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French colonial business: The case of a governor-entrepreneur in Ouidah in the first half of the 18th century.

In 1720 the governor of Ouidah, the major French outpost on the Guinea Coast, was accused of neglecting French interests by his own employees. On the point of losing his position, the governor was protected by French private merchants who vouched for him and he remained governor of the outpost. Why would French traders protect a colonial official involved in private trade? Through this case, the present paper will explore the connections between private merchants and overseas institutions whether state-sponsored company, navy or board of trade. I aim thereby at contradicting the persisting opposition between the French state and its institutions on the one hand, to “entrepreneurs and private merchants who aspired to the great economic freedom” on the other hand.[[1]](#footnote-1) This study will therefore focus on the intersection of overlapping interests between French private merchants and overseas agents and how it was operationalized in the case of Ouidah on the Slave Coast.

This paper will start by an overview of the French overseas trade in Ouidah, on the Slave Coast and especially focusing on the state-sponsored companies and the participation of private merchants. It will then explore the French organization of the trade in Ouidah, highlighting the negotiations between institutions and private merchants through the example of a *négociant* from Nantes. This will be followed by the African side of the organization of trade in Ouidah and the local administration overseas agents had to comply to. Lastly I will go into Bouchel’s case and explore why private merchants supported him. The presentation will touch upon concepts such as negotiation space and inter-personal loyalties within institutions. For the sake of clarity, the term “Hueda” will refer to the Kingdom currently Benin and “Ouidah” will refer to the town formed around the European forts in the kingdom of Hueda.[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, although this paper will not engage directly with the effects of slave trade on its victims, it has to be stated that what led the French and other Europeans to trade on the Guinea coast was the indisputably cruel part of the history of the Atlantic World: human trafficking.

**French trade in Ouidah**

The privileges of the French trade on the Slave Coast (between the River Volta and River Lagos on the West Coast of Africa) was granted successively to multiple state-sponsored companies from 1664 onwards.[[3]](#footnote-3) These companies were characterized by a strong interference of the King through the minister of the navy in their management and a majority of financiers among their shareholders and directors.[[4]](#footnote-4) Additionally, soon after their chartering, companies were requested by the minister of the navy to license out some of the trade to the West African Coast to private merchants from French port cities for a set price per enslaved African brought to the French West Indies. For instance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert asked the West India Company to give out permissions to French private traders and since the company was reluctant to do so, he gave the licenses himself. The Guinea Company chartered in 1685 had to share its area of trading monopoly with private traders as soon as 1692.[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly, when the Asiento contract was negotiated in favor of the French in 1701, Pontchartrain’s idea was that the company would license out part of its trade to the Spanish and French West Indies to private French port city merchants. Around the same time, the creation of a board of trade including deputies from port cities show the necessity for the state to consult merchants.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Company was accused by private traders through the board of trade of not handing out enough licenses and on a very irregular basis.[[7]](#footnote-7) During the negotiation of the peace of Utrecht in 1713 the Asiento contract was granted to the English and private traders successfully lobbied the minister of the navy to open the trade on the Guinea Coast. In 1716, the company officially lost its privilege on the “Guinea Coast” and the trade was officially “made free” to five French port cities : Nantes, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Le Havre and slightly later Saint Malo without limitation. The latter remained open until it was included to the John Law system and its “*Compagnie perpétuelle des Indes”* in 1720.

The main port city operating on the Guinea Coast during the first half of the 18th century was Nantes. Even though it did not have the tradition as Rouen merchants had in African trade, Nantes’ incomparable advantage was that until 1733 it stayed the center of the sales of the *Compagnie des Indes orientales.* Furthermore, similarly to other French port cities, it was an important trading point for northern European commodities; the port then had easy access to all the merchandises it needed for the African trade. When Lorient became the headquarter of the India Company in 1733, it stayed close enough to Nantes.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, licenses to trade in the area of monopoly of the successive state-sponsored companies were not cheap and sometimes difficult to acquire. Under the Asiento Company (1701-1713), French merchants paid 13 *livres* per enslaved African brought to the West Indies (out of which 3 *livres* were meant for the maintenance of the fort of Ouidah).[[9]](#footnote-9) Additionally, sale prices in the West Indies were restricted to a maximum of 400 *livres* per head which led to the complains of Nantes merchants.

