SECTION 2
European Encounters

The French Atlantic and the Dutch, Late Seventeenth–Late Eighteenth Century

Silvia Marzagalli

Beginning in the early sixteenth century, French merchants and captains became involved in the new Atlantic trade. Private ventures, and occasionally voyages of exploration co-sponsored by the monarchy, contributed to shaping French perceptions of Atlantic opportunities and progressively influenced royal decisions regarding the direction French colonization would take. By 1650, the French crown had built an empire both on the American mainland and in the islands of the West Indies. Parallel to the rise of the French West Indies, the French established permanent trading posts both in the Indian Ocean and on the African coast to procure slaves. Although in the eighteenth century France lost parts of its empire,¹ both its West Indian and slave trades flourished. By the eve of the French Revolution, France was not only one of the major colonial powers, but was also the world's foremost producer of sugar and coffee.

The boundaries of the French Empire did not limit or contain all the activities of French merchants, however. In fact, French merchants looked for opportunities all over the Atlantic. They were very active, for example, in Cádiz (and thus in the Spanish American trade) and in the Levant (which increasingly imported colonial crops).² This chapter deals exclusively with French colonial trade, the leading growth sector for the country in the eighteenth

-
- 1 Acadia and Newfoundland in 1713, New France in 1763, and Saint-Domingue/Haiti in 1804.
 - 2 On the French merchant community in Cádiz, see Manuel Bustos Rodríguez, *Los comerciantes de la Carrera de Indias en el Cádiz del siglo XVIII (1713–1775)* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 1995); Arnaud Bartolomei, *La Bourse et la vie. Destin collectif et trajectoires individuelles des marchands français de Cadix, de l'instauration du comercio libre à la disparition de l'empire espagnol (1778–1824)* (unpublished PhD diss., University of Provence, 2007). On the French in the Levant trade, see among others Elena Frangakis-Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century (1700–1820)* (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1992); Daniel Panzac, *La caravane maritime: marins européens et marchands ottomans en Méditerranée (1680–1830)* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2004). For a short discussion of the French empire versus French Atlantic, see Silvia Marzagalli, “The French Atlantic World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, c. 1450–c. 1820*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 235–251.

century. I will analyze the role played by Dutch merchants and the United Provinces in the emergence, consolidation and functioning of this French colonial trade in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Whereas states tried to set rules for channeling profits in order to increase the prosperity of their subjects and the territories under their control, early modern trade relied on merchant networks operating well beyond political boundaries. In looking at these networks' composition and at how they functioned, historians have considered citizenship, ethnicity, religion, or kinship as pertinent factors. But in talking about "Dutch" or "French" merchants, we should be aware that we run the risk of essentializing one element among these actors' multiple identities and thereby unduly attributing an exclusive, or at least preponderant, explanatory value to it. My sense is that merchants played with multiple identities and affiliations, depending on the nature of the economic transactions in which they were involved, and on the equally blurred identities of the partners with whom they were dealing. From the perspective of the governments involved, the question of assessing identities and affiliations was crucial because it was connected with the capacity of states to impose their sovereignty over individuals and spaces. Thus, states contributed to shaping the notion of what it meant to be a "Dutch," "French," or "British" merchant. In this sense, governments determined categories which oversimplified the reality of networks built on elements other than place of birth – elements such as confessional belonging or kinship. For example, the son of a Dutch couple born in France was defined as French by the French authorities, though he might have relatives in the United Provinces and belong to a Protestant congregation, affiliations that might influence, sometimes quite heavily, his mercantile activities. As legislation largely adopted categories determined by the state, however, they could be decisive in opening or closing the boundaries of legal trade.

