract, the French Company director and the Superior Council first had to agree upon how many textiles were needed, along with which type and when they had to be ready for shipping. The Company sometimes based these decisions on orders from the Company in Paris and, other times, when they had no information from France, they based them on previous experience. They then started negotiations with the Indian merchants of the Company, mainly regarding the advance payment for the raw material and the weavers’ wages.⁵⁷⁷ The proportion of the advance payment varied greatly, depending on the Company’s time constraints in Pondicherry.⁵⁷⁸ For the Company, the best moment to sign a contract was at the beginning of the year, so that the majority of the goods would be ready for

⁵⁷² Around Pondichéry the Komatti Chettys were the prominent social group (leaders of the right hand faction) as opposed to Madras where the Beri Chettys were most present (leaders of the left hand faction) in Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 130.

⁵⁷³ S. Arasaratnam, ‘Indian Merchants and Their Trading Methods (circa 1700)’, *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 3, no. 1 (1 March 1966): 85.

⁵⁷⁴ For instance in ANOM C2 66 f° 30, Diary of Martin, 16 August 1701; C2 69 f°9, letter of Hébert, 10 February 1710; f°160, letter of Dulivier 4 February 1715 ; f°209, letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716.

⁵⁷⁵ According the Catherine Manning, the French Company of the Indies in the 1720s revived the system of Indian merchants organizations which had been used under the former French East India Company. The contracts only stated that the merchants were obliged to stand “*solidairement l’un pour l’autre*” in Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 131.

⁵⁷⁶ Manning, 132.

⁵⁷⁷ ANOM C2 65 f°31, letter of Martin, 14 September 1699.

⁵⁷⁸ ANOM C2 63 f°52, letter of Bertrand, 7 April 1686.

shipment in September and then the rest in December. However, if the director lacked the necessary funds to pay the advance, he had to wait for Company ships to bring bullions from Cadiz before he could sign the contract.⁵⁷⁹ The bullions from Cadiz usually arrived in France between December and January and then continued on to India in February.⁵⁸⁰ Manning estimates that between 1719 and 1748, if the contract with the merchants was made early in the year, the advance payment amounted to less than fifteen percent of the total payment.⁵⁸¹ However, if the director signed the contract in September, when the French ships arrived in India with bullions from Cadiz, for merchandise due in December, the proportion of advanced payment could exceed fifty percent of the total price.

In Ouidah, the organization of the trade created a French dependency on hinterland slave suppliers. Before the conquest in 1727/33, enslaved Africans traded in Ouidah principally came from the interior kingdom of Dahomey. Under the Hueda kings, slave suppliers were private merchants who either captured or bought Africans in the hinterland markets.⁵⁸² Suppliers brought the slaves to the Hueda capital's prisons, where the trade took place.⁵⁸³ This system required European traders to travel to the capital to negotiate the price and pay customs to the Hueda king. French captains were responsible for the transport of the bought slaves from the capital to their ships. During the early Dahomian period and until the mid-eighteenth century, the King and his army used raids as the main source of supply of enslaved Africans.⁵⁸⁴ Raids targeted neighbouring interior kingdoms, particularly the Kingdom of Oyo. Paradoxically, the slave-raiding system both benefited from conflicts in the hinterland and suffered from the disruption the conflict caused along the trading routes, even after the conflict ended. The evidence of this disorder can be found during the reign of King Agaja (1727/33-1740), who warred with the kingdom of Oyo, one of the main slave suppliers of Ouidah. After the two kingdoms re-established peace in 1730, trade did not resume immediately and it took some time before the supply routes were safe again.⁵⁸⁵

Unlike the Hueda kings, the Dahomey kings enjoyed a monopoly on the sale of war captives. Prisoners of war had to be turned in to the Dahomian king, in exchange for payment. When King Agaja conquered Ouidah, he established a monopoly over the exportation of

⁵⁷⁹ ANOM C2 67 f°56-73, letter of Dulivier in Ougly, January 1703.

⁵⁸⁰ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 81.

⁵⁸¹ Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 133.

⁵⁸² Labat, *Voyage du chevalier Desmarchais*, 59. Cited in Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders', 50.

⁵⁸³ ANOM C6 25, 1716: *Mémoire du pays de Juda et de son négoce*.

⁵⁸⁴ Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders', 47.

⁵⁸⁵ Law, 50-51.

slaves. The implementation of a trade monopoly enabled the King Agaja and his officials to control the slave trade market and set the price of the slaves.⁵⁸⁶ During the first phase of the Dahomian slave trade, slave traders in Ouidah comprised part of the Dahomey administration, who traded on behalf of the king and were forbidden to do so for their own personal gain.⁵⁸⁷ When King Tegbesu arrived to power in 1740, he replaced the officials in charge of the trade in Ouidah, but continued the monopoly on slave trade. A few years later, the king drastically changed his strategy and, through a series of announcements made between 1746 and 1748, implemented a policy of “*free trade*” in Ouidah, initiating the second phase of the Dahomian slave trade. The sudden change arose from a peace treaty Tegbesu negotiated with the neighbouring Kingdom of Oyo, in an attempt to stop the frequent invasions of Dahomey territory by the Oyo army. King Tegbesu only reached a peace treaty with the Oyo king by becoming his tributary. Out of fear that the Oyo would supply enslaved Africans to the exiled Hueda king directly, the Dahomian slave-trade evolved from a monopolized supply chain predicated on prisoners of war and slave raids, into an intermediary market that attracted private traders from the hinterland and facilitated trade between the slave markets of the African interior and European exporters.⁵⁸⁸

Commercial brokers

The dependence on suppliers in both factories increased the importance of commercial brokers. When dealing with Indian merchants, the Company held a weak bargaining position, and their official broker played a major role in attempting to balance the power dynamic and strike better deals. This specific broker, or the “*courtier en chef des Malabars*,” acted as both a commercial broker and the representative of the Indian population.⁵⁸⁹ Both the company and the surrounding communities relied on the chief commercial broker to create the best market conditions for the acquisition of textiles. He negotiated with the Indian merchants to supply the Company, and also set up production centres that processed the raw materials to produce manufactured goods.⁵⁹⁰ In exchange for his services, he was entitled to a percentage of the sales he enabled. Since the 1980s, the historiography has demonstrated the dependency of European companies on brokers.⁵⁹¹ The sources call brokers *dubash* or *dobachis*, which means men of two languages. This term stresses their roles as translators, but that was far

⁵⁸⁶ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746.

⁵⁸⁷ Law, ‘Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders’, 62.

⁵⁸⁸ Law, 52.

⁵⁸⁹ Agmon, ‘The Currency of Kinship’, 141.

⁵⁹⁰ Agmon, 141.

⁵⁹¹ For instance Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*.

from their sole function.⁵⁹² Brokers were not only necessary to trading relations but also to daily-life activities; they were indispensable to the development of commerce and the day-to-day function of the administration. They predominantly made the connection between the Company and Indian merchants and oversaw the transaction by negotiating prices, paying advances and checking the quality of goods. Additionally, some luso-Asians worked as translators at the service of the company.⁵⁹³ Contrary to the official company broker, men like Antoine Cattel appear to have served exclusively as an interpreter and did not enter into competition with the commercial broker.

For more than a century, the powerful position of *courtier en chef des Malabars* in Pondicherry moved back and forth between members of two families: the Mudali family and the Pillai family.⁵⁹⁴ The former family practiced Christianity and the latter Hinduism, but both were from the same high-ranking caste group, called Vellalar. Chief commercial brokers were wealthy merchants, who did not limit their activities to brokering contracts. They often collected the company's tax-farm revenues like customs duties, as well as taxes on tobacco, *bétel*, drinks and the domain or *aldées*, the lands owned by the company around Pondicherry.⁵⁹⁵ In 1701, when Director Martin renegotiated the value of the tax farms by public auction, no one outbid the starting prices. Martin realized that the tax farmers had formed a cartel and he had no other choice than to "*not say anything and adjudicate the farms on the prices of last year.*"⁵⁹⁶ However, the brokers' families remained dependent on the company for their business and power. The relationship between the chief commercial broker and the overseas director was deeply inter-dependent.

Peculiarly, under both the Hueda and the Dahomey, the king appointed commercial brokers in Ouidah. He assigned the French, English and Portuguese representatives a specific broker each, called captains.⁵⁹⁷ The captains were part of the royal administration and, under the Hueda kings, combined their official position with that of private slave traders. Their role as intermediaries with Europeans, as well as high-ranking officials and traders, conferred

⁵⁹² Subrahmanyam, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', 17.

⁵⁹³ Such as Antoine Cattel who would always join François Martin when he was visiting Sher Khan in Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 17.

⁵⁹⁴ Agmon, 'The Currency of Kinship', 142.

⁵⁹⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°6, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701 and Marquet, 'Le rôle des intermédiaires'.

⁵⁹⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°35, Diary of Martin, 26 September 1701: "*L'on crie les fermes sur le prix de l'année dernière, il ne se présente point d'enchérisseur, nous (...) qu'il y avoit un complot fait*".

⁵⁹⁷ See chapter 2.

upon them economic and political power. However, their position was also fragile and, especially under the Dahomey kings, they were at the mercy of the king's arbitrary rule.⁵⁹⁸

Credit providers

When Company ships were scarce in Pondicherry, directors borrowed money to have cargoes ready for the arrival of ships. Furthermore, if they did not provide merchants with new contracts, the directors ran the risk of losing their merchants and weavers to the English and Dutch settlements along the Coromandel Coast.⁵⁹⁹ However, the Company struggled to find wealthy merchants able or willing to provide the credit.⁶⁰⁰ Once again, their bargaining position was relatively weak, because potential creditors were well aware of the difficulties the Company faced. In 1700, when negotiating a loan with Khoja Safar, an Armenian merchant established in Madras, Director Martin was forced to agree to a loan at a ten percent interest rate for four years.⁶⁰¹ An interest rate of ten percent was not uncommon in European settlements on the Coromandel Coast during this period; the standard ranged from eight to ten percent for long-term loans.⁶⁰² However, Safar left no room for negotiation regarding the length of the loan. Loans mentioned in the "*procès-verbaux des délibérations*" of the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry during the first decades of their settlement show that Armenian merchants, alongside Europeans, were important creditors of the Company and, in particular, the aforementioned Khoja Safar.⁶⁰³

Armenian merchants began settling in India at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁶⁰⁴ The forced deportation of Armenians from Julfa in 1605, as well as the fact that Hormuz passed under Safavid control, opened the Indian Ocean to merchants from Julfa. The Armenian merchants were Christians who seceded from established Christianity in 554 and established a church independent from Constantinople.⁶⁰⁵ According to Sebouh Aslanian, the use of "*commenda*" as a business method was an important factor of their development abroad.⁶⁰⁶ The "*commenda*" bound together a merchant with capital and a factor who could be sent abroad to invest the merchant's capital in long-distance trade with no liability to the

⁵⁹⁸ In 1746, the King Tegbesu decapitated and replaced all the captains in charge of the mediation with Europeans.

⁵⁹⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°36, Diary of Martin, 6 November 1701.

⁶⁰⁰ ANOM C2 67 f°128, letter of Martin, 2 October 1704.

⁶⁰¹ ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁶⁰² Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 279.

⁶⁰³ Khoja Safar appears in the minutes of the council for credit issues on 6 March 1705, 1 April 1706 and 24 September 1708 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 21;30;64.

⁶⁰⁴ Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, 48.

⁶⁰⁵ Razmik Stephan Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst, 2006), 43.

⁶⁰⁶ Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, 122.

merchant. It took New Julfa merchants less than fifty years to appear on the Coromandel Coast, mainly in Hyderabad, Golkonda and Masulipatnam. They travelled through the Persian Gulf and would stay in the Southern Indian markets for a year or two, which led to Armenian settlements. They traded in both the French settlements of Chandernagor and Pondicherry, among other European settlements.⁶⁰⁷ However, the French tended to have less success entering the Armenian networks than the English in Madras. Lacking the commercial opportunities of its neighbours, Proto Novo and Madras, Pondicherry did not manage to attract wealthy Indian and Armenian merchants, even later in the eighteenth century.⁶⁰⁸ For instance, the aforementioned important creditor of the East India Company, Khoja Safar, lived in Madras.

Similar to directors in Pondicherry, directors of the fort in Ouidah needed credit to sustain their trade and survival. Records of loans granted by Hueda traders and rulers to European representatives in Ouidah exist from as early as the 1690s, with the testimony of an English slave trader, William Snelgrave.⁶⁰⁹ The Asiento Company primarily needed credit for the maintenance of the fort and food supplies. They sometimes bought enslaved Africans on credit, and mainly borrowed cowry shells. As a consequence of a monetized economy, the Company needed cowry shells to pay for most of its daily transactions and for the slave trade. If Europeans defaulted on their loans, Hueda or Dahomey traders or the king could seize either the overseas director or employees.⁶¹⁰ Europeans repaid loans in goods or in cowry shells. From the 1690s, they also supplied goods to traders in advance, to finance their slave trading in the interior along the Slave Coast.⁶¹¹ In some cases, the advance payment was extended for a longer period than the length of a slave-trade voyage in the interior and evolved into debts. The king, often one of the debtors, did not always enforce the rules over debt repayments.⁶¹² In the French sources, Africans extended credit to the French much more frequently than the opposite. During the period under scrutiny, the Company frequently lived on credit in Ouidah.

In Pondicherry, the natural time constraints created by monsoons limited directors' margin of manoeuvre, both in terms of negotiating contracts and arranging cargoes. In turn, these time constraints strengthened Indian merchants' bargaining position in negotiations over

⁶⁰⁷ Aslanian, 50.

⁶⁰⁸ Manning, *Fortunes cqrloff à faire*, 132.

⁶⁰⁹ William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea* (London, 1734), p. 87-88 cited in Law, 'Finance and Credit in Pre-Colonial Dahomey'.

⁶¹⁰ Law, 28.

⁶¹¹ Law, 23.

⁶¹² Law, 31.

the price of the products and the proportion of the advance payment. In Ouidah, the Hueda and Dahomey kings kept slave suppliers under strict control. The Hueda kings did not maintain a royal monopoly over the exportation of slaves, but rather opened it to private traders. However, they centralized the slave trade at the Hueda capital and transactions took place under the supervision of Hueda officials. From the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah until the mid-eighteenth century, the Dahomey kings implemented a strict monopoly over slave export. During both phases, and perhaps especially during the royal monopoly period, the Company directors depended on the official broker appointed to them by the African administration to engage in trade.

The directors of Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah shared this reliance on commercial brokers to enter into trading relations. In Pondicherry, the key position of chief commercial broker of the company empowered specific merchant families. In turn, commercial brokers remained dependent on the East India Company for their future economic and social advancement, which resulted in a strong, interdependent relation. In Ouidah, commercial brokers were high officials appointed by the African administration. Under the Hueda kings, they combined their political role with mercantile activities. After the Dahomey kings implemented the royal monopoly, commercial brokers in Ouidah traded on behalf of the king. Similar to Indian brokers, they gained power through their role of commercial brokers, but they remained dependent on the kings who conferred this power upon them in the first place.

Directors of Pondicherry and Ouidah also relied extensively on credit, for both the survival of the forts and the development of the trade. Due to the system of advance payments on the Coromandel Coast, the director of Pondicherry took out regular loans in order to sign contracts with the Indian merchants of the Company. The available credit in Pondicherry was rare and mainly came from Armenian merchants, who had considerable bargaining power when negotiating the terms of the loans. In Ouidah, potential credit emanated from the king or his captains, which made reputation of the director among political authorities paramount. Given the circumstances, loans provided by other Europeans were to play an important role in the development of the French presence in both factories, as will be explored in detail later in this thesis.

Generally speaking, the bargaining power of suppliers, brokers and credit providers limited the agency of directors in both places. In Pondicherry, these economic actors came from different merchant communities. Suppliers were Chettys, brokers were from the Vellalar caste group and Armenian merchants provided most of the credit. These are not strict

distinctions, but they show that the director of Pondicherry interacted with multiple mercantile communities, each with their own commercial strategies. By contrast, in Ouidah, the three commercial activities of supplying slave markets, brokering contracts and providing credit were centralized in the hands of the king and his officials. Although private traders played a role in supplying enslaved Africans to the Hueda capital, they remained under the supervision of the king's officials. This means that, while Pondicherry directors negotiated with multiple actors, in Ouidah they dealt with a small group of actors centred around the king. Therefore, diplomatic relations with the king took on another level of importance in Ouidah, as they had both a political and commercial purpose. However, local commercial and political actors were not the only factors limiting the agency of overseas directors.

5. From theory to practice: orders from France

Throughout the period under study, Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah were administrated by different state-sponsored companies or directly by the king and the minister of the Navy. All of these companies had either launched or re-organized under the close supervision of the minister of the Navy. Private French merchants had sporadically participated in trade in the Indian Ocean and on the Western Coast of Africa before the creation of the companies, but both factories under study developed under the impetus of a chartered company: the East India Company (1664-1719) in Pondicherry and the Guinea/Asiento Companies (1685-1713) followed by the Company of the Indies (1719-1769) in Ouidah. Directors in Paris reported news from overseas to the minister of the Navy, who was also a company director. In turn, the minister of the Navy discussed overseas orders with the Parisian directors. In practice, company agents in Ouidah and Pondicherry received their orders from one authority: the directors in Paris, who included the minister of the Navy. The exception to this rule occurred in Ouidah between 1713-1722, when the fort fell under royal administration, and direct authority of the Council of the Navy.

In the case of Pondicherry, slow and difficult communication delayed the passage of instructions from the directors in France to the directors of Pondicherry. A letter sent from Paris could take up to two years to reach the overseas directors, or even longer when letters had to be circulated among French settlements in India.⁶¹³ The geographical distance between Paris and Pondicherry was further exacerbated by the Parisian directors' misunderstanding of the reality on the ground. On one hand, directors in France sent out commodities ill-suited to

⁶¹³ For instance, François Martin writes on the 25th of February 1692 that he has not received any news from France since August 1690. ANOM C2 64 f°7, letter of Martin, 25 February 1692.

the Indian trade markets and on the other hand, they had specific, often delayed, orders for what should be sent back to France.

French markets desired Indian products more than Indian markets needed French and European commodities. Nevertheless, Parisian directors pressured overseas directors to introduce as much French manufactured goods as possible.⁶¹⁴ Therefore, some of the merchandise sent by the Company did not meet local merchants' demand and ended up stored indefinitely in the Company storehouses. For instance, in 1687, Indian merchants under contract with the Company refused French textiles; there was no demand for them, because they did not have a bright enough colour.⁶¹⁵ The director of Pondicherry informed the Company that they had not found any buyers for these products over four years and therefore, the English Company had not sent any in the last three years.⁶¹⁶ Sometimes Indian merchants of the Company accepted the merchandise at a lower price. Nevertheless, the Company's slow adaptation to the overseas market was a real handicap to its development. In 1701, the director made clear that it was useless to send unwanted merchandise and asked Parisian directors to concentrate on the most, and only, demanded commodities: corals.⁶¹⁷ Aside from precious metal, processed or raw corals were one of the few commodities in high demand in Asia. Despite their low value as precious stones, merchants exchanged Mediterranean corals for Asian goods because they symbolized "*burgeoning trade*."⁶¹⁸

In addition to sending unwanted commodities, Parisian directors' instructions showed a clear unfamiliarity with the French position in the commercial landscape of the Coromandel Coast. For instance, they instructed the director not to buy and send any scrapped textiles back to France. However, as showed in the previous section, directors lacked bargaining power when negotiating the supply of textiles with Indian merchants. The Parisian directors were not aware that the overseas director could not refuse to buy these "*toiles de rebut*," only negotiate a cheaper price with Indian merchants of the Company.⁶¹⁹ Many directives were ill-adapted to the situation in Pondicherry and Director Hébert complained that "*it was extremely difficult to make [the directors] understand what our real interests are and how we should act to operate*

⁶¹⁴ ANOM C2 63 f°90, letter of Martin and Deslandes, 24 September 1687.

⁶¹⁵ ANOM C2 63 f°90, letter of Martin and Deslandes, 24 September 1687 ”.

⁶¹⁶ ANOM C2 66 f° 30, Diary of Martin, 16 August 1701.

⁶¹⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁶¹⁸ Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 226.

⁶¹⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°7, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

better than before."⁶²⁰ He went so far as to write that if the Parisian directors wanted to take advantage of the trade to India, they needed to "*wake up.*"⁶²¹

In turn, directors in Paris expressed their reservations about the quality of goods coming from Pondicherry, even when they had been pleased with commodities of a similar quality in previous shipments.⁶²² However, the negative reaction from directors in France regarding goods was not aimed at merely contradicting Pondicherry directors' decisions. East India Company directors had to follow strict instructions from the Asiento Company. Their needs for the West African trade determined the orders sent to Pondicherry.⁶²³ Connecting the two commodity chains on time proved to be a delicate matter, which gave the director in Pondicherry an extra challenge. The director had to not only adapt European merchandise to suit markets on the Coromandel Coast and meet contracts with Indian merchants of the Company in time, with the difficulties stated previously, but also adapt orders to the latest information from the Asiento Company. To understand how the French attempted to link these two commodity chains, one has to take a closer look to the exchange of information between the Asiento Company directors and Ouidah, their main trading post.

Communication between Paris and Ouidah was less problematic than in Pondicherry, due to the high volume of French private ships trading in Ouidah (fig. 3.5.). The Slave Coast had the advantage of being closer to Europe than the Coromandel Coast, and therefore the voyages were shorter, particularly in the France-Ouidah direction. Moreover, the Company directors in Paris knew the commodities required for the slave trade well: cowry shells, brandy, iron bars, guns, gunpowder and Indian textiles, among other things. Three quarters of these products came from East India Company stores and the rest came from the domestic market and the United Provinces.⁶²⁴ It was the quality and proportions of said products that seem to have been ill-adapted. Cowry shells had to be the main commodity sent on slave-trading ships, and then "*still other goods should be adapted to the taste of the [African] Kings.*"⁶²⁵ However, the idea that French manufactured goods should be sent to Ouidah endured in reports on the Guinea Coast: "*it would be desirable to send samples on each*

⁶²⁰ ANOM C2 69 f°22, letter of Hébert, 10 February 1710: "*à leur faire connoître quels sont nos véritables intérêts et de quelle manière nous devons nous conduire afin de mieux opérer que par les passé*".

⁶²¹ ANOM C2 69 f°24, letter of Hébert, 10 February 1710 "*il est nécessaire que les directeurs se réveillent un peu*".

⁶²² ANOM C2 67 f°254, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705.

⁶²³ ANOM C2 66 f°170, Diary of Martin, 21 January 1703: "*la compagnie nous donne ordre de faire travailler pour en fournir à la compagnie de l'assiente*".

⁶²⁴ ANOM C6 25, *Mémoire concernant la colonie de Juda, Côte de Guinée*, 1722.

⁶²⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 6 June 1717: "*il faut des bouges aux marchandises préférablement a toutes marchandises [...] Encore faudrait-il que les marchandises soient au gout des rois nègres*".

voyage in order to make [Africans] like and get used to French products".⁶²⁶ Overseas directors responded to these pressures by telling the directors that *salempouris*, *guinées bleues* and cowry shells could technically be considered "*French products*" because the Company traded in India exclusively for the Guinea market.⁶²⁷ Despite the fact that information from Ouidah made it clear that only Indian textiles met the African traders' demand, the Parisian directors still thought they could introduce French manufactured goods without attracting the African traders' notice. In this, the knowledge gap between the management in Paris and the directors of the fort in Ouidah is most striking. Indeed, directors of the fort in Ouidah knew that commodities of a lesser quality would be spotted sooner or later and that it was their reputations and positions at stake. They preferred to leave ill-suited merchandise stored in the fort.

Overseas directors of the fort in Ouidah knew that Indian textiles were in high demand among African traders. But specific preferences had to be met and thus adaptation was essential to guarantee competitiveness.⁶²⁸ For example, in 1734, aside from the ever-needed cowry shells and corals, the *salempouris* had to be blue and not white.⁶²⁹ Ten years later, buyers in Ouidah wanted the *Pondicherry* and the Indian cloth with a white background most.⁶³⁰ These specific pieces were in such high demand that African traders were willing to be accommodating: if the director had one ounce of these two exact textiles for each enslaved African they traded, the rest of the merchandise could be of lesser quality.⁶³¹ The ounce was an accounting unit that measured commodities. It amounted to one "*pièce de toile*", or one tobacco roll from Brazil, or four iron bars, to name a few examples.⁶³² Historians have already acknowledged how West African tastes impacted European purchases in India.⁶³³ This mechanism of West African consumption patterns influencing the Indian trade is

⁶²⁶ ANOM C6 25 f°7, *Mémoire sur le commerce de Guinée*, eighteenth century,: "*Il seroit encore a souhaiter que l'on fit des épreuves et des essais a chaque voyage pour donner du gout et accoutumer les Nègres a des certaines marchandises de France que l'on pourroit introduire chez eux insensiblement*".

⁶²⁷ ANOM C6 25, Instructions to Julien Du Bellay, 1733: "*Les salempouris, Guinée bleues et les cauris peuvent être regardées comme des marchandises du crû de France attendu que la compagnie les tire de son commerce avec l'Inde et le débouché n'est que pour la Guinée*".

⁶²⁸ Kazuo Kobayashi, *Indian Cotton Textiles and the Senegal River Valley in a Globalising World: Production, Trade and Consumption, 1750- 1850* (London School of Economics: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2016), 96. "*Quality of the cloth appealed to African consumers and no European textiles could match Indian Guinées in quality*".

⁶²⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734: "*des salempouris bleus sans aucun blancs*".

⁶³⁰ ANOM C6 25, lettre de Levet, 14 June 1743.

⁶³¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 14 June 1743.

⁶³² Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 68.

⁶³³ For instance, Kazuo Kobayashi demonstrates that Western African consumer agency shaped the demand for Indian textiles up to the nineteenth century. Kobayashi, *Indian Cotton Textiles and the Senegal River Valley*, 95. Christina Brauner argues that African actors shaped the companies' gift giving, see: Brauner, 'Connecting Things', 423.

unmistakable in the French case, because the East India Company directors sent “*samples of striped cloth to provide the Asiento Company*” to Pondicherry.⁶³⁴

Different global commodity chains were connected with each other, including Mediterranean corals and precious metal collected in Cadiz exchanged for Indian textiles, which directors then traded on the west coast of Africa for enslaved Africans, thereby increasing the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Orders sent to Pondicherry based on the consumption patterns in Ouidah attempted to integrate the markets on a global level. However, the Parisian management’s lack of understanding of power dynamics and organization of the trade made adaptation to consumer demand in Ouidah and Pondicherry difficult. Additionally, the Parisian directors were unaware of the company’s weak bargaining position at both factories. This made the tasks of overseas directors difficult as they tried to convince and inform the metropolitan directors of the realities and limitations of connecting commodity chains at the global level. Furthermore, the centralization of market information about Pondicherry and Ouidah in France made market integration difficult. A direct line of communication between the directors of Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah would have been the most cost-effective way to solve problems and connect the commodity chains smoothly. The fact that they never created one points out the limitations of local agencies in Pondicherry and Ouidah: to communicate and trade with each other, they had to go through the directors in France.

6. Captains: Company, Navy and private traders

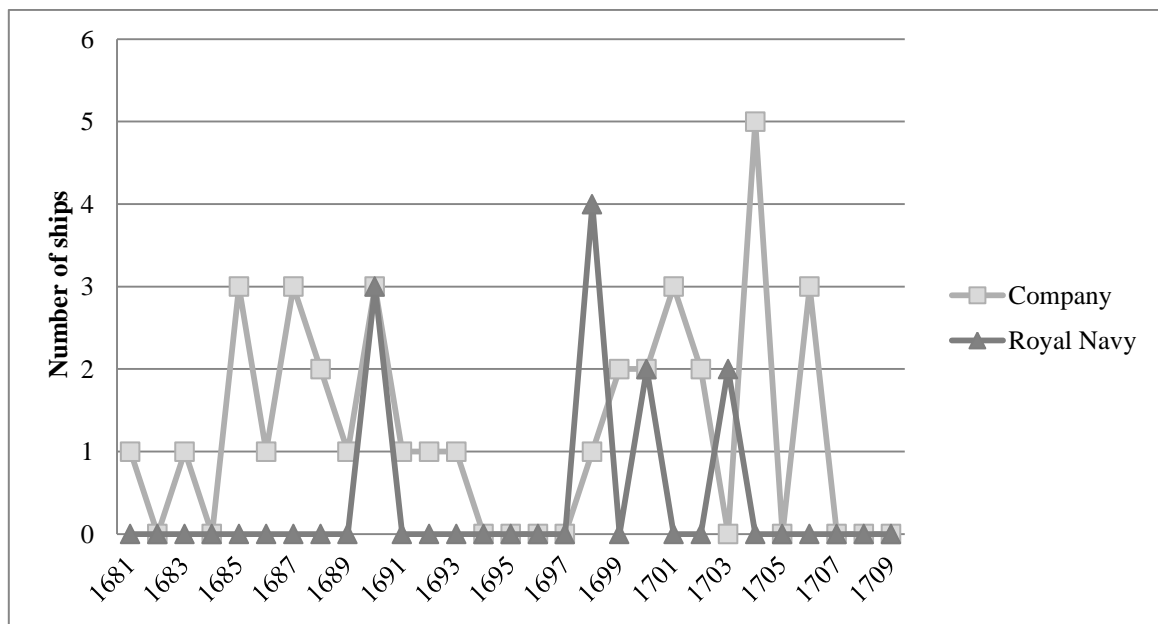
The link between directors in France and overseas directors was theoretically made through French ship captains, another group of commercial actors the directors had to consider. French ships sailing to Pondicherry were from the French East India Company and the Royal Navy until 1709, when the Company started sub-contracting its trading monopoly out to merchants from Saint Malo.⁶³⁵ Out of the fifty-five ships and frigates that sailed to Pondicherry from 1681 until 1709, the Royal Navy sent twelve. Royal Navy ships were meant to convoy Company ships and strengthen the French presence in India. In 1690, the Squadron of Dusquene-Guiton comprised of three Company ships and three from the Royal Navy. In 1698, another squadron left France with four ships from the Royal Navy. Another two navy ships left for Pondicherry in 1700 in the Squadron of Chateaumorant and, in 1704, the same two ships appear in the Squadron of de Pallières. The last ship sent by the King Louis XIV

⁶³⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°11, letter of Hardancourt, 5 February 1703: “*Nous receumes le 21 janvier la lettre de ces Mss du 4 mars 1702 la feuille des échantillons des toiles rayées pour fournir à a compagnie de l’assiente*”.

⁶³⁵ “Tableau de la navigation des Français aux Indes de 1665 à 1719” in Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 652–61.

was the *Maurepas*, equipped for privateering with the Company's ship, the *Pondicherry*, in 1703. Furthermore, some of the forty-three ships sailing under the East India Company flag were fitted out by private traders.⁶³⁶ The mix of Navy ships, privateering ships and Company ships demonstrates the dual role, both commercial and military, played by the East India Company. Louis XIV sought to extend European warfare in the Indian Ocean. As a direct result, the directors of Pondicherry interacted with captains with different interests, be they military, commercial or both, over which they did not always have authority.

Figure 3.3. Graph of East India Company and Royal Navy ships in Pondicherry between 1681 and 1709



Source: Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 652-61.

According to Martin, the king's ships were of “*great help to the company during the wars, however during peacetime the commerce of the company would be much more advantageous if only the company's ships were present.*”⁶³⁷ Problematically, during periods of peace, Royal Navy ships disturbed the neutrality imposed by the Mughal emperor upon Europeans sailing along the Coromandel Coast. These disruptions negatively impacted the director in Pondicherry, and his relationship with political authorities. Furthermore, private trade flourished among officers on board the king's ship.⁶³⁸ The director of Pondicherry knew about the officers' private trade: “*the higher officers bought some embroidered textiles,*

⁶³⁶ See chapter 1.

⁶³⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°258, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: “*les vaisseaux du roy sont assurément d'un grand secours à votre compagnie dans un temps de guerre, mais la paix vous seroit autrement avantageuse n'y ayant que vos navires*”.

⁶³⁸ ANOM C2 67 f°258, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705.

varnished objects from Japan which they bought from the Dutch, and some porcelain, there is no money left on the squadron because the officers had the time to spend what they had during their journey to Balassor and Pondicherry."⁶³⁹ Martin realized that it was impossible to prevent private trade completely and tolerated it when the invested capital was low and harmless to the trade in Pondicherry.⁶⁴⁰ This issue was hardly limited to the crews of the Royal Navy; the Company crews behaved no better. The Parisian directors received warnings from Pondicherry about the "*immense cargoes*" taken by Company officers for their own benefit as "*they paid more attention to their own interests than to that [of the Company directors].*"⁶⁴¹ Company ships traditionally allowed crews to take on board "*a certain weight, volume or quantity of merchandise*" for their personal trade called *pacotille*.⁶⁴² However, renewed legislation issued in February and March 1717 prohibited the *pacotille* of all crew members and officers, because they had "*embarked to France more considerable amounts than allowed by their permissions.*"⁶⁴³ These edicts are evidence that crew and officers frequently exceeded the legal limit of *pacotille*. The vast majority of *pacotille* was not intended for personal consumption. Instead, it entered illegal commercial circuits in France.⁶⁴⁴ The scale of the smuggling activities under the pretext of *pacotille* was so large that crew members and officers took out loans in France to buy their merchandise overseas or took orders from French shopkeepers, who provided them the funds in advance.⁶⁴⁵

After 1709, private merchants from Saint Malo fitted out most ships bound for Pondicherry. From 1709 until the integration of the East India Company's privileges in the Company of the Indies in 1719, the Saint Malo Company dispatched twenty-nine ships to Pondicherry. Their size varied greatly but Lespagnol evaluated the total tonnage at 11,770 *tonneaux*.⁶⁴⁶ Besides the direct voyage from Europe to Pondicherry, Saint Malo ships covered

⁶³⁹ ANOM C2 65 f°33, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699: "*les officiers principaux ont acheté en Bengale quelques couvertures brodées, des ouvrages de verny du Japon qu'ils ont tirés des Hollandais, des porcelaines une partie de ces achats pour des présents, il n'y a presque plus d'argent sur l'escadre les officiers ont eu le temps de dépenser ce qu'ils en avoient pendant leur séjour à Balaçor et Pondichéry*".

⁶⁴⁰ ANOM C2 65 f°33, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699.

⁶⁴¹ ANOM C2 13 f°48, letter of the East India Company directors to Pontchartrain, 2 May 1708: "*M. Hébert et Hardancourt nous assurent que les officiers rapportent des cargaisons immenses pour leur compte [...] ils ont eu plus d'attention à leurs intérêts qu'aux nôtres*" another evidence of company officers' private trade appears in ANOM C2 65 f° 86, letter of Martin, 5 March 1700.

⁶⁴² Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 95.

⁶⁴³ Edict of 22 February 1717 and 8 March 1717: "*plus attentifs à leur profit particulier [...], n'ont pas laissé d'embarquer en France des sommes plus considérables que ne portoient leurs permissions*" in Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres*, 4: 77-84.

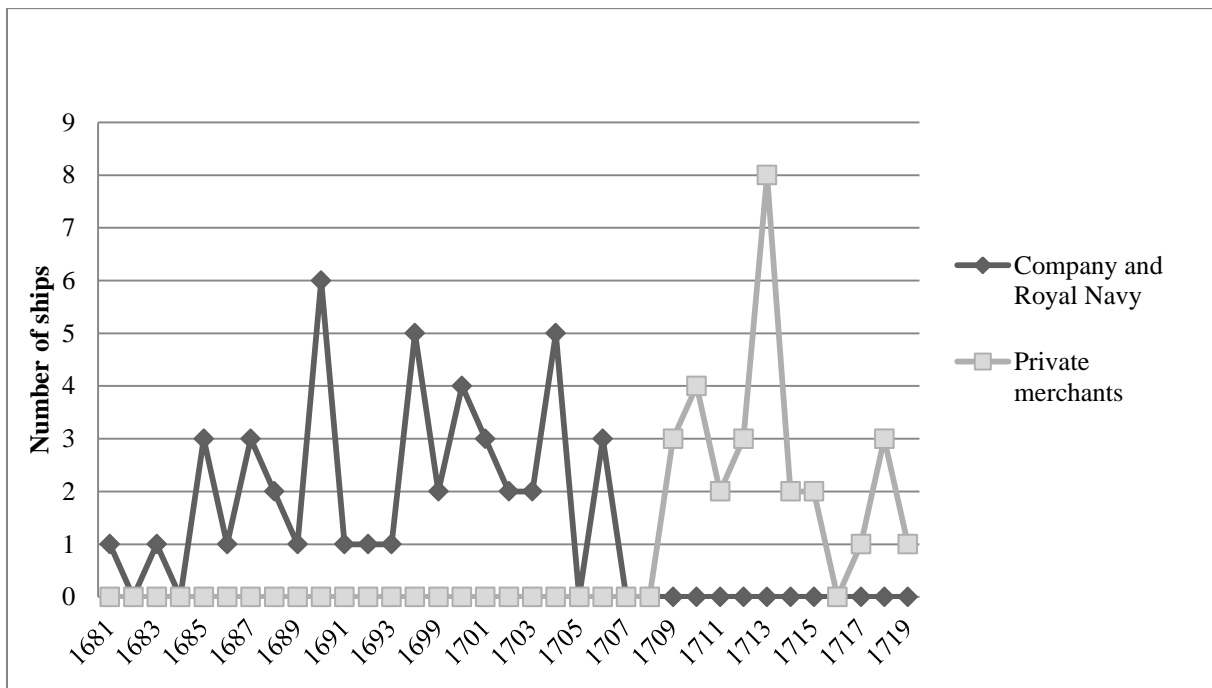
⁶⁴⁴ Eugénie Margoline-Plot, 'Les circuits parallèles des toiles de l'océan Indien', *Histoire urbaine*, no. 30 (1 September 2011): 114.

⁶⁴⁵ Margoline-Plot, 117.

⁶⁴⁶ Lespagnol, 'Cargaisons et profits du commerce indien', 314.

different circuits in Asia: to the East, from Pondicherry to Bengal, and/or Manila and/or Siam, and to the West, from Pondicherry to Calicut and/or Moka. The Saint Malo Company hoped to use the route from Pondicherry to Manila to acquire silver from the Galleon of Manila, instead of Cadiz. Manila silver was more convenient to access for the China trade. Most importantly, it cost less than the silver from Cadiz, because it avoided Spanish taxes.⁶⁴⁷ Indeed, the attempts to officially control the flow of silver from the American mines to the Philippines were futile. The lucrative pacific route for silver led to widespread corruption and smuggling, which made the silver in Manila that much cheaper.⁶⁴⁸

Figure 3.4. Graph of Company, Royal and private ships in Pondicherry between 1681 and 1720



Source: Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes orientales et Francois Martin*, 652-61.

The War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713) influenced the strategy of the Saint Malo merchants. Unlike the East India Company before them, they had experience in privateering and took advantage of the war in Europe to set up an aggressive endeavour in the Indian Ocean. They usually sailed in squadrons of three or four ships, in order to have enough offensive and defensive power against enemy ships. Because they privateered during war time, the Saint Malo merchants invested less in merchandise at the departure during war than

⁶⁴⁷ Dennis O. Flynn, 'Abitrage, China, and the World Trade in the Early Modern Period', in *European Entry into the Pacific: Spain and the Acapulco-Manila Galleons*, ed. Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giráldez Rivero, and James Sobredo (Aldershot [etc.]: Ashgate Variorum, 2001), 265.

⁶⁴⁸ Flynn, 266.

during peace time. Instead, they recouped the value of return merchandise through the prizing of English and Dutch ships.⁶⁴⁹ A report sent to the head of the navy council in 1715, confirms this strategy.⁶⁵⁰ But the English in Madras, who saw the aggressive Saint Malo strategy as a threat to their trade, described it in much greater detail:

*“There is a people of the French nation who call themselves by the name and appellation of a new St Malo’s company of merchants trading to the East Indies. They come out in a body of some 7 or 8 ships in company they are of great force both as to men and guns, they bring out but a very small stock to invest in goods, four such ships have arrived at Ponticherry on the 19th August last where they have contracted with the merchants of that place for an investment of seventy thousand pagodes worth of several sorts of cloth, which is not sufficient to fill up any one of their larger ship, on the 4th of this month they sailed from Ponticherry and as is believed are gone to Mergy a sea port belonging to the King of Syam, there to fit and clean their ships and then goe a cruising for what ships they can meet with belonging to the English that they can take and make prize off [...]”*⁶⁵¹

The Malouin ships seized at least ten English and Dutch ships in the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic, which they brought back to France to sell the cargoes.⁶⁵²

Between 1714 and 1746, private businessmen from French port cities owned most of the ships going to Ouidah. Except during the period from 1723 to 1725, private traders outnumbered Company ships. This can be explained by the fact that the French king did not grant monopoly for the trade along the section of the West African coast south of the Sierra Leone River to a new Company after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Instead, the trade remained open to merchants from Nantes, La Rochelle, Le Havre, Bordeaux and Saint Malo until the Company of the Indies added the Bight of Benin to their monopoly area in 1722. A year later, the Company tried to control the slave trading voyages to the whole Western African Coast. After two years, the Company of the Indies changed its strategy and re-issued licenses to port city traders, so that private businessmen could return to Ouidah. The Company sent roughly one to two ships a year between 1727 and 1744 and then one last ship in 1750, before letting the trade fall completely into the hands of private traders.

⁶⁴⁹ Lespagnol estimated the *mise en hors* at 1 200 – 1 500 *livres* per ton after 1713 and at 700 during the war. In a letter of Crozat from 1079 it is stated that they spent 12 000 to 13 000 *livres* on the fitting out of the four ships of the Raoul Squadron.

