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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 6: Integrating regional trading networks

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### 1. Introduction

The survival of the factories was made possible through strategic relations with rulers and calculated inter-imperial cooperation. However, overseas directors' strategy still needed to ensure the economic development of the factories, in addition to their survival. Historians of the French East India Company have largely discounted the period covering the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) up to the creation of the Company of the Indies in 1719. According to Marguerite Labernadie, "*from 1706 until 1722 not only had Pondicherry made no progress, but it was close to ruin.*"<sup>979</sup> Aniruddha Ray qualifies it as a "*stagnation period*" and in her recent work, Marie Ménard-Jacob describes that period as the "*fatal blow of the War of the Spanish Succession.*"<sup>980</sup> Furthermore, Glenn Ames states that the Company's activities came to a virtual halt during the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>981</sup> In addition, in the history of French expansion, the trading post of Ouidah is perceived as marginal, despite its role in the transatlantic slave trade supply.<sup>982</sup> However, these statements are only true if one exclusively emphasises inter-continental trade between either the Coromandel Coast or the Bight of Benin and France. Overseas directors knew that the evolution of the factories from mere survival to economic development could only happen by integrating regional trading networks. How did they integrate the Company's trade into these networks in their position of multi-lateral go-betweens?

Historians usually portray the reorganisation of the Company of the Indies, a few years after its creation, as the start of French intra-Asian trade.<sup>983</sup> Indeed, after 1722, the Company of the Indies allowed its employees to trade privately, therefore provoking an increase of the sources available to study the burgeoning trade.<sup>984</sup> Similarly, the study of French expansion on the West African Coast largely disregards the economic role of south Atlantic trading circuits. However, denying the role of intra-Asian activity that occurred before 1719 and the

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<sup>979</sup> "De 1706 à 1721 non seulement Pondichéry n'a pas progressé mais il fut à deux doigts de sa ruine" in Labernadie, *Le vieux Pondichéry*, 118..

<sup>980</sup> Ray, *The Merchant and the State*, 336; Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 263.

<sup>981</sup> Ames, 'Colbert's Indian Ocean Strategy', 559.

<sup>982</sup> Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française. T. 1*, 121; 447; Jean Meyer et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 131.

<sup>983</sup> "[...] for previously [to 1719] they had concentrated in their European trade and not participated in regional commerce" in Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, xi.: Mantiennne acknowledges some activities of François Martin in association with Chula merchants in Frédéric Mantiennne, 'Le commerce intra-asiatique français au 17e et 18e siècles', in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), 52.

<sup>984</sup> Mantiennne, 'Le commerce intra-asiatique français au 17e et 18e siècles', 61.

trading networks that spanned the south Atlantic as part of the French expansion in India and the West African Coast is restrictive. Using the perspective of overseas directors to explore their interpersonal relations of loyalty aims at unearthing a more diverse and dynamic economic reality in the factories, which places the agency of the overseas directors in the centre of the analysis.

The focus on overseas directors' personal networks also refutes the historiographical opposition between the interests of early modern chartered companies and private merchants.<sup>985</sup> The opening of the West African trade south of the Sierra Leone River from 1713 to 1720 and the transfer of the East India Company's granted monopoly to private merchants from 1709 to 1719, denote a complete delegation of Company trading monopolies to private interests during the second decade of the eighteenth century. However, this period is no indication of a teleological evolution towards free trade during the eighteenth century. Indeed, the port city merchants phase of the 1710s ended in 1719 with the creation of the Company of the Indies, which was granted the trading monopoly of the West African Coast and Indian Ocean, among others. Nor was this period the result of a confrontation "*between two economic philosophies*" in which port city merchants would defend free trade and the companies would embody protectionism.<sup>986</sup> Even if they could be opposed to chartered companies at times, port city merchants often "*gained a great deal from their association with a privileged company.*"<sup>987</sup> Furthermore, as has been demonstrated for the English East India Company, private trade of company servants in India cannot be limited to the Indian Ocean or isolated from their necessary connection to merchants of London.<sup>988</sup> Overseas directors' personal networks of loyalties crossed not only imperial, ethnic and cultural boundaries, but also the dichotomy between chartered companies and private traders.

The grant of the Indian trade monopoly to Saint Malo merchants changed the role of the factories in Asia. While they remained under the responsibility of the Parisian directors, the overseas directors became intermediaries between private merchants and Indian trade. The concession of privileges to private merchants therefore generated a "*second principal*" for overseas directors, in addition to their first principal in Paris. In Ouidah, private merchants had always been highly active, and therefore the directors of the fort had virtually always had

<sup>985</sup> Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 93.

<sup>986</sup> Hopkins, 94; Jean-Pierre Hirsch and Philippe Minard, "Laissez-nous faire et protégez nous beaucoup" : pour une histoire des pratiques institutionnelles dans l'industrie française (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle)', in *La France n'est-elle pas douée pour l'industrie ?*, ed. Louis Bergeron and Patrice Bourdelais (Paris: Belin, 1998), 150.

<sup>987</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 97.

<sup>988</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 284.

two principals: the French traders under licenses and the Navy council or Parisian directors. Following Emily Erikson's argument on the mutually beneficial relationship between private traders and the English and Dutch East India Company, I argue that French port city merchants preferred overseas directors to be well-connected and well-informed rather than simple executants with no local and regional integration—even if it meant they engaged in self-interested activities.<sup>989</sup> On one hand, overseas directors enabled principals to access otherwise unreachable information. On the other hand, overseas directors benefitted from the support of port city merchants both locally and when reporting back to their main principal, the Parisian directors. I further argue that these mutually beneficial agreements were only possible if an interpersonal relationship of loyalty between overseas directors and port city merchants existed. This chapter will therefore start with the different strategies used by overseas directors to integrate Company trade into local and regional trading circuits. The second section will explore overseas directors' cooperative relations with port city merchants through two cases, selected on the basis of the surviving evidence of port city merchants' petitions or testimonies in favour of overseas directors.

## 2. Attempts at self-sustainability

To understand the overseas directors' strategies to integrate regional trading networks, one first needs to know what pre-existing personal connections overseas directors benefitted from. Martin made his career in the Company's ranks and some of his family members worked in the Company factories in Asia.<sup>990</sup> However, his family network played a limited role in the Company integration into regional trading networks. To infiltrate these circuits, an overseas director had to reach outside of his family or the Company. For instance, a former agent of the Company, called Poutho, married and living in Merguy (Myanmar), regularly sailed to the Coromandel Coast, where he provided Martin with information about the state of the Kingdom of Siam.<sup>991</sup> Martin wanted news from Siam because it was the bridgehead for the Chinese trade. Taking another example, Martin could count on his connections with the Huguenot Chardin, in Madras to access the pre-existing English country trade routes. In 1701, Chardin enabled the sale of French laces in Manila and corals in China, on behalf of the

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<sup>989</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 174; Nierstrasz, 'In the Shadow of Companies: Empires of Trade in the Orient and Informal Entrepreneurship', 210.

<sup>990</sup> For instance, his son in law, André Boureau-Deslandes became the director of the trading post in Bengal in 1688. Additionally, some his nephews came to India as bookkeepers for the Company, one of them, Cuperly became the treasurer and inspector of merchandise in Bengal in Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 40.

<sup>991</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°163, diary of Martin, June-July 1702.

Company.<sup>992</sup> Generally speaking, the connection with the English Company employees in India would be instrumental to accessing economic networks regionally.

Martin's successor, Dulivier, was in a good position to fully enjoy the English connection. Through his marriage to Françoise Moisy, the daughter of an English businessman, Dulivier acquired an acute knowledge of European trade and owned a trading house in London.<sup>993</sup> His marriage provided him with a regular correspondence with London merchants, and his father-in-law joined him first in Bengal and then in Pondicherry.<sup>994</sup> Most importantly, during his time in Bengal Dulivier had close contacts with the governor of Madras Thomas Pitt. Traces of their frequent private correspondence appear as soon as 1699. In his letters, Pitt refers to Dulivier as his "*good friend and old acquaintance*"<sup>995</sup> and congratulated him for his new position when Dulivier becomes director of Ougly. The main purpose of this private correspondence was to engage in private trade, illegally in the case of Dulivier. They exchanged information about the current prices and types of commodities most demanded in their market. Pitt sent goods from China to be sold in Bengal and asked Dulivier for raw silk, taffetas, long pepper among others.<sup>996</sup> The profits of the Chinese goods were to be invested in the above mentioned commodities and sent back to Madras around six months later. However, if there was enough time between the operations, Dulivier was allowed to use the money for his own investments.<sup>997</sup> Dulivier further recommended some of his business contacts to Pitt and the latter took the opportunity of their business relationship to ask for some French wine.

Furthermore, in the years between his two tenures as director of Pondicherry, 1708 to 1713, Dulivier stayed in India as a private businessman until 1711, when he returned to France. Although the archives provide no details on his activities, he developed local trading connections during these years.<sup>998</sup> Regarding Hébert and his personal relations relevant for access to regional trading networks, there is only evidence of contact with the governor of

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<sup>992</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°9, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701.

<sup>993</sup> ANOM E 152, f°286, personnel file Dulivier, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the navy council 1717.

<sup>994</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°312, letter of Hébert, 2 February 1709.

<sup>995</sup> BM Add MSS 22842, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 4 June 1700.

<sup>996</sup> BM Add MSS 22843, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 3 September 1700: "*If your market be encouraging I will make you a consignment on the arrival of our china fleet if you send up any goods to these parts let it be raw silk taffetas, long pepper*".

<sup>997</sup> BM Add MSS 22846, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Dulivier, 16 February 1702/3: "*I will readily allow you for the time you are out of money or serve you at any time on like occasion here*".

<sup>998</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°80, letter of Dulivier, 14 July 1714.

Madras when they were both in Paris.<sup>999</sup> As for the directors in Ouidah, their pre-existing connections are more difficult to assess. Ducoulombier and Bouchel built experience in the Spanish American trade at the service of the Asiento Company prior to their directorship. The only other director of Ouidah who could have pre-existing interests towards the south Atlantic trade was Levet. He gained experience as vice-director and director interim in the 1730s. Consequently, when he came back in the 1740s, he most probably had, if not the connections, then at least the knowledge of how to integrate into the trading circuits to Brazil. How did the regional trade infiltration take place in practice?