**In Nantes, Montaudouin**

One of the most prominent *négociant* family in Nantesinvolved in slave trade were the Montaudoin and who owed 24% of the ships sailing to Ouidah during the first half of the 18th century (60 ships) and even half of the ships for a few years (between *c.* 1717 and 1722).[[10]](#footnote-10) The Montaudouin had family connections holding offices who could help in case of conflicts with state-sponsored companies. According to Gaston Martin, they exerted great influence on their fellow merchants of Nantes and many *mémoires* of the period were inspired by them.[[11]](#footnote-11) Aside from slave trade they were involved in cotton industry and financial investments.[[12]](#footnote-12) René Montaudoin became consul of the *contractacion* in 1721 followed his successor Thomas Montaudoin de Launay in 1732. The *contractation* of Nantes was an association of merchants created in the beginning of the 16th century gathering Spanish merchants from Bilbao established in Nantes and other local merchants involved in Spanish trade.[[13]](#footnote-13) The *contractation* of Nantes had tight relations with Bilbao but also with Andalusia, England, cities of the Hanse, Bruges and French ports of Saint Malo and La Rochelle among others.[[14]](#footnote-14) Being consul of the association at the beginning of the 18th century seems to have become more an honorific title since and the consul changed on a yearly basis to enable members to access the honour of such an office.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Under the Asiento Company, Pontchartrain, the minister of the navy, gave the permission to fit out two slave trading ships to René Montaudouin. The latter was thereby allowed to bring enslaved Africans to Cayenne and Martinique. Additionally, he could bring some of slaves he had caught through privateering to Saint Domingue even if “*it would not please the Company*”.[[16]](#footnote-16) The expedition was not profitable because of the high price of the foodstuff and he sued the Company. As a result he was allowed to send a ship to the Martinique in 1707.[[17]](#footnote-17) The profits must not have been that bad since in 1708 he complained to the board of trade that the “*Company refused to give him licenses for the ships he proposed to send in Guinea*”.[[18]](#footnote-18) By 1709 the Montaudouin fitted out 4 ships and in 1710 one again and 4 more in 1713.[[19]](#footnote-19) Once the Guinea trade was made open in 1713 for five specific port cities, private merchants from these privileged ports had to pay 20 *livres* per enslaved African brought to the West Indies which severely increased their costs. In turn, they were very eager to defend their privileges and high fines were given to captains trading on the Guinea coast who were not from the five port cities in question.[[20]](#footnote-20) This is interesting to mention because it goes against the idea that private merchants were in favour of a total freedom of trade and that they were opposed to institutions. The voyages of the Montaudouin to Ouidah were concentrated in the period between 1709-1722 and 1726-1729. This gap is due to the India Company not selling licenses during the first years following its charter. The next voyages were more sporadic, one in 1735, 1738, 1740 and 1743. René was mostly active in slave trade enterprises until 1731 when Thomas took over.

When a French slave trading ship arrived on the Guinea Coast it had to wait until Ouidah to find a metropolitan trading post. Until then the captain and crew had the choice to either trade at sea near the shore of villages – which was a very slow strategy – or to trade at other European forts all along the Gold Coast – which could be quite costly because captains had to adapt to the price of foreign company factors.[[21]](#footnote-21) In Ouidah however, licensed traders had the choice to trade directly with the captains of the King or with any of the European trading lodges, the French of course but also English, Dutch and Portuguese. Choosing for the French fort assured them protection of their commodities and they could keep the enslaved Africans they had traded in the *captiverie* of the fort.[[22]](#footnote-22) However, the advantages of dealing with the French governor depended on the abilities of the governor to negotiate with local authorities, intermediaries or local merchants. Indeed having a representative of the French company, and between 1713 and 1720 of the French navy, was not enough for French port city merchants to ensure their trade. They needed a governor who was embedded in the local trading networks. We will now see through the example of Bouchel (governor of Ouidah from 1716-1723) how these networks took place/were built.