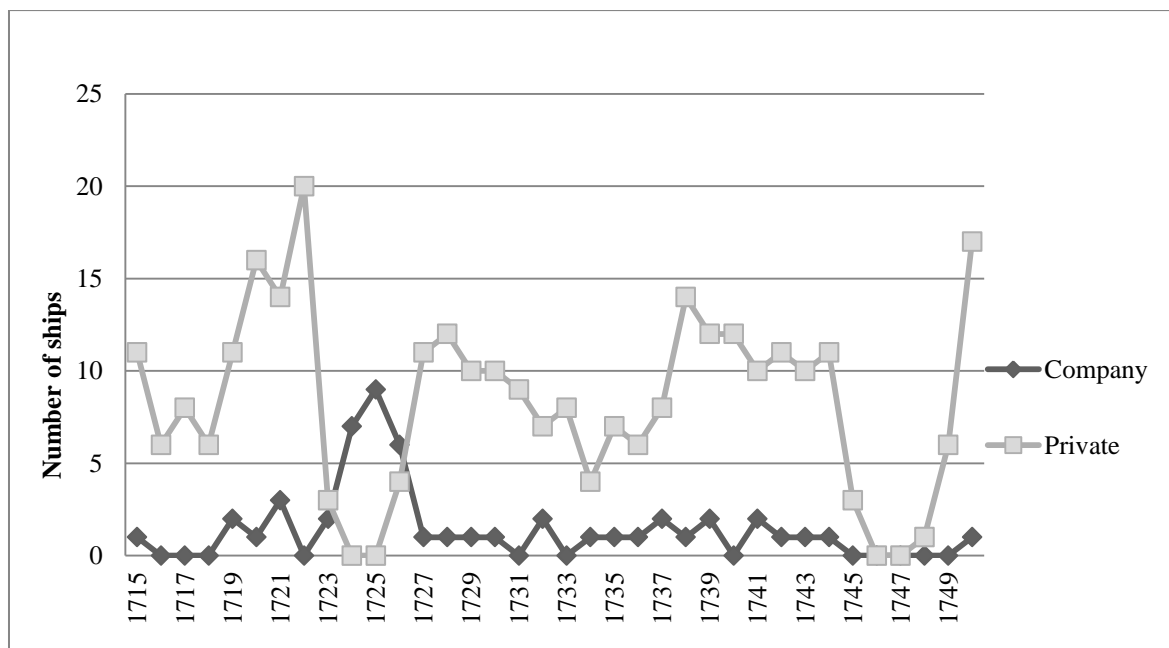
⁶⁵⁰ ANOM C2 13 f°206, Mémoire of Saint Malo merchants to the minister of the Navy, 15 December 1715.

⁶⁵¹ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 (1708-1709), Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 20 September 1710.

⁶⁵² Lespagnol, ‘Cargaisons et profits du commerce indien’, 329.

In a striking contrast to Pondicherry, the graph on figure 3.5. illustrates the high volume of ships sent to Ouidah, regularly over ten ships a year, compared to Pondicherry. The difference in journey length cannot be the sole explanation for this discrepancy. As mentioned earlier, voyages in the Atlantic took less time and required less investment than those in the Indian Ocean. There were more ships trading to Ouidah but with smaller tonnage than in Pondicherry and the type of commerce they engaged in was very different. More importantly, the French policy that opened the trade in to multiple port cities during the period of 1716 to 1722, and to all licensed French merchants after 1725, played a significant role in the number of French ships trading in Ouidah. In practical terms, the director of the fort in Ouidah administrated his factory in less isolation, and thus created a more commercially connected factory, than his counterpart in Pondicherry.

Figure 3.5. Graph of French Companies and private ships in Ouidah between 1714 and 1750



Source: Trans-Atlantic slave trade database online . last consulted 2 July 2017.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, ships carrying cargoes from the Guinea Coast mainly docked in the port city of Nantes. To Nantes' incomparable advantage, it remained the centre for the auctions of the Company of the Indies until 1733. This gave Nantes easy access to the main goods necessary for the West African trade. Furthermore, it served as an important trading point for other northern European products needed for the West African trade. The merchants of Nantes were in a privileged position to engage competitively in slave trade. Even in 1733, when the Company of the Indies' headquarter

became Lorient, Nantes' proximity remained an advantage.⁶⁵³ Besides this, according to historian Gaston Martin, the presence of foreign communities in the city, notably the Dutch, enabled frequent commercial exchange with Amsterdam.⁶⁵⁴ One of the most prominent merchants involved in slave trade was René Montaudoin, who owned twenty percent of the ships sailing to Ouidah until 1750. Montaudoin fitted out sixty ships during the first half of the eighteenth century. Most voyages were concentrated in the period between 1709 and 1722 and 1726 to 1729. The next voyages occurred more sporadically, with one in 1735, 1738, 1740 and 1743. René was mostly active in slave trade enterprises until 1731, when his brother Thomas took over. From 1709 to 1722, Montaudoin frequently owned half of the French ships arriving in Ouidah.⁶⁵⁵

When a French slave trading ship arrived on the Guinea Coast, it had to sail up to Ouidah to find a French trading post. Before Ouidah, the captain and crew had the choice to either trade at sea near the shore with local villages, a very slow strategy, or to trade at European forts, where they had to comply to the terms of the trade. Foreign ports did not always welcome French ships, as was the case after 1734, when English factory of Anamabo refused to trade with the Company. Trading in the French fort at Ouidah had the advantages of offering relatively low taxes, as well as help from the overseas director. However, unlike forts on the Gold Coast, European forts in Ouidah did not have direct access to the sea. European slave traders had to transport their merchandise to the beach by canoe and temporally store it under tents. From the beach, traders carried commodities either to trading lodge in Savi, during the Hueda period, or to the fort in Ouidah during the Dahomey period.⁶⁵⁶

Both private traders and company ships alike found the overseas director useful, as he would first send a message to the ships with detailed information about the state of the trade in Ouidah. Once informed, captains could then make the decision to unload their merchandise or to sail further down the coast. Furthermore, captains received a room in the French factory with their stored merchandise.⁶⁵⁷ Factors invited the captains to eat at their table and the director would then analyse what merchandise captains had available for the customs duty payment.⁶⁵⁸ Afterwards, the director would ask the official responsible for trade, either Assou or the *Yevogan*, to join them in the fort, where they started negotiations. Sailing under the

⁶⁵³ Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au temps de la traite des noirs*, 34.

⁶⁵⁴ Martin, *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle*, 18.

⁶⁵⁵ J. Chanson, *Une famille de négociants nantais à l'époque moderne : les Montaudouin. Monographie familiale* (Université de Nantes: Unpublished Master Thesis, 1977), 47.

⁶⁵⁶ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 71.

⁶⁵⁷ Berbain, 71.

⁶⁵⁸ ANOM E 214, personnel file Jacques Guestard.

Company name carried distinct advantages. Company ship captains enjoyed the services of the Company employees, such as the *acquérats* and the infrastructure: the lodge in Savi or the fort in Ouidah to store their merchandise.

In contrast, private captains had to show their license and, until 1728, to declare the merchandise they sold in the slave trade to the director of the fort in Ouidah.⁶⁵⁹ Lastly, private ship captains could keep the enslaved Africans they had traded in the *captiverie* of the fort before they began transporting them to the ships, in exchange for an additional tax. Directors provided “*foodstuff and refreshments of the country*” for the trans-Atlantic voyage, although references to this service are irregular.⁶⁶⁰ However, there were limited resources available for the provisioning of refreshment to ship captains. They collected the additional food and fresh water needed for the trans-Atlantic voyage at San Tomé or Principe.⁶⁶¹ Overseas directors of the fort in Ouidah complained about the number of private captains increasing competition and the bad quality of the merchandise they sold to the Hueda and Dahomey traders affecting the director’s reputation. For instance, the Dahomey King Agaja reported to the director of the fort in Ouidah that some French captains were guilty of spoiling the brandy with salted water.⁶⁶²

Captains coming into Pondicherry and Ouidah had different goals because they engaged in a different trade. In Pondicherry, Company merchant vessels, Royal Navy ships with a military commission and privateers from Saint Malo led to a conflict of interest. Aggressive privateering and navy ships destabilized the status quo established between different European and Asian powers on the Coromandel Coast, which impacted the local markets. Additionally, the widespread and substantial private trade carried out by crew members and officers on all French ships affected the trade in Pondicherry and limited Company profits on return merchandise in France. While in Ouidah, captains of both Company and private merchant ships mainly participated in commerce and then engaged in privateering during war time.⁶⁶³ If captains took part in private trade, the director did not have to attempt to control them, provided that the trade did not involve Company employees. However, until the contract with the Saint Malo Company in 1709, directors in Pondicherry reported the excess of private trade conducted by Company ship captains and crews to the

⁶⁵⁹ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 72.

⁶⁶⁰ “[...] des vivres et de rafraichissements du pays” in Doublet, *Journal du corsaire Jean Doublet de Honfleur*, 257.

⁶⁶¹ Martin, *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle*, 120.

⁶⁶² ANOM C6 25, letter of Delisle in Dahomey, 27 September 1728.

⁶⁶³ The prize of a Dutch ship is made in 1704 before passing by Elmina in Doublet, *Journal du corsaire Jean Doublet de Honfleur*, 252.

directors in France. This difference in protocol was due to the fact that throughout the period under study, private port city merchants owned the vast majority of the ships sailing into Ouidah. The director of Pondicherry's position of authority over captains only changed after the Company signed the first contract with private merchants from Saint Malo in 1709. Under the contract, directors in Pondicherry held a similar role to those in Ouidah. They interacted with captains and privateers who were not accountable to the Company or the ministry of the Navy, except for the percentage of their profit paid for the use of services. Most of the captains sailing to Pondicherry, after 1709, and the majority of those trading in Ouidah were private port city merchants.

7. Conclusion

Unlike the understanding of go-between as a third party in a dyadic relationship, this chapter has shown that directors interacted with a multitude of actors and mediated between various different interests. They were not intermediaries between two homogenous groups, with the French Companies or Navy Council on the one hand and a uniform Indian or African interest on the other. Instead, directors operated in a multilateral context. Firstly, the directors in France did not represent a monolithic group, as demonstrated in the first chapter of this research. Secondly, in the Pondicherry settlement, different communities, such as religious orders or workers, exercised their agency to address a noticeable heterogeneity of interests. In Ouidah, the indispensable canoemen could choose not to work and French ship captains coming to trade could avoid trading through the French director. Thirdly, the imbroglio of interests grew even more tangled, as commercial and military ship captains engaged in illegal private trade and large-scale privateering voyages.

Furthermore, overseas directors had to negotiate commercial deals with suppliers, who embodied yet another interest group who could take advantage of the French chartered companies' vulnerable position. In Pondicherry, the time pressures exerted on the advance payment system put the director in a weak bargaining position. In Ouidah, the director's lack of negotiating power stemmed from Dahomian control over slave trade, which developed into a monopoly on exports. Commercial brokers were both empowered by their position and dependent on their employer: in the case of Pondicherry, the East India Company, but in Ouidah, the Hueda and Dahomey kings. Directors in both factories relied extensively on credit providers, who imposed their own terms on the loan contracts. In addition to their distinctive interests, these actors and communities came from different social, religious and ethnic origins. Weavers, Topaz and Lascarins soldiers, merchants and brokers in Pondicherry

were from different castes and religions. In Ouidah, canoemen came from the Gold Coast, *acquérats* from far in the hinterland and some commercial brokers were Eurafricans. Similarly, crew members on French ships were often from diverse religious and European origin.

On top of managing all these relationships, directors played a key role as a link in a global commodity chain, and often attempted to coordinate the markets in Pondicherry and Ouidah. In this context, defining overseas directors as a third party in a dyadic relationship does not do justice to the complex interactions, multiple layers of interests and heterogeneity of actors and communities they faced. Nor does it take into account the way in which these complex relations interconnected through global commodity chains. Overseas directors' role as multilateral go-betweens made their situation more complex, but it also stimulated their agency. To maintain the French presence and develop commerce in both places, overseas directors resorted to a number of different strategies which will now be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Securing the position of overseas director

1. Introduction

European overseas chartered companies possessed a dual nature; political and economic.⁶⁶⁴ The French king and Company shareholders entrusted overseas chartered companies with a double mission. They had to develop overseas trade profitably and represent the king overseas. Following this reasoning, Company overseas agents were both traders and diplomats.⁶⁶⁵ The first step toward assessing overseas directors' agency and how it shaped the early modern French expansion in Pondicherry and Ouidah, is to understand how they secured their position politically. Given the challenges intrinsic to their role as multi-lateral go-betweens, the priorities of overseas directors were twofold. First, they had to ensure the safekeeping of their presence in Ouidah and territorial jurisdiction in Pondicherry, no matter how small. Second, they had to meet the most pressing financial needs to ensure the survival of the factories. The asymmetrical relationships that characterise the French interactions with African and Indian rulers generated little room for negotiation. In a similar manner, overseas directors' economic and financial dependence on locally-embedded merchants and workers restricted their latitude. Lastly, the orders coming from France added to the constraints on their agency.

Nevertheless, in her study on diplomatic relations on the west coast of Africa, Christina Brauner argues that cross-cultural encounters were “*no dialogue of deaf.*” Rather, directors were aware of the signs and demands to which they had to adapt.⁶⁶⁶ It is clear that “accommodative strategies” of individuals on-the-spot and their Indian or African partners were instrumental good cross-cultural diplomatic and commercial relations.⁶⁶⁷ Acknowledging overseas directors' ability to understand, at least partially, a different culture, including social norms, standards of behaviour and mercantile rules, allows us to expose the intentional and strategic aspect of their decisions. They positioned themselves within the power dynamics at play by testing the limits of their agency.

How did overseas directors engage with Indian and African political authorities in Pondicherry and Ouidah? How did they find solutions to basic financial needs? The chapter

⁶⁶⁴ Steensgaard, ‘The Companies as a Specific Institution in the History of European Expansion’, 262–63.

⁶⁶⁵ Carlos and Nicholas, ‘Giants of an Earlier Capitalism’, 414.

⁶⁶⁶ Brauner, ‘Connecting Things’, 423.

⁶⁶⁷ Guido Van Meersbergen, ‘Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Trade’, in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*, ed. Cátia Antunes and Amelia Polónia (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2016), 87.

begins with the interactions between the overseas directors of Pondicherry and the rulers upon which the settlement depended. Second, I explore overseas directors' different strategies to access funds that would guarantee the continued existence of the settlement. In the third section, the interactions and strategies in Pondicherry are contrasted with the situation in Ouidah.

2. Managing relations with changing political authorities

In the first years of the French settlement in Pondicherry, Director Martin maintained friendly and frequent contact with Sher Khan Lodi, governor under the sultan of Bijapur. In his diary, Martin recorded the development of a close relationship between Sher Khan and himself. He mentioned their long conversations and the lessons he learned from Sher Khan regarding south Indian politics.⁶⁶⁸ According to Martin, it was Sher Khan who dissuaded the Dutch from attacking Pondicherry in May 1676. In return, Sher Khan asked for his help in attacking Valudavur in September of the same year.⁶⁶⁹ When Baron, the French director of Surat, had to return to Surat by land in April 1675, the governor gave Martin advice regarding the best road to take. Sher Khan also offered to write letters of recommendation to the governors of the towns Baron would cross, and supplied him with one hundred soldiers and forty horsemen to escort him. All this help from Sher Khan proved to be crucial for Baron's journey.⁶⁷⁰ Because the relationship of mutual understanding was made on a personal level, it ended with the Maratha conquest in 1677 and the end of Sher Khan's power.

After 1677, Martin faced a new leader, Rajaram, with whom he was forced to develop a good relationship to keep Pondicherry safe. Two Maratha officers were appointed for the administration of Pondicherry. Despite the daily relations between the French and Maratha authorities, their interactions were mined by mistrust on both sides.⁶⁷¹ Given the bad relations, Martin made use of a different strategy than with Sher Khan. Rajaram needed funds for his army due to the war against the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. When Rajaram asked for a loan in 1690, Martin granted it to him in order to stay under his protection. By doing so, Martin attempted to create a power balance with Rajaram through mutual dependency. Rajaram needed the overseas director for loans and Martin needed Rajaram for peace around Pondicherry and protection against the Dutch threat during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697).

⁶⁶⁸ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 47.

⁶⁶⁹ Martin accepted and the expedition against Valudavur was a success, see Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 207–8.

⁶⁷⁰ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 17-18. "[...] sans les lettres de Chir Khan on n'aurait pas pu franchir toutes ces difficultés".

⁶⁷¹ Hatalkar, *Relations between the French and the Marathas*, 23.

However, this mutual dependency only remained viable if the French had enough money to lend, which was not the case in the long run. Even after the minister of the Navy reorganised and refinanced the Company in 1685, the settlements suffered from a constant lack of funds. The frequency of Company voyages to Pondicherry decreased to one ship per year after 1690, supplying barely enough funds for the trade to function. Martin could not keep up with the repetitive loans requested by Rajaram. When Rajaram asked for another loan in 1693, the French could not fulfil his request. The Maratha ruler turned to the Dutch, who agreed in exchange for his help in conquering Pondicherry.

When Pondicherry came back under French control, Martin returned to Pondicherry from Bengal, where he had taken refuge during the Dutch occupation. Once there, he faced yet another leader, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Just as Sher Khan Lodi mediated the interactions with the sultan of Bijapur, relations with Aurangzeb took place through the *faujdar*, Da'ud Khan Panni who would later be succeeded by the *nawab* Arcot, Sa'adatullah Khan. However, the relationship with Da'ud Khan was not as close as that with Sher Khan. While Martin regularly visited Sher Khan to discuss business and politics, Da'ud Khan predominantly communicated with Martin through envoys. Nevertheless, Martin referred to Da'ud Khan as a friend who “*demonstrated repeatedly his friendship.*”⁶⁷² Similar to Trivelatto's definition of business friendship, the friendship that Martin refers to was utilitarian and does not imply intimacy.⁶⁷³ Martin expected his “*friendship*” with Da'ud Khan to protect the Company's interests in Pondicherry against external military threats or even internal ones.

Martin's successors also had to navigate political changes, but within the Mughal empire. When Hébert arrived in India in 1709, Aurangzeb had been dead for two years. The following political instability at the Mughal court as well as the ambitions of Mughal local officials in the region surrounding Pondicherry were putting the French grants at stake. Hébert's approach to diverting possible conflict consisted in negotiating: “*I hope we will extricate ourselves out of this situation through negotiations.*”⁶⁷⁴ Aside from the *nawab* of Arcot, Pondicherry's directors had to deal with the commander of the fort of Senji, Sarup Singh, because some of the Company's lands and villages fell within his territory. Beyond this, they engaged in diplomatic correspondence with nearby rulers. For instance, Director

⁶⁷² ANOM C2 67 f°252, letter of Martin, 19 February 1703: “*Daoudkan nous a donné en diverses occasions des témoignages de son amitié [...] Daoudkan et le diwan étoient de nos amis.*”

⁶⁷³ Trivelatto, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 181.

⁶⁷⁴ ANOM C2 68 f°206, copy of the letter sent by Hébert to Pilavoine in Surat, 11 December 1708: “*j'espère que nous nous tirerons d'affaire par la négociation.*”

Hébert wrote to the ruler of Karungali, north of Pondicherry: “*we ask you to continue our friendship and in all occasions, we will let you know that we want to be your friend*” referring to the same utilitarian friendship.⁶⁷⁵

Gift-giving was a common strategy to build relationships with all political authorities. More generally, the offering of gifts has been acknowledged as a widespread diplomatic practice, both in Europe and outside of it.⁶⁷⁶ The offering of presents is a way to establish ties of mutual obligation.⁶⁷⁷ Therefore, gifts factored into the individual strategy of the director, because they were a way to ensure the “*quality of the future relations between donor and recipient*.”⁶⁷⁸ Gift-giving was not static and involved adjustment and interpretation by the overseas directors. While different variables can be used to interpret gift-giving transactions, the aspects that are the most telling indicators of the directors’ potential margin of manoeuvre are how voluntarily the gift was made and the physical reciprocity of the offering. If we consider the transactions between the Company and political rulers in Pondicherry on a sliding scale, the tribute would stand at the far end of the gift-giving transaction, where the overseas director would have no space to negotiate. In Mughal political culture there were different types of gifts, and the offering to a superior as a sign of acknowledgement of authority was called the *pīshkash*.⁶⁷⁹ It originally referred to a voluntary gift, it was in reality a obligatory tribute.⁶⁸⁰

Overseas directors adapted their gift-giving strategies to the power dynamics that characterised their position with the ruler. The gift-giving transactions with the *faujdar* Da’ud Khan, mostly took the form of tribute, or gifts strengthening a hierarchical relationship and confirming the ties of loyalty.⁶⁸¹ Reciprocity of physical gifts is rarely recorded in the sources. When there was indeed an exchange, the gift from the *faujar* or *nawab* would be of lesser value than that of the Company. Therefore, it re-enforced the asymmetrical power relations between the overseas director and the Mughal authorities. Aside from the regular tribute,

⁶⁷⁵ ANOM C2 68 f°325, letter of Hébert, 14 November 1709: “*nous vous demandons toujours la continuation de votre amitié et en toutes sortes d’occasions nous vous ferons connoître que nous voulons estre votre amy*”.

⁶⁷⁶ Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations 1661-1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), 116.

⁶⁷⁷ Christian Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l’autre: consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2002), 485.

⁶⁷⁸ Windler, 486. “*Il était un gage de qualité des relations futures entre donateur et destinataire.*”

⁶⁷⁹ Ann Lambton, ‘Pīshkash: Present or Tribute?’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (February 1994): 145.

⁶⁸⁰ Guido Van Meersbergen, *Ethnography and Encounter. Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Contact in Seventeenth-Century South Asia* (University College London: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2015), 173.

⁶⁸¹ Van Meersbergen, 174.

other forms of gift-giving transactions took place between the Mughals and the French. In 1702, Da'ud Khan sent a letter that gave notice of one of his conquests, and Director Martin “*could not reply in this conjuncture without sending presents*” and sent brandy, crystals and some merchandise from the Company warehouse.⁶⁸² These irregular, indirect demands for gifts were a way for Da'ud Khan to assert power over the Company, which symbolically acknowledged Da'ud Khan's sovereignty through these offerings.

In 1714, Sa'adatullah Khan new *nawab* of Arcot, sent one hundred horsemen and 200 men on foot to reclaim some villages that had been offered to the Company by Da'ud Khan and the commander of Senji.⁶⁸³ After some attempts at negotiating, Dulivier was “*forced to send him some presents which satisfied him.*”⁶⁸⁴ Dulivier also entrusted his messenger with the mission to negotiate the gift of some lands that the French Company wished to receive in order to compensate for the costs. Although there is no evidence of reciprocity, Dulivier hoped to get something in return. This hope demonstrates that the implications of each gift-giving transaction were not self-evident and that they were negotiated by the actors.⁶⁸⁵

Regarding the relationship between the directors and neighbouring rulers, such as the fortress commander of Senji, Sarup Singh, the gift-giving transactions entailed a voluntary dimension.⁶⁸⁶ The cultural boundary that separated the overseas director from the local political rulers could be taken advantage of and gave Martin some latitude.⁶⁸⁷ Given the financial situation of the Company, the overseas director continually tried to either postpone a gift-giving ritual or ignore it. According to Martin, “*giving presents once in a while is a necessity, but it is also important to make sure that they do not think that we are forced into it by their insults otherwise they will come back frequently, we need to make them hear reason before giving them anything.*”⁶⁸⁸ To Martin, there was a clear distinction between the gift-giving relationship with Da'ud Khan and with the commander of Senji. By differentiating between the two, Martin determined the recognition of political hierarchies.

⁶⁸² ANOM C2 66 f°166, 30 September 1702.

⁶⁸³ ANOM C2 69 f°77, letter of Dulivier, 14 February 1714.

⁶⁸⁴ ANOM C2 69 f°88, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714: “*ce qui nous obligea de luy envoyer quelques présents qui l'ont apaisé*”.

⁶⁸⁵ Gadi Algazi, ‘Doing Things with Gifts’, in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, ed. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, and Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 10.

⁶⁸⁶ The fortress commanders of Senji were Central Indian Rajputs called Bundelas: see Subrahmanyam, ‘Friday's Child’, 74.

⁶⁸⁷ Algazi, ‘Doing Things with Gifts’, 20.

⁶⁸⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°17, 26 March 1701: “*tirer des présents de temps à autre, c'est une nécessité de leur en faire quelques fois mais aussi il est important d'obtenir que ce soit dans une conjuncture ou ils ne puissent pas se persuader que l'on y est forcé par les peines qu'ils font, parce qu'ils reviendroient souvent à la charge, il faut chercher des voys de leur faire entendre raison avant de leur rien donner*”.

The gifts could be delayed to a certain extent, and it was for the overseas director to assess the risks and the length of such delays. The longer Martin waited, the more he resisted the Senji ruler's assertion of power. In 1701, when Sarup Singh complained that the Company sent gifts to Da'ud Khan but not to him, Martin, along with the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry, decided that if they agreed to give gifts on these terms, the ruler of Senji would think that the French feared them and therefore demand gifts more frequently. The Company suffered from recurrent attacks by the Sarup Singh's men, destabilising the hinterland and placing arbitrary taxes on the use of roads needed for food provisions and textile supplies to the settlement. To solve these problems, the council and Martin decided to send some soldiers to guarantee the hinterland's security, rather than send presents to the ruler of Senji.⁶⁸⁹ A few years later, the same ruler sent another complaint to Martin, concerning the use of wood. The ruler asked for a gift and the Director Martin wrote: "*we think it good to wait a few days before sending it to him.*"⁶⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Martin and the council made decisions after carefully balancing the involved risks. Sarup Singh still held a position of power that allowed him to assert some authority on the overseas director and obtain funds from the Company in two ways: military threats and forced reciprocity.

The same year that Martin delayed the offering of gifts and sent soldiers to stabilise the hinterland, envoys from Senji came to Pondicherry to claim the Company lands. They stated that the Company had to pay 7,000 to 8,000 rupees, or around 11,000 to 12,000 *livres*, to "*re-establish friendship and correspondence.*"⁶⁹¹ Mentioning these values sent a clear message to Martin about the expected value of the gift he should send, and left little space for negotiation. It was agreed that the overseas director would give gifts to the son of Sarup Singh, who was traveling nearby and Martin received presents in return. The "*good correspondence and friendship*" was restored, but the ruler of Senji still mentioned that he was in need of money.

Another way the ruler enforced subordination over the Company overseas director was through the "*convention of equal reciprocity.*"⁶⁹² This strategy took place when the director waited too long or attempted to avoid a gift exchange. In 1701, Sarup Singh who had been appointed a year earlier as commander of Senji, sent an envoy to let the overseas director

⁶⁸⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°27-32, diary of Martin, July-August 1701.

⁶⁹⁰ ANOM C2 66 f° 168, diary of Martin, 21 December 1702: "*nous croyons être bien d'attendre quelques jours à luy envoyer*".

⁶⁹¹ ANOM C2 66 f°31, diary of Martin July August 1701: "*il nous demande 7 à 8 000 roupies, que cela restablira l'amitié et la correspondance qu'il y a eu entre nous*".

⁶⁹² Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations 1661-1807*, 113. See also: Van Meersbergen, *Ethnography and Encounter*, 172.

know that he was surprised that the director had not visited him yet. The envoy brought gifts to the overseas director, who responded by sending one of his men with presents to Sarup Singh.⁶⁹³ The absence of counter-gifts from the French could have a major impact on diplomatic relations between the Company and the political authorities because it could be interpreted as a rejection of the relationship.⁶⁹⁴ Neighbouring rulers made use of this obligation of reciprocity to keep some authority over the French settlement.

The overseas director's evaluation of the timing and value of the gift was not always successful. It is relevant to examine one final instance with more detail because it provides us with an example of a failed negotiation through gifts. Analysing this failure allows us to better understand the director's agency in the gift-giving process.⁶⁹⁵ In 1714, Sa'adatullah Khan conquered the fortress of Senji, deposing the son of the late fortress commander, Sarup Singh.⁶⁹⁶ Consequently, lands that comprised part of the revenues of Pondicherry were threatened militarily once again. To end these intimidations, Dulivier considered it appropriate to send an agent to congratulate Sa'adatullah Khan on his new victories, along with 9,000 *livres* as a gift intended to convince him not to threaten the villages in question. The *nawab*'s French surgeon wrote to Dulivier that Sa'adatullah Khan was disappointed by the present, but he managed to convince the *nawab* to accept it and end his threats on the village.⁶⁹⁷

However, the gift Dulivier received in return was of trivial value and made no mention of the lands, which had been the main purpose of the gift exchange. Dulivier feared that this silence indicated that the negotiations had failed. A few days later, five horsemen and fifteen soldiers from Senji arrived in Pondicherry, demanding rights to the village of "*Oulgaré*", which was situated a small *lieue* away from Pondicherry, and earned 2,000 *écus*, or 6,000 *livres*, a year for the Company. Dulivier had underestimated the value of the present necessary for a successful outcome. The following silence and meagre gift from the *nawab* had been signs of a failed negotiation. In other settings, a counter gift of lower value than the first gift has been interpreted as a mark of the counter giver's inferior status.⁶⁹⁸ However, in this case, the lesser counter gift appears to be an indicator of the bad state of negotiations. Despite his experience, Dulivier failed this diplomatic negotiation. The interesting aspect of the

⁶⁹³ ANOM C2 66 f°32, diary of Martin, 26 August 1701.

⁶⁹⁴ João Melo, 'Seeking Prestige and Survival: Gift-Exchange Practices between the Portuguese Estado Da Índia and Asian Rulers', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56, no. 4–5 (1 January 2013): 676.

⁶⁹⁵ Algazi, 'Doing Things with Gifts', 18.

⁶⁹⁶ For details on this episode see Subrahmanyam, 'Friday's Child', 75–78.

⁶⁹⁷ ANOM C2 69 f°152, letter of Dulivier, 26 February 1715.

⁶⁹⁸ Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 497.

negotiation process is that the French surgeon warned Dulivier that the value of the gift had disappointed the *nawab*, and Dulivier did not increase his offering. The low value of his initial gift could be interpreted as a strategy to re-negotiate power relations with Sa'adatullah Khan.

Competition and intermediaries

Gift-giving transactions generated competition among the European settlements situated on the Coromandel Coast. This was hardly specific to the Coromandel Coast and it appears to have been a global phenomenon; it also occurred in North America, where the English and the French competed to offer the best gifts to their Amerindian trading partners, as well as at the Ottoman court and on the West African Coast.⁶⁹⁹ On the Coromandel Coast, each European company representative attempted to offer the most expensive gifts, to gain a good relationship with the Mughal authorities and guarantee the *farman* on which their settlement depended. The Dutch appear very competitive in French sources, which regularly refer to the “*considerable presents*” that the Dutch gave to the *nawab* and the *diwan*.⁷⁰⁰ However, the most striking case remains that of the English East India Company governor of Madras, Thomas Pitt.

When the Mughal army passed by Golkonda in early 1709, Pitt prepared an embassy for the new Mughal ruler to confirm the *farman*. Rumours that came to Pondicherry stated that this embassy involved more than 200 people and the expenses amounted to more than 100,000 *écus*, or 300,000 *livres*.⁷⁰¹ The French Company feared that it would have negative consequences for other European powers in the region, and particularly for themselves, if the Mughal emperor set the English gift as a standard. The state of the Company's finances did not allow for such large expenses and the only way for Hébert to secure his *farman* was to send a letter to Da'ud Khan with parrots and alcohol “*so that he would always keep protecting our interests*.”⁷⁰² Fortunately for Director Hébert, the English East India Company removed the governor of Madras and his successor did not approve of such a costly embassy for the Mughal ruler, who was already old, as after his death the gift-giving would have to be repeated.⁷⁰³ The overseas director's strategy was to be the first to give the new Mughal emperor a gift because if “*the Dutch present before us 'tis great odds but that theirs may be*

⁶⁹⁹ Brauner, ‘Connecting Things’, 415. Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations 1661-1807*, 115.

⁷⁰⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°158, diary of Martin, 28 March 1702: “*les hollandois ont fait leurs visites au nabab, daoutcan, au diwan, et au Boxy, les présents ont été considérables*”.

⁷⁰¹ ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709

⁷⁰² ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709: “*je luy ay aussi adressé une lettre pour Daoud Khan afin de le retenir toujours dans nos intérêts*”.

⁷⁰³ ANOM C2 69 f°4, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

so considerable as to reduce ours despicable.”⁷⁰⁴ The extent of the competition in the gift-giving transactions is only completely visible when one understands why Pitt planned to set up such an expensive embassy: to precede the Dutch.

In this competitive environment, directors frequently made use of intermediaries in their interactions with the *nawab* of Arcot, in order to assess the right diplomatic strategy for timing visits and determining the value of gifts. As a result, in addition to the official broker of the Company, who was in charge of deals with merchants, Pondicherry directors relied on an array of diplomatic mediators. A frequent intermediary in relations with Da’ud Khan was Venetian doctor, Niccolao Manucci. Manucci (1638-1715) is predominantly known for his book, *History of the Mogul India*, which he wrote based on his experience at the Mughal court. He arrived in India in 1656 and spent some time with the Jesuits in Delhi, where he learned some basic medical training. In 1661 he became the official doctor of, first, the family of the Mughal emperor’s ambassador, and second, of the harem of Aurangzeb’s son.⁷⁰⁵ In 1686, he established himself as an independent doctor in Madras and was informally involved in the English Company.⁷⁰⁶

Martin repeatedly referred to Manucci as “*his good friend*” and, indeed, Manucci acted as the witness at the wedding of Martin’s granddaughter in 1705.⁷⁰⁷ During personal meetings, Manucci gave Martin advice about local politics and the state of affairs in the region.⁷⁰⁸ His personal relationship with Manucci, who had acquired an extraordinary knowledge of Mughal court culture, was key to the relationship between Martin and Da’ud Khan. In 1701, Manucci was at Da’ud Khan’s camp when he received a letter from Martin, asking him to recommend the French East India Company to Da’ud Khan. Manucci promised to do so and mentioned in his diary that “*Monsieur Martin afterwards wrote me letters of thanks and gratitude notifying that my recommendations had been of great use to them.*”⁷⁰⁹ Through this recommendation, Manucci lent his credibility to Martin, which allowed the latter to form a better relationship to Da’ud Khan. Similar to letters of recommendation in mercantile correspondence, recommendations in the diplomatic sphere enabled individuals to

⁷⁰⁴ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°191, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, Saturday 15 January 1708/9 (old calendar).

⁷⁰⁵ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 177.

⁷⁰⁶ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 3: 375.

⁷⁰⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°42-46, diary of Martin, December 1701-January 1702: “*mon ami particulier*” and “*bon amy Maunouchy*” and in 1705: “*the marriage took place of the Lord Governor Martin’s granddaughter to Monsieur Ardancourt commissary and second councilor.*” in Manucci, 3: 166.

⁷⁰⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°42, diary of Martin, December 1701 and f°170, letter of Martin, 20 January 1703.

⁷⁰⁹ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 3: 375.

establish new contacts or to strengthen pre-existing relationships.⁷¹⁰ Considering the competition among all European settlements engaging in diplomatic and trading relationships with Da'ud Khan, Manucci's recommendation could have been a competitive advantage for the French over their fellow European company representatives.

Another strategic contact was Guesty, a French private merchant who lived in São Tomé de Meliapore. The Frenchman arrived in São Tomé in 1681, where he became a wealthy merchant and married a Luso-Indian woman a decade later.⁷¹¹ Guesty had already helped the Company as an interpreter during the negotiations of the settlement of Masulipatnam. In 1686, he obtained the *farman* from the Golkonda ruler for the Company and renewed it after the Mughal conquest in 1687.⁷¹² Martin called on him for help in 1693, when the Dutch threatened Pondicherry.⁷¹³ Martin reciprocated when Guesty asked for permission to send his son back to France, presumably for his education, on the Company ship the *Phélypeaux* in 1701; Martin agreed to this favour immediately, in acknowledgement of the services Guesty provided to the Company.⁷¹⁴

Together with Manucci, Martin would call on Guesty to visit Pondicherry and discuss the “*current affairs*.”⁷¹⁵ The role of the personal relationship between Martin and Manucci, as well as Guesty, in interactions with the Mughal governor clearly appeared in Da'ud Khan's blockade of Madras. In January 1702, Da'ud Khan, who was irritated with the English in Madras because of the attacks carried out by English privateers against important merchants in Surat, asked a French, Danish and Dutch representative to come to him. Martin understood that it was either to discuss an attack on Madras or to ask for money.⁷¹⁶ Since neither of these options positively impacted the French situation in Pondicherry, Martin decided to send Da'ud Khan some presents instead of an envoy. On 12 February, a letter arrived from Da'ud Khan demanding an in-person meeting with Martin, to which Martin answered that he could not make the journey. He wrote to Manucci, who knew the *nawab* very well, and asked him to explain to Da'ud Khan why he could not attend. When a third letter came from Da'ud Khan reiterating his demand, Martin then considered sending Guesty, who was in Pondicherry at the time.

⁷¹⁰ Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 181–82.

⁷¹¹ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 179.

⁷¹² ANOM C2 63 f°60, letter of Martin, 1 October 1686 and C2 63 f°100, letter of Martin, 29 November 1687.

⁷¹³ Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 179.

⁷¹⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°11, letter of Hardancourt, 22 February 1701.

⁷¹⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°169, 10 January 1703: “*j’envoie des pions au devant des sr Guesty et Menouchy à qui j’avois écrit de venir à Pondichéry sur les conjonctures présentes*”.

⁷¹⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°49, diary of Martin, 12–13 February 1702.

Guesty was a perfect fit for the mission and Martin considered him a trustworthy man. Also he spoke Persian and therefore did not need an interpreter.⁷¹⁷ Guesty accepted, but when Martin learned that Da'ud Khan had begun a blockade on Madras, he changed his mind: “*we realised that by choosing Guesty for this mission we would have to compensate for all the harm that could happen to him during the operation where we send him. He is a wealthy man, known in São Tomé and this fact alone suffices for the Moors to provoke an affront which would ultimately harm the Company.*”⁷¹⁸ The fact that Guesty was Martin's first choice to defend the interests of the Company and that he accepted the mission shows how Guesty's knowledge of local politics and language, as well as the Company's affairs, made him a key element of French settlements in India, without being an official part of the Company. Martin granted him the status of Company agent to guarantee his security, but he remained a private merchant in São Tomé; that is how he was the most useful to Martin.⁷¹⁹

Eventually, Martin decided to send Desprez, a Company merchant, since he had Martin's trust and the experience needed for such a mission without being one of the Company's most important merchants. Martin dispatched Desprez with gifts, for “*presents were the best passports to be well received.*”⁷²⁰ Manucci came from Madras to join Desprez after Martin's letter. They visited the *diwan* together, where they obtained two audiences with Da'ud Khan. When Desprez came back from his visits he delivered two letters from the *diwan* and the *nawab*, as well as gifts: a good horse and textiles. According to Desprez, Manucci had been of great service to the French. The negotiations had indeed discussed the English in Madras, and Martin, who was farsighted, decided to stay out of the conflict when he wrote, “*we should not expect the Moores to hand Madras to us, if they chase the English out of it, their plan if they can succeed is to reduce the European settlements to mere trading stations so they can regain control over them.*”⁷²¹ The fact that he had the choice to stay out of the conflict illustrates the negotiable aspects of the Mughal governor's demands.

⁷¹⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°154, diary of Martin, 18 February 1702.

⁷¹⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°156, Diary of Martin, 10 March 1703: “*Nous faisons réflexion en destinant mr Guesty pour ce voyage que nous serons obligé de luy donner un billet de l'indemniser de tout ce qui luy pourroit arriver de facheux dans l'action ou nous le commettons c'est un homme riche connu à St Thomé, ce point seul suffit à porter les mores de faire une avanie qui retombera sur la compagnie*”.

⁷¹⁹ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 2: 450.

⁷²⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°156, diary of Martin, 10 March 1703: “*y joindre des présens pour le général et pour le Diwan qui sont les passeports les plus assurés pour estre bien receux dans ces visittes*”.

⁷²¹ ANOM C2 66 f°158, diary of Martin, 26 March 1703 “*il ne faudroit pas s'attendre que les mores nous remissent Madras, sil ils en avoient chassé les anglois, leur dessein si ils peuvent réussir est de réduire les nations d'Europe de n'avoir que de simples comptoirs sur leurs terres, afin d'en estre les maistres*”.

To maintain the settlement of Pondicherry and its lands, overseas directors engaged in diplomatic relations with different rulers, adapting to the power dynamics. A common aspect of these interactions was the overwhelming presence of gift-giving sessions. Aside from the tribute, military threats and reciprocity were mechanisms used to force the Company's submission, and to enable rulers to access much needed funds. Gift-giving was not strictly defined and left space for interpretation on both sides. The overseas director had to evaluate when these transactions were negotiable and when they were not, how long they could wait before giving and how much they should give. They relied on their personal connections to act as intermediaries to facilitate the negotiation process. These intermediaries were key characters in the daily negotiations with political authorities in a competitive environment, and were often personally tied to the director. Nevertheless, failed negotiations through gift-giving happened despite intermediaries and the director's experience. This testifies to the dynamic character of the gift exchanges and the existence of possibilities for directors to re-evaluate power relations.

In 1715, when the Company directors attempted to control Director Dulivier's right to receive personal gifts from Indian rulers and merchants, Dulivier opposed the Company's decision: "*we cannot believe that if a viceroy or a diwan or any other power or qualified person sent marks of his esteem to a governor (as has happened before), that messieurs would claim them*".⁷²² Aside from the personal gain these gifts brought to Dulivier, the director's opposition to the Company's orders shows the interpersonal aspect of the gift-giving transaction. By controlling Dulivier's ability to offer and receive gifts at a personal level, his connections, his authority and power when addressing local rulers would be curtailed. This could negatively affect the next negotiation. Whatever the strategy adopted by overseas directors in these political relations, funds were paramount to the success of any negotiations and to the maintenance of the settlement.

3. Finding funds

Because of the unreliability of money transfers from France, directors had two main options to access funds locally. They could either find funds internally, by increasing the revenues of Pondicherry through demographic growth or attracting merchants, or they could ask for loans. To stimulate demographic growth, directors had to provide safe environments

⁷²² ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier 1715, Company instructions "*Aucun présent ne pourra etre fait aux grands du pays que par délibération du conseil*" Answer of Dulivier "*nous ne pouvons pas croire que quand un vicery un diwan ou autre puissance ou personne qualifiée envoyra à un gouverneur (comme le cas est quelques fois arrivé) quelques marques d'estime, que Messieurs veuillent se l'approprier.*"

for weavers and other inhabitants in Pondicherry.⁷²³ Martin aimed to develop the coral polishers and weavers' craftsmen villages and offered them the Company's protection and a neutral status in local wars.⁷²⁴ To make sure the settlement remained protected, Martin refused to decrease the wage of both European and Topaz soldiers out of fear of a mass desertion.⁷²⁵ Martin's experience played a role in his decision. In 1690, he had explained that a lower wage in Pondicherry would make other European settlements on the Coromandel Coast more attractive to soldiers.⁷²⁶ Additionally, when he sent the state of the garrisons to Paris, Martin warned that he would not let the high number of Topaz and Lascarins go until he received a sufficient number of French soldiers.⁷²⁷

His successor, Hébert, did not think it necessary to keep three garrisons or to work on the fortifications. According to him, if the Mughals wanted to harm them, they could easily starve them and the fortress could not protect them against that. His strategy therefore relied entirely on good relations with the Mughal governor of Karnataka. *"All our strength consists in taking care of our relations with the governor of Carnatic on which we depend, with whom I maintain a good correspondence, visiting him every six months with gifts because one never appears empty handed in front of the Moors."*⁷²⁸ In contrast, when Dulivier took over the management of Pondicherry in 1713, he argued against cutting down the number of Company soldiers and in favour of reinforcing the fortress. His main concerns were not Mughal attacks or the conquest of another European power, but the pillages and robberies perpetrated by neighbouring rulers, because *"if the inhabitants find themselves in insecurity they will look for a safer place somewhere else."*⁷²⁹ Under constant threat of a demographic haemorrhage, Dulivier held the opinion that the good existing relations with the Mughal governor were necessary, but not sufficient. He built the image of Pondicherry as a place of safety by maintaining enough soldiers and exhibiting a strong fortress, even if it was only representational.