*“Le vaisseau est réputé français”*

Except for some references to the intra-Asian trade of private French merchants, it is generally acknowledged that the country trade of the French East India Company began with the Company of the Indies in 1719.<sup>1000</sup> However, directors of Pondicherry made early attempts during the first East India Company. As early as 1685, Martin insisted on the importance of infiltrating intra-Asian trading networks to Manila and China for the economic development of Pondicherry. The access to Manila allowed French traders to acquire silver from South America through the Pacific route. According to Dennis Flynn’s estimates, the volume of silver reaching China through the Acapulco-Manila Galleon would, at times, equate to all the precious metal brought through the West-East route by the Portuguese, English and Dutch combined.<sup>1001</sup> Manila served as entrepôt, connecting American silver from Mexican and Peruvian mines with the Asian market.<sup>1002</sup> Silver was a necessary commodity for the Chinese trade. When China’s economy changed from a paper money system to silver-based during the fifteenth century, China became the dominant buyer of silver worldwide.<sup>1003</sup> The value of silver subsequently increased in China and reached double the European value.<sup>1004</sup> In this silver flow, European companies and the Portuguese *Estado da India* became middlemen between America and Asia, or Manila and China, and should not be perceived as driving forces.<sup>1005</sup>

<sup>999</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°315, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

<sup>1000</sup> Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, xi. Ménard-Jacob, *La première Compagnie des Indes*, 179.

<sup>1001</sup> Flynn, ‘Arbitrage, China, and the World Trade in the Early Modern Period’, 261.

<sup>1002</sup> Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, ‘Born with a “Silver Spoon”: The Origin of World Trade in 1571’, *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (1995): 201.

<sup>1003</sup> Dennis O. Flynn, ‘Silver in a Global Context, 1400-1800’, in *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE, Part 2: Patterns of Change*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, vol. 6, *The Cambridge World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 215.

<sup>1004</sup> Flynn, 216.

<sup>1005</sup> Flynn and Giráldez, ‘Born with a “Silver Spoon”’, 205.

If the Company could not sail to Manila or China, it could try to plug into the intra-Asian trading circuits extending to the Coromandel Coast. The English had small ships at their disposal, which they used to transport their merchandise along the Coromandel Coast to Madras. Martin argued that such small vessels would be useful for coastal trade, but also to attack Spanish ships. Two Spanish ships loaded with goods sailed from Manila regularly to trade in Madras and Portonovo. According to Martin, these ships were ill-equipped and easy to take as prize, if the Company had small ships.<sup>1006</sup> Additionally, these ships would enable Martin to enjoy a stronger position in power relations with commander of Senji, Sarup Singh. The ships would be enough to impede the trade of Sarup Singh's subjects on the Coromandel Coast and would give leverage to Martin in future diplomatic or commercial negotiations. The Company would not need to hire extra French crew because Martin hired local sailors. Despite Martin's advice, no small ships appear to have been sent to Pondicherry.

In 1701, Martin continued to inform the directors and minister of the Navy in Paris about the potential benefits of the country trade: "*there are some intra-Asian trades which are profitable, the country trade to China is the safest way to make profit, the trade to Manila can be advantageous, concerning Achem and other places it depends on the occasions.*"<sup>1007</sup> Aside from the small vessels that had not been sent, Martin asked the Company to send at least 200,000 *livres*, specifically designated to engage in this trade. The 200,000 *livres* would be an investment that would bring multiple advantages to the Company, as it would also attract great and wealthy merchants to Pondicherry, like in Madras.<sup>1008</sup> In February 1702, Martin gave further information about the necessary cargoes for the country trade: "*the cargoes are made out of pataque to exchange for gold and the returns from China are curiosities from the country, silk, tea and porcelain.*"<sup>1009</sup> Martin's successors followed the same strategy, making the same demand for small ships with small French crews that would be completed by Indian sailors. Martin added that they should not be afraid of the war since it "*would be easy to sail the ships under Armenian and Malabar names.*"<sup>1010</sup> If the directors in Paris appeared to be interested in the inner workings of the intra-Asian trade networks, they did not take action immediately. In the meantime, Martin relied on his personal connections to develop this trade.

<sup>1006</sup> ANOM C2 63 f°46, letter of Martin, 18 January 1685.

<sup>1007</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin, 22 February 1701: "*Il y a des commerces que l'on peut faire de l'Inde en Inde avec profit, celui de Chones est le plus seur, celui de Manilles n'est pas réglé pour les profits, mais il y a de temps à autres des coups à faire, à l'égard de l'achem et des autres lieux, l'on les entreprend suivant que l'on trouve les occasions avantageuses*".

<sup>1008</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°5-11, letter of Martin 22 February 1701.

<sup>1009</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°178, letter of Martin, 15 February 1702.

<sup>1010</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°284, letter of Hébert, 12 February, 1709.



In order to infiltrate intra-Asian networks with little support from the Parisian directors, overseas directors relied on Hindu, Portuguese, Armenian, and English traders. For instance, Indian merchants contributed to French integration into the sub-continental trading networks. In 1701, merchants from the “*North and South*” of India came to buy twenty-four boxes of corals.<sup>1011</sup> After some negotiation over the price, the merchants asked the French to provide them with a means of transporting the corals to Portonovo, where they were headed. Martin probably offered this service to attract merchants and build a sort of customer loyalty. Besides precious metals, corals were one of the only goods imported by the Company that were in high demand in India. The importance of corals to Pondicherry’s regional integration made Martin strongly opposed to the East India Company outsourcing the Chinese trade to the *Compagnie de Chine*, which was made of French private merchants. The director of Pondicherry worried about the influx of corals this new company would bring on the market.<sup>1012</sup> The lack of Company silver made the corals integral to the director’s attempts to enter local trading circuits.

Contact with Armenian merchants gave the French access to the intra-Asian trade with Manila. In practice, the Manila trade meant access to silver, which in turn was used for the Chinese trade. In 1701, an Armenian merchant wrote to Martin offering to buy part of the textiles woven in Pondicherry, to trade them to Manila.<sup>1013</sup> For the director of Pondicherry, this meant a real opportunity to integrate the Manila market, even if it was done indirectly through Armenian merchants. Marcos David, an Armenian merchant, and his son came to the Coromandel Coast from Manila and asked Martin to prepare four to five *balles* of textiles for shipment six weeks later. The merchants of Pondicherry were unable to fulfil the demand at such short notice and Marcos David sailed away to Madras. Martin was disappointed; he saw the Armenian merchant’s offer as a way of “*opening here the commerce to Manila.*”<sup>1014</sup> In an attempt to salvage the situation with Marcos David, Martin offered to buy some of his merchandise, but the prices were too high for the Company and Martin had to abandon the deal. Aside from the indirect infiltration into the Manila market, partnering with Armenian merchants also ensured better access to credit networks, a service always needed by the Company.

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<sup>1011</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°36, diary of Martin, October 1701.

<sup>1012</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°157, diary of Martin, March 1702.

<sup>1013</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°18, diary of Martin, April-May 1701.

<sup>1014</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°160, diary of Martin, May 1702: “*afin de commencer d’ouvrir icy le commerce pour les manilles*”.

Martin's connections also enabled the Company to have opportunities to actively participate in the intra-Asian trade. In 1700, the English had no ships available for a voyage to China and Pitt heard that three ships would soon arrive to Pondicherry from France. Pitt proposed that Martin sent one of these ships to China for the benefit of the French Company and the English private traders, or, if the French preferred to dispatch the ship themselves, he would load some English goods on it. He gave Martin the freedom to decide on the condition of this "*partnership*." Unfortunately, the rumours of the Company ships arriving from France were false and the English governor offered the same deal to the Danish governor in Tranquebar. The latter provided the English with a ship, which left for Canton on 17 July 1700.<sup>1015</sup> Another way of infiltrating the English country trade network was to have a French vessel join the English ships on their way to China. In 1701, Martin received news from his contacts in Madras that a French ship had arrived in Malacca with English ships.<sup>1016</sup> In the last instance, indirect access to the Chinese trade could take place through small ships, involving both Portuguese and Armenian merchants that came to Pondicherry regularly to trade merchandise from China—mainly textiles from their country trade.<sup>1017</sup>

Martin and his successors realised that what made the success of neighbouring Madras so considerable was the private intra-Asian trade of English Company employees and their association with local merchants.<sup>1018</sup> It was common knowledge in India that the key to the success of the English country trade was a reliance on local merchants and capital. The English themselves described this mix of English and local capital in their country trade ventures, stating "*tis a truth well known that the stocks adventured on the several country ships in this place and other ports belonging to the English, such stock sent to the sea is not allways all of it properly the English but, that of the natives are pretty much concerned and even the great men.*"<sup>1019</sup> The legal private trade of the English East India Company servants gave the Company a competitive advantage over its counterparts in the Indian Ocean trade. It allowed the English Company servants to tap into local capital markets and trading routes. Besides, close connections with private merchants in London enabled Madras based merchants to access capital.<sup>1020</sup> Although the contact with London were primarily aimed towards remitting capital back to the metropole, recent research has showed the existence of

<sup>1015</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°5, letter of Martin 22 February 1701.

<sup>1016</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°42, diary of Martin, December 1701.

<sup>1017</sup> ANOM C2 66 f°18, diary of Martin, Avril-May 1701; f°160, diary of Martin, April-May 1702; f°169, diary of Martin, January 1703.

<sup>1018</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°14, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

<sup>1019</sup> IOR/P/ 239/ 85 f°167-168, Wednesday 20 September 1710.

<sup>1020</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 87.

an English capital market in Madras.<sup>1021</sup> This capital market facilitated and increased commercial as well as financial activities of English private merchants in Madras. The English governor of Madras, Thomas Pitt was prominent country trade merchant in India, he had contacts in with commissioners in London and, additionally, operated as a banker in Madras.<sup>1022</sup> The English commercial elite in Madras balanced between investments in country trade in the Indian Ocean and private trade with the metropole.

In addition to the English example, the itinerary of the Company ship, the *Saint Louis*, which took Hébert to Pondicherry via the South Sea, inspired Hébert's vision to adopt this route as a way to develop Pondicherry. According to his view, the Company should dispatch ships to the South Sea to sell French goods for silver and send them from there to India, either through the Philippines or the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>1023</sup> While the English were a source of inspiration for the directors, Hébert felt that they should be avoided as intermediaries. However, the Company did not send any more ships after the *Saint Louis*, because they outsourced their monopoly to the Saint Malo merchants. In practice, the English intermediary proved indispensable for possible intra-Asian voyages during Hébert's tenure. For instance, in February 1709, Pitt offered to outfit an English ship in order to transport ninety to a hundred barels of pepper from Calicut to Pondicherry.<sup>1024</sup> The Dutch, who attempted to establish a monopoly on pepper, complained about Pitt's involvement in the French pepper transport from Calicut to Pondicherry.<sup>1025</sup>

Another possibility, which Dulivier used during the years of isolation, was to trade with the Mascarene Islands and, particularly, to supply slaves to the growing plantations. The inhabitants of the island of Bourbon expressed their strong need for workforce and they asked the director of Pondicherry to send them slaves. Dulivier saw in this need another way to reach economic self-sustainability in Pondicherry and he traded slaves to the island of Bourbon in the name of the Company.<sup>1026</sup> Evidence of regular and substantial slave trade from Pondicherry to the Mascarene Islands do not appear in the sources. However, this reference shows that it was a feasible option for Pondicherry directors. The possibilities of engaging in

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<sup>1021</sup> Mentz, 102.

<sup>1022</sup> Mentz, 186.