The use of categories such as "Dutch," "British," or "French" applied to merchants or even to the larger oceanic space of the Atlantic is, therefore, not self-evident. We have to question how such an identity was chosen or ascribed and how it was used by the actors, especially with respect to the institutions with which they interacted, and to the legal framework in which they decided or were forced to operate. I cannot answer these questions about how merchants used their multiple identities in any detail. This would require massive empirical research into sources such as merchant and legal papers. This chapter can, at most, provide an overall picture of the main ways in which the Netherlands and the Dutch – defined here as subjects of the United Provinces – were relevant for French colonial trade. I will start by reviewing the importance of the Dutch in the initial phases of the French West Indian trade,

and show how changes induced by Colbert's policy of excluding foreign and, most especially, Dutch merchants from French colonial trade put an end to the massive direct trade of the Dutch in the French West Indies. Secondly, I will show the persistent relevance of the Dutch in the re-export trade of French colonial goods throughout the eighteenth century. Finally, I will suggest that closed colonial mercantilistic systems such as the French one could only work in the long run because of the regular recurrence of warfare, which disrupted the peacetime patterns of colonial trade. Neutral carriers such as the Dutch allowed, then, for the rebalancing of capital flows between France and the United Provinces, as well as among other nations.

Dutch Merchants, Ships and Capital in the Seventeenth Century French West Indian Trade

France established permanent settlements in Canada and in the West Indies in the first half of the seventeenth century, but it was not until Colbert's ministry in the 1660s that the crown managed to make colonial trade profitable for merchants based in France. His mercantilist policy helped confirm contemporary conceptions of the usefulness of colonies. Whereas the economic utility of New France was still debatable in the seventeenth century, the French West Indies produced two profitable products: tobacco and, increasingly, sugar, once Dutch colonists introduced the techniques and know-how in the 1640s and 1650s.

By the mid-seventeenth century, merchants from Holland dominated a large part of the West Indian trade. As Wim Klooster put it, "The Dutch even managed to gain mercantile supremacy, albeit short-lived, in [...] Guadeloupe and Martinique."³ This situation began to change in the 1660s. In 1662, a report presented to the minister of finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, estimated that of 150 ships trading with the French Caribbean, no more than three or four were French-owned. The minister spent the rest of his life trying to reverse this situation.⁴ This led to a two-pronged strategy: firmer control by the crown on the local administration in the colonies; and the implementation of a policy for the exclusion of foreigners from the colonial trade – a policy specifically aimed at the Dutch. Colonies were put under direct state control, instead

3 Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches. Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1998), 89.

4 Jonathan Webster, "The Merchants of Bordeaux in Trade to the French West Indies, 1664–1717," (unpublished PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1972) 36.

of under the control of chartered companies or private landlords who had previously been granted proprietary rights (*propriétaires-seigneurs*). In 1671, foreign ships were banned from colonial ports while French exports to the colonies were exempted from all duties. Duties on French colonial imports were reduced from 5 percent to 3 percent. These decisions laid the basis for what was later labeled the “exclusive system,” a policy excluding foreigners from colonial trade and obliging the colonists to trade exclusively with the ports and merchants of the home country. French shipping and shipbuilding grew as a consequence of this policy shift.⁵ These policies were part of a larger project meant to assert French economic interests in Europe, and was implemented via various decisions, notably the toll tariffs of 1667. It came at a cost, though. Among others, the war against the Dutch (1672–1679) resulted from it, and the permanent subordination of colonists’ interests had political consequences, but as far as the colonial trade was concerned, it proved quite effective. Similar policies were being adopted in these years by other European countries as well.

The failure of the chartered *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* in 1666 opened up the opportunity for French merchants to ship on their own account to the colonies. Despite the almost continuous state of warfare which characterized the last 40 years of the reign of Louis XIV – wars which bought Saint-Domingue under French dominion (1697), and secured temporary access to Spanish America during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713) – French merchants were able to create the commercial networks that would allow them to rise to prominence in Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century.⁶ In this process, they benefited from the assistance of pre-existing commercial networks and the capital mobilized by these networks, notably the Dutch ones. Whereas Italians dominated sixteenth-century French businesses, Flemish and Dutch merchants and bankers took over this role in the seventeenth century. Many of them had settled in the main Atlantic ports in France to

5 Jean Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), 2 vols.

6 The War of the Spanish Succession was an important moment of capital accumulation for French merchants, which ought to be researched in greater detail. André Lespagnol has shown how merchants in Saint-Malo took advantage of different opportunities, whereas Christian Huetz de Lempis pointed to the emergence of a new class of shipowners, without being able to provide an exact account of how they made a fortune. André Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo. Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2nd ed., 1996); Christian Huetz de Lempis, *Géographie du commerce de Bordeaux à la fin du règne de Louis XIV* (Paris: Mouton, 1975). For the other major trading centers which emerged as colonial ports, we lack precise information.

control the salt, wine and other export trades. They were, therefore, well-positioned to take advantage of the emergence of French colonial trade.

