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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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Chapter 5: Inter-imperial cooperation

1. Introduction

The French overseas directors' weak bargaining position in local power dynamics, along with the previously mentioned context of dependency, impacted the sustainability of their factories. In order to remain present in both regions in the long term, overseas directors had to find immediate, local solutions. As part of their strategy, they turned to other European imperial powers in the region. Overseas context affected inter-imperial relations and as such, they should not be viewed exclusively through the lens of economic and military competition. As Amelia Polónia and Jack Owens argue, the sustainability of settlements can be found in agents and their initiatives, and particularly in “*cooperation based on individual initiative.*”⁸⁰³ To unveil part of these cooperative relations, this chapter explores inter-imperial interactions with a particular emphasis on cooperation.⁸⁰⁴ Rather than concentrating on the interaction between the metropolis and the factories, this chapter considers the personal connections that developed between overseas settlements and across imperial boundaries.⁸⁰⁵ I argue that solutions developed overseas were rarely in phase with the warfare and economic competition in Europe. Rather, overseas directors' strategies adapted to regional power dynamics and, more often than not, crossed imperial boundaries.

Narratives detailing the relationship between the French and other European expansions in India and the west coast of Africa during the first half of the eighteenth century have been biased due to the focus on economic competition among European imperial powers and prevailing contemporary mercantilistic views appearing in sources. Additionally, emphasis on the wars waged in Europe contributed to the distortion of historians' interpretation of French relations with other Europeans in India and on the west coast of Africa. It has been assumed that war in Europe had impacted negatively inter-imperial relations in India.⁸⁰⁶ As a result, war dynamics in Europe have been artificially projected onto a setting where Europeans were in a situation of dependency on the local societies and authorities. The French position in the local economic and political context impacted their relationships with other European companies and colonies. Inter-imperial relationships in

⁸⁰³ Polónia and Owens, ‘Cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Networks in Portuguese Overseas Expansion in the First Global Age, 1400-1800’, 4, 15.

⁸⁰⁴ Drayton, ‘Masked Condominia: Pan-European Collaboration in the History of Imperialism, c. 1500 to the Present’.

⁸⁰⁵ Mulich, ‘Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations’, 79.

⁸⁰⁶ Rose Vincent, ‘Relations franco-anglaises avant 1754 de l’amitié à l’affrontement’, in *Les relations entre la France et l’Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 78.

Pondicherry and Ouidah could not merely be a close replica of the European context. The sustainability of the factories relied on overseas directors' connections, which crossed imperial boundaries whether or not they were subjects of enemy states in Europe.

This chapter interprets the concept of inter-imperial cooperation as the cooperative relationships created and maintained across the overseas settlements or trading stations of different European imperial powers. Cooperation is defined as a behaviour “*providing a benefit to the recipient, which could be beneficial and/or costly to the actor and has been selected because of its beneficial effect on the recipient.*”⁸⁰⁷ The fact that a cooperative behaviour is chosen points toward a directed action aimed at a certain goal, which therefore implies the exercise of agency.⁸⁰⁸ If a cooperative behaviour is advantageous to both the actor and the recipient, the cooperation is mutually beneficial. When cooperation benefits the recipient but not the actor, the behaviour can be altruistic or reciprocal. In the case of reciprocal cooperation, the actors take turns in benefitting from the cooperation and a cooperative behaviour that appears disadvantageous for the actor in the short term can prove beneficial in the long term.⁸⁰⁹ A cooperative relationship is therefore the result of the risk assessment and exercise of the cooperators' agency to achieve a common goal. Did inter-imperial cooperation exist in Pondicherry and Ouidah and, if so, how was it maintained and why?

This chapter hypothesises that cooperative inter-imperial relationships were instrumental to the sustainability of the factories under study. Understanding the interdependence that characterised French relationships with other imperial powers allows us to position overseas directors within the regional power dynamics of the early eighteenth century. The re-evaluation of the French companies' situation overseas during this period will illustrate the non-linear path of dependence that characterised French overseas expansion. This chapter begins by analysing on what basis inter-imperial cooperation took place or not, and the means through which it could be sustained. It then explores the motives behind putting such cooperation into practice and finally, I nuance the competitive side of inter-imperial relationships. This chapter contributes to determining overseas directors' agency by

⁸⁰⁷ This definition is based on previous adaptation in historical studies of evolutionary biology definition : West, Griffin, and Gardner, ‘Social Semantics’, 419. Cited in Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 6.

⁸⁰⁸ Ana Sofia Vieira Ribeiro, *Merchanisms and Criteria of Cooperation in Trading Networks of the First Global Age. The Case Study of the Simon Ruiz Network, 1557-1606* (University of Porto: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2011), 43.

⁸⁰⁹ West, Griffin, and Gardner, ‘Social Semantics’, 420.

showing the strategies overseas directors utilised, as well as the means and motivations for such strategies.

2. European power dynamics

By the time the French settled in Pondicherry, European power dynamics in the Indian Ocean were undergoing a transition period, changing from the strong position of the VOC to that of the EIC. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company had enjoyed a strong military and commercial position in the Indian Ocean. This powerful situation compared to other Europeans was due to its monopolistic strategies on multiple sectors of the trade.⁸¹⁰ The VOC attempted at controlling the Euro-Asian trade as well as the intra-Asian trade of the Company servants. Additionally, what distinguished the VOC from other European East India Companies, was the acquisition of monopolies and monopsonies in specific spices. The VOC obtained these through the military conquest of various spice producing islands and the negotiation of exclusive pepper contracts with local rulers. The monopolies and monopsonies – although never completely successful – stimulated the intra-Asian trade and generated income for the VOC in Asia. These profits financed the VOC trade and limited its need for bullion from Europe. Most importantly, they paid for the military costs and enabled the VOC to partially implement coercively monopolies against its competitors and force exclusive contracts on local rulers.⁸¹¹

The powerful position of the VOC started decreasing during the last decades of the seventeenth century.⁸¹² This process was due to multiple factors: the political involvement of local sovereigns in the trade and, the unsafety of parts of Asia generated by the decline of the Mughal and Safavid empires, the enhanced European competition and the shift in the demand side from spices to textiles, coffee and tea.⁸¹³ The EIC's organization geared towards allowing private trade of its servants was more adapted to the situation in Asia and became more profitable.⁸¹⁴ Like other European Companies, the EIC used military force to protect its trade. The competitive advantage of the EIC compared to the French or other European East India Companies was that its servants tapped into local capital markets in India and used local commodities to finance their private trade.⁸¹⁵ The political instability played in the EIC's favour as English merchants partially filled the void created by the decrease of Indian

⁸¹⁰ Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 20; 75.

⁸¹¹ Nierstrasz, 73.

⁸¹² Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 14.

⁸¹³ Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 77.

⁸¹⁴ Nierstrasz, 20.

⁸¹⁵ Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 10.

merchants activities.⁸¹⁶ Importantly, English private traders benefitted from capital transfer from England.⁸¹⁷ In sum, the first decades of the French settlement in Pondicherry coincides with the height of the competition between the VOC and EIC, as the latter's position strengthened in the Indian Ocean. In this shift from the VOC to the EIC, the French Company was slowly increasing its importance.

A comparable shift in European power relations took place on the west African Coast. During the seventeenth century the strong Portuguese commercial monopoly had decreased and the Dutch WIC had taken control of various Portuguese forts and trading factories along the coast – particularly on the Gold Coast with the Dutch takeover of castle Elmina in 1637.⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, in the 1660s a peace treaty signed between the Dutch Republic and Portugal restricted severely Portuguese trade on the Gold and Slave Coast by forcing Portuguese merchants to pay a tax of ten percent of the value of the cargo brought from Brazil to Elmina.⁸¹⁹ Despite these restrictions, Portuguese commerce in the Bight of Benin restarted by the 1670s and by the end of the seventeenth century, many Portuguese merchants disregarded the tax.⁸²⁰

Simultaneously, the English who had been previously active on the west African Coast started forming a serious competitive threat to the WIC with the activities of the Royal Africa Company (1672).⁸²¹ The relationship between the WIC and the RAC in the last decade of the seventeenth century degraded among other things because of the English trade with Portuguese merchants from Brazil who evaded the WIC tax.⁸²² During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the interactions between the second WIC and the RAC companies remained conflictual, with the exception of the few first years of the Spanish Succession War.⁸²³ When the French West India Company tried to open a trading factory in Offra (Allada) in 1669, it was confronted with the conflictual European context and finally moved its factory to Ouidah in the following decades. By that time, the second WIC's area of operation on the west African Coast had shrunk and its slave trade was decreasing compared

⁸¹⁶ Mentz, 32.

⁸¹⁷ Mentz, 14.

⁸¹⁸ Henk den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven: scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674-1740* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997), 13–14.

⁸¹⁹ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 40–41.

⁸²⁰ Roquinaldo Ferreira, 'From Brazil to West Africa: Dutch Portuguese Rivalry, Gold Smuggling, and African Politics in the Bight of Benin', in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, ed. Michiel Van Groesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82; Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 194.

⁸²¹ Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 168–69.

⁸²² Ferreira, 'From Brazil to West Africa', 86.

⁸²³ Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*, 173–74.

to the English, French and Portuguese.⁸²⁴ The relations among Europeans in India and in the Bight of Benin during the first half of the eighteenth century were characterized by competition however as will be demonstrated in this chapter, they cannot be exclusively reduced to it.

3. The means of cooperation

Good correspondence and exchange of services

Aside from their relationship with Mughal governors and other rulers, directors of Pondicherry built relationships with other representatives of European imperial powers, mainly other European company agents. A large part of the archival evidence refers to the good relations between directors of Pondicherry and the English East India Company governors in Madras. For instance, in 1701 English ships stopped in Pondicherry and the officers on board dined at the French fort, exchanging food supplies for English goods.⁸²⁵ The Danish East India Company governors of Tranquebar also maintained good relationships with their fellow European company representatives in India, particularly the Dutch.⁸²⁶ When a new Danish governor arrived in India in 1690, he passed by Pondicherry on his way from Madras to Tranquebar to present his greetings to the French director.⁸²⁷ Martin identified him as “*very keen on providing services to the company.*”⁸²⁸

The relationships between the French, English and Danish Company representatives were fostered by frequent correspondence and a regular exchange of services. When the representatives changed, the correspondence was re-established and confirmed. When the Danish governor died in 1701 and was replaced by his vice director, the latter formally wrote a letter to Martin requesting the “*continuation of good correspondence*” and then wrote again in 1702.⁸²⁹ When the Dutch attacked Pondicherry in 1693, the Danish director of Tranquebar offered Martin a safe place for his wife and others who needed to retreat. Furthermore, the Danish sent refreshments to Pondicherry, along with some supplies which the French had bought in Tranquebar.⁸³⁰ The French reciprocated by transporting Danish employees or

⁸²⁴ Heijer, 217.

⁸²⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°33, diary of Martin, August-September 1701.

⁸²⁶ “*Les Hollandais et les Danois paraissent être dans une grande liaison entre eux*” in Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 55.

⁸²⁷ ANOM C2 63 f°161, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691.

⁸²⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin 22 February 1701: “*Mr le commandeur Danois de Tranquebar avec lequel nous courons d’intelligence, et fort porté à rendre service à votre compagnie*”.

⁸²⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May-June 1701: “*m’écrivoit en demandant une continuation de bonne correspondance.*” and C2 66 f°155, diary of Martin, February-March 1702.