<sup>1023</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°232, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

<sup>1024</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°14 letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710 and Council meeting minute, 11 February 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 73.

<sup>1025</sup> NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 f°163-166, letter of Johannes van Steelant, director general of the Coromandel Coast and gouverneur of Nagapattinam and his council to Thomas Pitt, governor of Madras, 2 May 1709.

<sup>1026</sup> ANOM C2 13 f°58-59, letter Bouynot East India Company captain, 30 September 1707.

country trade to the east in Manila and China, on the one hand, and to the west in the Mascarenes, on the other hand, were not mutually exclusive.

During Hébert's tenure, Dulivier stayed in India as a private businessman. In order to make the greatest profit in a short period, a captain had advised him to set up a voyage under the "*Moorish flag*" to Peru, sailing from the Coromandel Coast to China and, from there, to Peru and again back to China.<sup>1027</sup> Muslim merchants were very active on the Coromandel and Bay of Bengal regions.<sup>1028</sup> Among the Muslim merchant community, the Marakkayars were the dominant group in Eastern and Western coastal trade of the subcontinent and in the South East Asian trade. They stand out from other merchant communities for their limited involvement in commerce with Europeans and did not become important suppliers or purchasers for European East India Companies.<sup>1029</sup> Using a Muslim flag was therefore a strategy to remain neutral and avoid risks of being attacked. Dulivier proposed to Hébert to organize the venture under the name of the French Company. After a discussion with the Sovereign Council of Pondicherry, Hébert decided that the Company would take part in the project by letting the ship sail under the trading privileges of the Company and by providing crew and captains. To guarantee its profits, the Company, it would receive 3,000 pagodas before the ship left. Additionally, the Company would get five percent of the profits at the end of the voyage. One of the French Company captains, Beauvoilier, was to be the second on the voyage, with forty to fifty French among the crewmen and the rest would be "*men of the country*." Nevertheless, the ship would be "*considered French*" and the Parisian directors had to consider it as such.<sup>1030</sup> Hébert's hoped that the success of Dulivier's private venture would enable the Company to follow this model. However, the fact that the whole business was intended to remain secret raises suspicion about the real organisation of the voyage.

The other side of the deal does not appear in the French sources. The Dutch East India Company archive contains a complaint, dated 1709, with a hint to how and by whom the voyage was really organised. In 1709, a Dutch skipper sent a letter to the Dutch Company governor of the Coromandel Coast and Nagapattinam, Johannes van Steelant, describing a remarkable organization.<sup>1031</sup> When he arrived in Madras in January 1709, a Frenchman asked

<sup>1027</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°311-312, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

<sup>1028</sup> Coastal Muslim merchants spoke Tamil and had adopted Hindu social practices, see: Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 218.

<sup>1029</sup> Arasaratnam, 220.

<sup>1030</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°312, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709: "*il doit y avoir 40 à 50 françois, le reste des gens du pays, bref le vaisseau est réputé français et de la compagnie et vous devez le prendre pour tel*".

<sup>1031</sup> NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, account given to Johanens van Steelant, director general of the Coromandel Coast and gouverneur of Nagapattinam, 1 July 1709.

the skipper if he could be the skipper of a ship for the governor of Madras. He would sail the ship from Pondicherry to China and from there to the South Sea. The Frenchman then added that it would be an advantageous voyage and that the director of Pondicherry himself (Hébert) would be part of it. Furthermore, the Dutch skipper should not be afraid to arrive on “*Dutch lands*” since the ship would have both English and French passports.<sup>1032</sup> The Dutch skipper replied that he would think about the proposition. According to his letter, he decided to try to find out as much as possible about this venture. He discovered that Dulivier would equip the ship with a crew comprised half of Frenchmen and half Englishmen, which would raise the French flag and take the opportunity to pillage everything they could find and divide the prize among them. The ship would then pass by Pondicherry and give the director information about the state of affairs. Then, they would go to the Mascarene Islands to share and sell the prizes. From there, they would go back to the South Sea.

Many aspects of the deal between the French director and English governor to take Dutch goods as a prize were unclear. The Dutch informer acknowledged this while insisting on the existence of such cooperation: “*Even I could not discover what the agreement between the English and the French governors was, that there is one, is all too true,*” adding that it was clear that the English and the French were not enemies.<sup>1033</sup> He ended the letter by highlighting that, despite all appearances, there were no French ships in all of India except for one, which was sailing from Bengal to Pondicherry. With this conclusion, he thereby implied that all other ships with a French flag or passport were English ships representing the joint interests of the French director and the English governor. This letter reveals how the early French involvement in the intra-Asian trade depended on the directors’ personal connections, and particularly on the English connection. Indeed, the English appear to be necessary intermediaries for French integration in intra-Asian trade at this early stage of the French presence in India. Although the outcome of the venture is unknown, it is clear that French activities in Pondicherry were varied and rooted in the Indian Ocean, where adaptation and participation were the keys to success, despite the fact that historians have previously perceived this period as stagnant.

<sup>1032</sup> NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, 1 July 1709: “*Dat het een voordeelige reijs zoude zijn ook dat den gewese gouverneur van Pondicherij in person zoude mede vaaren, als mede dat ik geen vrees behoefde te hebben, van in de Hollanders landen te vallen alsoo dat schip met een angels en france paas zoude vaaren*”.

<sup>1033</sup> NL-HaNA 1.04.02. inv. no. 8373 Coromandel 1 208-216, 1 July 1709: “*Insgelijcx heb ik den teneur van het accoord tussen de Engels en francen gouverneur niet kunnen ontdekken, maar dat en een is, is maer altewaar ook zijn de Ingelsen en France niet minder als vijanden*”.

Needless to say, when Dulivier became director in 1714 after a few years as a private trader in India, he strongly argued in favour of developing the trade with Manila. He encouraged the Parisian directors to demand that Philip V of Spain grant them exclusive privileges to trade in the Philippines.<sup>1034</sup> Hired for his experience and connections in India, Dulivier's network had shrunk significantly after three years in France: *"I have learned that most of those who I had connection with are dead or have left."*<sup>1035</sup> However, his strategy remained the same: to maintain small vessels of 300 to 400 *tonneaux*, each with 20,000 *écus* of capital for the intra-Asian trade, attract Armenian and other merchants through *"la douceur du gouvernement"* and increase the revenues of Pondicherry through the development of commerce and the country trade. The revenues would, in turn, pay for the expenses and maintenance of the fort without any help from Europe. It is not clear how many ships and voyages Dulivier and the Saint Malo merchants managed to send to the Philippines, but it was enough to upset the officials in Manila: *"all officials of the government and the people are very irritated by the frequent voyages of the French vessels in the South Sea and to China."*<sup>1036</sup> Dulivier ultimately intended to make Pondicherry self-sustainable and rooted in Indian and Pacific Oceans trading networks, rather than in the trans-oceanic commerce to Europe. Dulivier, and directors before him, understood that developing the settlement on a strong political and commercial basis was *"never going to happen through what is sent from Europe [...] but through the voyages which we will set up in this colony to other places in India."*<sup>1037</sup> Each of them developed methods to access regional trading networks, despite and because of the lack of support from Paris.

#### *The south Atlantic connection*

Rather than focusing on the trade of their *"nation,"* overseas directors' economic strategy in Ouidah lay in local and regional trading connections. Similar to the Pondicherry directors, they realised that the way to sustain French trade in Ouidah was not through French trade circuits, but across imperial and cultural boundaries. Inter-imperial trade for the maintenance of the fort and in the Company's interest occurred frequently throughout the period under study. In 1733, for instance, the English governor provided Levet with most of

<sup>1034</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°166, Answer to the letter Dulivier by Pontchartrain, 14 February 1714.

<sup>1035</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°80, letter of Dulivier 14 February 1714: *"j'appris que la plupart de ceux avec qui j'avois relations sont morts ou ont quittés"*.

<sup>1036</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°92, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714: *"tous les officiers du gouvernement et des peuples qui sont fort irrités par rapport aux fréquents voyages que font les vaisseaux françois dans la mer du sud en chine"*.

<sup>1037</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°110, letter of Dulivier, 8 October 1714: *"ce ne sera jamais par l'envoie qu'on fera en Europe que la compagnie trouvera quelque bénéfice par cet endroit, mais bien par les voiajes qu'on entreprendra de cette colonie pour les différents endroits de l'inde"*.

the slaves for the French slave trade shipments.<sup>1038</sup> Other trading activities took place among European representatives, although more out of necessity than cooperation.<sup>1039</sup> The Company directors encouraged Du Bellay to sell enslaved Africans to other Europeans in Ouidah, but only if the captives were over forty years old.<sup>1040</sup> However, European factors knew that all inter-imperial trade was not equally profitable, and soon their interests converged towards Brazil and the south Atlantic trading networks. Overseas directors understood that they were dependent on Luso-Brazilian traders, especially on the tobacco merchants to trade profitably in Ouidah. After a few years of experience in Ouidah, Bouchel attempted to bypass the Luso-Brazilian intermediaries and access the Brazilian market directly. In 1718, he asked the council of the Navy to negotiate the permission to collect the highly demanded tobacco directly in Brazil: “*it would be permitted to transport tobacco from Brazil to this coast as the Portuguese do presently.*”<sup>1041</sup> Realising that this plan would not materialise, Bouchel changed his strategy and entered into a partnership with some Luso-Brazilian private merchants.

In 1721, Dubord, lieutenant of the fort during Bouchel’s tenure, denounced the “*trading society and close relations*” that the director had with Luso-Brazilian captains and merchants.<sup>1042</sup> Bouchel had apparently shared his fort’s dwindling food supply with his Luso-Brazilian connections after an attack by privateers, which left Dubord and other employees with only corn and water for three to four months and led to the death of two employees. According to this complaint, the director openly said that he was losing his time with the French nation and wanted to maximise his profit by dealing with Luso-Brazilians in the little time he had left in Ouidah. Dubord continued, describing Bouchel’s trade organisation: “*he has himself in Allada, instead of one or two employees, the named João Basilio, Manuel Gomes, and Joucan, Portuguese who collect captives in partnership with him, bring them to Savi, the capital of the Hueda kingdom, and when they are in the prison, they secretly chose the best ones for the Portuguese.*”<sup>1043</sup> In the French trading station at Jakin, in the neighbouring kingdom of Allada, Bouchel had his own network of “*Portuguese*” partners

<sup>1038</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 26 August 1733.

<sup>1039</sup> In 1722, for instance, the Dutch sold some of their enslaved Africans to the French overseas director because they were dying. NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89: “*En genootsacke geweest om de aan de France directeur te debitteren te meer om dat alle slave aande de loop raakten en ettelijkeheid gestierven en weeren*”

<sup>1040</sup> ANOM C6 25, Instructions to Julien Du Bellay, 27 June 1733.

<sup>1041</sup> ANOM C6 25 Mémoire of Bouchel, 1718: “*Qu’il soit permis de transporter du tabac du Brésil jusqu’à cette coste comme le font a present les Portugais*”.