⁷²³ ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁷²⁴ Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 47.

⁷²⁵ ANOM C2 67 f° 248, letter of Martin, 19 February 1703.

⁷²⁶ ANOM C2 63 f°151, letter of Martin, 20 February 1690.

⁷²⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°7, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁷²⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°5 and f°11 letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710: *"toute notre force consiste à nous bien menager avec le gouverneur du Carnate d'où nous dépendons avec lequel j'entretiens une bonne correspondance, l'envoyant visiter tous les six mois et luy faisant quelques prés ens suivant nos moyens car on ne se présente jamais les mains vides devant les maures"*.

⁷²⁹ ANOM C2 69 f°73, letter of Dulivier, 14 February 1714: *"les habitants ne se trouvant plus avec leur famille en seureté auroient été chercher un azile plus sur ailleurs"*.

A second important element for the growth of the settlement was religious tolerance. As shown by Danna Agmon, the legislation curtailing the religious freedom of Indian weavers enacted by Director Martin in 1701, and strongly supported by the Jesuits, led to the uprising of a great majority of Pondicherry's population.⁷³⁰ At that time, the Hindu population stood at 30,000 people against 500 Christians. Martin understood the potential disaster and cancelled the legislation. Whether the initiation of this legislation against non-Catholic worshippers came exclusively from Martin, or from the Jesuits, is outside the scope of this chapter. However, sources prior to 1701 suggest that Martin realised the necessity of religious tolerance. In September of 1699, he wrote to the Company in Paris that "*it is sure that people from all nations and religions will come to settle [in Pondicherry], the English, the Danes and the Dutch receive indifferently in their settlements, Catholics, mosques, pagodes, this freedom is granted to attract inhabitants.*"⁷³¹ The fact that he efficiently and rapidly cancelled the by-law after the uprising in 1701 shows that he was in favour, at least for pragmatic reasons, of religious tolerance in Pondicherry.

The Parisian directors' instructions to Hébert regarding his visit to the French settlements in India paid particular attention to religious matters. Despite the distance, Parisian directors had learned from the religious conflicts under the directorship of Martin, and saw it as a threat. In their instructions, they repeatedly made the direct connection between freedom of religion and population increase in Pondicherry, which would result in an increase in the town's revenues. They wrote that "*he [Hébert] will make all necessary efforts to increase the revenues of Pondicherry, and he will examine if it would be appropriate to give freedom of conscience in order to attract the people, and increase taxes.*"⁷³² The memory of the two strikes under Martin's management was never far from Hébert's mind. He had read the minutes of the Council proceedings during the unrest of 1705 in detail and reported that a similar event happened in Madras in 1707.⁷³³ Therefore, in July 1708, just after Hébert's arrival in the French settlement, Hébert and the Sovereign Council granted freedom of

⁷³⁰ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 69–71.

⁷³¹ ANOM C2 65 f°31, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699 : "*il est seur qu'il y viendra des gens s'y établir de diverses nations et de religions différentes, les anglois les danois et les hollandois reçoivent tous indifféremment chez eux catholiques, mosquées, pagodes, l'on accorde cette liberté pour avoir des habitants*".

⁷³² ANOM C2 12 f°115, 29 May 1706 : Company instructions to Hébert "*Il faut s'il luy plaît soin de mettre tout en usage pour augmenter les revenus de Pondichéry et il examinera avec soin s'il est convenable de donner liberté de conscience, afin d'attirer le peuple, et augmenter par-là les droits d'entrée et de sortie*".

⁷³³ ANOM C2 68 f°278-279, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

commerce and religion to everyone who wished to settle in Pondicherry, in order to increase commerce.⁷³⁴

By the end of Hébert's first year in Pondicherry, he appointed a Hindu as chief broker (*courtier en chef des Malabars*), Nayiniyappa Pillai (1654-1717), to replace a Christian broker. From the religious context of Pondicherry, the appointment of a Hindu broker in the religious context of Pondicherry served as yet another step towards Hébert's pragmatic tolerance. He explained his tolerant strategy to the directors in the beginning of 1709 when he wrote: "*these people reason like everywhere else in the inhabited world, someone wants to force us to stay in a place where we do not earn a living and where we suffer by our religion, it is better to find somewhere else to go.*"⁷³⁵ He concluded his reasoning behind his decision to grant freedom of religion in Pondicherry by stating that: "*the English who are opposed to the Catholic religion in England, endured it publicly in Madras.*"⁷³⁶ By distinguishing between the situation in Europe and that in India, Hébert tried to show the Parisian directors that Catholicism in France and tolerance in Pondicherry were not mutually exclusive.

The Jesuits kept considerable power and influence in Pondicherry because they communicated directly with Louis XIV, whose confessor was a member of the Society of Jesus.⁷³⁷ When the Jesuits demanded that the function of courtier-in-chief only be given to a Christian, thereby excluding the current Hindu broker Pillai, Dulivier was faced with a difficult conundrum. On the one hand, he had to please the Jesuits and, on the other hand, the trade in Pondicherry depended on the skills of "*one of the most capable men of all of India for the negotiations of a company.*"⁷³⁸ Unable to take sides and thus illustrating the narrow margin for manoeuvre in this scenario, Dulivier opted to compromise and appointed a Christian assistant to Pillai.⁷³⁹ Furthermore, when orders came from France to restrict Hindu ceremonies following pressure exerted by the Jesuits, Dulivier opposed these orders, stating: "*the difficulties that I foresee and the risks by troubling them on their religion of losing this*

⁷³⁴ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 92.

⁷³⁵ ANOM C2 68 f°265, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: "*Ces gens raisonnent comme on le fait partout dans le monde habitable, on veut nous forcer de rester dans un lieu où nous ne gagnons pas notre vie, ou l'on ne souffre pas notre religion il vaut mieux chercher ailleurs*".

⁷³⁶ ANOM C2 68 f°265, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: "*les anglois qui sont si opposé à la religion catholique en Angleterre la souffre publiquement à Madras*".

⁷³⁷ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 113.

⁷³⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°103, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714 "*un des plus habiles hommes pour la négociation d'une compagnie qu'il y ait dans l'inde*".

⁷³⁹ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 113.

colony.”⁷⁴⁰ Once again, Dulivier’s dependency on the Hindu workforce motivated his opposition and demonstrated the usual pragmatic tolerance of his predecessors.

However, the pragmatic tolerance strategy was not consistent. The entanglement of power dynamics, economic motives and religious matters resulted in contradictory religious policies from the director. In 1709, the same year Hébert argued in favour of religious freedom in Pondicherry, he had the “*happiness of forcing some non-Christians to demolish a small pagoda where they performed their adorations and deliberations.*”⁷⁴¹ During the same month Dulivier opposed the orders of the Company to restrict Hindu ceremonies, he forbade a Hindu celebration. The response was instantaneous: between 60,000 and 70,000 Hindu people left Pondicherry.⁷⁴² Similar to Martin before him, Dulivier reinstated full religious freedom. Most strikingly is the case of Hébert, who after appointing Nayiniyappa as chief broker of Pondicherry, imprisoned him to replace him with a Christian broker under the influence of the Jesuits. The following mistreatment of Nayiniyappa and his death generated a scandal that made its way to France and would cost Hébert his job. Martin, Hébert and Dulivier kept attempting to restrict religious freedom as a way to enforce their power over the population, while simultaneously voicing their concern and awareness of the necessity of such religious freedom for the economic development of the settlement. Tolerance attracted people to the settlement but feelings of fear and uncertainty helped governing bodies assert their power. However, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, attempts to restrict religious freedom and therefore establish a stronger French authority over the inhabitants of Pondicherry were unsuccessful.⁷⁴³ Overseas directors had to adapt their policies to the demands of the Indian population and not the opposite.

The other way to stimulate the economic growth of the settlement was not only to increase the population but also to attract wealthy merchants. After the hard blow of the Dutch conquest, the Company had to rebuild trust with merchants and weavers; the accounts between the Company and its merchants had not been cleared, contracts had been broken and promises that funds would come on the next ships had not been kept. Some merchants had left Pondicherry for Madras or the Dutch settlements and the only way to attract them back was to become an economically dynamic settlement. One of the factors that attracted wealthy

⁷⁴⁰ ANOM C2 69 f°154, letter of Dulivier, 26 February 1715: “*les difficultés que je prévoyois et les risques qu’il y auroit en les inquiétant sur leur religion de perdre un jour cette colonie*”.

⁷⁴¹ ANOM C2 68 f°322, letter of Hébert, 10 October 1709: “*J’ay eu le bonheur d’obliger les gentils d’abattre une petite pagode, ou toutes les nuits ils faisoient leurs adorations et délibérations*”.

⁷⁴² The population had increased steeply during the first decade of the eighteenth century, see: Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 95.

⁷⁴³ Agmon, 96.

merchants was guaranteed access to the French passport for their ships, security of their assets and protection of their confidential business information, similar to other European settlements on the Coromandel Coast. However, the Parisian directors instructed Dulivier not to deliver a Company passport to any enemy of France, demanding that if Armenian, Muslim or Hindu merchants asked for a passport they would have to disclose their trading route, business partners and a complete list of their goods. The directors' demanded that he seize the goods of those businessmen guilty of trading with French enemies. The specificity of the order indicates that the French authorities knew that Armenian, Hindu and Muslim merchants frequently traded with French enemies, including European competitors. These cross-cultural trading partnerships happened frequently enough for the metropolitan directors to regard the selling of passports to these merchants as an indirect way to contribute to the economic development of their enemies.

Dulivier opposed the Parisian directors' orders when he answered that "*wanting to touch the subjects of the Mughal, the Gentils [non-Christians] or the Armenian would mean losing everything, the smallest complaint about the refusal of a passport could lead to very bad consequences*" adding that the merchants would never let anyone into the "*secrets of their trade*."⁷⁴⁴ Dulivier's strong refusal to obey these orders reveals both the gap between the Parisian directors' vision and the reality of the situation in Pondicherry, and the strong dependence on local merchants and the necessity to comply to local mercantile rules. Another reason for Dulivier's opposition was that the selling of French passports to foreign ships was a source of revenue for the settlement. In 1711, Hébert sold a French passport to Seatergood and Joones, merchants from Madras who sailed on a Muslim ship owned by Persian merchant, Bérangey, to trade in China and Malacca, for 1,000 pagodas (8,500 *livres*).⁷⁴⁵ Dulivier justified granting a French passport to English merchants during the War of the Spanish Succession by arguing that the Company had not sent any aid to Pondicherry the previous year. This example illustrates the widespread web of cross-cultural trading partnerships and the difficulty differentiating the so-called enemies from the allies in these intricacies of interests. Stopping the distribution of passports to merchants who traded with French enemies would virtually put this profitable activity on hold. Furthermore, aside from

⁷⁴⁴ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, Company instructions to Dulivier dated from 1711 and the reply in 1714: "*de vouloir toucher aux dis sujets du Mogol, aux Gentils ou Arméniens se seroient vouloir tout perdre, car sur la moindre des plaintes mesmes sur un refus de passeport on nous suciteroit de très facheuses affaires, on les obligerait ainsy jamais à déclarer la quantité des marchandises ces sortes de gens sont trop jaloux du secret de leur commerce pour se soumettre à une pareille maxime*".

⁷⁴⁵ Council minute, 23 May 1711 in *Procès-verbaux Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 98.

bringing much-needed funds into the Company's coffers in Pondicherry, the passport system, which originated in the Portuguese system of Cartazes, enabled the French Company to spread its sphere of influence beyond controlled territories, without costs.

As a last option to find funds, the overseas director of Pondicherry borrowed money. Credit opportunities for the French in Pondicherry were scarce. In 1707, the French East India Company's "South Sea squadron" was delayed and Dulivier, as interim director, had exhausted all credit. He decided, with the agreement of the council, to send a small boat (*quesche*) to the Mascarens, where he sold for 5,000 piasters of merchandise and borrowed 20,000 piasters from the inhabitants of the island of Bourbon, at an interest rate of ten percent.⁷⁴⁶ The strategy had been successful, since it had brought 25,000 piasters to Pondicherry at a critical moment as only one of the "South Sea Squadron" ships made it to Pondicherry: "*the piasters have been of great help, without them it would have been hard to keep the fortress of Pondicherry*".⁷⁴⁷ The minister of the Navy himself congratulated Dulivier on his initiative.⁷⁴⁸ Connections between French settlements not only in the Indian sub-continent but in the whole Indian Ocean demonstrate that they were not self-contained and interacted independently from the metropolis.⁷⁴⁹

In September 1708, an important creditor of the Company, the Armenian merchant Khoja Safar of Madras, asked Dulivier to pay the Company's debt, which amounted to 19,000 pagodas, or 153,900 *livres*.⁷⁵⁰ The debt had increased in the last years of Martin's directorship. In 1705, Martin renewed the loan of 10,000 pagodas, or 81,000 *livres*, made to Khoja Safar in 1700 at an interest rate of ten percent, and in 1706 he increased it to 15,000 pagodas, or 121,500 *livres*, on the same interest rate for the next four years.⁷⁵¹ Dulivier and the council were unable to repay the accumulated debt and decided to pay half of the debt back and make a new contract for 10,000 pagodas.⁷⁵² Director Dulivier therefore soon relied on his good relations with other European governors, either for more credit or to pay back existing loans. In 1709, Dulivier had not received any news or supplies from the Company for the past two years and resolved to borrow 8,000 pagodas, or 64,800 *livres*, from the English in

⁷⁴⁶ ANOM C2 13 f°58, letter of Bouynot (Company ship captain) in Pondichéry, 30 September 1707.

⁷⁴⁷ ANOM C2 12 f°219, East India Company directors, 1 October 1707: "*qui ont esté d'un grand secours, et sans lesquels il auroit esté bien difficile de conserver la forteresse de Pondichéry*".

⁷⁴⁸ ANOM B//30 f° 351, Pontchartrain to Dulivier, 16 January 1709.

⁷⁴⁹ April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1.

⁷⁵⁰ Council meeting minute, 24 September 1708 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 64.

⁷⁵¹ Council meeting minute, 6 March 1705 and 1 April 1706 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 21, 30.

⁷⁵² Council meeting minute, 24 September 1708 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 64.

Madras with the promise to reimburse them in January. Aware that delaying the payment of this debt would ruin the director's reputation, Dulivier decided to ask for a loan of 30,000 piasters, or 150,000 *livres*, to the Spanish governor of Manila to reimburse his debt to the English.⁷⁵³

By 1709, private merchants, mostly from Saint Malo, owned most of the French ships coming to Pondicherry. The merchants enjoyed the infrastructure of the Company in exchange for ten percent of their profit. The financial state of the settlement worsened, because neither private traders nor the Company sent funds to Pondicherry. Hébert complained to Paris, stating that: "*the Company has to send us funds to maintain ourselves [...] because not providing us the means to maintain the fort, while giving passports to ships asking us for merchandise, it is expecting the impossible from us.*"⁷⁵⁴ According to Hébert, the Company spent 50,000 *écus*, or 150,000 *livres*, a year in Pondicherry. The bad financial state of the Company was known locally, which made it difficult to access any credit.⁷⁵⁵ If Hébert seemed to inflate the annual spending of the settlement to strengthen his argument, the lack of creditworthiness of the Company was a real obstacle to accessing funds. Indeed, the English company had more debt, but because its trade was known to be profitable, its solvency was not questioned.⁷⁵⁶ Facing this difficulty, Hébert resorted to selling the space reserved for the East India Company on the Saint Malo merchants' ships, which the merchants promised to the Company as part of their treaty. According to the 1708 contract, the Company was entitled to ten *tonneaux* of merchandise in each Saint Malo ship, free of freight costs.⁷⁵⁷ Hébert admitted that there was no merchandise available in the Company warehouses to fill the reserved space. The director made 36,000 *livres* on the sale of cargo space, which, according to him, could have been more profitable to the Company as it might have amounted to 100,000 *livres* of profit in France.⁷⁵⁸

The necessity to at least keep up the appearances of the Company's good financial state was expressed explicitly by the minister of the Navy. Pontchartrain had strongly argued against Hébert's proposition to sell all of the fort's cutlery to pay the Company's debts, by

⁷⁵³ Council meeting minute, 19 June 1708 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 39–40.

⁷⁵⁴ ANOM C2 69 f°7, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710: "*la compagnie doit songer à nous envoyer des fonds pour nous soutenir [...] car de dire qu'elle donne cette permission aux vaisseaux, qu'elle nous envoie quoique ce soit et qu'elle nous demande encore des marchandises c'est nous demander l'impossible*" other mentions of this issue in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 82.

⁷⁵⁵ ANOM C2 69 f° 9, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710 and Council meeting minute, 22 December 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 88..

⁷⁵⁶ ANOM C2 68 f° 319, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1715.

⁷⁵⁷ Council meeting minute, 22 of December 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 87.

⁷⁵⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°5, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709.

writing “*it smells furiously of bankruptcy, it is necessary to avoid to even show signs of it because these things provoke a lot of rumours.*”⁷⁵⁹ The bankruptcy rumours would affect the Company’s credit opportunities. In March 1712, Hébert sent his son to Madras to negotiate a loan with merchants. The widow of a Huguenot, Chardin, agreed to lend 4,000 pagodas under the condition that the loan would be made in Hébert’s name because she “*did not want to do business with the Company.*”⁷⁶⁰ The Company’s debts accrued while using the director’s creditworthiness as collateral. There is no evidence that it generated a lower interest rate, but rather that the loan would not have been possible without the personal engagement of the director. It was not an exceptional measure, as Company councillors in Pondicherry asked the director to provide this service for future loans. According to economic theory, transaction costs were reduced through the recognition of the responsibility of a principal for his agent. Credit was then granted to an agent based on the credit worthiness of his principal.⁷⁶¹ However, in the case of the French East India Company and its agent in Pondicherry, the exact opposite took place. Once the creditworthiness of the Company completely eroded, it was the director’s personal reputation that enabled the settlement to benefit from the necessary loans. Individual creditworthiness complemented the institution’s limits and contributed to its survival.

Despite the divergent strategy of Hébert regarding the military protection of the settlement, it appears that, in order to maintain a steady population growth, the other directors agreed that the amount of Topaz and Lascarins could not be lowered. Although under pressure from the Parisian directors to severely decrease the garrison’s budget, Martin and Dulivier refused to cut their pay for fear of desertion. The fortress and the garrison may not have had a military role against a potential Mughal attack, but nevertheless projected an appearance of power to neighbouring rulers. All directors were aware of the necessity of religious tolerance, while time and again, they all attempted to assert power through religious restrictions, and failed. To attract mercantile activities, the director had to oppose the orders of the French authorities, which were ill-suited to the context of the Company in India as the case of the passports illustrates. Finally, under the advice of the minister of the Navy, directors attempted

⁷⁵⁹ ANOM B//30 f°352, Pontchartrain to the East India Company directors, January 1709: “*cela sent furieusement la banqueroute et c’est ce qu’il faut toujours éviter surtout de la faire paroître se sont des choses qui font beaucoup de bruit et d’éclats dans un pays*”.

⁷⁶⁰ Council meeting minute, 23 February 1712: “*Ne voulant point avoir affaire à la compagnie*” in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 109.

⁷⁶¹ Douglas C. North, ‘Institutions, Transaction Costs, and the Rise of Merchant Empires’, in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, ed. James D. Tracy, Studies in Comparative Early Modern History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

to keep up the appearance of solvency as a way to continue accessing credit. Aside from Armenian credit providers, the French resorted to asking for loans to their enemies in Europe, the English, and in order to pay back some of the loans, generated a chain of debts across imperial borders. Once the Company's creditworthiness was not enough, the Company used the director's personal reputation of solvency as collateral for the loans.

The agency of overseas directors in Pondicherry can be observed in their repetitive attempts at re-defining power dynamics with rulers and with the population they governed. Even more striking is how they exercised their agency towards their principals when they opposed metropolitan orders, although their agency should not be limited to those instances. Overseas directors frequently came up against unprecedented situations that made the metropolitan rules irrelevant. Consequently, an element of improvisation was necessary for the sake of the Company's interests. Even the opposition to metropolitan orders was, in most cases, not against the interests of the Company, but rather in its favour. The orders could and should have been negotiated by overseas directors, who were hired to carefully assess the risks and opportunities of each decision according to the context. The margin of manoeuvre given to overseas directors was the consequence of the Company's limits as an institution in terms of funds, connections and power.

4. Relations with rulers, access to credit and managing private traders in Ouidah

Contrary to Pondicherry, the trade in Ouidah was centralised in the hands of local rulers, particularly during the early Dahomian phase, but also to a lesser extent under the Hueda kings. The French fort's lack of sovereignty, coupled with the economic dependence on the authorities, made maintaining good relations with the Hueda and Dahomey kings essential to the director's position and the continued existence of the trading post in Ouidah. Due to the recurrent political conflicts and economic competition between the Hueda kingdom and its neighbour Allada, and later between the Dahomey and the Hueda kings, the overseas directors first needed to demonstrate their loyalty to the current authorities. At the same time, French directors had to maximise their trading relations in the Bight of Benin and open access to markets outside of Ouidah, where smaller trading posts existed, such as at the main port of Allada, Jakin. Ducoulombier engaged in diplomatic relations with the neighbouring kingdom of Allada. For instance, after the King of Allada died in 1715,

Ducoulombier sent the new King a “*present to renew their friendship*.”⁷⁶² Additionally, he sent his vice-director, Bouchel, to manage the trade in Jakin. When the commercial situation was not favourable in Ouidah, he advised many French captains to trade at Jakin.

Jealous of the commerce Ducoulombier was actively developing in Allada, King Hufon of Hueda decided, in a secret council, to force the French director to return to Europe on the next French ship.⁷⁶³ On 9 August 1715, the order was executed. King Hufon sent his army and gave Ducoulombier two hours to sort out his papers and Ducoulombier sailed back to France the next morning. Ducoulombier had underestimated the necessity to regularly demonstrate his loyalty to Hufon, and was unable to navigate the relations with both Allada and Hueda. The English factor stated that “*the King has sent off the French director for sending a ship to Jacquin and threatened to do the same by the Dutch chief*,” which demonstrates that Ducoulombier was hardly a unique case.⁷⁶⁴ Aware of this constant threat, Ducoulombier’s successor, Bouchel, took into account Hufon’s sensitivities, particularly regarding his sovereign rights such as tax collection or justice. When an *acquérat* caught a thief in the French lodge, Bouchel first warned Assou, who sent him to the King to demand justice. The King decided to let Bouchel be the judge of the thief’s sentence, telling Bouchel that this consideration increased his regard for Bouchel.⁷⁶⁵ Acknowledging Hufon’s sovereignty and right to adjudicate justice, even when it directly concerned the French factory, was part of Bouchel’s strategy to enhance his relationship with the King.

During the troubled times of the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah, the French trading lodge in the capital was destroyed and the fort became the only remaining building in which the Company employees were safe. The Hueda King and Captain Assou regularly claimed the fort until in 1733, when the Hueda conquered Ouidah for good. Since the beginning of the conflict, the overseas director of Ouidah’s first priority was to benefit from the protection of the new ruler. Dupetitval sent a diplomatic mission to King Agaja of Dahomey early on in the war, to enhance the good relations between the French director and Agaja, and the loyalty of the director. The commercial situation changed drastically after the Dahomian conquest, due to Agaja’s attempts to establish a monopoly over the slave trade.⁷⁶⁶ The stronger centralisation of the slave trade gave even more importance to the visits to King Agaja.

⁷⁶² ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 26 July 1717: “*Envoi d’un présent pour renouveler l’amitié*”.

⁷⁶³ ANOM E 145, personnel file Ducoulombier, mémoire, 1717.

⁷⁶⁴ TNA T70/6 f°27, abstracts of letter received from Whydah by the Royal Africa Company, 14 September 1715.

⁷⁶⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 26 July 1717: “*cette déférence lui a attiré l’estime du roy*”.

⁷⁶⁶ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

Dupetitval's envoy, Delisle, reported that the Dahomian King attested to being his best friend.⁷⁶⁷ Similar to the relationship with the Mughal governor, the word friendship was utilitarian and did not imply any intimacy. King Agaja used the same term to qualify his relationship with the Portuguese in 1733: "*the King of Dahomey declares that he likes supremely the Portuguese nation and that he wants no other in his territories.*"⁷⁶⁸ The friendship meant that Dupetitval succeeded, at least momentarily, in benefitting from the King's protection.

However, the directors were aware of the volatility of these statements of friendship. After Tegbesu's accession to the throne in 1742, Levet came back to Ouidah as director and purposely encouraged French captains to come ashore to trade in Ouidah, to ostentatiously demonstrate to the Dahomian King that he was actively restoring commerce.⁷⁶⁹ Levet chose an interpreter, Jacques Cazimir, for the "*most important negotiations.*"⁷⁷⁰ However, despite his experience as vice-director and interim director, and the use of an interpreter he trusted, his visits to King Tegbesu remained uneasy. This was probably due to the fact that he brought up uncomfortable subjects, such as the dismissal of his predecessor, Levens, or the imprisonment of the director of the Portuguese fort, Basilio.⁷⁷¹ When the King promised him that he would never do any harm to the French fort, he remained sceptical, as he wrote "*they are like dinner friends who take their friendship back as soon as one removes the tablecloth.*"⁷⁷² The friendship relations with the Hueda and Dahomey kings had to be continuously renewed and, just as in Pondicherry, this renewal happened through gift-giving.

Even more than in Pondicherry, the boundary between tributes, taxes and gifts was particularly thin in the context of the West African contact zone.⁷⁷³ The metropolitan authorities attempted to make the distinction in their instructions to Bouchel: "*the council observes that, in this regard, he has to be careful that the presents made to the king of Ouidah should not be considered an increase of the Costumes of the Negros.*"⁷⁷⁴ However, this

⁷⁶⁷ ANOM C6 25, letter of Delisle visiting the Dahomey king to Dupetitval, 31 August 1728.

⁷⁶⁸ APB 27 doc. 79, letter of the Vice Roy to the Overseas Council in Brazil, 12 January 1733: "*le Roi de Daomé [...] qui déclare aimer suprêmement la nation portugaise, de telle sorte qu'il n'en veut pas d'autre dans ses possessions*" translated and cited in Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 156.

⁷⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

⁷⁷⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 25 February 1744: "*Intreprete aux palabres les plus importantes*".

⁷⁷¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

⁷⁷² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 25 February 1744: "*ils sont comme les amys de la table, qui retirent leur amitié sitot qu'on lève la nappe*".

⁷⁷³ Brauner, 'Connecting Things', 416.

⁷⁷⁴ ANOM E 43, personnel file of Bouchel: "*le conseil luy observa sur ce sujet qu'il doit bien prendre en garde que les presents qui pourront estre faits au Roy de Juda ne soient pris pour une augmentation de Coutumes les Negres ayant intérests de l'insinuer afin d'augmenter les droits qu'ils reçoivent*".

distinction appears to have been difficult to apply in practice, as the gift-giving in West Africa was mostly one-sided.⁷⁷⁵ The Company directly depended on gift-giving sessions with local rulers to enjoy their protection and to build commercial ties. These sessions took place on special occasions, such as when the ruler or the director changed, recent victories or royal funerals. When Ducoulombier arrived in Ouidah in 1712, he started by restoring French credibility, “*doing unimaginable solicitations to the King and great men of the Kingdom, sparing no presents*” which was, according to him, the only way to preserve the privileges they had acquired.⁷⁷⁶ As for Bouchel, he was in Allada when Ducoulombier returned to France; Bouchel had to give great gifts to the Hueda King in order to be allowed to come back to take over authority of French fort.⁷⁷⁷ In 1733, when the father of the Dahomian King Agaja died, the King’s administration persistently asked Levet, the interim director, to come to the funerals. The French director brought gunpowder as a present for Agaja and Alligny, the captain for the French, as well as alcohol for the King’s commerce official.⁷⁷⁸

As in Pondicherry, local rulers played Europeans against one another during gift-giving transactions, taking advantage of the competition between countries.⁷⁷⁹ European representatives would not only compete over the value of the gifts but also on when they would offer their gifts. For instance, King Agaja also invited the Portuguese and English to the funeral of his father; Levet had to leave immediately for the ceremony “*since English and Portuguese directors were always so punctual to go every time the king asks them.*”⁷⁸⁰ The king did not necessarily need a special event and used any pretext to ask European representatives to visit him, bearing gifts. Levet remarked that King Tegbesu used the pretext of trade negotiations to summon the directors, when it was obviously out of “*pure caprice.*”⁷⁸¹ These forced and competitive gift offerings were close to tributes, just as they were in Pondicherry. However, the difference was the specificity of the Dahomey ruler’s demands.

When he arrived in Ouidah in November 1733, Director Du Bellay undertook his mandatory visit to King Agaja. He began by complimenting the King of Dahomey and asking for his protection. As a reply, King Agaja held Du Bellay’s hand multiple times to confirm his

⁷⁷⁵ Brauner, ‘Connecting Things’, 416.

⁷⁷⁶ ANOM E 145, personnel file Ducoulombier, mémoire, 1717: “*faire toutes les sollicitations imaginables auprès du roy et des grands du royaume n’épargnant point les presents*”.

⁷⁷⁷ ANOM E 145, personnel file Ducoulombier, mémoire, 1717.

⁷⁷⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

⁷⁷⁹ Brauner, ‘Connecting Things’, 415.

⁷⁸⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

⁷⁸¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 25 February 1744: “*sous prétexte de quelques palabres touchant le commerce et réellement par pur caprice*”.

protection.⁷⁸² In exchange for his protection, the King required the overseas director to offer specific gifts from the Company. Among these gifts, King Agaja only wanted guns and provided Du Bellay with an extremely detailed list of gifts.⁷⁸³ The specificity of the demands testifies to the limited agency of the overseas director in these gift-giving sessions. Indeed, before Du Bellay, the interim director, Levet, attempted to oppose the demands of Agaja. The King had asked Levet to exchange all of the French fort's gunpowder for enslaved Africans. Levet refused and, on the order of King Agaja, sailed back to France in January 1734.⁷⁸⁴ Du Bellay was aware of the consequences of opposition, as he was the one who had to communicate Agaja's expulsion order to Levet. Levet's failed opposition put a final limit to the agency of Du Bellay.

Within the source material, mentions of physical reciprocity in gift-giving relations take the form of payments. For instance, King Agaja asked for a table and cups for tea, as well as a Portuguese bed, for which he sent enslaved Africans to Dupetitval. Agaja controlled the transaction; he decided on the commodity and set the price. Other signs of reciprocity appear in the negotiations initiated by the overseas director. The latter brought presents to the king to ask for a favour or a deal, and the counter gift sent by the king would seal that deal. Because of its voluntary nature, this type of gift exchange implied that the overseas director had a greater latitude, in both the value of the gift and the interpretation of the counter gift. The director's agency in these negotiations is evident in an example of when negotiations failed. When Levet negotiated the replacement of the Portuguese director with King Tegbesu, Levet used the familiar form of addressing the King and spoke in an aggressive tone. Nevertheless, Levet and Tegbesu reached an agreement. Levet offered many valuable presents and received a female enslaved African in return. However, Levet overestimated the symbolic value of the gift-giving exchange.⁷⁸⁵ If the transaction sealed the deal between the overseas director and the King of Dahomey regarding the Portuguese director, it did not prove that Tegbesu was "*happy about the truth that he always found in what I [Levet] told him,*" as Levet wrote to

⁷⁸² ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733.

⁷⁸³ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733. The king demanded a golden jacket with bulletproof bracelets and helmet lined with red satin, four pieces of velvet, one bleu, one white and the last one of such specific colour that the King gave a sample to Du Bellay. The list continued with the presents to be given to the King's four main wives, generals, captains and councilors. Other examples of detailed demands can be found in ANOM C6 25, letter of Delisle visiting the Dahomey king to Dupetitval, 13 September 1728. Agaja asked to Deslile, Dupetitval's envoy, a bottle of hard liquor or all the hats with golden and silver edges.

⁷⁸⁴ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 167.

⁷⁸⁵ Verger, 184–85.

France.⁷⁸⁶ Soon after, Tegbesu had Levet killed and Guestard succeeded him as director. Levet did not underestimate the value of the gifts, but rather chose the wrong strategy during negotiations, which had fatal consequences. This wrong choice illustrates the limited, but existing, agency of the French directors in Ouidah.

Like in Pondicherry, the director's position not only depended on his ability to conduct negotiations and to provide frequent gifts to the authorities, but also on access to credit. The trading station lacked basic funds during the whole period under study, but particularly during the directorships of Ducoulombier and Bouchel. Their mandates correspond to the administration of the Asiento Company and the Council of the Navy, as well as the first years of the Company of the Indies. The lack of funds was due, in part, to the fact that the administration of the Navy opened the trade in the Bight of Benin to merchants from French port cities. The merchants were not held accountable for the maintenance of the fort and therefore did not necessarily contribute to the administration costs.⁷⁸⁷ The most common strategy utilised by overseas directors was to borrow cowry shells and foodstuff from the King of Dahomey or another European representative in Ouidah. When Ducoulombier arrived in Ouidah in 1712, he found starved Company employees and had to ask for supplies and loans from the English and Dutch.⁷⁸⁸ Three years later, he wrote to the Council of the Navy that "*this fort survives on cowry shells from the English and on loans.*"⁷⁸⁹ The extreme need for cowry shells led Ducoulombier to make unprofitable deals with the King, selling 214 ounces of gold at a value of fifty *livres* per ounce, instead of the seventy-five *livres* as valued in France. According to him, it provoked a loss of more than 3,000 *livres*.⁷⁹⁰

When Bouchel became overseas director, he sent employees to get cowry shells from the Danish in Accra because he worried that the Parisian directors would not send any much-needed supplies before his first letters arrived.⁷⁹¹ In 1717, Bouchel resorted to borrowing cowry shells from the Hueda King, Hufon. As long as the overseas directors appeared able to repay their debt to the King, the latter continued to loan them cowry shells. If the creditworthiness of the overseas director and the French came into question, however, it could endanger the director's position. Two years later, King Hufon had not been reimbursed and

⁷⁸⁶ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746: "*Pour me montrer combien il était content de la vérité qu'il avait toujours trouvée dans tout ce que je lui avais dit*".

⁷⁸⁷ ANOM B//36 f°207, letter of the minister of the Navy to Ducoulombier, 29 June 1714: "*au sujet de la liberté du commerce de Guinée*".

⁷⁸⁸ ANOM E 145, personnel file Ducoulombier, mémoire, 1717.

⁷⁸⁹ ANOM C25, 6 April 1715: "*il fait subsister le fort par des Bouges qu'il a des anglois et des emprunts*".

⁷⁹⁰ ANOM E 145, personnel file Ducoulombier, mémoire, 1717.

⁷⁹¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 26 July 1717.

did not press Bouchel to pay him back yet. But by 1720, he realised that none of the many French ships anchoring in Ouidah had paid back the loan and “*that Bouchel was already indebted to the English and Dutch governors as well as to the Portuguese Francisco Pereira Mendez, and that he indebted himself daily to the Dutch.*”⁷⁹² The King doubted about Bouchel’s ability to repay his debts, and demanded that French captains warned the French King of the situation. He made it clear that if France did not send funds to Ouidah, something would happen to Bouchel and to the French ships. The open trade period only partly explains Bouchel’s extreme levels of debt, and his case will be further analysed in later chapters. The administration of the Company of the Indies did not solve the problem of funds. Especially during the Dahomian Wars, French dependence on fellow European representatives, particularly the English, for cowry shells remained heavy.

A last option for the directors would be to ask for credit to private traders that had a vested interest in the “Guinea trade”. While private traders sometimes sold overpriced supplies to French directors in Ouidah, one should not assume that the French private merchants and directors had disparate interests.⁷⁹³ Indeed, the French port city traders had no use for a fort that was deeply in debt; they therefore would at times advance money for its maintenance. In December 1721, the vice-director of Ouidah stayed in Nantes, where Montaudouin offered him a small loan of 6,000 *livres* for the maintenance of the trading post.⁷⁹⁴ This sum would be taken from what Montaudouin owed, or would owe to the Company of the Indies, which had taken over the administration of the fort in 1720. In February 1722, Bigot de la Mothe, the administrator of the Navy in Nantes, reported that “*in conformity with the orders, I made a deal with M. Montaudouin for a loan of 12,000 livres of goods for the trading post of Ouidah.*”⁷⁹⁵ The fact that the Navy administrator referred to this loan while the Company of the Indies was, technically, in charge is due to the administration’s transition period. This transition period could also explain why the trading fort in Ouidah lacked funds during these specific years. Given that the annual budget for the fort’s maintenance was between 25,000 and 42,000 *livres*, the loan from Montaudouin was a relatively important contribution. It amounted to something between one-half and one-fourth

⁷⁹² AN MAR/B/3/264, Council of the Navy, 1720: “*et qu’il say que le dit sieur est endetté avec les directeurs anglois et hollandoir, et le Sr Francisque Perere Mendez portugais, et qu’il s’endette tous les jours avec le directeur hollandois*”.

⁷⁹³ ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 6 June 1717.

⁷⁹⁴ ANOM E 285, personnel file Levesque, 6 December 1721.

⁷⁹⁵ AN MAR/B/3/280, Bigot de la Mothe to the Council of the Navy, 19 February 1722: “*en conformité de ses ordres je passeray un marché avec Mr Montaudouin pour les 12000 livres d’effets qu’il avance pour le comptoir de Juda*”.

of the yearly budget. Montaudouin's financial help was strategic. If the Company of the Indies changed the policy regarding the access of private traders to the Bight of Benin, Montaudouin would have leverage as creditor of the Company.

In contrast to the directors in Pondicherry, directors in Ouidah did not make money from taxes gained by attracting inhabitants and merchants. However, the way they managed private merchants, be they African or European, affected the director's position. During Bouchel's directorship, African merchants were not a uniform group of official merchants. Hufon's power was challenged by his high officials and "*merchants did what they wanted.*"⁷⁹⁶ Managing both private French captains ready to pay a high price for a short journey on the coast, and private African traders who increased prices as long as they found buyers, was a difficult task. In order to keep prices as low as possible for the French merchants who traded through him, Bouchel had a strategy to keep the private African traders in line with French interests. He paid extra attention to private traders and would occasionally lend them money or goods, which he would normally not do, to commit them to providing enslaved Africans to French ships.⁷⁹⁷ In doing so, the French director attempted to use debts to bind private traders to his interests and those of the French captains.

On the other hand, the large number of French private traders, both during the open trade phase and after, led French captains to outbid each other and increase the price of the enslaved Africans by one-third, according to the director.⁷⁹⁸ Bouchel anticipated the negative impact of such a price increase on the French trade and did his best to force them to pay the prevailing price. As a result, the French captains that arrived in Ouidah would avoid him, and trade with representatives who did not necessarily have lower prices but would make their stay on the coast considerably shorter than if they complied to Bouchel's price control. However, Bouchel was most concerned with his reputation among the African merchants and authorities. Indeed, if private traders started the negotiations without him, they asked him to finish them as soon as a problem appeared. This caused concerns for him and reduced his credibility with the Hueda kings and administration. Additionally, the Council of the Navy summarized his demand as follow: "*It would be more appropriate if ship-owners ordered their captains to refer directly to him for the payment of duties, presents, favours towards the great men of the country because the King and his officials want the consideration between*

⁷⁹⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Bouchel, 1716: "*les marchands font ce qu'ils veulent*".

⁷⁹⁷ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Bouchel, 1716.

⁷⁹⁸ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Bouchel, 1716.

them and the Europeans to be reciprocal.”⁷⁹⁹ The Navy’s answer is unknown. Bouchel explicitly placed himself as intermediary between the French captains and African authorities and traders, based on his understanding of Hueda society and his experience in trading transactions with African actors.

Under the Company of the Indies’ administration, the director had the extra difficulty of negotiating good deals for Company ships, in comparison to all private ships and other European ships on the coast. As a solution to the problem of increased prices, Levet let the private ships finish their trade first until he was “*alone to control the prices,*” to take care of the Company ship.⁸⁰⁰ If it took too long and the prices were not attractive enough, Levet kept the Company ship’s merchandise and sent the ship back to France. The overseas director was not preoccupied with the reaction of the directors in Paris, but with that of King Tegbesu. Returning an empty ship without engaging in any trade could be terrible for Levet’s reputation, and had partly cost his predecessor his position.⁸⁰¹ To limit the damage, Levet paid the customs and offered gifts as if the trade would take place.

Unlike his predecessors, Levet saw an opportunity for the French trade in the great number of French private traders. Dahomian authorities and merchants made a distinction between French Company ships and private ships: “*This country is not able to give any profit to the Company, I say the Company because I think that if a French ship came, as long as it was not from the Company, it would make a good commerce because Africans see us as their milking cows and we will always be their fools if we stay in this position.*”⁸⁰² According to Levet’s views, the only way to make the trade in Ouidah profitable was to leave it to private traders, who would not be held accountable by the King of Dahomey. The director advocated in favour of private traders replacing the Company in the Bight of Benin, despite the fact that the Company employed him.

In Ouidah, the Hueda and particularly the Dahomey administration had a strong political and commercial role. They were both sovereign and creditor, and sometimes trading

⁷⁹⁹ AN MAR/B/1/19, Council of the Navy, 1717: “*Il seroit à propos que les propriétaires des navires ordonnassent à leurs capitaines de referer directement à ses avis pour le payement des droits pour les présents, pour les complaisances à l’égard des principaux du pays et pour leur commerce, le roy et les grands prétendants que la considération entr’eux et les Européens soit réciproque*”.

⁸⁰⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 25 February 1744: “*suspendre la traite jusqu’à ce que les deux autres navires eussent fini la leur afin qu’estant seul je puisse estre maître du prix*”.

⁸⁰¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 25 February 1744.

⁸⁰² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746: “*ce pays [...] incapable par luy mesme d’aucune ressource pour la compagnie, je dis pour la compagnie, par ce que je crois que s’il venoit un navire françois, pourvu qu’il ne luy appartint pas, qu’il feroit un bon commerce, car les negres nous regardent comme leurs vaches à lait et nous serons toujours leurs duppes [...] tant que nous serons dans la position ou nous sommes*”.

partners of the French and other Europeans. Regular visits and giving gifts to the king, as well as the maintenance of creditworthiness and management of French private traders, were all necessary to maintain the director's reputation with the political authorities. To exert their power over the directors, the Hueda and Dahomey kings made them responsible and accountable not only for Company affairs but for all French private traders. The latitude of directors was therefore narrow and exercising agency frequently led to the loss of the director's position, be it through exile or death. As a consequence, overseas directors in Ouidah were less afraid to disregard metropolitan orders than those of Hueda and Dahomey kings.