⁸³⁰ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 321.

packages back to Europe on behalf of the Danish Company directors.⁸³¹ The reciprocity also took place in French relations with the English Company officials, through services such as lending small ships when the English needed them.⁸³² In return, small French boats called *quesche*, designed to sail on the Coromandel Coast, would also stop in Madras to take money on their way to Masulipatnam. These reciprocated services enabled the French to integrate financial channels on the Coromandel Coast, with probable outreach in the Indian sub-continent and beyond via English networks.

Relations with the Dutch were more distant, particularly after the occupation of Pondicherry from 1693 to 1699. No references of frequent “*good correspondence*” or exchange of services appear in the archives. However, the Dutch and the French directors did not always disagree. When negotiating with the Mughal authorities, they sometimes combined their forces. For instance, when freedom of the movements of goods and merchants was at stake, they joined together to ask the Mughal governor to write to Aurangzeb about the issues of restriction on “*the persons and goods of all Europeans throughout his dominions.*”⁸³³ According to the English governor, these negotiations succeeded because orders came from Aurangzeb to enable the Europeans “*to trade without restraints.*” While one can raise doubts about the applications of these orders in practice, the fact remains that the Dutch and the French Company representatives collectively acted against the trade restrictions. The fact that the Dutch generally abstained from “*good correspondence*” with the French can be explained by the power dynamics in the Indian Ocean. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the Dutch had achieved a stronger economic and political position than the French, the Danish and even the English. In this sense, the interdependence that characterised French, Danish and English on the Coromandel Coast did not apply to the VOC.

A comment deserves to be made about relations between the French director and the Portuguese on the Coromandel Coast. Contact with the Portuguese and Luso-Indians was frequent and mainly done for communicative and mercantile purposes. Contrary to references about the Dutch, English or Danish, interaction with what is referred to as “*Portuguese*” in the

⁸³¹ ANOM C2 65 f°33, letter of Martin and Chalonge, 14 September 1699.

⁸³² ANOM C2 66 f°33, diary of Martin, August-September 1701 and C2 66 f°39, diary of Martin, November 1701.

⁸³³ IOR/ G/19/35 (1703-1704) f°32, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, from fort St David to Madras, 14 March 1702/3 (old calendar) “*About nine weeks since we the French and the Dutch got the governor of this City to write the King to request that he would take off the restraint on the persons and goods of all European throughout his dominions [...] the king on his perusal there of immediately to resolve that orders should be issued out to all parts of his dominions that the interdictions should be taken off that they should trade without restraint as formerly which orders both the formentioned affirm are executed copy of what is arrived*”.

sources does not imply a personal relationship between the French director and the governor of a Portuguese settlement. The majority of what Martin calls “*Portuguese*” were not officials under the authority of the *Estado da India*, but *mestiços* who were born in Asia and had never been to Europe.⁸³⁴ Historians of the Portuguese presence in eighteenth-century Asia acknowledge that Portuguese trade is better described as a Portuguese influence that operated outside of the Portuguese empire, which was embodied by the *Estado da India*. Their role in enabling the French to integrate intra-Asian trade networks will be analysed further in the following chapter.

A striking feature of the overseas director’s inter-imperial relations in Pondicherry was his reliance on other imperial powers in India for communication with Paris and other French trading posts in India. A substantial part of communication with France occurred through English East India Company ships.⁸³⁵ English captains put the letters to the Parisian directors together with other letters and packages for the English directors in London.⁸³⁶ In turn, some packages and letters from Paris could arrive through Madras if they were put on an English ship in Surat.⁸³⁷ Moreover, Martin made use of the regular arrival of ships in nearby Madras to communicate with his fellow Company officials in Bengal, Surat and even China.⁸³⁸ Indeed, the French shared the trading space in both Bengal and Surat with the English and the Dutch. The widespread English country trade network made English officials an important communication element in the route to China for the French Company.

The Danish Company also contributed to French communication between India and Europe as well as the French trading posts in Bengal and Surat.⁸³⁹ In 1690, the aforementioned new Danish governor offered to safely deliver French letters back to Europe.⁸⁴⁰ When a Danish ship left Surat with goods for an Armenian merchant in Madras in 1702, the French Company director of Surat, Louis Pilavoine, took the opportunity to send

⁸³⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°131, letter of Martin, 2 October 1704 and Stefan Halikowski Smith, ‘No Obvious Home: The Flight of the Portuguese “Tribe” from Makassar to Ayutthaya and Cambodia during the 1660s’, *International Journal of Asian Studies*, no. 7 (1) (January 2010): 1.

⁸³⁵ ANOM C2 63 f°108, letter of Deslandes-Boureau and Martin, 17 October 1688 ; C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701; C2 66 f°39 November 1701; C2 66 f°42, diary of Martin, December 1701 ; C2 66 f°192-198, letter of Martin, 13 October 1702.

⁸³⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁸³⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°163, diary of Martin, June-July 1702.

⁸³⁸ ANOM C2 63 f°100, Letter of Martin, 29 November 1687; C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May 1701 ; C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701; C2 66 f°160, diary of Martin, April-May 1702; C2 66 f°166, diary of Martin September-November 1702.

⁸³⁹ ANOM C2 64 f°18, letter of Marin, 6 October 1692.

⁸⁴⁰ ANOM C2 63 f°161, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691. Other evidence of the transport of letters to the Company in Paris from Pondichéry by the Danes appears in 1703, ANOM C2 67 f°247, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705 and ANOM C2 67 f°122, letter of Denyon, 7 February 1704.

30,000 piasters, a Company employee and the patent letters from Louis XIV creating the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry.⁸⁴¹ There are no traces of payment for these services and it can be posited that the Danish Company representatives expected the French to offer services in return. Additionally, small “*Portuguese*” ships passing by Pondicherry transferred letters to and from the French Company agent in Bengal.

The directors used foreign communication channels to transport goods to Pondicherry. They freighted English ships with goods like saltpetre from Bengal to the Coromandel Coast.⁸⁴² The Armenian community in Madras attracted Armenian ships from Surat, which stopped in Madras on their way to Bengal and transported French goods or personnel.⁸⁴³ The dependency on foreign communication channels for not only the transportation of goods and personnel, but more importantly the exchange of information between Pondicherry, Paris and other Company trading posts in the Indian Ocean, demonstrates the Company’s inability to provide an efficient communication network for overseas settlements. The Company, as an institution, supposedly decreased transaction costs by running efficient communication channels. Despite the relative frequency of the Company’s ships coming to Pondicherry in the first years after the return of the French Company to Pondicherry in 1699, it remained reliant on Danish, English, Portuguese and Armenian channels for both trans-oceanic and intra-Asian communication. This system of communication did not change with the declaration of war in Europe between the English and the French.⁸⁴⁴

(Non-) effects of war

Martin heard rumours of a war starting in Europe pitting the French against the English and the Dutch from May 1701.⁸⁴⁵ However, he would not give credit to these whispers for two years. In this regard, the slow communication with Europe played in his favour. The countries formally declared war on May 1702 and, in November 1702, the flow of information about the declaration of war intensified. Rumours spread along the Coromandel Coast about the Dutch readying a fleet of twenty-four ships to re-take Pondicherry.⁸⁴⁶ In February 1703, Martin wrote to Paris that “*the officers of the English*

⁸⁴¹ ANOM C2 66 f°159, diary of Martin, April 1702.

⁸⁴² ANOM C2 63 f°56, letter of Deltor, 7 April 1686: “*deux mil mans ou environ cent quarante-quatre milliers salpestres qui ont esté mis à fret sur un bastiment anglois du Bengale*”.

⁸⁴³ ANOM C2 66 f°34, diary of Martin, September 1701.

⁸⁴⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°167, diary of Martin, November-December 1702; C2 67 f°8, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

⁸⁴⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°19, diary of Martin, May-June 1701.

⁸⁴⁶ ANOM C2 66 f°167, diary of Martin, November-December 1702.

*Company who are on this coast did not receive any notice [of the war].*⁸⁴⁷ In the English East India Company archive, it appears that the English agent of Fort David only became aware of England's involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession on 4 March 1703.⁸⁴⁸ It took nearly a whole year for the French and English companies to be officially informed about the declaration of war, which had left time for the Company representatives to ensure the continuation of their "*good correspondence.*"

When the War of the Spanish Succession officially broke out in India, relations among Europeans did not undergo major changes; contacts with the English in Madras and Fort David remained friendly and distrust of the Dutch grew stronger. Regular correspondence between the English and the French had already been preserved during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697). In February 1690, the governor of Madras wrote to Martin that he would not suspend his correspondence with him since he had not received such orders.⁸⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1703 the correspondence carried on: "*we have always maintained good correspondence with those of this nation who are near us in Madras and Goudelour, it continues. The principal officers assured us that war in Europe would not impede our good relations.*"⁸⁵⁰ This continuance was not a given, as the situation with the VOC illustrates. One of the Company employees in Pondicherry maintained a correspondence with a Frenchman married and established in Colombo. At the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, the resident of Colombo wrote to French Company employee that "*they could no longer carry on their correspondence since the Dutch were extraordinarily animated against the French because of the events in Europe.*"⁸⁵¹ Correspondence between the Dutch and French Company representatives on the Coromandel Coast, already rare before the declaration of war, reduced to a minimum during the war.

According to Martin, the official union between the English and the Dutch did not strengthen the friendship between the two powers. He wrote that "*it is certain that they hate*

⁸⁴⁷ ANOM C2 66 f°168 C2 67 f°5, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703.

⁸⁴⁸ IOR G/19/35 f° 29, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, letter from Fort David to Madras, 4 march 1702/3 (old calendar).

⁸⁴⁹ ANOM C2 63 f°152, letter of Martin, 20 February 1690.

⁸⁵⁰ ANOM C2 67 f°5, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703: "*nous avons toujours entretenu bonne correspondance avec ceux de cette nation qui sont proches de nous à Madras et à Goudelour, elle continue. Les principaux d'entre ces officiers nous ont meme donné des assurances que la guerre de l'Europe ne rompra point l'intelligence entr'eux.*"

⁸⁵¹ ANOM C2 66 f°159, diary of Martin, April 1702: "*Il n'y avoit plus de lieu à present d'entretenir la correspondance, que les hollandois étoient extraordinairement animés contre le françois à cause des mouvements en Europe.*"

*each other and this hatred is reciprocal in India.*⁸⁵² Further evidence of the informal situation between the English and the French during the war is the fact that French soldiers chose to desert to the Dutch settlements rather than the English because they “*give them back to each other.*”⁸⁵³ The good relationship with the English led the French director to show some regret in September 1703, when he learned that the French ships *Maurepas* and *Pondicherry*, had taken the *Canterbury*, an English ship, as a prize when coming back from China in the Strait of Malacca.⁸⁵⁴ He was happy for the commodities this prize would bring to the Company, but added that “*it would have however been desirable that the prize would have been done on the Dutch rather than on the English since we enjoy such good relations with this nation.*”⁸⁵⁵ Most strikingly, the English offered protection to the French in Pondicherry when they were threatened by Dutch takeover, both in 1693 during the Nine Years’ War and in 1703, during the War of the Spanish Succession. The Danish made a similar offer in 1693, however, the interesting point here is that the English and the French fought against one another in both wars. This fact therefore strengthens the argument that wars in Europe had little effect on informal agreements between the English and French Company representatives on the Coromandel Coast.

