



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

Heijmans, E.A.R.

### **Citation**

Heijmans, E. A. R. (2018, March 22). *The Agency of Empire: personal connections and individual strategies in the shaping of the French Early Modern Expansion (1686-1746)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/61078>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/61078>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/61078> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Heijmans, E.A.R.

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

**Issue Date:** 2018-03-22

## Conclusion

---

In October 1753 the director of Pondicherry, Joseph François Dupleix was impeached and called back to France by the Company of the Indies. Dupleix had joined the Company ranks in India in 1722, worked as councillor in Pondicherry before becoming the director of Chandannagar in Bengal in 1731 and of Pondicherry in 1741. As director of Chandannagar, he had accumulated a fortune through his operations in intra-Asian private trade involving a widespread network featuring English and Dutch East India Company merchants among others.<sup>1123</sup> He had already be fired from the Company in 1724 because of his corrupt practices.<sup>1124</sup> What triggered his dismissal from the Company in 1753 was his strategy of military conquests in Karnataka and the Deccan from 1748 until 1754, particularly after 1752 when the Company directors strictly opposed his territorial ambitions.<sup>1125</sup> What later became known “*la politique de Dupleix*” was based on the principle that the commerce of the Company in Asia was reliant on capital from France and – similarly to his predecessors studied in this research – Dupleix’s strategy was to find a way to make the Company in Asia less dependent on irregular and insufficient funds from France. According to him, the only solution is the military conquest of Indian territories to collect enough taxes for the Company to finance itself in Asia.<sup>1126</sup>

As with English East India Company servants, the territorial ambitions of Dupleix were not devoid of personal interest. The direct relations between conquest in India and the private trade of European company servants have been pointed out by historians. Indeed, the territorial expansion taking place in the mid-eighteenth century in India was the result of the ambitions of company servants in Asia to protect their private operations and not of the European Companies or governments.<sup>1127</sup> Dupleix was no exception. Although his territorial ambitions were not exclusively directed towards personal interests, he did profit personally from the early victories but also lost once the tide turned.<sup>1128</sup> Even if it will ultimately lead to his dismissal, Dupleix’s politic of territorial expansion and his private trade operations show that he benefitted from a much wider freedom of action than his predecessors of the first decades of the settlement of Pondicherry.

---

<sup>1123</sup> Manning, *Fortunes à faire*, 24.

<sup>1124</sup> Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, 139.

<sup>1125</sup> Alfred Martineau, *Dupleix: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Société d’éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales Paris, 1931), 256–57.

<sup>1126</sup> Martineau, 236.

<sup>1127</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 38; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 27.

<sup>1128</sup> Martineau, *Dupleix*, 258.

## CONCLUSION

In Ouidah, men taking the position of directors during the second part of the eighteenth century showed more integration in Dahomian society than their predecessors.<sup>1129</sup> Among these directors, Ollivier de Montaguère was in charge of the factory from 1776 to 1785 under the reign of Kpengla. While in office, de Montaguère had set up a private business partnership with, on the one hand, Joseph Le Beau, a *mulatto* who provided enslaved Africans and, on the other hand, de Montaguère's son in law, captain on slave trading ships for the trading house Romberg et Bapst in Bordeaux.<sup>1130</sup> By giving priority to his own private trade, de Montaguère generated many complaints from French captains trading in Ouidah.<sup>1131</sup> His personal profit was not limited to this partnership; de Montaguère also allowed the *acquérats* to use the goods of the fort for their own slave trade provided they gave him a percentage of the transactions in cowry shells. He also attempted draw multiple bills of exchange in the name of the *Compagnie de Guyane* (in charge of the factory of Ouidah) on its correspondent in Lisbon.<sup>1132</sup>

Furthermore, de Montaguère was in good terms with Dahomian King and his officials who allegedly familiarly called him “monsieur Ollivier”.<sup>1133</sup> He was well-connected to local merchants and had married an Afro-Dutch woman called Sophie with whom he had children. When he was called back for abusive private trade, the Dahomians opposed the decision. If he sailed back ultimately, he remains an interesting case of stronger integration in Dahomian society through his business partners, his wife and his good relations with the King than his predecessors studied in this research. The extent of his personal commerce both in slave trade, in profiting from the *acquérats*' personal trade and his partial integration in local networks demonstrate the wide margin of manoeuvre Montaguère enjoyed.