From the beginning, La Rochelle participated intensively in the West Indian trade, whereas Nantes specialized in the slave trade. Bordeaux's shipowners also converted their businesses to the colonial trade – successfully competing with the aforementioned Atlantic ports – which proved more profitable than the Newfoundland fisheries. As Bordeaux was to become the most important French port for colonial trade, its case deserves closer attention. By the 1660s, a few wealthy French merchants in Bordeaux fitted out expeditions to both Newfoundland and to the West Indies. Some of these merchants were Catholic, like François Saige and Pierre Cornut; others were Huguenots, like Etienne Dhariette, who fitted out the first known expedition from Bordeaux to Quebec in 1671, as well as the first triangular shipping venture from Bordeaux to Quebec and to the West Indies in 1672.⁷ For the latter voyage, Dhariette freighted the ship of his Catholic colleague, Saige. Whether Catholic or Protestant-owned, most of the funds for these Newfoundland ventures were obtained through bottomry loans granted by a naturalized Dutch merchant living in Bordeaux, Jean de Ridder, and his brother-in-law, the British wine merchant Thomas Arundell. Between 1660 and his death in 1671, Ridder financed 86 bottomry loans in Bordeaux for expeditions to the Newfoundland fisheries, often in partnership with Everhard Jabach, a banker who settled in Paris, who was also director of the French East Indian Company.⁸ Ridder also financed and insured the first Bordeaux ventures to the West Indies.⁹ This group of wealthy merchants was also the originator of Bordeaux's increasing involvement in the West Indian trade, which developed from the 1660s onwards. By 1685, Bordeaux fitted out 50 ships to the West Indies. Huguenot merchant Etienne Dhariette participated, alone or in partnership with other merchants, in a quarter of the

7 Bertrand Gautier mentions a venture in 1632 from Bordeaux to Canada, but finds no evidence of other ventures in 1630–1635 and 1645–1650. Bertrand Gautier, *Contribution à l'histoire de l'économie maritime et de la société marchande à Bordeaux dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle: 1630–1650* (unpublished PhD diss., University of Bordeaux III, 1987–1988).

8 Peter Voss, "L'exemple d'un 'bourgeois et marchand de Bordeaux' au milieu du XVII^e siècle [Jean de Ridder]," *Bulletin du Centre d'Histoire des Espaces Atlantiques*, 4 (1988): 73–109. Webster, *Merchants*. Jabach's father had made a fortune as banker in Antwerp, before settling back in Cologne and converting to Catholicism in order to be accepted in the local Senate. See Vicomte de Grouchy, "Everhard Jabach, collectionneur parisien," *Mémoires de la société d'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France*, 21 (Paris: H. Champion, 1894), 217–248.

9 Peter Voss has found evidence, between 1654 and 1671, of a total of 239 bottomry loans and 241 insurance contracts granted by de Ridder. A quarter of them were granted to Bordeaux ship-owners, who were able to consistently increase their fleet in those years. Voss, "L'exemple."

343 voyages sent out from Bordeaux to the West Indies from the 1660s until 1685.¹⁰ Although it is difficult to generalize in the absence of detailed research on the specific contribution of Dutch capital in the rise of colonial shipping in other French ports, this case supports the widespread contemporary perception of the trade supremacy of the Dutch in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Whereas Dutch capital and insurance services were decisive for the West Indian trade in this phase, within a generation French merchants in Bordeaux were able to send expeditions to the West Indies using their own financial resources. A similar evolution toward autonomy in financing long-distance trade has been observed in Marseille.¹¹ This might have been the result of the high returns upon investment of these expeditions, on the one hand, and of the implementation of French colonial policy aimed at excluding foreigners from its colonial trade on the other. Foreign participation, however, continued to be of great importance in Bordeaux, as it was in other major French ports. Northern Europeans remained in charge of most of France's European import and export trade, and the United Provinces was a vital market for French colonial re-exports throughout the eighteenth century.

