Networks

Aske Laursen Brock

On November 9 1666, during the second Anglo-Dutch war, a ship chartered by the English East India Company arrived in Surat, India. On board were valuable commodities, bullion and letters from home. The directors in London wrote annual letters to their employees setting forth the coming year's commercial strategy and often instilling the need for better book keeping to the people on the ground in India.¹ Letters flowing back and forth between England and the overseas were integral for the corporations' constant processes of negotiation with their employees, foreign merchants and states. As well as the official letters, employees also often received personal letters from loved ones, business partners and individuals hoping to be paid or find employment. This Friday in 1666, the president of the East India Company's affairs in Surat, Sir George Oxenden, received numerous letters from his contacts in England. A letter from his sister Elizabeth Dalyson came to him "by the hands of Mr Abraham Papillon, Brother to our Friend Mr Thomas Papillon."² In the letter, she mentioned that all commodities – musk and ambergris – that Oxenden sent back had arrived safely, and asked him to greet all her friends and family in Surat. Their network spanned the globe and they made their fortune in all corners of the world, though particularly Asia proved to be a good place for the Oxenden family.³ The trading corporations that made these encounters possible were amalgamations of numerous networks and through their unique constitutions and jurisdictional latitude they created durable market spaces across the globe shaping lives and careers of English and non-Europeans alike.

Besides a letter from Dalyson, Abraham Papillon delivered a letter from his aforementioned brother Thomas Papillon. Papillon, Dalyson and Oxenden were members of a network consisting of important EIC personnel trading in

1 See for instance British Library (from here on BL) IOR E/3/89, f. 15–16, f. 248. In the Levant, under the jurisdiction of the regulated Levant Company, the letters more often revolved around the spending of the Ambassador in Constantinople, who the company had to support. See for instance, National Archives (from here on TNA) SP105/151, f. 121.

2 BL Add Ms 40700, [undated, pre. March 1666], Elizabeth Dalyson to George Oxenden.

3 The familial success was expressed by Elizabeth Oxenden, a relative to George Oxenden and Elizabeth Dalyson, in 1677, see BL IOR MS EUR/E210/1, f. 7.

various goods between Surat and London.⁴ Their trade was private, but the company provided a needed framework within which they could build and expand their network. This particular letter, however, was explicitly not about their commercial interests but rather an introduction of Abraham. Through his family connections, he was first apprenticed to a master in York, but was mistreated and left his place without becoming a freeman. Instead, he returned to London and moved in with his newlywed brother Thomas, who soon found space to be scarce and sought to send Abraham to Barbados.⁵ Initially, the unfortunate Abraham was successful in the Caribbean, but the Anglo-Dutch war put an end to his success when Michel de Ruyter swept away all he had built up on the Caribbean island of Nevis. For a new start, Abraham Papillon was “willing to make one voyage to the East Indies” in order to “give an experiment of his skill and knowledge in order some further advancement.”⁶ After numerous trials and tribulations, he found himself in India, recommended by two central agents in a private trade network, and hoped to be employed in Asia. He pursued his success on three different continents using and building global contacts as he went along networking along the way. Networks working under the larger durable carapace of corporations spanned the globe in the early modern period and created lasting impacts domestically and globally.

Defining Corporate Global Networks

Why are corporate networks particularly useful for understanding the global perspectives of the past? They illustrate the messiness and complexities of early modern life better than binary depictions of global interactions. Investigating corporate global social networks makes it possible to see beyond the simple existence of community and gauge the reasons for the behaviour and decisions of individuals.⁷ The early modern world consisted of a variety of overlapping messy entangled networks formed within companies and corporations. The corporate world was expanding rapidly and during the seventeenth and

4 This incarnation of the network consisted of George Oxenden, who was the EIC president in Surat, his sister Elizabeth Dalyson, the EIC directors Christopher Boone, John Paige, Thomas Papillon and his partner Josiah Child.