Although similarly to Dupleix, Montaguère lost his position of overseas director, why did they exercise more agency than the directors did during the early period of the two factories? Fundamentally, the role of overseas directors for their principal had not changed. They still depended on the quality and quantity of goods and funds sent from France, negotiated trading contracts with Indian merchants or enslaved Africans with Dahomian

---

<sup>1129</sup> “Several spoke Fongbe, married Dahomean women fathered children and functioned comfortably in Dahomean culture” in Bay, *Wives of the Leopard Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, 68.

<sup>1130</sup> Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 66.

<sup>1131</sup> ANOM COL E 315, personnel file of Montaguère: “*Relativement au commerce que le s. Ollivier Montaguère a fait en société avec le s. Senat son gendre (...)*”.

<sup>1132</sup> ANOM COL E 315, personnel file of Montaguère, answer of the *Compagnie de la Guyan française* to the letter of the 24 September of Ollivier de Montaguère.

<sup>1133</sup> Berbain, *Études sur la traite des Noirs*, 66.

## CONCLUSION

authorities and traders and, attempted to acquire credit.<sup>1134</sup> What affected the agency of overseas directors were the alterations in the policies of the Companies in charge of the factories and local political changes.

In Pondicherry the position of director was more comfortable, the Company of the Indies had increased its profitability compared to its predecessor and, was perceived as a threat by its English and Dutch counterparts.<sup>1135</sup> The settlement had grown and the *nawab* of Arcot delegated the right of minting rupees.<sup>1136</sup> Most importantly, the Company of the Indies allowed its servants to trade in Asia and kept its monopoly on the Euro-Asian commerce. This policy generated incredible opportunities for Company servants to enrich themselves which were fully seized by overseas directors.<sup>1137</sup> Legal private trade increased and strengthened business connections across cultural and imperial boundaries. What is particular of the directorship of Dupleix in Pondicherry is the shift towards territorial expansion in India. No premeditated plan existed, but the troubled local political situation in India coupled with military reinforcement from Europe, particularly during the Seven Years War, tempted French and English Company officials towards the use violence and coercion to conquer the Indian Subcontinent.<sup>1138</sup>

In the case of Ouidah, the frequent changes in the French institutions in charge of the factory from the Company of the Indies, to direct royal administration and the *Compagnie de Guyane* at the end of the eighteenth century meant that the policies regarding the permission of private trade by French representatives in Ouidah were not consistent. The factors affecting the agency of overseas directors in Ouidah are rather to be found in the changes taking place in the Dahomian administration. In 1746, Tegbesu allowed private African and Eur-African traders to engage in slave trade in Dahomian territory.<sup>1139</sup> The opening of the slave trade in Dahomey led to the emergence of a private merchant community in the town of Ouidah, increasing the opportunities for overseas directors. Additionally, local political context affected positively the development of the town of Ouidah. By 1743 the firm establishment of the Dahomian rule over the town of Ouidah led to the reconstruction of the town.

---

<sup>1134</sup> Martineau, *Dupleix*, 73.

<sup>1135</sup> Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive*, 3–5.

<sup>1136</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, 93.

<sup>1137</sup> Dodwell, *Dupleix and Clive*, xvii.

<sup>1138</sup> After the death of Aurangzeb, the political map of India was divided in smaller polities in Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 32.

<sup>1139</sup> He reaffirmed the opening of the slave trade in 1769 in Law, *Ouidah*, 111.

## CONCLUSION

Except for a decrease of population at the end Tegbesu's reign in 1776, the town experienced a steady demographic increase in the second part of the eighteenth century.<sup>1140</sup> The population was a mixed of Hueda indigenous people, Dahomians, migrants from the Gold Coast and descendants of the Europeans including a growing Afro-Brazilian community.<sup>1141</sup> If the end of the Dahomian wars and the affirmation of their authority over the town of Ouidah ended destructions and brought political stability, tensions between the monarchy and the coastal communities of Ouidah were still present. Indeed as an illustration of these political tensions, Dahomian officials in charge of the town of Ouidah were frequently executed until 1770. After that date, the confrontation shifted towards the rising merchant community in Ouidah.<sup>1142</sup> Nevertheless, overseas directors in Ouidah were facing a more stable political environment, coupled with a stronger merchant community in a growing town. The integration – even if partial – in local communities, relations to the authorities and the development of personal trade connections were facilitated by the evolution of the town of Ouidah. Lastly, the larger context of the strong increase in French slave trade during the second half of the eighteenth century related to the intensification of sugar production in the French West Indies could have strengthened the position of overseas directors in Ouidah.