<sup>1042</sup> ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721.

<sup>1043</sup> ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721: “*lui-même tient a Jaquin en Hardre a la place d’un ou deux officiers les nommés Jean Basille, Manuel Gommers, et Joucan, Portugais qui ramassent des captifs en société avec lui, les font venir à Xavier ville capitale du Royaume de Juda et quand ils sont dans les tronc, ils font secretement choisir les meilleurs aux Portugais*”.

instead of French employees. Aside from obvious private trade, Dubord accused the director of openly neglecting French trade in Ouidah. Dubord described him as “*a man who acts against the rights of his motherland and the interest of his Prince.*”<sup>1044</sup> Indeed, he secretly reserved the best enslaved Africans for his Luso-Brazilian partners.

The accusation further unveiled Bouchel’s personal network. Bouchel introduced one of his Luso-Brazilian trading partners, Francisco Pereira, to the Hueda and Allada kings. According to Dubord, the connection with both kings enabled Pereira to gain direct access to the slave market. By 1721, Francisco Pereira managed to acquire a fort in Ouidah on behalf of the Viceroy of Brazil.<sup>1045</sup> As demonstrated in chapter five, the European imperial representatives in Ouidah were all involved in the slave supply of Luso-Brazilian merchants from Bahia. The Luso-Brazilian acquisition of a fort made the European middlemen redundant. It is difficult to assess Bouchel’s exact role in connecting Pereira with the Hueda King and helping the Luso-Brazilians to acquire a fort in Ouidah. Dubord’s accusation might exaggerate Bouchel’s influence in local power relations. Indeed, King Hufon had provided protection to Luso-Brazilian traders before and he “*always wanted them to be part of the neutrality treaty.*”<sup>1046</sup> So the acquisition of the fort could have been a natural development of pre-existing trade relations between Luso-Brazilians and Hueda merchants. However, other sources acknowledge Bouchel’s business partnership with Pereira, and references to it appear in Dutch documents: “*Francisco Pereira was associated with Bouchel for some years.*”<sup>1047</sup> Through his association with “*Portuguese*” agents in Jakin and with the future Luso-Brazilian director, Bouchel attempted to infiltrate slave trade networks to supply the general slave market, rather than only the French one.

In the early 1740s, Levet attempted to reach self-sustainability, not for his private trade but for the *comptoir*’s economic growth. He planned to develop the trade in Ouidah independently from Company ships. He proposed that the Parisian directors send him two good ships of around thirty to forty *tonneaux* to develop “*considerable trade in gold without having to send blacks to Martinique.*”<sup>1048</sup> He would use the ships to engage in coastal trade on

<sup>1044</sup> ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721: “*un homme qui agit si fort contre les droits de sa patrie, et l’intérêt de son Prince*”.

<sup>1045</sup> On the Brazilian-Bight of Benin connection over time see : Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*.

<sup>1046</sup> ANOM C6 25, Mémoire on the state of the country of Juda and its trade, 1716: “*le roy qui a toujours voulu qu’ils fussent compris dans le traité de neutralité*”.

<sup>1047</sup> NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.nr. 89, (scan 7), Journal of Sint George d’Elmina, 4 January 1722: “*Francisco Pereira die zig eenige Jaren bij de heer Bouchel heft afgehouden gehad*”.

<sup>1048</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 6 January 1743: “*au moyen desquels la compagnie ferait un commerce considérable en or sans être obligé d’envoyer des noirs à la Martinique*”.



the Gold Coast, where Levet hoped to trade French commodities for gold. However, this proposal remained a project; its application was too dangerous for the director of Ouidah. Indeed, a year later, Levet had second thoughts, admitting that the King of Dahomey would never tolerate this arrangement. According to Levet, Tegbesu would prevent the crew from loading the merchandise on to the small ships and block the captains and canoemen from passing the sand bar. And if the French managed to overcome all these obstacles, then Tegbesu would blame the decrease of commercial activity on the small French boats hindering the access of other ships.<sup>1049</sup> Levet's apprehension came from his experience: "*when a French ship comes in this bay and depending on the news of the trade, leaves to trade elsewhere, the Africans blame us for their departure, they hold us responsible for those who pass by the bay without stopping or even those which do not come at all.*"<sup>1050</sup> The King held Levet accountable for the lack of trade in Ouidah. Making Levet personally responsible for a collective group served as an effective way for Tegbesu to assert power over him. The French attempt at self-sufficiency in Ouidah was not realistic, given their dependence on Tegbesu's protection.

Once again, the key lay with the south Atlantic connection. Levet's tenure in the 1740s coincided with the virtual halt of French shipping to Ouidah for a few years. Levet realised that contact with Brazil would solve the problems that arose from the lack of French ships, not only for supplies, but also for trade. He actively developed an interpersonal relationship with the Viceroy of Brazil, Vasco Fernandez Cesar de Meneses. In 1743, the King of Dahomey imprisoned the Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah, João Basilio, for collaborating with the Hueda King and other enemies of the Dahomey. Additionally, he accused Basilio of negatively affecting the regional trade. Merchants from Bahia had decided to organise their trade to the Bight of Benin, limiting it to no more than twenty-four ships per year.<sup>1051</sup> This resulted in better trading conditions for captains but had negative repercussions on the trade in Ouidah and on the Luso-Brazilian director accountable to Tegbesu. To strengthen his connection with the Luso-Brazilians, Levet negotiated to save Basilio's life.<sup>1052</sup>

<sup>1049</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744.

<sup>1050</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 January 1744: "*quand il vient un navire françois mouiller en cette rade et que suivant les nouvelles qu'il apprend, le bien de son commerce l'oblige d'aller faire sa traite ailleurs, les negres nous imputent la cause de son départ, ils nous rendent aussi responsable de ceux qui passent à vue de la rade sans mouiller, meme de ceux qui ne viennent pas*".

<sup>1051</sup> Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 173–77.

<sup>1052</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

After multiple attempts, Levet saved the Luso-Brazilian director but Basilio had to stay in prison until the next Brazilian ship could take him back.<sup>1053</sup> Levet's strategy worked in his favour. He wrote to France that "*there was no expression of gratitude that Basilio and all the other Portuguese did not use to thank him [Levet].*"<sup>1054</sup> He went even further in his assistance, and gave Basilio some clothes and food for the journey to Brazil. Basilio then promised Levet that all the ships from his "*nation*" would trade with the French director from then on. Levet's service to the Luso-Brazilians was an investment that he hoped would pay off. According to him, "*this event has put this nation in a strict obligation of gratitude to ours, which nothing can exempt it from.*"<sup>1055</sup> This incident was the best thing that could happen to the French in Ouidah and could enable the economic development of the fort as well as its self-sustainability.

Levet's plan was to take advantage of the Luso-Brazilian fort's difficult position to strengthen his role as middleman with Luso-Brazilian merchants. He offered to provision the goods necessary for the slave trade and extended the fort's protection to them. Cowry shells and brandy featured predominantly among these goods. According to Levet, "*all Portuguese ships coming to the coast are forced to buy cowry shells, textiles and brandy to trade.*"<sup>1056</sup> Regarding the cowry shells and textiles, the director could provide them to Luso-Brazilian merchants for tobacco or gold. The sale of brandy is more difficult to attest. Luso-Brazilians produced sugar cane alcohol, called *cachaça*, which they exported to the West African Coast, in particular, Luanda. Indeed, the export of Luso-Brazilian distilled alcohol increased drastically after the ban on the importation of cane brandy to Luanda was lifted in 1695.<sup>1057</sup> Contemporaries even perceived *cachaça* as a commodity where Luso-Brazilians out-competed European traders in Angola.<sup>1058</sup> Given that Luso-Brazilians produced their own distilled alcohol that proved to be competitive in Angola, why would they rely on French brandy in Ouidah? A possible explanation may be found in the context of the supply in Bahia or the demand in Ouidah.

<sup>1053</sup> ANOMC6 25, letter of Levet, 21 August 1743.

<sup>1054</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 14 June 1743.

<sup>1055</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, between August 1743 and January 1744: "*cet evenement a mis cette nation dans une étroite obligation de reconnaissance envers la notre, dont rien ne la peut dispenser*".

<sup>1056</sup> ANOM C6 25 letter of Levet, 24 August 1743: "*Tous les navires portugais qui viennent à la coste sont obligés d'acheter des bouges, platilles et eau de vie pour faire leur traite*".

<sup>1057</sup> José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and Its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830* (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2004), 89.

<sup>1058</sup> Curto, 158.

During the first decades of the eighteenth century, Rio de Janeiro increased its production and export of *cachaça* to Luanda, but Salvador de Bahia remained a prolific exporter. On their side of the supply, merchants from Bahia had easy access to Brazilian distilled alcohol. Nevertheless, their trade to the Bight of Benin does not appear to include *cachaça*, but instead sugar, wood, gold or tobacco.<sup>1059</sup> It can therefore be assumed that the answer lies on the demand side. Historians have discussed the factors that led to the consumption of European or Brazilian alcoholic drinks in addition to those already existing on the west coast of Africa. According to José Curto, the popularity of *cachaça* and other imported alcoholic drinks derives from the higher percentage of alcohol when compared to the locally-produced palm wine or beer made from local grains.<sup>1060</sup> John Thornton and Joseph Miller point out other possible factors: the changing tastes of Africans and prestige. Although Curto dismisses these arguments due to lack of evidence, they might provide the answer to our question.

Indeed, there is no clear evidence of a significant difference between the percentage of alcohol in French brandy (*eau-de-vie*) as opposed to *cachaça*. Therefore, the answer of taste or prestige could be a valuable explanation. Levet referred to French brandy of such high quality that when traders used it in their trade, it would lower the price of slaves.<sup>1061</sup> Of course, there is always the possibility that Levet lied about the quality and the demand of French brandy. However, he and Du Bellay already reported trading brandy for Brazilian gold in the 1730s.<sup>1062</sup> Additionally, Levet would not have asked the Parisian directors to send him a great cargo of brandy to supply Luso-Brazilian traders if he knew it would not sell.<sup>1063</sup> Levet had made a deal with Luso-Brazilian captains, promising them that he would be ready with enough goods if they promised to engage in slave trade through him. Simultaneously, Levet continued to strengthen his ties to the Brazilian viceroy.

In 1746, after the death of the Luso-Brazilian director, Tegbesu named Francisco Nunès head of the fort. The viceroy of Brazil and Levet strongly opposed this decision for two reasons. First, the choice of the representatives in Ouidah was not a prerogative of the King of Dahomey, but one of the few rights of the European companies and the viceroy of Brazil.<sup>1064</sup>

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<sup>1059</sup> Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, N.J., [etc.]: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>1060</sup> Curto, *Enslaving Spirits*, 49–50.

<sup>1061</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 1 January 1744: “*les françois ne le désirent pas moins par la grande quantité d’eau de vie qu’ils employent dans leur traite qui diminue beaucoup le prix de leurs captifs*”.