5 Kent History and Library Centre (KHLIC) U1015/C1 1650 January 12th London, Thomas Papillon to David Papillon.

6 BL Add Ms 40700, f. 67

7 Barry Wellman and Charles Wetherell, “Social Network Analysis of Historical Communities: Some Questions from the Present for the Past,” *The History of the Family* 1, no. 1 (1996): 114–15.

eighteenth century, the companies grew at a greater rate than the state, and, as a result, corporations were at the forefront of interactions between Britain and the world. Networks show the nuances of society via the corporations they debated and promoted corporate governance globally.⁸ The corporations, who, through their inclusion of people from all tiers of society, with different religions and different cultural understanding of economy, possessed the necessary constitutional latitude to negotiate the processes of early globalisation.

Corporate networks illustrate the importance of both large united bodies and individuals' decisions within the budding empires that were emerging from the "overlapping and intersecting worlds of commercial and colonial enterprises and the transoceanic global perspectives that men derived through their travels from one ocean basin to another."⁹ They make it possible to understand the relationships between individuals, institutions and geographies, they can be used to link the micro and macro levels, and make sense out of individual and institutional behaviour.¹⁰ They dictate and are dictated by the behaviour of the corporations and the influence the interactions with people overseas. The study of corporate global networks make it possible to not only link micro and macro levels, they also make it possible to acknowledge the agency and entrepreneurship of previously marginalised people – in European historiography – like women and non-European agents.¹¹ Networks and

- 8 Phil Withington, "Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1027; Keith Wrightson, "Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England," in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Steve Hindle, and Adam Fox (Basingstoke: Routledge, 1996), 11.
- 9 Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.
- 10 Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 22.
- 11 The role and agency of women in commercial networks is discussed well in for instance Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Laura Gowing, "Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 3 (2016); Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). The literature on cooperation between Europeans and non-Europeans are ever increasing. For overseas networks see for instance Ashin Das Gupta, *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Søren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London 1660–1740* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C. A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy in Early Modern India," in *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India*, ed. Sanjay Subrahmanyam

corporations circumvent binary explanations of European domination and nuances our understanding of the world. Similar to a chain not being stronger than its weakest link: the biggest and the smallest node in a network all have roles to play.

In 2005, David Hancock lamented that networks permeated all corners of historical research as well as other disciplines increasingly watering down the usefulness of the term. Historians working with networks, according to Hancock, “tend to celebrate networks as flexible, “organic,” and egalitarian,” while overlooking the potential contemporary downsides of networks.¹² However, network as an analytical concept refuses to die. Historians continue to use social networks as focal points for their research. By focusing on these networks, it is possible to look beyond the customary linear narrative of history and appreciate geographical as well as spatial nuances.¹³ The companies were at the centre of these networks and were instrumental in creating an early modern English society “bound together by ties of obligation which linked individuals at the inter-personal level and also connected companies, investors, and the government.”¹⁴ The durability of corporate networks – both urban and commercial corporation – meant that corporation as a format was integral in English state formation. The individuals who in one way or another participated in corporate life were active agents in what Phil Withington has referred to as the “national incorporation” shaping the English state in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ The incorporation was not only national; through the corporate expansion overseas, it became a global phenomenon.

Francesca Trivellato has presented a very concise definition of the core values in commercial social networks in her book *Familiarity of Strangers*. Drawing on social network methodology, she argued that we should view cross cultural business relations as the “creative combination of group discipline,

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Haneda Masashi, ed. *Asian Port Cities 1600–1800: Local and Foreign Cultural Interactions* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009); Bhaswati Bhattacharya, Gita Dharampal-Frick, and Jos Gommans, “Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (1500–2000),” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2/3 (2007).

12 David Hancock, “The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots’ Early- Modern Madeira Trade,” *Business History Review* 79 (2005): 469.

13 Natasha Glaisyer, “Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth- Century British Empire,” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2004): 475.

14 “Calculating Credibility: Print Culture, Trust and Economic Figures in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *Economic History Review* 60, no. 4 (2007): 708.