5. Conclusion

To enable their agency, directors had to secure the political and economic viability of the factories. Maintaining their position as directors not only meant complying with the demands of rulers, merchants, workers and metropolitan directors, but testing the limits of these demands and orders by exercising agency. In Pondicherry, directors adapted to power dynamics when engaging with rulers. When possible, they entered into interpersonal relationships stimulated by an exchange of services, or they attempted to strengthen the mutual dependency that already characterised their relationship with the rulers. The latter strategy could only be sustained in the long run if the overseas directors could keep their commitment to provide financial support to the ruler. When power dynamics were asymmetrical, particularly, but not exclusively, in the case of the *faujdar* or *nawab*, the director engaged in gift-giving transactions to acquire the Mughal governor's protection and "friendship." These offerings were one-sided and forced in a competitive environment, leaving little space for agency.

The director's agency can be observed when the gift-giving had a relatively voluntary aspect, for instance with neighbouring rulers. In these cases, directors could delay their gifts or decide not to send any. These decisions depended on the power dynamics and were instrumental in affirming the director's latitude. However, neighbouring rulers could use military threats and forced reciprocity to re-assert their power over the director. This situation generated a constant tug of war, which influenced the director's position. Even in forced gift-giving sessions, directors kept a certain amount of agency in their choice of intermediary, who could maximise the chances of success and minimise the cost of negotiations. For instance, Director Martin relied on personal connections and recommendations to engage with the *nawab*. If visits to the ruler could be forced upon the overseas director, the latter had the choice to refuse a proposition if he thought it detrimental to the Company, provided he was in

position to do so. A second way to exercise agency in forced gift-giving was through the value of the gifts. Offering a present of a lesser value could cause negotiations to fail but if it succeeded, the director could re-determine power relations. Gift-giving was imposed on directors, but at the same time it served as a tool to access connections, power and authority as the primary representative of the Company.

In Ouidah, French directors faced a similar asymmetrical power dynamic with the Hueda and Dahomey kings. Additionally, political and economic competition between neighbouring African kingdoms made the directors' demonstration of loyalty necessary to the safekeeping of their position. Ducoulombier's strategy to develop trade in Hueda, as well as in Allada, while being aware of the Hueda King's jealousy was not successful. His successors took special care to avoid any confusion regarding his loyalty, particularly during the Dahomian conquest (1727-1733). This chapter recognises the same use of the term "*friendship*" to characterise the relationship of the Dahomey and the overseas directors. This utilitarian friendship consisted of a reciprocal understanding: the French were under the protection of the Dahomey, in exchange for tribute-like gifts. Directors were aware that the king's friendship was volatile and had to be constantly renewed through gift-giving. Just as in Pondicherry, the offering of gifts was frequently one-sided and forced, and took place in a competitive context. However, in contrast to Pondicherry, the extreme specificity of the demands left the director with little latitude regarding the value of the gift. Furthermore, refusing royal demands, if it demonstrated the director's agency, led to the loss of his position. In negotiations initiated by overseas directors, where gift-giving entailed a voluntary aspect, some agency is visible. In the example of Levet's failed negotiations, his strategy's downfall came not from the gifts, but from his tone and behaviour. It had been a conscious decision to address King Agaja in this way and to challenge his authority.

To enable their agency, directors first tested the limits of their relationship with rulers and second, with the population they governed. In Pondicherry, most directors understood that the settlement had to become a safe environment to stimulate demographic growth. They contributed to the protection of the settlement by hiring local soldiers and avoiding desertion. However, the strong-arm tactic is most apparent in the directors' religious policies. The interplay of pragmatic religious tolerance and recurrent ceremony restrictions, demonstrates the directors' governance strategy and their attempt to assert authority over the predominantly Hindu population. Third, directors at times opposed the Company orders from France to secure their position. Dulivier made this particularly clear in his refusal to comply with the

instructions of the Company that forbade the sale of passports to merchants who were commercial partners of France's enemies. Instead, the director went further into a chain of debt with other Europeans, including with the enemies of France. In these moments of direct or indirect opposition, directors' agency was striking but should not be seen as opposing the Company's interests. Refusing orders and exercising agency was frequently done for the sake of the Company's development. In many ways, the director's situation was new to the Company, and the metropolitan administration could not predict the challenges he faced. The director's agency then appeared in his ability to improvise solutions to protect the interests of the Company. For instance, when the creditworthiness of the Company in India was in jeopardy, the director decided to engage his own personal credit for the Company's loans. This illustrates how individuals and institutions complemented each other.

In the fort in Ouidah, directors similarly relied on France's economic competitors, other Europeans and the African kings, for loans. Regarding trade, Levet's strategy encouraged French private merchants and sent a Company ship back to France empty. These decisions could be perceived, at first, as contrary to the interests of the Company. The directors in Ouidah were in a unique position, in that they feared the reaction of the African authorities rather than their own employers. However, similar to Pondicherry, the directors improvised some of the strategies to protect the interests of the metropolitan authorities and secure their position. Faced with a high number of private traders, both African and European, Bouchel created a bond of loyalty with African merchants by lending them goods on credit, and attempted to centralise the French private traders in a bid to keep the price as low as possible. No instructions from the Council of the Navy corresponded to these issues.

Despite the overseas directors' narrow range of latitude in their interactions with rulers, merchants and inhabitants under their governance or outside of it, they found ways to negotiate and to attempt to re-define power relations. The role of overseas directors was to carefully assess the risks and opportunities when making decisions about the political and economic survival of the factories, even if it went against some metropolitan orders. Metropolitan institutions were aware that overseas directors needed to improvise in order to best protect the Company or the Council of the Navy's interests. Could the goal of the Company, as an institution, have been to provide an arena for directors to exercise their agency? The next chapters will explore this question further by assessing different mechanisms of overseas directors' agency in Pondicherry and Ouidah.

Chapter 5: Inter-imperial cooperation

1. Introduction

The French overseas directors' weak bargaining position in local power dynamics, along with the previously mentioned context of dependency, impacted the sustainability of their factories. In order to remain present in both regions in the long term, overseas directors had to find immediate, local solutions. As part of their strategy, they turned to other European imperial powers in the region. Overseas context affected inter-imperial relations and as such, they should not be viewed exclusively through the lens of economic and military competition. As Amelia Polónia and Jack Owens argue, the sustainability of settlements can be found in agents and their initiatives, and particularly in "*cooperation based on individual initiative*."⁸⁰³ To unveil part of these cooperative relations, this chapter explores inter-imperial interactions with a particular emphasis on cooperation.⁸⁰⁴ Rather than concentrating on the interaction between the metropolis and the factories, this chapter considers the personal connections that developed between overseas settlements and across imperial boundaries.⁸⁰⁵ I argue that solutions developed overseas were rarely in phase with the warfare and economic competition in Europe. Rather, overseas directors' strategies adapted to regional power dynamics and, more often than not, crossed imperial boundaries.

Narratives detailing the relationship between the French and other European expansions in India and the west coast of Africa during the first half of the eighteenth century have been biased due to the focus on economic competition among European imperial powers and prevailing contemporary mercantilistic views appearing in sources. Additionally, emphasis on the wars waged in Europe contributed to the distortion of historians' interpretation of French relations with other Europeans in India and on the west coast of Africa. It has been assumed that war in Europe had impacted negatively inter-imperial relations in India.⁸⁰⁶ As a result, war dynamics in Europe have been artificially projected onto a setting where Europeans were in a situation of dependency on the local societies and authorities. The French position in the local economic and political context impacted their relationships with other European companies and colonies. Inter-imperial relationships in

⁸⁰³ Polónia and Owens, 'Cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Networks in Portuguese Overseas Expansion in the First Global Age, 1400-1800', 4, 15.

⁸⁰⁴ Drayton, 'Masked Condominia: Pan-European Collaboration in the History of Imperialism, c. 1500 to the Present'.

⁸⁰⁵ Mulich, 'Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations', 79.

⁸⁰⁶ Rose Vincent, 'Relations franco-anglaises avant 1754 de l'amitié à l'affrontement', in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 78.

Pondicherry and Ouidah could not merely be a close replica of the European context. The sustainability of the factories relied on overseas directors' connections, which crossed imperial boundaries whether or not they were subjects of enemy states in Europe.

This chapter interprets the concept of inter-imperial cooperation as the cooperative relationships created and maintained across the overseas settlements or trading stations of different European imperial powers. Cooperation is defined as a behaviour “*providing a benefit to the recipient, which could be beneficial and/or costly to the actor and has been selected because of its beneficial effect on the recipient.*”⁸⁰⁷ The fact that a cooperative behaviour is chosen points toward a directed action aimed at a certain goal, which therefore implies the exercise of agency.⁸⁰⁸ If a cooperative behaviour is advantageous to both the actor and the recipient, the cooperation is mutually beneficial. When cooperation benefits the recipient but not the actor, the behaviour can be altruistic or reciprocal. In the case of reciprocal cooperation, the actors take turns in benefitting from the cooperation and a cooperative behaviour that appears disadvantageous for the actor in the short term can prove beneficial in the long term.⁸⁰⁹ A cooperative relationship is therefore the result of the risk assessment and exercise of the cooperators' agency to achieve a common goal. Did inter-imperial cooperation exist in Pondicherry and Ouidah and, if so, how was it maintained and why?

This chapter hypothesises that cooperative inter-imperial relationships were instrumental to the sustainability of the factories under study. Understanding the interdependence that characterised French relationships with other imperial powers allows us to position overseas directors within the regional power dynamics of the early eighteenth century. The re-evaluation of the French companies' situation overseas during this period will illustrate the non-linear path of dependence that characterised French overseas expansion. This chapter begins by analysing on what basis inter-imperial cooperation took place or not, and the means through which it could be sustained. It then explores the motives behind putting such cooperation into practice and finally, I nuance the competitive side of inter-imperial relationships. This chapter contributes to determining overseas directors' agency by

⁸⁰⁷ This definition is based on previous adaptation in historical studies of evolutionary biology definition : West, Griffin, and Gardner, ‘Social Semantics’, 419. Cited in Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 6.

⁸⁰⁸ Ana Sofia Vieira Ribeiro, *Mechanisms and Criteria of Cooperation in Trading Networks of the First Global Age. The Case Study of the Simon Ruiz Network, 1557-1606* (University of Porto: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2011), 43.

⁸⁰⁹ West, Griffin, and Gardner, ‘Social Semantics’, 420.

showing the strategies overseas directors utilised, as well as the means and motivations for such strategies.

2. European power dynamics

By the time the French settled in Pondicherry, European power dynamics in the Indian Ocean were undergoing a transition period, changing from the strong position of the VOC to that of the EIC. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company had enjoyed a strong military and commercial position in the Indian Ocean. This powerful situation compared to other Europeans was due to its monopolistic strategies on multiple sectors of the trade.⁸¹⁰ The VOC attempted at controlling the Euro-Asian trade as well as the intra-Asian trade of the Company servants. Additionally, what distinguished the VOC from other European East India Companies, was the acquisition of monopolies and monopsonies in specific spices. The VOC obtained these through the military conquest of various spice producing islands and the negotiation of exclusive pepper contracts with local rulers. The monopolies and monopsonies – although never completely successful – stimulated the intra-Asian trade and generated income for the VOC in Asia. These profits financed the VOC trade and limited its need for bullion from Europe. Most importantly, they paid for the military costs and enabled the VOC to partially implement coercively monopolies against its competitors and force exclusive contracts on local rulers.⁸¹¹

The powerful position of the VOC started decreasing during the last decades of the seventeenth century.⁸¹² This process was due to multiple factors: the political involvement of local sovereigns in the trade and, the unsafety of parts of Asia generated by the decline of the Mughal and Safavid empires, the enhanced European competition and the shift in the demand side from spices to textiles, coffee and tea.⁸¹³ The EIC's organization geared towards allowing private trade of its servants was more adapted to the situation in Asia and became more profitable.⁸¹⁴ Like other European Companies, the EIC used military force to protect its trade. The competitive advantage of the EIC compared to the French or other European East India Companies was that its servants tapped into local capital markets in India and used local commodities to finance their private trade.⁸¹⁵ The political instability played in the EIC's favour as English merchants partially filled the void created by the decrease of Indian

⁸¹⁰ Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 20; 75.

⁸¹¹ Nierstrasz, 73.

⁸¹² Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 14.

⁸¹³ Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 77.

⁸¹⁴ Nierstrasz, 20.

⁸¹⁵ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 10.

merchants activities.⁸¹⁶ Importantly, English private traders benefitted from capital transfer from England.⁸¹⁷ In sum, the first decades of the French settlement in Pondicherry coincides with the height of the competition between the VOC and EIC, as the latter's position strengthened in the Indian Ocean. In this shift from the VOC to the EIC, the French Company was slowly increasing its importance.

A comparable shift in European power relations took place on the west African Coast. During the seventeenth century the strong Portuguese commercial monopoly had decreased and the Dutch WIC had taken control of various Portuguese forts and trading factories along the coast – particularly on the Gold Coast with the Dutch takeover of castle Elmina in 1637.⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, in the 1660s a peace treaty signed between the Dutch Republic and Portugal restricted severely Portuguese trade on the Gold and Slave Coast by forcing Portuguese merchants to pay a tax of ten percent of the value of the cargo brought from Brazil to Elmina.⁸¹⁹ Despite these restrictions, Portuguese commerce in the Bight of Benin restarted by the 1670s and by the end of the seventeenth century, many Portuguese merchants disregarded the tax.⁸²⁰

Simultaneously, the English who had been previously active on the west African Coast started forming a serious competitive threat to the WIC with the activities of the Royal Africa Company (1672).⁸²¹ The relationship between the WIC and the RAC in the last decade of the seventeenth century degraded among other things because of the English trade with Portuguese merchants from Brazil who evaded the WIC tax.⁸²² During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the interactions between the second WIC and the RAC companies remained conflictual, with the exception of the few first years of the Spanish Succession War.⁸²³ When the French West India Company tried to open a trading factory in Offra (Allada) in 1669, it was confronted with the conflictual European context and finally moved its factory to Ouidah in the following decades. By that time, the second WIC's area of operation on the west African Coast had shrunk and its slave trade was decreasing compared

⁸¹⁶ Mentz, 32.

⁸¹⁷ Mentz, 14.

⁸¹⁸ Henk den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven: scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674-1740* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997), 13–14.

⁸¹⁹ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 40–41.

⁸²⁰ Roquinaldo Ferreira, 'From Brazil to West Africa: Dutch Portuguese Rivalry, Gold Smuggling, and African Politics in the Bight of Benin', in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, ed. Michiel Van Groesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82; Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 194.

⁸²¹ Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 168–69.

⁸²² Ferreira, 'From Brazil to West Africa', 86.

⁸²³ Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 173–74.

to the English, French and Portuguese.⁸²⁴ The relations among Europeans in India and in the Bight of Benin during the first half of the eighteenth century were characterized by competition however as will be demonstrated in this chapter, they cannot be exclusively reduced to it.

3. The means of cooperation

Good correspondence and exchange of services

Aside from their relationship with Mughal governors and other rulers, directors of Pondicherry built relationships with other representatives of European imperial powers, mainly other European company agents. A large part of the archival evidence refers to the good relations between directors of Pondicherry and the English East India Company governors in Madras. For instance, in 1701 English ships stopped in Pondicherry and the officers on board dined at the French fort, exchanging food supplies for English goods.⁸²⁵ The Danish East India Company governors of Tranquebar also maintained good relationships with their fellow European company representatives in India, particularly the Dutch.⁸²⁶ When a new Danish governor arrived in India in 1690, he passed by Pondicherry on his way from Madras to Tranquebar to present his greetings to the French director.⁸²⁷ Martin identified him as “very keen on providing services to the company.”⁸²⁸

The relationships between the French, English and Danish Company representatives were fostered by frequent correspondence and a regular exchange of services. When the representatives changed, the correspondence was re-established and confirmed. When the Danish governor died in 1701 and was replaced by his vice director, the latter formally wrote a letter to Martin requesting the “*continuation of good correspondence*” and then wrote again in 1702.⁸²⁹ When the Dutch attacked Pondicherry in 1693, the Danish director of Tranquebar offered Martin a safe place for his wife and others who needed to retreat. Furthermore, the Danish sent refreshments to Pondicherry, along with some supplies which the French had bought in Tranquebar.⁸³⁰ The French reciprocated by transporting Danish employees or

⁸²⁴ Heijer, 217.

⁸²⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°33, diary of Martin, August-September 1701.

⁸²⁶ “*Les Hollandais et les Danois paraissent être dans une grande liaison entre eux*” in Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 55.

⁸²⁷ ANOM C2 63 f°161, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691.

⁸²⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin 22 February 1701: “*Mr le commandeur Danois de Tranquebar avec lequel nous courons d’intelligence, et fort porté à rendre service à votre compagnie*”.

⁸²⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May-June 1701: “*m’écrivoit en demandant une continuation de bonne correspondance*.” and C2 66 f°155, diary of Martin, February-March 1702.

⁸³⁰ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 321.

packages back to Europe on behalf of the Danish Company directors.⁸³¹ The reciprocity also took place in French relations with the English Company officials, through services such as lending small ships when the English needed them.⁸³² In return, small French boats called *quesche*, designed to sail on the Coromandel Coast, would also stop in Madras to take money on their way to Masulipatnam. These reciprocated services enabled the French to integrate financial channels on the Coromandel Coast, with probable outreach in the Indian sub-continent and beyond via English networks.

Relations with the Dutch were more distant, particularly after the occupation of Pondicherry from 1693 to 1699. No references of frequent “*good correspondence*” or exchange of services appear in the archives. However, the Dutch and the French directors did not always disagree. When negotiating with the Mughal authorities, they sometimes combined their forces. For instance, when freedom of the movements of goods and merchants was at stake, they joined together to ask the Mughal governor to write to Aurangzeb about the issues of restriction on “*the persons and goods of all Europeans throughout his dominions*.”⁸³³ According to the English governor, these negotiations succeeded because orders came from Aurangzeb to enable the Europeans “*to trade without restraints*.” While one can raise doubts about the applications of these orders in practice, the fact remains that the Dutch and the French Company representatives collectively acted against the trade restrictions. The fact that the Dutch generally abstained from “*good correspondence*” with the French can be explained by the power dynamics in the Indian Ocean. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the Dutch had achieved a stronger economic and political position than the French, the Danish and even the English. In this sense, the interdependence that characterised French, Danish and English on the Coromandel Coast did not apply to the VOC.

A comment deserves to be made about relations between the French director and the Portuguese on the Coromandel Coast. Contact with the Portuguese and Luso-Indians was frequent and mainly done for communicative and mercantile purposes. Contrary to references about the Dutch, English or Danish, interaction with what is referred to as “*Portuguese*” in the

⁸³¹ ANOM C2 65 f°33, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699.

⁸³² ANOM C2 66 f°33, diary of Martin, August-September 1701 and C2 66 f°39, diary of Martin, November 1701.

⁸³³ IOR/ G/19/35 (1703-1704) f°32, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, from fort St David to Madras, 14 March 1702/3 (old calendar) “*About nine weeks since we the French and the Dutch got the governor of this City to write the King to request that he would take off the restraint on the persons and goods of all European throughout his dominions [...] the king on his perusal there of immediately to resolve that orders should be issued out to all parts of his dominions that the interdictions should be taken off that they should trade without restraint as formerly which orders both the formentioned affirm are executed copy of what is arrived*”.

sources does not imply a personal relationship between the French director and the governor of a Portuguese settlement. The majority of what Martin calls “*Portuguese*” were not officials under the authority of the *Estado da India*, but *mestiços* who were born in Asia and had never been to Europe.⁸³⁴ Historians of the Portuguese presence in eighteenth-century Asia acknowledge that Portuguese trade is better described as a Portuguese influence that operated outside of the Portuguese empire, which was embodied by the *Estado da India*. Their role in enabling the French to integrate intra-Asian trade networks will be analysed further in the following chapter.

A striking feature of the overseas director’s inter-imperial relations in Pondicherry was his reliance on other imperial powers in India for communication with Paris and other French trading posts in India. A substantial part of communication with France occurred through English East India Company ships.⁸³⁵ English captains put the letters to the Parisian directors together with other letters and packages for the English directors in London.⁸³⁶ In turn, some packages and letters from Paris could arrive through Madras if they were put on an English ship in Surat.⁸³⁷ Moreover, Martin made use of the regular arrival of ships in nearby Madras to communicate with his fellow Company officials in Bengal, Surat and even China.⁸³⁸ Indeed, the French shared the trading space in both Bengal and Surat with the English and the Dutch. The widespread English country trade network made English officials an important communication element in the route to China for the French Company.

The Danish Company also contributed to French communication between India and Europe as well as the French trading posts in Bengal and Surat.⁸³⁹ In 1690, the aforementioned new Danish governor offered to safely deliver French letters back to Europe.⁸⁴⁰ When a Danish ship left Surat with goods for an Armenian merchant in Madras in 1702, the French Company director of Surat, Louis Pilavoine, took the opportunity to send

⁸³⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°131, letter of Martin, 2 October 1704 and Stefan Halikowski Smith, ‘No Obvious Home: The Flight of the Portuguese “Tribe” from Makassar to Ayutthaya and Cambodia during the 1660s’, *International Journal of Asian Studies*, no. 7 (1) (January 2010): 1.

⁸³⁵ ANOM C2 63 f°108, letter of Deslandes-Boureau and Martin, 17 October 1688 ; C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701; C2 66 f°39 November 1701; C2 66 f°42, diary of Martin, December 1701 ; C2 66 f°192-198, letter of Martin, 13 October 1702.

⁸³⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁸³⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°163, diary of Martin, June-July 1702.

⁸³⁸ ANOM C2 63 f°100, Letter of Martin, 29 November 1687; C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May 1701 ; C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701; C2 66 f°160, diary of Martin, April-May 1702; C2 66 f°166, diary of Martin September-November 1702.

⁸³⁹ ANOM C2 64 f°18, letter of Marin, 6 October 1692.

⁸⁴⁰ ANOM C2 63 f°161, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691. Other evidence of the transport of letters to the Company in Paris from Pondichéry by the Danes appears in 1703, ANOM C2 67 f°247, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705 and ANOM C2 67 f°122, letter of Denyon, 7 February 1704.

30,000 piasters, a Company employee and the patent letters from Louis XIV creating the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry.⁸⁴¹ There are no traces of payment for these services and it can be posited that the Danish Company representatives expected the French to offer services in return. Additionally, small “*Portuguese*” ships passing by Pondicherry transferred letters to and from the French Company agent in Bengal.

The directors used foreign communication channels to transport goods to Pondicherry. They freighted English ships with goods like saltpetre from Bengal to the Coromandel Coast.⁸⁴² The Armenian community in Madras attracted Armenian ships from Surat, which stopped in Madras on their way to Bengal and transported French goods or personnel.⁸⁴³ The dependency on foreign communication channels for not only the transportation of goods and personnel, but more importantly the exchange of information between Pondicherry, Paris and other Company trading posts in the Indian Ocean, demonstrates the Company’s inability to provide an efficient communication network for overseas settlements. The Company, as an institution, supposedly decreased transaction costs by running efficient communication channels. Despite the relative frequency of the Company’s ships coming to Pondicherry in the first years after the return of the French Company to Pondicherry in 1699, it remained reliant on Danish, English, Portuguese and Armenian channels for both trans-oceanic and intra-Asian communication. This system of communication did not change with the declaration of war in Europe between the English and the French.⁸⁴⁴

(Non-) effects of war

Martin heard rumours of a war starting in Europe pitting the French against the English and the Dutch from May 1701.⁸⁴⁵ However, he would not give credit to these whispers for two years. In this regard, the slow communication with Europe played in his favour. The countries formally declared war on May 1702 and, in November 1702, the flow of information about the declaration of war intensified. Rumours spread along the Coromandel Coast about the Dutch readying a fleet of twenty-four ships to re-take Pondicherry.⁸⁴⁶ In February 1703, Martin wrote to Paris that “*the officers of the English*

⁸⁴¹ ANOM C2 66 f°159, diary of Martin, April 1702.

⁸⁴² ANOM C2 63 f°56, letter of Deltor, 7 April 1686: “*deux mil mans ou environ cent quarante-quatre milliers salpestres qui ont esté mis à fret sur un bastiment anglois du Bengale*”.

⁸⁴³ ANOM C2 66 f°34, diary of Martin, September 1701.

⁸⁴⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°167, diary of Martin, November-December 1702; C2 67 f°8, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

⁸⁴⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May-June 1701.

⁸⁴⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°167, diary of Martin, November-December 1702.

*Company who are on this coast did not receive any notice [of the war].*⁸⁴⁷ In the English East India Company archive, it appears that the English agent of Fort David only became aware of England's involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession on 4 March 1703.⁸⁴⁸ It took nearly a whole year for the French and English companies to be officially informed about the declaration of war, which had left time for the Company representatives to ensure the continuation of their "*good correspondence.*"

When the War of the Spanish Succession officially broke out in India, relations among Europeans did not undergo major changes; contacts with the English in Madras and Fort David remained friendly and distrust of the Dutch grew stronger. Regular correspondence between the English and the French had already been preserved during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697). In February 1690, the governor of Madras wrote to Martin that he would not suspend his correspondence with him since he had not received such orders.⁸⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1703 the correspondence carried on: "*we have always maintained good correspondence with those of this nation who are near us in Madras and Goudelour, it continues. The principal officers assured us that war in Europe would not impede our good relations.*"⁸⁵⁰ This continuance was not a given, as the situation with the VOC illustrates. One of the Company employees in Pondicherry maintained a correspondence with a Frenchman married and established in Colombo. At the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, the resident of Colombo wrote to French Company employee that "*they could no longer carry on their correspondence since the Dutch were extraordinarily animated against the French because of the events in Europe.*"⁸⁵¹ Correspondence between the Dutch and French Company representatives on the Coromandel Coast, already rare before the declaration of war, reduced to a minimum during the war.

According to Martin, the official union between the English and the Dutch did not strengthen the friendship between the two powers. He wrote that "*it is certain that they hate*

⁸⁴⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°168 C2 67 f°5, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703.

⁸⁴⁸ IOR G/19/35 f° 29, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, letter from Fort David to Madras, 4 march 1702/3 (old calendar).

⁸⁴⁹ ANOM C2 63 f°152, letter of Martin, 20 February 1690.

⁸⁵⁰ ANOM C2 67 f°5, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703: "*nous avons toujours entretenu bonne correspondance avec ceux de cette nation qui sont proches de nous à Madras et à Goudelour, elle continue. Les principaux d'entre ces officiers nous ont meme donné des assurances que la guerre de l'Europe ne rompra point l'intelligence entr'eux.*"

⁸⁵¹ ANOM C2 66 f°159, diary of Martin, April 1702: "*Il n'y avoit plus de lieu à present d'entretenir la correspondance, que les hollandois étoient extraordinairement animés contre le françois à cause des mouvements en Europe.*"

each other and this hatred is reciprocal in India.”⁸⁵² Further evidence of the informal situation between the English and the French during the war is the fact that French soldiers chose to desert to the Dutch settlements rather than the English because they “*give them back to each other.*”⁸⁵³ The good relationship with the English led the French director to show some regret in September 1703, when he learned that the French ships *Maurepas* and *Pondicherry*, had taken the *Canterbury*, an English ship, as a prize when coming back from China in the Strait of Malacca.⁸⁵⁴ He was happy for the commodities this prize would bring to the Company, but added that “*it would have however been desirable that the prize would have been done on the Dutch rather than on the English since we enjoy such good relations with this nation.*”⁸⁵⁵ Most strikingly, the English offered protection to the French in Pondicherry when they were threatened by Dutch takeover, both in 1693 during the Nine Years’ War and in 1703, during the War of the Spanish Succession. The Danish made a similar offer in 1693, however, the interesting point here is that the English and the French fought against one another in both wars. This fact therefore strengthens the argument that wars in Europe had little effect on informal agreements between the English and French Company representatives on the Coromandel Coast.

When a Dutch official passed by Madras on his way to Pulicat a few months after the English governor’s offer, the Dutch ships and the fort of Madras fired their cannons to ostentatiously show the union between both nations.⁸⁵⁶ In the meantime, the French had accepted the help of the English Company, and the French Company’s merchandise, as well as some officials and family of Pondicherry inhabitants, were kept safe in Madras.⁸⁵⁷ This does not seem to have been a contradiction for Martin, since the informal and formal unions appeared to be compatible; while the English and the Dutch were formally allies in the European War, the English and the French were informal allies in India. When, at the eve of the War of the Spanish Succession, Martin explained to the Parisian directors of the Company why transferring all the commodities and the money of the Company to Madras was the safest option to limit the damages, he stated this formal and informal distinction clearly:

⁸⁵² ANOM C2 67 f°6, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703: “*Leur union avec les Hollandais ne contribue pas à cimenter l’amitié entre ces deux nations, il est certain qu’ils se hayssent, et cette haine est réciproque dans les Indes*”.

⁸⁵³ ANOM C2 67 f°132, letter of Boissieux, 9 October 1704: “*parce qu’on se les rends*”. Other evidences in Alfred Martineau, ed., *Résumé des actes de l’État civil de Pondichéry. 1, De 1676 à 1735* (Pondichéry: Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde française, 1917), 55.

⁸⁵⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°121, letter of Martin, 10 Februray 1704.

⁸⁵⁵ ANOM C2 67 f°24, “*Il auroit cependant esté à souhaitter qelle eut esté fait plutôt sur les hollandais que sur les anglois a cause de la bonne intelligence que nous avons avec cette nation*”.

⁸⁵⁶ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 55.

⁸⁵⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

*“Milords will maybe think that it is risky to put their belongings in the hands of these gentlemen [the English] because the war has been declared in Europe, we cannot doubt that England is against us, however we only have one solution in the situation where we are now, we do not see where else we could go, the signs of good will of these gentlemen showed towards us and the reciprocity of the friendly correspondence which we have maintained are points which convince us to accept their offer without hesitation, even if the interests of the Dutch and English are common in Europe, they are not for that reason better friends in India.”*⁸⁵⁸

In his justification to the Parisian directors, Martin summarised what had led to the cooperation between the English and the French Companies on the Coromandel Coast: the signs of good will through reciprocal and friendly correspondence. The “good correspondence” was regular, friendly and implied reciprocity. Along with the regular exchange of services, it was the basis for further cooperative relations. The maintenance of “good correspondence” enabled representatives from different companies to enter into an inter-imperial relationship of loyalty, despite the competition and the warfare in Europe.

After Martin’s death in 1707, the strategies of communication through foreign channels did not alter. There are references to the Parisian directors using the same channels to reach Pondicherry. In 1707, Parisian directors sent duplicates of their letters to Dulivier through Denmark, England, the Netherlands, Portugal and Marseille.⁸⁵⁹ They received three letters from Dulivier through England, and one through Denmark in 1708. Hébert used the same routes for his correspondence to the Parisian directors: “*I wrote to you via Surat and Tranquebar, this one through England.*”⁸⁶⁰ During the early years of both Dulivier and Hébert’s tenure, most letters passed through England and Denmark.⁸⁶¹ The recourse to foreign channels of communication under Hébert and Dulivier intensified between 1707 and 1709,

⁸⁵⁸ ANOM C2 67 f°10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703: “*Messieurs trouveront peut-être que c’est risquer que de mettre leurs effets entre les mains de ces Messieurs dont nous parlons, puisque suivant les apparences la guerre déclarée en Europe, nous ne pouvons pas douter que l’Angleterre ne soit contre nous, nous n’avons qu’une seule réponse à faire dans les conjonctures ou nous nous rencontrons, que nous ne voyons point d’autre lieu où nous jeter joint que les précautions que nous prenons, les témoignages que nous avons de la bonne volonté de ces messieurs pour nous et la correspondance réciproque d’amitié que nous avons entretenus ensemble sont des points qui nous peuvent porter à nous servir sans hésiter de l’offre qu’ils nous font [...] quoy que les anglois et hollandois soient unis d’intérêts dans les mouvements de l’Europe, ils n’en sont pas pour cela plus grands amis dans les Indes*”.

⁸⁵⁹ ANOM C2 13 f°79, letter of the Parisian directors to Hébert, 25 September 1708.

⁸⁶⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°206, copy of the letter sent by Hébert to Pilavoine in Surat, 11 December 1708: “*J’ay eu l’honneur messieurs de vous écrire par voye de Surat et de Tranquebar, celle cy par l’Angleterre*”.

⁸⁶¹ ANOM C2 68 f°317, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709 ; C2 68 f° 318, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709 ; C2 68 f° 320, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709 ; C2 68 f°322, letter of Hébert, 10 October 1709; C2 69 f°83, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714.

due to the halt of all French shipping to Pondicherry. Indeed, these years correspond to the transition from the East India Company to the first sub-contracting treaty with the Saint Malo merchants. The Company was unable to fit out ships after the last sent with Hébert on board, and the Saint Malo merchants dispatched their first ship in December 1708. The only solution for both the metropolitan directors and overseas directors was to use foreign channels of communication, even if they were technically enemies.

The mandates of Martin, Duliver and Hébert shared a common feature: the strong ties that united them with the English governor of Madras. When an uprising took place in Madras in 1707, Dulivier sent four small ships with some men to help the English ships to unload their cargoes.⁸⁶² It should be noted that Dulivier had to rely on his good relationship with the governor of Madras to make a loan in 1709, which he reimbursed with another loan from the Spanish in Manila. The access to credit among fellow European representatives, mentioned in chapter four, falls into the context of the exchange of services. As for Hébert, he explicitly referred to the close interpersonal relationship he enjoyed with the governor of Madras: *“I wrote to the governor of Madras to borrow a ship, he immediately granted one to me [...] the governor of Madras which I have met in Paris [...] remembers some services I provided to him and I can expect any kind of help from him at any time.”*⁸⁶³ In 1712, there was a shortage of rice in Pondicherry and the governor of Madras offered to supply Hébert with the necessary grain.⁸⁶⁴ The French reciprocated these services, for example when the French in Pondicherry lent surgical material to Madras and Dulivier agreed to sell gunpowder to English governor Edward Harrison (1711-1717).⁸⁶⁵ Even the minister of the Navy acknowledged the necessity to maintain peace with the English in his letter to Hébert in September 1712: *“this war, however, should not impede you to treat them [the English] well [...] to have consideration and respect for them, and friendship and to consider them as friends rather than enemies.”*⁸⁶⁶ The state of war did not alter either the good correspondence or the exchange of services and both mechanisms fostered English and French relations, which provided a good basis for potential future cooperation.

⁸⁶² ANOM C2 68 f°279, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

⁸⁶³ ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: *“ayant écrit au gouverneur de Madras pour avoir un vaisseau à fret, sur le champ il m’en a accordé un [...] qu’en tout temps par le moyen du gouverneur de Madras que j’ay connu à Paris [...] qui se ressouvient de quelque service que je luy ay rendu que j’en peux espérer toutes sortes de secours”*.

⁸⁶⁴ Council meeting minute, 16 February 1712 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 108.

⁸⁶⁵ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°190 (1708-1709) Public Proceedings Fort Madras; Council meeting minute, 19 November 1713 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 128.

⁸⁶⁶ ANOM B//34 f°469, letter of Pontchartrain to Hébert, 19 September 1712: *“cette guerre cependant ne doit pas vous empecher de les bien traiter [...] de leur marquer de la considération de lestime et de l’amitié et de les regarder plustot comme amys que comme ennemis”*.

Visits and collective action

In Ouidah, relations between the different European representatives were friendly. Given the proximity of the trading lodges and forts, agents maintained good inter-imperial relations through frequent personal visits. In his voyage to the Bight of Benin for the Royal African Company, William Smith described these daily meetings: “*near the European factories was a spacious place where grew a parcel of fine, tall, shady trees, under which the English, French and Portuguese governors, factors, sea captains walked, and transacted business every day as on a change.*”⁸⁶⁷ Therefore, overseas directors did not only engage in diplomatic relations with rulers but also with the other European representatives. Du Bellay (1733-1734) asked for boxes of wine from Bordeaux for the English and the Portuguese factors “*to engage them in living in union and understanding together as we have done until now and will hopefully do in the future.*”⁸⁶⁸ A year later, he also explained to the Company that the trade was improving, thanks to Hueda traders and his “*industrie*” with the English and his “*friends the Portuguese.*”⁸⁶⁹

Directors also fostered good inter-imperial relations by engaging in correspondence and paying visits to other European forts along the Bight of Benin. For instance, in 1743, Levet stayed in the Dutch fort of Elmina for four days and spent another four days at the English fort of Cape Coast Castle.⁸⁷⁰ However, while the situation of dependency and control under which the European factors were kept in Ouidah itself generated good diplomatic relations among them, they were not necessarily a given in the broader context of the Bight of Benin. At the time of Levet’s visit to Cape Coast Castle, the relationship with the English had grown delicate due to French attempts to create a trading post in Anamabo on the Gold Coast, which would bring them in direct competition with the English Royal Africa Company. The difference between these interactions can be directly linked to the stronger position of the English and Dutch companies in Cape Coast Castle and in Elmina, as opposed to in Ouidah.

In contrast, the situation in Ouidah forced European directors and factors to make difficult and strategic decisions collectively. During the conflicts between the kings of Allada and Hueda in the 1710s, the King of Allada attempted to attract European traders to his lands by sending “*daily invitations for us to go to Offrah [...] to establish the trade.*”⁸⁷¹ This was a

⁸⁶⁷ William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London, 1744), 193.

⁸⁶⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733: “*Je leur envoie chacun une autre pour les engager à vivre en union et intelligence ensemble comme nous avons fait depuis et comme j’espère faire à l’avenir*”.

⁸⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734.

⁸⁷⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

⁸⁷¹ TNA T70/1475 f°13 A, letter of Baillie, between 21 May and 15 June 1717.

difficult decision to make, particularly considering the risk of the Hueda King taking revenge. The English factor, William Baillie, wrote to the English Royal African Company in 1717 stating that he consulted with the French director on the topic several times. They agreed that it was more prudent to send some ships first to Jakin, the port of the Kingdom of Allada, before establishing a new lodge in Offra.⁸⁷² The extreme environment led the two competing company agents to advise each other on the best strategy. Similarly, when European representatives had to make demands to kings in Ouidah, they presented them collectively with as many demands as possible. For instance, after the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah, the French, English and Portuguese heads of the fort presented to King Agaja grievances about the abuses of the Dahomian captains in charge of the European trade. They complained that Dahomian captains visited their forts one at a time, three times a day, under the pretext of trade negotiations but, in reality, they came to drink brandy. Levet explicitly referenced the collective aspect of the talks with Agaja: “*I took advantage of my stay to complain together with the English and Portuguese directors against Alligny, Nançou and Zouglas captains for Dada of the French, English and Portuguese nations.*”⁸⁷³ Collective negotiations could have positive results; the King dismissed his three captains, replacing them with a single official called Tegan.⁸⁷⁴ However, it is unclear if the change was due to the complaint or if it was the result of an internal power struggle. Nevertheless, it appears that collective actions often took place, as a similar united negotiation occurred a year later. Du Bellay negotiated “*de concert*” with the Portuguese to recover some of their men who had been captured by the King.⁸⁷⁵

Given the frequency of French private ships arriving in Ouidah, directors relied less on other European ships than in India, utilising the French private merchants’ ships to communicate with Paris. One of the few cases of French use of other Europeans for their communication during this period was a report written by Vice-Director Levesque, which was sent through a Portuguese ship to the French consul in Lisbon.⁸⁷⁶ Levesque later returned to France in 1718 through Brazil and Portugal.⁸⁷⁷ A few letters passed through Dutch Company ships and, in reciprocation, the Dutch factor on the Guinea Coast passed some of his letters to

⁸⁷² TNA T70/1475 f°13 A, letter of Baillie, between 21 May and 15 June 1717.

⁸⁷³ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733: “*J’ay profité du séjour que j’y ay fait pour faire une plainte conjointement aux Ms. Les directeurs anglois et portugais contre Alligny, Nançou et Zonglas, capitaine pour Dada des nations Française, angloise et portugaise*”.

⁸⁷⁴ According to Levet, this change reduced the consumption of eau-de-vie from 10-14 *ancres* to 4-5.

⁸⁷⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734.

⁸⁷⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of Levesque, 1719.

⁸⁷⁷ ANOM COL E 285, personnel file of Levesque, letter of Levesque from Bahia, 24 December 1718.

the WIC through Nantes merchants' vessels in 1722.⁸⁷⁸ It was only when the effect of the Austrian succession in Europe negatively impacted the number of French ships coming to Ouidah that the dependency on foreign communication channels intensified.

Levet, the director during the 1740s, expected a decrease in the quantity of Company ships coming to Ouidah due to the war in Europe. Moreover, it is important to remember that Levet, in need of goods, had kept the last Company ship's merchandise and sent the ship back to France empty. However, the director had not counted on the drastic decrease in the number of French private ships arriving in Ouidah. On 1 February 1746, there had not been a French ship sailing to Ouidah since 5 December 1744.⁸⁷⁹ From 1727 to 1744, the port city merchants sent an average of ten ships a year to Ouidah; this dropped to three ships a year in 1745, to none in 1746 and 1747 and then one ship in 1748.⁸⁸⁰ Institutions like French chartered companies were supposed to provide protection and security in wartime, in order to decrease trade risks and, therefore, subsequent transactions costs.⁸⁸¹ However, it appears that the companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah, instead of ensuring the protection of wartime trade, delegated the trade to private traders. In 1709, the Company granted private merchants exclusive privileges to trade in Pondicherry. The majority of the merchants came from Saint Malo, and engaged in privateering ventures until the end of the war. In Ouidah, private merchants actively participated in the trade during the whole period under study. However, unlike the Saint Malo merchants in the Indian Ocean, they were not ready to assume the risk involved in making the voyages during wartime in Europe. As a result, all French shipping to Ouidah, by both the Company of the Indies and private merchants, halted for some years.

Consequently, Levet had to find alternatives ways to communicate with Parisian directors and, more importantly, to receive basic supplies. In his letter of 13 October 1746, Levet offers three solutions.⁸⁸² One option was to utilise the connection through Brazil and Lisbon. A correspondent or the French consul in Lisbon could pass the supplies or letters to a merchant from Bahia. There were enough licensed ships travelling from Lisbon to Bahia to offer the Company frequent opportunities to send their supplies. From Bahia, opportunities to

⁸⁷⁸ NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89, (scan 65), Journal of Sint George d'Elmina, 9 February 1722: "*Deze gaat met een franse schip komende van Nantes*".

⁸⁷⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746: "*nous n'en avons vu icy aucun depuis le navire l'aventurier de Nantes parti de cette rade le 4-5 décembre 1744*".