The focus of this research on the early years of the French expansion by studying the first decades of the two factories and of the Companies that administrated them is a deliberate choice, well before the beginning of the territorial expansion in India and the political influence of the Afro-Brazilian merchants in Dahomey. Choosing a period when the power relations was not in favour of Europeans, and particularly not of the French, allowed for the uncovering of individual strategies in overcoming the limits of French institutions. Some of these strategies, such as the attempts at self-sustainability through taxation and intra-Asian trade, are the roots of the politics used by later directors. Despite their narrow margin of manoeuvre, I have uncovered the role of overseas and metropolitan directors' agency in shaping the French expansion in India and on the West African Coast. Overseas directors' (in)ability to adapt to local political, economic and cultural conditions, as well as the development of cross-cultural, trans-imperial and metropolitan connections shaped the early French expansion. In the metropolis, the French expansion was based on the mutually-beneficial partnerships between companies and private traders.

---

<sup>1140</sup> Law, 73.

<sup>1141</sup> Bay, *Wives of the Leopard Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, 168.

<sup>1142</sup> The merchant interests of Ouidah played a role in the subsequent coup against the Dahomey King in 1818 in Law, *Ouidah*, 119–22.

## CONCLUSION

Shifting the perspective to individual, their strategies and their connections showed another type of expansion which is not limited to national categorization, economic profitability or institutional efficiency. The complementarity between individual agency and chartered companies demonstrated in this dissertation reinforces the argument about the necessary participation of private interests in the development of other European chartered companies.<sup>1143</sup> The agency of directors inside the French companies included – but was not limited to – their private trade activities and the information, contacts and experience that such operations offered to the companies. The complementary role of directors' agency also encompassed their ability to take strategic decisions regarding cross-cultural diplomatic relations and trans-imperial power dynamics contributing to both their own interests and those of the companies. The comparison between Pondicherry and Ouidah allowed me to test my hypothesis on multiple cases and to demonstrate that it was not limited to one region of the French early modern expansion.

Based on historiographical debates that have revised the position of Europeans in the political and economic context in India and on the west coast of Africa, unveiling overseas directors' agency meant first understanding the degree of their dependence on political authorities. In this regard, the two factories presented significant differences. In terms of sovereignty rights, although Louis XIV delegated similar sovereign powers to the Guinea/Asiento Company and the East India Company, they took a different form in practice. Indeed, sovereignty rights acquired by the companies in the two factories depended primarily on the powers delegated to them by local rulers. Pondicherry developed into a settlement that ruled itself while Ouidah remained a trading post and tributary under direct authority of the African administration. However, the sovereign rights acquired in Pondicherry depended on the *farman* granted by the Mughal emperor which made the Company in Pondicherry a tributary to the ruler. Aside from tributary relations, Pondicherry and Ouidah shared a number of other features. Their geographical situation made them vulnerable to blockades: they were dependent on the hinterland for foodstuff and not easily provisioned via the sea for different reasons. Additionally, their military forces were relatively weak when compared to the Mughal, Dahomey or even the other European garrisons and they were unable to seriously resist an attack. The dependence of the factories from local rulers, which is obvious in the case of Ouidah, has to be stressed also for Pondicherry. Following the current

---

<sup>1143</sup> Among others: Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 12–13; Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*, 275; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 73.

## CONCLUSION

historiographical development in the study of India and the West African Coast, the French overseas directors' margin of manoeuvre was defined primarily by local political rulers.

Many other actors contributed to limiting the agency of overseas directors in both regions through their own strong bargaining position within the organisation of the trade. In Pondicherry, directors contracted through brokers with Indian merchants, who supplied them with textiles from the weaving villages in the hinterland. Additionally, directors had to provide payment in advance and relied on credit providers, who were frequently Armenian merchants. The rhythm of the monsoons played in Indian merchants' favour; they had the upper hand in contract negotiations, despite the mediation of a skilled broker. This, in turn, increased the need for credit, which placed credit providers in a good position as well. Lastly, the position of main broker of the Company was a powerful one and led to the empowerment of specific merchant families, who appear in the records as major tax farmers of the French territories.