15 Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 217–18.

contractual obligations and customary norms, political protection, and discursive conventions.”¹⁶ Using this definition, Trivellato argued for the importance of ties cutting across families and religion. To formalise ties and reduce transaction costs, the corporate format was ideal to perpetrate cross-cultural trade. Corporations were important agents for creating durable ties based on credit, obligations and norms across the globe. It is necessary to add time to the definition as this is a crucial element to appreciate the importance of global corporate networks. For it to be a network rather than a casual encounter, a commercial network need to be “a group of people who are in contact consistently over a sustained time period through commercial interests and actions, having as a common goal the desire to profit economically from commercial activities.”¹⁷ The corporation, with its larger body of support and increasing bureaucracy, was designed to develop consistent contact over a sustained period of time.¹⁸ By combining the different definitions above, with their respective caveats, this chapter defines corporate networks as durable, often cross-cultural, global connections formed under a larger multi-institutional umbrella.

Though the emphasis on the importance of networks for understanding history is not new, networks have become increasingly popular to explain the early modern world and the development of European empires. The aim has been to provide context, nuance and texture to European expansion through a focus on the “overlapping and intersecting works of commercial and colonial enterprises and the transoceanic perspective”.¹⁹ Unlike networks, corporations are rarely the protagonists of global history. More often than not, the corporations have been cast as antagonists in global history creating impermeable networks excluding the large parts of commercial society.²⁰ Instead the role as protagonist is more likely taken up by families or loosely connected associates. The agency of individuals, interlopers and free agents has been viewed as paramount in driving globalisation forward.²¹ The family networks and networks

16 Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 16.

17 Maria Fusaro, “Cooperating Mercantile Networks in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Economic History Review* 65, no. 2 (2012): 702.

18 For the connection between commerce, trans-regional and temporal space see Bhat-tacharya, Dharampal-Frick, and Gommans, “Spatial and Temporal.”

19 Games, *Web of Empire*, 7.

20 See in particular Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003), 51–91.

21 David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); “A World of Business to Do”: William Freeman and the Foundations of England's Commercial Empire, 1645–1707,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2000); Rothschild, *Inner Life*.

of associates has inspired a global microhistory focusing on the ties between individuals across the globe, which, through their networks made it possible to connect micro- and macrohistories “by the history of the individuals’ own connections.”²² The efforts of early free traders and individual merchants have been perceived as the primary driving force behind the political economy.²³ However, these networks – family networks and business partnerships – did not leave the same global traces as the corporation. For better or worse. It was incredibly difficult to create a personal network that survived on a global scale much longer than one generation during the early modern period. Recently, the question of private and corporate networks has been nuanced by utilizing social network methodology to demonstrate a significantly more nuanced image of the corporate world. In the case of the East India Company, their networks “stretched beyond the merchant network that belonged to it, into the wider commercial community and groups at Court around the Crown.”²⁴ Corporate networks were flexible and durable making them ideal tools for building empires.

Corporate networks relied on the relationship between the company in the metropole, the employees abroad and local partners as well as different cross-cultural brokers. Alison Games pointed out that companies and increasing cosmopolitanism were central for English expansion, demonstrating how companies and their overseas endeavours formed an ever-tighter global web. In *Web of Empire*, she provides fascinating details about how the Virginia Company’s development in America was influenced not only by the English experience

For a framework considering free agents and informal, self-organising and networked empire see Catia Antunes, “Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis,” *Portuguese Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012).

- 22 Rothschild, *Inner Life*, 7. For further examples of the global microhistories see for instance, see for instance Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?,” *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011); *The Familiarity of Strangers*; Tonio Andrade, “A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory,” *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (London: Faber, 2008).
- 23 Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chp. 3. Recently, individual agency and corporate ideas have been combined in an attempt to explain the development of the English colonial state in India as well as the development of the African Slave Trade, see William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2013); David Veevers, “‘Inhabitants of the Universe’: Global Families, Kinship Networks, and the Formation of the Early Modern Colonial State in Asia,” *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 1 (2015).
- 24 Edmond J. Smith, “Networks of the East India Company, C. 1600–1625” (Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, 2016), 103.