When a Dutch official passed by Madras on his way to Pulicat a few months after the English governor’s offer, the Dutch ships and the fort of Madras fired their cannons to ostentatiously show the union between both nations.⁸⁵⁶ In the meantime, the French had accepted the help of the English Company, and the French Company’s merchandise, as well as some officials and family of Pondicherry inhabitants, were kept safe in Madras.⁸⁵⁷ This does not seem to have been a contradiction for Martin, since the informal and formal unions appeared to be compatible; while the English and the Dutch were formally allies in the European War, the English and the French were informal allies in India. When, at the eve of the War of the Spanish Succession, Martin explained to the Parisian directors of the Company why transferring all the commodities and the money of the Company to Madras was the safest option to limit the damages, he stated this formal and informal distinction clearly:

⁸⁵² ANOM C2 67 f°6, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703: “*Leur union avec les Hollandais ne contribue pas à cimenter l’amitié entre ces deux nations, il est certain qu’ils se hayssent, et cette haine est réciproque dans les Indes*”.

⁸⁵³ ANOM C2 67 f°132, letter of Boissieux, 9 October 1704: “*parce qu’on se les rends*”. Other evidences in Alfred Martineau, ed., *Résumé des actes de l’État civil de Pondichéry. 1, De 1676 à 1735* (Pondichéry: Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde française, 1917), 55.

⁸⁵⁴ ANOM C2 67 f°121, letter of Martin, 10 Februray 1704.

⁸⁵⁵ ANOM C2 67 f°24, “*Il auroit cependant esté à souhaitter qelle eut esté fait plutôt sur les hollandais que sur les anglois a cause de la bonne intelligence que nous avons avec cette nation*”.

⁸⁵⁶ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 55.

⁸⁵⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

*“Milords will maybe think that it is risky to put their belongings in the hands of these gentlemen [the English] because the war has been declared in Europe, we cannot doubt that England is against us, however we only have one solution in the situation where we are now, we do not see where else we could go, the signs of good will of these gentlemen showed towards us and the reciprocity of the friendly correspondence which we have maintained are points which convince us to accept their offer without hesitation, even if the interests of the Dutch and English are common in Europe, they are not for that reason better friends in India.”*⁸⁵⁸

In his justification to the Parisian directors, Martin summarised what had led to the cooperation between the English and the French Companies on the Coromandel Coast: the signs of good will through reciprocal and friendly correspondence. The “*good correspondence*” was regular, friendly and implied reciprocity. Along with the regular exchange of services, it was the basis for further cooperative relations. The maintenance of “*good correspondence*” enabled representatives from different companies to enter into an inter-imperial relationship of loyalty, despite the competition and the warfare in Europe.

After Martin’s death in 1707, the strategies of communication through foreign channels did not alter. There are references to the Parisian directors using the same channels to reach Pondicherry. In 1707, Parisian directors sent duplicates of their letters to Dulivier through Denmark, England, the Netherlands, Portugal and Marseille.⁸⁵⁹ They received three letters from Dulivier through England, and one through Denmark in 1708. Hébert used the same routes for his correspondence to the Parisian directors: “*I wrote to you via Surat and Tranquebar, this one through England.*”⁸⁶⁰ During the early years of both Dulivier and Hébert’s tenure, most letters passed through England and Denmark.⁸⁶¹ The recourse to foreign channels of communication under Hébert and Dulivier intensified between 1707 and 1709,

⁸⁵⁸ ANOM C2 67 f°10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703: “*Messieurs trouveront peut-être que c’est risquer que de mettre leurs effets entre les mains de ces Messieurs dont nous parlons, puisque suivant les apparences la guerre déclarée en Europe, nous ne pouvons pas douter que l’Angleterre ne soit contre nous, nous n’avons qu’une seule réponse à faire dans les conjonctures ou nous nous rencontrons, que nous ne voyons point d’autre lieu où nous jeter joint que les précautions que nous prenons, les témoignages que nous avons de la bonne volonté de ces messieurs pour nous et la correspondance réciproque d’amitié que nous avons entretenus ensemble sont des points qui nous peuvent porter à nous servir sans hésiter de l’offre qu’ils nous font [...] quoy que les anglois et hollandois soient unis d’intérêts dans les mouvements de l’Europe, ils n’en sont pas pour cela plus grands amis dans les Indes*”.

⁸⁵⁹ ANOM C2 13 f°79, letter of the Parisian directors to Hébert, 25 September 1708.

⁸⁶⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°206, copy of the letter sent by Hébert to Pilavoine in Surat, 11 December 1708: “*J’ay eu l’honneur messieurs de vous écrire par voye de Suratte et de Tranquebar, celle cy par l’Angleterre*”.

⁸⁶¹ ANOM C2 68 f°317, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709 ; C2 68 f° 318, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709 ; C2 68 f° 320, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1709 ; C2 68 f°322, letter of Hébert, 10 October 1709; C2 69 f°83, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714.

due to the halt of all French shipping to Pondicherry. Indeed, these years correspond to the transition from the East India Company to the first sub-contracting treaty with the Saint Malo merchants. The Company was unable to fit out ships after the last sent with Hébert on board, and the Saint Malo merchants dispatched their first ship in December 1708. The only solution for both the metropolitan directors and overseas directors was to use foreign channels of communication, even if they were technically enemies.

The mandates of Martin, Duliver and Hébert shared a common feature: the strong ties that united them with the English governor of Madras. When an uprising took place in Madras in 1707, Dulivier sent four small ships with some men to help the English ships to unload their cargoes.⁸⁶² It should be noted that Dulivier had to rely on his good relationship with the governor of Madras to make a loan in 1709, which he reimbursed with another loan from the Spanish in Manila. The access to credit among fellow European representatives, mentioned in chapter four, falls into the context of the exchange of services. As for Hébert, he explicitly referred to the close interpersonal relationship he enjoyed with the governor of Madras: “*I wrote to the governor of Madras to borrow a ship, he immediately granted one to me [...] the governor of Madras which I have met in Paris [...] remembers some services I provided to him and I can expect any kind of help from him at any time.*”⁸⁶³ In 1712, there was a shortage of rice in Pondicherry and the governor of Madras offered to supply Hébert with the necessary grain.⁸⁶⁴ The French reciprocated these services, for example when the French in Pondicherry lent surgical material to Madras and Dulivier agreed to sell gunpowder to English governor Edward Harrison (1711-1717).⁸⁶⁵ Even the minister of the Navy acknowledged the necessity to maintain peace with the English in his letter to Hébert in September 1712: “*this war, however, should not impede you to treat them [the English] well [...] to have consideration and respect for them, and friendship and to consider them as friends rather than enemies.*”⁸⁶⁶ The state of war did not alter either the good correspondence or the exchange of services and both mechanisms fostered English and French relations, which provided a good basis for potential future cooperation.

⁸⁶² ANOM C2 68 f°279, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

⁸⁶³ ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: “*ayant écrit au gouverneur de Madras pour avoir un vaisseau à fret, sur le champ il m’en a accordé un [...] qu’en tout temps par le moyen du gouverneur de Madras que j’ay connu à Paris [...] qui se ressouvient de quelque service que je luy ay rendu que j’en peux espérer toutes sortes de secours*”.

⁸⁶⁴ Council meeting minute, 16 February 1712 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 108.

⁸⁶⁵ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°190 (1708-1709) Public Proceedings Fort Madras; Council meeting minute, 19 November 1713 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 128.

⁸⁶⁶ ANOM B//34 f°469, letter of Pontchartrain to Hébert, 19 September 1712: “*cette guerre cependant ne doit pas vous empecher de les bien traiter [...] de leur marquer de la considération de lestime et de l’amitié et de les regarder plustot comme amys que comme ennemis*”.

Visits and collective action

In Ouidah, relations between the different European representatives were friendly. Given the proximity of the trading lodges and forts, agents maintained good inter-imperial relations through frequent personal visits. In his voyage to the Bight of Benin for the Royal African Company, William Smith described these daily meetings: “*near the European factories was a spacious place where grew a parcel of fine, tall, shady trees, under which the English, French and Portuguese governors, factors, sea captains walked, and transacted business every day as on a change.*”⁸⁶⁷ Therefore, overseas directors did not only engage in diplomatic relations with rulers but also with the other European representatives. Du Bellay (1733-1734) asked for boxes of wine from Bordeaux for the English and the Portuguese factors “*to engage them in living in union and understanding together as we have done until now and will hopefully do in the future.*”⁸⁶⁸ A year later, he also explained to the Company that the trade was improving, thanks to Hueda traders and his “*industrie*” with the English and his “*friends the Portuguese.*”⁸⁶⁹

Directors also fostered good inter-imperial relations by engaging in correspondence and paying visits to other European forts along the Bight of Benin. For instance, in 1743, Levet stayed in the Dutch fort of Elmina for four days and spent another four days at the English fort of Cape Coast Castle.⁸⁷⁰ However, while the situation of dependency and control under which the European factors were kept in Ouidah itself generated good diplomatic relations among them, they were not necessarily a given in the broader context of the Bight of Benin. At the time of Levet’s visit to Cape Coast Castle, the relationship with the English had grown delicate due to French attempts to create a trading post in Anamabo on the Gold Coast, which would bring them in direct competition with the English Royal Africa Company. The difference between these interactions can be directly linked to the stronger position of the English and Dutch companies in Cape Coast Castle and in Elmina, as opposed to in Ouidah.

In contrast, the situation in Ouidah forced European directors and factors to make difficult and strategic decisions collectively. During the conflicts between the kings of Allada and Hueda in the 1710s, the King of Allada attempted to attract European traders to his lands by sending “*daily invitations for us to go to Offrah [...] to establish the trade.*”⁸⁷¹ This was a

⁸⁶⁷ William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London, 1744), 193.

⁸⁶⁸ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733: “*Je leur envoie chacun une autre pour les engager à vivre en union et intelligence ensemble comme nous avons fait depuis et comme j’espère faire à l’avenir*”.

⁸⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734.

⁸⁷⁰ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

⁸⁷¹ TNA T70/1475 f°13 A, letter of Baillie, between 21 May and 15 June 1717.

difficult decision to make, particularly considering the risk of the Hueda King taking revenge. The English factor, William Baillie, wrote to the English Royal African Company in 1717 stating that he consulted with the French director on the topic several times. They agreed that it was more prudent to send some ships first to Jakin, the port of the Kingdom of Allada, before establishing a new lodge in Offra.⁸⁷² The extreme environment led the two competing company agents to advise each other on the best strategy. Similarly, when European representatives had to make demands to kings in Ouidah, they presented them collectively with as many demands as possible. For instance, after the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah, the French, English and Portuguese heads of the fort presented to King Agaja grievances about the abuses of the Dahomian captains in charge of the European trade. They complained that Dahomian captains visited their forts one at a time, three times a day, under the pretext of trade negotiations but, in reality, they came to drink brandy. Levet explicitly referenced the collective aspect of the talks with Agaja: “*I took advantage of my stay to complain together with the English and Portuguese directors against Alligny, Nançou and Zouglas captains for Dada of the French, English and Portuguese nations.*”⁸⁷³ Collective negotiations could have positive results; the King dismissed his three captains, replacing them with a single official called Tegan.⁸⁷⁴ However, it is unclear if the change was due to the complaint or if it was the result of an internal power struggle. Nevertheless, it appears that collective actions often took place, as a similar united negotiation occurred a year later. Du Bellay negotiated “*de concert*” with the Portuguese to recover some of their men who had been captured by the King.⁸⁷⁵

Given the frequency of French private ships arriving in Ouidah, directors relied less on other European ships than in India, utilising the French private merchants’ ships to communicate with Paris. One of the few cases of French use of other Europeans for their communication during this period was a report written by Vice-Director Levesque, which was sent through a Portuguese ship to the French consul in Lisbon.⁸⁷⁶ Levesque later returned to France in 1718 through Brazil and Portugal.⁸⁷⁷ A few letters passed through Dutch Company ships and, in reciprocation, the Dutch factor on the Guinea Coast passed some of his letters to

⁸⁷² TNA T70/1475 f°13 A, letter of Baillie, between 21 May and 15 June 1717.