⁸⁸⁰ Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: www.slavevoyages.org last consulted 20.09.2017. After the war, the number of French port city ships increased steeply, with 6 in 1749 and 17 in 1750.

⁸⁸¹ North, 'Institutions, Transaction Costs, and the Rise of Merchant Empires', 24.

⁸⁸² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

reach Ouidah arose every three months.⁸⁸³ Another option was the Dutch channel. The Dutch Republic remained neutral until 1747, when Louis XV declared war on the Dutch Republic.⁸⁸⁴ Even if it had been declared earlier, the news of the war would not have reached the Bight of Benin immediately, and, the director could take advantage of this buffer. From 1744 to 1746, the director sent multiple letters via Dutch ships to the address of Pierre Testas and Son in Amsterdam.⁸⁸⁵

Pierre Testas was a Huguenot merchant and banker based in Amsterdam from at least 1697.⁸⁸⁶ Part of his business connected to overseas trade; he owned plantations in Berbice and shares in the English South Sea Company.⁸⁸⁷ In the early 1720s, he was involved in the sugar and indigo trade with merchants from Bordeaux.⁸⁸⁸ Additionally, Testas and his son were in contact with the directors of the Company of the Indies, as the latter provided them with a power of attorney in October 1743, to hire workers for the Company.⁸⁸⁹ Finally, the firm of Testas and Son kept close connections with Nantes merchants, Walsh and Shiell, who were particularly active in the trade on the Bight of Benin. In 1747, a contract stated that Wailsh sold sugar and indigo to Shiell in Saint Domingue, to be loaded on a Dutch ship for Testas and Son in Amsterdam.⁸⁹⁰ The connections Testas maintained with French traders and the directors of Company of the Indies throughout the War of Austrian Succession made him a reliable recipient for Levet's letters. The letters dated from 1746, received by the directors in Paris via the firm Testas and Son, attest to this. Similar to the directors in Pondicherry, Levet used foreign channels of communication to reach France.

Furthermore, Levet's strategy sought to use Dutch communication channels for supplying the fort, as well as sending letters. In 1746, in a desperate attempt to receive provisions, Levet proposed two options to the Parisian directors. First, the Company was to send the provisions to its correspondent in the Dutch Republic, who would then place them on the first Dutch ship sailing to the Guinea coast. Together with the directors' letters, the

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁴ Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire: Volume II: The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich, 1648-1806*, vol. 1 (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), 357.

⁸⁸⁵ ANOM C6 25, letters of Levet, 25 février 1744, 12 octobre 1746 and 13 octobre 1746.

⁸⁸⁶ SAA, NA, 3375, f°390, Testament of Pierre Testas, 16 August 1697; SAA, NA, 7982/ 93, Obligation to Pierre Testas, 13 May 1719.

⁸⁸⁷ SAA, NA 8009/1367, notarial deed in English about the Pierre Testas' shares in the South Sea Company, 18 February 1724; SAA, NA 8789, Contract of employment by Pierre Testas, 10 January 1741.

⁸⁸⁸ SAA, NA 7997/227, notarial deed in French about raw sugar sent from Bordeaux to Pierre Testas, 20 May 1721.

⁸⁸⁹ SAA, NA 11283/10, notarial deed giving Pierre Testas & zonen power of attorney for the French East India Company, 4 October 1743.

⁸⁹⁰ SAA, NA 11310/40, notarial deed in French about Pierre Testas & zonen giving power of attorney to a Nantes merchants over a shipment of sugar and indigo, 14 September 1747.

supplies were to be addressed to the Dutch governor general of Elmina, Jacob de Petersen. According to Levet, de Petersen could be trusted because he had always been helpful to the French and a letter had been duly delivered to Levet.⁸⁹¹ Alternatively, the Company could send everything that was necessary for the fort's survival to a correspondent in Holland, who would fit out a ship in his own name but on behalf of the Company. The ship would sail directly to Ouidah with the secret order of supplying the French. Levet would then pretend to buy the supplies from the Dutch ship and recommended in his letter that the captain should therefore preferably speak a little bit of French.⁸⁹²

Levet added that in the event of a war with the Dutch Republic, this plan could still hold until one month before the declaration of war, as it would leave time for the ship to unload supplies before the news reached the Bight of Benin.⁸⁹³ Levet's letters had been sent through these two channels themselves: in 1746 he sent duplicates through Brazil and Portugal, as well as the Dutch Republic.⁸⁹⁴ It remains difficult to assess if Levet's attempts to take advantage of the slow communication between Europe and the Guinea Coast succeeded, and if the Parisian directors put his advice into practice. However, there is evidence that the Parisian directors considered sending supplies to Ouidah on Dutch ships as an option. In September 1745, the Company directors in Paris asked merchants in the Dutch Republic if any of their ships would be willing to transport supplies to Ouidah. The Dutch responded positively, but on the condition that the Dutch ship be granted a passport ensuring its protection against possible French attacks.⁸⁹⁵ To persuade the minister of the Navy to grant the permission to the Dutch, the Parisian directors underlined that "*the subsistence of the employees of this Company on the Guinea Coast depends on this opportunity.*"⁸⁹⁶ Just as in Pondicherry, Parisian directors made use of the same foreign channels of communication to reach the fort of Ouidah as the overseas directors. They acknowledged the fort's dependence on foreign networks of communication and provisioning for its survival. The Company of Indies relied on other European networks to supply and communicate with its overseas settlements in both directions.

⁸⁹¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁴ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 1 February 1746: "*par la voie du Brezil*" and duplicata "*par voie de Hollande*"; letter of Levet, 13 October 1746: "*par voie du Brezil et de Lisbonne*" and triplicata "*par voie de Hollande*".

⁸⁹⁵ AN MAR/B/3/439, Council of the Navy, 11 September 1745.

⁸⁹⁶ AN MAR/B/3/439, Council of the Navy, 11 September 1745: "*Comme la subsistance des employés de cette Compagnie à la côte de Guinée dépend de cette facilité, j'espère que vous voudrez bien vous y prêter*".

Overseas directors of Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah maintained good relations across imperial boundaries. Primarily due to a shared cultural background, in some cases superficial friendly relations evolved through regular correspondence or visits and the frequent exchange of services or collective actions. In Pondicherry, cooperative relations between the French and the English fostered by “*good correspondence*” and exchange of services continued despite a declaration of war in Europe creating an enmity between the two imperial powers. The continuation of such cooperative relations depended on local power dynamics, rather than those in Europe. In Ouidah, the visits and collective action were a consequence of the weak position of authority held by European forts in Ouidah. Once outside of the direct authority of the Hueda or Dahomey kings, particularly in forts where Europeans had more power, such as Cape Coast Castle, European relations were less cohesive. In both cases, local power relations, rather than European ones, affected overseas directors’ decisions to undertake close relations with other imperial powers.

French companies relied extensively on foreign channels to communicate and supply their settlements. The mechanism occurred more frequently in Pondicherry, where overseas and Parisian directors used Portuguese, Danish and English channels to reach the Indian settlement. This method continued until the Saint Malo merchants began to send ships to Pondicherry in 1709. In Ouidah, apart from some exceptions, directors channelled most letters and provisioning through French private traders. Only after the declaration of war in Europe cut the fort off from private traders did overseas and Parisian directors turn consistently to foreign communication networks. The two main options were the Dutch, through the firm of Testas and Son and the WIC representative in Elmina, and the Portuguese, through merchants of Bahia and Lisbon. The “*good correspondence*” and visits fostered interpersonal relationships of loyalty between different imperial representatives. Exchange of services and collective actions developed into stronger cooperative relations.

4. The motives of cooperation

Emergency mechanism

European companies’ position in local power dynamics had an impact on relations between their representatives. Depending upon the military and economic threats from rulers or others, European overseas directors or factors decided to go further in cooperative endeavours. For instance, competition with the VOC was much more threatening to the English governor of Madras than a faraway war. At the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, Thomas Pitt entered into an agreement with Martin, to cooperate to prevent a

second Dutch conquest of Pondicherry.⁸⁹⁷ The help offered by the English East India Company was not purely altruistic; it was to their advantage that Pondicherry stayed French. The second Dutch attack on Pondicherry never took place, but the threat generated mutual cooperation between Martin and Pitt.

European company representatives in a vulnerable position towards Dutch or Mughal powers, among others, developed a sense of common cause founded upon their good correspondence and exchange of gifts and services. In 1702, Pitt sent a letter to Martin informing him of the blockade that the *faujdar* Da'ud Khan had started around Madras. In the same letter, Pitt added that they should also provide each other with artisans.⁸⁹⁸ In a second missive, Pitt emphasised the danger that Da'ud Khan represented for all European nations: *“the Mughal gave him [Da'ud Khan] the order to arrest all chiefs of Europeans nations to take them with him in front of the king where they would be forced to sign a promise to pay what the privateers have taken from his subjects [...] Orenzeb does not want Europeans to have any fortified places on his land since as merchants they do not need any.”*⁸⁹⁹ According to Pitt, his threat *“should bring them [Europeans] together and should push them to offer each other reciprocal assistance.”*⁹⁰⁰ The English governor included the orders of the Mughal emperor, translated into Portuguese, in the letter.

Martin compared the Persian version and the Portuguese version of the order and concluded that the Mughal orders were against the English exclusively.⁹⁰¹ The Mughal emperor sought revenge after English privateers attacked wealthy Mughal merchants in Surat. Pitt manipulated the documents to generate an uprising against Mughal power. The document clearly stated that Aurangzeb was not against European merchants, but against the territorial ambition exhibited by the fortifications. However, these two elements did not impede Martin's agreement with the need for a common front against the Mughals. Martin then received another letter from Pitt, who decided to write to the representatives of the French, Danish and Dutch companies on the Coromandel Coast, to gather all Europeans against

⁸⁹⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°6, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703.

⁸⁹⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°154, diary of Martin, February 1702.

⁸⁹⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°209, French Copy of the letter of Daud Khan to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 16 November 1701: *“[...] un ordre de prendre et arrester les chefs de toutes les nations d'Europe pour les emmener avec lui devant le roy, ou les forcer à signer une promesse de payer, ce que les forbans ont pris a ses sujets [...] Orenzeb ne veut pas que les européens ayent des places fortifiées sur ses terres n'en ayant pas besoin, n'estant que des marchands”*.

⁹⁰⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°155, diary of Martin, February-March 1702: *“doit porter à se joindre ensemble, et s'entredonner les assistances réciproques”*.

⁹⁰¹ ANOM C2 66 f°210, French Copy of the letter of Daud Khan to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 16 November 1701.

Mughal attacks.⁹⁰² Martin answered that the French would not be the last to join in this common cause, especially if it could stop the “*persecutions*.”⁹⁰³ To be assured of the equal investment of all European representatives, however, Martin requested a written record of the agreement, including penalties for those who did not keep their word. According to him, a similar deal had been made in Surat, where the Dutch, English and French had trading posts, but it did not materialise. Martin finished his letter by showing his determination to make such a union possible, on the condition of an equal investment from every “*nation*” just as an official international agreement.

Despite the fact that the coalition on the Coromandel Coast eventually failed, the English governor’s attempt is remarkable. It shows the need for cooperation and a common front to fight the unbalanced relationship the imperial powers had with Mughal rulers. Even if the arrangement among all the European companies did not materialise, either in Surat or on the Coromandel Coast, the fact that both Pitt and Martin, and probably the Danish governor as well, proposed this agreement illustrates how they all perceived this cooperation as mutually beneficial to developing their trade and settlement. However, local power dynamics both stimulated cooperative relations and limited them at the same time. This specific blockade was the same one that encouraged Da’ud Khan to contact Martin repeatedly and led to Desprez and Manucci’s diplomatic mission.⁹⁰⁴ Martin was on thin ice with the Mughal authorities and clearly tried to stay out of the conflict. Even if it was beneficial for the Company to help the English Company, he could not always. Da’ud Khan had sent two letters, forbidding the French to carry any merchandise to Madras. In fear of being deprived of supplies from the hinterland themselves, the French had to accept Da’ud Khan’s terms.⁹⁰⁵ Mutual cooperation between Martin and Pitt depended on their company’s position in local power relations. However, if they were both vulnerable enough to enter into a cooperative relationship where the benefits would outweigh disadvantages, the cooperation could materialise within the limits imposed by the Mughal power.

External military threats and the interdependent nature of the English and French Company’s relationship generated cooperation and preserved it. An instance in which the director of Pondicherry tested the limits of the cooperation illustrates the punishment

⁹⁰² ANOM C2 66 f°157, diary of Martin, March 1702.

⁹⁰³ ANOM C2 66 f°211, Letter of Martin to Pitt in Madras, February 1702.

⁹⁰⁴ See chapter 4.

⁹⁰⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°211, Letter of Martin to Pitt in Madras, February 1702. The same happened with the English officials of fort Saint David in Tegnepatnam: see ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702.

mechanisms used to maintain cooperative relations. In January 1709, the *Saint Louis*, the last Company ship in the Indian Ocean, took an English ship as a prize near Madras. The English ship was returning from the coast of Sumatra and its value was estimated at 40,000 *livres*.⁹⁰⁶ Immediately, the Company captain felt uneasy about the prize and considered returning it to the English because “*he felt that the English would have resentment and that they would complain at the court of the great Mughal.*”⁹⁰⁷ But the crew and officers decided against it and brought the English prize to Pondicherry. The governor of Madras reacted instantaneously and Hébert received “*fulminating letters*” as soon as the ship arrived in Pondicherry. The English governor threatened to attack the *Saint Louis*, but most importantly, he declared he would retain 20,000 *livres* worth of French Company goods, which had come in on two English ships from Bengal, together with French sailors.

Hébert, realising that the consequences of a conflict with either the English or the Mughal governor would be disastrous for the Company, gathered the council, the officers of the garrison and the merchants of the Company to discuss the possibility of returning the prize to the English Company. According to the director, the group unanimously decided to hand the ship and the merchandise back to Madras. Hébert further justified his decision by warning the board in Paris that French ships taking prizes near the Indian coasts “*breached the rule of the Great Mughal who would not bear any act of hostilities on his coasts.*”⁹⁰⁸ The argument of Mughal neutrality was only part of the reason why the director attempted to limit the prizes made on English ships. The other reason was that the French in Pondicherry could not afford a conflict with the English in Madras, as the maintenance of Pondicherry depended on their cooperation with the English. As a punishment mechanism, the English governor would immediately interrupt all cooperative activities with the French, including the transport of goods from Bengal and the common front against the Mughal ruler.

In Ouidah, the power of the Dahomian king over European representatives affected the way they interacted with each other. This was particularly true during the period of the Dahomian conquest, which generated fear and instability. The King of Dahomey’s power alternated between strong and weak, depending on the attacks from his neighbour, the King of

⁹⁰⁶ ANOM C2 68 f°304, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

⁹⁰⁷ ANOM C2 68 f°304, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: “*il sentoit bien que les anglois en auroient du ressentiment, et qu’ils ne manqueroient pas d’emporter leurs plaints à la cour du grand mogul*”.

⁹⁰⁸ ANOM C2 68 f°305, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: “*Les anglois disent que [...] par conséquent que nous contreveons à la volonté du grand mogul qui ne souffrira pas que sur ces coests on commette aucun acte d’hostilité.*”

Oyo.⁹⁰⁹ Conflicts with the Oyo kingdom forced the Dahomian army to shift to the hinterland. Coastal kingdoms often took the opportunity to rebel against the Dahomey, leading to an endemic insecurity that was detrimental to European forts and trade. Du Bellay, director during the Dahomian wars, was aware of the danger because he listed directors and factors, both French and English who had been cruelly “*massacred and made martyrs*” by the Dahomian kings. He even added that he did not see any alternative death for himself or his employees than being decapitated.⁹¹⁰

In this situation of fear, solidarity prevailed and cooperation served as an emergency mechanism. The Viceroy of Brazil acknowledged the necessity of inter-imperial solidarity in Ouidah to the King of Portugal: “*no fortress in the port of AOuidah [Ouidah] is capable of defending itself when the Africans attack [...], all together they can offer a stronger resistance.*”⁹¹¹ English governor Thomas Wilson explicitly stated this sense of common cause after the Dahomian army attacked the French: “*Governor Wilson answered that they have come down out of the Country in a hostile manner, without giving him the least notice, and attacked his Neighbours the French, he looked on it as the common Cause of all the Europeans settled there, who were bound to assist one another.*”⁹¹² After that attack, the English governor saw the predicament of all Europeans as a “*common plight.*” Wilson’s solidarity did not help Du Bellay, who was a lost cause. He had tried to take advantage of the conflict, pitting King Agaja against the Hueda King Huffon and his captain, Assou.⁹¹³ After the attack of the Dahomian army, Wilson attempted to protect Du Bellay, who was taken by the Hueda people and killed. The cooperative relations between Wilson and Du Bellay were limited by local power dynamics, which they could not alter.

Personal interest

Cooperative relations between the English and the French Company representatives were not necessarily free from personal interest. In July 1689, when the Nine Years’ War broke out in Europe, Elihu Yale, governor of Madras, offered Martin a safe place for his wife and other people who needed to retreat.⁹¹⁴ In September, Yale sent one of his men to

⁹⁰⁹ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 184.

⁹¹⁰ ANOM C2 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733.

⁹¹¹ APB 23 f°90, letter Vice Roy of Brazil to Lisbon, 30 July 1728: “*Aucune des forteresses construites au port d’Ajuda n’est capable de se défendre quand les nègres veulent l’attaquer [...] parce que tous réunis pouvaient offrir une résistance plus vigoureuse.*” Translated and cited in Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 146.

⁹¹² Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, 118.

⁹¹³ According to Snelgrave, Du Bellay had warned the Dahomian army that Assou would try to reconquer Juda and offered protection to Assou for money. Snelgrave, 119.

⁹¹⁴ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 48.

Pondicherry to pay a visit and reiterated the offer to protect Martin's wife, insisting that she would be safe and adding that he knew from reliable sources that the Dutch would attack Pondicherry.⁹¹⁵ According to Martin, the English governor had his own ships trading for his personal profit in India and wanted to protect these ships from a potential encounter with the French at sea. Martin reflected that maybe protecting his wife in Madras would enable the English to pressure the French into not attacking any of his private ships. Even if this supposition was not true, the fact that the English governor kept his own ships adds a variable to the equation. Indeed, English Company representatives strove for cooperation with the French not only to develop the English East India Company's trade and settlements in India, but also to protect their own investments and wealth, both of which were at stake.

The director could also take advantage of the interdependent relations with the English Company to establish his prominence in local power dynamics. When a conflict started between the English governor of Madras and the commander of the fort of Senji, Sarup Singh, in 1711, Hébert offered to act as the mediator in the dispute. He had received four "*copys of letters from Serrop Sing, Paula Beerza and the Buxee to inpowering him to sett a treaty on foot with us and leaving it wholly to him to make the peace.*"⁹¹⁶ This offer to mediate in a conflict that could harm the English East India Company came during the War of the Spanish Succession. Despite the war, the important role of mediator was still given to the French director. The choice had been forced upon the English governor, Harrison, who needed a third party in the dispute with Sarup Singh and he could not refuse the proposition of negotiating with their enemy, or the offer of help by the French. According to Harrison, Hébert had the power to ruin the affairs of the English East India Company by giving assistance to their enemies.⁹¹⁷ However, the English governor was not satisfied with the terms of the peace treaty negotiated by Hébert, stating that he would "*by no means sign to these articles as he has drawn them up*" and asked for a new treaty.⁹¹⁸ Furthermore, Hébert insisted on interfering in English affairs about the fortification of Madras, which in turn upset the English.⁹¹⁹

Hébert's overzealous behaviour was aimed at strengthening his personal relationship with the governor of Madras but, more importantly, at asserting French power, and by extension, his own power, with the commander of Senji. On one hand, he offered a service, which made the English governor indebted to him. On the other hand, by placing himself as a

⁹¹⁵ Martin, 3: 53.

⁹¹⁶ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°66, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 10 March 1711/1712 (old calendar).

⁹¹⁷ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°67, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 10 March 1711/1712 (old calendar).

⁹¹⁸ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°119, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 29 April 1712.

⁹¹⁹ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°126, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 5 May 1712.

third party in negotiations, he implicitly raised the French Company to a position of power before the commander of Senji. As mentioned above, instructions from Paris were not against cooperation between the English and the French in times of war in Europe. On the contrary, the Parisian directors grew worried that Hébert's interference in the dispute between the English and the commander of Senji would harm cooperative relations. They therefore acknowledged the French-English cooperation necessary to the survival of the settlement as they urged the director of Pondicherry "*to maintain good relations with them [the English] since the conservation of Pondicherry depends on it.*"⁹²⁰ An excess of intervention in English affairs out of personal interest would endanger the Company.

Dulivier was just as eager of intervening in English affairs to develop a personal network. In February 1714, Harrison quarrelled with the governor of Fort David in Cuddalore and they both wrote to Dulivier, asking permission for him to stay in Pondicherry while he prepared the accounts of the settlements. Dulivier accepted, stating that "*these type of things cannot be refused in any country of the world and especially not in a country like this one.*"⁹²¹ In their arrangement, Dulivier and Harrison agreed that the governor of Cuddalore had to hand in his accounts after two weeks or Dulivier would bring the governor of Cuddalore to the council of Madras for trial.⁹²² However, the governor of Cuddalore had sailed to France on a Saint Malo merchant ship and died in Paris. Dulivier later wrote to the Parisian directors that he had provided "*a great service to the English company for which he was very badly rewarded by the individuals occupying the highest ranks in these parts of India.*"⁹²³ Irritated, the Parisian directors replied that if Dulivier had accepted a deal that could damage the reputation of the French Company, he should comply with it. The directors ended the letter by ordering Dulivier to execute the agreements he made with the English or the Dutch in the future, "*in order to not compromise the good relations that the peace between France and these nations has restored.*"⁹²⁴ The directors had to navigate the fine balance between good relations maintained for the sake of the settlement and those developed on a personal level.

⁹²⁰ ANOM C2 14 f°165, reply of Dulivier to the orders of Pontchartrain, 1714: "*de se bien ménager avec les premiers puisque la conservation de Pondichéry en dépend*".

⁹²¹ ANOM C2 69 f°74, letter of Dulivier, 14 Februry 1714: "*ces sortes de choses ne se refusent guerre dans aucun pays du monde et particulièrement dans un comme celui-cy*".

⁹²² ANOM C2 14 f°165, letter of Dulivier to Pontchartrain, 1714.

⁹²³ ANOM C2 69 f°77, letter of Dulivier, 14 February 1714: "*nous avons aussy rendu un service considérable à la compagnie d'angleterre dont nous sommes des plus mal récompensés par les personnes qui occupent leurs premiers employés dans cette partie de l'inde*".

⁹²⁴ ANOM C2 14 f°165, Answer of the East India Company directors to the letter of Dulivier sent to Pontchartrain: "*nous écrivons à M. Du Livier d'exécuter à l'avenir les traittés qu'il fera avec les anglois et les*

In Ouidah, conflicts among European representatives were rare, but directors could take advantage of them when they happened. When the English factor attacked the Dutch factor with ninety men and imprisoned him in 1715, Ducoulombier released the Dutchman with Captain Assou and six *acquérats*.⁹²⁵ The Dutch factor was grateful and his superior at Elmina sent a thank you letter to Ducoulombier. When an interloper offered to bring the factor back to England, “*all asked for the governor to be the witness.*”⁹²⁶ This illustrates the fact that Ducoulombier’s position was central to the conflict mediation. Additionally, and perhaps this counted more to Ducoulombier, he received “*the compliments of the King and the big men of the Kingdom.*”⁹²⁷ Placing himself as an intermediary in a conflict enabled the director to enhance his power and reputation. This was the perfect situation for the director to establish his prominence as mediator, to strengthen his reputation with the Hueda King and his connections with other European representatives.

Additionally, similar to the situation in Pondicherry, the safekeeping of the peace in Ouidah was a necessity acknowledged by the board of directors in Paris. In their instructions to Ducoulombier’s successor, Bouchel, the Council of the Navy stated that “*after the expiration of the neutrality between the French, the English and the Dutch under the consent of the Hueda King for all the ships on his shores, the company allows him to renew it for as long as he judges necessary, recommending him to live in mutual understanding with these nations.*”⁹²⁸ The neutrality treaty could be renewed even if the countries declared war in Europe and the Parisian directors expected the continued peace between European trading nations to have positive effects on the continuation of the French trade in Ouidah. Ducoulombier, by protecting the peace in Ouidah, therefore also strengthened his position with the board of directors.

In Pondicherry and Ouidah, military threats and political unrest led directors to engage in cooperative relations with other representatives of European companies. In Pondicherry, threats could be generated by rulers or other European companies with a stronger position in

hollandois afin de ne plus compromettre la bonne intelligence que la paix à rétablir entre la France et ces nations”.

⁹²⁵ ANOM COL E 145 Mémoire Ducoulombier 1717 and C6 25 Mémoire Ducoulombier 1715

⁹²⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier 1714, “*Tous demandèrent que le directeur soit présent pour être témoin de l’accord*”.

⁹²⁷ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier, 1715: “*il receut des compliments du roy et des grands du royaume et l’applaudissement universel des peuples de la coste*”.

⁹²⁸ ANOM E 43, Personnel file Bouchel, Instructions of the Council of the Navy: “*Le temps expiré de la neutralité entre les françois, les anglois et les hollandois du consentement du Roy de Juda pour les vaisseaux qui sont dans ses rades, la Compagnie consent qu’il puisse la renouveler pour le temps qu’il jugera a propos [...] luy recommandant de vivre en bonne intelligence avec ces nations*”.

local power dynamics. In Ouidah, however, all European representatives within the Dahomian territory acknowledged the need for a common front. This cooperation was made possible by interpersonal relationships of loyalty built on regular correspondence or visits, as well as the exchange of services between different European representatives. Cooperation was mutually advantageous; actors gained strength by combining their efforts. Cooperation as an emergency mechanism therefore only took place when actors of the cooperative relations were relatively weak and vulnerable. Additionally, the emergency cooperation occurred within the boundaries created by local authorities. Directors could also exploit the interdependent relations linked to cooperation as an emergency mechanism for personal interests. Offers of cooperation were often motivated by private stakes, such as fostering personal assets or connections and establishing prominence in local power dynamics.

5. The nuances of competitive interactions

Competitive interactions have been widely stressed by the literature on European overseas companies. However, it has failed to acknowledge the negative impact of such competition on overseas settlements or forts and the strategies developed on the spot to curtail its damages.

Curtailling competition

The competition between the different European companies on the Coromandel Coast is illustrated by gift-giving sessions to Mughal rulers, where different companies' representatives attempted to offer more gifts, faster than the others. The main source of competition among the European companies came primarily from the VOC. This was particularly the case between the English and the Dutch. François Martin wrote that "*there is a furious jealousy between the English and the Dutch Companies.*"⁹²⁹ In 1701, Muslim ships attacked a Danish ship and an English ship and the English governor in Madras wrote to Martin that he suspected an alliance with the Dutch, since the attackers greeted the Dutch and left their ships unharmed.⁹³⁰ In the case of the French and the Dutch companies, the most obvious element of competition was the Dutch occupation of Pondicherry between 1693 and 1699, which left the French fearful of a potential future Dutch attack.⁹³¹ During the War of the Spanish Succession, the French did not dare leave their ships in Pondicherry for too long, in

⁹²⁹ ANOM C2 65 f°60, letter of Martin, 15 February 1700: "*Il y a une furieuse jalousie entre la compagnie anglaise et hollandaise*".

⁹³⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°26, diary of Martin, July 1701.

⁹³¹ ANOM C2 63 f°141, letter of Martin, 10 October 1689.

case of a Dutch attack.⁹³² Therefore, the director paid close attention to events in the nearby Dutch settlements by regularly sending his men to spy in Nagapattinam and receiving letters from the Capuchins, who lived south of Pondicherry, which kept him up to date with the actions of the Dutch.⁹³³

The fear of the VOC harmed the French presence in Pondicherry and the communication among French settlements and with Paris. Dutch ships posed the main threat to French fleets; the Dutch frequently attacked or seized French ships.⁹³⁴ French letters and packages intended for other Company officials in India or headed for France were also intercepted by the Dutch.⁹³⁵ However, the French were as guilty as the Dutch of mistreating ships. The VOC factor in Nagapattinam, Coymans, complained about these incidents to Martin.⁹³⁶ As evidence of planned competitive behaviour, a report entirely devoted to the ways in which the French could interrupt Dutch and English trade in India can be found in the French archive.⁹³⁷ However, there was a large discrepancy between theory and practice when it came to what the Company was able to do in India. Martin realised that this competition was harmful to the Company in Pondicherry and decided to limit it as much as possible.

On 13 January 1705, a French fleet seized the Dutch ship the *Gulden Vogel Phenix*, and brought it to Pondicherry. Dutch company agents and the commissary Bernard Phoonsen, who were on board, were accommodated in the fort and the Dutch governor of Nagapattinam sent two of his men to negotiate the prisoners' ransom.⁹³⁸ In the organisation of the Dutch East India Company, the high government of Batavia sent the commissary to visit and check all the factories of the Dutch company in India.⁹³⁹ One commissary was in charge of the eastern coast of the Indian subcontinent, the other one of the western side, and they would switch every year.⁹⁴⁰ In the settlements of the VOC, the visiting commissary ranked first after the council, if there was one, in the hierarchy. Due to Phoonsen's high position, Martin believed he could negotiate much more than a ransom, and that it would be advantageous to

⁹³² ANOM C2 66 f° 164, diary of Martin, July-August 1702.

⁹³³ ANOM C2 66 f° 161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702; f° 168, diary of Martin, December 1702; f° 170, diary of Martin, January 1703.

⁹³⁴ ANOM C2 63 f° 145, 10 October 1689. Two ships going back to France with their merchandise were seized at the Cap of Good Hope.

⁹³⁵ ANOM C2 67 f° 10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

⁹³⁶ ANOM C2 66 f° 12, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁹³⁷ ANOM C2 66 f° 138, *Mémoire sur les entreprises qui se peuvent faire sur les places qui appartiennent aux anglois et hollandois que pour interrompre seulement leur commerce dans les Indes*, 1701.

⁹³⁸ ANOM C2 67 f° 250-258, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705.

⁹³⁹ J. Aalbers, *Rijcklof van Goens, commissaris en veldoverste der Oost-Indische Compagnie, en zijn arbeidsveld, 1653/54 en 1657/58* (Groningen: Wolters, 1916), 27.

⁹⁴⁰ Aalbers, 28.

settle a ceasefire with the Dutch. This was further motivated by the fact that the Mughal general Da'ud Khan had impeded the consolidation of French fortifications; the Dutch could take advantage of French weakness, ally themselves with the Mughals and take over Pondicherry. According to Martin, "*it would have been difficult to fight against these two nations if they were united.*"⁹⁴¹ Martin justified his strategy by pointing out the direct link between the situation with the Mughals and the attempts at peace with the Dutch: "*what we wrote about the moors made us see how to take advantage of the prize on the Dutch commissary.*"⁹⁴² The French Company's weak situation in Pondicherry led the director to try to curtail the competition with the VOC.

When he mentioned a potential ceasefire, the director insisted on the mutual inconvenience of the conflicts in India.⁹⁴³ Phoonsen first replied that the negotiation of a local truce exceeded his powers. Martin reminded him of the Dutch treatment of the imprisoned French officials in Batavia in 1693 after their defeat: the Dutch sent them back to Europe. The director threatened the VOC employees with the same fate if they did not agree to a treaty, claiming that the truce would be as beneficial to the Dutch as to the French. To this, the Dutch agents replied that it could hardly be the case, since they held more power than the French in the Indian Ocean. In response to the argument that negotiating such a truce exceeded the Dutch commissary's power, Martin replied that he had received as little power to sign this treaty from Louis XIV as the Dutch had from the council in Batavia.

After further discussions and negotiations, Phoonsen's secretary, who spoke French, gave orders that came from the council of Nagapattinam. The commissary needed a confirmation that the council of Nagapattinam would support his treaty. After the Dutch agents of Nagapattinam gave Phoonsen the power to arrange the Dutch Company's affairs on the Coromandel Coast, he could sign a ceasefire treaty between the French and the Dutch. However, Phoonsen knew that his superior at the council of Batavia would never ratify the local truce he was about to sign. The situation was difficult for the Dutch prisoners. The monsoon was over, which meant that few ships could reach Pondicherry to liberate them and, additionally, a Dutch ship was coming back from Japan and would be taken as a prize by the French if Phoonsen did not ratify the peace treaty. No matter how strong the Dutch were in

⁹⁴¹ ANOM C2 67 f°251, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: "*Il auroit été difficile de pouvoir nous soutenir contre ces deux nations unies*".

⁹⁴² ANOM C2 67 f°252, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: "*Ce que nous marquons à l'égard des mores nous a porté de voir de tirer quelque utilité pour votre compagnie de la prise du commissaire hollandais.*"

⁹⁴³ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 4: 159-164.

this region when compared to the French, in this situation they were forced to sign or they would be sent back to Europe.

After weighing the pros and cons, Phoonsen and his agents resolved to sign the treaty on the assumption that if the council of Batavia refused to acknowledge its validity, the treaty would be cancelled.⁹⁴⁴ The treaty covered the geographical area between Nagapattinam and the “*Pointe des Palmes*,” fifteen leagues away from the entrance of the Ganges River but no further, because the commissary had no power over the Dutch settlement in Bengal. The French desired a truce that would cover all of India, but Phoonsen could only negotiate for the Coromandel Coast. In turn, the Dutch agreed to sign the treaty if the French returned the *Gulden Vogel Phenix* and its cargo. The French refused but allowed them to buy back the ship, to which the Dutch replied that their Company had enough ships. Finally, Martin and Phoonsen, as well as the first administrator for the Dutch Company in Nagapattinam, Hendricq Gronsus, signed the treaty on 27 January 1705.⁹⁴⁵

Martin, the mastermind behind the treaty, intended it to secure Pondicherry against any future attacks and to allow the major settlement of the Company to develop. Indeed, more than a ceasefire, the second article of the treaty stated that “*there will be a perfect understanding in the said region without harming each other directly or indirectly.*”⁹⁴⁶ The director handed back the prisoners and because there were rumours of attacks from the commander of Senji, he gave his new allies an escort of twenty-four soldiers to Nagapattinam. He then wrote that he thought to have made an advantageous deal for the Company. By taking advantage of the VOC prize, he managed to negotiate a mutually advantageous local truce with Dutch officials, which would enable the French in Pondicherry to communicate and trade with their settlements on the Coromandel Coast and Bengal without fear of Dutch action. This local truce shows the level of French dependency on limited inter-imperial competition for their survival in Pondicherry, even with their rivals in Europe and in India. Unfortunately for Martin’s plan of peace among the European companies on the Coromandel Coast, as soon as the councillors of Batavia heard about the local truce they fired Phoonsen, along with the agents and the Dutch Company officials of Nagapattinam who ratified the treaty.⁹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this episode illustrates Martin’s strategy to make use of the

⁹⁴⁴ Manucci, 4: 164.

⁹⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, VOC 1.04.02 inv. no 8919 f°343-349.

⁹⁴⁶ ANOM C2 67 f°245, Treaty between France and the Dutch Republic in 1705: “*Qu’il y aura dans la dite étendue une parfaite intelligence entre les deux nations sans pouvoir chercher directement ou indirectement les voyes de se nuire*”.

⁹⁴⁷ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 4: 237.

competitive environment as a way to create cooperation. However, this cooperation could not be forced upon the VOC, which enjoyed a stronger position than the French Company and did not see it as a mutually advantageous deal.

Outside source of competition

Competitive aspects were not exclusive to the French Company's relations with the VOC. Despite their interdependence, the English and the French companies showed some signs of mistrust and competition. Stating that the French had full confidence in the English—friendly neighbours in India and enemies in Europe—would be as partial as neglecting the importance of their cooperation altogether. French overseas employees restricted the military information they sent to the Parisian directors when they used English channels of communication, a sign that they did not fully trust their allies.⁹⁴⁸ On two instances during the Nine Years' War, Martin coded his letter to the directors in France because he was unsure how the letter would reach Surat before being sent to Europe.⁹⁴⁹ However, this technique was not recurrent and does not appear to have been used during the War of the Spanish Succession. Furthermore, despite their good relations with the English governor of Madras, directors of Pondicherry remained as critical of the information provided by the English as they did the Dutch "*because we cannot completely trust the information the English and the Dutch want or dare to publish.*"⁹⁵⁰ The French and the English did occasionally take each other's ships as prizes. During the War of the Spanish Succession, voyages to the Persian Gulf and Bengal were risky because of the possibility of Dutch attacks, but also English attacks as well.⁹⁵¹ In 1703, the Company took the English ship *Canterbury* as a prize and enjoyed the sale of its cargo, even if the French director showed some regret.

Perhaps the best illustration of the mistrust between the English and French company representatives was the constant spying. Shortly before the declaration of the War of the Spanish Succession, Martin, while enjoying a "*good correspondence*" with Pitt, still sent some of his men to both English and Dutch settlements to "*be informed about their movements.*"⁹⁵² On the English side, they paid careful attention to French affairs in

⁹⁴⁸ ANOM C2 67 f°20, letter of Denyon, 27 September 1703: "*la voye que l'on utilise pour escrire en Europe ne permettant pas qu'on le risque ny que l'on s'étende beaucoup en narration*".

⁹⁴⁹ ANOM C2 63 f°175, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691 and, ANOM C2 64 f°12, letter of Martin, 30 September 1692.

⁹⁵⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°205, copy of the letter sent by Hébert to Pilavoine in Surat, 24 July 1708: "*car on ne peut pas tout à fait ajouter foy a ce que les anglois et holandois veulent ou osent publier*".

⁹⁵¹ ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702: "*la guerre étant déclarée en Europe, le retour du golfe de Perse étant dangereux par une rencontre de vaisseaux anglois et holandois*".

⁹⁵² ANOM C2 66 f°39, diary of Martin, November 1701: "*afin d'estre informé de leurs mouvements*".

Pondicherry. Pitt sent a spy to the French settlement and asked the agent in Fort David to do the same, to corroborate the information.⁹⁵³ The French aimed most of their intelligence efforts at the Dutch settlement of Nagapattinam. Martin regularly sent at least two spies, who did not know each other, to double-check information.⁹⁵⁴ Other companies' widespread information networks prevented the Parisian board from keeping the arrival and itinerary of their ships secret. The information about the arrival of a French ship spread faster through rumours among all European settlements than through official French channels.⁹⁵⁵

In the 1710s, English surveillance of Pondicherry intensified. In January 1710, Harrison sent spies to Pondicherry to gather information about the affairs of the French Company.⁹⁵⁶ Additionally, recurrent references to the movements of French ships around Pondicherry appear in the English Company archive.⁹⁵⁷ The main concern was not the East India Company itself, but the Saint Malo merchants who had been granted the trade monopoly to India. The English Company proceedings in Madras relates that the “*great fears, and apprehension they have [at Fort David] of the St Mallo ships at Ponticherry of their having some ill design in agitation.*”⁹⁵⁸ During the War of the Spanish Succession, Saint Malo ships were equipped to be corsairs. In January 1710, the threat of being made a prize by the Saint Malo merchants was so high, the English decided that ships at Fort David would not be fully loaded. The Saint Malo merchants sailed to the Indian Ocean in squadrons and made a great part of their returns by seizing Dutch and English ships.

Harrison accused the Saint Malo merchants of importing the War of the Spanish Succession into India, where it did not belong. He wrote to London: “*tis true the crowne of England hath maintained a great and just warre for eight years past against the King of France [...] but this warre in Europe ought not to extend to these parts of the world which the French ships doe.*”⁹⁵⁹ The English governor probably referred to the neutrality imposed on European representatives residing within the Mughal emperor's territories. Although the Mughal emperor imposed the neutrality, both English and French overseas directors wanted to secure peace locally on the Coromandel Coast. The *modus operandi* of the Saint Malo

⁹⁵³ IOR G/19/35 f°138, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, Letter from fort David to Madras, 9 November 1703.

⁹⁵⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702 and C2 66 f°178, letter of Martin, 15 February 1702.

⁹⁵⁵ ANOM C2 67 f°131, letter of Martin, 2 October 1704: “*les précautions que vous prenez messieurs pour oster aux autres nations la connaissance de vos desseins ne réussissent pas suivant vos intentions [...] ce bruit s'est répandu le long de la coste, et à passé de la dans l'Inde*”.

⁹⁵⁶ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°4, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 9 January 1709/10 (old calendar).

⁹⁵⁷ IOR/P/ 239/ 84 f°145, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, December 1708.

⁹⁵⁸ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°18, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 31 January 1709/10 (old calendar).

⁹⁵⁹ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°167, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 20 September 1710.

merchants, particularly during the War of the Spanish Succession, became a serious threat to the informal local peace and cooperation. Unlike when a Company captain took a ship as a prize, the director of Pondicherry did not have the power to return the prize when it was judged too detrimental to the Company, as had happened in 1709 with the *Saint Louis*. The threat of the Saint Malo merchants on the local truce and good relations came from the “*outside*.” The Parisian directors themselves knew about the danger of sending privateering ships to India. In 1708, they warned the minister of the Navy that it would upset Indian traders and interrupt the navigation of Mughal subjects, which would ultimately have a negative impact on the Company’s settlements and on their overseas employees.⁹⁶⁰ The Saint Malo merchants’ aggressive strategy threatened the informal peace between Hébert and Pitt or Dulivier and Harrison and, unfortunately for the overseas directors, they had no control and would have to adapt to it.

Competition in inter-imperial trade

Similar to Pondicherry, French directors in Ouidah remained wary of their fellow European representatives. The collective action of European factors when visiting the Dahomian king coupled with the underlying competition among them because their position as trading partners was at stake. As mentioned earlier, King Agaja purposefully made the environment competitive and he measured the zeal of European factors by the amount of gifts they brought and how early they arrived.⁹⁶¹ Furthermore, while the trading space in Ouidah remained free of European imperial conflicts, this was not the case outside of the Hueda or Dahomey kings’ sovereignty. Indeed, one of the reasons why Levet was completely isolated from France during the 1740s was that the English took the only ship sent by the Parisian directors to supply the fort as a prize along the West African Coast. French attempts to create a trading station at Anamabo were also a source of competition between the French and the English companies.⁹⁶²

However, in Ouidah itself, the main reason behind the competition among European representatives was to have the upper hand in inter-imperial trade with the Portuguese-Brazilians. The slave trade in Ouidah was overwhelmingly oriented towards Brazil, especially Bahia. Portuguese-Brazilian captains traded gold and tobacco with all European factors in

⁹⁶⁰ ANOM C2 13 f°4, letter of East India Company directors in Paris to Pontchartrain, February 1708.

⁹⁶¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 26 August 1733.

⁹⁶² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744.