In Ouidah, the centralisation of the slave trade market in the Hueda capital, and the subsequent royal monopoly over the slave trade during the early years of the Dahomey conquest, led to the concentration of economic and political power that resided in the hands of the king and his officials. An appointed broker, who was part of the king's administration, mediated the relations with the Hueda and Dahomey traders. Finally, a great part of the credit opportunities laid with the King and his officials. These factors strengthened the African authorities' bargaining position with European representatives in Ouidah. However, contrary to the situation in Pondicherry, African commercial and political actors were much less diverse. The concentration of power in the hands of the Hueda and Dahomey kings increased their strong position. Overseas directors in Ouidah had no other option but to submit in both the economic and the political sphere, enjoying even less margin for manoeuvre than in Pondicherry.

There, aside from Indian and Armenian merchants, other prominent actors in the development of the settlement were Indian inhabitants, who mostly worked as weavers for the Company. Their agency was tightly linked to their profession, which enabled them to leave the settlement immediately when their rights were not respected or if the situation was better in another settlement. In a similar way, soldiers of the garrison easily went to other settlements for higher wages. In Ouidah, workers who were known to exercise their agency were canoe rowers. The French hired canoemen from the Gold Coast due to their superior skills. These canoemen frequently refused to work for the French, thereby asserting their



## CONCLUSION

agency. However, the main local workers were the slaves of the fort, *acquérats*, of whose agency, and over whom, very little is known. The significant difference in the number of inhabitants between Pondicherry and Ouidah largely accounts for the stronger display of agency in Pondicherry. In both factories however, the weak position of French overseas directors in local power relations, as well as in the local economic context, affected their role as agent of the Company.

Overseas directors were meant to act as an intermediary between local political authorities and commercial actors on one hand, and Company interests on the other. However, in practice, they had to navigate an array of different interests and neither of the two sides was homogenous. This is why the term “*multi-lateral go-between*” is more fitting our case-studies than the concept of go-between, which is mostly used to define as a third party in a dyadic relationship. As has been shown, the multitude of political and economic actors from different castes and ethnicities in Pondicherry, each of them following their own agenda, cannot be simplified into a single interest group. Similarly, despite the strong centralisation in Ouidah, different actors emerge, such as private merchants under the Hueda period, the different officials having their own relations of power towards the Dahomey King, and canoemen from the Gold Coast.

A similar variety can be observed on the companies’ side. In Pondicherry, Company captains had their own profit in mind, and private merchants under the Saint Malo merchants’ monopoly were granted the right to engage in privateering ventures that destabilised the role of the overseas directors. In the settlement of Pondicherry itself, Company interests and those of religious orders could clash. In Ouidah, both Company captains and private merchants shared the trading space, often simultaneously. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, orders from directors in Paris were often ill-adapted to the weak bargaining position of overseas directors in the two factories. These orders were aimed at connecting commodity chains between India and the west coast of Africa, adding a layer of complexity to the role of multi-lateral go-betweens.

There were greater incentives, both in number and quality, to become an overseas director in Pondicherry. Serving as director of Pondicherry, more often than not, meant social reward in France through being granted the title of knight of the Order of *Saint Lazare et Notre Dame du Mont Carmel*. Additionally, Pondicherry had become the Company’s central settlement in India and the director governed over the nascent colony, as well as all other trading posts in the subcontinent. Furthermore, the directorship of the settlement potentially

## CONCLUSION

offered opportunities for self-enrichment through illegal private trade. Louis XIV distributed no such social reward for service in Ouidah, and the life expectancy of directors was low due to disease, local conflicts and the Hueda or Dahomey king's power. Authoritarian rule frequently led to either deportation or death of overseas directors. The power of the director was limited to the small fort and by the strong control of the Hueda and later Dahomey kings. The difference in size and responsibility also meant a lower pay than that in Pondicherry, despite the high mortality rates in Ouidah. Nevertheless, some incentives existed to make the position of director of Ouidah more tempting. First, directors could hope to make a career inside the Company and transfer elsewhere after serving in Ouidah. Second, similar to Pondicherry, there were many opportunities for private trade. Finally, overseas directors could still hope to increase their power despite the strong authority of the African kings.

