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

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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 ato administrate 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'establissement 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.

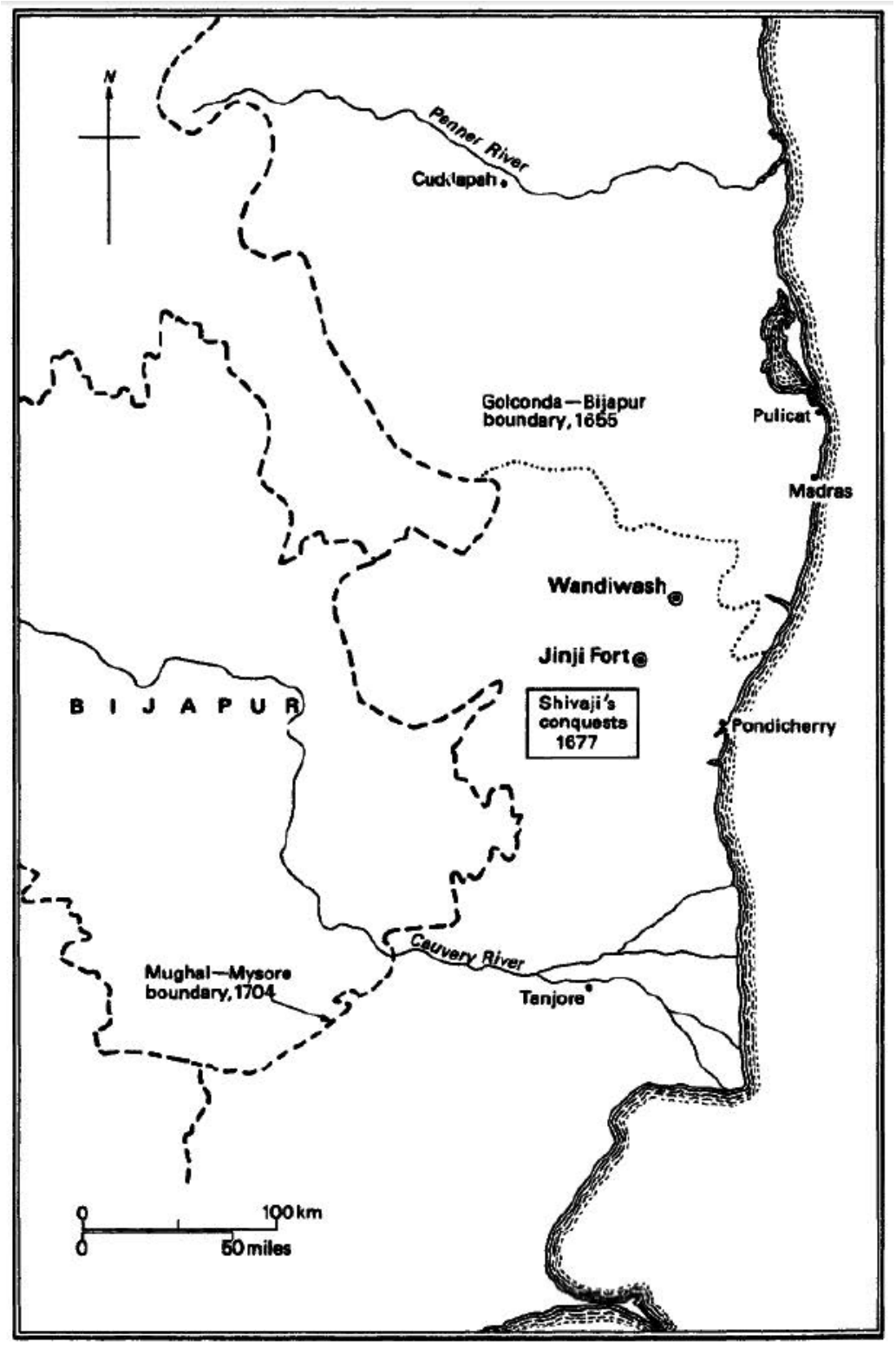
2. Political guidelines and the French presence in Pondicherry and Ouidah

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'lfiqar 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.