The Dutch and the Re-export of French Colonial Goods

Whereas Dutch merchants initiated sugar production in the French West Indies, carried on most of its colonial trade in the mid-seventeenth century, and financed the first French expeditions to the West Indies beginning in the 1660s, colonial shipping and trade was largely taken over in the eighteenth century by French businesses funded by French capital. Although firms involved in French colonial trade could occasionally include naturalized merchants and descendants of foreigners born in France – who were considered by the French authorities as French subjects – French merchants nonetheless dominated this protected market.¹²

10 Webster, *Merchants*, 125–160. Silvia Marzagalli, “Le négoce bordelais et ses hommes,” in *Histoire des Bordelais. La modernité triomphante (1715–1815)*, 2 vols., ed. Michel Figeac (Bordeaux: Mollat/Fédération Historique du Sud-Ouest, 2002), 1:85–115.

11 Paul Butel, *Les négociants bordelais, l'Europe et les Iles au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974); Charles Carrière, *Négociants marseillais au XVIII^e siècle* (Marseille: Institut historique de Provence, 1973).

12 On the legal status of foreigners in France, see Silvia Marzagalli, “L'évolution de la politique française vis-à-vis des étrangers à l'époque moderne: conditions, discours,

Within a few decades after Spain's official recognition of French sovereignty over Saint-Domingue (1697), the French part of the island became the world's major sugar and coffee producer. Increasing quantities of colonial goods were, therefore, shipped to France, where four ports (Bordeaux, Nantes, Marseille and Le Havre/Rouen) monopolized 90 percent of colonial trade.¹³

National consumption of colonial goods, however, was comparatively low, although France, with its 24 million inhabitants in 1750 and 28 million in 1789, was by far the most populated country in Europe. Despite French cities shifting to new consumption patterns directly linked to imports from the Americas (coffee, tobacco, textiles colored with indigo, mahogany furniture, etc.), France re-exported 80 percent of its colonial imports to other European countries as well as to the Levant. This was due to the fact that the capacity of the national market was limited by low incomes and high inland transport costs. The main markets were in Northern Europe, and the Dutch played an important role in the redistribution of colonial goods imported to French ports in accordance with dictates of the mercantilist system. Colonial goods found their way to their final markets on foreign ships, as a natural extension of the traditional role played by foreigners in the overall import and export trade with France.¹⁴

pratiques," in *Les étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques (XV^e–XIX^e siècle)*. *Expériences allemandes et françaises*, ed. Mickaël Augeron and Pascal Even (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010), 45–62.

- 13 On French colonial trade and its legal framework, see Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial*.
- 14 In most of the seventeenth century French Atlantic ports, the export of "traditional" products (wine, salt, cereals) was dominated by foreign interests – and most significantly the Dutch – who had commission merchants in most of these French ports. French merchants were generally in charge of the local trades, or acted as commission merchants, without investing in shipping and the export trade on their own account. For Nantes, see Jean Meyer, *L'armement nantais dans la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Sevpen, 1969); for Saint-Malo, Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo*, 273. For the Dutch trade in French wine, see Henriette de Bruyn Kops, *A spirited exchange: the wine and brandy trade between France and the Dutch Republic in its Atlantic framework, 1600–1650* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007) and Anne Wegener Sleeswijk, *Les vins français aux Provinces-unies au 18^e siècle: négoce, dynamique institutionnelle et la restructuration du marché// Franse wijn in de republiek in de 18^e eeuw: economisch handelen, institutionele dynamiek en de herstructurering van de markt* (unpublished PhD diss., EHESS and the University of Amsterdam, 2006), 3 vols. Competition occasionally led to conflicts, like in Nantes, where demonstrations against Portuguese New Christians (1636–1637) and the Dutch (1640) took place. See Guy Saupin, *Nantes au XVII^e siècle: vie politique et société urbaine* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1996), 247–249.

Using the data we have entered into the online Navigocorpus database,¹⁵ we can provide a global overview of the presence of Dutch ships in France in 1787. Data have been collected for all available clearances (i.e. for a total of 98 French ports, encompassing 80 percent of all clearances in the Channel and Atlantic ports, but only 3 percent of Mediterranean ports). In order to compensate for the absence of equivalent sources on the clearances for French Mediterranean ports, we have also entered into the database all entries from the Health Office data in Marseille (corresponding to 32 percent of all Mediterranean clearances. These entries, however, do cover 80 percent of all non-Spanish foreign ship movements in the French Mediterranean ports).¹⁶ Without being exhaustive, available data for 1787 offer a quite accurate picture of Dutch shipping in France.