<sup>1062</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Du Bellay, 17 January 1734 and C6 25, letter of Levet, 26 August 1733.

<sup>1063</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 24 August 1743.

<sup>1064</sup> Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres*, 169–71.

Second, the viceroy had put Nunès on trial in Brazil ten years earlier, on charges of provoking Basilio's imprisonment.<sup>1065</sup> The outcome of the trial forbade Nunès to set foot on the Bight of Benin. Under these circumstances, the viceroy once again called on the help of the French director, who he referred to as "*chosen to act as a delegate for all nations to speak to the king of Dahomey*."<sup>1066</sup> Levet's role was to speak in favour of the director officially sent by the viceroy of Brazil. However, Nunès secured his position by offering a large amount of gifts to Tegbesu, ensuring the King's support. Eventually, however, Levet managed to negotiate that Nunès would be dismissed as soon as a new director was sent from Brazil.

The arrival of the new director enabled Levet once more to reinforce his interpersonal relationship with the viceroy of Brazil. On 2 September 1746, the viceroy asked a favour of Levet: "*when he [the new Brazilian director] will step ashore [in Ouidah], secretly, he will go directly to your fort and communicate the orders he received, and will propose and decide with you which are the best ways to succeed in this important matter*."<sup>1067</sup> The viceroy therefore included the director in important decisions regarding the future of the Luso-Brazilian fort, acknowledging his full trust in Levet. However, the viceroy's trust did not rely solely on Levet's friendship with the Luso-Brazilians. He ended his letter by writing that "*this matter is not only important for the Portuguese nation but for all the others living in this country*."<sup>1068</sup> This last sentence stressed the mutual dependency that linked the director and the viceroy.

Levet had managed to become an important intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey, and he took advantage of this new position. Indeed, during Levet's tenure, he sent many letters through Brazil. Levet explicitly stated that his close connection to the viceroy enabled him to communicate with the directors: "*To avoid any problem I send this [letter] through Brazil, I am proud that the services I provided to the Portuguese nation will facilitate the reception*."<sup>1069</sup> Most importantly, the viceroy forced Luso-Brazilian captains to

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<sup>1065</sup> Verger, 168.

<sup>1066</sup> AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6: viceroy of Brazil: "*nous avons eu de nouveau recours à lui par l'intermédiaire de Jacques Levet (...) qui fut en personne délégué par toutes les nations*". Translated and cited in Verger, 183.

<sup>1067</sup> AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6, letter of the viceroy of Brazil to Levet, 2 September 1746: "*aussitôt qu'il descendra à terre, sans se faire connaître d'aucune personne, il aille droit chez vous, et vous communiquant les ordres qu'il a, propose et conclue avec vous les moyens qui se jugeront les plus avantageux et les mieux indiqués pour réussir avec succès une affaire aussi importante*". Translated and cited in Verger, 186.

<sup>1068</sup> AHU S. Tomé Caixa 6, letter of the viceroy of Brazil to Levet, 2 September 1746: "*dans laquelle, non seulement est intéressée la nation portugaise mais toutes les autres qui habitent ce pays-là*". Translated and cited in Verger, 186.

<sup>1069</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 1 February 1746.

bring food and medical supplies to Levet when the French fort was in need.<sup>1070</sup> These mutual services were of a personal nature, since Levet had to require more supplies from the Company when news arrived that Vasco Fernandez Cesar de Meneses was going to be replaced. The role of intermediary came at a price and in order to win the trust of the viceroy of Brazil, Levet had to forcefully negotiate with Tegbesu multiple times. The last denial regarding the replacement of Nunès with a new director from Brazil had been particularly difficult and Levet had made some diplomatic mistakes.<sup>1071</sup> Soon after, Tegbesu sent him back to France. However, after Levet's tenure, Company directors understood the advantages of a connection with Brazil and they kept a correspondent in Brazil, who could send them supplies when needed until 1765.<sup>1072</sup>

Overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah knew that the economic activities of their factories would only increase if they took active part in regional trade, thereby reaching a form of self-sufficiency and ending the reliance on Company ships or supplies. The strategies to integrate into regional trading circuits varied from one director to another, but they were all directed towards a main goal: in Pondicherry, profiting from the Chinese trade and in Ouidah, the Brazilian trade. Martin tried to convince Parisian directors to send small ships to engage in coastal trade while attracting merchants who operated in country trade circuits to Pondicherry. His successors took an active part in the intra-Asian trade by partnering with English traders who acted as bridges to country trade trading networks that were otherwise inaccessible to the French Company. These intra-Asian partnerships relied on the directors' interpersonal connections. Their role as individuals enabled the Company to access country trade networks. The English acted as necessary middlemen for the French, although the English remained "*important, but potentially disposable intermediaries*" within the dynamics of intra-Asian trade.<sup>1073</sup>

In Ouidah, directors of the French fort engaged in trade with other European factors, however, the most profitable commercial activities involved Brazilian tobacco or gold. Therefore, Bouchel quickly attempted to infiltrate the south Atlantic trading circuits by partnering up with Luso-Brazilian private traders and entering into an interpersonal relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah. His strategy geared itself towards infiltrating the slave market, to supply private traders well beyond imperial

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<sup>1070</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet, 13 October 1746.

<sup>1071</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>1072</sup> Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 64.

<sup>1073</sup> Flynn and Giráldez, 'Born with a "Silver Spoon"', 206.

boundaries. At a later stage, Levet would follow this line of action towards Brazilian trade. He secured French access to the trade by entering into a personal relationship of loyalty with the viceroy of Brazil. He built his position as intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey. Guaranteeing the viceroy's interests granted Levet protection, supply and, theoretically, privileged access to Luso-Brazilian trade. However, integration into regional trading networks and attempts at self-sufficiency were only possible if overseas directors simultaneously managed their relationships with their principals in France, who hired them.

### 3. Preserving metropolitan connections

Overseas directors had to strike a balance between the necessities of infiltrating intra-Asian country trade and south Atlantic networks and maintaining their reputation with the directors in France. In Pondicherry, after the Company granted its trading monopoly to the Saint Malo Company, the Saint Malo merchants mediated relations between overseas directors and their principals. In Ouidah, for the majority of the period under study, French private merchants acted as the main intermediaries between Parisian and overseas directors. French private merchants transported letters and, more importantly, provided the only direct reports of overseas directors' behaviours to France. The future of overseas directors and their ability to further develop their factories economically as well as their personal fortune, therefore, depended on the way they interacted with French private merchants. In this sense, Saint Malo or other French private merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah can be considered "*second principals*." The perspective of French private merchants as "*second principals*" helps us understand how overseas directors managed to integrate into regional trading networks while protecting their position. Considering French private merchants as principals of overseas directors allows us to further reject the idea that private merchants and chartered companies held opposing interests.

#### *Intersecting interests*

As Anthony Hopkins argues, the theory of simplistic opposition between early modern chartered companies and private merchants' interests no longer stands.<sup>1074</sup> Once it benefitted them, merchants did not challenge the system of exclusive privileges. From 1712 until 1719, a Company predominantly composed of Saint Malo merchants enjoyed the East India Company monopoly, which they jealously protected from other French port cities. In the case of the West African monopoly, the crown limited the trading privileges to five port cities. These

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<sup>1074</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 93.

merchants trading to the west coast of Africa under licenses provided services to the metropolitan institutions in charge of the *comptoir* in Ouidah. Chartered companies, or the council of the Navy during the free period, and private merchants were extremely interdependent; port city merchants needed the Company infrastructure in India and in return, companies needed private businessmen to take over the trade. This section will further contest the theory of opposition by viewing it from the perspective of the overseas setting.

At first sight, the interests of overseas directors and French private merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah appear to be opposed. In Pondicherry, Hébert criticised the Parisian directors' decision to grant the Company's trading monopoly to the Saint Malo Company. According to him, the merchants enjoyed the Company's infrastructure without paying for it and were therefore always sure of making a profit.<sup>1075</sup> While the Saint Malo merchants were not accountable for the maintenance of the French settlements in India, their prospective profit was nevertheless affected by the risk any voyage to the Indian Ocean entailed. However, the fact that Hébert perceived Saint Malo merchants as benefitting from the Company's investment to make private profit shows the potential conflict of interests. The first years of Hébert's tenure did not improve his perception of the Saint Malo trading monopoly in India. Indeed, given that the Parisian directors did not send funds with the first Saint Malo ships, Hébert made unprofitable deals with the private merchants to access basic funds for the settlement.

Dulivier also expressed doubts about the advantages of granting the Company monopoly to the Saint Malo merchants. He struggled to negotiate the transportation of French employees or soldiers on Malouin ships to France. In practice, many former employees and soldiers were stranded in India and forced "*to wander around*."<sup>1076</sup> Men left without income around and in Pondicherry could lead to violence, thefts or attacks, which would make the environment unsafe. The lack of funds prohibited Dulivier from re-hiring soldiers to prevent problems. The Saint Malo merchants' refusal to transport these men could have further antagonised the overseas directors. In Ouidah, directors had similar difficult relations with the private traders who operated on the Bight of Benin. Private traders sold overpriced supplies to the director and the high volume of traders led to significant competition and high prices that were difficult for the director to control.<sup>1077</sup>

<sup>1075</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°9, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710.

<sup>1076</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°108 and f°115, letter of Dulivier, 8 October 1714: "*de mener une vie errante*".

<sup>1077</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Bouchel, 6 June 1717.

Additionally, the simultaneous presence of multiple port city merchants in Ouidah made fort employees' private trade difficult for the director to control. In 1728, Dupetitval strictly implemented the prohibition of private trade upon his employees.<sup>1078</sup> When the scandal of the ship *Le Mars* of Marseille broke, revealing a widespread private gold and slave trade involving the fort's French employees, the Dutch at Jakin, the English factor in Ouidah and the crew of the French ship *Le Mars*, Dupetitval began a court case against the involved French Company employees.<sup>1079</sup> As revenge, the plaintiffs spread defamatory information to the Dahomian King, who then had Dupetitval kidnapped and killed.<sup>1080</sup> Port city merchants' goals were to have their cargo ready as soon as possible; the large number of traders and the subsequent competition they generated led them to resort to any means to shorten their voyage. These means, particularly when they involved illegal trade, did not always match the goals set by overseas directors.

Despite their criticism, overseas directors knew that their reputation in France depended, in part, on the way they treated private merchants and their captains. Therefore, Hébert did not miss an opportunity to report how well he advised the captains. In 1710, he wrote that "*I put all my attention to facilitate the trade of these two ships from Saint Malo, the captains, agent and directors will be satisfied of our methods*" and added that if the trade was not as beneficial as expected, it was because the ships had arrived on the coast too late.<sup>1081</sup> The year before, he had similarly informed the minister of the Navy that he had provided the captains with all the help he could and if the voyage was unprofitable it was because of the fleet's untimely arrival.<sup>1082</sup> Dulivier, too, worried about his reputation and, realising that the returning captains bore news about his management skills to the Company, sent the same type of self-complementing missives to the Parisian directors: "*sirs must be assured that we will*

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<sup>1078</sup> The instructions of the Company to Dupetitval must have been similar to those given to Du Bellay five years later C6 25 Instructions to Du Bellay, 27 June 1733: "*La compagnie deffend expressement à M. Julien Du Bellay, commis et préposés à son service de faire aucun commerce directement ny indirectment pour leur compte, sous peine de confiscation des marchandises, perte de leurs appointements, gratifications et révocation d'employ*".