in Ireland, but also by individuals with experience from the Mediterranean and from the Levant Company.²⁵ Similarly, Susanah Romney has recently emphasised that early Dutch colonial success in the Americas relied on intimate networks. These networks – consisting of rich (or at least middling) and poor, men and women, European, slaves and natives – constituted empire rather than formal structures or metropolitan authorities.²⁶ Nonetheless, they were working within, worth, alongside and against the companies. The companies, themselves structures of relations, provided a dynamic space for interaction making the members express their agency “by creatively interpreting their circumstances, which in turn affects the course of action individuals choose.”²⁷ By understanding the agency of individuals it becomes possible to investigate how different members of the companies influenced decision making. The private networks, encouraged by the semi-decentralised structures, which in particular English trading companies effectively were, allowed local knowledge to filter into their knowledge base, which, perhaps inadvertently, improved the companies’ performances.²⁸

The corporations in turn functioned as an umbrella for many other networks and new connections were formed and shaped.²⁹ Through shared interests and overlapping personnel the corporations became stronger. Like modern day trading corporations, interlocks (executive personnel serving on multiple boards) between different companies were not infrequent.³⁰ Studies of decision-making in modern companies have shown that the corporate interlock and learning in networks were essential in, among other things, acquisitions and strategic decisions because interlocking directors bring their

25 Games, *Web of Empire*, 54–56.

26 Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 18–22.

27 Emily Erikson, “Formalist and Relationalist Theory in Social Network Analysis,” *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 3 (2013): 222.

28 “Formalist and Relationalist,” 77; Edmond J. Smith, “The Global Interests of London’s Commercial Community, 1599–1625: Investment in the East India Company,” *Economic History Review* (2018).

29 See for instance Aske Laursen Brock and William A. Pettigrew, “Leadership and the Social Agendas of the Seventeenth Century English Trading Corporation,” in *From Public Interest to Private Profit: The Changing Political and Social Legitimacy of International Business* ed. William A. Pettigrew and David Chan Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

30 The total number of directors serving on the board of multiple English overseas trading companies across the seventeenth century was 241 (20%). This indicates relatively high levels of experience sharing and network building across companies. The calculation is based on the “First Multinationals Database.” See Aske Laursen Brock, “The Company Director: Commerce, State, and Society” (University of Kent, 2017), 34–37.

experiences with them to the new company.³¹ The initial strategies of the East India Company were influenced by the expanding investor community in the early seventeenth century and the Royal African Company similarly grew out existing groups of directors.³² As fleeting connections and simple partnerships between merchants solidified, their behaviour became routinized and the previous loose connections could be transformed into chartered corporations.

Trust, Credit and Transaction Costs

Trust is one of the most central concepts in networks; without trust and credit there was no basis to build a network on.³³ As Craig Muldrew influentially argued “the early modern economy was a system of cultural, as well as material, exchanges in which the central mediating factor was credit or trust.”³⁴ Credit and trust were closely linked to the individuals and could be seen as an expression of “the opinion of their capacity, industry and honesty.”³⁵ As the commerce came to span more and more of the known world, the trust similarly had to expand across the globe. Moreover, the networks of trust had to encompass more than British merchants; they also had to be extended to local merchants. According to eighteenth century writers, it seemed that trust was intimately

31 Christine M. Beckman and Pamela R. Haunschild, “Network Learning: The Effects of Partners’ Heterogeneity of Experience on Corporate Acquisitions,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2002): 93. The influence of the directors differed depending on their background within their first company, and whether they had first or second-hand experience, Anja Tuschke, William Gerard Sanders, and Exequiel Hernandez, “Whose Experience Matters in the Boardroom? The Effects of Experiential and Vicarious Learning on Emerging Market Entry,” *Strategic Management Journal* 35, no. 3 (2014): 399.

32 Smith, “Global Interests.”; Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt*.

33 See for instance Natasha Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660–1720* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006); Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks*, ed. Royal Historical Society (London: Royal Historical Society, 2010); Avner Greif, “Reputation and Coalitions in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders,” *The Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (1989); Thomas Leng, “‘A Potent Plantation Well Armed and Policed’: Huguenots, the Hartlib Circle, and British Colonization in the 1640s,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2009); Esther Sahle, “Quakers, Coercion, and Pre-Modern Growth: Why Friends’ Formal Institutions for Contract Enforcement Did Not Matter for Early Modern Trade Expansion,” *The Economic History Review* 71, no. 2 (2018).