**In Ouidah, Bouchel**

Ouidah was situated in the coastal kingdom of Hueda.[[23]](#footnote-23) Its administration included a great amount of different office holders which were governors of one of the 26 provinces. Yovogan was the captain of all white men (*Yovo* meaning white) and the intermediary for the French was captain Assou.[[24]](#footnote-24) Within this socio-political framework, the power of the French in Ouidah was limited to the fort and they, along with the English, Dutch and Portuguese, were only established there because the Hueda Kings allowed them to. It has already been stressed by recent historiography that the power relation between Europeans and Africans all along the West Coast of Africa was clearly on the side of the local authorities.[[25]](#footnote-25) New governors arriving in Ouidah would always start their directorship by paying tribute to the Hueda King. Their contact to the monarchies were mediated by a captain who they also had to pay customs to. Additionally, every event was an opportunity for the local kings to either come to visit, or to require the visit of the French governor. These visits inevitably entailed the offering of presents to local authorities. The fragile positon of the French is shown most clearly at moments of local wars. Their fort was built out of local material which did not resist bad weather and was not of real protection against attacks. The roof for instance could rot because of the rains or burn very easily during wars. The cannons which were supposed to defend the fort suffered from the humidity became rusty and barely usable.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The governor’s reputation and a fortiori the French’s reputation in Ouidah were necessary not only to establish themselves but also maintain their establishment. The French had to borrow food and money regularly from the king of Hueda. The latter then trusted the governor enough to lend them supplies and believed in the ability of the governor to pay his debt. However, this advantageous situation as a trustworthy governor was fragile. If we take the example of Bouchel, French traders reported that the Hueda king was starting to show some signs of mistrust towards him. The King knew that Bouchel had borrowed not only from him but also from many other foreign governors and that the governor did not reimburse any of them. Quite a few French ships had passed by Ouidah in the meantime but since they were private ships they were not accountable for the debts contracted on the spot by the governor. More than anything, private merchants took advantage of the situation to sell overprized supplies from France to the governor.[[27]](#footnote-27)

As intermediaries between Hueda Kings and their home country, governors in Ouidah had to maintain a good reputation to both authorities. Since they were the main correspondent with the metropole, their main strategy was to seem unreplaceable in the eyes of the French authorities. They picture themselves as the center of political relations among local. The governor Bouchel in 1715 illustrates this matter very well when he wrote in a letter to the navy council: “*Thanks to me and captain Assou, the king of Agoème* [Dahomey] *and Ardres* [Ardrah/Allada] *are on good terms again and all the slaves pursued in the last 8 months come from Agoème and are allowed to be brought to the coast through Ardres*”.[[28]](#footnote-28) Captain Assou, aside from being the captain of the French was a prominent character in the Hueda Kingdom, he had orchestrated the accession to the throne by the sill minor king Houffon in 1708 and since then stayed very influential at court.[[29]](#footnote-29) The negotiations Bouchel is mentioning must have been more of Assou’s action than Bouchel’s although the presence of an European company representative while negotiating trade must have been a plus for Asssou. However, by writing to the navy that Bouchel himself with the help of captain Assou had facilitated the transport of captives through different local kingdoms, Bouchel made sure he was seen as indispensable. Furthermore, he underlined persistently how well his personal relationship with local traders and rulers were. He was very proud of telling navy that he managed to allow French slaving ships to pay customs after the trade and not before, which saved traders 7-8 days.

The French governor’s authority could only be exercise on the fort employees, but inside the fort the governor’s powers were extremely broad since he could sentence any employee to be excluded from the company and sent back to the metropole for further judgement. Only in 1748, under the India Company, a council will be formed by the governor, the vice-governor and the storekeeper to take important decision and to sign the letters and memoirs to the company. However, the governor did not have any authority on the high number of French licensed traders who came to Ouidah. Bouchel complained that licensed merchants avoided him on purpose in order to trade with other fort governors who had better offers. He was concerned about the fact that licensed traders could trade without dealing with him as he wrote that he personally had to finish the negotiations between private traders and local merchants because they had not been handled properly. This caused him troubles and reduced his credit towards the Hueda Kings and administration. He added: “*I would be more comfortable if all the trade would happen through me so that there wouldn’t be any misunderstanding*”.[[30]](#footnote-30) Bouchel was rightfully worried about how the trade took place with licensed traders since as a representative of the French navy he was ultimately accountable to the Hueda authorities if anything went wrong during the transaction.

