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CHAPTER 2

Trans-Imperial and Cross-Cultural Networks for the Slave Trade, 1580s–1800s

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva

Introduction

Most of the historiography on European engagement in the hideous transatlantic slave trade has focused primarily on the volume of voyages, slaves and African commodities.1 Until now scholars who examine merchants’ participation in this trade have centred their attention mainly on the activities of state monopolies and state-sponsored commercial companies such as the Dutch West India Company (WIC), among others.2 However, according to the


evidence gathered in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) on vessels’ owners, state-sponsored companies’ participation in the transatlantic slave trade was quite modest, accounting only for 6 percent of overall commerce in the period between 1514 and 1866. A comparative analysis of the number of voyages organised by state-sponsored companies sailing under different flags also points to identical results, representing less than 10 percent of the total share for each flag.

The sole exception is the Netherlands for which the number of voyages organized by the WIC and the Middleburg Commercial Company (MCC) accounted for around 35 percent of the slave voyages carried out under the Dutch flag. It is likely, however, that the participation of state-sponsored companies in the Dutch slave trade is over-represented, as recent scholarship in this field has shown that it was common practice for these companies, especially the first and second WIC, to rely on the services of private merchants and entrepreneurs to conduct many of their inter-continental commercial and shipping activities. In this study we aim, therefore, to give private participation in the slave trade the attention it deserves, given its weight in the overall volume of trade as a way to better our knowledge and understanding of early modern merchants and their relationship with colonial economies and empires.

Although the TSTD has provided us with an impressive collection of data on slave voyages, including details on ship owners and captains, little is known about private merchants’ participation in the transatlantic slave trade. The studies of Vila Vilar, Franco Vega, Miller, Newson and Michin, and Green, among others, focusing mainly on Portuguese private engagement in this commerce are some of the few exceptions.

Most of these studies have, however, concentrated their attention on the activities of groups of private merchants who operated solely or mainly with

3 Calculations made by the author on the basis of the information available on http://www.slaevoyages.org, 20-06-2012.

members of their own group, whether this group was ethnic-, religious-, or kin-based. This scenario contrasts with other Atlantic areas and commercial branches for which private merchants' activities and cross-cultural businesses networks have been examined and well-documented in various recent studies.\textsuperscript{5} Schnurmann, Studnicki-Gizbert, Ebert, Trivellato, and Antunes are some of the most important contributions.\textsuperscript{6} These authors have not only clearly shown the role played by private businessmen in the making of the early modern Atlantic economy, but have also devoted more attention to the study of the involvement of merchants in financial and commercial ventures with partners outside of their traditional business connections, including family, friends and the firms – also known as the F-connection.\textsuperscript{7} In other words, individuals that engaged in transactions with members of other cultural groups are regarded as cross-cultural. Here, it is also our goal to study the business relationships established between merchants of different ethnic, religious


and cultural affiliations\(^8\) for the operation of the slave trade, leading to the formation of cross-cultural business networks extending across the borders of various European empires.\(^9\)

During the early modern period, Portuguese, Sephardic Jews, Dutch, Flemish and German businessmen based in the Dutch Republic, Portugal and other places in Europe, as well as in Spanish America, Brazil, Angola and Mozambique were at the heart of this complex system of interactions.\(^10\) They will be the prime focus of this study. Here, we will look into their activities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By analysing two chronological periods and connections between multiple geographical areas we aim to explore how the establishment of these networks might have aided private initiative to defy and or cooperate with monopolies imposed by states or state-sponsored companies.

Our analysis is based on a selection of case studies made accordingly to the quality and number of relevant primary sources gathered in Portuguese and Dutch archives.\(^11\) The study of these primary materials is complemented with

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information available in the TSTD and secondary literature. Let us start, however, by briefly examining the juridical framework that regulated the participation of private merchants in the transatlantic slave trade.

**Legal Frameworks for Private Participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: The Iberian and Dutch Cases**

During the early modern period the juridical framework regulating private participation in the transatlantic slave trade within the sphere of influence of the Iberian Crowns and the Dutch Republic underwent several changes. Those changes affected the business prospects for private merchants and the level of risk involved in financial and commercial transactions associated with the slave trade, both directly and indirectly, leading to possible changes in terms of networks’ formation and operation.

Portuguese trade with western Africa had been a monopoly since the mid-fifteenth century. To organize trade and prevent the intervention of smugglers, the Crown had established monopolies and several factories in the Guinea-Bissau region, Cape Verde, and São Tomé. However, by the late fifteenth century, the Crown started to grant private merchants trading licenses to operate within certain areas and with a specific range of goods as well as to lease direct management of the different monopolies to private interests. Between the 1530s and 1640s, the latter became common practice. The monopolies of the Cape Verden and Guinean, São Tomé, and Angolan trades were leased regularly to private businessmen, named as *contratadores.*

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The contratadores had permission to trade and to place their own factors and assistants in the different regions. They were also allowed to grant avenças (trading licenses) to other private merchants. The avenças were contracts authorizing the avençador (license holder) to export a certain quantity of a given product within a specific geographical area. According to these contracts, the contratadores would cover the risks involved in the transport, such as shipwreck, fire, and capture by pirates and corsairs. The other party had permission to load the quantity of goods mentioned in the contract in a specific port. The contratador or his agents could sell these trading licenses, in either Portugal or the Atlantic possessions. To avoid losses, they could demand a fiança (pledge of goods) from the avençadores.