⁸⁷³ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733: “*J’ay profité du séjour que j’y ay fait pour faire une plainte conjointement aux Ms. Les directeurs anglois et portugais contre Alligny, Nançou et Zonglas, capitaine pour Dada des nations Française, angloise et portugaise*”.

⁸⁷⁴ According to Levet, this change reduced the consumption of eau-de-vie from 10-14 *ancres* to 4-5.

⁸⁷⁵ ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734.

⁸⁷⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of Levesque, 1719.

⁸⁷⁷ ANOM COL E 285, personnel file of Levesque, letter of Levesque from Bahia, 24 December 1718.

the WIC through Nantes merchants' vessels in 1722.⁸⁷⁸ It was only when the effect of the Austrian succession in Europe negatively impacted the number of French ships coming to Ouidah that the dependency on foreign communication channels intensified.

Levet, the director during the 1740s, expected a decrease in the quantity of Company ships coming to Ouidah due to the war in Europe. Moreover, it is important to remember that Levet, in need of goods, had kept the last Company ship's merchandise and sent the ship back to France empty. However, the director had not counted on the drastic decrease in the number of French private ships arriving in Ouidah. On 1 February 1746, there had not been a French ship sailing to Ouidah since 5 December 1744.⁸⁷⁹ From 1727 to 1744, the port city merchants sent an average of ten ships a year to Ouidah; this dropped to three ships a year in 1745, to none in 1746 and 1747 and then one ship in 1748.⁸⁸⁰ Institutions like French chartered companies were supposed to provide protection and security in wartime, in order to decrease trade risks and, therefore, subsequent transactions costs.⁸⁸¹ However, it appears that the companies operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah, instead of ensuring the protection of wartime trade, delegated the trade to private traders. In 1709, the Company granted private merchants exclusive privileges to trade in Pondicherry. The majority of the merchants came from Saint Malo, and engaged in privateering ventures until the end of the war. In Ouidah, private merchants actively participated in the trade during the whole period under study. However, unlike the Saint Malo merchants in the Indian Ocean, they were not ready to assume the risk involved in making the voyages during wartime in Europe. As a result, all French shipping to Ouidah, by both the Company of the Indies and private merchants, halted for some years.

Consequently, Levet had to find alternative ways to communicate with Parisian directors and, more importantly, to receive basic supplies. In his letter of 13 October 1746, Levet offers three solutions.⁸⁸² One option was to utilise the connection through Brazil and Lisbon. A correspondent or the French consul in Lisbon could pass the supplies or letters to a merchant from Bahia. There were enough licensed ships travelling from Lisbon to Bahia to offer the Company frequent opportunities to send their supplies. From Bahia, opportunities to

⁸⁷⁸ NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89, (scan 65), Journal of Sint George d'Elmina, 9 February 1722: "*Deze gaat met een franse schip komende van Nantes*".

⁸⁷⁹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746: "*nous n'en avons vu icy aucun depuis le navire l'aventurier de Nantes parti de cette rade le 4-5 décembre 1744*".

⁸⁸⁰ Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: www.slavevoyages.org last consulted 20.09.2017. After the war, the number of French port city ships increased steeply, with 6 in 1749 and 17 in 1750.

⁸⁸¹ North, 'Institutions, Transaction Costs, and the Rise of Merchant Empires', 24.

⁸⁸² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

reach Ouidah arose every three months.⁸⁸³ Another option was the Dutch channel. The Dutch Republic remained neutral until 1747, when Louis XV declared war on the Dutch Republic.⁸⁸⁴ Even if it had been declared earlier, the news of the war would not have reached the Bight of Benin immediately, and, the director could take advantage of this buffer. From 1744 to 1746, the director sent multiple letters via Dutch ships to the address of Pierre Testas and Son in Amsterdam.⁸⁸⁵

Pierre Testas was a Huguenot merchant and banker based in Amsterdam from at least 1697.⁸⁸⁶ Part of his business connected to overseas trade; he owned plantations in Berbice and shares in the English South Sea Company.⁸⁸⁷ In the early 1720s, he was involved in the sugar and indigo trade with merchants from Bordeaux.⁸⁸⁸ Additionally, Testas and his son were in contact with the directors of the Company of the Indies, as the latter provided them with a power of attorney in October 1743, to hire workers for the Company.⁸⁸⁹ Finally, the firm of Testas and Son kept close connections with Nantes merchants, Walsh and Shiell, who were particularly active in the trade on the Bight of Benin. In 1747, a contract stated that Wailsh sold sugar and indigo to Shiell in Saint Domingue, to be loaded on a Dutch ship for Testas and Son in Amsterdam.⁸⁹⁰ The connections Testas maintained with French traders and the directors of Company of the Indies throughout the War of Austrian Succession made him a reliable recipient for Levet's letters. The letters dated from 1746, received by the directors in Paris via the firm Testas and Son, attest to this. Similar to the directors in Pondicherry, Levet used foreign channels of communication to reach France.

Furthermore, Levet's strategy sought to use Dutch communication channels for supplying the fort, as well as sending letters. In 1746, in a desperate attempt to receive provisions, Levet proposed two options to the Parisian directors. First, the Company was to send the provisions to its correspondent in the Dutch Republic, who would then place them on the first Dutch ship sailing to the Guinea coast. Together with the directors' letters, the

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁴ Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire: Volume II: The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich, 1648-1806*, vol. 1 (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), 357.

⁸⁸⁵ ANOM C6 25, letters of Levet, 25 février 1744, 12 octobre 1746 and 13 octobre 1746.

⁸⁸⁶ SAA, NA, 3375, f°390, Testament of Pierre Testas, 16 August 1697; SAA, NA, 7982/ 93, Obligation to Pierre Testas, 13 May 1719.

⁸⁸⁷ SAA, NA 8009/1367, notarial deed in English about the Pierre Testas' shares in the South Sea Company, 18 February 1724; SAA, NA 8789, Contract of employment by Pierre Testas, 10 January 1741.

⁸⁸⁸ SAA, NA 7997/227, notarial deed in French about raw sugar sent from Bordeaux to Pierre Testas, 20 May 1721.

⁸⁸⁹ SAA, NA 11283/10, notarial deed giving Pierre Testas & zonen power of attorney for the French East India Company, 4 October 1743.

⁸⁹⁰ SAA, NA 11310/40, notarial deed in French about Pierre Testas & zonen giving power of attorney to a Nantes merchants over a shipment of sugar and indigo, 14 September 1747.

supplies were to be addressed to the Dutch governor general of Elmina, Jacob de Petersen. According to Levet, de Petersen could be trusted because he had always been helpful to the French and a letter had been duly delivered to Levet.⁸⁹¹ Alternatively, the Company could send everything that was necessary for the fort's survival to a correspondent in Holland, who would fit out a ship in his own name but on behalf of the Company. The ship would sail directly to Ouidah with the secret order of supplying the French. Levet would then pretend to buy the supplies from the Dutch ship and recommended in his letter that the captain should therefore preferably speak a little bit of French.⁸⁹²

Levet added that in the event of a war with the Dutch Republic, this plan could still hold until one month before the declaration of war, as it would leave time for the ship to unload supplies before the news reached the Bight of Benin.⁸⁹³ Levet's letters had been sent through these two channels themselves: in 1746 he sent duplicates through Brazil and Portugal, as well as the Dutch Republic.⁸⁹⁴ It remains difficult to assess if Levet's attempts to take advantage of the slow communication between Europe and the Guinea Coast succeeded, and if the Parisian directors put his advice into practice. However, there is evidence that the Parisian directors considered sending supplies to Ouidah on Dutch ships as an option. In September 1745, the Company directors in Paris asked merchants in the Dutch Republic if any of their ships would be willing to transport supplies to Ouidah. The Dutch responded positively, but on the condition that the Dutch ship be granted a passport ensuring its protection against possible French attacks.⁸⁹⁵ To persuade the minister of the Navy to grant the permission to the Dutch, the Parisian directors underlined that "*the subsistence of the employees of this Company on the Guinea Coast depends on this opportunity.*"⁸⁹⁶ Just as in Pondicherry, Parisian directors made use of the same foreign channels of communication to reach the fort of Ouidah as the overseas directors. They acknowledged the fort's dependence on foreign networks of communication and provisioning for its survival. The Company of Indies relied on other European networks to supply and communicate with its overseas settlements in both directions.

⁸⁹¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁴ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 1 February 1746: "*par la voie du Brezil*" and duplicata "*par voie de Hollande*"; letter of Levet, 13 October 1746: "*par voie du Brezil et de Lisbonne*" and triplicata "*par voie de Hollande*".

⁸⁹⁵ AN MAR/B/3/439, Council of the Navy, 11 September 1745.

⁸⁹⁶ AN MAR/B/3/439, Council of the Navy, 11 September 1745: "*Comme la subsistance des employés de cette Compagnie à la côte de Guinée dépend de cette facilité, j'espère que vous voudrez bien vous y prêter*".

Overseas directors of Pondicherry and the fort in Ouidah maintained good relations across imperial boundaries. Primarily due to a shared cultural background, in some cases superficial friendly relations evolved through regular correspondence or visits and the frequent exchange of services or collective actions. In Pondicherry, cooperative relations between the French and the English fostered by “*good correspondence*” and exchange of services continued despite a declaration of war in Europe creating an enmity between the two imperial powers. The continuation of such cooperative relations depended on local power dynamics, rather than those in Europe. In Ouidah, the visits and collective action were a consequence of the weak position of authority held by European forts in Ouidah. Once outside of the direct authority of the Hueda or Dahomey kings, particularly in forts where Europeans had more power, such as Cape Coast Castle, European relations were less cohesive. In both cases, local power relations, rather than European ones, affected overseas directors’ decisions to undertake close relations with other imperial powers.

French companies relied extensively on foreign channels to communicate and supply their settlements. The mechanism occurred more frequently in Pondicherry, where overseas and Parisian directors used Portuguese, Danish and English channels to reach the Indian settlement. This method continued until the Saint Malo merchants began to send ships to Pondicherry in 1709. In Ouidah, apart from some exceptions, directors channelled most letters and provisioning through French private traders. Only after the declaration of war in Europe cut the fort off from private traders did overseas and Parisian directors turn consistently to foreign communication networks. The two main options were the Dutch, through the firm of Testas and Son and the WIC representative in Elmina, and the Portuguese, through merchants of Bahia and Lisbon. The “*good correspondence*” and visits fostered interpersonal relationships of loyalty between different imperial representatives. Exchange of services and collective actions developed into stronger cooperative relations.

4. The motives of cooperation

Emergency mechanism

European companies’ position in local power dynamics had an impact on relations between their representatives. Depending upon the military and economic threats from rulers or others, European overseas directors or factors decided to go further in cooperative endeavours. For instance, competition with the VOC was much more threatening to the English governor of Madras than a faraway war. At the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, Thomas Pitt entered into an agreement with Martin, to cooperate to prevent a

second Dutch conquest of Pondicherry.⁸⁹⁷ The help offered by the English East India Company was not purely altruistic; it was to their advantage that Pondicherry stayed French. The second Dutch attack on Pondicherry never took place, but the threat generated mutual cooperation between Martin and Pitt.