The database provides information on 828 Dutch entries or clearances in France, representing a total of 582 different ships. Their tonnage, as far as the information provided in the clearances reveals, is shown in Figure 4.1. We do not have any data on the tonnage of the 33 Dutch ships entering Marseille that year.

Out of 32 different recorded French ports which were frequented by Dutch ships in 1787, information on the main exported item(s) in the cargo is provided for 18 ports only, among which was Bordeaux,¹⁷ but not for the three other main colonial ports. Sugar was on board 105 ships, coffee on 18 additional ships (in 40 instances, coffee is mentioned together

15 On Navigocorpus, see <http://navigocorpus.org/> and <http://navigocorpus.hypotheses.org/>. For a description of the database, see Jean-Pierre Dedieu, et al., "Navigocorpus, a database for shipping information. A methodological and technical introduction," *International Journal of Maritime History* 33, no. 2 (2011): 241–262, and id., "Navigocorpus at work. A brief overview of the potentialities of a database," *International Journal of Maritime History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 331–359.

16 Spanish ships were exempted from some duties, which affects the statistics. A comparison with other statistics shows that between 75 percent and 85 percent of total foreign shipping in Provence was concentrated in Marseille. Ports in the Languedoc (notably Sète) had a total of foreign shipping (Spanish shipping excluded) which, between 1774 and 1790, represented about 15 percent of the corresponding figures for ports in the Provence. Roussillon had hardly any foreign, non-Spanish shipping. See Christian Pfister-Langanay and Silvia Marzagalli, "La navigation des ports français en Méditerranée au XVIII^e siècle: premiers aperçus à partir d'une source inexploitée," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 83 (2011): 273–295.

17 With 16 percent of the known Dutch clearances from France and 26 percent of the total known Dutch tonnage, Bordeaux had 74 of the 121 known Dutch ships exporting French colonial goods.

with sugar). As Figure 4.2 shows, the United Provinces was by far the main destination of these ships.

In Bordeaux, 88 of the 338 ships exporting sugar or coffee abroad in 1787 (26 percent) were Dutch. Figure 4.3 shows the flags and destinations of these ships. As these figures show, most of the Dutch shipping in French colonial goods was bound for the United Provinces, although a part of it was subsequently re-exported to other areas. As far as the Baltic trade is concerned, the online Sound Toll Register provides a complementary picture. A total of 484 ships passed the Sound coming from a French port and bound for the Baltic in 1787.¹⁸ Sixty-eight of them had a captain who declared himself to be living in the United Provinces (14 percent). All of these Dutch ships cleared from a French Atlantic port. Twenty-two of them declared either sugar or coffee on board (nine of which also had indigo as cargo), whereas the French sources in Navigocorpus allowed for the identification of only nine ships bound for the Baltic with colonial goods. Differences with the data contained in Navigocorpus are due to the fact that cargoes are described in much more detail in the Sound Toll registers than in French clearance registers. Moreover, Dutch captains clearing from a French port might have declared a Dutch destination, when they eventually made a stop before crossing the Sound. All but three of these ships entering the Baltic came from Bordeaux. The others cleared from Nantes. With 22 ships out of a total of 158 ships entering the Baltic from a French

FIGURE 4.1 *Total tonnage of Dutch ships clearing French ports in 1787.*

SOURCE: NAVIGOCORPUS DATABASE. [HTTP://NAVIGOCORPUS.ORG/](http://navigocorpus.org/).

18 Two of them in the first week of January 1787, thus with a departure from the French port in 1786.

FIGURE 4.2 *Destination of Dutch ships clearing French Atlantic ports with sugar or coffee on board, 1787.*

SOURCE: NAVIGOCORPUS DATABASE, DATA FROM 18 FRENCH ATLANTIC PORTS.

[HTTP://NAVIGOCORPUS.ORG/](http://NAVIGOCORPUS.ORG/).

FIGURE 4.3 *Total tonnage of the ships clearing Bordeaux with sugar or coffee in 1787, per destination and flag.*

SOURCE: NAVIGOCORPUS DATABASE. [HTTP://NAVIGOCORPUS.ORG/](http://NAVIGOCORPUS.ORG/).