In addition, during the fifteenth century, in an attempt to promote settlement and economic development, the Crown also made several royal donations of overseas lands to noblemen (the so-called donatários and capitães-donatários), which included administrative and judicial powers, as well as commercial freedoms. As a consequence, the donatários, capitães-donatários and the settlers of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Angola held royal permission to trade with the nearest regions of the African continent, opening the door for another stream of private participation in the slave trade, as well as in other businesses.13

On the other hand, throughout the Union of the Iberian Crowns (1580–1640), the Portuguese commercial and financial community were also able to hold contracts from the Spanish royal monopolies.14 The Spanish asiento – Spain’s monopoly over the trading licenses for the regular supply of African slaves to the Spanish American colonies – was among those contracts. Between 1586 and 1640, Portuguese businessmen monopolized the system of asientos. By simultaneously holding the Spanish asiento and the Portuguese royal

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monopolies on the African trade, these merchants managed to control both the major supply and the consumer markets for slave labour.

After the Portuguese Restoration in 1640, the Portuguese merchants who held the asiento at the time abandoned Seville, and the links of the Portuguese mercantile elite based in Lisbon to the transatlantic slave trade appeared to weaken. Between the 1640s and 1670s, most contratadores of the Angolan royal monopoly were citizens and merchants based in Luanda. Whereas in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the role played, in part, by the contratadores was taken over by several commercial companies chartered by the crown and given monopoly rights over the trade with Brazil and various regions of western Africa. The establishment of these companies did not, however, remove private merchants from the slave and other colonial trades.

Thus, from the early sixteenth century, private merchants controlled the Crown monopolies in western Africa, including the slave trade. These regulations opened a window for the legal participation in the colonial trade for them, but simultaneously created enough room for private initiatives that also challenged the monopolies, either through tax evasion, smuggling, and other types of transactions deemed as ‘illegal’ by the states and companies.

In the Dutch Republic, trade with western Africa, including the slave trade, was controlled by private businessmen until 1621. In the main Dutch port cities, there were a handful of private firms and several independent businessmen involved in these commercial branches. These private firms had no formal commercial organization comparable to the WIC, and only hired merchants and accountants aboard ships, onshore, or aboard floating trading posts.

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The establishment of the WIC by the States-General in 1621 brought to an end this initial period of free trade, by granting the WIC a monopoly over all Atlantic commerce.

From its outset, the chartering of the WIC was met with great opposition from the merchants of Amsterdam and the northern port cities of the Republic, who had important investments in the north Atlantic fisheries, Brazilian sugar and dyewood, the salt trade with South America, and the African gold, ivory, and slave trades. Some commercial branches were, therefore, detached from the WIC monopoly soon after its establishment. The Brazilian and African trades, however, remained under the WIC’s control, but not without hampering profits for both the WIC and the private merchants.

Between the mid-1630s and 1650s, the military character of the WIC caused the disruption of many activities in Brazil and western Africa, while, in the Republic, the burden of paying for the huge military campaigns against the Portuguese possessions in the Atlantic began to be felt. As early as the mid-1630s, the WIC lacked the cash flow to operate its businesses in Brazil, western Africa, the Caribbean, and North America and struggled to ensure the transport of commodities, personnel, and weaponry between its posts and settlements. To mitigate its losses, the WIC gave shareholders permission to participate in the trade with Brazil and the Caribbean in 1638. In 1647, the WIC also agreed to open the slave trade from Angola to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Americas to private merchants. Finally, in 1648, the trade with North America, including the slave trade, was opened to private merchants from the Republic. This shift in the WIC policies opened a wide range of opportunities for businesses in the Republic, and it meant that, for substantial periods of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, private merchants controlled most of the Atlantic commerce, including the slave trade.


The only branch of Atlantic trade that remained as a WIC monopoly was the trade in gold.22

The bankruptcy of the first WIC in 1674 and the process leading to the chartering of a second company under the same name, did not introduce major changes to the legal framework already in place. Although, the second WIC held a nominal monopoly over Dutch participation in the slave trade, including activities in Loango and Angola, and had administrative, fiscal and military authority to enforce this monopoly,23 more often than not the transatlantic slave trade remained in the hands of private entrepreneurs and merchants in the Republic and their partners elsewhere. In time, the WIC became primarily an administrative, fiscal and military organization, responsible for the maintenance and administration of outposts in western Africa as well as taxation on trade, while private firms appeared to dominate the trade itself. This was reflected in the increasing activities of interlopers in the Company monopoly.24

It continued with the formation of multiple small, medium and large-sized companies in Dutch ports and their increasing role in the commerce between the Republic, western Africa, and particularly the Loango and Angolan regions. The MCC, founded in 1720, is the best known example of such private independent consortia.25

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Although states and state-sponsored companies regulated the participation of private merchants in their commercial monopolies, they struggled to enforce this legislation. This fact opened up broad opportunities for individuals to engage in commercial activities that fell out of the aforementioned legal framework, creating business portfolios and networks that simultaneously combined legal and “illegal” transactions, and explored the voids in the regulations to their own advantage. In this process, royal officers and companies’ employees on-the-spot also played an important role.

In the following two sections of this study we will examine in detail four case studies in an attempt to emphasize the advantages (and/or disadvantages) of these business networks as mechanisms to challenge, defy and/or cooperate with the monopolies of the Iberian Crowns and the Dutch state-sponsored companies, among others.

**Slave Trade Monopolies and Private Networks in the Seventeenth Century: The Iberian and the WIC Monopolies and the Sephardi and Christian Networks**

Between ca. 1590 and 1623, the Republic was home to two groups of merchants with economic interests in the slave trade: a group of Christian merchants of Dutch, Flemish, and German origin (hereafter referred to as Dutch) and the Portuguese Sephardim established in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities.