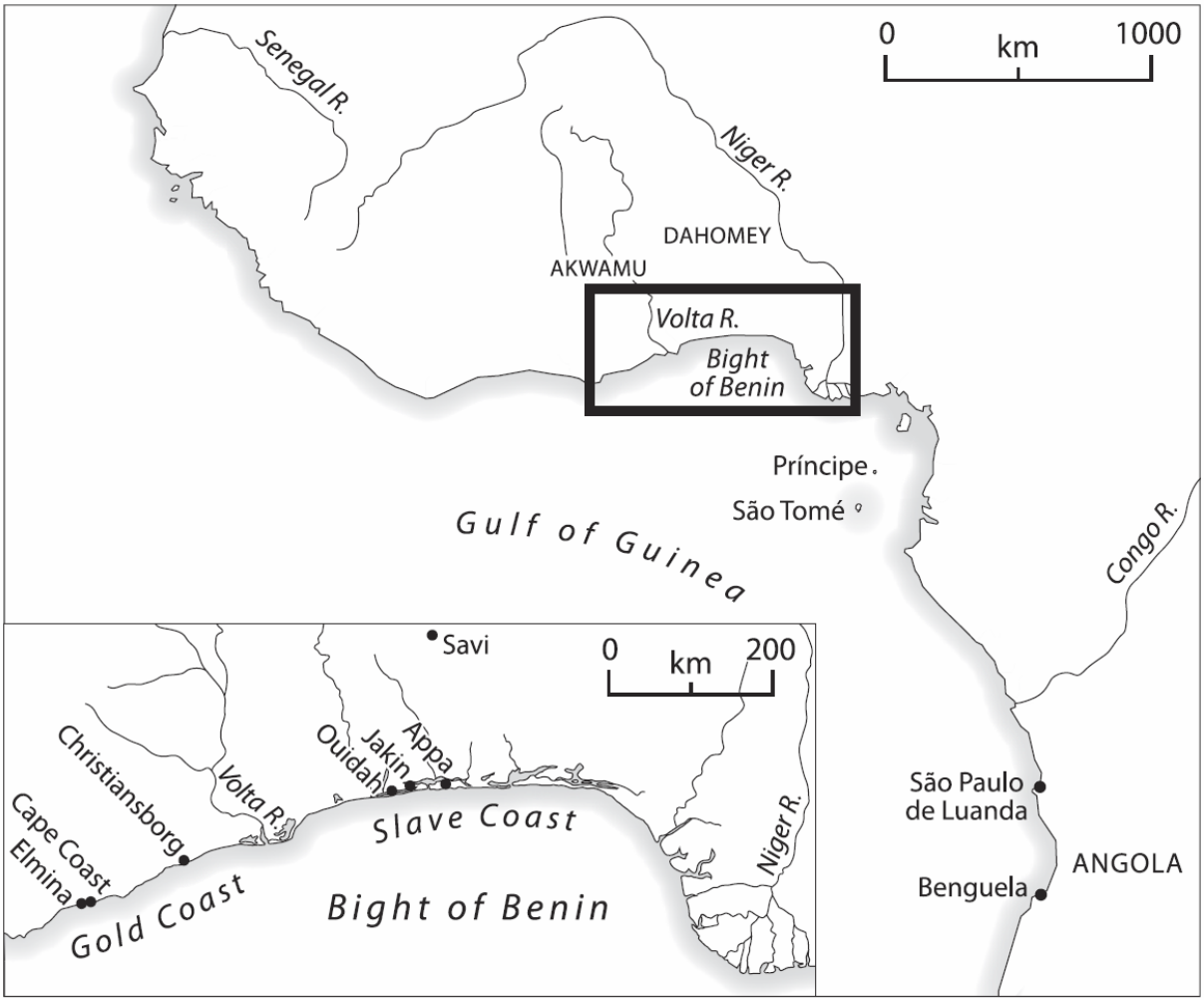
In 1707, Aurangzeb passed away and for the following decades political instability at the Mughal court created a power vacuum.[380] Maratha rulers, other local inland rulers and former Mughal officials took advantage of the imperial weakness to strengthen their power locally. Therefore, when Da'ud Khan 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.