Ouidah.⁹⁶³ Bahia-based merchants took part in the slave trade; the King of Portugal authorised the sale of their low-quality tobacco in exchange for enslaved Africans in 1644. According to Pierre Verger, the main reasons for the connection between Bahia and Ouidah were the following: third-quality tobacco from Bahia, which was indispensable for the economic balance of Bahia, had been forbidden in Portugal, and the Guinea Coast therefore became the main market for the Bahia merchants; additionally, according to the treaty of 1641, tobacco was the only Portuguese commodity allowed on the Guinea Coast by the Dutch; finally, the King of Portugal, in an attempt to prevent illegal gold trade with the English Company, forbade merchants from Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian ports where tobacco was not produced to trade to the Guinea Coast.⁹⁶⁴ Thanks to tobacco, Bahia traded directly with the Guinea Coast and circumvented metropolitan authority. In the long run, it led to the emergence of an influential Brazilian community in Ouidah.⁹⁶⁵

The rivalry between Lisbon and Bahia for control over the trade on the Bight of Benin created a distinct Brazilian merchant community, whose economic interests opposed those of Lisbon.⁹⁶⁶ Their situation in Ouidah was uncomfortable because they did not have a fort before 1721 and, according to the treaty with the WIC, all Portuguese-Brazilian ships had to pass by Elmina to pay a ten percent tax on their cargo.⁹⁶⁷ Furthermore, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, there were no rules regarding the number of ships allowed to leave Bahia for the Guinea Coast, which resulted in a highly-competitive environment on the slave market. The merchants who fitted out the ships only bought forty to sixty enslaved Africans out of the whole cargo and gave permission to the captain and the crew to engage in slave trade for their own benefit. Once the captain finished his personal trade, the rest of the crew had to finish their own trade. This practice led to a steep increase in prices when the numerous Portuguese-Brazilian ships came ashore, and particularly when the crew had to follow the captain and finish their trade, as it could double the price of captives.⁹⁶⁸

The English factor, Blainey, had previously been a merchant in Bahia. To keep the Brazilian trade under control, he proposed the construction of a canal connecting his fort to

⁹⁶³ NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1. 05. 14, inv. no. 89, Journal of Sint George d'Elmina, 4 January 1722: “*Capitein Torres de welke twee maenden hier geweest heft en van alle europeanse goederen leveren goud en tabak*”.

⁹⁶⁴ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 28–29.

⁹⁶⁵ Robin Law, ‘The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah’, *Slavery & Abolition* 22, no. 1 (1 April 2001): 22–23.

⁹⁶⁶ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 132.

⁹⁶⁷ Verger, 42.

⁹⁶⁸ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast, 1722.

the sea. The aim was to make other nations pay for the right to use the canal. Understandably, King Agaja and his council did not accept the proposal and Ducoulombier was very shocked by it. However, as it happens, Ducoulombier himself admitted to proposing a similar project “*to let our men watch over the Portuguese trade to avoid fraud.*”⁹⁶⁹ Short of controlling it, European representatives all actively took part in the Brazilian trade. When the English governor had no English ships ashore in Ouidah, he automatically traded with the Brazilians. In April 1718 Baillie, an English factor, wrote to his superior at Cape Coast Castle: “*Since my last have purchased pretty many slaves and am still continuing to do so in order to supply the Portuguese.*”⁹⁷⁰ A great part of the English factor’s activities was to provide the Portuguese-Brazilian with slaves, and the same was true for the Dutch factor, who had a trading lodge in Savi until the Dahomian conquest.

The small amount of Dutch ships coming to Ouidah did not negatively affect the trading activities of the Dutch representative, as “*the Dutch trade all the time in their trading station and sell captives to all nations especially to the Portuguese for gold powder.*”⁹⁷¹ The first gold mines in Brazil were discovered in Bahia and Minas Geraes in 1698, which resulted in an increased demand for a workforce, and thus illegal trade ensued in the Bight of Benin.⁹⁷² The attraction of the gold trade led European representatives to take over the role of intermediary between African traders and Brazilian ships, traditionally taken by Luso-Africans.⁹⁷³ The Portuguese-Brazilian’s formal fort in Ouidah in 1721 raised opposition from other European representatives. If the Portuguese-Brazilians had their own fort, they would not need to trade via other forts and the French, among others, would no longer enjoy the gold powder revenue.⁹⁷⁴ Portuguese-Brazilians had undercut the European factors who competed to be their middlemen.

Inter-imperial interactions in Pondicherry and Ouidah did not reclude plenty of ship prizes and spying, conflicts and rivalry. However, in analysis of the competition in Pondicherry requires recognising the nuance that directors attempted to curtail the competition with other European Companies, even with the VOC. Aware that the competition

⁹⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier, 1714: “*de faire veiller par nos gens de si près le commerce des portugais pour qu’ils ne fraudulent pas*”.

⁹⁷⁰ TNA T70/1475 f° 29, letter of Baillie, 30 April 1718.

⁹⁷¹ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire concernant la colonie de Juda, Côte de Guinée, 1722: “*ils traitent en tous temps dans leur comptoir et vendent leurs captifs à toutes les nations dans la disette surtout aux portugais en poudre d’or*”.

⁹⁷² Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 47; 67. About the illegal gold trade between Bahia and the Royal African Company see Verger, 46–53.

⁹⁷³ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 46.

⁹⁷⁴ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of Levesque to the French Consul in Portugal, 20 March 1719.

would harm Pondicherry's survival, they tried to maintain a local truce with the Dutch and the English on the Coromandel Coast. Saint Malo merchants brought competition with the English to the Coromandel Coast, which the directors had no power over. On the Bight of Benin, competitive relations occurred mostly outside of the Hueda and Dahomey kings' territory. Nevertheless, some aspects of the inter-imperial relations in Ouidah included rivalry in gift-giving and, more importantly, in access to Portuguese-Brazilian gold and tobacco.

6. Conclusion

Overseas directors' agency manifested itself through their interactions with other European imperial powers in Pondicherry and Ouidah. The transition from superficial, friendly relations based on a common cultural background to cooperation was made consciously, through regular correspondence, visits, gifts and reciprocal services. A declaration of war in Europe did not necessarily negatively impact the continuation of correspondence and exchange of services among European imperial powers. Cooperation between different European powers depended on their representatives' strategy and on their position in local power relations rather than on warfare in Europe. In India, inter-imperial interactions have to be placed in the larger context of the transition in European power dynamics from the VOC to the EIC and the early stage of expansion of the French in India. In the Bight of Benin, European power relations were tamed by the authority of local sovereigns. The position of European representatives in local power dynamics had to be weak enough for the cooperative relations to be mutually advantageous. In this case, declaration of war in Europe, even if it created enmity between two imperial powers, would only reinforce the existing cooperation. Indeed, the disruption of French shipping from Europe led to overseas directors' increased isolation, which had the double effect of giving more latitude to overseas directors to cooperate with other European companies and increased the necessity to do so.

The motivation for cooperation was therefore French interdependence with other European imperial powers due to economic or military threats. These local threats generated a context of power relations that did not align with that of Europe. This is particularly evident in Ouidah, where moments of solidarity coincided with great local disturbances, such as the Dahomian conquest. The cooperation generated by local power context, also limited this very context. In Pondicherry, the fear of revenge from Da'ud Khan prevented the French director from helping the English Company supply Madras. At the same time, the interdependence acted as both the generator of the cooperation and the reason for its continuation. As illustrated by the returned English ship made prize by the *Saint Louis*, the Company's

dependence on the English transport of goods from Bengal made sure the cooperation would endure. Lastly, cooperative behaviours were not exempt from personal interests. Directors could take advantage of the interdependent relationship to strengthen their personal position of power as mediator, while enhancing their reputation with local rulers and reinforcing their personal networks across imperial boundaries.

Competitive aspects of inter-imperial relations in Pondicherry and Ouidah were less conventional than usually portrayed. In Ouidah, competition between European representatives mostly took the form of rivalry to access inter-imperial trade with Portuguese-Brazilians from Bahia. In Pondicherry, the competition came from French private merchants who threatened local inter-imperial agreements. Overseas directors' interests were to curtail these competitive behaviours and they exercised their agency to attempt to make local truces possible. The overseas and Parisian directors, who realised the need for peace to develop their settlements despite the formal state of war and economic competition in Europe, used the argument of the Mughals or the Hueda kings' imposed neutrality on European representatives to their advantage.

The inter-imperial cooperative interactions and, particularly, the attempts to curtail wars in Europe to spill over in India or on the west coast of Africa were not necessarily restricted to the timeframe or the regions presented in this research. Indeed, in 1744, the director of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix tried to secure an agreement with the English governor of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta to prohibit any hostilities East of the Cape of Good Hope.⁹⁷⁵ These negotiations failed, the power dynamics had evolved during the previous decades and the French Company's trade had increased and started to be perceived as a threat for the EIC.⁹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the attempt demonstrates that the strategy of men-on-the-spot to protect the Company and their interests crossed imperial borders. Similarly, it was not particular to Pondicherry or Ouidah as a treaty of non-aggression on the Senegal and Gambian coast was signed between the French Senegal Company and the Royal Africa Company in 1705.⁹⁷⁷ Companies were empowered to make treaties "*without regard to Peace*

⁹⁷⁵ Matthew Smith Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748* (London [etc.]: Longman, 1995), 185.

⁹⁷⁶ Henry Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive: The Beginning of Empire* (London: Methuen, 1920), 3–4.

⁹⁷⁷ Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française. T. I*, 120.

or War in Europe”.⁹⁷⁸ The impact of war in Europe on the interactions among overseas European settlements and factories deserves to be further investigated.

These instances, when individuals’ agency complement institutions’ limitations, demonstrate how individuals shaped the French expansion by engaging in cooperative relations across imperial boundaries and relying on these relationships to develop their settlements. Warfare in Europe could not be projected on regions where the Company depended on directors’ personal networks, which more often than not crossed imperial boundaries. Labels such as the French, the English or the Dutch were not important in this peculiar context. What mattered was their position in local power relations and the subsequent personal connections across imperial boundaries, which enabled the survival of the factories. Inter-imperial cooperation was an important step towards integrating regional networks, which would allow not only the survival of the factories but potential economic gains. Interpersonal relations of loyalty across imperial divides were instrumental to this infiltration, as is argued in the following chapter.

⁹⁷⁸ Charles Davenant, *Reflections upon the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa, through the Whole Course and Progress [...]*, vol. III (London, 1709), 34.

Chapter 6: Integrating regional trading networks

1. Introduction

The survival of the factories was made possible through strategic relations with rulers and calculated inter-imperial cooperation. However, overseas directors' strategy still needed to ensure the economic development of the factories, in addition to their survival. Historians of the French East India Company have largely discounted the period covering the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) up to the creation of the Company of the Indies in 1719. According to Marguerite Labernadie, "*from 1706 until 1722 not only had Pondicherry made no progress, but it was close to ruin.*"⁹⁷⁹ Aniruddha Ray qualifies it as a "*stagnation period*" and in her recent work, Marie Ménard-Jacob describes that period as the "*fatal blow of the War of the Spanish Succession.*"⁹⁸⁰ Furthermore, Glenn Ames states that the Company's activities came to a virtual halt during the War of the Spanish Succession.⁹⁸¹ In addition, in the history of French expansion, the trading post of Ouidah is perceived as marginal, despite its role in the transatlantic slave trade supply.⁹⁸² However, these statements are only true if one exclusively emphasises inter-continental trade between either the Coromandel Coast or the Bight of Benin and France. Overseas directors knew that the evolution of the factories from mere survival to economic development could only happen by integrating regional trading networks. How did they integrate the Company's trade into these networks in their position of multi-lateral go-betweens?

Historians usually portray the reorganisation of the Company of the Indies, a few years after its creation, as the start of French intra-Asian trade.⁹⁸³ Indeed, after 1722, the Company of the Indies allowed its employees to trade privately, therefore provoking an increase of the sources available to study the burgeoning trade.⁹⁸⁴ Similarly, the study of French expansion on the West African Coast largely disregards the economic role of south Atlantic trading circuits. However, denying the role of intra-Asian activity that occurred before 1719 and the

⁹⁷⁹ "De 1706 à 1721 non seulement Pondichéry n'a pas progressé mais il fut à deux doigts de sa ruine" in Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 118..

⁹⁸⁰ Ray, *The Merchant and the State*, 336; Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 263.

⁹⁸¹ Ames, 'Colbert's Indian Ocean Strategy', 559.

⁹⁸² Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française. T. 1*, 121; 447; Jean Meyer et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 131.

⁹⁸³ "[...] for previously [to 1719] they had concentrated in their European trade and not participated in regional commerce" in Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, xi.: Mantiennne acknowledges some activities of François Martin in association with Chula merchants in Frédéric Mantiennne, 'Le commerce intra-asiatique français au 17e et 18e siècles', in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 52.

⁹⁸⁴ Mantiennne, 'Le commerce intra-asiatique français au 17e et 18e siècles', 61.

trading networks that spanned the south Atlantic as part of the French expansion in India and the West African Coast is restrictive. Using the perspective of overseas directors to explore their interpersonal relations of loyalty aims at unearthing a more diverse and dynamic economic reality in the factories, which places the agency of the overseas directors in the centre of the analysis.

The focus on overseas directors' personal networks also refutes the historiographical opposition between the interests of early modern chartered companies and private merchants.⁹⁸⁵ The opening of the West African trade south of the Sierra Leone River from 1713 to 1720 and the transfer of the East India Company's granted monopoly to private merchants from 1709 to 1719, denote a complete delegation of Company trading monopolies to private interests during the second decade of the eighteenth century. However, this period is no indication of a teleological evolution towards free trade during the eighteenth century. Indeed, the port city merchants phase of the 1710s ended in 1719 with the creation of the Company of the Indies, which was granted the trading monopoly of the West African Coast and Indian Ocean, among others. Nor was this period the result of a confrontation "*between two economic philosophies*" in which port city merchants would defend free trade and the companies would embody protectionism.⁹⁸⁶ Even if they could be opposed to chartered companies at times, port city merchants often "*gained a great deal from their association with a privileged company.*"⁹⁸⁷ Furthermore, as has been demonstrated for the English East India Company, private trade of company servants in India cannot be limited to the Indian Ocean or isolated from their necessary connection to merchants of London.⁹⁸⁸ Overseas directors' personal networks of loyalties crossed not only imperial, ethnic and cultural boundaries, but also the dichotomy between chartered companies and private traders.

The grant of the Indian trade monopoly to Saint Malo merchants changed the role of the factories in Asia. While they remained under the responsibility of the Parisian directors, the overseas directors became intermediaries between private merchants and Indian trade. The concession of privileges to private merchants therefore generated a "*second principal*" for overseas directors, in addition to their first principal in Paris. In Ouidah, private merchants had always been highly active, and therefore the directors of the fort had virtually always had

⁹⁸⁵ Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 93.

⁹⁸⁶ Hopkins, 94; Jean-Pierre Hirsch and Philippe Minard, "Laissez-nous faire et protégez nous beaucoup" : pour une histoire des pratiques institutionnelles dans l'industrie française (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle)', in *La France n'est-elle pas douée pour l'industrie ?*, ed. Louis Bergeron and Patrice Bourdelais (Paris: Belin, 1998), 150.

⁹⁸⁷ Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 97.

⁹⁸⁸ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 284.

two principals: the French traders under licenses and the Navy council or Parisian directors. Following Emily Erikson's argument on the mutually beneficial relationship between private traders and the English and Dutch East India Company, I argue that French port city merchants preferred overseas directors to be well-connected and well-informed rather than simple executants with no local and regional integration—even if it meant they engaged in self-interested activities.⁹⁸⁹ On one hand, overseas directors enabled principals to access otherwise unreachable information. On the other hand, overseas directors benefitted from the support of port city merchants both locally and when reporting back to their main principal, the Parisian directors. I further argue that these mutually beneficial agreements were only possible if an interpersonal relationship of loyalty between overseas directors and port city merchants existed. This chapter will therefore start with the different strategies used by overseas directors to integrate Company trade into local and regional trading circuits. The second section will explore overseas directors' cooperative relations with port city merchants through two cases, selected on the basis of the surviving evidence of port city merchants' petitions or testimonies in favour of overseas directors.

2. Attempts at self-sustainability

To understand the overseas directors' strategies to integrate regional trading networks, one first needs to know what pre-existing personal connections overseas directors benefitted from. Martin made his career in the Company's ranks and some of his family members worked in the Company factories in Asia.⁹⁹⁰ However, his family network played a limited role in the Company integration into regional trading networks. To infiltrate these circuits, an overseas director had to reach outside of his family or the Company. For instance, a former agent of the Company, called Poutho, married and living in Merguy (Myanmar), regularly sailed to the Coromandel Coast, where he provided Martin with information about the state of the Kingdom of Siam.⁹⁹¹ Martin wanted news from Siam because it was the bridgehead for the Chinese trade. Taking another example, Martin could count on his connections with the Huguenot Chardin, in Madras to access the pre-existing English country trade routes. In 1701, Chardin enabled the sale of French laces in Manila and corals in China, on behalf of the

⁹⁸⁹ Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 174; Nierstrasz, 'In the Shadow of Companies: Empires of Trade in the Orient and Informal Entrepreneurship', 210.

⁹⁹⁰ For instance, his son in law, André Boureau-Deslandes became the director of the trading post in Bengal in 1688. Additionally, some his nephews came to India as bookkeepers for the Company, one of them, Cuperly became the treasurer and inspector of merchandise in Bengal in Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 40.

⁹⁹¹ ANOM C2 66 f°163, diary of Martin, June-July 1702.

Company.⁹⁹² Generally speaking, the connection with the English Company employees in India would be instrumental to accessing economic networks regionally.

Martin's successor, Dulivier, was in a good position to fully enjoy the English connection. Through his marriage to Françoise Moisy, the daughter of an English businessman, Dulivier acquired an acute knowledge of European trade and owned a trading house in London.⁹⁹³ His marriage provided him with a regular correspondence with London merchants, and his father-in-law joined him first in Bengal and then in Pondicherry.⁹⁹⁴ Most importantly, during his time in Bengal Dulivier had close contacts with the governor of Madras Thomas Pitt. Traces of their frequent private correspondence appear as soon as 1699. In his letters, Pitt refers to Dulivier as his "*good friend and old acquaintance*"⁹⁹⁵ and congratulated him for his new position when Dulivier becomes director of Ougly. The main purpose of this private correspondence was to engage in private trade, illegally in the case of Dulivier. They exchanged information about the current prices and types of commodities most demanded in their market. Pitt sent goods from China to be sold in Bengal and asked Dulivier for raw silk, taffetas, long pepper among others.⁹⁹⁶ The profits of the Chinese goods were to be invested in the above mentioned commodities and sent back to Madras around six months later. However, if there was enough time between the operations, Dulivier was allowed to use the money for his own investments.⁹⁹⁷ Dulivier further recommended some of his business contacts to Pitt and the latter took the opportunity of their business relationship to ask for some French wine.

Furthermore, in the years between his two tenures as director of Pondicherry, 1708 to 1713, Dulivier stayed in India as a private businessman until 1711, when he returned to France. Although the archives provide no details on his activities, he developed local trading connections during these years.⁹⁹⁸ Regarding Hébert and his personal relations relevant for access to regional trading networks, there is only evidence of contact with the governor of

⁹⁹² ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁹⁹³ ANOM E 152, f°286, personnel file Dulivier, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the navy council 1717.

⁹⁹⁴ ANOM C2 68 f°312, letter of Hébert, 2 February 1709.

⁹⁹⁵ BM Add MSS 22842, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 4 June 1700.

⁹⁹⁶ BM Add MSS 22843, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 3 September 1700: "*If your market be encouraging I will make you a consignment on the arrival of our china fleet if you send up any goods to these parts let it be raw silk taffetas, long pepper*".

⁹⁹⁷ BM Add MSS 22846, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 16 February 1702/3: "*I will readily allow you for the time you are out of money or serve you at any time on like occasion here*".

⁹⁹⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°80, letter of Dulivier, 14 July 1714.

Madras when they were both in Paris.⁹⁹⁹ As for the directors in Ouidah, their pre-existing connections are more difficult to assess. Ducoulombier and Bouchel built experience in the Spanish American trade at the service of the Asiento Company prior to their directorship. The only other director of Ouidah who could have pre-existing interests towards the south Atlantic trade was Levet. He gained experience as vice-director and director interim in the 1730s. Consequently, when he came back in the 1740s, he most probably had, if not the connections, then at least the knowledge of how to integrate into the trading circuits to Brazil. How did the regional trade infiltration take place in practice?

“Le vaisseau est réputé français”

Except for some references to the intra-Asian trade of private French merchants, it is generally acknowledged that the country trade of the French East India Company began with the Company of the Indies in 1719.¹⁰⁰⁰ However, directors of Pondicherry made early attempts during the first East India Company. As early as 1685, Martin insisted on the importance of infiltrating intra-Asian trading networks to Manila and China for the economic development of Pondicherry. The access to Manila allowed French traders to acquire silver from South America through the Pacific route. According to Dennis Flynn’s estimates, the volume of silver reaching China through the Acapulco-Manila Galleon would, at times, equate to all the precious metal brought through the West-East route by the Portuguese, English and Dutch combined.¹⁰⁰¹ Manila served as entrepôt, connecting American silver from Mexican and Peruvian mines with the Asian market.¹⁰⁰² Silver was a necessary commodity for the Chinese trade. When China’s economy changed from a paper money system to silver-based during the fifteenth century, China became the dominant buyer of silver worldwide.¹⁰⁰³ The value of silver subsequently increased in China and reached double the European value.¹⁰⁰⁴ In this silver flow, European companies and the Portuguese *Estado da India* became middlemen between America and Asia, or Manila and China, and should not be perceived as driving forces.¹⁰⁰⁵

⁹⁹⁹ ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, xi. Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 179.

¹⁰⁰¹ Flynn, ‘Arbitrage, China, and the World Trade in the Early Modern Period’, 261.

¹⁰⁰² Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, ‘Born with a “Silver Spoon”: The Origin of World Trade in 1571’, *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (1995): 201.

¹⁰⁰³ Dennis O. Flynn, ‘Silver in a Global Context, 1400-1800’, in *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE, Part 2: Patterns of Change*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, vol. 6, *The Cambridge World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 215.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Flynn, 216.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Flynn and Giráldez, ‘Born with a “Silver Spoon”’, 205.

If the Company could not sail to Manila or China, it could try to plug into the intra-Asian trading circuits extending to the Coromandel Coast. The English had small ships at their disposal, which they used to transport their merchandise along the Coromandel Coast to Madras. Martin argued that such small vessels would be useful for coastal trade, but also to attack Spanish ships. Two Spanish ships loaded with goods sailed from Manila regularly to trade in Madras and Portonovo. According to Martin, these ships were ill-equipped and easy to take as prize, if the Company had small ships.¹⁰⁰⁶ Additionally, these ships would enable Martin to enjoy a stronger position in power relations with commander of Senji, Sarup Singh. The ships would be enough to impede the trade of Sarup Singh's subjects on the Coromandel Coast and would give leverage to Martin in future diplomatic or commercial negotiations. The Company would not need to hire extra French crew because Martin hired local sailors. Despite Martin's advice, no small ships appear to have been sent to Pondicherry.

In 1701, Martin continued to inform the directors and minister of the Navy in Paris about the potential benefits of the country trade: "*there are some intra-Asian trades which are profitable, the country trade to China is the safest way to make profit, the trade to Manila can be advantageous, concerning Achem and other places it depends on the occasions.*"¹⁰⁰⁷ Aside from the small vessels that had not been sent, Martin asked the Company to send at least 200,000 *livres*, specifically designated to engage in this trade. The 200,000 *livres* would be an investment that would bring multiple advantages to the Company, as it would also attract great and wealthy merchants to Pondicherry, like in Madras.¹⁰⁰⁸ In February 1702, Martin gave further information about the necessary cargoes for the country trade: "*the cargoes are made out of pataque to exchange for gold and the returns from China are curiosities from the country, silk, tea and porcelain.*"¹⁰⁰⁹ Martin's successors followed the same strategy, making the same demand for small ships with small French crews that would be completed by Indian sailors. Martin added that they should not be afraid of the war since it "*would be easy to sail the ships under Armenian and Malabar names.*"¹⁰¹⁰ If the directors in Paris appeared to be interested in the inner workings of the intra-Asian trade networks, they did not take action immediately. In the meantime, Martin relied on his personal connections to develop this trade.

¹⁰⁰⁶ ANOM C2 63 f°46, letter of Martin, 18 January 1685.

¹⁰⁰⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701: "*Il y a des commerces que l'on peut faire de l'Inde en Inde avec profit, celui de Chones est le plus seur, celui de Manilles n'est pas réglé pour les profits, mais il y a de temps à autres des coups à faire, à l'égard de l'achem et des autres lieux, l'on les entreprend suivant que l'on trouve les occasions avantageuses*".

¹⁰⁰⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°5-11, letter of Martin 22 February 1701.

¹⁰⁰⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°178, letter of Martin, 15 February 1702.

¹⁰¹⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°284, letter of Hébert, 12 February, 1709.

In order to infiltrate intra-Asian networks with little support from the Parisian directors, overseas directors relied on Hindu, Portuguese, Armenian, and English traders. For instance, Indian merchants contributed to French integration into the sub-continental trading networks. In 1701, merchants from the “*North and South*” of India came to buy twenty-four boxes of corals.¹⁰¹¹ After some negotiation over the price, the merchants asked the French to provide them with a means of transporting the corals to Portonovo, where they were headed. Martin probably offered this service to attract merchants and build a sort of customer loyalty. Besides precious metals, corals were one of the only goods imported by the Company that were in high demand in India. The importance of corals to Pondicherry’s regional integration made Martin strongly opposed to the East India Company outsourcing the Chinese trade to the *Compagnie de Chine*, which was made of French private merchants. The director of Pondicherry worried about the influx of corals this new company would bring on the market.¹⁰¹² The lack of Company silver made the corals integral to the director’s attempts to enter local trading circuits.

Contact with Armenian merchants gave the French access to the intra-Asian trade with Manila. In practice, the Manila trade meant access to silver, which in turn was used for the Chinese trade. In 1701, an Armenian merchant wrote to Martin offering to buy part of the textiles woven in Pondicherry, to trade them to Manila.¹⁰¹³ For the director of Pondicherry, this meant a real opportunity to integrate the Manila market, even if it was done indirectly through Armenian merchants. Marcos David, an Armenian merchant, and his son came to the Coromandel Coast from Manila and asked Martin to prepare four to five *balles* of textiles for shipment six weeks later. The merchants of Pondicherry were unable to fulfil the demand at such short notice and Marcos David sailed away to Madras. Martin was disappointed; he saw the Armenian merchant’s offer as a way of “*opening here the commerce to Manila.*”¹⁰¹⁴ In an attempt to salvage the situation with Marcos David, Martin offered to buy some of his merchandise, but the prices were too high for the Company and Martin had to abandon the deal. Aside from the indirect infiltration into the Manila market, partnering with Armenian merchants also ensured better access to credit networks, a service always needed by the Company.

¹⁰¹¹ ANOM C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701.

¹⁰¹² ANOM C2 66 f°157, diary of Martin, March 1702.

¹⁰¹³ ANOM C2 66 f°18, diary of Martin, April-May 1701.

¹⁰¹⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°160, diary of Martin, May 1702: “*afin de commencer d’ouvrir icy le commerce pour les manilles*”.

Martin's connections also enabled the Company to have opportunities to actively participate in the intra-Asian trade. In 1700, the English had no ships available for a voyage to China and Pitt heard that three ships would soon arrive to Pondicherry from France. Pitt proposed that Martin sent one of these ships to China for the benefit of the French Company and the English private traders, or, if the French preferred to dispatch the ship themselves, he would load some English goods on it. He gave Martin the freedom to decide on the condition of this "*partnership*." Unfortunately, the rumours of the Company ships arriving from France were false and the English governor offered the same deal to the Danish governor in Tranquebar. The latter provided the English with a ship, which left for Canton on 17 July 1700.¹⁰¹⁵ Another way of infiltrating the English country trade network was to have a French vessel join the English ships on their way to China. In 1701, Martin received news from his contacts in Madras that a French ship had arrived in Malacca with English ships.¹⁰¹⁶ In the last instance, indirect access to the Chinese trade could take place through small ships, involving both Portuguese and Armenian merchants that came to Pondicherry regularly to trade merchandise from China—mainly textiles from their country trade.¹⁰¹⁷

Martin and his successors realised that what made the success of neighbouring Madras so considerable was the private intra-Asian trade of English Company employees and their association with local merchants.¹⁰¹⁸ It was common knowledge in India that the key to the success of the English country trade was a reliance on local merchants and capital. The English themselves described this mix of English and local capital in their country trade ventures, stating "*tis a truth well known that the stocks adventured on the several country ships in this place and other ports belonging to the English, such stock sent to the sea is not allways all of it properly the English but, that of the natives are pretty much concerned and even the great men.*"¹⁰¹⁹ The legal private trade of the English East India Company servants gave the Company a competitive advantage over its counterparts in the Indian Ocean trade. It allowed the English Company servants to tap into local capital markets and trading routes. Besides, close connections with private merchants in London enabled Madras based merchants to access capital.¹⁰²⁰ Although the contact with London were primarily aimed towards remitting capital back to the metropole, recent research has showed the existence of

¹⁰¹⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin 22 February 1701.

¹⁰¹⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°42, diary of Martin, December 1701.

¹⁰¹⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°18, diary of Martin, Avril-May 1701; f°160, diary of Martin, April-May 1702; f°169, diary of Martin, January 1703.

¹⁰¹⁸ ANOM C2 69 f°14, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

¹⁰¹⁹ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°167-168, Wednesday 20 September 1710.

¹⁰²⁰ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 87.

an English capital market in Madras.¹⁰²¹ This capital market facilitated and increased commercial as well as financial activities of English private merchants in Madras. The English governor of Madras, Thomas Pitt was prominent country trade merchant in India, he had contacts in with commissioners in London and, additionally, operated as a banker in Madras.¹⁰²² The English commercial elite in Madras balanced between investments in country trade in the Indian Ocean and private trade with the metropole.

In addition to the English example, the itinerary of the Company ship, the *Saint Louis*, which took Hébert to Pondicherry via the South Sea, inspired Hébert's vision to adopt this route as a way to develop Pondicherry. According to his view, the Company should dispatch ships to the South Sea to sell French goods for silver and send them from there to India, either through the Philippines or the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁰²³ While the English were a source of inspiration for the directors, Hébert felt that they should be avoided as intermediaries. However, the Company did not send any more ships after the *Saint Louis*, because they outsourced their monopoly to the Saint Malo merchants. In practice, the English intermediary proved indispensable for possible intra-Asian voyages during Hébert's tenure. For instance, in February 1709, Pitt offered to outfit an English ship in order to transport ninety to a hundred barels of pepper from Calicut to Pondicherry.¹⁰²⁴ The Dutch, who attempted to establish a monopoly on pepper, complained about Pitt's involvement in the French pepper transport from Calicut to Pondicherry.¹⁰²⁵

Another possibility, which Dulivier used during the years of isolation, was to trade with the Mascarene Islands and, particularly, to supply slaves to the growing plantations. The inhabitants of the island of Bourbon expressed their strong need for workforce and they asked the director of Pondicherry to send them slaves. Dulivier saw in this need another way to reach economic self-sustainability in Pondicherry and he traded slaves to the island of Bourbon in the name of the Company.¹⁰²⁶ Evidence of regular and substantial slave trade from Pondicherry to the Mascarene Islands do not appear in the sources. However, this reference shows that it was a feasible option for Pondicherry directors. The possibilities of engaging in

¹⁰²¹ Mentz, 102.

¹⁰²² Mentz, 186.

¹⁰²³ ANOM C2 68 f°232, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

¹⁰²⁴ ANOM C2 69 f°14 letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710 and Council meeting minute, 11 February 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 73.

¹⁰²⁵ NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 f°163-166, letter of Johannes van Steelant, director general of the Coromandel Coast and gouverneur of Nagapattinam and his council to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 2 May 1709.

¹⁰²⁶ ANOM C2 13 f°58-59, letter Bouynot East India Company captain, 30 September 1707.

country trade to the east in Manila and China, on the one hand, and to the west in the Mascarenes, on the other hand, were not mutually exclusive.

During Hébert's tenure, Dulivier stayed in India as a private businessman. In order to make the greatest profit in a short period, a captain had advised him to set up a voyage under the "*Moorish flag*" to Peru, sailing from the Coromandel Coast to China and, from there, to Peru and again back to China.¹⁰²⁷ Muslim merchants were very active on the Coromandel and Bay of Bengal regions.¹⁰²⁸ Among the Muslim merchant community, the Marakkayars were the dominant group in Eastern and Western coastal trade of the subcontinent and in the South East Asian trade. They stand out from other merchant communities for their limited involvement in commerce with Europeans and did not become important suppliers or purchasers for European East India Companies.¹⁰²⁹ Using a Muslim flag was therefore a strategy to remain neutral and avoid risks of being attacked. Dulivier proposed to Hébert to organize the venture under the name of the French Company. After a discussion with the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry, Hébert decided that the Company would take part in the project by letting the ship sail under the trading privileges of the Company and by providing crew and captains. To guarantee its profits, the Company, it would receive 3,000 pagodas before the ship left. Additionally, the Company would get five percent of the profits at the end of the voyage. One of the French Company captains, Beauvoilier, was to be the second on the voyage, with forty to fifty French among the crewmen and the rest would be "*men of the country*." Nevertheless, the ship would be "*considered French*" and the Parisian directors had to consider it as such.¹⁰³⁰ Hébert's hoped that the success of Dulivier's private venture would enable the Company to follow this model. However, the fact that the whole business was intended to remain secret raises suspicion about the real organisation of the voyage.

The other side of the deal does not appear in the French sources. The Dutch East India Company archive contains a complaint, dated 1709, with a hint to how and by whom the voyage was really organised. In 1709, a Dutch skipper sent a letter to the Dutch Company governor of the Coromandel Coast and Nagapattinam, Johannes van Steelant, describing a remarkable organization.¹⁰³¹ When he arrived in Madras in January 1709, a Frenchman asked

¹⁰²⁷ ANOM C2 68 f°311-312, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

¹⁰²⁸ Coastal Muslim merchants spoke Tamil and had adopted Hindu social practices, see: Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 218.

¹⁰²⁹ Arasaratnam, 220.

¹⁰³⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°312, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: "*il doit y avoir 40 à 50 françois, le reste des gens du pays, bref le vaisseau est réputé français et de la compagnie et vous devez le prendre pour tel*".

¹⁰³¹ NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, account given to Johanens van Steelant, director general of the Coromandel Coast and gouverneur of Nagapattinam, 1 July 1709.

the skipper if he could be the skipper of a ship for the governor of Madras. He would sail the ship from Pondicherry to China and from there to the South Sea. The Frenchman then added that it would be an advantageous voyage and that the director of Pondicherry himself (Hébert) would be part of it. Furthermore, the Dutch skipper should not be afraid to arrive on “*Dutch lands*” since the ship would have both English and French passports.¹⁰³² The Dutch skipper replied that he would think about the proposition. According to his letter, he decided to try to find out as much as possible about this venture. He discovered that Dulivier would equip the ship with a crew comprised half of Frenchmen and half Englishmen, which would raise the French flag and take the opportunity to pillage everything they could find and divide the prize among them. The ship would then pass by Pondicherry and give the director information about the state of affairs. Then, they would go to the Mascarene Islands to share and sell the prizes. From there, they would go back to the South Sea.

Many aspects of the deal between the French director and English governor to take Dutch goods as a prize were unclear. The Dutch informer acknowledged this while insisting on the existence of such cooperation: “*Even I could not discover what the agreement between the English and the French governors was, that there is one, is all too true,*” adding that it was clear that the English and the French were not enemies.¹⁰³³ He ended the letter by highlighting that, despite all appearances, there were no French ships in all of India except for one, which was sailing from Bengal to Pondicherry. With this conclusion, he thereby implied that all other ships with a French flag or passport were English ships representing the joint interests of the French director and the English governor. This letter reveals how the early French involvement in the intra-Asian trade depended on the directors’ personal connections, and particularly on the English connection. Indeed, the English appear to be necessary intermediaries for French integration in intra-Asian trade at this early stage of the French presence in India. Although the outcome of the venture is unknown, it is clear that French activities in Pondicherry were varied and rooted in the Indian Ocean, where adaptation and participation were the keys to success, despite the fact that historians have previously perceived this period as stagnant.

¹⁰³² NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, 1 July 1709: “*Dat het een voordeelige reijs zoude zijn ook dat den gewese gouverneur van Pondicherij in person zoude mede vaaren, als mede dat ik geen vrees behoefde te hebben, van in de Hollanders landen te vallen alsoo dat schip met een angels en france paas zoude vaaren*”.

¹⁰³³ NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, 1 July 1709: “*Insgelijcx heb ik den teneur van het accoord tussen de Engels en francen gouverneur niet kunnen ontdekken, maar dat en een is, is maer altewaar ook zijn de Ingelsen en France niet minder als vijanden*”.

Needless to say, when Dulivier became director in 1714 after a few years as a private trader in India, he strongly argued in favour of developing the trade with Manila. He encouraged the Parisian directors to demand that Philip V of Spain grant them exclusive privileges to trade in the Philippines.¹⁰³⁴ Hired for his experience and connections in India, Dulivier's network had shrunk significantly after three years in France: *"I have learned that most of those who I had connection with are dead or have left."*¹⁰³⁵ However, his strategy remained the same: to maintain small vessels of 300 to 400 *tonneaux*, each with 20,000 *écus* of capital for the intra-Asian trade, attract Armenian and other merchants through *"la douceur du gouvernement"* and increase the revenues of Pondicherry through the development of commerce and the country trade. The revenues would, in turn, pay for the expenses and maintenance of the fort without any help from Europe. It is not clear how many ships and voyages Dulivier and the Saint Malo merchants managed to send to the Philippines, but it was enough to upset the officials in Manila: *"all officials of the government and the people are very irritated by the frequent voyages of the French vessels in the South Sea and to China."*¹⁰³⁶ Dulivier ultimately intended to make Pondicherry self-sustainable and rooted in Indian and Pacific Oceans trading networks, rather than in the trans-oceanic commerce to Europe. Dulivier, and directors before him, understood that developing the settlement on a strong political and commercial basis was *"never going to happen through what is sent from Europe [...] but through the voyages which we will set up in this colony to other places in India."*¹⁰³⁷ Each of them developed methods to access regional trading networks, despite and because of the lack of support from Paris.

The south Atlantic connection

Rather than focusing on the trade of their *"nation,"* overseas directors' economic strategy in Ouidah lay in local and regional trading connections. Similar to the Pondicherry directors, they realised that the way to sustain French trade in Ouidah was not through French trade circuits, but across imperial and cultural boundaries. Inter-imperial trade for the maintenance of the fort and in the Company's interest occurred frequently throughout the period under study. In 1733, for instance, the English governor provided Levet with most of

¹⁰³⁴ ANOM C2 14 f°166, Answer to the letter Dulivier by Pontchartrain, 14 February 1714.

¹⁰³⁵ ANOM C2 69 f°80, letter of Dulivier 14 February 1714: *"j'appris que la plupart de ceux avec qui j'avois relations sont morts ou ont quittés"*.

¹⁰³⁶ ANOM C2 69 f°92, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714: *"tous les officiers du gouvernement et des peuples qui sont fort irrités par rapport aux fréquents voyages que font les vaisseaux françois dans la mer du sud en chine"*.

¹⁰³⁷ ANOM C2 69 f°110, letter of Dulivier, 8 October 1714: *"ce ne sera jamais par l'envoie qu'on fera en Europe que la compagnie trouvera quelque bénéfice par cet endroit, mais bien par les voiajes qu'on entreprendra de cette colonie pour les différents endroits de l'inde"*.

the slaves for the French slave trade shipments.¹⁰³⁸ Other trading activities took place among European representatives, although more out of necessity than cooperation.¹⁰³⁹ The Company directors encouraged Du Bellay to sell enslaved Africans to other Europeans in Ouidah, but only if the captives were over forty years old.¹⁰⁴⁰ However, European factors knew that all inter-imperial trade was not equally profitable, and soon their interests converged towards Brazil and the south Atlantic trading networks. Overseas directors understood that they were dependent on Luso-Brazilian traders, especially on the tobacco merchants to trade profitably in Ouidah. After a few years of experience in Ouidah, Bouchel attempted to bypass the Luso-Brazilian intermediaries and access the Brazilian market directly. In 1718, he asked the council of the Navy to negotiate the permission to collect the highly demanded tobacco directly in Brazil: “*it would be permitted to transport tobacco from Brazil to this coast as the Portuguese do presently.*”¹⁰⁴¹ Realising that this plan would not materialise, Bouchel changed his strategy and entered into a partnership with some Luso-Brazilian private merchants.

In 1721, Dubord, lieutenant of the fort during Bouchel’s tenure, denounced the “*trading society and close relations*” that the director had with Luso-Brazilian captains and merchants.¹⁰⁴² Bouchel had apparently shared his fort’s dwindling food supply with his Luso-Brazilian connections after an attack by privateers, which left Dubord and other employees with only corn and water for three to four months and led to the death of two employees. According to this complaint, the director openly said that he was losing his time with the French nation and wanted to maximise his profit by dealing with Luso-Brazilians in the little time he had left in Ouidah. Dubord continued, describing Bouchel’s trade organisation: “*he has himself in Allada, instead of one or two employees, the named João Basilio, Manuel Gomes, and Joucan, Portuguese who collect captives in partnership with him, bring them to Savi, the capital of the Hueda kingdom, and when they are in the prison, they secretly chose the best ones for the Portuguese.*”¹⁰⁴³ In the French trading station at Jakin, in the neighbouring kingdom of Allada, Bouchel had his own network of “*Portuguese*” partners

¹⁰³⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 26 August 1733.

¹⁰³⁹ In 1722, for instance, the Dutch sold some of their enslaved Africans to the French overseas director because they were dying. NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89: “*En genootsacke geweest om de aan de France directeur te debitteren te meer om dat alle slave aande de loop raakten en ettelijkeheid gestierven en weeren*”

¹⁰⁴⁰ ANOM C6 25, Instructions to Julien Du Bellay, 27 June 1733.

¹⁰⁴¹ ANOM C6 25 Mémoire of Bouchel, 1718: “*Qu’il soit permis de transporter du tabac du Brésil jusqu’à cette coste comme le font a present les Portugais*”.

¹⁰⁴² ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721.

¹⁰⁴³ ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721: “*lui-même tient a Jaquin en Hardre a la place d’un ou deux officiers les nommés Jean Basille, Manuel Gommers, et Joucan, Portugais qui ramassent des captifs en société avec lui, les font venir à Xavier ville capitale du Royaume de Juda et quand ils sont dans les tronc, ils font secretement choisir les meilleurs aux Portugais*”.

instead of French employees. Aside from obvious private trade, Dubord accused the director of openly neglecting French trade in Ouidah. Dubord described him as “*a man who acts against the rights of his motherland and the interest of his Prince.*”¹⁰⁴⁴ Indeed, he secretly reserved the best enslaved Africans for his Luso-Brazilian partners.