The Dutch merchants started their economic activities in the south Atlantic in the late 1580s, mainly investing in the Brazilian sugar and dyewood trades and the African commerce in gold, ivory and leather.26 In these early years, Dutch participation in the slave trade was minimal, as the studies by Postma, Eltis, and Vos, et al. have demonstrated.27 There are, however, several examples of ships connecting the Republic to western Africa and traveling back to Europe via Brazil, the Spanish West Indies, Jamaica and Martinique, and the Guianas, transporting slaves. Many of these voyages were organized by members of the Portuguese Sephardic community based in Amsterdam and other

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26 See, for example, Amsterdam Municipal Archives (hereafter SAA), Notarial Archives (hereafter NA), 376/114–115: 6 March 1613; NA, 376/114–115: 6 March 1613.

Dutch ports, either single-handedly or in partnership. The commercial webs setup by the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam encompassed various European States (i.e. the Republic, Portugal, Spain and, at times, Flanders, France and several Italian cities), as well as Upper and Lower Guinea, Angola, Brazil, and the Spanish West Indies and thus covering both Iberian Empires. Diogo Nunes Belmonte is a case in point.

In order to organize his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, Belmonte had connections in Europe, Western Africa and the American colonies. In Europe, Belmonte appeared associated with Sebastião Ribeiro and Manuel Carvalho, both Portuguese Sephardic Jews based in Amsterdam. Belmonte and Ribeiro had also connections in Lisbon with Custódio Lobo da Costa, whereas in the West Indies their main contact person seems to have been Francisco Ribeiro. Let us start with Sebastião Ribeiro. He was not only an investor in the slave voyages organized by Belmonte, but he also acted as skipper on several occasions. In 1613, De Engel Michiel, for example, was freighted by Belmonte and Ribeiro. Ribeiro acted as the skipper and was instructed to purchase slaves in Angola and sell them in the West Indies, Jamaica, Martinique, and the coast of Honduras were some of the ports recommended for disembarkation. The vessel was to return to Seville with bullion, gold, silver and other commodities.

Custódio Lobo da Costa, on the other hand, was Ribeiro’s brother. Da Costa was also a merchant, but based in Lisbon. On several occasions, he was recruited as skipper and representative of Belmonte and Ribeiro. The Espírito Santo da Nazaré, freighted by them in 1623, was skippered by Da Costa. The vessel was to sail from Lisbon to Seville. Here, Da Costa was in charge of taking care of all paper work at the Casa de la contratación and obtained the required permissions to sail to the Spanish West Indies – the vessel’s main destination. From Seville, the ship was to head South to Angola, where Da Costa was responsible for acquiring slaves. Thus, as skippers, both Ribeiro and his brother were responsible for the transport of exchange commodities from the Republic to Africa, often via Lisbon and Seville. In these two ports, they were in charge of purchasing an avença from the Portuguese contratador of the Angolan trade as well as trade licenses from the holders of the Spanish asiento. They were also expected to solve unexpected problems, such as delays in ports

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29 SAA, NA, 258/81: 19 March 1613; NA, 254/188–188v: 22 May 1614.
30 For further details on these bureaucratic procedures, see: Newson and Minchin, From Capture to Sale: Chapter 1.
or lack of commodities and enslaved Africans in the ports of embarkation and issues related to disembarkation, the sale of commodities and the purchase of return cargos.

In this business, Manuel de Carvalho, also Portuguese and based in Amsterdam, acted as credit provider. For instance, in 1617, Carvalho had granted commercial credit to Belmonte for the venture of the *St. Michiel*. The ship had been freighted by Belmonte and skippered by Sebastião Ribeiro to transport slaves from Angola to the Spanish West Indies. Here, Francisco Ribeiro was Belmonte’s contact person. In 1617, Francisco sent to Seville a return cargo on board to *De Capitaine Francisco Ferreira*.32

In the slave voyages organized by the Belmonte family and its associates, the cargos on board the ships were insured by Anthoine van Dimen, Albert Schuijt, Wijbrant Warwijk, Hans van Soldt de Jonge, Pelgrom van Dronckelaer, and Samuel Voerknecht, among many others. For example, in 1614, they insured for Diogo Nunes Belmonte the slaves transported on board the ship *De Engel Michiel*, as well as the return cargo of gold, silver, and other commodities. Captain Sebastião Ribeiro was hired to sail the Luanda–West Indies–Seville route.33

Hence, the commercial interests of the Portuguese Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam and their agents crossed the geographical boundaries of several Atlantic empires, encompassing not only the Iberian Atlantic, but also areas like Jamaica and Martinique, which were under the increasing influence of the English and French. Their networks had a trans-imperial character not only from a commercial view point, but also in the financial organization of the ventures and their insurance.

As importantly, Belmonte’s network and the roles played by his partners and their activities within the business web clearly show how it was possible for private merchants and entrepreneurs to operate successfully within the legal frames imposed by monopolistic states, like the Iberian Crowns. Simultaneously, this example demonstrates how it was possible for foreign investors such as the German, Flemish and Dutch, who were legally not authorized to participate directly in the Iberian slave trade and other colonial trades, to engage in these commercial branches indirectly by covering the risks of the voyages organized by this network, and, in this way, defying the rules of operation of the Iberian monopolies. In addition, the Belmonte case also calls our attention to the advantages that cross-cultural networks offer their members in terms of strategies to draw capital from different sources, and to benefit from combining

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33 *Ibidem*. 
know-how about European and colonial supply and consumption markets, and about the *modus operandi* through the bureaucratic apparatus of Iberian monopolies and their surveilling institutions, namely the *Casa da Índia* in Lisbon and the *Casa de la Contratación*, in Seville.