34 Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: New York: Macmillan, 1998), 4.

35 Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (1763), 548.

connected the nationality, ethnicity and religion of people. To some commentators, foreigners and people of different religious persuasions could not be trusted.³⁶ In the early age of globalisation, however, there was little choice but to extend the networks across the globe if one wanted to participate in the emerging global market. The solution to the lack of trust and limited credit in cross-cultural trade was primarily to expand commerce through either kinship networks, incorporated entities or both.³⁷

The companies were commonwealths constructed by the social networks of their members, but equally had to rely on credit and trust; the charters and bonds were not enough. A central issue for the companies' expansion overseas – particularly for the directors in London who wanted to optimise their overseas governance and their business – was the asymmetric flows of information from overseas to London.³⁸ This issue did not only arise within companies, but unlike kinship networks, the companies relied on a different kind of trust. As Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas has pointed out, the relationship between directors in London and their managers on the ground abroad was a key reason for the ultimate collapse of the chartered companies.³⁹ The companies were aware this and attempted different methods to ensure the faithfulness of their managers such as employing people of the same nationality.⁴⁰ The flows of information was essential to secure companies' profit and people with experience from the different corners of the globe were therefore of great importance. They had the necessary experience of conditions and personal connections to influence the decisions of the companies.

36 *Universal Dictionary* 761.

37 Lamikiz, *Spanish Merchants*, 10. There are certain overlaps between the two: families invested together and trade together in the companies. For instance the influential mercantile author Lewes Roberts, a leading member of both the Levant and East India Company, ensured that both his sons, William and Gabriel, found their way into corporate trade.

38 For the asymmetric information flow and managing the manager, see Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Managing the Manager: An Application of the Principal Agent Model to the Hudson's Bay Company," *Oxford Economic Papers* 45, no. 2 (1993): 245–49. For the companies' attempt to improve overseas bureaucracy see Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Chapter 3.

39 Carlos and Nicholas, "Managing the Manager," 255.

40 Such as employing agents from Orkney as the Hudson's Bay Company did from the beginning of the 1680s, "Managing the Manager," 254. Alternatively relying on respected brokers could be a solution, see Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "Making Money at the Blessed Place of Manila: Armenians in the Madras–Manila Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 1 (2008): 5.

There is little discussion that the innovation of trading companies from the mid-sixteenth century onwards depersonalised trade. However, as Maria Fusaro has argued “family was still the default mechanism of business partnerships and, even at the level of salaried agents of English trading.”⁴¹ Family networks spanning the globe were a “multiplier effects of empire, in which individuals at home were connected, by information and expectations to events in the East and West Indies.”⁴² The trust between family members meant that the networks could spread at a quicker pace and disseminate knowledge, ideas and expectations globally. At times, family networks and patrimonial ties are quite obviously connected. In her book the *Familial State*, Julia Adams demonstrated the close links between chartered companies – In this case the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) – family networks and state formation. While the English and French East India Companies struggled against outside interest groups, the Dutch company “landed squarely in the laps of the ruling city burgomasters’ family factions.”⁴³ Though the English did not have the same degree of family dominance in their trades, family networks were one of the many integral networks constituting the trading corporations.⁴⁴

A number of English company servants who served abroad continued to have personal interests after their return to Europe, which meant they continued to rely on both their successors and their local contacts. For instance, William Langhorn and Streynsham Master were both Company Presidents in Madras in 1670s, but were dismissed once their contract ran out. In 1698, the former interloper Thomas Pitt became president of the company’s operations in Madras, which meant Langhorn and Master came to rely on him to continue their business. That proved tricky at times. In October 1701, Pitt informed Master that one of the merchants Master had done business with, a diamond merchant named Vydapa, had died and the investment was lost. Pitt blamed Master’s closest local broker, Surapa, for the loss of Master’s commodities and the issue could only be resolved if Pitt could find the papers Master left in Madras.⁴⁵ However, Master was not satisfied with the developments. In a letter, he

41 Fusaro, “Cooperating,” 703.

42 Rothschild, *Inner Life*, 2.

43 Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 82. For the influence of family networks in the early years of the VOC, see also Oscar Gelderblom, ed. *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

44 David Veevers, “‘The Company as Their Lords and the Deputy as a Great Rajah’: Imperial Expansion and the English East India Company on the West Coast of Sumatra, 1685–1730,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 5 (2013); “Global Families.”