The accusation further unveiled Bouchel’s personal network. Bouchel introduced one of his Luso-Brazilian trading partners, Francisco Pereira, to the Hueda and Allada kings. According to Dubord, the connection with both kings enabled Pereira to gain direct access to the slave market. By 1721, Francisco Pereira managed to acquire a fort in Ouidah on behalf of the Viceroy of Brazil.¹⁰⁴⁵ As demonstrated in chapter five, the European imperial representatives in Ouidah were all involved in the slave supply of Luso-Brazilian merchants from Bahia. The Luso-Brazilian acquisition of a fort made the European middlemen redundant. It is difficult to assess Bouchel’s exact role in connecting Pereira with the Hueda King and helping the Luso-Brazilians to acquire a fort in Ouidah. Dubord’s accusation might exaggerate Bouchel’s influence in local power relations. Indeed, King Hufon had provided protection to Luso-Brazilian traders before and he “*always wanted them to be part of the neutrality treaty.*”¹⁰⁴⁶ So the acquisition of the fort could have been a natural development of pre-existing trade relations between Luso-Brazilians and Hueda merchants. However, other sources acknowledge Bouchel’s business partnership with Pereira, and references to it appear in Dutch documents: “*Francisco Pereira was associated with Bouchel for some years.*”¹⁰⁴⁷ Through his association with “*Portuguese*” agents in Jakin and with the future Luso-Brazilian director, Bouchel attempted to infiltrate slave trade networks to supply the general slave market, rather than only the French one.

In the early 1740s, Levet attempted to reach self-sustainability, not for his private trade but for the *comptoir*’s economic growth. He planned to develop the trade in Ouidah independently from Company ships. He proposed that the Parisian directors send him two good ships of around thirty to forty *tonneaux* to develop “*considerable trade in gold without having to send blacks to Martinique.*”¹⁰⁴⁸ He would use the ships to engage in coastal trade on

¹⁰⁴⁴ ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721: “*un homme qui agit si fort contre les droits de sa patrie, et l’intérêt de son Prince*”.

¹⁰⁴⁵ On the Brazilian-Bight of Benin connection over time see : Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*.

¹⁰⁴⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire on the state of the country of Juda and its trade, 1716: “*le roy qui a toujours voulu qu’ils fussent compris dans le traité de neutralité*”.

¹⁰⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89, (scan 7), Journal of Sint George d’Elmina, 4 January 1722: “*Francisco Pereira die zig eenige Jaren bij de heer Bouchel heft afgehouden gehad*”.

¹⁰⁴⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 6 January 1743: “*au moyen desquels la compagnie ferait un commerce considérable en or sans être obligé d’envoyer des noirs à la Martinique*”.

the Gold Coast, where Levet hoped to trade French commodities for gold. However, this proposal remained a project; its application was too dangerous for the director of Ouidah. Indeed, a year later, Levet had second thoughts, admitting that the King of Dahomey would never tolerate this arrangement. According to Levet, Tegbesu would prevent the crew from loading the merchandise on to the small ships and block the captains and canoemen from passing the sand bar. And if the French managed to overcome all these obstacles, then Tegbesu would blame the decrease of commercial activity on the small French boats hindering the access of other ships.¹⁰⁴⁹ Levet's apprehension came from his experience: "*when a French ship comes in this bay and depending on the news of the trade, leaves to trade elsewhere, the Africans blame us for their departure, they hold us responsible for those who pass by the bay without stopping or even those which do not come at all.*"¹⁰⁵⁰ The King held Levet accountable for the lack of trade in Ouidah. Making Levet personally responsible for a collective group served as an effective way for Tegbesu to assert power over him. The French attempt at self-sufficiency in Ouidah was not realistic, given their dependence on Tegbesu's protection.

Once again, the key lay with the south Atlantic connection. Levet's tenure in the 1740s coincided with the virtual halt of French shipping to Ouidah for a few years. Levet realised that contact with Brazil would solve the problems that arose from the lack of French ships, not only for supplies, but also for trade. He actively developed an interpersonal relationship with the Viceroy of Brazil, Vasco Fernandez Cesar de Meneses. In 1743, the King of Dahomey imprisoned the Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah, João Basilio, for collaborating with the Hueda King and other enemies of the Dahomey. Additionally, he accused Basilio of negatively affecting the regional trade. Merchants from Bahia had decided to organise their trade to the Bight of Benin, limiting it to no more than twenty-four ships per year.¹⁰⁵¹ This resulted in better trading conditions for captains but had negative repercussions on the trade in Ouidah and on the Luso-Brazilian director accountable to Tegbesu. To strengthen his connection with the Luso-Brazilians, Levet negotiated to save Basilio's life.¹⁰⁵²

¹⁰⁴⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744.

¹⁰⁵⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744: "*quand il vient un navire françois mouiller en cette rade et que suivant les nouvelles qu'il apprend, le bien de son commerce l'oblige d'aller faire sa traite ailleurs, les negres nous imputent la cause de son départ, ils nous rendent aussi responsable de ceux qui passent à vue de la rade sans mouiller, meme de ceux qui ne viennent pas*".

¹⁰⁵¹ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 173–77.

¹⁰⁵² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

After multiple attempts, Levet saved the Luso-Brazilian director but Basilio had to stay in prison until the next Brazilian ship could take him back.¹⁰⁵³ Levet's strategy worked in his favour. He wrote to France that "*there was no expression of gratitude that Basilio and all the other Portuguese did not use to thank him [Levet].*"¹⁰⁵⁴ He went even further in his assistance, and gave Basilio some clothes and food for the journey to Brazil. Basilio then promised Levet that all the ships from his "*nation*" would trade with the French director from then on. Levet's service to the Luso-Brazilians was an investment that he hoped would pay off. According to him, "*this event has put this nation in a strict obligation of gratitude to ours, which nothing can exempt it from.*"¹⁰⁵⁵ This incident was the best thing that could happen to the French in Ouidah and could enable the economic development of the fort as well as its self-sustainability.

Levet's plan was to take advantage of the Luso-Brazilian fort's difficult position to strengthen his role as middleman with Luso-Brazilian merchants. He offered to provision the goods necessary for the slave trade and extended the fort's protection to them. Cowry shells and brandy featured predominantly among these goods. According to Levet, "*all Portuguese ships coming to the coast are forced to buy cowry shells, textiles and brandy to trade.*"¹⁰⁵⁶ Regarding the cowry shells and textiles, the director could provide them to Luso-Brazilian merchants for tobacco or gold. The sale of brandy is more difficult to attest. Luso-Brazilians produced sugar cane alcohol, called *cachaça*, which they exported to the West African Coast, in particular, Luanda. Indeed, the export of Luso-Brazilian distilled alcohol increased drastically after the ban on the importation of cane brandy to Luanda was lifted in 1695.¹⁰⁵⁷ Contemporaries even perceived *cachaça* as a commodity where Luso-Brazilians out-competed European traders in Angola.¹⁰⁵⁸ Given that Luso-Brazilians produced their own distilled alcohol that proved to be competitive in Angola, why would they rely on French brandy in Ouidah? A possible explanation may be found in the context of the supply in Bahia or the demand in Ouidah.

¹⁰⁵³ ANOMC6 25, letter of Levet, 21 August 1743.

¹⁰⁵⁴ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

¹⁰⁵⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, between August 1743 and January 1744: "*cet evenement a mis cette nation dans une étroite obligation de reconnaissance envers la notre, dont rien ne la peut dispenser*".

¹⁰⁵⁶ ANOM C6 25 letter of Levet, 24 August 1743: "*Tous les navires portugais qui viennent à la coste sont obligés d'acheter des bouges, platilles et eau de vie pour faire leur traite*".

¹⁰⁵⁷ José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and Its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830* (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2004), 89.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Curto, 158.

During the first decades of the eighteenth century, Rio de Janeiro increased its production and export of *cachaça* to Luanda, but Salvador de Bahia remained a prolific exporter. On their side of the supply, merchants from Bahia had easy access to Brazilian distilled alcohol. Nevertheless, their trade to the Bight of Benin does not appear to include *cachaça*, but instead sugar, wood, gold or tobacco.¹⁰⁵⁹ It can therefore be assumed that the answer lies on the demand side. Historians have discussed the factors that led to the consumption of European or Brazilian alcoholic drinks in addition to those already existing on the west coast of Africa. According to José Curto, the popularity of *cachaça* and other imported alcoholic drinks derives from the higher percentage of alcohol when compared to the locally-produced palm wine or beer made from local grains.¹⁰⁶⁰ John Thornton and Joseph Miller point out other possible factors: the changing tastes of Africans and prestige. Although Curto dismisses these arguments due to lack of evidence, they might provide the answer to our question.

Indeed, there is no clear evidence of a significant difference between the percentage of alcohol in French brandy (*eau-de-vie*) as opposed to *cachaça*. Therefore, the answer of taste or prestige could be a valuable explanation. Levet referred to French brandy of such high quality that when traders used it in their trade, it would lower the price of slaves.¹⁰⁶¹ Of course, there is always the possibility that Levet lied about the quality and the demand of French brandy. However, he and Du Bellay already reported trading brandy for Brazilian gold in the 1730s.¹⁰⁶² Additionally, Levet would not have asked the Parisian directors to send him a great cargo of brandy to supply Luso-Brazilian traders if he knew it would not sell.¹⁰⁶³ Levet had made a deal with Luso-Brazilian captains, promising them that he would be ready with enough goods if they promised to engage in slave trade through him. Simultaneously, Levet continued to strengthen his ties to the Brazilian viceroy.

In 1746, after the death of the Luso-Brazilian director, Tegbesu named Francisco Nunès head of the fort. The viceroy of Brazil and Levet strongly opposed this decision for two reasons. First, the choice of the representatives in Ouidah was not a prerogative of the King of Dahomey, but one of the few rights of the European companies and the viceroy of Brazil.¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁵⁹ Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, N.J., [etc.]: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Curto, *Enslaving Spirits*, 49–50.

¹⁰⁶¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 1 January 1744: “*les françois ne le désirent pas moins par la grande quantité d’eau de vie qu’ils employent dans leur traite qui diminue beaucoup le prix de leurs captifs*”.

¹⁰⁶² ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734 and C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

¹⁰⁶³ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 24 August 1743.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 169–71.

Second, the viceroy had put Nunès on trial in Brazil ten years earlier, on charges of provoking Basilio's imprisonment.¹⁰⁶⁵ The outcome of the trial forbade Nunès to set foot on the Bight of Benin. Under these circumstances, the viceroy once again called on the help of the French director, who he referred to as "*chosen to act as a delegate for all nations to speak to the king of Dahomey*."¹⁰⁶⁶ Levet's role was to speak in favour of the director officially sent by the viceroy of Brazil. However, Nunès secured his position by offering a large amount of gifts to Tegbesu, ensuring the King's support. Eventually, however, Levet managed to negotiate that Nunès would be dismissed as soon as a new director was sent from Brazil.

The arrival of the new director enabled Levet once more to reinforce his interpersonal relationship with the viceroy of Brazil. On 2 September 1746, the viceroy asked a favour of Levet: "*when he [the new Brazilian director] will step ashore [in Ouidah], secretly, he will go directly to your fort and communicate the orders he received, and will propose and decide with you which are the best ways to succeed in this important matter*."¹⁰⁶⁷ The viceroy therefore included the director in important decisions regarding the future of the Luso-Brazilian fort, acknowledging his full trust in Levet. However, the viceroy's trust did not rely solely on Levet's friendship with the Luso-Brazilians. He ended his letter by writing that "*this matter is not only important for the Portuguese nation but for all the others living in this country*."¹⁰⁶⁸ This last sentence stressed the mutual dependency that linked the director and the viceroy.

Levet had managed to become an important intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey, and he took advantage of this new position. Indeed, during Levet's tenure, he sent many letters through Brazil. Levet explicitly stated that his close connection to the viceroy enabled him to communicate with the directors: "*To avoid any problem I send this [letter] through Brazil, I am proud that the services I provided to the Portuguese nation will facilitate the reception*."¹⁰⁶⁹ Most importantly, the viceroy forced Luso-Brazilian captains to

¹⁰⁶⁵ Verger, 168.

¹⁰⁶⁶ AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6: viceroy of Brazil: "*nous avons eu de nouveau recours à lui par l'intermédiaire de Jacques Levet (...) qui fut en personne délégué par toutes les nations*". Translated and cited in Verger, 183.

¹⁰⁶⁷ AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6, letter of the viceroy of Brazil to Levet, 2 September 1746: "*aussitôt qu'il descendra à terre, sans se faire connaître d'aucune personne, il aille droit chez vous, et vous communiquant les ordres qu'il a, propose et conclue avec vous les moyens qui se jugeront les plus avantageux et les mieux indiqués pour réussir avec succès une affaire aussi importante*". Translated and cited in Verger, 186.

¹⁰⁶⁸ AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6, letter of the viceroy of Brazil to Levet, 2 September 1746: "*dans laquelle, non seulement est intéressée la nation portugaise mais toutes les autres qui habitent ce pays-là*". Translated and cited in Verger, 186.

¹⁰⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746.

bring food and medical supplies to Levet when the French fort was in need.¹⁰⁷⁰ These mutual services were of a personal nature, since Levet had to require more supplies from the Company when news arrived that Vasco Fernandez Cesar de Meneses was going to be replaced. The role of intermediary came at a price and in order to win the trust of the viceroy of Brazil, Levet had to forcefully negotiate with Tegbesu multiple times. The last denial regarding the replacement of Nunès with a new director from Brazil had been particularly difficult and Levet had made some diplomatic mistakes.¹⁰⁷¹ Soon after, Tegbesu sent him back to France. However, after Levet's tenure, Company directors understood the advantages of a connection with Brazil and they kept a correspondent in Brazil, who could send them supplies when needed until 1765.¹⁰⁷²

Overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah knew that the economic activities of their factories would only increase if they took active part in regional trade, thereby reaching a form of self-sufficiency and ending the reliance on Company ships or supplies. The strategies to integrate into regional trading circuits varied from one director to another, but they were all directed towards a main goal: in Pondicherry, profiting from the Chinese trade and in Ouidah, the Brazilian trade. Martin tried to convince Parisian directors to send small ships to engage in coastal trade while attracting merchants who operated in country trade circuits to Pondicherry. His successors took an active part in the intra-Asian trade by partnering with English traders who acted as bridges to country trade trading networks that were otherwise inaccessible to the French Company. These intra-Asian partnerships relied on the directors' interpersonal connections. Their role as individuals enabled the Company to access country trade networks. The English acted as necessary middlemen for the French, although the English remained "*important, but potentially disposable intermediaries*" within the dynamics of intra-Asian trade.¹⁰⁷³

In Ouidah, directors of the French fort engaged in trade with other European factors, however, the most profitable commercial activities involved Brazilian tobacco or gold. Therefore, Bouchel quickly attempted to infiltrate the south Atlantic trading circuits by partnering up with Luso-Brazilian private traders and entering into an interpersonal relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah. His strategy geared itself towards infiltrating the slave market, to supply private traders well beyond imperial

¹⁰⁷⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

¹⁰⁷¹ See chapter 4.

¹⁰⁷² Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 64.

¹⁰⁷³ Flynn and Giráldez, 'Born with a "Silver Spoon"', 206.

boundaries. At a later stage, Levet would follow this line of action towards Brazilian trade. He secured French access to the trade by entering into a personal relationship of loyalty with the viceroy of Brazil. He built his position as intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey. Guaranteeing the viceroy's interests granted Levet protection, supply and, theoretically, privileged access to Luso-Brazilian trade. However, integration into regional trading networks and attempts at self-sufficiency were only possible if overseas directors simultaneously managed their relationships with their principals in France, who hired them.

3. Preserving metropolitan connections

Overseas directors had to strike a balance between the necessities of infiltrating intra-Asian country trade and south Atlantic networks and maintaining their reputation with the directors in France. In Pondicherry, after the Company granted its trading monopoly to the Saint Malo Company, the Saint Malo merchants mediated relations between overseas directors and their principals. In Ouidah, for the majority of the period under study, French private merchants acted as the main intermediaries between Parisian and overseas directors. French private merchants transported letters and, more importantly, provided the only direct reports of overseas directors' behaviours to France. The future of overseas directors and their ability to further develop their factories economically as well as their personal fortune, therefore, depended on the way they interacted with French private merchants. In this sense, Saint Malo or other French private merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah can be considered "*second principals*." The perspective of French private merchants as "*second principals*" helps us understand how overseas directors managed to integrate into regional trading networks while protecting their position. Considering French private merchants as principals of overseas directors allows us to further reject the idea that private merchants and chartered companies held opposing interests.

Intersecting interests

As Anthony Hopkins argues, the theory of simplistic opposition between early modern chartered companies and private merchants' interests no longer stands.¹⁰⁷⁴ Once it benefitted them, merchants did not challenge the system of exclusive privileges. From 1712 until 1719, a Company predominantly composed of Saint Malo merchants enjoyed the East India Company monopoly, which they jealously protected from other French port cities. In the case of the West African monopoly, the crown limited the trading privileges to five port cities. These

¹⁰⁷⁴ Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 93.

merchants trading to the west coast of Africa under licenses provided services to the metropolitan institutions in charge of the *comptoir* in Ouidah. Chartered companies, or the council of the Navy during the free period, and private merchants were extremely interdependent; port city merchants needed the Company infrastructure in India and in return, companies needed private businessmen to take over the trade. This section will further contest the theory of opposition by viewing it from the perspective of the overseas setting.

At first sight, the interests of overseas directors and French private merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah appear to be opposed. In Pondicherry, Hébert criticised the Parisian directors' decision to grant the Company's trading monopoly to the Saint Malo Company. According to him, the merchants enjoyed the Company's infrastructure without paying for it and were therefore always sure of making a profit.¹⁰⁷⁵ While the Saint Malo merchants were not accountable for the maintenance of the French settlements in India, their prospective profit was nevertheless affected by the risk any voyage to the Indian Ocean entailed. However, the fact that Hébert perceived Saint Malo merchants as benefitting from the Company's investment to make private profit shows the potential conflict of interests. The first years of Hébert's tenure did not improve his perception of the Saint Malo trading monopoly in India. Indeed, given that the Parisian directors did not send funds with the first Saint Malo ships, Hébert made unprofitable deals with the private merchants to access basic funds for the settlement.

Dulivier also expressed doubts about the advantages of granting the Company monopoly to the Saint Malo merchants. He struggled to negotiate the transportation of French employees or soldiers on Malouin ships to France. In practice, many former employees and soldiers were stranded in India and forced "*to wander around*."¹⁰⁷⁶ Men left without income around and in Pondicherry could lead to violence, thefts or attacks, which would make the environment unsafe. The lack of funds prohibited Dulivier from re-hiring soldiers to prevent problems. The Saint Malo merchants' refusal to transport these men could have further antagonised the overseas directors. In Ouidah, directors had similar difficult relations with the private traders who operated on the Bight of Benin. Private traders sold overpriced supplies to the director and the high volume of traders led to significant competition and high prices that were difficult for the director to control.¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁷⁵ ANOM C2 69 f°9, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

¹⁰⁷⁶ ANOM C2 69 f°108 and f°115, letter of Dulivier, 8 October 1714: "*de mener une vie errante*".

¹⁰⁷⁷ ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 6 June 1717.

Additionally, the simultaneous presence of multiple port city merchants in Ouidah made fort employees' private trade difficult for the director to control. In 1728, Dupetitval strictly implemented the prohibition of private trade upon his employees.¹⁰⁷⁸ When the scandal of the ship *Le Mars* of Marseille broke, revealing a widespread private gold and slave trade involving the fort's French employees, the Dutch at Jakin, the English factor in Ouidah and the crew of the French ship *Le Mars*, Dupetitval began a court case against the involved French Company employees.¹⁰⁷⁹ As revenge, the plaintiffs spread defamatory information to the Dahomian King, who then had Dupetitval kidnapped and killed.¹⁰⁸⁰ Port city merchants' goals were to have their cargo ready as soon as possible; the large number of traders and the subsequent competition they generated led them to resort to any means to shorten their voyage. These means, particularly when they involved illegal trade, did not always match the goals set by overseas directors.

Despite their criticism, overseas directors knew that their reputation in France depended, in part, on the way they treated private merchants and their captains. Therefore, Hébert did not miss an opportunity to report how well he advised the captains. In 1710, he wrote that "*I put all my attention to facilitate the trade of these two ships from Saint Malo, the captains, agent and directors will be satisfied of our methods*" and added that if the trade was not as beneficial as expected, it was because the ships had arrived on the coast too late.¹⁰⁸¹ The year before, he had similarly informed the minister of the Navy that he had provided the captains with all the help he could and if the voyage was unprofitable it was because of the fleet's untimely arrival.¹⁰⁸² Dulivier, too, worried about his reputation and, realising that the returning captains bore news about his management skills to the Company, sent the same type of self-complementing missives to the Parisian directors: "*sirs must be assured that we will*

¹⁰⁷⁸ The instructions of the Company to Dupetitval must have been similar to those given to Du Bellay five years later C6 25 Instructions to Du Bellay, 27 June 1733: "*La compagnie deffend expressement à M. Julien Du Bellay, commis et préposés à son service de faire aucun commerce directement ny indirectment pour leur compte, sous peine de confiscation des marchandises, perte de leurs appointements, gratifications et révocation d'employ*".

¹⁰⁷⁹ ANOM C6 25, Dupetitval "Affaire du Vaisseau le Mars de Marseille", 23 September 1728.

¹⁰⁸⁰ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of the Company of the Indies against Galot, 8 November 1730.

¹⁰⁸¹ ANOM C2 69 f°9, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710: "*J'ay mis toute mon attention à faciliter le commerce de ces deux vaisseaux de st Malo, les capitaines et le préposé des intéressés rendront bon compte de quelle manière nous nous y sommes tous pris*".

¹⁰⁸² ANOM C2 68 f°322, letter of Hébert, 16 February 1709.

not spare any efforts to satisfy the people with whom they made the treaty and procure them all the advantages.”¹⁰⁸³

Private merchants’ voyages stood a better chance of profit if they could make use of well-maintained overseas infrastructures. Indeed, the Company’s bad financial state and consequent bad reputation in Pondicherry reflected negatively on the Saint Malo merchants. It was therefore in their interest to make mutually-beneficial arrangements with overseas directors. When two Saint Malo ships arrived in Pondicherry with no Company funds to maintain the settlement, Hébert proposed that the captains load 800 pagodas’ (6800 *livres*) worth of merchandise on the ships sailing to Merguy, and to share the profit in equal parts between the Saint Malo captains and the Company.¹⁰⁸⁴ The director had no capital to risk and needed to cooperate with Saint Malo merchants. The two captains, de la Birsellainne and de la Chardonnier, accepted and a Company employee joined them to ensure the Company’s interests.

Similarly, a deeply-indebted fort in Ouidah was useless to French port city traders and they advanced money for its maintenance. Therefore, private merchants operating in Ouidah cooperated with overseas directors. In the 1740s, Levet bought most of his supplies, such as flour or wine, from private ships using bills of exchange in the name of the Company. The port city traders provided further logistical support: “*the company lacking canoes for a long time, I bought two from s. Auffray captain of the ship le grand chasseur of Saint Malo.*”¹⁰⁸⁵ Overpriced supplies and unprofitable deals were not the norm and overseas directors and private merchants learned to cooperate for their mutual benefit. Furthermore, in some cases, private merchants even vouched for or defended overseas directors in France. Why did private merchants do this? More importantly, how did overseas directors manage to get private traders to defend them in front of their principals in Paris? To answer these questions, this chapter analyses two cases, that of Dulivier in Pondicherry and Bouchel in Ouidah.

In October 1715, Hébert’s return to Pondicherry undermined Dulivier’s position as director. Louis XIV granted Hébert the title of “*général de la nation française*” although the authority it conferred to him over Dulivier was unclear. Conflict of interest soon arose

¹⁰⁸³ ANOM C2 69 f°88, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714: “*Mrs doivent cependant être persuadés que nous n’épargnerons aucun de nos soins pour satisfaire les personnes avec qui ils traitent et leur procurer tous les avantages*”.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Council meeting minute, 23 September 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 84.

¹⁰⁸⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 21 August 1743: “*une lettre de change sur la compagnie de 1756 livres pour farine et vin qu’il a achetés de ce capitaine*” and 25th of February 1744: “*Achat de vivres sur le navire l’aymable de Nantes payer en deux lettres de change [...] la compagnie n’ayant point de pirogues depuis longtemps j’en ay traité deux du sieur auffray capitaine de navire le grand chasseur de st Malo*”.

between the two men and Dulivier demanded to return to France if his authority was not restored.¹⁰⁸⁶ Indeed, it did not take long to tarnish Dulivier's reputation among Indian traders. As Dulivier himself noted, as his contacts realised "*he was powerless their trust in him decreased.*"¹⁰⁸⁷ The Saint Malo merchants supported Dulivier's claims against Hébert in multiple instances. In 1716, Dulivier asked the notary of the Company in Pondicherry to make a deed explaining the injustice he suffered in front of witnesses. Dulivier explained how Hébert stripped him of all his authority and credit in the *comptoir*.¹⁰⁸⁸ He added that "*Pierre Dulivier protests against him [Hébert] about all the events, the damages and interests of the considerable prejudice he [Hébert] has done to his private trade.*"¹⁰⁸⁹ Among the deed's five signatures appears that of an agent of the Saint Malo Company in India, Du Coudray Perrée.¹⁰⁹⁰ Why did a Saint Malo merchant agent testify in favour of protecting the private trade of a director?

A year later, the Saint Malo Company merchants wrote a letter of complaint to the Parisian directors against Hébert. The Saint Malo Company had a vested interest in getting rid of Hébert. He had instated an illegal tax of four percent on transactions. Furthermore, Hébert opened an investigation into the Jesuits' accusations against the Company broker, Nayiniyappa.¹⁰⁹¹ The Jesuits accused Nayiniyappa of, among other things, instigating the uprising of 1715. Hébert declared the Hindu broker guilty and imprisoned him.¹⁰⁹² The change from tolerant pragmatism to taking the Jesuits' side, supports historians' claim that the Jesuits were behind Hébert's return to Pondicherry.¹⁰⁹³ Nayiniyappa was a wealthy and well-connected merchant, who was highly skilled and necessary to the Saint Malo merchants. The Company threatened to breach the ten year monopoly grant and stop making voyages to India if the directors did not call Hébert back to France due to his mismanagement of the trade.¹⁰⁹⁴ In the letter, they condemned the injustices Hébert perpetrated on Dulivier and emphasised

¹⁰⁸⁶ ANOM C2 69 f°182-183, letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716.

¹⁰⁸⁷ ANOM C2 69 f°183 letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716: "*m'a réduit à un tel point que les peuples parmi lesquels j'avois acquis quelque réputation me regardant aujourd'huy comme une personne sans aucun pouvoir n'ont plus la confiance qu'ils avoient autrefois en moy*".

¹⁰⁸⁸ ANOM E 152 f°275, personnel file Dulivier.

¹⁰⁸⁹ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 9 September 1716: "*Le dit Pierre Dulivier proteste contre luy de tous événements quelconques et de tous dommages et interests du préjudice considérable qu'il apporte à son commerce particulier*".

¹⁰⁹⁰ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 9 September 1716. Nicolas Perrée de la Villstreux (1690-174 ?) was the son of Pierre Perrée du Coudray (1656-1742) merchant of Saint Malo. Nicolas had been recruited as agent for the Saint Malo East India Company in India where he stayed until 1719, see: Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 858.

¹⁰⁹¹ For a thorough analysis of the "affaire Nayiniyappa" see Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*.

¹⁰⁹² ANOM C2 14 f°260-270, Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants to the king and the Navy Council, 1717.

¹⁰⁹³ Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 123-24.

¹⁰⁹⁴ ANOM C2 14 f°260, Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants to the king and the navy council, 1717.

Dulivier's upright honesty. Parisian directors had no alternative but to bow to the Saint Malo Company's blackmail and they fired Hébert in November 1717.¹⁰⁹⁵ Dulivier asked to replace Hébert by arguing that neither the Company, nor Saint Malo merchants, nor employees, nor Indians nor missionaries complained about himself.¹⁰⁹⁶

The second case covers the aforementioned accusations against Bouchel's private business with Luso-Brazilian traders and his negligence of the French trade. To strengthen his argument, Dubord added that some of French ships' captains had complained about Bouchel to the representative of the Navy in Nantes and in La Rochelle.¹⁰⁹⁷ It is unlikely that the director could neglect French interests so obviously without impunity. Indeed, in the council of the Navy's instructions to Bouchel when he became director, one of the main orders directed him to "*treat with perfect equality all the French ships [...] and that the King maintains him in this office only for the purpose of the trade of these ships.*"¹⁰⁹⁸ Nevertheless, a year later ten men, a priest and several French captains and sailors, signed a letter in favour of Bouchel to the minister of the Navy, arguing that if he replaced Bouchel, the King of Ouidah would be displeased. Consequently, Bouchel's removal would be harmful to French trade and the French in Ouidah in general:

*"the named hereafter let you know that, Assou, the captain of the French nation, told us of the bad position in which he found himself, when he had heard about your soon departure for France, in a time where everything seems authorised, banditry, theft of the canoemen and carriers, and other abuses happening daily, far from being able to prevent it after your departure, he foresaw very bad consequences, by the bad disposition of the King and the big men of this kingdom against the one who will succeed you."*¹⁰⁹⁹

¹⁰⁹⁵ ANOM C2 14 f°255, Company directors in Paris, 24 November 1717.

¹⁰⁹⁶ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier f°290, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the Navy Council 1717.

¹⁰⁹⁷ ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord, Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721.

¹⁰⁹⁸ ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel, Instructions of the navy council to Bouchel, 1716: "*Le second est d'observer une parfaite égalité par raport à tous les vaisseaux françois qui iront en traite à Juda et de ne pas favoriser plustost le commerce des uns que des autres, le sr Bouchel leur devant à tous également et le Roy ne l'entretenant à ce poste et ceux qui y sont que par rapport au commerce de ces navires*".

¹⁰⁹⁹ ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel: "*Les dénommés cy dessous vous representent, qu'Assou capitaine a la nation françoise, nous avoit remontré la facheuse nécessité où il se trouvoit, sur ce qu'il a appris votre prochain départ pour France, dans un temps où tout semble autoriser le brigandage, par le vol des canottiers et porteur de marchandises, et autres abûts qui se commettent journellement, que bien loing d'y pouvoir remédier après vôstre départ, il prévoyoit au contraire de très facheuses suites, par la mauvaise disposition du Roy, et des grands de ce Royaume contre celuy qui vous doit succéder ; à ces fins, nous tous d'une voix unanime, vous supplions voûloir faire attention à ce que cy-dessus, en contienuant de protéger comme vous avés toujours fait le*

Why would these ten men vouch for a director who was involved in private trade activities and accused of neglecting French trade in the Bight of Benin? The competition for Brazilian gold and tobacco was already challenging enough for French private traders without protecting a director who favoured their competitors.

Local integration and interpersonal relations

A possible motivation for the French port city merchants' support of overseas directors was their private trade. It generated a widespread network, which allowed them to integrate into local and regional trading circuits that could be beneficial for French private traders. Following the argument regarding the benefits of an agent's malfeasant behaviour for the principal, private merchants seen as "*second principals*" would also prefer to enjoy the network and skills of a well-connected and well-informed overseas director, despite his known engagement in private trade. Private trade was common in the two factories but not equally significant in terms of integration into the local and regional trading networks. The attraction of the directorship of Pondicherry and Ouidah was not devoid of private interest. In Pondicherry, the Company forbade private trade by employees overseas, but it appears to have been broadly tolerated. Hébert, for instance, asked the Company to load a certain amount of goods on ships sailing back to France as a reward for his service.¹¹⁰⁰ He then informed the Parisian directors that he had sent some goods to his wife, awarding himself the permission to do so. As demonstrated in the first chapter, even the Parisian directors asked overseas directors to send them goods for private purposes.¹¹⁰¹

In Ouidah, private trade by employees of the fort was illegal until 1763, but it could have been tolerated. In Ducoulombier's instructions from Paris, the Company explicitly forbid it: "*the company expressly forbids to him and his employees to trade any slaves under the penalty of losing their wages.*"¹¹⁰² Private traders entrusted Ducoulombier with 1,400 *livres* worth of merchandise for their account.¹¹⁰³ Similarly, the vice-director, Levesque, brought merchandise to Ouidah for his own benefit and claimed that Louis XIV openly tolerated the activity.¹¹⁰⁴ Dubord himself revealed in his complaint that Bouchel was jealous of "*any kind*

commerce, jusqu'à ce qu'il plaise au Conseil de Marine d'y autrement pourvoir à Xavier Royaume de Juda en Afrique ce 6 Juillet 1722. Collationné à l'original par moi Directeur sous signé à Juda ce 20e juillet 1722".

¹¹⁰⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°316, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

¹¹⁰¹ See chapter 1.

¹¹⁰² ANOM E 145, Personnel file Ducoulombier, Asiento Company Instructions to Ducoulombier Article 15: "*La compagnie defend expressement de faire aucun commerce de negres ny souffrir qu'il en soit fait par aucun de ses employés à peine de perdre les uns et les autres leurs gages*".

¹¹⁰³ AN MAR/B/1/9, letter of Bouchel to the navy council, 9 November 1715.

¹¹⁰⁴ ANOM E 285, personnel file Levesque.

of commerce that they [the employees] were doing,” thereby implying that Bouchel tolerated private trade.¹¹⁰⁵ In fact, private trade was so widespread that it generated a degree of competition between those practicing it. The significance of both Dulivier’s situation in Pondicherry and Bouchel’s in Ouidah is that there is evidence of their private activities integrating their trade with local and regional trading networks.

Clues in Dulivier’s personnel file point towards his private trade as director, in direct connection with merchants from Carcassonne involving textiles and diamonds.¹¹⁰⁶ However, it was his years as a private businessman in India that were paramount to the development of Pondicherry’s business connections in the intra-Asian trade. Although some of his contacts had died by the time Dulivier returned to Pondicherry again, his knowledge and experience as a private merchant in India made him an asset to the Saint Malo merchants. Indeed, Dulivier’s argument to remain director of Pondicherry in 1717 focused on how useful he was to the Saint Malo merchants. According to him, although Hébert acted as director of Pondicherry, the Saint Malo merchants preferred to deal with Dulivier due to his experience in the trade. Dulivier linked the intra-Asian trade knowledge directly to his connections with English merchants in his argument: *“the trust that the most considerable merchants of Madras and sir Thomas Pitts, general for the English East India Company had in the sieur Dulivier, led them to offer an opportunity for a voyage to China on an English ship; the knowledge he possessed of the Indian trade, made the owners of the shipment turn to him for the purchase of their cargoes in Pondicherry and Bengal.”*¹¹⁰⁷ The trust English merchants, particularly Pitt, showed towards Dulivier made him a useful director to the Saint Malo merchants.

Regarding Bouchel’s personal commercial activities, they involved a network of connections with *“Portuguese”* partners in Jakin and the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah, Francisco Pereira. Additionally, the argument used in the French captain’s petition was that replacing Bouchel would not please King Hufon and his officials. If we are to believe the captains, Bouchel counted Hufon and Assou among those in his network. The fact that Bouchel helped Francisco Pereira acquire a fort for the viceroy of Brazil and the

¹¹⁰⁵ ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: *“son avidité pour le gain lui fait envier a ses officier mesmes, les moindres petits commerces qu’ils pouroient faire”*.

¹¹⁰⁶ ANOM E 152 f°201, personnel file Dulivier.

¹¹⁰⁷ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier f°288, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the navy council 1717: *“La confiance que les plus considérables Négocians Anglois de Madras & le sieur Thomas Pitts General de la Compagnie des Indes d’Angleterre avoient pour le sieur Dulivier, les porta à lui proposer une entreprise pour faire un voyage en Chine sur un Vaisseau Anglois Après son retour à Pondichéry en 1710, il y arriva trois Navires de S. Malo venant de France ; la connoissance qu’il avoit de tout le commerce des Indes, fit que les Interressés à ce chargement, le prièrent de vouloir faire l’achat de leurs cargaisons à Pondichéry & Bengale”*.

Portuguese by introducing him to Hufon contributes to connecting Bouchel to the Hueda King. According to Erikson's argument, it was overseas directors' networks and their knowledge of the trade that French port city merchants, as "*second principals*," could tap into thanks to their private trade. This was true for both cases under scrutiny. However, how did these "*second principals*" make sure that overseas directors would put these skills and networks at their service? Aside from their ability to report negligent behaviour to the Parisian directors or the Navy Council, French port city merchants had another way to ensure loyalty: interpersonal relations.

During his time in India, Dulivier exchanged personal correspondence with a director of the Saint Malo Company, Luc Magon de la Balue.¹¹⁰⁸ Magon de la Balue was an important investor in the Saint Malo partnership; he invested 322,000 *livres* out of 4,250,000 *livres* of total capital. In 1714, letters from Magon to Dulivier in Pondicherry referred to the friendship they developed during Dulivier's stay in Brittany, sending greeting from him and his wife to Dulivier and his wife, which implies a close relationship.¹¹⁰⁹ Magon recommended one of his friends, sir of Saint Marc, lieutenant of the ship *le Chasseur*, to Dulivier, writing that "*it is a person for whom I have a lot of consideration and to whom I would like to do a favour, please provide him with the services he needs and help him in the purchases he has to do.*"¹¹¹⁰ Magon's gratefulness enhanced the interpersonal relationship with Dulivier, encouraging further mutual services.¹¹¹¹

Other signs of private transactions between Magon and Dulivier appear in the Malouin merchant's personal correspondence. For instance, Magon wrote to his contact in Cadiz to buy 1,500 piasters and address them to Dulivier in Pondicherry. Magon demanded that the piasters be under his own account, so that Dulivier would "*have more attention to make the purchases.*"¹¹¹² The outcome of the transaction depended on Dulivier personally. When the itinerary changed, sending the Malouin ship was dispatched to Moka instead of Pondicherry, Magon explained to both his contact in Cadiz and Dulivier in Pondicherry that there was no point in sending the 1,500 piasters anymore: "*I do not judge necessary to load the 1,500*

¹¹⁰⁸ See chapter 1.

¹¹⁰⁹ A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, Februray 1714.

¹¹¹⁰ A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, Februray 1714: "*Sr. de st Marc lieutenant sur le vaisseau le chasseur c'est une personne pour qui j'ay beaucoup de considération et à que je serois bien aise de faire plaisir vous m'obligeriez très sensiblement de luy rendre service et de luy ayder dans les petits achats qu'il a à faire*".

¹¹¹¹ A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, 23 Februray 1714.

¹¹¹² A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Musq et compagnie in Cadix, 1 March 1714: "*pour mon compte afin que M. Dulivier ait plus d'attention a faire ma commission*".

piasters on the vessel because it would be disagreeable to see my piasters come back without having been used."¹¹¹³ As the ship did not pass by Dulivier's *comptoir*, the transaction was cancelled.

As showed in chapter one, the Saint Malo merchants were involved in private trade in India through a merchant of Madras, Lapostre, who would send diamonds back to them *via* London based merchants such as Mendes da Costa Junior. Dulivier was an intermediary for Magon de la Balue's private trade in Pondicherry. Indeed Dulivier had been in close business partnership and therefore connected to the governor of Madras, Pitt who himself had been a partner of Mendes da Costa Junior in his diamond trade in India.¹¹¹⁴ Private trade between India and Europe was characterized by inter-personal relations and mutual trust. It is unsure if Dulivier was recommended by Pitt to Magon de la Balue through their common connection, Mendes da Costa but these connections could not have been only coincidental. Saint Malo merchants were using their contacts across Europe and in India to establish safe private trade routes.

The direct connection with the Saint Malo merchants enhanced Dulivier's ability to engage in intra-Asian trade for the Company. In 1714, the Saint Malo merchants lent Dulivier a small ship for a trip to Bengal, Persia or Calicut.¹¹¹⁵ Similar to Martin before him, and thanks to his previous experience in Bengal, Dulivier knew that the only way to develop Pondicherry and the trade of the East India Company was to develop the intra-Asian trade. The main obstacle to the development of the French country trade was the scarcity of small vessels able to sail along the Coromandel Coast and inside the shallow rivers in Bengal. Obtaining the Saint Malo ship, even temporarily, was a step forward in French involvement in intra-Asian trade. Saint Malo merchants were well-aware of the profits linked to the intra-Asian trade and they had been the main reason for their interest in signing the ten-year contract that granted them the Company's trading monopoly in 1714 once the war and privateering were over. "*The utility we saw in the 'country trade' of the English and the Dutch [...] in Moka, Persia, China, Manila and Japan determined us to sign a new treaty with the*

¹¹¹³ A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, 8 March 1714: "*je ne juge pas a propos d'envoyer 1 500 piastres à M. Dulivier ayant bien de l'apparence que ce vaisseau ne touchera point à Pondichéry [...] M. je vous prie de ne point charger dans ce vaisseau les 1 500 piastres dont je vous parlois cy dessus car il me seroit désagréable de voir revenir mes piastres comme je les aurois donner sans estre employé*".

¹¹¹⁴ BM Add MSS 22850, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Philip and John Mendes da Costa, 21 October 1709..

¹¹¹⁵ ANOM C2 69 f°92, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714.

Company.”¹¹¹⁶ Dulivier’s further integration into the intra-Asian trade, thanks to the Saint Malo merchants’ cooperation, would strengthen his connections and knowledge of the country trade, which Saint Malo merchants were particularly eager to maximise. In turn, it ensured he would remain an attractive overseas director for the Saint Malo Company.

In 1717, during Dulivier’s conflict with Hébert and the scandal of the mistreatment of Nayiniyappa, Dulivier reported his version of events in his private correspondence with Magon.¹¹¹⁷ In light of this interpersonal relationship, it is little wonder that Saint Malo merchants sided with Dulivier in the conflict. Nayiniyappa’s imprisonment led to his death and a scandal, which exposed Hébert as the main culprit. By the end of 1717, the Company dismissed Hébert and his son and sent them back to France. Hardancourt, the director in Bengal, was made director of Pondicherry. In a letter to the Saint Malo Company agent in Pondicherry in 1719, Magon expressed his happiness about the departure of Hébert: “*you had to fight against Hébert who crossed every one of our intentions; his dismissal must facilitate the affairs*.”¹¹¹⁸ As for Dulivier, although he was not chosen to take over Hébert’s position in Pondicherry, he seems to have navigated his connections and networks a bit better. He appears in the Company archive in 1721 as the director of Surat, granted the title of “*commissaire général*” in charge of “*visiting the other company settlements in India and to preside in all councils during his journey*.”¹¹¹⁹ The divergent careers of Dulivier and Hébert can be partially explained by Dulivier’s support in France and his ability to maintain his interpersonal relationship of loyalty with the Saint Malo merchants.