Combining both legally-bounded and defiant business activities was not only a reality within the Iberian monopolies on the slave trade and colonial commerce, but was also a common practice within the state-sponsored monopolistic companies, such as the Dutch WIC. From a legal point of view, the establishment of the WIC by the States-General in 1621 required private merchants in the Republic to abandon their participation in the Atlantic commerce. By 1623, these regulations were enforced and the latter had to bring their activities to a halt. Many protested, and others devised strategies to continue operations in these areas. These included the use of passports from non-Dutch cities, ports of departure outside of the Republic, and instructions to supercargoes to trade in areas out of the reach of the jurisdiction of the WIC, due to the threat of confiscation of the vessel and cargo by the WIC.³⁴ Both the Portuguese Sephardim and the Dutch made use of these strategies.³⁵

However, as was mentioned earlier, the strict monopoly of the WIC did not last long due to the financial and commercial difficulties faced by the company. From the mid-1630s, individuals were authorized to participate in the monopoly trade and as early as the mid-1640s an increasing number of Dutch merchants chose to cooperate with the WIC and comply with her trade regulations as a strategy to improve their business opportunities. Henrico Mathias, a merchant of German descent based in Amsterdam in the second half of the seventeenth century, is a case in point.

On August 1, 1657, Henrico Mathias signed a contract with the directors of the WIC to deliver slaves to Curaçao on the ship *De Coninck Salomon*.³⁶ Like Mathias, Heerman Abrahamsen, and their associates, as well as Balthasar and Joseph Coymans – all merchants in Amsterdam – also signed agreements with the WIC for the supply of slaves to the Dutch Caribbean and the Spanish Americas, in 1662 and 1675, respectively.³⁷

At the same time, and in an identical way as the Belmonte case analysed earlier, they too associated themselves with business partners outside their natural group in a clear attempt to capitalize on the know-how these outsiders

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³⁵ SAA, NA, 420/536: 20 December 1639; NA, 1690/599: 16 April 1648.
³⁶ SAA, NA, 2118: 1 August 1657.
had of business in European, African and American markets, and their knowledge of the legislation and legal procedure in use in each commercial branch and region under the control of the different monopolistic entities.

Mathias’ activities have left us with a paper trail that allows us to reconstruct, at least in part, his cross-cultural and trans-imperial slave trade networks. He started his economic activities in the Atlantic in the 1650s and remained active until the 1670s, showing clear interests in western Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean Islands, New Netherland, and the Spanish American colonies in both South and Central America and the West Indies.

In order to organize the slave trade, Mathias had connections in Europe, western Africa and the American colonies. In Europe, Henrico Mathias appeared associated with Jacinto Vasques, a merchant in Seville with investments in the slave trade, as well as with Marcelo van der Goes and Philip van Hulten, merchants in Amsterdam. Whereas in London, Jacob Luce (possibly Jacob de Luz? of Portuguese Sephardic origin) had power of attorney and commercial credit from Mathias to recover goods seized by English privateers.

In western Africa, Mathias’ main activity was the slave trade, though he also participated in other trades. His representatives were present in Angola and on the Gold Coast, more precisely in Mina, Mouri, Cape Coast, Accra and Kormantin. Here, Henrico kept up regular contacts with the representatives of the WIC.

In the trade with the Spanish Central American colonies, including the slave trade, Mathias was associated with Johan van Wickevoort and Jacomo Rulant or Rulant, the first based in Amsterdam and also involved in the Russian trade, and the latter in Antwerp. Don Manuel d’Acosta y Souza and Captain Benito d’Almeda, most likely Spaniards, also appeared involved in the slave trade activities of Mathias between Cape Verde area and the Spanish colonies.

In the inter- and intra-continental trade with the Caribbean and, more precisely, Curaçao, Henrico appears associated with Guillelmo Belin le Garde and

38 SAA, NA, 2117/161: 23 November 1656; NA, 2715/207: 10 April 1660.
40 SAA, NA, 2231/100: 10 September 1669.
41 SAA, NA, 2717/65: 19 January 1661.
44 Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief (hereafter NEHA), Bijzondere Collecties 471, no. 2.4 Shipping, 2.4.53. Jacomo Rulant, 1660–1662.
Philip van Hulten.\textsuperscript{45} On the island, Ghijsberto de Rosa (most likely a Spanish captain),\textsuperscript{46} who had conducted trade on their behalf with some inhabitants of the island, the Spanish colonies and the WIC beginning in the early 1660s, was used as their representative. Edward Man and Isaac van Beeck, directors of the WIC Chamber of Amsterdam, were also important contacts for Mathias’ business with Curaçao.\textsuperscript{47}

For example, on 1 August 1657, Edward Man and Isaac van Beeck, on behalf of the WIC, received a group of enslaved Africans transported on board the ship \textit{Den Coninck Salomon}, freighted by Henrico Mathias. An estimated value of 100 silver \textit{reales} had to be paid for the “cargo.” The payment could be made either in currency (usually silver or gold from the Spanish American colonies) or through the selling of goods (such as hides, tobacco, \textit{cochenille}, \textit{compeche-cochenille}, \textit{silver-cochenille} and \textit{compeche-hout}\textsuperscript{48}) shipped directly to Amsterdam or via the New Netherland.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, Petrus Stuyvesant, governor of this colony, was also part of Mathias contacts in the Americas.\textsuperscript{50} The relations between Edward Man and Isaac van Beeck (directors of the WIC, Chamber of Amsterdam) and Henrico Mathias went beyond the slave trade. On 4 March 1655, they were authorized by Mathias to obtain permission to release the ship \textit{Madama van Brazil}, under the command of Captain Hendrick Vroom. The ship and crew were, at the time, retained in Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{51}