**The case**

This ambiguous situation of on the one hand building good relations with local authorities in order to facilitate the trade and on the other hand not having any authority on traders gave all its complexity to the position of governor of the fort in Ouidah. Despite this challenge, the position of intermediary in trade, if managed well, could be advantageous. Indeed, the geographic closeness of different European forts, not only in Ouidah but all along the Guinea Coast, was conducive to private partnerships involving governors and traders of other European empires. An illustration of this is the trading partnership of the French governor Bouchel. In 1721, a lieutenant in the fort denounced the “trading society and close relations” that Bouchel had with Portuguese captains and merchants.[[31]](#footnote-31) The governor had apparently shared his fort's dwindling food supply with his Portuguese connections after an attack of privateers, leaving Dubord and his compatriots with only corn and water for 3-4 months, leading to the death of two French employees. According to this complaint, the governor had openly said that he was losing his time with the French nation and he wanted to earn more by dealing with the Portuguese in the little time he had left in Ouidah.

The governor had his own networks of Portuguese agents in Jacquin and Ardres: Jean Basil, Manuel Gomez and Joucan (probably a Luso-African) who collected slaves in partnership with him and brought them to Xavier, the capital of the Hueda Kingdom where the trade took place. Bouchel kept secretly the best slaves for his Portuguese trading partners and only the leftovers were available for the French ships Bouchel even introduced one of his trading partners, Francisco Pereira to the Hueda Kings and their neighbours the Kings of Ardrah. The connections with both Kings would have, according to Dubord, enabled the Portuguese to have the priority in the business. It is difficult to assess if this was indeed the case but what is sure is that in 1721, Francisco Pereira managed to acquire a fort in Ouidah on behalf of the Vice-Roy of Brazil.[[32]](#footnote-32) And that even Bouchel described as “spoiling” the trade. The connections between Ouidah and Brazil (especially Bahia) will grow in intensity over time but European governors had already realized the potential profit they could get from trading with Brazilians before Bouchel’s governorship.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Private trade of employees of the fort was illegal until 1763, but could have been tolerated as the vice-governor, Levesque, claimed it was : “*I brought to Ouidah merchandises for my own account since this activity has been openly tolerated by the King to my predecessors*”.[[34]](#footnote-34) The suppliant Dubord himself revealed in his complaint that Bouchel was so greedy that he was jealous of “*any kind of commerce that they [the employees] were doing*”[[35]](#footnote-35). Furthermore, the argument of the complaint against Bouchel is not the personal trade of a governor but how it harmed French trade on the coast: “*a man who acts against the rights of his motherland and the interest of his Prince*” adding that some captains of French ships had complained to the representative of the navy in Nantes and in La Rochelle against Bouchel. It is however highly unlikely that the governor could be neglecting so obviously the French interests in all impunity. Indeed in the instructions of the council of the navy to Bouchel when he became governor, one of the main order was that he should “*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*”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Apparently not all captains felt their trade was neglected in Ouidah since his position was saved by a petition signed in 1722 by ten French captains and sailors who argued to the navy that if Bouchel would be replaced the king of Juda would be displeased and it would be harmful of French trade and for the French in Ouidah in general: “*the named here after let you know that, Assou the captain of the French nation, told us the bad position where he was, when he had heard about your soon departure for France, in a time where everything seems authorized, 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 follow ups, by the bad disposition of the king and the big men of this kingdom against the one who will succeed you. Signed: Duqué commandant de la Ste Agnés 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 aûmonier du Contoir, D’eschebehere cy-devant capitaine en second du navire la Ste Agnès de Nantes*.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The vice-governor, Levesque denounced this petition as being part of Bouchel’s scheme to remain the governor of Ouidah. It is impossible to know if the captains took the initiative of writing a petition to support Bouchel or if Bouchel himself drafted the petition and made the captains sign it. In any case, the fact that the warning or even the threat is described as coming from Assou and that the main argument is made around what pleased or not the “King and his big men” shows how men-on-the-spot could make use of their position and the information they possessed. The information asymmetry created by the distance between France and Ouidah made of paramount importance for the French authorities to keep local administrators pleased and both Bouchel and the French captains knew this.