Atlantic port with either sugar or coffee on board, the Dutch owned 14 percent of the ships which carried French colonial re-export trade to this area.¹⁹

This data about 1787 reflects the situation after at least four decades of relative decline in the position held by Dutch shipping in French import and export markets. From his analysis of Bordeaux, Paul Butel showed that Dutch ships represented 65 percent of total foreign tonnage in Bordeaux in 1715, 44 percent in 1746, 29 percent in 1773 and 18 percent in 1787.²⁰ Despite this decline, which is consistent with the general trend in the relative position of the Dutch in the international transport markets, these data show that the Dutch still played a significant role in the re-export trade of French colonial goods at the end of the *ancien régime*, given the fact that colonial trade had increased impressively in the eighteenth century. The position of the Dutch in the re-export markets for French colonial goods, notably in Bordeaux, was still important on the eve of the French Revolution, even if their growth rate was slower than that of other Northern Europeans.²¹ This achievement relied on solid merchant networks which did not require an overly large presence of Dutch middlemen in France. As a matter of fact, the Dutch were only a small community in most major French ports.²²

The Role of Dutch Neutrality and the Necessity of Warfare

The trade relations we have discussed so far concerns peacetime. During peace, the mercantilist system worked at its best, and West Indian products found their way to European consumers through a French port and the concomitant re-export trade. War, however, disrupted peacetime colonial trade

19 All the data on the Sound Toll have been extracted from the Sound Toll Online Database <http://www.soundtoll.nl> (consulted 5 August 2012).

20 Paul Butel, *Les négociants bordelais*, 53.

21 Using the balances of trade, Butel provides some figures of this relative decline both for Bordeaux and for France: Butel, *Les négociants bordelais*, 52–67.

22 For Bordeaux, Voss showed that the Dutch were already outnumbered by Hanseatic merchants by 1715. See Peter Voss, “Une communauté sur le déclin? Les marchands hollandais à Bordeaux, 1650–1715,” *Bulletin du Centre d'Histoire des Espaces Atlantiques* 7 (1995): 33–57. In Marseille, Carrière has identified a total of 22 merchants from the United Provinces and from the Austrian Netherlands between 1715 and 1789. This equaled 22 out of the total of 489 foreigners, which was less than 5 percent. Dutch ships represented almost 12 percent of the total foreign entrances in Marseille. Carrière, *Négociants marseillais*, 1: 273, 584.

and the *système exclusif*. Chased by the British navy and enemy privateers, French ships were no longer able to supply colonists with goods and slaves, nor could they safely carry colonial goods to France. More generally, trade under the French flag during a conflict was dangerous, and this resulted in taking recourse to neutral carriers, among which the Dutch were well-positioned during most of the eighteenth-century conflicts. The Dutch, in fact, consistently carried a portion of the shipping in French metropolitan ports. During the War of the Spanish Succession, France issued, for instance, over 4000 passes to Dutch captains.²³ In order to take part in the colonial trade, merchants and colonists also organized alternative trade routes, and made use of neutral ports. In 1780, for instance, Bordeaux merchant Gradis supplied his plantations in Martinique and Saint-Domingue through St. Eustatius, from which he also dispatched his sugar to London, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam.²⁴ In some instances, such as in 1793, French colonial ports were opened to foreign neutral ships.

Without exploring the role played by Dutch ships and the Dutch colonies in the Americas in warfare any further – not to mention the endemic smuggling which went on even in peacetime with other imperial systems²⁵ – I would instead like to develop some more general reflections on the role played by warfare and neutrality and how these impacted the way Atlantic trade worked.²⁶

Warfare is often considered an exogenous element disrupting the regular course of transatlantic trade. There are at least two reasons which lead me to believe that we should rethink this picture. The first reason is that warfare was just as frequent as peace, and there is no particular reason why we should consider that the latter represents the norm, and that warfare was an exception. Neither was warfare exogenous to the Atlantic system. European empires

23 John S. Bromley, "Le commerce de la France de l'ouest et la guerre maritime," *Annales du Midi* 65 (1953): 49–66 (cited by Carrière, *Négociants marseillais* 1973, 1:498).