In addition, to defend his interests on board the ships, Mathias usually hired a supercargo, both for the ships sailing in the inter-continental circuits linking Europe to the Americas directly and for those going via western Africa.\textsuperscript{52} Mathias also made regular investments in other areas of the Atlantic, including long-distance routes between Brazil, the southern Spanish American colonies and the Republic, as well as coastal trade between Curaçao and New Netherland.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{45} SAA, NA, 2211/140–142: 26 July 1661.
\textsuperscript{46} National Archives of the Netherlands (hereafter NL-HaNa), Resolution Book of Curaçao, no. 58.
\textsuperscript{47} SAA, NA, 2118/137: 1 August 1657.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Compeche-cochenille} and \textit{Compeche-hout} refer to \textit{cochenille} and dyewood imported from the hinterland of Spanish America into the port of Campeche in the Yucatan Peninsula and exported from there to Europe and other locations.
\textsuperscript{49} SAA, NA, 2118/137: 1 August 1657.
\textsuperscript{50} SAA, NA, 2117/161: 23 November 1656.
\textsuperscript{51} SAA, NA, 2116/45: 4 March 1655.
\textsuperscript{52} SAA, NA, 1131/67–68: 21 October 1659.
Thus, Mathias operated several inter-continental routes connecting Europe, western Africa and the Americas, with the transatlantic slave trade as one of his important areas of investment. In this business, he appeared associated with several directors of the Amsterdam Chamber of the WIC and relied on an extensive network of people including skippers, ship captains, pilots, insurers, credit providers, and supercargoes of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Together they acquired essential pieces of information to deal with the monopolistic regulations of the WIC, either to cooperate with the company and/or to circumvent its procedures and to handle the supply-demand patterns of the coastal markets of supply and consumption on both shores of the Atlantic. Some of Mathias’ contacts also had good connections with the Spanish authorities in the Caribbean islands, the Spanish American mainland and Spain.

In this process the officials of the WIC on-the-spot, including directors, chief-merchants, and financial officers, among others, played an important role as they could control and supervise commercial transactions and label them as “legal” or “illegal” according the WIC rules. But as importantly, they could engage privately in trade with merchants not authorized to trade within the WIC monopoly areas and commercial branches, or by facilitating tax evasion, bribery, etc. although all these practices would be labelled “corruption” by the WIC directors in the Republic. These were, however, common practices among company officials elsewhere, including the VOC servants in Asia,\(^{54}\) or the employees of the English and French African companies serving in the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century, as we will see in more detail in the following section.

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**Slave Trade Monopolies and Private Networks in the Eighteenth Century: Monopoly Holders and the Portuguese-Brazilian Merchant Networks**

In the eighteenth century, alongside various commercial companies and firms, either state-sponsored or built entirely on private initiative (like the MCC), merchants based in Europe and elsewhere in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans kept organizing their commercial activities and networks with eyes fixed not only on the opportunities offered within the empire of their ‘home’ state or kingdom, but also on locations outside the jurisdiction of their home states.

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Like in earlier periods, their selection of business partners often fell out of their traditional groups – the family, the friends and the firm – to incorporate merchants of other ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, based in Europe as well as in different colonial spaces and sometimes even with formal links to other monopolistic entities, either in the capacity of state officials or company employees. These practices become quite evident from an analysis of the Portuguese-Brazilian networks that operated in the Brazil–Gulf of Guinea slave trade circuits during the eighteenth century.

During this period, due to a continuous growth in the demand for slave labour in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade witnessed a significant increase in terms of the number of voyages, vessels, total number of enslaved Africans transported, and regions of embarkation and disembarkation. In Brazil, the location of mining fields in the interior was one of the major factors contributing to this increase. To cater to these new labour needs of the Brazilian market, while avoiding the strong competition of Portuguese slave merchants already involved in the trade with Angola, and the still stronger presence of Dutch, and foremost the English and French in the Gold Coast, new slave circuits linking Brazil to the Bight of Benin and the Slave Coast (the so-called Costa da Mina\footnote{In the broader sense, the ‘Costa da Mina’ corresponded to the stretch of the West African coast between Cape Mount and Cape Lopez. For the Portuguese-Brazilian merchants operating in the region, it referred to the ports located between the Volta and the Lagos Rivers. Gustavo Acioli Lopes, *Negócio da Costa da Mina e Comércio Atlântico: Tabaco, Açúcar, Ouro e Tráfico de Escravos: Pernambuco* (1654–1760) (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of São Paulo, 2008): 176. Pierre Verger, *Fluxo e Refluxo do Tráfico de Escravos entre os Golfo de Benin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos: dos séculos XVII a XIX* (Salvador: Corrupio, 1997): 37. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969: 129–130. Patrick Manning, “The Slave Trade in the Bight of Benin, 1640–1890”. In *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of Atlantic Slave Trade*. Edited by Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn. New York: Academic Press, 1979: 107, 114–115.}) emerged after the 1670s. The commercial operations in these routes, which remained active for most of the eighteenth century, offer us an excellent insight into the main topic under scrutiny here.