<sup>1079</sup> ANOM C6 25, Dupetitval "Affaire du Vaisseau le Mars de Marseille", 23 September 1728.

<sup>1080</sup> ANOM C6 25, Mémoire of the Company of the Indies against Galot, 8 November 1730.

<sup>1081</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°9, letter of Hébert, 15 February 1710: "*J'ay mis toute mon attention à faciliter le commerce de ces deux vaisseaux de st Malo, les capitaines et le préposé des intéressés rendront bon compte de quelle manière nous nous y sommes tous pris*".

<sup>1082</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°322, letter of Hébert, 16 February 1709.



*not spare any efforts to satisfy the people with whom they made the treaty and procure them all the advantages.*”<sup>1083</sup>

Private merchants’ voyages stood a better chance of profit if they could make use of well-maintained overseas infrastructures. Indeed, the Company’s bad financial state and consequent bad reputation in Pondicherry reflected negatively on the Saint Malo merchants. It was therefore in their interest to make mutually-beneficial arrangements with overseas directors. When two Saint Malo ships arrived in Pondicherry with no Company funds to maintain the settlement, Hébert proposed that the captains load 800 pagodas’ (6800 *livres*) worth of merchandise on the ships sailing to Merguy, and to share the profit in equal parts between the Saint Malo captains and the Company.<sup>1084</sup> The director had no capital to risk and needed to cooperate with Saint Malo merchants. The two captains, de la Birsellainne and de la Chardonnier, accepted and a Company employee joined them to ensure the Company’s interests.

Similarly, a deeply-indebted fort in Ouidah was useless to French port city traders and they advanced money for its maintenance. Therefore, private merchants operating in Ouidah cooperated with overseas directors. In the 1740s, Levet bought most of his supplies, such as flour or wine, from private ships using bills of exchange in the name of the Company. The port city traders provided further logistical support: “*the company lacking canoes for a long time, I bought two from s. Auffray captain of the ship le grand chasseur of Saint Malo.*”<sup>1085</sup> Overpriced supplies and unprofitable deals were not the norm and overseas directors and private merchants learned to cooperate for their mutual benefit. Furthermore, in some cases, private merchants even vouched for or defended overseas directors in France. Why did private merchants do this? More importantly, how did overseas directors manage to get private traders to defend them in front of their principals in Paris? To answer these questions, this chapter analyses two cases, that of Dulivier in Pondicherry and Bouchel in Ouidah.

In October 1715, Hébert’s return to Pondicherry undermined Dulivier’s position as director. Louis XIV granted Hébert the title of “*général de la nation française*” although the authority it conferred to him over Dulivier was unclear. Conflict of interest soon arose

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<sup>1083</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°88, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714: “*Mrs doivent cependant être persuadés que nous n’épargnerons aucun de nos soins pour satisfaire les personnes avec qui ils traitent et leur procurer tous les avantages*”.

<sup>1084</sup> Council meeting minute, 23 September 1709 in *Procès-verbaux des délibérations*, 84.

<sup>1085</sup> ANOM C6 25, letter of Levet 21 August 1743: “*une lettre de change sur la compagnie de 1756 livres pour farine et vin qu’il a achetés de ce capitaine*” and 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1744: “*Achat de vivres sur le navire l’aymable de Nantes payer en deux lettres de change [...] la compagnie n’ayant point de pirogues depuis longtemps j’en ay traité deux du sieur auffray capitaine de navire le grand chasseur de st Malo*”.

between the two men and Dulivier demanded to return to France if his authority was not restored.<sup>1086</sup> Indeed, it did not take long to tarnish Dulivier's reputation among Indian traders. As Dulivier himself noted, as his contacts realised "*he was powerless their trust in him decreased.*"<sup>1087</sup> The Saint Malo merchants supported Dulivier's claims against Hébert in multiple instances. In 1716, Dulivier asked the notary of the Company in Pondicherry to make a deed explaining the injustice he suffered in front of witnesses. Dulivier explained how Hébert stripped him of all his authority and credit in the *comptoir*.<sup>1088</sup> He added that "*Pierre Dulivier protests against him [Hébert] about all the events, the damages and interests of the considerable prejudice he [Hébert] has done to his private trade.*"<sup>1089</sup> Among the deed's five signatures appears that of an agent of the Saint Malo Company in India, Du Coudray Perrée.<sup>1090</sup> Why did a Saint Malo merchant agent testify in favour of protecting the private trade of a director?

A year later, the Saint Malo Company merchants wrote a letter of complaint to the Parisian directors against Hébert. The Saint Malo Company had a vested interest in getting rid of Hébert. He had instated an illegal tax of four percent on transactions. Furthermore, Hébert opened an investigation into the Jesuits' accusations against the Company broker, Nayiniyappa.<sup>1091</sup> The Jesuits accused Nayiniyappa of, among other things, instigating the uprising of 1715. Hébert declared the Hindu broker guilty and imprisoned him.<sup>1092</sup> The change from tolerant pragmatism to taking the Jesuits' side, supports historians' claim that the Jesuits were behind Hébert's return to Pondicherry.<sup>1093</sup> Nayiniyappa was a wealthy and well-connected merchant, who was highly skilled and necessary to the Saint Malo merchants. The Company threatened to breach the ten year monopoly grant and stop making voyages to India if the directors did not call Hébert back to France due to his mismanagement of the trade.<sup>1094</sup> In the letter, they condemned the injustices Hébert perpetrated on Dulivier and emphasised

<sup>1086</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°182-183, letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716.

<sup>1087</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°183 letter of Dulivier, 10 February 1716: "*m'a réduit à un tel point que les peuples parmi lesquels j'avois acquis quelque réputation me regardant aujourd'huy comme une personne sans aucun pouvoir n'ont plus la confiance qu'ils avoient autrefois en moy*".

<sup>1088</sup> ANOM E 152 f°275, personnel file Dulivier.

<sup>1089</sup> ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 9 September 1716: "*Le dit Pierre Dulivier proteste contre luy de tous événements quelconques et de tous dommages et interests du préjudice considérable qu'il apporte à son commerce particulier*".

<sup>1090</sup> ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 9 September 1716. Nicolas Perrée de la Villstreux (1690-174 ?) was the son of Pierre Perrée du Coudray (1656-1742) merchant of Saint Malo. Nicolas had been recruited as agent for the Saint Malo East India Company in India where he stayed until 1719, see: Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 858.

<sup>1091</sup> For a thorough analysis of the "affaire Nayiniyappa" see Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*.

<sup>1092</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°260-270, Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants to the king and the Navy Council, 1717.

<sup>1093</sup> Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance*, 123-24.

<sup>1094</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°260, Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants to the king and the navy council, 1717.

Dulivier's upright honesty. Parisian directors had no alternative but to bow to the Saint Malo Company's blackmail and they fired Hébert in November 1717.<sup>1095</sup> Dulivier asked to replace Hébert by arguing that neither the Company, nor Saint Malo merchants, nor employees, nor Indians nor missionaries complained about himself.<sup>1096</sup>

The second case covers the aforementioned accusations against Bouchel's private business with Luso-Brazilian traders and his negligence of the French trade. To strengthen his argument, Dubord added that some of French ships' captains had complained about Bouchel to the representative of the Navy in Nantes and in La Rochelle.<sup>1097</sup> It is unlikely that the director could neglect French interests so obviously without impunity. Indeed, in the council of the Navy's instructions to Bouchel when he became director, one of the main orders directed him to "*treat with perfect equality all the French ships [...] and that the King maintains him in this office only for the purpose of the trade of these ships.*"<sup>1098</sup> Nevertheless, a year later ten men, a priest and several French captains and sailors, signed a letter in favour of Bouchel to the minister of the Navy, arguing that if he replaced Bouchel, the King of Ouidah would be displeased. Consequently, Bouchel's removal would be harmful to French trade and the French in Ouidah in general:

*"the named hereafter let you know that, Assou, the captain of the French nation, told us of the bad position in which he found himself, when he had heard about your soon departure for France, in a time where everything seems authorised, banditry, theft of the canoemen and carriers, and other abuses happening daily, far from being able to prevent it after your departure, he foresaw very bad consequences, by the bad disposition of the King and the big men of this kingdom against the one who will succeed you."*<sup>1099</sup>

<sup>1095</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°255, Company directors in Paris, 24 November 1717.

<sup>1096</sup> ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier f°290, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the Navy Council 1717.

<sup>1097</sup> ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord, Mémoire to the Navy Council, 1721.

<sup>1098</sup> ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel, Instructions of the navy council to Bouchel, 1716: "*Le second est d'observer une parfaite égalité par raport à tous les vaisseaux françois qui iront en traite à Juda et de ne pas favoriser plustost le commerce des uns que des autres, le sr Bouchel leur devant à tous également et le Roy ne l'entretenant à ce poste et ceux qui y sont que par rapport au commerce de ces navires*".

<sup>1099</sup> ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel: "*Les dénommés cy dessous vous representent, qu'Assou capitaine a la nation françoise, nous avoit remontré la facheuse nécessité où il se trouvoit, sur ce qu'il a appris votre prochain départ pour France, dans un temps où tout semble autoriser le brigandage, par le vol des canottiers et porteur de marchandises, et autres abûts qui se commettent journellement, que bien loing d'y pouvoir remédier après vôstre départ, il prévoyoit au contraire de très facheuses suites, par la mauvaise disposition du Roy, et des grands de ce Royaume contre celuy qui vous doit succéder ; à ces fins, nous tous d'une voix unanime, vous supplions voûloir faire attention à ce que cy-dessus, en contienuant de protéger comme vous avés toujours fait le*

Why would these ten men vouch for a director who was involved in private trade activities and accused of neglecting French trade in the Bight of Benin? The competition for Brazilian gold and tobacco was already challenging enough for French private traders without protecting a director who favoured their competitors.