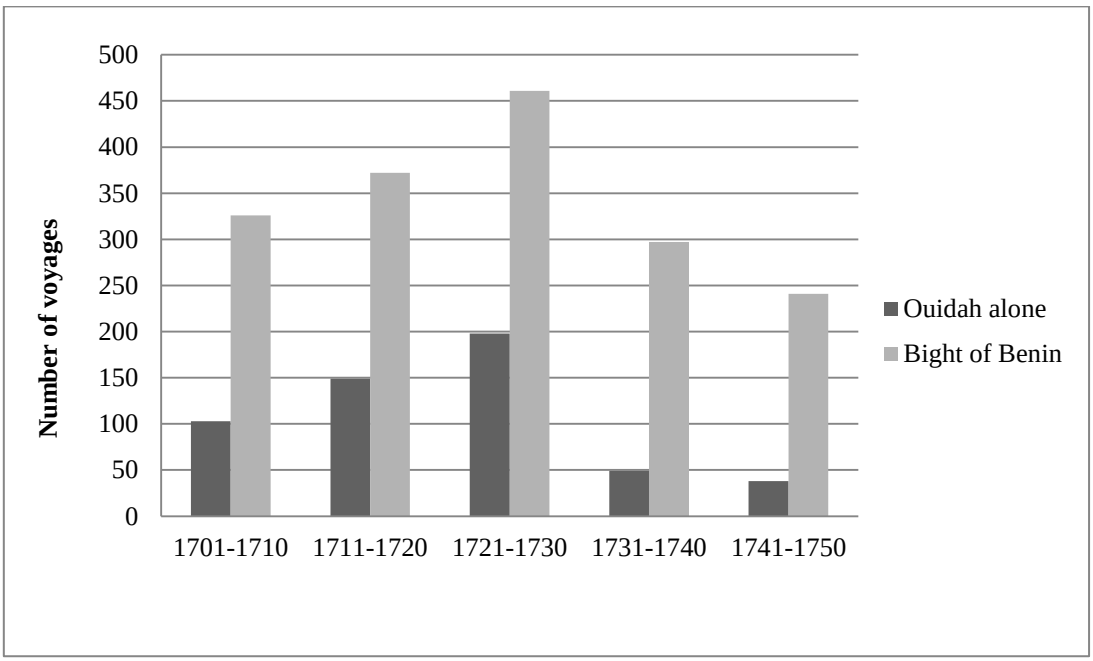
Figure 2.3. Map of the Bight of Benin



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.

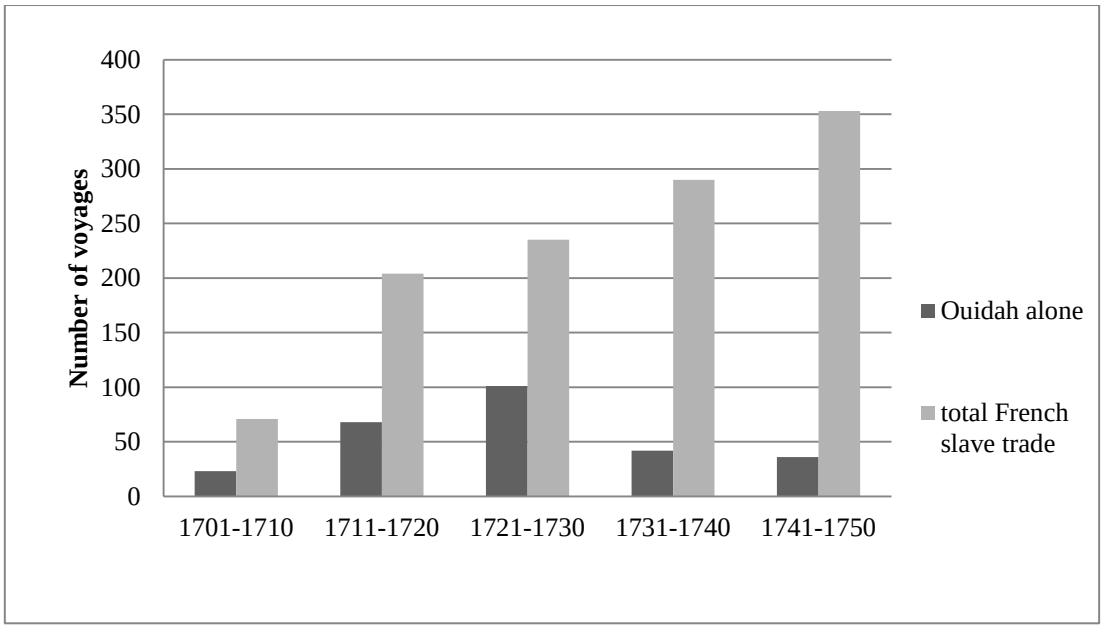
Ouidah, where multiple European forts were situated, was a major slave-trading hub during the eighteenth century. Between 1700 and 1750, a total of 1,697 European ships sailed to the Bight of Benin to engage in slave trade. In Ouidah alone, the number of European ships amounted to 537. As presented on 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 govenor 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 year 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 Compnany 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 Rijswijck.[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 en 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]