For most of the first half of the eighteenth century Portuguese-Brazilian\footnote{In this context, the expression ‘Portuguese-Brazilian’ refers to merchants born in Portugal, but resident and/or with main economic activities in Brazil.} merchants based in the regions of Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro\footnote{For further details, see: Manolo Florentino, *Em costas negras. Uma história do tráfico entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997.} resorted to cross-cultural and trans-imperial commercial circuits and financial
connections to build their business, and often as a strategy to circumvent regulations of the Portuguese Crown concerning the monopoly on the slave trade, in particular the special privileges granted to Bahian slave merchants, who could trade directly with Angola.\textsuperscript{58} During the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, the Portuguese-Brazilian networks built between Brazil and the Gulf of Guinea for the slave trade appear to have been, in contrast, a clear strategy to circumvent the monopoly constraints imposed by the Portuguese state-sponsored companies, i.e. the \textit{Companhia Geral de Comércio do Grão-Pará e Maranhão} and the \textit{Companhia Geral de Comércio de Pernambuco e Paraíba} established in 1755 and 1756, respectively.\textsuperscript{59}

Although the Bight of Benin and the so-called “Slave Coast” were never formally under the control of Portugal, throughout the entire early modern period the Portuguese Crown always felt empowered enough to issue various laws regulating the commerce of its subjects and foreigners in these regions. As mentioned earlier, for most of the fifteenth and sixteenth century settlers of São Tomé had been permitted to trade with the so-called \textit{Costa da Mina} as means to acquire the necessary labour force for the deforestation of the island and the construction of sugar mills and the subsequent production of sugar. In the course of the sixteenth century, Portuguese and foreign merchants in possession of trading licences and/or those holding leases for the Crown’s monopoly on the trade with the island of São Tomé, were also granted permission to trade on the region.

The takeover of the Portuguese forts on the Gold Coast, and the temporary occupation of the islands of the Gulf of Guinea by the Dutch wic, all within the context of the Eighty Years War, would lead the Habsburg monarchs to forbid Portuguese subjects from trading in the region. However, the economic decline of the Gulf Guinea Archipelago in the 1650s and 1660s and the difficulties faced by the Portuguese Atlantic economy as a whole led the Portuguese monarchs to lift these trading bans with the \textit{Costa da Mina}. On 11 March 1673, the Portuguese Crown granted all its subjects (“from this kingdom and the Conquests”) permission to trade with the aforementioned Coast. There were, however, a few requirements. Vessels, regardless of their port of registration, had to depart from Portugal. They also had to call at São Tomé on the way to the Coast to pay the duties owed to the Portuguese Crown, with payment being calculated on the basis of the estimated value of the cargo to be acquired on the Coast.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} Verger, \textit{Fluxo e refluxo do tráfico de escravos}: 21.
\textsuperscript{59} Carreira, \textit{As companhias pombalinas de navegação}.

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Finally, transactions were limited to commerce with African traders and not with other European merchants or officials of chartered companies.

Over time, several ports in Brazil were also authorised to trade directly with the Costa da Mina, namely Salvador (Bahia), Rio de Janeiro, and Recife, Goiana and Paraíba (Pernambuco). This permission also had its caveats. Besides, the last two requirements mentioned above, Portuguese-Brazilian merchants operating in these direct circuits were forbidden to use high quality Brazilian gold and tobacco in these transactions (only low grade tobacco was allowed). European goods used as exchange commodities in the transactions had to be brought from Brazil. Finally, merchants operating in this business were obliged to pay royal duties on the value of the cargoes transported at the ports of embarkation and disembarkation.

It was within this context that Portuguese-Brazilian merchants developed their slaving operations on the Costa da Mina. Manoel Gonçalves Viana and his associate Manoel Correa Seixas, together with Luís Coelho Ferreira and partners are two cases in point. According to the data available in the TSTD, they...
appear to have been the most active slave vessel owners in the region of Bahia in the first and second half of the century. Let us start by looking into Viana and Seixas’ activities. Viana started his slave trade business in 1707 and stayed active until 1731. During this period, his single- or co-owned vessels sailed the middle passage forty nine times, thereby connecting the region of Bahia and the so-called *Costa da Mina*.63

Like many other early modern merchants, Viana started his participation in this trade in partnership with other peers: among them were initially António Lopes Ferrão and Manoel Correa Seixas, and, at a later stage, Manoel Francisco Braga, Domingos Azevedo Coutinho, Dionísio Barbosa, and Cipriano da Silva Fernandes. With the exception of Seixas, who appears associated with Viana multiple times, most of these partnerships were established for a single journey, as were, for instance, the associations with Braga, Coutinho and Barbosa for the slave voyage of the ship *Jesus Maria José* in 1722.

Many of these partnerships were established as means to gather enough financial and material resources to organize the slave ventures, but in many cases they were also a way to capitalise on the business experience and knowledge of peers involved in this commerce for a longer period of time. This was, for example, the case of Manoel Correa Seixas, Viana’s main associate between 1714 and 1726. In 1707, when Viana came into the business, Seixas had already single-handedly organized at least four slave voyages between Bahia and the *Costa da Mina* since 1700, the year he entered the business. Until 1714, the year Seixas stopped organizing slave voyages single-handedly, he alone had carried out more than six voyages and several others in partnership.

Although, Viana’s associates and the ship captains serving in his vessels were all Portuguese-Brazilian merchants, and the ports of departure and disembarkation visited by his ships were part of the Portuguese Empire, most of the slave purchases in West Africa were carried out in ports outside the sphere.