European company representatives in a vulnerable position towards Dutch or Mughal powers, among others, developed a sense of common cause founded upon their good correspondence and exchange of gifts and services. In 1702, Pitt sent a letter to Martin informing him of the blockade that the *faujdar* Da'ud Khan had started around Madras. In the same letter, Pitt added that they should also provide each other with artisans.⁸⁹⁸ In a second missive, Pitt emphasised the danger that Da'ud Khan represented for all European nations: “*the Mughal gave him [Da'ud Khan] the order to arrest all chiefs of Europeans nations to take them with him in front of the king where they would be forced to sign a promise to pay what the privateers have taken from his subjects [...] Orenzeb does not want Europeans to have any fortified places on his land since as merchants they do not need any.*”⁸⁹⁹ According to Pitt, his threat “*should bring them [Europeans] together and should push them to offer each other reciprocal assistance.*”⁹⁰⁰ The English governor included the orders of the Mughal emperor, translated into Portuguese, in the letter.

Martin compared the Persian version and the Portuguese version of the order and concluded that the Mughal orders were against the English exclusively.⁹⁰¹ The Mughal emperor sought revenge after English privateers attacked wealthy Mughal merchants in Surat. Pitt manipulated the documents to generate an uprising against Mughal power. The document clearly stated that Aurangzeb was not against European merchants, but against the territorial ambition exhibited by the fortifications. However, these two elements did not impede Martin's agreement with the need for a common front against the Mughals. Martin then received another letter from Pitt, who decided to write to the representatives of the French, Danish and Dutch companies on the Coromandel Coast, to gather all Europeans against

⁸⁹⁷ ANOM C2 67 f°6, letter of Martin, 5 February 1703.

⁸⁹⁸ ANOM C2 66 f°154, diary of Martin, February 1702.

⁸⁹⁹ ANOM C2 66 f°209, French Copy of the letter of Daud Khan to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 16 November 1701: “[...] *un ordre de prendre et arrester les chefs de toutes les nations d'Europe pour les emmener avec lui devant le roy, ou les forcer à signer une promesse de payer, ce que les forbans ont pris a ses sujets [...] Orenzeb ne veut pas que les européens ayent des places fortifiées sur ses terres n'ayant pas besoin, n'estant que des marchands*”.

⁹⁰⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°155, diary of Martin, Februray-March 1702: “*doit porter à se joindre ensemble, et s'entredonner les assistances réciproques*”.

⁹⁰¹ ANOM C2 66 f°210, French Copy of the letter of Daud Khan to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 16 November 1701.

Mughal attacks.⁹⁰² Martin answered that the French would not be the last to join in this common cause, especially if it could stop the “*persecutions.*”⁹⁰³ To be assured of the equal investment of all European representatives, however, Martin requested a written record of the agreement, including penalties for those who did not keep their word. According to him, a similar deal had been made in Surat, where the Dutch, English and French had trading posts, but it did not materialise. Martin finished his letter by showing his determination to make such a union possible, on the condition of an equal investment from every “*nation*” just as an official international agreement.

Despite the fact that the coalition on the Coromandel Coast eventually failed, the English governor’s attempt is remarkable. It shows the need for cooperation and a common front to fight the unbalanced relationship the imperial powers had with Mughal rulers. Even if the arrangement among all the European companies did not materialise, either in Surat or on the Coromandel Coast, the fact that both Pitt and Martin, and probably the Danish governor as well, proposed this agreement illustrates how they all perceived this cooperation as mutually beneficial to developing their trade and settlement. However, local power dynamics both stimulated cooperative relations and limited them at the same time. This specific blockade was the same one that encouraged Da’ud Khan to contact Martin repeatedly and led to Desprez and Manucci’s diplomatic mission.⁹⁰⁴ Martin was on thin ice with the Mughal authorities and clearly tried to stay out of the conflict. Even if it was beneficial for the Company to help the English Company, he could not always. Da’ud Khan had sent two letters, forbidding the French to carry any merchandise to Madras. In fear of being deprived of supplies from the hinterland themselves, the French had to accept Da’ud Khan’s terms.⁹⁰⁵ Mutual cooperation between Martin and Pitt depended on their company’s position in local power relations. However, if they were both vulnerable enough to enter into a cooperative relationship where the benefits would outweigh disadvantages, the cooperation could materialise within the limits imposed by the Mughal power.

External military threats and the interdependent nature of the English and French Company’s relationship generated cooperation and preserved it. An instance in which the director of Pondicherry tested the limits of the cooperation illustrates the punishment

⁹⁰² ANOM C2 66 f°157, diary of Martin, March 1702.

⁹⁰³ ANOM C2 66 f°211, Letter of Martin to Pitt in Madras, February 1702.

⁹⁰⁴ See chapter 4.

⁹⁰⁵ ANOM C2 66 f°211, Letter of Martin to Pitt in Madras, February 1702. The same happened with the English officials of fort Saint David in Tegnepatnam: see ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702.

mechanisms used to maintain cooperative relations. In January 1709, the *Saint Louis*, the last Company ship in the Indian Ocean, took an English ship as a prize near Madras. The English ship was returning from the coast of Sumatra and its value was estimated at 40,000 *livres*.⁹⁰⁶ Immediately, the Company captain felt uneasy about the prize and considered returning it to the English because “*he felt that the English would have resentment and that they would complain at the court of the great Mughal.*”⁹⁰⁷ But the crew and officers decided against it and brought the English prize to Pondicherry. The governor of Madras reacted instantaneously and Hébert received “*fulminating letters*” as soon as the ship arrived in Pondicherry. The English governor threatened to attack the *Saint Louis*, but most importantly, he declared he would retain 20,000 *livres* worth of French Company goods, which had come in on two English ships from Bengal, together with French sailors.

Hébert, realising that the consequences of a conflict with either the English or the Mughal governor would be disastrous for the Company, gathered the council, the officers of the garrison and the merchants of the Company to discuss the possibility of returning the prize to the English Company. According to the director, the group unanimously decided to hand the ship and the merchandise back to Madras. Hébert further justified his decision by warning the board in Paris that French ships taking prizes near the Indian coasts “*breached the rule of the Great Mughal who would not bear any act of hostilities on his coasts.*”⁹⁰⁸ The argument of Mughal neutrality was only part of the reason why the director attempted to limit the prizes made on English ships. The other reason was that the French in Pondicherry could not afford a conflict with the English in Madras, as the maintenance of Pondicherry depended on their cooperation with the English. As a punishment mechanism, the English governor would immediately interrupt all cooperative activities with the French, including the transport of goods from Bengal and the common front against the Mughal ruler.

In Ouidah, the power of the Dahomian king over European representatives affected the way they interacted with each other. This was particularly true during the period of the Dahomian conquest, which generated fear and instability. The King of Dahomey’s power alternated between strong and weak, depending on the attacks from his neighbour, the King of

⁹⁰⁶ ANOM C2 68 f°304, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

⁹⁰⁷ ANOM C2 68 f°304, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: “*il sentoit bien que les anglois en auroient du ressentiment, et qu’ils ne manqueraient pas d’emporter leurs plaints à la cour du grand mogul*”.

⁹⁰⁸ ANOM C2 68 f°305, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: “*Les anglois disent que [...] par conséquent que nous contreveons à la volonté du grand mogul qui ne souffrira pas que sur ces coests on commette aucun acte d’hostilité.*”

Oyo.⁹⁰⁹ Conflicts with the Oyo kingdom forced the Dahomian army to shift to the hinterland. Coastal kingdoms often took the opportunity to rebel against the Dahomey, leading to an endemic insecurity that was detrimental to European forts and trade. Du Bellay, director during the Dahomian wars, was aware of the danger because he listed directors and factors, both French and English who had been cruelly “*massacred and made martyrs*” by the Dahomian kings. He even added that he did not see any alternative death for himself or his employees than being decapitated.⁹¹⁰

In this situation of fear, solidarity prevailed and cooperation served as an emergency mechanism. The Viceroy of Brazil acknowledged the necessity of inter-imperial solidarity in Ouidah to the King of Portugal: “*no fortress in the port of AOuidah [Ouidah] is capable of defending itself when the Africans attack [...], all together they can offer a stronger resistance.*”⁹¹¹ English governor Thomas Wilson explicitly stated this sense of common cause after the Dahomian army attacked the French: “*Governor Wilson answered that they have come down out of the Country in a hostile manner, without giving him the least notice, and attacked his Neighbours the French, he looked on it as the common Cause of all the Europeans settled there, who were bound to assist one another.*”⁹¹² After that attack, the English governor saw the predicament of all Europeans as a “*common plight.*” Wilson’s solidarity did not help Du Bellay, who was a lost cause. He had tried to take advantage of the conflict, pitting King Agaja against the Hueda King Huffon and his captain, Assou.⁹¹³ After the attack of the Dahomian army, Wilson attempted to protect Du Bellay, who was taken by the Hueda people and killed. The cooperative relations between Wilson and Du Bellay were limited by local power dynamics, which they could not alter.

Personal interest

Cooperative relations between the English and the French Company representatives were not necessarily free from personal interest. In July 1689, when the Nine Years’ War broke out in Europe, Elihu Yale, governor of Madras, offered Martin a safe place for his wife and other people who needed to retreat.⁹¹⁴ In September, Yale sent one of his men to

⁹⁰⁹ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 184.

⁹¹⁰ ANOM C2 25, letter of Du Bellay, 21 November 1733.

⁹¹¹ APB 23 f°90, letter Vice Roy of Brazil to Lisbon, 30 July 1728: “*Aucune des forteresses construites au port d’Ajuda n’est capable de se défendre quand les nègres veulent l’attaquer [...] parce que tous réunis pouvaient offrir une résistance plus vigoureuse.*” Translated and cited in Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 146.

⁹¹² Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*, 118.

⁹¹³ According to Snelgrave, Du Bellay had warned the Dahomian army that Assou would try to reconquer Juda and offered protection to Assou for money. Snelgrave, 119.

⁹¹⁴ Martin, *Mémoires de François Martin*, 3: 48.

Pondicherry to pay a visit and reiterated the offer to protect Martin's wife, insisting that she would be safe and adding that he knew from reliable sources that the Dutch would attack Pondicherry.⁹¹⁵ According to Martin, the English governor had his own ships trading for his personal profit in India and wanted to protect these ships from a potential encounter with the French at sea. Martin reflected that maybe protecting his wife in Madras would enable the English to pressure the French into not attacking any of his private ships. Even if this supposition was not true, the fact that the English governor kept his own ships adds a variable to the equation. Indeed, English Company representatives strove for cooperation with the French not only to develop the English East India Company's trade and settlements in India, but also to protect their own investments and wealth, both of which were at stake.

The director could also take advantage of the interdependent relations with the English Company to establish his prominence in local power dynamics. When a conflict started between the English governor of Madras and the commander of the fort of Senji, Sarup Singh, in 1711, Hébert offered to act as the mediator in the dispute. He had received four "*copys of letters from Serrop Sing, Paula Beerza and the Buxee to inpowering him to sett a treaty on foot with us and leaving it wholly to him to make the peace.*"⁹¹⁶ This offer to mediate in a conflict that could harm the English East India Company came during the War of the Spanish Succession. Despite the war, the important role of mediator was still given to the French director. The choice had been forced upon the English governor, Harrison, who needed a third party in the dispute with Sarup Singh and he could not refuse the proposition of negotiating with their enemy, or the offer of help by the French. According to Harrison, Hébert had the power to ruin the affairs of the English East India Company by giving assistance to their enemies.⁹¹⁷ However, the English governor was not satisfied with the terms of the peace treaty negotiated by Hébert, stating that he would "*by no means sign to these articles as he has drawn them up*" and asked for a new treaty.⁹¹⁸ Furthermore, Hébert insisted on interfering in English affairs about the fortification of Madras, which in turn upset the English.⁹¹⁹

Hébert's overzealous behaviour was aimed at strengthening his personal relationship with the governor of Madras but, more importantly, at asserting French power, and by extension, his own power, with the commander of Senji. On one hand, he offered a service, which made the English governor indebted to him. On the other hand, by placing himself as a

⁹¹⁵ Martin, 3: 53.