24 Paul Butel, *La croissance commerciale bordelaise dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (thèse d'Etat, Lille, Service de reproduction des thèses, 2 vols., 1973), 146–147.

25 See Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, chapter 5; Christian Schnakenbourg, *Les sucreries de la Guadeloupe dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle (1760–1790): contribution à l'étude de la crise de l'économie coloniale à la fin de l'ancien régime* (Thèse d'Etat, Université de Paris II, 1972).

26 I have developed the argument I suggest in this section with more details in a chapter entitled "Is warfare necessary to the functioning 18th century colonial systems? Some reflections on the necessity of cross-imperial and foreign trade in the French case," in *Beyond Empires: Self-Organizing Cross-Imperial Economic Networks versus Institutional Empires, 1500–1800*, ed. Catia Antunes and Amelia Polonia, forthcoming.

in the Americas generated tensions, as states tried to keep their colonies closed to foreigners while, at the same time, trying to penetrate the colonial markets of other European empires. Imperial struggles to take over parts of colonial markets regularly generated warfare. Violence and wars can thus be seen as intrinsic elements of the colonial empires of the early modern European powers.

The second reason why I believe we should try to include war in the narrative of colonial trade is based upon economic considerations. Michel Morineau noticed that in 1788 the United Provinces imported from France twice the value of their exports to France.²⁷ The imbalance was even greater for other Northern European territories, notably for the Hanseatic towns. Morineau suggested that some mechanisms of compensation were necessarily at work, making it possible for the Northern Europeans to withstand a structural imbalance in the long run. Besides insurance and shares in French trade, Morineau pointed to war as the major factor in reestablishing the balance, as international conflicts provoked an increased recourse to neutral shipping on the one hand, and consistent French war expenditures abroad on the other.²⁸ In an Atlantic perspective, warfare could be considered an element which was necessary to equalize imbalances in trade which were generated by the existence of closed imperial systems – systems which obliged colonists to trade exclusively (or mainly²⁹) with the home country. Morineau's interpretation is particularly interesting because it views warfare as a part of a system, and not as an exogenous element interfering with an otherwise progressive exponential growth of trade, as most of French historians have interpreted France eighteenth-century trade.³⁰ Smuggling and interimperial trade might have

27 Michel Morineau, "La vraie nature des choses et leur enchaînement entre la France, les Antilles et l'Europe (XVII^e–XIX^e siècle)," *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer* 84, no. 314 (1997): 3–24, 15–19.

28 Morineau, "La vraie nature," 18.

29 In the British case, a limited trade in non-enumerated goods with extra-imperial countries was authorized. For the role played by Southern Europe in the balance of trade of the thirteen North American British colonies before 1776, see John McCusker, "Worth a War? The Importance of the Trade between British America and the Mediterranean," *Research in Maritime History* 44 (2010): 7–24. See also James G. Lydon, "Fish and Flour for Gold: Southern Europe and the Colonial American Balance of Payments," *Business History Review* 39 (1965): 171–183.

30 On the traditional interpretations of French eighteenth-century colonial trade and the impact of the Revolution on it, including a possible alternative interpretative framework, see Silvia Marzagalli, "Le négoce maritime et la rupture révolutionnaire: un ancien débat revisité," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 352, no. 2 (2008): 183–207.

played an analogous role in peacetime by providing a balance in an international system of exchange. More globally, compensation mechanisms could follow complex patterns of multilateral relations, including both colonial and international trade.³¹ This is not to say that such processes were consciously put into being by precise identifiable actors. Rather, I am suggesting that the system based on theoretically closed imperial systems could last for over a century because of its structural leaks (smuggling) and because of readjustments of imbalances caused by warfare.