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63 According to the TSDT, Manoel Gonçalves Viana was the individual or co-owner of at least fifteen ships, among which were: the *Santo António*, Santíssimo Sacramento e Nossa Senhora das Neves, Santíssimo Sacramento Nossa Senhora da Luz, Senhor Bom Jesus de Bouças e Nossa Senhora do Ó e São José, Santíssimo Sacramento Nossa Senhora da Luz e Santo António, Nossa Senhora do Ó e Santo António, Nossa Senhora das Brotas e São Gonçalo, Nossa Senhora da Purificação e Santo António da Barra, Nossa Senhora da Conceição e Santo António da Mouraria, Nossa Senhora do Tejo e Barroquinha, Nossa Senhora das Brotas e Piedade. For further details, see http://www.slavevoyages.org, 07-03-2012.
of influence of the Portuguese Crown or on the margins of its effective control.\textsuperscript{64} Eighty-nine percent of Viana and Co.’s vessels acquired slaves on the \textit{Costa da Mina} without specifying the port; eight percent of the voyages obtained their ‘cargoes’ in the port of Whydah (present-day Benin); two percent in Jacquin (present-day Benin); and two percent in Elmina (present-day Ghana).\textsuperscript{65} As for Seixas’ voyages organized individually or in association with others, eighty-two percent of the voyages also acquired slaves in the \textit{Costa da Mina}, and eighteen percent in Calabar (present-day Nigeria).

Official reports and petitions sent to Lisbon by servants of the Crown in Brazil and São Tomé confirmed the commercial transactions between Portuguese-Brazilian merchants and other European traders settled in the region. The Dutch and English were an important connection on the Coast, not only for the purchase of slaves, but, more importantly, to acquire commodities in demand on the Coast and not easily accessible in the Brazilian ports, such as European, Asian and African textiles, alcoholic beverages, beads, etc. To obtain these products, Portuguese-Brazilian merchants like Viana and Seixas used gold extracted from the recently-opened Brazilian mines and tobacco (often high-grade) produced in Alagoas, Pernambuco and Bahia, as exchange commodities.\textsuperscript{66}

European merchants and chartered companies based in the region were eager to access these commodities. In the case of the wic, Postma estimates that between 1715 and 1731, the Company sold an annual average to 200 slaves to Portuguese-Brazilian slavers.\textsuperscript{67} Payments were often made in gold, as the shipments of this mineral by the Company during this period clearly show.\textsuperscript{68} On the other hand, Brazilian tobacco, also called Portuguese tobacco, was reported by officials of the Royal African Company of England (rac) to be one of the main products traded by the Dutch in certain ports.\textsuperscript{69} These were not,\textsuperscript{64} Among the ship captains serving Viana more often were: António Matins, António Martins Carvallho, Manoel Ferreira Lopes, José Marques Brandão, Domingos Barbosa Pereira, António Álvares, Manoel do Couto Santos, Manoel da Costa Porto, Manoel de Andrade, Carlos de Sepulveda de Carvalho. For further details see: http://www.slavevoyages.org:07-03-2012.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{AHU, São Tomé}, cx. 4, doc. 81: Lisbon, 10 July 1721: ‘Consulta do Conselho Ultramarino sobre as cartas dos governadores do Brasil e a petição de José de Torres’. See also, Lopes, \textit{Negócio da Costa da Mina}: 1.
\textsuperscript{67} Postma, The Dutch Slave Trade: 77–78.
\textsuperscript{68} Heijer, Goud, Ivoor en Slave.
however, transactions involving only Portuguese-Brazilian merchants and WIC officials. José dos Santos Torres, a merchant of Bahia, operating in the same region in the 1710s–1720s, not only engaged in the sugar trade with Dutch officials on the Coast, but also managed to bring English capital into these deals.\textsuperscript{70} English officials of the RAC were also engaged in transactions with Portuguese-Brazilian merchants on the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin.\textsuperscript{71}

Two decades later, these trading practices were still in use. In 1752, the galley \textit{Aleluia da Ressureição e Almas}, property of José de Freitas Sacotto, businessman in Recife (Pernambuco), sailed to the \textit{Costa da Mina} under the command of ship captain José Francisco da Rocha. At the expense of Sacotto and other small investors in the cargo, he acquired brandy,\textsuperscript{72} metal ware, beads, smoking pipes, and different types of textiles\textsuperscript{73} of European, Asian and local origin, on the Coast from the employees of the WIC at Elmina and Anomabu, using mainly tobacco as exchange. The captain also carried trade with an English slave at Cape Lahou (present-day Ivory Coast) from whom he obtained iron in exchange for tobacco. As for the slave purchases, the captain called at Anomabu, Accra, and Popo – ports outside Portuguese jurisdiction – where he acquired twenty-eight percent of the slave ‘cargo’, while the remaining seventy-two percent were obtained at Whydah (Ajudá).\textsuperscript{74}

Although the Portuguese Crown had built a fort in this port in 1721 with the permission of the King of Dahomé, and a Portuguese-Brazilian community gradually settled in the port, it is very likely that the slave purchases of the \textit{Aleluia da Ressurreição e Almas}, as well as those of other Portuguese-Brazilian slavers, were not made exclusively with Portuguese-Brazilian traders or their


\textsuperscript{72}This was very likely \textit{Genebra} possibly the Dutch \textit{Jenever brandwijn} or a French cognac.