⁹¹⁶ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°66, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 10 March 1711/1712 (old calendar).

⁹¹⁷ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°67, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 10 March 1711/1712 (old calendar)

⁹¹⁸ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°119, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 29 April 1712.

⁹¹⁹ IOR/P/ 239/ 86 f°126, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 5 May 1712.

third party in negotiations, he implicitly raised the French Company to a position of power before the commander of Senji. As mentioned above, instructions from Paris were not against cooperation between the English and the French in times of war in Europe. On the contrary, the Parisian directors grew worried that Hébert's interference in the dispute between the English and the commander of Senji would harm cooperative relations. They therefore acknowledged the French-English cooperation necessary to the survival of the settlement as they urged the director of Pondicherry "*to maintain good relations with them [the English] since the conservation of Pondicherry depends on it.*"⁹²⁰ An excess of intervention in English affairs out of personal interest would endanger the Company.

Dulivier was just as eager of intervening in English affairs to develop a personal network. In February 1714, Harrison quarrelled with the governor of Fort David in Cuddalore and they both wrote to Dulivier, asking permission for him to stay in Pondicherry while he prepared the accounts of the settlements. Dulivier accepted, stating that "*these type of things cannot be refused in any country of the world and especially not in a country like this one.*"⁹²¹ In their arrangement, Dulivier and Harrison agreed that the governor of Cuddalore had to hand in his accounts after two weeks or Dulivier would bring the governor of Cuddalore to the council of Madras for trial.⁹²² However, the governor of Cuddalore had sailed to France on a Saint Malo merchant ship and died in Paris. Dulivier later wrote to the Parisian directors that he had provided "*a great service to the English company for which he was very badly rewarded by the individuals occupying the highest ranks in these parts of India.*"⁹²³ Irritated, the Parisian directors replied that if Dulivier had accepted a deal that could damage the reputation of the French Company, he should comply with it. The directors ended the letter by ordering Dulivier to execute the agreements he made with the English or the Dutch in the future, "*in order to not compromise the good relations that the peace between France and these nations has restored.*"⁹²⁴ The directors had to navigate the fine balance between good relations maintained for the sake of the settlement and those developed on a personal level.

⁹²⁰ ANOM C2 14 f°165, reply of Dulivier to the orders of Pontchartrain, 1714: "*de se bien ménager avec les premiers puisque la conservation de Pondichéry en dépend*".

⁹²¹ ANOM C2 69 f°74, letter of Dulivier, 14 Febraury 1714: "*ces sortes de choses ne se refusent guerre dans aucun pays du monde et particulièrement dans un comme celui-cy*".

⁹²² ANOM C2 14 f°165, letter of Dulivier to Pontchartrain, 1714.

⁹²³ ANOM C2 69 f°77, letter of Dulivier, 14 February 1714: "*nous avons aussy rendu un service considérable à la compagnie d'angleterre dont nous sommes des plus mal récompensés par les personnes qui occupent leurs premiers employés dans cette partie de l'inde*".

⁹²⁴ ANOM C2 14 f°165, Answer of the East India Company directors to the letter of Dulivier sent to Pontchartrain: "*nous écrivons à M. Du Livier d'executer à l'avenir les traittés qu'il fera avec les anglois et les*

In Ouidah, conflicts among European representatives were rare, but directors could take advantage of them when they happened. When the English factor attacked the Dutch factor with ninety men and imprisoned him in 1715, Ducoulombier released the Dutchman with Captain Assou and six *acquérats*.⁹²⁵ The Dutch factor was grateful and his superior at Elmina sent a thank you letter to Ducoulombier. When an interloper offered to bring the factor back to England, “*all asked for the governor to be the witness.*”⁹²⁶ This illustrates the fact that Ducoulombier’s position was central to the conflict mediation. Additionally, and perhaps this counted more to Ducoulombier, he received “*the compliments of the King and the big men of the Kingdom.*”⁹²⁷ Placing himself as an intermediary in a conflict enabled the director to enhance his power and reputation. This was the perfect situation for the director to establish his prominence as mediator, to strengthen his reputation with the Hueda King and his connections with other European representatives.

Additionally, similar to the situation in Pondicherry, the safekeeping of the peace in Ouidah was a necessity acknowledged by the board of directors in Paris. In their instructions to Ducoulombier’s successor, Bouchel, the Council of the Navy stated that “*after the expiration of the neutrality between the French, the English and the Dutch under the consent of the Hueda King for all the ships on his shores, the company allows him to renew it for as long as he judges necessary, recommending him to live in mutual understanding with these nations.*”⁹²⁸ The neutrality treaty could be renewed even if the countries declared war in Europe and the Parisian directors expected the continued peace between European trading nations to have positive effects on the continuation of the French trade in Ouidah. Ducoulombier, by protecting the peace in Ouidah, therefore also strengthened his position with the board of directors.

In Pondicherry and Ouidah, military threats and political unrest led directors to engage in cooperative relations with other representatives of European companies. In Pondicherry, threats could be generated by rulers or other European companies with a stronger position in

hollandois afin de ne plus compromettre la bonne intelligence que la paix à rétablir entre la France et ces nations”.

⁹²⁵ ANOM COL E 145 Mémoire Ducoulombier 1717 and C6 25 Mémoire Ducoulombier 1715

⁹²⁶ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier 1714, “*Tous demandèrent que le directeur soit présent pour être témoin de l’accord*”.

⁹²⁷ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier, 1715: “*il receut des compliments du roy et des grands du royaume et l’applaudissement universel des peuples de la coste*”.

⁹²⁸ ANOM E 43, Personnel file Bouchel, Instructions of the Council of the Navy: “*Le temps expiré de la neutralité entre les françois, les anglois et les hollandois du consentement du Roy de Juda pour les vaisseaux qui sont dans ses rades, la Compagnie consent qu’il puisse la renouveler pour le temps qu’il jugera a propos [...] luy recommandant de vivre en bonne intelligence avec ces nations*”.

local power dynamics. In Ouidah, however, all European representatives within the Dahomian territory acknowledged the need for a common front. This cooperation was made possible by interpersonal relationships of loyalty built on regular correspondence or visits, as well as the exchange of services between different European representatives. Cooperation was mutually advantageous; actors gained strength by combining their efforts. Cooperation as an emergency mechanism therefore only took place when actors of the cooperative relations were relatively weak and vulnerable. Additionally, the emergency cooperation occurred within the boundaries created by local authorities. Directors could also exploit the interdependent relations linked to cooperation as an emergency mechanism for personal interests. Offers of cooperation were often motivated by private stakes, such as fostering personal assets or connections and establishing prominence in local power dynamics.

5. The nuances of competitive interactions

Competitive interactions have been widely stressed by the literature on European overseas companies. However, it has failed to acknowledge the negative impact of such competition on overseas settlements or forts and the strategies developed on the spot to curtail its damages.

Curtailling competition

The competition between the different European companies on the Coromandel Coast is illustrated by gift-giving sessions to Mughal rulers, where different companies' representatives attempted to offer more gifts, faster than the others. The main source of competition among the European companies came primarily from the VOC. This was particularly the case between the English and the Dutch. François Martin wrote that "*there is a furious jealousy between the English and the Dutch Companies.*"⁹²⁹ In 1701, Muslim ships attacked a Danish ship and an English ship and the English governor in Madras wrote to Martin that he suspected an alliance with the Dutch, since the attackers greeted the Dutch and left their ships unharmed.⁹³⁰ In the case of the French and the Dutch companies, the most obvious element of competition was the Dutch occupation of Pondicherry between 1693 and 1699, which left the French fearful of a potential future Dutch attack.⁹³¹ During the War of the Spanish Succession, the French did not dare leave their ships in Pondicherry for too long, in

⁹²⁹ ANOM C2 65 f°60, letter of Martin, 15 February 1700: "*Il y a une furieuse jalousie entre la compagnie anglaise et hollandaise*".

⁹³⁰ ANOM C2 66 f°26, diary of Martin, July 1701.

⁹³¹ ANOM C2 63 f°141, letter of Martin, 10 October 1689.

case of a Dutch attack.⁹³² Therefore, the director paid close attention to events in the nearby Dutch settlements by regularly sending his men to spy in Nagapattinam and receiving letters from the Capuchins, who lived south of Pondicherry, which kept him up to date with the actions of the Dutch.⁹³³

The fear of the VOC harmed the French presence in Pondicherry and the communication among French settlements and with Paris. Dutch ships posed the main threat to French fleets; the Dutch frequently attacked or seized French ships.⁹³⁴ French letters and packages intended for other Company officials in India or headed for France were also intercepted by the Dutch.⁹³⁵ However, the French were as guilty as the Dutch of mistreating ships. The VOC factor in Nagapattinam, Coymans, complained about these incidents to Martin.⁹³⁶ As evidence of planned competitive behaviour, a report entirely devoted to the ways in which the French could interrupt Dutch and English trade in India can be found in the French archive.⁹³⁷ However, there was a large discrepancy between theory and practice when it came to what the Company was able to do in India. Martin realised that this competition was harmful to the Company in Pondicherry and decided to limit it as much as possible.

On 13 January 1705, a French fleet seized the Dutch ship the *Gulden Vogel Phenix*, and brought it to Pondicherry. Dutch company agents and the commissary Bernard Phoonsen, who were on board, were accommodated in the fort and the Dutch governor of Nagapattinam sent two of his men to negotiate the prisoners' ransom.⁹³⁸ In the organisation of the Dutch East India Company, the high government of Batavia sent the commissary to visit and check all the factories of the Dutch company in India.⁹³⁹ One commissary was in charge of the eastern coast of the Indian subcontinent, the other one of the western side, and they would switch every year.⁹⁴⁰ In the settlements of the VOC, the visiting commissary ranked first after the council, if there was one, in the hierarchy. Due to Phoonsen's high position, Martin believed he could negotiate much more than a ransom, and that it would be advantageous to

⁹³² ANOM C2 66 f° 164, diary of Martin, July-August 1702.

⁹³³ ANOM C2 66 f° 161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702; f° 168, diary of Martin, December 1702; f° 170, diary of Martin, January 1703.

⁹³⁴ ANOM C2 63 f° 145, 10 October 1689. Two ships going back to France with their merchandise were seized at the Cap of Good Hope.

⁹³⁵ ANOM C2 67 f° 10, letter of Martin, 15 February 1703.

⁹³⁶ ANOM C2 66 f° 12, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

⁹³⁷ ANOM C2 66 f° 138, *Mémoire sur les entreprises qui se peuvent faire sur les places qui appartiennent aux anglois et hollandois que pour interrompre seulement leur commerce dans les Indes*, 1701.

⁹³⁸ ANOM C2 67 f° 250-258, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705.

⁹³⁹ J. Aalbers, *Rijklof van Goens, commissaris en veldoverste der Oost-Indische Compagnie, en zijn arbeidsveld, 1653/54 en 1657/58* (Groningen: Wolters, 1916), 27.