#### *Local integration and interpersonal relations*

A possible motivation for the French port city merchants' support of overseas directors was their private trade. It generated a widespread network, which allowed them to integrate into local and regional trading circuits that could be beneficial for French private traders. Following the argument regarding the benefits of an agent's malfeasant behaviour for the principal, private merchants seen as "*second principals*" would also prefer to enjoy the network and skills of a well-connected and well-informed overseas director, despite his known engagement in private trade. Private trade was common in the two factories but not equally significant in terms of integration into the local and regional trading networks. The attraction of the directorship of Pondicherry and Ouidah was not devoid of private interest. In Pondicherry, the Company forbade private trade by employees overseas, but it appears to have been broadly tolerated. Hébert, for instance, asked the Company to load a certain amount of goods on ships sailing back to France as a reward for his service.<sup>1100</sup> He then informed the Parisian directors that he had sent some goods to his wife, awarding himself the permission to do so. As demonstrated in the first chapter, even the Parisian directors asked overseas directors to send them goods for private purposes.<sup>1101</sup>

In Ouidah, private trade by employees of the fort was illegal until 1763, but it could have been tolerated. In Ducoulombier's instructions from Paris, the Company explicitly forbid it: "*the company expressly forbids to him and his employees to trade any slaves under the penalty of losing their wages.*"<sup>1102</sup> Private traders entrusted Ducoulombier with 1,400 *livres* worth of merchandise for their account.<sup>1103</sup> Similarly, the vice-director, Levesque, brought merchandise to Ouidah for his own benefit and claimed that Louis XIV openly tolerated the activity.<sup>1104</sup> Dubord himself revealed in his complaint that Bouchel was jealous of "*any kind*

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*commerce, jusqu'à ce qu'il plaise au Conseil de Marine d'y autrement pourvoir à Xavier Royaume de Juda en Afrique ce 6 Juillet 1722. Collationné à l'original par moi Directeur sous signé à Juda ce 20e juillet 1722*".

<sup>1100</sup> ANOM C2 68 f°316, letter of Hébert, 12 February 1709.

<sup>1101</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>1102</sup> ANOM E 145, Personnel file Ducoulombier, Asiento Company Instructions to Ducoulombier Article 15: "*La compagnie defend expressement de faire aucun commerce de negres ny souffrir qu'il en soit fait par aucun de ses employés à peine de perdre les uns et les autres leurs gages*".

<sup>1103</sup> AN MAR/B/1/9, letter of Bouchel to the navy council, 9 November 1715.

<sup>1104</sup> ANOM E 285, personnel file Levesque.

*of commerce that they [the employees] were doing,*” thereby implying that Bouchel tolerated private trade.<sup>1105</sup> In fact, private trade was so widespread that it generated a degree of competition between those practicing it. The significance of both Dulivier’s situation in Pondicherry and Bouchel’s in Ouidah is that there is evidence of their private activities integrating their trade with local and regional trading networks.

Clues in Dulivier’s personnel file point towards his private trade as director, in direct connection with merchants from Carcassonne involving textiles and diamonds.<sup>1106</sup> However, it was his years as a private businessman in India that were paramount to the development of Pondicherry’s business connections in the intra-Asian trade. Although some of his contacts had died by the time Dulivier returned to Pondicherry again, his knowledge and experience as a private merchant in India made him an asset to the Saint Malo merchants. Indeed, Dulivier’s argument to remain director of Pondicherry in 1717 focused on how useful he was to the Saint Malo merchants. According to him, although Hébert acted as director of Pondicherry, the Saint Malo merchants preferred to deal with Dulivier due to his experience in the trade. Dulivier linked the intra-Asian trade knowledge directly to his connections with English merchants in his argument: *“the trust that the most considerable merchants of Madras and sir Thomas Pitts, general for the English East India Company had in the sieur Dulivier, led them to offer an opportunity for a voyage to China on an English ship; the knowledge he possessed of the Indian trade, made the owners of the shipment turn to him for the purchase of their cargoes in Pondicherry and Bengal.”*<sup>1107</sup> The trust English merchants, particularly Pitt, showed towards Dulivier made him a useful director to the Saint Malo merchants.

Regarding Bouchel’s personal commercial activities, they involved a network of connections with *“Portuguese”* partners in Jakin and the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah, Francisco Pereira. Additionally, the argument used in the French captain’s petition was that replacing Bouchel would not please King Hufon and his officials. If we are to believe the captains, Bouchel counted Hufon and Assou among those in his network. The fact that Bouchel helped Francisco Pereira acquire a fort for the viceroy of Brazil and the

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<sup>1105</sup> ANOM E 140, personnel file Dubord: *“son avidité pour le gain lui fait envier a ses officier mesmes, les moindres petits commerces qu’ils pouroient faire”*.

<sup>1106</sup> ANOM E 152 f°201, personnel file Dulivier.

<sup>1107</sup> ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier f°288, printed letter of Dulivier to the king and the navy council 1717: *“La confiance que les plus considérables Négocians Anglois de Madras & le sieur Thomas Pitts General de la Compagnie des Indes d’Angleterre avoient pour le sieur Dulivier, les porta à lui proposer une entreprise pour faire un voyage en Chine sur un Vaisseau Anglois Après son retour à Pondichéry en 1710, il y arriva trois Navires de S. Malo venant de France ; la connoissance qu’il avoit de tout le commerce des Indes, fit que les Interressés à ce chargement, le prièrent de vouloir faire l’achat de leurs cargaisons à Pondichéry & Bengale”*.

Portuguese by introducing him to Hufon contributes to connecting Bouchel to the Hueda King. According to Erikson's argument, it was overseas directors' networks and their knowledge of the trade that French port city merchants, as "*second principals*," could tap into thanks to their private trade. This was true for both cases under scrutiny. However, how did these "*second principals*" make sure that overseas directors would put these skills and networks at their service? Aside from their ability to report negligent behaviour to the Parisian directors or the Navy Council, French port city merchants had another way to ensure loyalty: interpersonal relations.

During his time in India, Dulivier exchanged personal correspondence with a director of the Saint Malo Company, Luc Magon de la Balue.<sup>1108</sup> Magon de la Balue was an important investor in the Saint Malo partnership; he invested 322,000 *livres* out of 4,250,000 *livres* of total capital. In 1714, letters from Magon to Dulivier in Pondicherry referred to the friendship they developed during Dulivier's stay in Brittany, sending greeting from him and his wife to Dulivier and his wife, which implies a close relationship.<sup>1109</sup> Magon recommended one of his friends, sir of Saint Marc, lieutenant of the ship *le Chasseur*, to Dulivier, writing that "*it is a person for whom I have a lot of consideration and to whom I would like do a favour, please provide him with the services he needs and help him in the purchases he has to do.*"<sup>1110</sup> Magon's gratefulness enhanced the interpersonal relationship with Dulivier, encouraging further mutual services.<sup>1111</sup>

Other signs of private transactions between Magon and Dulivier appear in the Malouin merchant's personal correspondence. For instance, Magon wrote to his contact in Cadiz to buy 1,500 piasters and address them to Dulivier in Pondicherry. Magon demanded that the piasters be under his own account, so that Dulivier would "*have more attention to make the purchases.*"<sup>1112</sup> The outcome of the transaction depended on Dulivier personally. When the itinerary changed, sending the Malouin ship was dispatched to Moka instead of Pondicherry, Magon explained to both his contact in Cadiz and Dulivier in Pondicherry that there was no point in sending the 1,500 piasters anymore: "*I do not judge necessary to load the 1,500*

<sup>1108</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>1109</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, Februray 1714.

<sup>1110</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, Februray 1714: "*Sr. de st Marc lieutenant sur le vaisseau le chasseur c'est une personne pour qui j'ay beaucoup de considération et à que je serois bien aise de faire plaisir vous m'obligeriez très sensiblement de luy rendre service et de luy ayder dans les petits achats qu'il a à faire*".

<sup>1111</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, 23 Februray 1714.

<sup>1112</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Musq et compagnie in Cadix, 1 March 1714: "*pour mon compte afin que M. Dulivier ait plus d'attention a faire ma commission*".

*piasters on the vessel because it would be disagreeable to see my piasters come back without having been used.*”<sup>1113</sup> As the ship did not pass by Dulivier’s *comptoir*, the transaction was cancelled.

As showed in chapter one, the Saint Malo merchants were involved in private trade in India through a merchant of Madras, Lapostre, who would send diamonds back to them *via* London based merchants such as Mendes da Costa Junior. Dulivier was an intermediary for Magon de la Balue’s private trade in Pondicherry. Indeed Dulivier had been in close business partnership and therefore connected to the governor of Madras, Pitt who himself had been a partner of Mendes da Costa Junior in his diamond trade in India.<sup>1114</sup> Private trade between India and Europe was characterized by inter-personal relations and mutual trust. It is unsure if Dulivier was recommended by Pitt to Magon de la Balue through their common connection, Mendes da Costa but these connections could not have been only coincidental. Saint Malo merchants were using their contacts across Europe and in India to establish safe private trade routes.

The direct connection with the Saint Malo merchants enhanced Dulivier’s ability to engage in intra-Asian trade for the Company. In 1714, the Saint Malo merchants lent Dulivier a small ship for a trip to Bengal, Persia or Calicut.<sup>1115</sup> Similar to Martin before him, and thanks to his previous experience in Bengal, Dulivier knew that the only way to develop Pondicherry and the trade of the East India Company was to develop the intra-Asian trade. The main obstacle to the development of the French country trade was the scarcity of small vessels able to sail along the Coromandel Coast and inside the shallow rivers in Bengal. Obtaining the Saint Malo ship, even temporarily, was a step forward in French involvement in intra-Asian trade. Saint Malo merchants were well-aware of the profits linked to the intra-Asian trade and they had been the main reason for their interest in signing the ten-year contract that granted them the Company’s trading monopoly in 1714 once the war and privateering were over. “*The utility we saw in the ‘country trade’ of the English and the Dutch [...] in Moka, Persia, China, Manila and Japan determined us to sign a new treaty with the*

<sup>1113</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 11 J 3, Magon de la Balue to Dulivier, 8 March 1714: “*je ne juge pas a propos d’envoyer 1 500 piastres à M. Dulivier ayant bien de l’apparence que ce vaisseau ne touchera point à Pondichéry [...] M. je vous prie de ne point charger dans ce vaisseau les 1 500 piastres dont je vous parlois cy dessus car il me seroit désagréable de voir revenir mes piastres comme je les aurois donner sans estre employé*”.

<sup>1114</sup> BM Add MSS 22850, Letter Book of Thomas Pitt, Fort St George, letter of Pitt to Philip and John Mendes da Costa, 21 October 1709..

<sup>1115</sup> ANOM C2 69 f°92, letter of Dulivier, 18 July 1714.

*Company*.”<sup>1116</sup> Dulivier’s further integration into the intra-Asian trade, thanks to the Saint Malo merchants’ cooperation, would strengthen his connections and knowledge of the country trade, which Saint Malo merchants were particularly eager to maximise. In turn, it ensured he would remain an attractive overseas director for the Saint Malo Company.