**Inter-personal loyalties and negotiation space**

The question remains who were these signatories and why would they help Bouchel? Nine individuals signed the petition in favor of Bouchel and, except for the priest of the fort and one captain from La Rochelle, all of them were captains or sailors from Nantes.[[38]](#footnote-38) Bellinger sailed seven times to the Guinea Coast out of which three were during the governorship of Bouchel. Even if he was the captain of a ship owed by Dumothay Bassinot when he signed the petition, it has to be noted that five of the seven ships he sailed with to the Guinea Coast were fitted out by Montaudouin. Braheix sailed three times to Ouidah during Bouchel’s governorship on ships owed by Dumothay Bassinot. Dumoulin had been sailing mainly to the West Indies on Montaudouin’s ships before he made two voyages to Ouidah in 1720 and 1722 on ships fitted out by Montaudouin. Duqué sailed to the Guinea Coast eight times and twice when Bouchel was governor with ships owed by Luc Shiell. In this case the under captain signed as well. Lancelot went six times to the Guinea coast all of which were on Montaudouin’s ships. And lastly, Beluté was a sailor on a ship owed by Darquistade when he signed the petition in favor of Bouchel. Most of them had already been to Ouidah and had met Bouchel. Bellinger, Toussaint and Dumoulin were together in Ouidah when they signed the petition. However, to understand why they did support Bouchel it would be relevant to go back to who they worked for. As noted above most of the shipowners were prominent Nantes slave traders among which we recognized the aforementioned Montaudouin.

The Hueda Kings had adopted a strategy of open trade for all Europeans in order to enhance the competition among European traders in their favor.[[39]](#footnote-39) Therefore, in their reports governors often complain about this harsh competition among Europeans. Even when they were multiple ships from France, traders would outbid each other sometimes by a third of the price, competing at times with their compatriots. Conditions of trade were difficult and having contacts on the ground was of great value. Additionally to this local context, it should be reminded that by 1720 the John Law’s India Company of had been granted the privileges of the Guinea Coast which threatened the trade of private merchants. Until 1722 the Company had let private merchants “who were used to this commerce” trade on the Guinea Coast through licenses. The positive side was that the tax on the trade was lowered from 20 *livres* per enslaved African to 13 *livres*. Merchants who were worried at first, realized their activity was compatible with the company’s privileges as it had been the case before the opening of the trade.[[40]](#footnote-40) However, it must have reminded them of the issues linked to the company licensing system: were there going to be enough licenses, who was going to get them and for how long would the company sell licenses?

Keeping good relations with the new Company was paramount for the merchants’ interests in the Guinea trade. Helped by their maire, Gérard Mellier, who had kept close relations with a company director, the Nantais managed to negotiate a discount of 6 *livres* per enslaved Africans brought to the West Indies.[[41]](#footnote-41) However, securing their connections with metropolitan institutions was only part of private merchants’ necessary network. Contacts with authorities and traders on the Guinea Coast were at least as important since the success of the voyage depended on these intermediaries. According to Gérard Mellier, the maire of Nantes, Montaudouin had such close connections with the sovereigns of Adrah (next to the kingdom of Hueda) that the King called “MM. Montaudouin, his cousins and friends” and the son of the King was even sent to France for his education.[[42]](#footnote-42) In 1727 a letter to the navy Gérard Mellier, relating to the conquest of Ouidah by Dahomey, the so-called “friends and cousins of the Montaudouin” seem to be mistaken for the Hueda Kings instead of the Ardrah sovereigns.[[43]](#footnote-43) Nevertheless, the Montaudouin appeared to be seriously investing into local networks on the Guinea Coast especially with the Ardrah Kings. In the conjuncture explained above, it was not a bad move to have his captains supporting a governor on-the-spot. Therefore, it becomes clear that by signing the petition, the captains enhanced the inter-personal relation with the governor and made him indebted to them. Indeed, all of these ten French captains and sailors successfully traded enslaved Africans in Ouidah without having to go in other part of the coast as it was often the case for private traders.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Another way of fostering relations with overseas agents which Montaudouin resorted to was to lend money to them for the maintenance of the fort. In December 1721, Levesque (vice-governor of Ouidah and main opponent of Bouchel) stayed in Nantes where Montaudouin offered him a loan of 6 000 *livres* for the maintenance of trading post of Ouidah.[[45]](#footnote-45) This sum would be taken off from what Montaudouin owed or would owe to the Company in the future. By February 1722, the administrator of the navy in Nantes, Bigot de la Mothe reported “*in conformity with the orders, I made a deal with Mr. Montaudouin for a loan of 12 000 livres goods for the trading post of Ouidah*”.[[46]](#footnote-46) Institutions, be they metropolitan or overseas, were aided private merchants as long as there was space for inter-personal negotiations and connections.