⁹⁴⁰ Aalbers, 28.

settle a ceasefire with the Dutch. This was further motivated by the fact that the Mughal general Da'ud Khan had impeded the consolidation of French fortifications; the Dutch could take advantage of French weakness, ally themselves with the Mughals and take over Pondicherry. According to Martin, “*it would have been difficult to fight against these two nations if they were united.*”⁹⁴¹ Martin justified his strategy by pointing out the direct link between the situation with the Mughals and the attempts at peace with the Dutch: “*what we wrote about the moors made us see how to take advantage of the prize on the Dutch commissary.*”⁹⁴² The French Company's weak situation in Pondicherry led the director to try to curtail the competition with the VOC.

When he mentioned a potential ceasefire, the director insisted on the mutual inconvenience of the conflicts in India.⁹⁴³ Phoosen first replied that the negotiation of a local truce exceeded his powers. Martin reminded him of the Dutch treatment of the imprisoned French officials in Batavia in 1693 after their defeat: the Dutch sent them back to Europe. The director threatened the VOC employees with the same fate if they did not agree to a treaty, claiming that the truce would be as beneficial to the Dutch as to the French. To this, the Dutch agents replied that it could hardly be the case, since they held more power than the French in the Indian Ocean. In response to the argument that negotiating such a truce exceeded the Dutch commissary's power, Martin replied that he had received as little power to sign this treaty from Louis XIV as the Dutch had from the council in Batavia.

After further discussions and negotiations, Phoosen's secretary, who spoke French, gave orders that came from the council of Nagapattinam. The commissary needed a confirmation that the council of Nagapattinam would support his treaty. After the Dutch agents of Nagapattinam gave Phoosen the power to arrange the Dutch Company's affairs on the Coromandel Coast, he could sign a ceasefire treaty between the French and the Dutch. However, Phoosen knew that his superior at the council of Batavia would never ratify the local truce he was about to sign. The situation was difficult for the Dutch prisoners. The monsoon was over, which meant that few ships could reach Pondicherry to liberate them and, additionally, a Dutch ship was coming back from Japan and would be taken as a prize by the French if Phoosen did not ratify the peace treaty. No matter how strong the Dutch were in

⁹⁴¹ ANOM C2 67 f°251, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: “*Il auroit été difficile de pouvoir nous soutenir contre ces deux nations unies?*”

⁹⁴² ANOM C2 67 f°252, letter of Martin, 19 February 1705: “*Ce que nous marquons à l'égard des mores nous a porté de voir de tirer quelque utilité pour votre compagnie de la prise du commissaire hollandois.*”

⁹⁴³ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 4: 159-164.

this region when compared to the French, in this situation they were forced to sign or they would be sent back to Europe.

After weighing the pros and cons, Phoosen and his agents resolved to sign the treaty on the assumption that if the council of Batavia refused to acknowledge its validity, the treaty would be cancelled.⁹⁴⁴ The treaty covered the geographical area between Nagapattinam and the “*Pointe des Palmes*,” fifteen leagues away from the entrance of the Ganges River but no further, because the commissary had no power over the Dutch settlement in Bengal. The French desired a truce that would cover all of India, but Phoosen could only negotiate for the Coromandel Coast. In turn, the Dutch agreed to sign the treaty if the French returned the *Gulden Vogel Phenix* and its cargo. The French refused but allowed them to buy back the ship, to which the Dutch replied that their Company had enough ships. Finally, Martin and Phoosen, as well as the first administrator for the Dutch Company in Nagapattinam, Hendricq Gronsius, signed the treaty on 27 January 1705.⁹⁴⁵

Martin, the mastermind behind the treaty, intended it to secure Pondicherry against any future attacks and to allow the major settlement of the Company to develop. Indeed, more than a ceasefire, the second article of the treaty stated that “*there will be a perfect understanding in the said region without harming each other directly or indirectly.*”⁹⁴⁶ The director handed back the prisoners and because there were rumours of attacks from the commander of Senji, he gave his new allies an escort of twenty-four soldiers to Nagapattinam. He then wrote that he thought to have made an advantageous deal for the Company. By taking advantage of the VOC prize, he managed to negotiate a mutually advantageous local truce with Dutch officials, which would enable the French in Pondicherry to communicate and trade with their settlements on the Coromandel Coast and Bengal without fear of Dutch action. This local truce shows the level of French dependency on limited inter-imperial competition for their survival in Pondicherry, even with their rivals in Europe and in India. Unfortunately for Martin’s plan of peace among the European companies on the Coromandel Coast, as soon as the councillors of Batavia heard about the local truce they fired Phoosen, along with the agents and the Dutch Company officials of Nagapattinam who ratified the treaty.⁹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this episode illustrates Martin’s strategy to make use of the

⁹⁴⁴ Manucci, 4: 164.

⁹⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, VOC 1.04.02 inv. no 8919 f°343-349.

⁹⁴⁶ ANOM C2 67 f°245, Treaty between France and the Dutch Republic in 1705: “*Qu’il y aura dans la dite étendue une parfaite intelligence entre les deux nations sans pouvoir chercher directement ou indirectement les voyes de se nuire*”.

⁹⁴⁷ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, 4: 237.

competitive environment as a way to create cooperation. However, this cooperation could not be forced upon the VOC, which enjoyed a stronger position than the French Company and did not see it as a mutually advantageous deal.

Outside source of competition

Competitive aspects were not exclusive to the French Company's relations with the VOC. Despite their interdependence, the English and the French companies showed some signs of mistrust and competition. Stating that the French had full confidence in the English—friendly neighbours in India and enemies in Europe—would be as partial as neglecting the importance of their cooperation altogether. French overseas employees restricted the military information they sent to the Parisian directors when they used English channels of communication, a sign that they did not fully trust their allies.⁹⁴⁸ On two instances during the Nine Years' War, Martin coded his letter to the directors in France because he was unsure how the letter would reach Surat before being sent to Europe.⁹⁴⁹ However, this technique was not recurrent and does not appear to have been used during the War of the Spanish Succession. Furthermore, despite their good relations with the English governor of Madras, directors of Pondicherry remained as critical of the information provided by the English as they did the Dutch “*because we cannot completely trust the information the English and the Dutch want or dare to publish.*”⁹⁵⁰ The French and the English did occasionally take each other's ships as prizes. During the War of the Spanish Succession, voyages to the Persian Gulf and Bengal were risky because of the possibility of Dutch attacks, but also English attacks as well.⁹⁵¹ In 1703, the Company took the English ship *Canterbury* as a prize and enjoyed the sale of its cargo, even if the French director showed some regret.

Perhaps the best illustration of the mistrust between the English and French company representatives was the constant spying. Shortly before the declaration of the War of the Spanish Succession, Martin, while enjoying a “*good correspondence*” with Pitt, still sent some of his men to both English and Dutch settlements to “*be informed about their movements.*”⁹⁵² On the English side, they paid careful attention to French affairs in

⁹⁴⁸ ANOM C2 67 f°20, letter of Denyon, 27 September 1703: “*la voye que l'on utilise pour escrire en Europe ne permettant pas qu'on le risque ny que l'on s'étende beaucoup en narration*”.

⁹⁴⁹ ANOM C2 63 f°175, letter of Martin, 25 September 1691 and, ANOM C2 64 f°12, letter of Martin, 30 September 1692.

⁹⁵⁰ ANOM C2 68 f°205, copy of the letter sent by Hébert to Pilavoine in Surat, 24 July 1708: “*car on ne peut pas tout à fait ajouter foy a ce que les anglois et holandois veulent ou osent publier*”.

⁹⁵¹ ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702: “*la guerre étant déclarée en Europe, le retour du golfe de Perse étant dangereux par une rencontre de vaisseaux anglois et hollandois*”.

⁹⁵² ANOM C2 66 f°39, diary of Martin, November 1701: “*afin d'estre informé de leurs mouvements*”.

Pondicherry. Pitt sent a spy to the French settlement and asked the agent in Fort David to do the same, to corroborate the information.⁹⁵³ The French aimed most of their intelligence efforts at the Dutch settlement of Nagapattinam. Martin regularly sent at least two spies, who did not know each other, to double-check information.⁹⁵⁴ Other companies' widespread information networks prevented the Parisian board from keeping the arrival and itinerary of their ships secret. The information about the arrival of a French ship spread faster through rumours among all European settlements than through official French channels.⁹⁵⁵

In the 1710s, English surveillance of Pondicherry intensified. In January 1710, Harrison sent spies to Pondicherry to gather information about the affairs of the French Company.⁹⁵⁶ Additionally, recurrent references to the movements of French ships around Pondicherry appear in the English Company archive.⁹⁵⁷ The main concern was not the East India Company itself, but the Saint Malo merchants who had been granted the trade monopoly to India. The English Company proceedings in Madras relates that the “*great fears, and apprehension they have [at Fort David] of the St Mallo ships at Ponticherry of their having some ill design in agitation.*”⁹⁵⁸ During the War of the Spanish Succession, Saint Malo ships were equipped to be corsairs. In January 1710, the threat of being made a prize by the Saint Malo merchants was so high, the English decided that ships at Fort David would not be fully loaded. The Saint Malo merchants sailed to the Indian Ocean in squadrons and made a great part of their returns by seizing Dutch and English ships.

Harrison accused the Saint Malo merchants of importing the War of the Spanish Succession into India, where it did not belong. He wrote to London: “*tis true the crowne of England hath maintained a great and just warre for eight years past against the King of France [...] but this warre in Europe ought not to extend to these parts of the world which the French ships doe.*”⁹⁵⁹ The English governor probably referred to the neutrality imposed on European representatives residing within the Mughal emperor's territories. Although the Mughal emperor imposed the neutrality, both English and French overseas directors wanted to secure peace locally on the Coromandel Coast. The modus operandi of the Saint Malo

⁹⁵³ IOR G/19/35 f°138, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, Letter from fort David to Madras, 9 November 1703.

⁹⁵⁴ ANOM C2 66 f°161, diary of Martin, September-October 1702 and C2 66 f°178, letter of Martin, 15 February 1702.

⁹⁵⁵ ANOM C2 67 f°131, letter of Martin, 2 October 1704: “*les précautions que vous prenez messieurs pour oster aux autres nations la connaissance de vos desseins ne réussissent pas suivant vos intentions [...] ce bruit s'est répandu le long de la coste, et à passé de la dans l'Inde*”.

⁹⁵⁶ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°4, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 9 January 1709/10 (old calendar).

⁹⁵⁷ IOR/P/ 239/ 84 f°145, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, December 1708.

⁹⁵⁸ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°18, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 31 January 1709/10 (old calendar).

⁹⁵⁹ IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°167, Public Proceedings Fort Madras, 20 September 1710.

merchants, particularly during the War of the Spanish Succession, became a serious threat to the informal local peace and cooperation. Unlike when a Company captain took a ship as a prize, the director of Pondicherry did not have the power to return the prize when it was judged too detrimental to the Company, as had happened in 1709 with the *Saint Louis*. The threat of the Saint Malo merchants on the local truce and good relations came from the “*outside*.” The Parisian directors themselves knew about the danger of sending privateering ships to India. In 1708, they warned the minister of the Navy that it would upset Indian traders and interrupt the navigation of Mughal subjects, which would ultimately have a negative impact on the Company’s settlements and on their overseas employees.⁹⁶⁰ The Saint Malo merchants’ aggressive strategy threatened the informal peace between Hébert and Pitt or Dulivier and Harrison and, unfortunately for the overseas directors, they had no control and would have to adapt to it.