In 1717, during Dulivier’s conflict with Hébert and the scandal of the mistreatment of Nayiniyappa, Dulivier reported his version of events in his private correspondence with Magon.<sup>1117</sup> In light of this interpersonal relationship, it is little wonder that Saint Malo merchants sided with Dulivier in the conflict. Nayiniyappa’s imprisonment led to his death and a scandal, which exposed Hébert as the main culprit. By the end of 1717, the Company dismissed Hébert and his son and sent them back to France. Hardancourt, the director in Bengal, was made director of Pondicherry. In a letter to the Saint Malo Company agent in Pondicherry in 1719, Magon expressed his happiness about the departure of Hébert: “*you had to fight against Hébert who crossed every one of our intentions; his dismissal must facilitate the affairs*.”<sup>1118</sup> As for Dulivier, although he was not chosen to take over Hébert’s position in Pondicherry, he seems to have navigated his connections and networks a bit better. He appears in the Company archive in 1721 as the director of Surat, granted the title of “*commissaire général*” in charge of “*visiting the other company settlements in India and to preside in all councils during his journey*.”<sup>1119</sup> The divergent careers of Dulivier and Hébert can be partially explained by Dulivier’s support in France and his ability to maintain his interpersonal relationship of loyalty with the Saint Malo merchants.

In the case of Bouchel, his personal connections with port city merchants are more difficult to uncover. Similar to Dulivier, his contact with France and the minister of the Navy happened exclusively through French port city merchant ships or other Europeans. His reputation in France therefore relied on his interactions with captains of port city merchant ships in Ouidah. It appears that of the nine individuals who signed the petition in favour of

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<sup>1116</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°206-208: Mémoire of the Saint Malo merchants, 15 December 1715: “*L’utilité qui est reconnue du commerce que les Anglais et les Hollandais d’Inde en Inde suivant les mémoires qui nous ont été rapportées par les officiers de vos vaisseaux en exécution de nos instructions, principalement à Moja, en Perse, à la Chine, aux Manilles, au Japon, nous ont déterminés de faire au mois de juillet 1712 un traité avec la Compagnie*”.

<sup>1117</sup> ANOM C2 14 f°268: letter of the East India Company directors with answers of the Saint Malo merchants to the French King and Council of the Navy.

<sup>1118</sup> A.D.I-et-V. 1F 1897, Magon de la Balue à Delavigne Buisson in Pondichéry, 24 February 1719: “*vous aviez messieurs Hébert à combattre qui traversoient en tout vos bonnes intentions, leur rappel doit faciliter toutes choses*”.

<sup>1119</sup> ANOM E 152, personnel file Dulivier, 1721: “*autres comptoirs des Indes pour les visiter en qualité de de commissaire général, mesme présider à tous les conseils qu’y s’y pourront tenir pendant son séjour*”.



Bouchel, at least six had met him previously.<sup>1120</sup> Aside from the fort priest, who knew Bouchel for obvious reasons, most of them had sailed multiple times to Ouidah.<sup>1121</sup> Bellingier sailed to the Guinea Coast seven times, out of which three were during Bouchel's directorship. Braheix went to Ouidah three times during Bouchel's mandate, while Dumoulin made two voyages to Ouidah in 1720 and 1722. Duqué sailed to the Guinea Coast eight times and twice when Bouchel was director—in this case the under captain signed as well. Lancelot travelled to the Guinea Coast six times, three times to Ouidah.

The fact that the majority of the captains had dealt with Bouchel before and vouched for him demonstrates that at least some French captains were pleased with his management. Their signatures made the director of Ouidah indebted to them and created a relationship of interpersonal loyalty. Indeed, competition in Ouidah was extremely tough. The Hueda kings had adopted the strategy of open trade for all Europeans, in order to enhance the competition among European traders in their favour. Trade conditions were difficult and contacts on the ground were of great value. Therefore, despite the accusation of negligence made by fort employees and the private business partnership with Luso-Brazilian traders, the captains still defended Bouchel. Additionally, in the complaint of Vice-director Levesque it appears that the French captains who signed the petition were against the “*reform of abuses that Bouchel had tolerated until now*” because the Hueda King disapproved of any changes.<sup>1122</sup> Port city merchants' interests were not necessarily in favour of reforming abuses, especially not if it contradicted the Hueda King and thus their trading interests. They needed a director who could manage their trade without opposing their trading partner, despite—or rather, thanks to—his involvement in private trade. Bouchel remained in charge of Ouidah until the fort passed into the authority of the Company of the Indies and the new director sent by the new Company effectively took charge.

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<sup>1120</sup> ANOM E 43, personnel file Bouchel: “*Signé Duqué commandant de la Ste Agnès de Nantes, Dusmoulin commandant du Maréchal d'Estrée de Nantes, Lancelot capitaine du navire La Paix de Nantes, F. Braheix capitaine du navire La Duchesse d'Orléans de Nantes, Basil capitaine du navire l'Hercule de la Rochelle, F. Bellingès capitaine du navire la Généreuse de Nantes, Beluté cy-devant commis du navire l'Hermione de Nantes, Gibbon aumonier du Contoir, D'eschebehere cy-devant capitaine en second du navire la Ste Agnès de Nantes*”.

<sup>1121</sup> [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org) (last consulted on the 22 September 2017) based on Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*. Additional information about the captains was found in Nicolas Jolin, *Répertoire des capitaines négriers de la période 1717-1738*, vol. 1 (Université de Nantes: Mémoire de Maîtrise sous la direction de Guy Saupin, 1998), 15, 41, 79, 81, 139.

<sup>1122</sup> ANOM E 285, personnel file Levesque: “*faire signé une deliberation par des Capitaines et des employez a luy affider par laquelle ils disoient apparemment que les negres ne vouloient point pour Directeur en Chef le dit Sr. Levesque parce qu'il vouloit reformer tous les abus que le dit Sr. Bouchel avoit toléré jusqu'alors, ce qui a causé et qui causent actuellement un très grand préjudice au commerce de la Nation*”.

Overseas directors guaranteed French port city merchants' support by developing their network and knowledge on the ground through integrating into regional trading circuits. Although this strategy often meant that overseas directors engaged in personal commercial activities, it was to their advantage to put their experience at the service of port city merchants. Indeed, port city merchants' complaints to the directors in Paris had a decisive effect on their future career. For this mutually advantageous relationship to take place, and for both parties to trust each other, this chapter has argued that interpersonal relations between overseas directors and port city merchants were necessary. These relations could occur through personal correspondence or meetings that cemented the relations of "*intersecting interests*." In turn, interpersonal relations allowed for further exchange of services and cooperation between representatives of state-sponsored institutions such as chartered companies and private merchants.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, in order to promote economic activities and growth in their factories, overseas directors attempted to integrate into local and regional trading networks. This regional integration was made necessary by the lack of funding, ships and supplies sent to the factories, among other reasons. It soon became apparent to overseas directors that the way to increase economic activities in their factories would not be through French trans-continental channels but by reaching some level of self-sustainability. This could be achieved in different ways. In Pondicherry, the attempts to integrate into intra-Asian trade took place, more or less, with the active involvement of the director. After multiple demands for small vessels to conduct intra-Asian trade, the inertia of the Parisian directors left Martin with limited options. Aware that he did not have the means to conduct country trade himself, Martin sought to bring intra-Asian trade to him by making Pondicherry as attractive as possible to Armenian, Indian, "*Portuguese*" and other European merchants. His contact with merchants in Madras, and particularly with the Huguenot Chardin, enabled Martin to indirectly infiltrate country trade circuits. Finally, Martin dispatched a French ship to join the English fleet en route to China. When Hébert arrived in Pondicherry, he partnered with the English governor of Madras, in the name of the Company, through Dulivier's intermediary. Furthermore, despite the fact that the director played a more active role in the intra-Asian trade voyages, he remained reliant on English mediation to actively integrate with country trade networks. Hébert and Dulivier were able to tap into country trade networks through the mediation of the English governors, and other English merchants assimilated themselves into

pre-existing intra-Asian networks. Despite all their efforts, the access to intra-Asian trade remained indirect.

In Ouidah, French directors engaged in trade with other European factors, but, the most profitable commercial activities involved Brazilian tobacco or gold. Bouchel therefore soon attempted to infiltrate the south Atlantic trading circuits by partnering with Luso-Brazilian private traders and entering into an interpersonal relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director in Ouidah. His strategy geared towards infiltrating the slave market to supply private traders well beyond imperial boundaries. Levet followed this line of action directed towards Brazilian trade. However, his strategy to access the Brazilian market differed from previous directors. Indeed, he entered into an interpersonal relationship of loyalty with the viceroy of Brazil to ensure that Brazilian traders supplied the French fort and would trade with it. He actively built his position as intermediary between the viceroy and the King of Dahomey. Guaranteeing the interests of the viceroy granted Levet with protection, supply and, theoretically, privileged access to Luso-Brazilian trade.

However, prioritising Luso-Brazilian interests came at a cost, and Levet lost his position as director of the fort in Ouidah. This loss was not due to unsatisfactory services to the Company or the French private traders, but because he negotiated too forcefully with the Dahomey King to protect the viceroy's interests. Because of their role as multi-lateral go-betweens, overseas directors had to navigate multiple interests and networks. In addition to local diplomatic relations and regional economic integration, overseas directors had to maintain good metropolitan relations. These Parisian relations were further complicated by the appearance of what this chapter has termed "*second principals*," or port city merchants mediating between overseas and Parisian directors. However, the "*two principals*" situation also offered opportunities for overseas directors. Indeed, they could enter into mutually beneficial relations with private merchants and gain their support in Paris. As second principals, port city merchants could benefit from overseas directors' attempts at self-sustainability, because these attempts implied the development of connections and knowledge of regional trading circuits.

Bouchel's personal trading connections with Brazilian merchants were accepted by French private captains, who needed an agent who was well-connected to Assou and King Hufon, as well as the inner workings of trade in Ouidah. Similarly, the Saint Malo merchants' support of Dulivier shows the importance port city merchants placed on the ability to count on overseas directors who benefitted from local and trans-imperial connections.

During his time as an independent merchant, Dulivier openly engaged Hébert in private partnerships with the English governor, demonstrating his extensive network of connections and his knowledge of the country trade. The fact that he operated on a private level with his English connections did not repel Saint Malo merchants. On the contrary, it made their direct contact with Dulivier all the more valuable. Overseas directors were most useful to French port city merchants when they had built their own networks of interpersonal loyalties.

However, in order for these mutually beneficial agreements to take place, they had to be cemented by interpersonal relations. These relations took different forms in the two showcased events. In the case of Dulivier, the relationship was built on letter exchanges with specific members of the Saint Malo Company and through services to Saint Malo ship captains in Pondicherry. The support came from the Saint Malo merchants in France, who personally wrote to the minister of the Navy. In Bouchel's case, he did not engage in direct correspondence with port city merchants in France but asked their captains in Ouidah for their support. The scarcity of sources does not allow a strong assertion that there was an exchange of favours between the director and the captains who supported him. However, the evidence of the captains' multiple encounters with Bouchel during his directorship, and the harsh competition and difficulties of trade in Ouidah during that period suggest that the captains considered Bouchel a good business partner. Overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah overcame the challenges and limitations of French state-sponsored companies by integrating into regional commercial networks on the one hand, and cooperating with French private merchants operating in the two factories on the other hand.