45 BL Add Ms 22844, f. 38–40.

expressed his puzzlement over Pitt's handling of the situation because "Surapa in his letter by the Dutches gives me hopes of recovering some of them [diverse goods]."⁴⁶ By maintaining his connections with his local partner, Master gained an advantage and did not have to rely solely on information from Pitt. The network he had started during his time as a company employee served him well.⁴⁷ Langhorne, on the other hand, was more forgiving of Pitt's endeavours as he was familiar with the "distempers those parts are lyable to."⁴⁸ The flows of information from multiple sources combined with mutual trust made the corporations flexible and individuals rich.

Corporations and Broker Networks

As exemplified by Master, Pitt and Langhorne, to conduct trade successfully far from British shores, be it in Africa, Asia or America, company personnel and private merchants relied heavily on local cooperation.⁴⁹ In Qing China, the European companies were limited to ply their trade in a small area of Canton (modern day Guangzhou). As a result, they had to develop strong ties to the different *Hong* merchants, who were the only merchants allowed to trade with the Europeans. The Canton system and the network between merchants, translators and the companies developed due to the sustained period of trade and the companies' ability to submit to foreign rulers.⁵⁰ The Indian merchant Kasi Viranna is one famous example of Anglo-Indian cooperation and of the

46 BL Add Ms 22852, f. 30.

47 Surapa was served less well as he was among the Indian merchants bankrupted through his connection to the English company, see S. Arasaratnam, "Indian Merchants and Their Trading Methods (Circa 1700)," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 3, no. 1 (1966): 88–89.

48 BL Add Ms 22852, f. 149. At this point, Langhorne and Pitt belonged to the "old" company, while Master belonged to the "new" company, which might have influence their relationship. However, even though they represented different companies they still relied on each other as part of a larger network.

49 For the necessity of local trading partners in Africa see Robin Law, *The English in West Africa, 1681–1683*, ed. Robin Law, *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

50 For the European and Asian interaction in Canton see Haneda Masashi, "Canton, Nagasaki and the Port Cities of the Indian Ocean: A Comparison," in *Asian Port Cities 1600–1800: Local and Foreign Cultural Interactions*, ed. Haneda Masashi (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009); Liu Yong, "The Commercial Culture of the VOC in Canton in the Eighteenth Century," in *Asian Port Cities 1600–1800: Local and Foreign Interactions*, ed. Haneda Masashi (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009); Lisa Hellman, "Navigating the Foreign Quarters: Everyday Life of the Swedish East India

global expansion of networks.⁵¹ Throughout his career, he worked with at least four presidents of the East India Company in Madras, who all relied on him but also suffered from the connection: the company was not pleased with the relationship between its employees in India and Viranna.⁵² He was to some extent unique – few contemporary merchants seem to have had a similar reach and prominence – but networks were shaped by seemingly insignificant actors as well and the companies relied on them too.

The English companies, during most of the period 1550–1750, were in a relatively weak position compared to the empires with whom they were trading. Massacres of personnel by either former local trading partners or follow Europeans were an inherent danger of early commercial expansion.⁵³ Dangers like this were a strong argument for incorporating networks instead of working in smaller partnerships. In the tumultuous 1640s, a loosely connected group of English investors attempted to settle Madagascar with little success. This was partly due to the lack of corporate back up and partly due to some rather clumsy interactions with the locals. In 1646, two years after the adventure had begun, John Smart, who was elected governor of the prospective Madagascar colony, had to petition the East India Company to be transported back to England.⁵⁴ Commercial networks and associations could carry a trade a short

Company Employees in Canton and Macao 1730–1830" (PhD, University of Stockholm, 2015), particularly chapter 3.