In the case of Bouchel, his personal connections with port city merchants are more difficult to uncover. Similar to Dulivier, his contact with France and the minister of the Navy happened exclusively through French port city merchant ships or other Europeans. His reputation in France therefore relied on his interactions with captains of port city merchant ships in Ouidah. It appears that of the nine individuals who signed the petition in favour of

¹¹¹⁶ ANOM C2 14 f°206-208: Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants, 15 December 1715: “*L’utilité qui est reconnue du commerce que les Anglais et les Hollandais d’Inde en Inde suivant les mémoires qui nous ont été rapportées par les officiers de vos vaisseaux en exécution de nos instructions, principalement à Moja, en Perse, à la Chine, aux Manilles, au Japon, nous ont déterminés de faire au mois de juillet 1712 un traité avec la Compagnie*”.

¹¹¹⁷ ANOM C2 14 f°268: letter of the East India Company directors with answers of the Saint Malo merchants to the French King and Council of the Navy.

¹¹¹⁸ A.D.I-et-V. 1F 1897, Magon de la Balue à Delavigne Buisson in Pondichéry, 24 February 1719: “*vous aviez messieurs Hébert à combattre qui traversoient en tout vos bonnes intentions, leur rappel doit faciliter toutes choses*”.

¹¹¹⁹ ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 1721: “*autres comptoirs des Indes pour les visiter en qualité de de commissaire général, mesme présider à tous les conseils qu’y s’y pourront tenir pendant son séjour*”.

Bouchel, at least six had met him previously.¹¹²⁰ Aside from the fort priest, who knew Bouchel for obvious reasons, most of them had sailed multiple times to Ouidah.¹¹²¹ Bellingier sailed to the Guinea Coast seven times, out of which three were during Bouchel's directorship. Braheix went to Ouidah three times during Bouchel's mandate, while Dumoulin made two voyages to Ouidah in 1720 and 1722. Duqué sailed to the Guinea Coast eight times and twice when Bouchel was director—in this case the under captain signed as well. Lancelot travelled to the Guinea Coast six times, three times to Ouidah.

The fact that the majority of the captains had dealt with Bouchel before and vouched for him demonstrates that at least some French captains were pleased with his management. Their signatures made the director of Ouidah indebted to them and created a relationship of interpersonal loyalty. Indeed, competition in Ouidah was extremely tough. The Hueda kings had adopted the strategy of open trade for all Europeans, in order to enhance the competition among European traders in their favour. Trade conditions were difficult and contacts on the ground were of great value. Therefore, despite the accusation of negligence made by fort employees and the private business partnership with Luso-Brazilian traders, the captains still defended Bouchel. Additionally, in the complaint of Vice-director Levesque it appears that the French captains who signed the petition were against the “*reform of abuses that Bouchel had tolerated until now*” because the Hueda King disapproved of any changes.¹¹²² Port city merchants' interests were not necessarily in favour of reforming abuses, especially not if it contradicted the Hueda King and thus their trading interests. They needed a director who could manage their trade without opposing their trading partner, despite—or rather, thanks to—his involvement in private trade. Bouchel remained in charge of Ouidah until the fort passed into the authority of the Company of the Indies and the new director sent by the new Company effectively took charge.

¹¹²⁰ ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel: “*Signé Duqué commandant de la Ste Agnès de Nantes, Dusmoulin commandant du Maréchal d'Estrée de Nantes, Lancelot capitaine du navire La Paix de Nantes, F. Braheix capitaine du navire La Duchesse d'Orléans de Nantes, Basil capitaine du navire l'Hercule de la Rochelle, F. Bellingès capitaine du navire la Généreuse de Nantes, Beluté cy-devant commis du navire l'Hermione de Nantes, Gibbon aumonier du Contoir, D'eschebehere cy-devant capitaine en second du navire la Ste Agnès de Nantes*”.

¹¹²¹ www.slavevoyages.org (last consulted on the 22 September 2017) based on Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*. Additional information about the captains was found in Nicolas Jolin, *Répertoire des capitaines négriers de la période 1717-1738*, vol. 1 (Université de Nantes: Mémoire de Maîtrise sous la direction de Guy Saupin, 1998), 15, 41, 79, 81, 139.

¹¹²² ANOM E 285, personnel file Levesque: “*faire signé une deliberation par des Capitaines et des employez a luy affider par laquelle ils disoient apparemment que les negres ne vouloient point pour Directeur en Chef le dit Sr. Levesque parce qu'il vouloit reformer tous les abus que le dit Sr. Bouchel avoit toléré jusqu'alors, ce qui a causé et qui causent actuellement un très grand préjudice au commerce de la Nation*”.

Overseas directors guaranteed French port city merchants' support by developing their network and knowledge on the ground through integrating into regional trading circuits. Although this strategy often meant that overseas directors engaged in personal commercial activities, it was to their advantage to put their experience at the service of port city merchants. Indeed, port city merchants' complaints to the directors in Paris had a decisive effect on their future career. For this mutually advantageous relationship to take place, and for both parties to trust each other, this chapter has argued that interpersonal relations between overseas directors and port city merchants were necessary. These relations could occur through personal correspondence or meetings that cemented the relations of "*intersecting interests*." In turn, interpersonal relations allowed for further exchange of services and cooperation between representatives of state-sponsored institutions such as chartered companies and private merchants.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, in order to promote economic activities and growth in their factories, overseas directors attempted to integrate into local and regional trading networks. This regional integration was made necessary by the lack of funding, ships and supplies sent to the factories, among other reasons. It soon became apparent to overseas directors that the way to increase economic activities in their factories would not be through French trans-continental channels but by reaching some level of self-sustainability. This could be achieved in different ways. In Pondicherry, the attempts to integrate into intra-Asian trade took place, more or less, with the active involvement of the director. After multiple demands for small vessels to conduct intra-Asian trade, the inertia of the Parisian directors left Martin with limited options. Aware that he did not have the means to conduct country trade himself, Martin sought to bring intra-Asian trade to him by making Pondicherry as attractive as possible to Armenian, Indian, "*Portuguese*" and other European merchants. His contact with merchants in Madras, and particularly with the Huguenot Chardin, enabled Martin to indirectly infiltrate country trade circuits. Finally, Martin dispatched a French ship to join the English fleet en route to China. When Hébert arrived in Pondicherry, he partnered with the English governor of Madras, in the name of the Company, through Dulivier's intermediary. Furthermore, despite the fact that the director played a more active role in the intra-Asian trade voyages, he remained reliant on English mediation to actively integrate with country trade networks. Hébert and Dulivier were able to tap into country trade networks through the mediation of the English governors, and other English merchants assimilated themselves into

pre-existing intra-Asian networks. Despite all their efforts, the access to intra-Asian trade remained indirect.

In Ouidah, French directors engaged in trade with other European factors, but, the most profitable commercial activities involved Brazilian tobacco or gold. Bouchel therefore soon attempted to infiltrate the south Atlantic trading circuits by partnering with Luso-Brazilian private traders and entering into an interpersonal relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah. His strategy geared towards infiltrating the slave market to supply private traders well beyond imperial boundaries. Levet followed this line of action directed towards Brazilian trade. However, his strategy to access the Brazilian market differed from previous directors. Indeed, he entered into an interpersonal relationship of loyalty with the viceroy of Brazil to ensure that Brazilian traders supplied the French fort and would trade with it. He actively built his position as intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey. Guaranteeing the interests of the viceroy granted Levet with protection, supply and, theoretically, privileged access to Luso-Brazilian trade.

However, prioritising Luso-Brazilian interests came at a cost, and Levet lost his position as director of the fort in Ouidah. This loss was not due to unsatisfactory services to the Company or the French private traders, but because he negotiated too forcefully with the Dahomey King to protect the viceroy's interests. Because of their role as multi-lateral go-betweens, overseas directors had to navigate multiple interests and networks. In addition to local diplomatic relations and regional economic integration, overseas directors had to maintain good metropolitan relations. These Parisian relations were further complicated by the appearance of what this chapter has termed "*second principals*," or port city merchants mediating between overseas and Parisian directors. However, the "*two principals*" situation also offered opportunities for overseas directors. Indeed, they could enter into mutually beneficial relations with private merchants and gain their support in Paris. As second principals, port city merchants could benefit from overseas directors' attempts at self-sustainability, because these attempts implied the development of connections and knowledge of regional trading circuits.

Bouchel's personal trading connections with Brazilian merchants were accepted by French private captains, who needed an agent who was well-connected to Assou and King Hufon, as well as the inner workings of trade in Ouidah. Similarly, the Saint Malo merchants' support of Dulivier shows the importance port city merchants placed on the ability to count on overseas directors who benefitted from local and trans-imperial connections.

During his time as an independent merchant, Dulivier openly engaged Hébert in private partnerships with the English governor, demonstrating his extensive network of connections and his knowledge of the country trade. The fact that he operated on a private level with his English connections did not repel Saint Malo merchants. On the contrary, it made their direct contact with Dulivier all the more valuable. Overseas directors were most useful to French port city merchants when they had built their own networks of interpersonal loyalties.

However, in order for these mutually beneficial agreements to take place, they had to be cemented by interpersonal relations. These relations took different forms in the two showcased events. In the case of Dulivier, the relationship was built on letter exchanges with specific members of the Saint Malo Company and through services to Saint Malo ship captains in Pondicherry. The support came from the Saint Malo merchants in France, who personally wrote to the minister of the Navy. In Bouchel's case, he did not engage in direct correspondence with port city merchants in France but asked their captains in Ouidah for their support. The scarcity of sources does not allow a strong assertion that there was an exchange of favours between the director and the captains who supported him. However, the evidence of the captains' multiple encounters with Bouchel during his directorship, and the harsh competition and difficulties of trade in Ouidah during that period suggest that the captains considered Bouchel a good business partner. Overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah overcame the challenges and limitations of French state-sponsored companies by integrating into regional commercial networks on the one hand, and cooperating with French private merchants operating in the two factories on the other hand.

Conclusion

In October 1753 the director of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix was impeached and called back to France by the Company of the Indies. Dupleix had joined the Company ranks in India in 1722, worked as councillor in Pondicherry before becoming the director of Chandannagar in Bengal in 1731 and of Pondicherry in 1741. As director of Chandannagar, he had accumulated a fortune through his operations in intra-Asian private trade involving a widespread network featuring English and Dutch East India Company merchants among others.¹¹²³ He had already be fired from the Company in 1724 because of his corrupt practices.¹¹²⁴ What triggered his dismissal from the Company in 1753 was his strategy of military conquests in Karnataka and the Deccan from 1748 until 1754, particularly after 1752 when the Company directors strictly opposed his territorial ambitions.¹¹²⁵ What later became known “*la politique de Dupleix*” was based on the principle that the commerce of the Company in Asia was reliant on capital from France and – similarly to his predecessors studied in this research – Dupleix’s strategy was to find a way to make the Company in Asia less dependent on irregular and insufficient funds from France. According to him, the only solution is the military conquest of Indian territories to collect enough taxes for the Company to finance itself in Asia.¹¹²⁶

As with English East India Company servants, the territorial ambitions of Dupleix were not devoid of personal interest. The direct relations between conquest in India and the private trade of European company servants have been pointed out by historians. Indeed, the territorial expansion taking place in the mid-eighteenth century in India was the result of the ambitions of company servants in Asia to protect their private operations and not of the European Companies or governments.¹¹²⁷ Dupleix was no exception. Although his territorial ambitions were not exclusively directed towards personal interests, he did profit personally from the early victories but also lost once the tide turned.¹¹²⁸ Even if it will ultimately lead to his dismissal, Dupleix’s politic of territorial expansion and his private trade operations show that he benefitted from a much wider freedom of action than his predecessors of the first decades of the settlement of Pondicherry.

¹¹²³ Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 24.

¹¹²⁴ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, 139.

¹¹²⁵ Alfred Martineau, *Dupleix: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Société d’éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales Paris, 1931), 256–57.

¹¹²⁶ Martineau, 236.

¹¹²⁷ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 38; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 27.

¹¹²⁸ Martineau, *Dupleix*, 258.

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In Ouidah, men taking the position of directors during the second part of the eighteenth century showed more integration in Dahomian society than their predecessors.¹¹²⁹ Among these directors, Ollivier de Montaguère was in charge of the factory from 1776 to 1785 under the reign of Kpengla. While in office, de Montaguère had set up a private business partnership with, on the one hand, Joseph Le Beau, a *mulatto* who provided enslaved Africans and, on the other hand, de Montaguère's son in law, captain on slave trading ships for the trading house Romberg et Bapst in Bordeaux.¹¹³⁰ By giving priority to his own private trade, de Montaguère generated many complaints from French captains trading in Ouidah.¹¹³¹ His personal profit was not limited to this partnership; de Montaguère also allowed the *acquérats* to use the goods of the fort for their own slave trade provided they gave him a percentage of the transactions in cowry shells. He also attempted draw multiple bills of exchange in the name of the *Compagnie de Guyane* (in charge of the factory of Ouidah) on its correspondent in Lisbon.¹¹³²

Furthermore, de Montaguère was in good terms with Dahomian King and his officials who allegedly familiarly called him "monsieur Ollivier".¹¹³³ He was well-connected to local merchants and had married an Afro-Dutch woman called Sophie with whom he had children. When he was called back for abusive private trade, the Dahomians opposed the decision. If he sailed back ultimately, he remains an interesting case of stronger integration in Dahomian society through his business partners, his wife and his good relations with the King than his predecessors studied in this research. The extent of his personal commerce both in slave trade, in profiting from the *acquérats*' personal trade and his partial integration in local networks demonstrate the wide margin of manoeuvre Montaguère enjoyed.

Although similarly to Dupleix, Montaguère lost his position of overseas director, why did they exercise more agency than the directors did during the early period of the two factories? Fundamentally, the role of overseas directors for their principal had not changed. They still depended on the quality and quantity of goods and funds sent from France, negotiated trading contracts with Indian merchants or enslaved Africans with Dahomian

¹¹²⁹ "Several spoke Fongbe, married Dahomean women fathered children and functioned comfortably in Dahomean culture" in Bay, *Wives of the Leopard Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, 68.

¹¹³⁰ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 66.

¹¹³¹ ANOM COL E 315, personnel file of Montaguère: "Relativement au commerce que le s. Ollivier Montaguère a fait en société avec le s. Senat son gendre (...)"

¹¹³² ANOM COL E 315, personnel file of Montaguère, answer of the *Compagnie de la Guyan française* to the letter of the 24 September of Ollivier de Montaguère.

¹¹³³ Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 66.

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authorities and traders and, attempted to acquire credit.¹¹³⁴ What affected the agency of overseas directors were the alterations in the policies of the Companies in charge of the factories and local political changes.

In Pondicherry the position of director was more comfortable, the Company of the Indies had increased its profitability compared to its predecessor and, was perceived as a threat by its English and Dutch counterparts.¹¹³⁵ The settlement had grown and the *nawab* of Arcot delegated the right of minting rupees.¹¹³⁶ Most importantly, the Company of the Indies allowed its servants to trade in Asia and kept its monopoly on the Euro-Asian commerce. This policy generated incredible opportunities for Company servants to enrich themselves which were fully seized by overseas directors.¹¹³⁷ Legal private trade increased and strengthened business connections across cultural and imperial boundaries. What is particular of the directorship of Dupleix in Pondicherry is the shift towards territorial expansion in India. No premeditated plan existed, but the troubled local political situation in India coupled with military reinforcement from Europe, particularly during the Seven Years War, tempted French and English Company officials towards the use violence and coercion to conquer the Indian Subcontinent.¹¹³⁸

In the case of Ouidah, the frequent changes in the French institutions in charge of the factory from the Company of the Indies, to direct royal administration and the *Compagnie de Guyane* at the end of the eighteenth century meant that the policies regarding the permission of private trade by French representatives in Ouidah were not consistent. The factors affecting the agency of overseas directors in Ouidah are rather to be found in the changes taking place in the Dahomian administration. In 1746, Tegbesu allowed private African and Eur-African traders to engage in slave trade in Dahomian territory.¹¹³⁹ The opening of the slave trade in Dahomey led to the emergence of a private merchant community in the town of Ouidah, increasing the opportunities for overseas directors. Additionally, local political context affected positively the development of the town of Ouidah. By 1743 the firm establishment of the Dahomian rule over the town of Ouidah led to the reconstruction of the town.

¹¹³⁴ Martineau, *Dupleix*, 73.

¹¹³⁵ Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive*, 3–5.

¹¹³⁶ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 93.

¹¹³⁷ Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive*, xvii.

¹¹³⁸ After the death of Aurangzeb, the political map of India was divided in smaller polities in Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 32.

¹¹³⁹ He reaffirmed the opening of the slave trade in 1769 in Law, *Ouidah*, 111.

CONCLUSION

Except for a decrease of population at the end Tegbesu's reign in 1776, the town experienced a steady demographic increase in the second part of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁴⁰ The population was a mixed of Hueda indigenous people, Dahomians, migrants from the Gold Coast and descendants of the Europeans including a growing Afro-Brazilian community.¹¹⁴¹ If the end of the Dahomian wars and the affirmation of their authority over the town of Ouidah ended destructions and brought political stability, tensions between the monarchy and the coastal communities of Ouidah were still present. Indeed as an illustration of these political tensions, Dahomian officials in charge of the town of Ouidah were frequently executed until 1770. After that date, the confrontation shifted towards the rising merchant community in Ouidah.¹¹⁴² Nevertheless, overseas directors in Ouidah were facing a more stable political environment, coupled with a stronger merchant community in a growing town. The integration – even if partial – in local communities, relations to the authorities and the development of personal trade connections were facilitated by the evolution of the town of Ouidah. Lastly, the larger context of the strong increase in French slave trade during the second half of the eighteenth century related to the intensification of sugar production in the French West Indies could have strengthened the position of overseas directors in Ouidah.

The focus of this research on the early years of the French expansion by studying the first decades of the two factories and of the Companies that administrated them is a deliberate choice, well before the beginning of the territorial expansion in India and the political influence of the Afro-Brazilian merchants in Dahomey. Choosing a period when the power relations was not in favour of Europeans, and particularly not of the French, allowed for the uncovering of individual strategies in overcoming the limits of French institutions. Some of these strategies, such as the attempts at self-sustainability through taxation and intra-Asian trade, are the roots of the politics used by later directors. Despite their narrow margin of manoeuvre, I have uncovered the role of overseas and metropolitan directors' agency in shaping the French expansion in India and on the West African Coast. Overseas directors' (in)ability to adapt to local political, economic and cultural conditions, as well as the development of cross-cultural, trans-imperial and metropolitan connections shaped the early French expansion. In the metropolis, the French expansion was based on the mutually-beneficial partnerships between companies and private traders.

¹¹⁴⁰ Law, 73.

¹¹⁴¹ Bay, *Wives of the Leopard Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, 168.

¹¹⁴² The merchant interests of Ouidah played a role in the subsequent coup against the Dahomey King in 1818 in Law, *Ouidah*, 119–22.

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Shifting the perspective to individual, their strategies and their connections showed another type of expansion which is not limited to national categorization, economic profitability or institutional efficiency. The complementarity between individual agency and chartered companies demonstrated in this dissertation reinforces the argument about the necessary participation of private interests in the development of other European chartered companies.¹¹⁴³ The agency of directors inside the French companies included – but was not limited to – their private trade activities and the information, contacts and experience that such operations offered to the companies. The complementary role of directors' agency also encompassed their ability to take strategic decisions regarding cross-cultural diplomatic relations and trans-imperial power dynamics contributing to both their own interests and those of the companies. The comparison between Pondicherry and Ouidah allowed me to test my hypothesis on multiple cases and to demonstrate that it was not limited to one region of the French early modern expansion.

Based on historiographical debates that have revised the position of Europeans in the political and economic context in India and on the west coast of Africa, unveiling overseas directors' agency meant first understanding the degree of their dependence on political authorities. In this regard, the two factories presented significant differences. In terms of sovereignty rights, although Louis XIV delegated similar sovereign powers to the Guinea/Asiento Company and the East India Company, they took a different form in practice. Indeed, sovereignty rights acquired by the companies in the two factories depended primarily on the powers delegated to them by local rulers. Pondicherry developed into a settlement that ruled itself while Ouidah remained a trading post and tributary under direct authority of the African administration. However, the sovereign rights acquired in Pondicherry depended on the *farman* granted by the Mughal emperor which made the Company in Pondicherry a tributary to the ruler. Aside from tributary relations, Pondicherry and Ouidah shared a number of other features. Their geographical situation made them vulnerable to blockades: they were dependent on the hinterland for foodstuff and not easily provisioned via the sea for different reasons. Additionally, their military forces were relatively weak when compared to the Mughal, Dahomey or even the other European garrisons and they were unable to seriously resist an attack. The dependence of the factories from local rulers, which is obvious in the case of Ouidah, has to be stressed also for Pondicherry. Following the current

¹¹⁴³ Among others: Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 12–13; Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 275; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 73.

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historiographical development in the study of India and the West African Coast, the French overseas directors' margin of manoeuvre was defined primarily by local political rulers.

Many other actors contributed to limiting the agency of overseas directors in both regions through their own strong bargaining position within the organisation of the trade. In Pondicherry, directors contracted through brokers with Indian merchants, who supplied them with textiles from the weaving villages in the hinterland. Additionally, directors had to provide payment in advance and relied on credit providers, who were frequently Armenian merchants. The rhythm of the monsoons played in Indian merchants' favour; they had the upper hand in contract negotiations, despite the mediation of a skilled broker. This, in turn, increased the need for credit, which placed credit providers in a good position as well. Lastly, the position of main broker of the Company was a powerful one and led to the empowerment of specific merchant families, who appear in the records as major tax farmers of the French territories.

In Ouidah, the centralisation of the slave trade market in the Hueda capital, and the subsequent royal monopoly over the slave trade during the early years of the Dahomey conquest, led to the concentration of economic and political power that resided in the hands of the king and his officials. An appointed broker, who was part of the king's administration, mediated the relations with the Hueda and Dahomey traders. Finally, a great part of the credit opportunities laid with the King and his officials. These factors strengthened the African authorities' bargaining position with European representatives in Ouidah. However, contrary to the situation in Pondicherry, African commercial and political actors were much less diverse. The concentration of power in the hands of the Hueda and Dahomey kings increased their strong position. Overseas directors in Ouidah had no other option but to submit in both the economic and the political sphere, enjoying even less margin for manoeuvre than in Pondicherry.

There, aside from Indian and Armenian merchants, other prominent actors in the development of the settlement were Indian inhabitants, who mostly worked as weavers for the Company. Their agency was tightly linked to their profession, which enabled them to leave the settlement immediately when their rights were not respected or if the situation was better in another settlement. In a similar way, soldiers of the garrison easily went to other settlements for higher wages. In Ouidah, workers who were known to exercise their agency were canoe rowers. The French hired canoemen from the Gold Coast due to their superior skills. These canoemen frequently refused to work for the French, thereby asserting their

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agency. However, the main local workers were the slaves of the fort, *acquérats*, of whose agency, and over whom, very little is known. The significant difference in the number of inhabitants between Pondicherry and Ouidah largely accounts for the stronger display of agency in Pondicherry. In both factories however, the weak position of French overseas directors in local power relations, as well as in the local economic context, affected their role as agent of the Company.

Overseas directors were meant to act as an intermediary between local political authorities and commercial actors on one hand, and Company interests on the other. However, in practice, they had to navigate an array of different interests and neither of the two sides was homogenous. This is why the term “*multi-lateral go-between*” is more fitting our case-studies than the concept of go-between, which is mostly used to define as a third party in a dyadic relationship. As has been shown, the multitude of political and economic actors from different castes and ethnicities in Pondicherry, each of them following their own agenda, cannot be simplified into a single interest group. Similarly, despite the strong centralisation in Ouidah, different actors emerge, such as private merchants under the Hueda period, the different officials having their own relations of power towards the Dahomey King, and canoemen from the Gold Coast.

A similar variety can be observed on the companies’ side. In Pondicherry, Company captains had their own profit in mind, and private merchants under the Saint Malo merchants’ monopoly were granted the right to engage in privateering ventures that destabilised the role of the overseas directors. In the settlement of Pondicherry itself, Company interests and those of religious orders could clash. In Ouidah, both Company captains and private merchants shared the trading space, often simultaneously. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, orders from directors in Paris were often ill-adapted to the weak bargaining position of overseas directors in the two factories. These orders were aimed at connecting commodity chains between India and the west coast of Africa, adding a layer of complexity to the role of multi-lateral go-betweens.

There were greater incentives, both in number and quality, to become an overseas director in Pondicherry. Serving as director of Pondicherry, more often than not, meant social reward in France through being granted the title of knight of the Order of *Saint Lazare et Notre Dame du Mont Carmel*. Additionally, Pondicherry had become the Company’s central settlement in India and the director governed over the nascent colony, as well as all other trading posts in the subcontinent. Furthermore, the directorship of the settlement potentially

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offered opportunities for self-enrichment through illegal private trade. Louis XIV distributed no such social reward for service in Ouidah, and the life expectancy of directors was low due to disease, local conflicts and the Hueda or Dahomey king's power. Authoritarian rule frequently led to either deportation or death of overseas directors. The power of the director was limited to the small fort and by the strong control of the Hueda and later Dahomey kings. The difference in size and responsibility also meant a lower pay than that in Pondicherry, despite the high mortality rates in Ouidah. Nevertheless, some incentives existed to make the position of director of Ouidah more tempting. First, directors could hope to make a career inside the Company and transfer elsewhere after serving in Ouidah. Second, similar to Pondicherry, there were many opportunities for private trade. Finally, overseas directors could still hope to increase their power despite the strong authority of the African kings.

The first step to secure their position as overseas directors was to be granted the protection and "friendship" of local rulers. In the early years of the settlement in Pondicherry, rulers changed regularly and directors interacted with them according to local power dynamics. Martin, for instance, had closer personal relations with the governor of Bijapur, Sher Khan Lodi, than with the Maratha leader, Shivaji, or the Mughal governor, Daud Khan Panni. The director's relations with Shivaji were based on a fragile equilibrium of interdependence. As for his relationship with the Mughal governor it was, as was the case with previous rulers, based on gift-giving sessions, similar to tributes. Additionally, directors dealt with the ambitions of neighbouring rulers. These different rulers frequently imposed gift giving on directors. However, it could also be a beneficial tool for directors to access connections, assert power or establish their authority within the pre-existing power dynamics. Directors assessed the value of the gifts and decided in which situations gift exchanges could be delayed or refused. The refusal to enter into a gift-giving relationship had a larger meaning of refusing the hierarchical relations, and therefore was instrumental to the directors' attempts to redefine power relations.

Similar gift-giving relations existed between the French and the Hueda, and later Dahomey. However, due to the concentration of power, the position of overseas director of Ouidah greatly depended on the protection of Hueda or Dahomey authorities and the benefits from their "*friendship*." The specificities of the value and the commodities demanded by African authorities further narrowed the agency of directors when engaging in the gift exchange. Challenging Dahomey authority usually ended in the forced return of the director. But even in these unbalanced relationships, directors made choices and implemented

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strategies that showcase their agency. Gift-giving was by no means a static mechanism and strategies were present on both sides of the interaction. Furthermore, there were other ways of gaining the King's protection; for instance, by indicating unwavering loyalty or demonstratively acknowledging the sovereignty of the Dahomey king. Gift-giving sessions did not provide directors in Ouidah with the same opportunity to claim a position in local power relations, as it did in Pondicherry. Nevertheless, relations with Dahomey or Hueda kings, just as with Indian rulers, required improvisation and strategic decisions that fell to overseas directors.

Besides the constant attention devoted to strengthening the protection provided by local rulers and securing the factory and their position as head of it, overseas directors had to make the factory useful to the Company. Theoretically, directors in Pondicherry prioritised finding funds to start contracting the necessary commodities for future cargoes and, in Ouidah, buying enslaved Africans before the arrival of French ships, but in practice, the greatest priority was ensuring the survival of the fort's employees. The frequency of French ships sailing to the two factories differed greatly and impacted the strategies directors employed to find emergency funds. In Pondicherry, directors could stimulate demographic growth and subsequently increase income, which guaranteed the inhabitants' protection and religious freedom. However, directors' implementation of pragmatic religious freedom was not constant. Instead, it alternated with strong religious restrictions in an attempt to assert control over the population. Directors were also required to adapt to local commercial rules. These decisions were, at times, in contradiction with orders coming from Paris but justified as being for the sake of the factory. More often than not, directors improvised decisions on the spot to overcome the Company's limitations and deficiencies overseas. This was particularly true in regard to creditworthiness. The Company's reputation in India could become so eroded that the overseas director resorted to taking out loans on his own credit. This illustrates the symbiotic relation between the Company and the agency of its servants.

In Ouidah, directors could borrow cowry shells from the king and his officials. However, the consequences in cases of insolvency were dire. In case of high debts, directors feared the deterioration of their relationship with local authorities more than their own employer in France. The frequency of French private ships coming to Ouidah enabled directors to draw bills of exchange on their principals in Paris to buy basic commodities. In both factories, directors relied extensively on other European settlements in the region. In Ouidah, directors borrowed from other factors and even from the Danish on the Gold Coast.

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Sometimes it even led to a chain of debts, such as when the director reimbursed the English governor of Madras by indebting himself to the Spanish governor of Manila. The reliance on other European imperial powers for credit formed part of a larger cooperative system across European empires in the two regions of analysis.

Trans-imperial cooperation in Pondicherry and Ouidah was based on interpersonal relations maintained through regular correspondence or visits, the exchange of services and collective negotiations. A striking example of this was the strong reliance on foreign shipping for communication with France, particularly in Pondicherry but also, in times of warfare in Europe, in Ouidah. The declaration of war in Europe did not affect the “*good correspondence*” between specific representatives of imperial powers. Indeed, the cooperative relationship that ensued was based on the cooperative actors’ situation locally, rather than the European context. It was the result of a careful assessment of risks and opportunities by the overseas directors. The motivation to cooperate across imperial boundaries was linked to the weak position of power in the local political context, which led to an interdependent relationship between the two actors of the cooperation. Representatives of European imperial powers relied on inter-imperial solidarity as an emergency mechanism, and encouraged a united front out of necessity. Overseas directors could take advantage of this situation of mutual dependence for personal purposes. By imposing themselves as the third party in a conflict, they forced cooperation and achieved a position of authority within local power dynamics.

Interdependence triggered cooperation and made sure it would endure. Defection on this cooperation ended all activities that the French factories relied upon to survive. English ships took French Company merchandise from the Coromandel Coast to Bengal; the English governor could easily keep the merchandise as collateral in the event of the French director’s defection. The cooperation was calculated. If one of the actors’ power increased, the fragile equilibrium of interdependence would break and the cooperation would end. The inter-imperial cooperative relations did not exclude competition, and both mechanisms were not mutually exclusive. Local rulers provoked a competitive environment that was most observable in the gift-giving sessions. The competitive behaviours often took other forms than usually assumed. In Pondicherry, they came from the “*outside*,” or from Saint Malo merchants’ privateering activities and put the carefully built inter-imperial cooperation in the region at stake. In Ouidah, each European factor sought to have the upper hand in another inter-imperial endeavour: trade with the Luso-Brazilians.

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Generally speaking, warfare and competition in Europe cannot be projected onto a setting where the Company relied on overseas directors' connections for the resilience of its factories. Indeed, these connections constantly crossed imperial boundaries. If anything, war declarations increased overseas directors' agency and led them to further rely on other European imperial powers. By focusing on inter-imperial relations instead of exclusively intra-imperial dynamics, I have challenged traditional national narratives that have portrayed European expansions as evolving in isolation from each other, with the exception of competitive interactions. I have shown that overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah relied heavily on inter-imperial cooperation to maintain their factories and therefore revise their position in local power dynamics. Their reliance on other powers did not end there, however. To reach a stage of economic development, overseas directors had to deepen their trans-imperial and cross-cultural connections.

In the hope of economic growth, and to stimulate commercial activity, overseas directors' strategies were geared towards local and regional trading networks, rather than on the commercial connection and dependence to the metropolis. They therefore attempted, with more or less success, to integrate into local and regional commercial circuits. In Pondicherry, this meant the web of trade networks spanning from the Mascarene Islands to Manila and, most importantly, China. The Company lacked the means to infiltrate these networks alone, and overseas directors found different ways to overcome these deficiencies. First, Martin sought to make Pondicherry attractive to merchants who had a strong intra-Asian business and made use of his personal connections who had access to the Chinese market, which enabled him to access some goods. Another option, shown by Dulivier, was to intensify the commercial ties with other Company settlements across the Indian Ocean, such as the Mascarene Islands. Finally, both the Mascarenes and the Chinese markets could be connected by partnering with English Company merchants through Dulivier's network. The English possessed the knowledge and the connections needed to trade in the intra-Asian networks through their country trade activities. Overseas directors of Pondicherry used their cooperative relations with the English not only to maintain their settlement, but also to access markets that would otherwise be inaccessible.

In Ouidah, overseas directors directed their commercial strategy towards Brazil and south Atlantic networks. After failing to bypass Luso-Brazilian traders, an option for Bouchel was to enter into a business partnership with them and have his own agents in the nearby trading posts to maximise his access to the slave market. Additionally, an interpersonal

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relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director was a useful complementary strategy to ensure that the partnership would endure the creation of the Luso-Brazilian fort. Levet also took advantage of interpersonal connections, both through direct correspondence with the viceroy of Brazil and acting as an indispensable representative of Luso-Brazilian interests in Ouidah, for both his own gain and the Company's. In this role, Levet ensured the protection of the viceroy, and therefore Luso-Brazilians prioritised the French when trading, which gave the director privileged access to the south Atlantic connections.

From the perspective of principal-agent relations, prioritising the economic self-sustainability of their factories could clash with metropolitan interests. The infiltration of local and regional trading networks frequently included the personal gains, economic or otherwise, of overseas directors at the expense of the Company. However, as demonstrated by recent studies on principal-agent relations, the malfeasant behaviour of agents could be useful to their principal, in which case they would have a mutually-beneficial relation. Overseas directors' attempts at self-sustainability generated much-needed knowledge and connections that benefitted the Parisian directors, provided this information was used to their advantage. In the cases under scrutiny, the principal-agent situation was further complicated by the existence of a "*second principal*:" port city merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah through a Company monopoly grant, because they bought licenses or because the crown had opened the trade to them. I have found that in the dual principal setting, similar mutually-beneficial deals took place between overseas directors and port city merchants. The signs of this cooperation further refute the theory of a dichotomy, opposing port city merchants' interests to those of the French state and its companies.

The mutually-beneficial relationship between overseas directors and port city merchants was based on the private merchants' guarantee of their support to the Parisian directors and the minister of the navy. In turn, the merchants would benefit from overseas directors' connections and knowledge, regardless of if it was generated by illegal private trade. I have further shown that these cooperative behaviours could only be sustained if they were cemented by interpersonal relations between the two parties. They could take place through face-to-face meetings or through regular private correspondence. These mutually-beneficial relations are more understandable if one takes the perspective of the "*second principals*" and their strategies as individuals. The intersection of private interests on both sides generated and maintained the cooperation between overseas directors and port city merchants. Indeed, directors and main investors in port city merchants' partnerships and the

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chartered companies under scrutiny appear to have had a personal interest in the commercial ventures.

Transferring the principal-agent interactions to the Parisian directors reveals their strategies and demonstrates the agency of individuals usually portrayed as forced into investing in chartered companies. It has been demonstrated that Parisian directors had their own reasons for investing in chartered companies. Despite the fact that chartered companies appeared as institutionally attractive in theory, the protection granted to their investors, such as limited liability, was not respected in practice. Additionally, the *de facto* management of the chartered companies under study by the minister of the Navy and the French kings weighs against the positive incentives for directors to invest and manage companies. As for the argument of the upward social mobility the investment would generate for the directors, it is virtually impossible to disentangle this investment from other types of investments, such as offices and royal revenue collections. Therefore, it would be hazardous to consider the social status a major motivation. Most directors under scrutiny invested in multiple companies, which indicates that there were other incentives.

It has been demonstrated that these other incentives were varying forms of market access. Chartered companies provided their directors and shareholders with privileged access to markets under monopoly and, consequently, limited competition. Parisian directors maximised their legitimate access to privileges through contracting the provisioning of companies, acquiring entire cargoes before they were auctioned and buying Company licenses for their own business. Most strikingly, they appear to have used the Company structures overseas and the infiltrated intra-Asian markets to trade for their own benefit. Their position as directors or shareholders in multiple companies simultaneously enabled them to connect commodity chains. It gave them privileged access to goods that they needed for their other overseas businesses. Furthermore, the high volume of their investments in chartered companies and sub-contracting companies provided some directors with a strong bargaining position with the minister of the Navy and the king, opening the door to other markets. Similar to the mutually-beneficial relationship between some private traders and overseas directors mentioned above, directors' private endeavours and Company interests were not opposed, but rather complementary. The agency of Parisian directors was needed to complement the deficiencies of the Company and vice versa, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two.

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The agency of Parisian and overseas directors shaped the French expansion from the metropolis to the overseas trading stations and settlements. Their agency manifested itself in the strategies used to interact with local rulers and their—often failed—attempts to redefine power relations. Their cooperative undertakings across imperial boundaries, despite political and economic competition in Europe, indicate the role of their strategies and connections for the maintenance of the factories. Their agency is further shown by their objective of economic self-sustainability, by focusing on local and regional commercial networks rather than on the connection to France. Furthermore, the entanglements of public and private interests in the French expansion are demonstrated by their interpersonal relations with private merchants. This synergetic relationship is even more obvious once the principal-agent problem is applied in the metropolitan setting. Parisian directors' agency is demonstrated by the varying strategies used to maximise their legitimate access to markets, while supplementing the shortages of the companies.

The inter-dependent relations between Companies and the agency of its servants made it beneficial for Companies to make space for metropolitan and overseas directors' freedom of action. The goal of French chartered companies appears increasingly less oriented towards efficiency or profitability, and more towards offering a platform for individual agency to stimulate the expanding early empire. By highlighting the role of individual agency in shaping the French early modern expansion, this dissertation has presented an alternative to the institutional and path-dependent narrative, bringing to light a period when the French empire in India and the West African Coast was in its infancy and could have taken a very different shape.

Glossary¹¹⁴⁴

Acquérats: Enslaved Africans of the French fort of Ouidah.

Agou: Interpreter in the Hueda administration.

Akhigan: Official responsible for the trade in the Dahomey administration.

Aldée: From the Portuguese word *aldeia*; a village or small rural community.

Aplogan: (*gan* meaning chief) high officials of the Hueda administration.

Arrack: Liquor or spirit, commonly distilled from coconut palm sap, rice or sugarcane.

Bétel: pepper plant whose leaves are consumed in Asia.

Bonyon: principal royal merchant under Dahomey.

Chamber of Justice: French sovereign tribunal or commission of the Royal Council temporarily established to search out those who have embezzled royal funds.

Chaudrie: Court in Pondicherry ruling on disputes between Indian inhabitants.

Chetty: A South Indian merchant caste, divided over years into several subcastes, each functioning as a separate caste.

Cockavo: The highest military officer in Ouidah in the Dahomey administration.

Coki: Principal royal merchant under Dahomey.

Diwan: Provincial revenue farmer and administrator, usually Mughal.

Dubash: Literally “two languages”; interpreter; translator.

Fanam: Southern Indian currency, gold or silver coin.

Farman: literally “command”; imperial grant, patent, charter.

Faujdar: literally “army-holder”; head of tributary military or police force, usually Mughal.

Ferme générale: consortium of tax-farmers collecting indirect revenues and the revenues of the royal domain in France.

Financier: fisco-financial administrator for the French monarchy, the function combined collecting royal revenue and providing credit to the king.

Gogan: High official of the Hueda administration.

¹¹⁴⁴ Arasara, p. 389-394 ; Kaepelin p. 663-667; Stern, p. 286-288 ; slave coast, and rowlands

CURRENCIES

Guinées: Thin cotton textiles mainly produced on the Coromandel Coast.

Marakkayar: A subdivision of Tamil Muslims of Coromandel.

Mehu: High official of the Dahomey administration.

Migan: High official of the Dahomey administration.

Nayak: Southern Indian ruler, often a tributary state under Vijayanagara empire.

Nawab: A Mughal provincial governor or viceroy.

Pagoda: Southern Indian currency, gold or silver; also a Hindu temple.

Pīshkash: Offering, tribute, gift, most often to a government official.

Qùèche: small French ship of 200 to 500 *tonneaux*.

Receveur général: Function in the French fiscal system in charge of collecting direct taxes from the *receveurs* locally and transferred it to the royal treasury or kept it available for the royal administration in the provinces.

Rupée: Mughal currency, silver coin.

Salempouris: white or blue cotton textiles from the Coromandel Coast.

Topaz: mestizo Indo-Portuguese soldier.

Vellalar: A Tamil agricultural caste.

Yevogan: (*yevo* meaning white) the official responsible for all dealing with Europeans in the Hueda and Dahomey administration.

Currencies¹¹⁴⁵

1 livres tournois = 20 sous; 1sol = 12 deniers

1 écu = 3 livres

1 pagoda = 8 livres tournois and 10 sous

1 fanam = 4 sous

1 Pondicherry rupee = 30-33 sous

¹¹⁴⁵ Paul Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes orientales et François Martin: étude sur l'histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l'Inde sous Louis XIV (1664-1719)* (Paris: Challamel, 1908), 540–41.

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Curriculum vitae

Elisabeth Heijmans was born on the 20th of March 1989 in Tournai, Belgium. In 2008, she started the bachelor in History at Namur University in Belgium followed by the Master in history at the Catholic University of Louvain that she combined with a teaching diploma. As part of her education, Elisabeth studied at the University of Salamanca, Spain for six months. Based on her Master's thesis, she published 'Le projet d'une dévotion à l'échelle mondiale, l'exemple de La Josephina de Gracián de la Madre de Dios (1545-1614)' in *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Leuven Louvain-la-Neuve, 3-4, 2015.

In 2013, Elisabeth started her PhD in the ERC funded project *Fighting Monopolies, Defying Empires 1500-1750* entitled 'The Agency of Empire: Personal Connections and Individual Strategies in the Shaping of the French Early Modern Expansion (1686-1746)' at Leiden University, institute for history under the supervision of prof. dr. Catia Antunes and prof. dr. Silvia Marzagalli. During her PhD, she completed the N.W. Posthumus Institute Graduate Training Program and taught Bachelor and Master Research Seminars at Leiden University. After her PhD, Elisabeth started as a postdoctoral researcher in the NWO-funded project *Resilient Diversity: the Governance of Racial and Religious Plurality in the Dutch Empire, 1600-1800*.