These negotiations with institutions are also evident in their relations to the navy which was the institution responsible for collecting the tax of 20 *livres* per enslaved African brought to the West Indies. This tax was partly necessary for the maintenance of the fort of Ouidah during the open trade period. However, private merchants among which multiple representatives of the family Montaudouin accepted freedom but not the increase in taxation. Bigot de la Mothe reported that: “*the négociants coming back from their trade pretend they did not have to pay and even that the navy owes them! They say they don’t have certificates mentioning how many slaves they brought to the Antilles.*”[[47]](#footnote-47) Private merchants nearly convinced Bigot de la Mothe who asked the navy if some ships had special duty free privileges. He did not possess the lists of his former colleagues, Lusançay and Ricouart, making it very difficult to keep track of which ship left when. He finally received an “*état général*” of the slaves brought to Saint Domingue and the Martinique and asked the merchants to pay according to it or they would be prosecuted. Major Nantes merchants – Montaudouin, Delaunay Montaudouin, Delavolvetiere Montaudouin, Michel, Groux, Morlay Booseny, Luc Shiell, among others – signed a petition to the King asking for a cut of 30% off their debt to the navy. In a second petition they ask for a delay of payment of 3-6 months and that the 30% off apply also to the ships which did not come back yet. This was accepted but Bigot managed to stop the negociation by stating that if the *négoicants* did not pay in the 3 next month there would only be 15% off and if they did not pay they would not get the discount. The court of admiralty was according to him *“not in a rush”* so it is not even sure if merchants who did not pay were really prosecuted and prominent Nantes merchants must have been aware of it to negotiate their debt.

This illustrates how there was space for negotiations with the navy through the intervention of the King. Additionally, the system had changed so frequently (from company privilege to direct management by the state) that navy official himself did not seem to be aware of who had to pay when he further wrote : “*I beg the council to give me orders* [about the maintenance of the fort of Ouidah] *since the slave trade is now entirely in the hands of the Company maybe it should also take care of the maintenance of the comptoir*”.[[48]](#footnote-48) What is clear however, is that, at least during the period of open-trade, it was difficult to make private traders pay for the maintenance of the fort. Montaudouin thereby enjoyed the infrastructure without paying the full price for it and gracefully proposed a loan to the navy for the maintenance of the fort…

**Concluding remarks**

If institutions aided the economic well-being of private merchants it was because of the possibility of negotiation and inter-personal loyalties they offered. In the metropole, the multiple layers of institutions were potential places of negotiation and lobbying for merchants. The board of trade where merchant interests could be represented against companies which did not respect the licensing system is the most obvious example. However, if we want to go beyond the company versus private traders dichotomy, it is interesting to see the taxes due to the navy were negotiable through merchant petitions to the King. Additionally, on the state-sponsored companies level, connections between merchants and company directors made negotiations possible. Most importantly, in the trading post of Ouidah, local agents were most useful for merchants if they had built their own network of inter-personal loyalties even if it was illegally. In the case of Bouchel, his connections with local authorities such as Assou but also the King of Hueda and Adrah to whom he had introduced his Portuguese trading partner, as well as his inter-imperial network made out of luso-Africans and Brazilians made him a very valuable connection for French private traders. The possibility of creating a reciprocal deal on the personal level between captains and local agents enhanced the efficiency of the trade, not necessarily because the agent represented metropolitan institutions but because they had infiltrated Hueda institutions which had enabled them to create other necessary inter-personal loyalties.