- 51 Viranna has been the subject of a number of studies recently, see Yogesh Sharm, "A Life of Many Parts: Kasi Viranna; a Seventeenth Century South Indian Merchant Magnate," *The Medieval History Journal*, no. 1 (1998); Ogborn, *Global Lives*; Aske Laursen Brock, "Asian Influences on the Commercial Strategies of the English East India Company," in *The East India Company, 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian Connection*, ed. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Michael Wagner, "The East India Company and the Shift in Anglo-Indian Commercial Relations in the 1680s," in *The East India Company 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian Connection*, ed. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2016).
- 52 See for instance the 1681 letter from the Court of directors in London demanding that the overseas employees stop working with him (however, he was already dead by then), BL IOR Ms EUR/E210/2: f. 239–241. For other powerful contemporary agents in Asia, Subrahmanyam and Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists."; Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat C. 1700–1750," in *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics* ed. Ashin Das Gupta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 53 See for instance Danny Wong Tze-Ken, "The Destruction of the English East India Company Factory on Condore Island, 1702–1705," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 5 (2012); Alison Games, "Violence on the Fringes: The Virginia (1622) and Amboyna (1623) Massacres," *History* 99, no. 336 (2014); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 304–07.
- 54 BL Add Ms 14037, f. 42. For English attempts of early colonisation in Africa see, Edmond J. Smith, "'Canaanising Madagascar': Africa in English Imperial Imagination, 1635–1650,"

distance, or for a shorter period, but for settling overseas diplomacy, the jurisdictional evasiveness and integrative nature corporation provided a much needed framework for formalising ties.⁵⁵

English companies sought to tie networks of brokers and local merchants to their corporate entities during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In London, the directors of the different companies were more hesitant of the reliance and relationship on brokers. In 1675, the EIC directors wrote to their employee John Child in Rajapore to complain about how “[the factors] have childishly trusted the information of their Brokers, the noyse & stink of dancing women haveing as wee understand put serious business out of their heads.”⁵⁶ One way to improve the relationship between brokers and company was by incorporating the loosely connected local trading partners. For both the Levant Company and the East India Company, the Armenian diaspora were an important trading partner.⁵⁷ For the East India Company, working with the Armenians gave them a chance to rid themselves of “Those knavish linguists and brokers that have been nursed up in the time of the late agents.”⁵⁸ Throughout the early modern period, broker networks were of the greatest importance for global trade.

In 1688, while the East India Company and Levant Company were struggling internally over the silk trade, the East India Company attempted to gain an advantage by making a formal agreement with the leaders of the Armenians in Isfahan, Persia.⁵⁹ The deal was proposed after lengthy debates between the deputy governor, Sir Josiah Child, and Coja Panous Calendar, “an Armenian merchant of eminence.”⁶⁰ It was a favourable deal designed to lead the Armenians’ India and Persia trade through England and circumventing Aleppo, a central trading hub for the Levant Company, in exchange for low customs, freedom to live in company settlements, freedom of religion and freedom to

Itinerario 39, no. Special Issue 02 (2015). The people behind the colony had connections to the East India Company, but lacked the understanding of colonisation in Africa.

55 See the introduction to this volume.

56 BL IOR G/3/7, f. 67.

57 Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Chapter 3 and 4.

58 BL IOR E/3/92, f. 82.

59 An excellent sourcebook for the relationship between the English East India Company and the Armenians have been published by the late Vahé Baladouni and Margaret Makepeace, “Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 88, no. 5 (1998).

60 BL IOR B/39, p. 133.

pass and repass on the company's ships. The Armenians were trusted brokers and could play a crucial role "for the better encouragement of that nation to settle and cohabit in the several garrisons, cities and towns in the East Indies under our jurisdiction."⁶¹ The English company hoped to formalise the networks they had built up over the years through a formal agreement. Beside the hope circumventing the Levant Company, the hope was also to gain better understanding of the intricate dealings at the Mughal Court where the East India Company was struggling greatly at the times. Instead of continuing to do business as usual, the directors in London encouraged to heed the advice of aforementioned Coja Panous Calendar who was going to settle in Fort St George on the Coromandel Coast.⁶² After trading closely with the Armenian merchants, the East India Company wished to tie them closer to the corporate body. The continuous connections between company and broker as well as connections between individuals created a durable network.