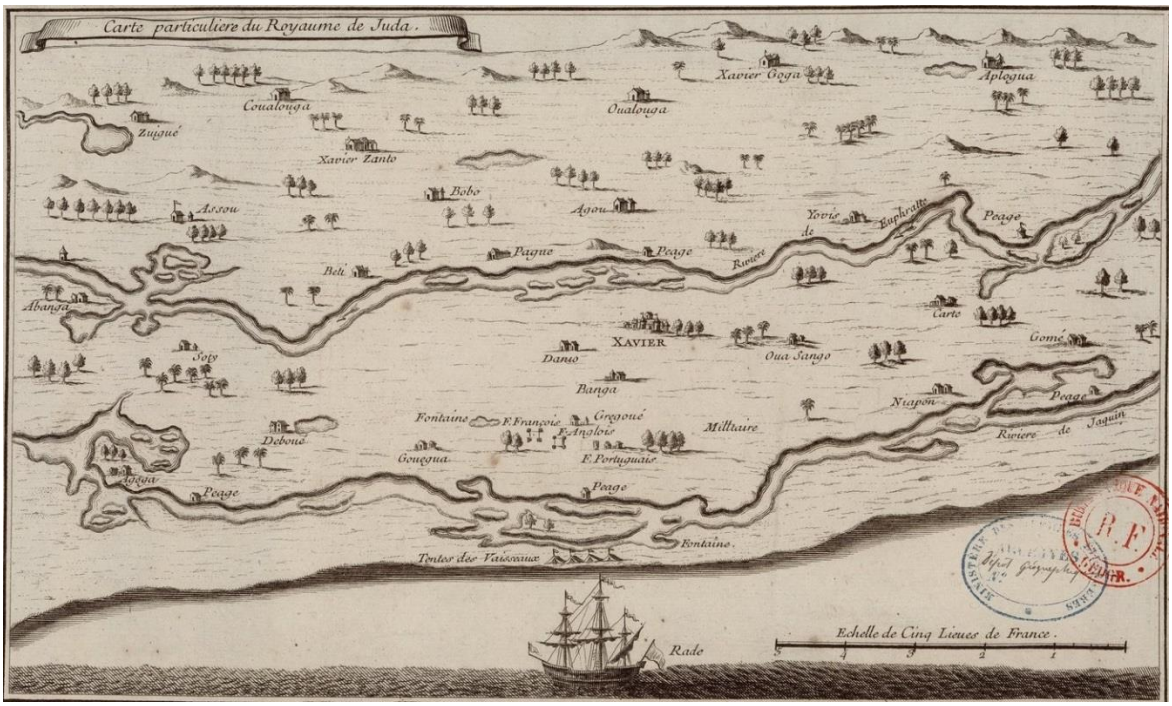
When the original French factory in the Hueda kingdom burned down in 1703, the Company factor recommended building a new one nearer to the sea; at the original location, it was impossible to transport merchandise from the ships to the trading lodge in Savi in a day. When Jean Doublet, the French corsair 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 Entrepreunarial 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 Coffers: 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 allotte 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 for 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 Carnatte 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]

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[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 Kaeppelin, *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 païs*".