The French colonial and re-export trade allowed France to compensate for trade imbalances with Great Britain, Central Europe and Asia in peacetime. By imposing limitations on colonial trade and forcing it to pass through French ports, however, the mercantilist system generated other imbalances (notably between France and Northern Europe). Warfare might have served as an overall adjustment variable which contributed frequently enough to recalibrate the system, especially given the fact that these Northern European countries were generally neutral and took advantage of warfare to increase their trade and shipping substantially. In this sense, the policy of neutrality adopted by the United Provinces during most of eighteenth-century conflicts was crucial, and its case is comparable to the Hanseatic city of Hamburg. Conflicts, however, also led to the progressive loss of France's first colonial empire (1713, 1763, 1804, 1815), thus emphasizing a further element of its fragility. Other elements were increasing colonial debts, decreasing profit margins, and the deportation of an increasing number of captives, which meant that on the eve of the Haitian Revolution the majority of slaves in Saint-Domingue were born in Africa, and, therefore, less integrated into the colonial society than were West-Indian born slaves.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed a few ways in which the Dutch played a role in the emergence and viability of French colonial trade from the second part of the seventeenth century up to the French Revolution. This role evolved over time.

31 On this point, as far as the Dutch and British trade in the Baltic is concerned, see Karin Newman, "Anglo-Dutch Commercial Co-operation and the Russia Trade in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Interactions of Amsterdam and Antwerp with the Baltic region, 1400–1800*, ed. W.J. Wieringa (Leiden: M. Nijhoff, 1983), 95–103. On the role of Amsterdam for the English payments for their Baltic trade, see also Artur Attman, "English trade balances in the Baltic during the eighteenth century," in *Britain and the Northern Seas: some essays* (Proceedings of the 4th Conference of the Association for the History of the Northern Seas), ed. Walter Minchinton (Pontefract: Lofthouse, 1985), 43–52, esp. 45.

Whereas Dutch capital proved essential for the rise of French-based shipping to the West Indies, the Dutch were thereafter essential mainly for organizing a flourishing re-export trade of colonial goods from the French ports to the United Provinces on Dutch ships. The exclusion of the Dutch from direct trade to French America was less effective in wartime, when French colonies might be opened up to neutral trade. More significantly, the exclusive colonial system created by France was viable in the long run only if some mechanisms compensated for the structural imbalance of trade it generated. The United Provinces is a case in point – although not the only one – to test the hypothesis that war played a central role. I did not aim to be exhaustive in any of my considerations of these elements. Further research is badly needed. Nor could I examine all possible aspects of the questions I raised. Some of them have been neglected, such as the role played by Amsterdam as a major international financial center for remittances and payments and as an insurance market for shipping, which was essential in enabling international trade and shipping.

The aim of this chapter was to present a case study. Atlantic imperial systems – taking for granted that they existed – cannot be studied as atomized, disconnected entities. To understand the way they worked we must adopt a systemic approach. In order to stress this point here, I have deliberately and artificially constrained the “French Atlantic” within the framework of the French colonial mercantilist system, without even examining its leaks and constant compromises at the local, colonial level. Nor have I discussed the way French merchants profited on the margins of it, while at the same time they lobbied for the maintenance of protective legislation.³² The point I make is that French colonial trade originated, flourished and persisted only through the collaboration of non-French merchants and the existence of non-French markets, among which the Dutch and the United Provinces were a vital

32 I am referring for instance to the attitude of French merchants toward the United States market after the independence: while they complained bitterly for the moderate opening of the French West Indies to North American ships, they also fitted out their own ships to the United States and the West Indies to optimize profit opportunities in such triangular ventures. Gaston Martin, “Commercial relations between Nantes and the American Colonies during the War of Independence,” *Journal of Economic and Business History* 4 (1931–1932): 815–820; see also Silvia Marzagalli, *Bordeaux et les États-Unis, 1776–1815: politique et stratégies négociantes dans la genèse d'un réseau commercial* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), chapter 2. On the attitude of French merchants and industrialists toward the French state, see Jean-Pierre Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce. Entreprise et institution dans la région lilloise (1780–1860)* (Paris: EHESS, 1991); Jean-Pierre Hirsch and Philippe Minard, “Laissez-nous faire et protégez-nous beaucoup: pour une histoire des pratiques institutionnelles dans l'industrie française,” in *La France n'est-elle pas douée pour l'industrie?*, ed. Louis Bergeron and Patrice Bourdelais (Paris: Belin, 1998), 135–158.

element, but certainly not the only one, and actually no longer the most dynamic as time passed. In order to move beyond this general picture, we need to investigate far more sources, including the private papers of merchants and the records left in notarial archives. Only then can we shed new light on the fascinating historiographical questions about neutrality, trans-imperial trade, and constantly reconfigured merchant networks.