Incorporating Local Partners

Though the Armenian merchants initially preferred to be free to trade with whomever they pleased rather than being limited to one company, the agreement between the East India Company and the Armenian merchants shaped the governance in Madras.⁶³ Simultaneously with this attempt to create a sustained network, the East India Company was engaged in another attempt to incorporate the globe. In 1688, the East India Company sought to incorporate Madras using Portsmouth as a model. In connection with this, the company in London wrote to Fort St George and reminded their employees that the local citizens "shall forever remain in the same freedome, as if they were English men borne, and enjoy a perpetuall liberty as to their religion and Property as to their Inheritances [...] but they must never expect to be freer than all free men are in England."⁶⁴ The corporate format should give the same rights in India as in England and ensure some form of representation of everyone involved. The aldermen of the city included the different casts, Jewish inhabitants, Armenians, Portuguese and English.⁶⁵ This meant incorporating the diverse

61 BL IOR B/39, p. 135.

62 BL IOR E/3/91, f. 281.

63 BL IOR E/3/53, f. 90–92.

64 BL IOR E/3/91, f. 137.

65 See Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–98.

powerful ethno-religious networks into a new entity creating an innovative corporate hybrid. At a time when religious dissent was illegal or severely questioned in England, the hybridity was a significant innovation.⁶⁶

This hybrid was more successful than the joint stock attempted in the aftermath of Kasi Viranna's demise in Madras. In the hope of not having to rely on a single merchant again and to create a more advantageous position for the East India Company, local merchants were convinced or coerced to operate in a form of joint stock around 1700. The merchants had the monopoly on supplying the English company with goods while the English were guaranteed a set price. The result for the local merchants was disaster and imprisonment when they ended in debt to the company.⁶⁷ William Langhorne, himself a former president in Madras, heard of the collapse of the smaller joint stock company in Madras through Thomas Pitt and was convinced that the lack of success was due to the quality of the Madras merchants. Kasi Viranna and Beri Timmana, two of the most influential merchants of their generation, came from a lowly background (according to Langhorne); they worked hard to earn their living. The descendants failed because they were brought up in plenty and were born "with higher stomachs," and with less intelligence for the corporate trade.⁶⁸ Solidifying commercial networks into a corporation was not always an advantage for all partners. In the fortified cities in India, the merchants were more at mercy of the English whereas the Armenian merchants were dispersed over a large area and had multiple trading partners across the world and did not have to rely on the goodwill of the English. The attempts in India to incorporate looser networks into a solid corporate structure consisting of multiple networks was the acknowledgement of the usefulness, flexibility and durability of the corporation in England. However, across the globe the corporations had to adjust and take onboard lessons from locals and European.

Conclusion

The period between 1550 and 1750 was one of rapid globalisation; the British Isles benefitted more than most from this. From being an insignificant kingdom on the western frontier of Europe, England and later Great Britain grew to

66 For this flexibility see William A. Pettigrew, "Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History," *Itinerario* 39, no. 03 (2015): 500–01. See also Haig Smith's contribution in this volume.

67 Arasaratnam, "Indian Merchants," 88–90.

68 BL Add Ms 22852, f. 149.

be arguably the most powerful empire in the world aided greatly by the many different corporations and global networks. Of course, networks then as now, exist beyond corporations and official institutions. However, the corporations created an opportunity to form lasting connections in distant countries. Kinship networks, business associations as well as commercial networks bound up on religion alone were vulnerable abroad. The Oxenden/Master family lost its footing in India in the latter seventeenth century, Viranna's business empire crumpled after his death and the attempts to colonise Madagascar by a smaller associations were unsuccessful. However, when these networks were solidified alongside other networks within corporations, they became more durable. Between 1550 and 1750, the corporations' networks continued to expand across the Levant, Africa and Asia. The corporations' autonomous global nature integrated British and local trading partners in durable networks and, inadvertently, formed hybridised global corporations.

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