The first step to secure their position as overseas directors was to be granted the protection and "friendship" of local rulers. In the early years of the settlement in Pondicherry, rulers changed regularly and directors interacted with them according to local power dynamics. Martin, for instance, had closer personal relations with the governor of Bijapur, Sher Khan Lodi, than with the Maratha leader, Shivaji, or the Mughal governor, Daud Khan Panni. The director's relations with Shivaji were based on a fragile equilibrium of interdependence. As for his relationship with the Mughal governor it was, as was the case with previous rulers, based on gift-giving sessions, similar to tributes. Additionally, directors dealt with the ambitions of neighbouring rulers. These different rulers frequently imposed gift giving on directors. However, it could also be a beneficial tool for directors to access connections, assert power or establish their authority within the pre-existing power dynamics. Directors assessed the value of the gifts and decided in which situations gift exchanges could be delayed or refused. The refusal to enter into a gift-giving relationship had a larger meaning of refusing the hierarchical relations, and therefore was instrumental to the directors' attempts to redefine power relations.

Similar gift-giving relations existed between the French and the Hueda, and later Dahomey. However, due to the concentration of power, the position of overseas director of Ouidah greatly depended on the protection of Hueda or Dahomey authorities and the benefits from their "*friendship*." The specificities of the value and the commodities demanded by African authorities further narrowed the agency of directors when engaging in the gift exchange. Challenging Dahomey authority usually ended in the forced return of the director. But even in these unbalanced relationships, directors made choices and implemented

## CONCLUSION

strategies that showcase their agency. Gift-giving was by no means a static mechanism and strategies were present on both sides of the interaction. Furthermore, there were other ways of gaining the King's protection; for instance, by indicating unwavering loyalty or demonstratively acknowledging the sovereignty of the Dahomey king. Gift-giving sessions did not provide directors in Ouidah with the same opportunity to claim a position in local power relations, as it did in Pondicherry. Nevertheless, relations with Dahomey or Hueda kings, just as with Indian rulers, required improvisation and strategic decisions that fell to overseas directors.

Besides the constant attention devoted to strengthening the protection provided by local rulers and securing the factory and their position as head of it, overseas directors had to make the factory useful to the Company. Theoretically, directors in Pondicherry prioritised finding funds to start contracting the necessary commodities for future cargoes and, in Ouidah, buying enslaved Africans before the arrival of French ships, but in practice, the greatest priority was ensuring the survival of the fort's employees. The frequency of French ships sailing to the two factories differed greatly and impacted the strategies directors employed to find emergency funds. In Pondicherry, directors could stimulate demographic growth and subsequently increase income, which guaranteed the inhabitants' protection and religious freedom. However, directors' implementation of pragmatic religious freedom was not constant. Instead, it alternated with strong religious restrictions in an attempt to assert control over the population. Directors were also required to adapt to local commercial rules. These decisions were, at times, in contradiction with orders coming from Paris but justified as being for the sake of the factory. More often than not, directors improvised decisions on the spot to overcome the Company's limitations and deficiencies overseas. This was particularly true in regard to creditworthiness. The Company's reputation in India could become so eroded that the overseas director resorted to taking out loans on his own credit. This illustrates the symbiotic relation between the Company and the agency of its servants.

In Ouidah, directors could borrow cowry shells from the king and his officials. However, the consequences in cases of insolvency were dire. In case of high debts, directors feared the deterioration of their relationship with local authorities more than their own employer in France. The frequency of French private ships coming to Ouidah enabled directors to draw bills of exchange on their principals in Paris to buy basic commodities. In both factories, directors relied extensively on other European settlements in the region. In Ouidah, directors borrowed from other factors and even from the Danish on the Gold Coast.

## CONCLUSION

Sometimes it even led to a chain of debts, such as when the director reimbursed the English governor of Madras by indebting himself to the Spanish governor of Manila. The reliance on other European imperial powers for credit formed part of a larger cooperative system across European empires in the two regions of analysis.

Trans-imperial cooperation in Pondicherry and Ouidah was based on interpersonal relations maintained through regular correspondence or visits, the exchange of services and collective negotiations. A striking example of this was the strong reliance on foreign shipping for communication with France, particularly in Pondicherry but also, in times of warfare in Europe, in Ouidah. The declaration of war in Europe did not affect the “*good correspondence*” between specific representatives of imperial powers. Indeed, the cooperative relationship that ensued was based on the cooperative actors’ situation locally, rather than the European context. It was the result of a careful assessment of risks and opportunities by the overseas directors. The motivation to cooperate across imperial boundaries was linked to the weak position of power in the local political context, which led to an interdependent relationship between the two actors of the cooperation. Representatives of European imperial powers relied on inter-imperial solidarity as an emergency mechanism, and encouraged a united front out of necessity. Overseas directors could take advantage of this situation of mutual dependence for personal purposes. By imposing themselves as the third party in a conflict, they forced cooperation and achieved a position of authority within local power dynamics.

