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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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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 XVIII^e 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 nomé 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.

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