Competition in inter-imperial trade

Similar to Pondicherry, French directors in Ouidah remained wary of their fellow European representatives. The collective action of European factors when visiting the Dahomian king coupled with the underlying competition among them because their position as trading partners was at stake. As mentioned earlier, King Agaja purposefully made the environment competitive and he measured the zeal of European factors by the amount of gifts they brought and how early they arrived.⁹⁶¹ Furthermore, while the trading space in Ouidah remained free of European imperial conflicts, this was not the case outside of the Hueda or Dahomey kings’ sovereignty. Indeed, one of the reasons why Levet was completely isolated from France during the 1740s was that the English took the only ship sent by the Parisian directors to supply the fort as a prize along the West African Coast. French attempts to create a trading station at Anamabo were also a source of competition between the French and the English companies.⁹⁶²

However, in Ouidah itself, the main reason behind the competition among European representatives was to have the upper hand in inter-imperial trade with the Portuguese-Brazilians. The slave trade in Ouidah was overwhelmingly oriented towards Brazil, especially Bahia. Portuguese-Brazilian captains traded gold and tobacco with all European factors in

⁹⁶⁰ ANOM C2 13 f°4, letter of East India Company directors in Paris to Pontchartrain, February 1708.

⁹⁶¹ ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 26 August 1733.

⁹⁶² ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744.

Ouidah.⁹⁶³ Bahia-based merchants took part in the slave trade; the King of Portugal authorised the sale of their low-quality tobacco in exchange for enslaved Africans in 1644. According to Pierre Verger, the main reasons for the connection between Bahia and Ouidah were the following: third-quality tobacco from Bahia, which was indispensable for the economic balance of Bahia, had been forbidden in Portugal, and the Guinea Coast therefore became the main market for the Bahia merchants; additionally, according to the treaty of 1641, tobacco was the only Portuguese commodity allowed on the Guinea Coast by the Dutch; finally, the King of Portugal, in an attempt to prevent illegal gold trade with the English Company, forbade merchants from Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian ports where tobacco was not produced to trade to the Guinea Coast.⁹⁶⁴ Thanks to tobacco, Bahia traded directly with the Guinea Coast and circumvented metropolitan authority. In the long run, it led to the emergence of an influential Brazilian community in Ouidah.⁹⁶⁵

The rivalry between Lisbon and Bahia for control over the trade on the Bight of Benin created a distinct Brazilian merchant community, whose economic interests opposed those of Lisbon.⁹⁶⁶ Their situation in Ouidah was uncomfortable because they did not have a fort before 1721 and, according to the treaty with the WIC, all Portuguese-Brazilian ships had to pass by Elmina to pay a ten percent tax on their cargo.⁹⁶⁷ Furthermore, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, there were no rules regarding the number of ships allowed to leave Bahia for the Guinea Coast, which resulted in a highly-competitive environment on the slave market. The merchants who fitted out the ships only bought forty to sixty enslaved Africans out of the whole cargo and gave permission to the captain and the crew to engage in slave trade for their own benefit. Once the captain finished his personal trade, the rest of the crew had to finish their own trade. This practice led to a steep increase in prices when the numerous Portuguese-Brazilian ships came ashore, and particularly when the crew had to follow the captain and finish their trade, as it could double the price of captives.⁹⁶⁸

The English factor, Blainey, had previously been a merchant in Bahia. To keep the Brazilian trade under control, he proposed the construction of a canal connecting his fort to

⁹⁶³ NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1. 05. 14, inv. no. 89, Journal of Sint George d'Elmina, 4 January 1722: “*Capitein Torres de welke twee maenden hier geweest heft en van alle europeanse goederen leveren goud en tabak*”.

⁹⁶⁴ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 28–29.

⁹⁶⁵ Robin Law, ‘The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah’, *Slavery & Abolition* 22, no. 1 (1 April 2001): 22–23.

⁹⁶⁶ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 132.

⁹⁶⁷ Verger, 42.

⁹⁶⁸ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire about the colony of Juda, Guinea Coast, 1722.

the sea. The aim was to make other nations pay for the right to use the canal. Understandably, King Agaja and his council did not accept the proposal and Ducoulombier was very shocked by it. However, as it happens, Ducoulombier himself admitted to proposing a similar project “*to let our men watch over the Portuguese trade to avoid fraud.*”⁹⁶⁹ Short of controlling it, European representatives all actively took part in the Brazilian trade. When the English governor had no English ships ashore in Ouidah, he automatically traded with the Brazilians. In April 1718 Baillie, an English factor, wrote to his superior at Cape Coast Castle: “*Since my last have purchased pretty many slaves and am still continuing to do so in order to supply the Portuguese.*”⁹⁷⁰ A great part of the English factor’s activities was to provide the Portuguese-Brazilian with slaves, and the same was true for the Dutch factor, who had a trading lodge in Savi until the Dahomian conquest.

The small amount of Dutch ships coming to Ouidah did not negatively affect the trading activities of the Dutch representative, as “*the Dutch trade all the time in their trading station and sell captives to all nations especially to the Portuguese for gold powder.*”⁹⁷¹ The first gold mines in Brazil were discovered in Bahia and Minas Geraes in 1698, which resulted in an increased demand for a workforce, and thus illegal trade ensued in the Bight of Benin.⁹⁷² The attraction of the gold trade led European representatives to take over the role of intermediary between African traders and Brazilian ships, traditionally taken by Luso-Africans.⁹⁷³ The Portuguese-Brazilian’s formal fort in Ouidah in 1721 raised opposition from other European representatives. If the Portuguese-Brazilians had their own fort, they would not need to trade via other forts and the French, among others, would no longer enjoy the gold powder revenue.⁹⁷⁴ Portuguese-Brazilians had undercut the European factors who competed to be their middlemen.

Inter-imperial interactions in Pondicherry and Ouidah did not reclude plenty of ship prizes and spying, conflicts and rivalry. However, in analysis of the competition in Pondicherry requires recognising the nuance that directors attempted to curtail the competition with other European Companies, even with the VOC. Aware that the competition

⁹⁶⁹ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire Ducoulombier, 1714: “*de faire veiller par nos gens de si près le commerce des portugais pour qu’ils ne fraudent pas*”.

⁹⁷⁰ TNA T70/1475 f° 29, letter of Baillie, 30 April 1718.

⁹⁷¹ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire concernant la colonie de Juda, Côte de Guinée, 1722: “*ils traitent en tous temps dans leur comptoir et vendent leurs captifs à toutes les nations dans la disette surtout aux portugais en poudre d’or*”.

⁹⁷² Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 47; 67. About the illegal gold trade between Bahia and the Royal African Company see Verger, 46–53.

⁹⁷³ Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 46.

⁹⁷⁴ ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of Levesque to the French Consul in Portugal, 20 March 1719.

would harm Pondicherry's survival, they tried to maintain a local truce with the Dutch and the English on the Coromandel Coast. Saint Malo merchants brought competition with the English to the Coromandel Coast, which the directors had no power over. On the Bight of Benin, competitive relations occurred mostly outside of the Hueda and Dahomey kings' territory. Nevertheless, some aspects of the inter-imperial relations in Ouidah included rivalry in gift-giving and, more importantly, in access to Portuguese-Brazilian gold and tobacco.

6. Conclusion

Overseas directors' agency manifested itself through their interactions with other European imperial powers in Pondicherry and Ouidah. The transition from superficial, friendly relations based on a common cultural background to cooperation was made consciously, through regular correspondence, visits, gifts and reciprocal services. A declaration of war in Europe did not necessarily negatively impact the continuation of correspondence and exchange of services among European imperial powers. Cooperation between different European powers depended on their representatives' strategy and on their position in local power relations rather than on warfare in Europe. In India, inter-imperial interactions have to be placed in the larger context of the transition in European power dynamics from the VOC to the EIC and the early stage of expansion of the French in India. In the Bight of Benin, European power relations were tamed by the authority of local sovereigns. The position of European representatives in local power dynamics had to be weak enough for the cooperative relations to be mutually advantageous. In this case, declaration of war in Europe, even if it created enmity between two imperial powers, would only reinforce the existing cooperation. Indeed, the disruption of French shipping from Europe led to overseas directors' increased isolation, which had the double effect of giving more latitude to overseas directors to cooperate with other European companies and increased the necessity to do so.

The motivation for cooperation was therefore French interdependence with other European imperial powers due to economic or military threats. These local threats generated a context of power relations that did not align with that of Europe. This is particularly evident in Ouidah, where moments of solidarity coincided with great local disturbances, such as the Dahomian conquest. The cooperation generated by local power context, also limited this very context. In Pondicherry, the fear of revenge from Da'ud Khan prevented the French director from helping the English Company supply Madras. At the same time, the interdependence acted as both the generator of the cooperation and the reason for its continuation. As illustrated by the returned English ship made prize by the *Saint Louis*, the Company's

dependence on the English transport of goods from Bengal made sure the cooperation would endure. Lastly, cooperative behaviours were not exempt from personal interests. Directors could take advantage of the interdependent relationship to strengthen their personal position of power as mediator, while enhancing their reputation with local rulers and reinforcing their personal networks across imperial boundaries.

Competitive aspects of inter-imperial relations in Pondicherry and Ouidah were less conventional than usually portrayed. In Ouidah, competition between European representatives mostly took the form of rivalry to access inter-imperial trade with Portuguese-Brazilians from Bahia. In Pondicherry, the competition came from French private merchants who threatened local inter-imperial agreements. Overseas directors' interests were to curtail these competitive behaviours and they exercised their agency to attempt to make local truces possible. The overseas and Parisian directors, who realised the need for peace to develop their settlements despite the formal state of war and economic competition in Europe, used the argument of the Mughals or the Hueda kings' imposed neutrality on European representatives to their advantage.

The inter-imperial cooperative interactions and, particularly, the attempts to curtail wars in Europe to spill over in India or on the west coast of Africa were not necessarily restricted to the timeframe or the regions presented in this research. Indeed, in 1744, the director of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix tried to secure an agreement with the English governor of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta to prohibit any hostilities East of the Cape of Good Hope.⁹⁷⁵ These negotiations failed, the power dynamics had evolved during the previous decades and the French Company's trade had increased and started to be perceived as a threat for the EIC.⁹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the attempt demonstrates that the strategy of men-on-the-spot to protect the Company and their interests crossed imperial borders. Similarly, it was not particular to Pondicherry or Ouidah as a treaty of non-aggression on the Senegal and Gambian coast was signed between the French Senegal Company and the Royal Africa Company in 1705.⁹⁷⁷ Companies were empowered to make treaties "*without regard to Peace*

⁹⁷⁵ Matthew Smith Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748* (London [etc.]: Longman, 1995), 185.

⁹⁷⁶ Henry Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive: The Beginning of Empire* (London: Methuen, 1920), 3–4.

⁹⁷⁷ Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française. T. 1*, 120.

or War in Europe".⁹⁷⁸ The impact of war in Europe on the interactions among overseas European settlements and factories deserves to be further investigated.

These instances, when individuals' agency complement institutions' limitations, demonstrate how individuals shaped the French expansion by engaging in cooperative relations across imperial boundaries and relying on these relationships to develop their settlements. Warfare in Europe could not be projected on regions where the Company depended on directors' personal networks, which more often than not crossed imperial boundaries. Labels such as the French, the English or the Dutch were not important in this peculiar context. What mattered was their position in local power relations and the subsequent personal connections across imperial boundaries, which enabled the survival of the factories. Inter-imperial cooperation was an important step towards integrating regional networks, which would allow not only the survival of the factories but potential economic gains. Interpersonal relations of loyalty across imperial divides were instrumental to this infiltration, as is argued in the following chapter.

⁹⁷⁸ Charles Davenant, *Reflections upon the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa, through the Whole Course and Progress [...]*, vol. III (London, 1709), 34.