Interdependence triggered cooperation and made sure it would endure. Defection on this cooperation ended all activities that the French factories relied upon to survive. English ships took French Company merchandise from the Coromandel Coast to Bengal; the English governor could easily keep the merchandise as collateral in the event of the French director’s defection. The cooperation was calculated. If one of the actors’ power increased, the fragile equilibrium of interdependence would break and the cooperation would end. The inter-imperial cooperative relations did not exclude competition, and both mechanisms were not mutually exclusive. Local rulers provoked a competitive environment that was most observable in the gift-giving sessions. The competitive behaviours often took other forms than usually assumed. In Pondicherry, they came from the “*outside,*” or from Saint Malo merchants’ privateering activities and put the carefully built inter-imperial cooperation in the region at stake. In Ouidah, each European factor sought to have the upper hand in another inter-imperial endeavour: trade with the Luso-Brazilians.

## CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, warfare and competition in Europe cannot be projected onto a setting where the Company relied on overseas directors' connections for the resilience of its factories. Indeed, these connections constantly crossed imperial boundaries. If anything, war declarations increased overseas directors' agency and led them to further rely on other European imperial powers. By focusing on inter-imperial relations instead of exclusively intra-imperial dynamics, I have challenged traditional national narratives that have portrayed European expansions as evolving in isolation from each other, with the exception of competitive interactions. I have shown that overseas directors in Pondicherry and Ouidah relied heavily on inter-imperial cooperation to maintain their factories and therefore revise their position in local power dynamics. Their reliance on other powers did not end there, however. To reach a stage of economic development, overseas directors had to deepen their trans-imperial and cross-cultural connections.

In the hope of economic growth, and to stimulate commercial activity, overseas directors' strategies were geared towards local and regional trading networks, rather than on the commercial connection and dependence to the metropolis. They therefore attempted, with more or less success, to integrate into local and regional commercial circuits. In Pondicherry, this meant the web of trade networks spanning from the Mascarene Islands to Manila and, most importantly, China. The Company lacked the means to infiltrate these networks alone, and overseas directors found different ways to overcome these deficiencies. First, Martin sought to make Pondicherry attractive to merchants who had a strong intra-Asian business and made use of his personal connections who had access to the Chinese market, which enabled him to access some goods. Another option, shown by Dulivier, was to intensify the commercial ties with other Company settlements across the Indian Ocean, such as the Mascarene Islands. Finally, both the Mascarenes and the Chinese markets could be connected by partnering with English Company merchants through Dulivier's network. The English possessed the knowledge and the connections needed to trade in the intra-Asian networks through their country trade activities. Overseas directors of Pondicherry used their cooperative relations with the English not only to maintain their settlement, but also to access markets that would otherwise be inaccessible.

In Ouidah, overseas directors directed their commercial strategy towards Brazil and south Atlantic networks. After failing to bypass Luso-Brazilian traders, an option for Bouchel was to enter into a business partnership with them and have his own agents in the nearby trading posts to maximise his access to the slave market. Additionally, an interpersonal

## CONCLUSION

relationship with the future Luso-Brazilian director was a useful complementary strategy to ensure that the partnership would endure the creation of the Luso-Brazilian fort. Levet also took advantage of interpersonal connections, both through direct correspondence with the viceroy of Brazil and acting as an indispensable representative of Luso-Brazilian interests in Ouidah, for both his own gain and the Company's. In this role, Levet ensured the protection of the viceroy, and therefore Luso-Brazilians prioritised the French when trading, which gave the director privileged access to the south Atlantic connections.