1. Hirsch, J-P., Minard, P., « Laissez-nous faire et protégez nous beaucoup » : pour une histoire des pratiques institutionelles dans l’industrie française (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle) » in Bergeron, L. and Bourdelais, P., *La France n’est-elle pas douée pour l’industrie ?*, Paris , 1998, p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I follow the terminology of ; Law, R., *Ouidah. The Social History of a West African Slaving ‘Port’ 1727-1892*, Oxford, 2004, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In 1664 Colbert created the West India Company which was the first French state-sponsored company to be granted the monopoly of trade on the West African Coast. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On French state-sponsored companies operating on the West Coast of Africa see among others : Mims, S., *Colbert’s West India Policy,* New York, 1912 and Cole, W.C., *Colbert and a century of French mercantilism*, New York, vol. II, 1939; Ly, A., La compagnie du Sénégal de 1673 à 1696, Bordeaux, 1955 and Banks, K.J., “Financiers, factors, and French Proprietary Companies in West Africa 1664-1713” in Roper, L.H. and Van Ruymbeke, B., W., *Constructing Early Modern Empires : Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World 1500–1750,* Leiden-Boston, 2007; Scelle, G., *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille. Contrats et traités d’Assiento*, t. II, Paris, 1906; Haudrère, P., *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIè s.*, 2 tomes, Paris, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Scelle, G., *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille. Contrats et traités d’Assiento*, t. II, Paris, 1906, p. 187-192. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On the board of trade see for instance : Pierre Bonnassieux et Eugène Lelong, Conseil de Commerce et bureau du commerce, 1700-1791, Paris, 1900 & Waren Scoville, « The French economy in 1700-1701 : An appraisal by the Deputies of Trade » in Journal of Economic History, 22 n°2 (1962), p. 231-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The port city deputies at the board of trade had taken notes that licenses would be sold but told Pontchartrain that none had been sold yet. Scelle, G., *La traite négrière,* op. cit., p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pétré-Grenouilleau, O., *Nantes au temps de la traite des Noirs*, Paris, 1998, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. AN F12 54 Conseil de commerce 26 sept. 1708 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Online Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, originally from Mettas, J., *Répertoire des Expéditions Négrières Françaises au XVIIIe Siècle*; t. 1, *Nantes* , Paris, 1978 : mainly René Montaudouin and Thomas Montaudouin de Launay but also Jean Montaudouin and Jacques Montaudouin. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gaston, M., *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle. L'ère des Négriers, d'après des documents inédits*, Paris, 1931., p. 184 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Chanson, J., *Une famille de négociants nantais à l’époque moderne : les Montaudoin*, (Mémoire de License, Université de Nantes), Nantes, 1977, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Jeulin, P., « Aperçus sur la contractation de Nantes (1530 environ - 1733) » in *Annales de Bretagne*, Vol. 40, n°2, 1932, p. 284-331. Connections avec Malaga, Seville, Portugal, Bayonne, La Rochelle, Saint Malo, Rouen, Bruges, Hanse, l’Angleterre. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Ibid*., p. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Archives municipales de Nantes HH (194 Délibérations de 1717-1733) cited in Jeulin, P., « Aperçus sur la contractation de Nantes (1530 environ - 1733) » in *Annales de Bretagne*, Vol. 40, n° 3, p. 485-486. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. FR ANOM COL B 28 Pontchartrain à M. de Lusançay, 26 juin 1706 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. FR ANOM COL B 28 Pontchartrain à Montaudouin 31 aout 1707 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. F12 54 (1708) F° 281-285. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Online Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, originally from Mettas, J., *Répertoire des Expéditions Négrières Françaises*, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Marin, G., *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle, l’administration de Gérard Mellier*, Nantes, 1928, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Berbain, S., *Études sur la traite des noirs au Golfe de Guinée*, op. cit., p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In 1767 the tax disappeared in *Ibid.*, p. 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Law, R.., *The slave coast of West Africa 1550-1750*, Oxford, 1991, p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See among others: Law, R.., *The slave coast*, op. cit. ; Law, R., *Ouidah,* op. cit.; Kelly, K.G., “Controlling Traders: Slave Coast Strategies at Savi and Ouidah”; Kelly, K.G., “Indigenous Responses to Colonial Encounter on the West African Coast: Hueda and Dahomey from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Century” in Lyons, C.L. and Papadopoulos, J.K., *The Archeology of Colonialism*, 2002; Bay, E.G., *The wives of the Leopard*, *Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, Charlottesville and London, 1998, Manning, P., “The slave trade in the bight of Benin, 1640-1890” in Gemery, H.A. and Hogendorn, J.S., (eds) *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, New York, 1979; Manning, P. Slavery, *Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960*, Cambridge, 1982; Stein, R.L., *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century an Old Regime Business*, Madison, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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33. The English governor Blainey especially. ANF C6/25 (1) Ducoulombier 1714 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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48. MAR/B/3/280 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)