[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. Hatalkar, *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.

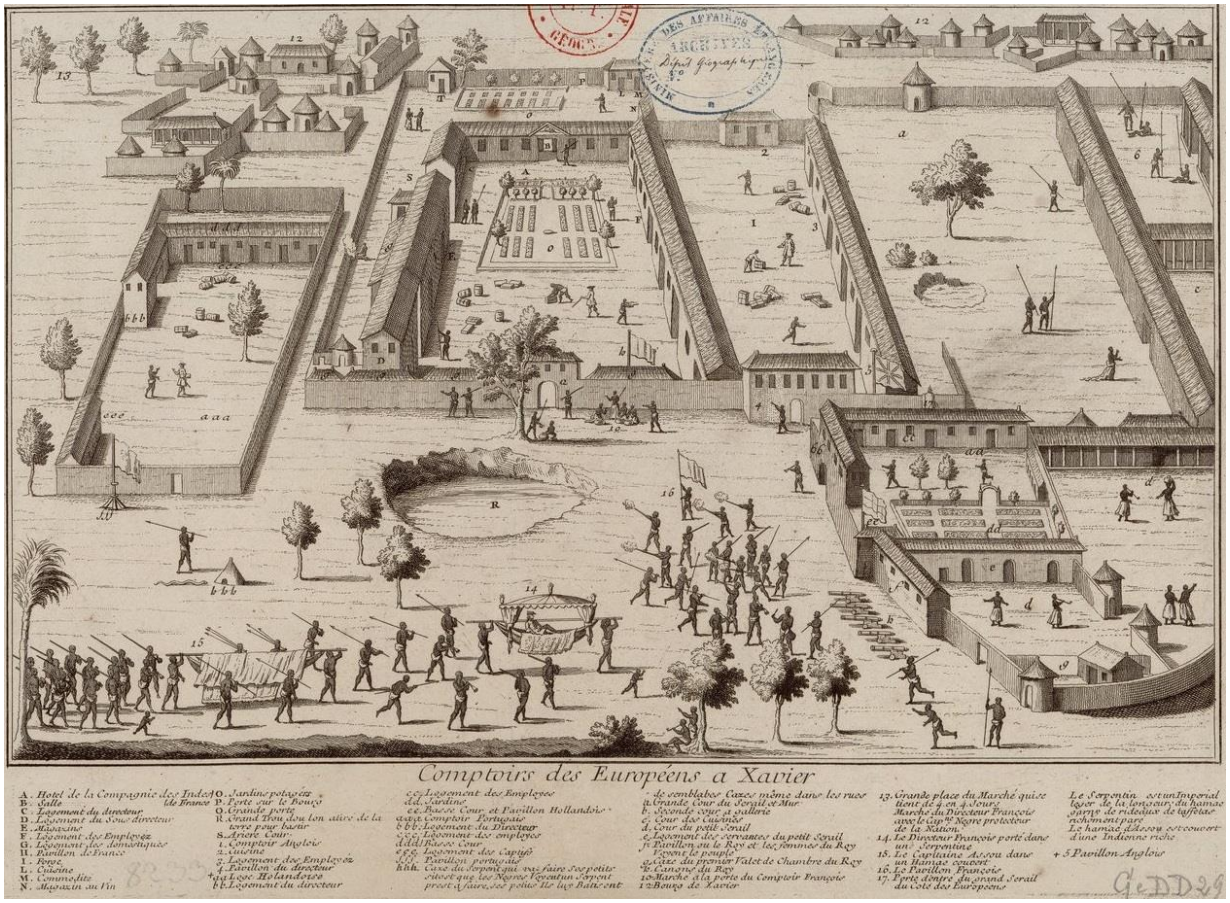
In Ouidah, the Asiento Company had no territorial domination over their fort and factory. Studies on European forts on the Gold Coast have argued convincingly that the building of fortification did not imply the domination of territories. Rather, European forts were aimed at achieving exclusive commercial 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 etant sur sa terre d'où l'on ne peut aujourd'huy 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 absolû 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 suitte*".

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 expulsed.[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.