From the perspective of principal-agent relations, prioritising the economic self-sustainability of their factories could clash with metropolitan interests. The infiltration of local and regional trading networks frequently included the personal gains, economic or otherwise, of overseas directors at the expense of the Company. However, as demonstrated by recent studies on principal-agent relations, the malfeasant behaviour of agents could be useful to their principal, in which case they would have a mutually-beneficial relation. Overseas directors' attempts at self-sustainability generated much-needed knowledge and connections that benefitted the Parisian directors, provided this information was used to their advantage. In the cases under scrutiny, the principal-agent situation was further complicated by the existence of a "*second principal*:" port city merchants operating in Pondicherry and Ouidah through a Company monopoly grant, because they bought licenses or because the crown had opened the trade to them. I have found that in the dual principal setting, similar mutually-beneficial deals took place between overseas directors and port city merchants. The signs of this cooperation further refute the theory of a dichotomy, opposing port city merchants' interests to those of the French state and its companies.

The mutually-beneficial relationship between overseas directors and port city merchants was based on the private merchants' guarantee of their support to the Parisian directors and the minister of the navy. In turn, the merchants would benefit from overseas directors' connections and knowledge, regardless of if it was generated by illegal private trade. I have further shown that these cooperative behaviours could only be sustained if they were cemented by interpersonal relations between the two parties. They could take place through face-to-face meetings or through regular private correspondence. These mutually-beneficial relations are more understandable if one takes the perspective of the "*second principals*" and their strategies as individuals. The intersection of private interests on both sides generated and maintained the cooperation between overseas directors and port city merchants. Indeed, directors and main investors in port city merchants' partnerships and the

## CONCLUSION

chartered companies under scrutiny appear to have had a personal interest in the commercial ventures.

Transferring the principal-agent interactions to the Parisian directors reveals their strategies and demonstrates the agency of individuals usually portrayed as forced into investing in chartered companies. It has been demonstrated that Parisian directors had their own reasons for investing in chartered companies. Despite the fact that chartered companies appeared as institutionally attractive in theory, the protection granted to their investors, such as limited liability, was not respected in practice. Additionally, the de facto management of the chartered companies under study by the minister of the Navy and the French kings weighs against the positive incentives for directors to invest and manage companies. As for the argument of the upward social mobility the investment would generate for the directors, it is virtually impossible to disentangle this investment from other types of investments, such as offices and royal revenue collections. Therefore, it would be hazardous to consider the social status a major motivation. Most directors under scrutiny invested in multiple companies, which indicates that there were other incentives.

It has been demonstrated that these other incentives were varying forms of market access. Chartered companies provided their directors and shareholders with privileged access to markets under monopoly and, consequently, limited competition. Parisian directors maximised their legitimate access to privileges through contracting the provisioning of companies, acquiring entire cargoes before they were auctioned and buying Company licenses for their own business. Most strikingly, they appear to have used the Company structures overseas and the infiltrated intra-Asian markets to trade for their own benefit. Their position as directors or shareholders in multiple companies simultaneously enabled them to connect commodity chains. It gave them privileged access to goods that they needed for their other overseas businesses. Furthermore, the high volume of their investments in chartered companies and sub-contracting companies provided some directors with a strong bargaining position with the minister of the Navy and the king, opening the door to other markets. Similar to the mutually-beneficial relationship between some private traders and overseas directors mentioned above, directors' private endeavours and Company interests were not opposed, but rather complementary. The agency of Parisian directors was needed to complement the deficiencies of the Company and vice versa, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two.

## CONCLUSION

The agency of Parisian and overseas directors shaped the French expansion from the metropolis to the overseas trading stations and settlements. Their agency manifested itself in the strategies used to interact with local rulers and their—often failed—attempts to redefine power relations. Their cooperative undertakings across imperial boundaries, despite political and economic competition in Europe, indicate the role of their strategies and connections for the maintenance of the factories. Their agency is further shown by their objective of economic self-sustainability, by focusing on local and regional commercial networks rather than on the connection to France. Furthermore, the entanglements of public and private interests in the French expansion are demonstrated by their interpersonal relations with private merchants. This synergetic relationship is even more obvious once the principal-agent problem is applied in the metropolitan setting. Parisian directors' agency is demonstrated by the varying strategies used to maximise their legitimate access to markets, while supplementing the shortages of the companies.

The inter-dependent relations between Companies and the agency of its servants made it beneficial for Companies to make space for metropolitan and overseas directors' freedom of action. The goal of French chartered companies appears increasingly less oriented towards efficiency or profitability, and more towards offering a platform for individual agency to stimulate the expanding early empire. By highlighting the role of individual agency in shaping the French early modern expansion, this dissertation has presented an alternative to the institutional and path-dependent narrative, bringing to light a period when the French empire in India and the West African Coast was in its infancy and could have taken a very different shape.