\textsuperscript{73}These appear enrolled in various categories including: ‘paniscos’, ‘lenços grossos’, algodão vermelho, ‘riscado’, ‘panos brancos, ‘chita’.

agents established there. The same assumption is also valid for trade conducted by Portuguese-Brazilians at the port of Jacquin, as was the case of Viana and Seixas mentioned earlier. Although the Portuguese Crown had an establishment in this port, the Dutch built first a trading house, and latter a fort (Fort Zelandia, 1726–1734) there, where they traded regularly with Portuguese-Brazilian merchants. An official report from the Portuguese Overseas Council dating from 2 November 1721 stated that in Jacquin the WIC officials sold: ‘slaves and merchandise to ships of Bahia in the value of more than one million cruzados every year [paid] in gold powder.’ In fact, already in 1707, the Director of the RAC urged the factors at Cape Coast Castle and Whydah to trade with the Portuguese-Brazilians, especially in gold, merchandise (possibly tobacco, which was a commodity in great demand among the Europeans) and slaves, with the sole condition that the Company factors could not sell European commodities.

Lúis Coelho Ferreira, a prominent merchant in Bahia, is another case in point. Between 1749 and 1784, Ferreira, either alone or in partnership with David de Oliveira Lopes, Manuel Lourenço da Costa, among others, participated regularly in the slave trade with Western Africa. Although Ferreira’s direct partners in this business had the same cultural background and religious affiliations, some of them engaged in the slave trade in areas controlled

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by the British, including Barbados. Given this fact and the clear English interest and investment in the Brazilian colonial economy during the same period, it is very likely that English capital also found its way into the organization of these Portuguese-Brazilian slave voyages, as was the case in the aforementioned trade of Torres.

In addition, Ferreira and his partners acquired their slave cargoes mainly on the Gold Coast and Bight of Benin – sixty-five percent of the total number of voyages organized. Most likely these human cargoes were purchased from European and African merchants on the Coast, since these areas remained during the second half of the eighteenth century outside of the effective control of the Portuguese Crown. It is also likely that European merchants in these areas, either operating in their own name or on behalf of a specific State-sponsored company, offered better deals. Moreover, the high concentration of trading posts and forts along the Coast under the control of rival European monopolistic companies also increased the possibilities for bargaining on the part of Portuguese-Brazilian merchants as well as their chances for making the best deal.

The remaining thirty-five percent of the slave vessels equipped by Ferreira and partners headed to Benguela, Cabinda and São Tomé. Although these were areas under the formal sovereignty of the Portuguese Crown, they were also removed from the main administrative and fiscal centre of the slave trade at the time which was located in Luanda. The choice of these locations for the acquisition of slaves, in particular Benguela and Cabinda, appears to have been part of a clear strategy on the part of these merchant networks to avoid the constraints imposed by the Portuguese Crown on slave vessels operating in the Angolan trade. All vessels were required to sail via Luanda to allow Portuguese royal officials to inspect and tax cargoes, and, in some cases, to also earn some extra income through bribes.\textsuperscript{81} The dislocation of slave routes and slave trade networks from areas under the effective control of the States and State-sponsored companies continued to be a strategy adopted by private merchants.

\textsuperscript{81} This shift of slave merchants to ports of purchase away from the control of states would be once again visible in the first half of the nineteenth century, as British regulations on the abolition of the slave trade started to be enforced by representatives of British authorities in slave ports and by the patrolling squadrons. Evidence clearly shows the southward dislocation of Portuguese-Brazilian merchants from the \textit{Costa da Mina} together with African merchants to the port of Benguela. Mariana P. Candido, “Merchants and the Business of Slave Trade at Benguela, 1750–1850”. \textit{African Economic History} 35, no. 1 (2207): 1–30. José C. Curto, “Movers of slaves: The Brazilian Community in Benguela (Angola), c.1722–1832”. In, \textit{Angola on the Move}. Edited by Beatrix Heintze and Achim von Oppen. Frankfurt an Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008.
involved in the slave trade well into the eighteenth century. Even commercial firms like the MCC chose areas for the purchase of slaves in Western Africa out of the reach of the jurisdiction and effective control of State and State-sponsored monopolies – in this specific case by concentrating its activities in the Loango and Congo regions.

Thus, from a geographical and commercial point of view, the operations of the Portuguese-Brazilian mercantile communities engaged in the slave trade between Brazil, the Gold Coast, the Costa da Mina or the peripheral regions of Angola, had a trans-imperial character. These businessmen acquired their slave ‘cargoes’ in areas outside or on the margins of the Portuguese empire and the jurisdiction of the Portuguese Crown, as a way to circumvent the constraints imposed by royal regulations on this commerce. Simultaneously, the enslaved Africans were not only obtained from African merchants and trade representatives of African authorities but also from other European traders settled or operating on the Coast, in most cases Dutch and English. More importantly, these merchants relied on these Northern European connections to obtain European, Asian and African commodities, especially textiles, alcoholic beverages and weapons (mainly guns), which were either difficult to purchase in Brazil for a good price, or were listed among the merchandise that was forbidden to be traded in Western Africa by Portuguese subjects.

From a logistical point of view, the networks built by many of these merchants, however, do not appear to be trans-imperial like those described for

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the former century. This was the case for the eighteenth-century Portuguese-Brazilian businessmen, mentioned earlier. The vessels employed by the Portuguese-Brazilians in the slave trade between Brazil, the Gold Coast, and Costa da Mina, as well as some of the vessels used in the bilateral commerce between Angola and Brazil, were built in Brazilian shipyards and equipped in the local ports. In most cases, the ship captain acted as a representative of the interests of both the ship owner and other investors. These ships, like the remaining crew, appear to have been manned by Portuguese- and Afro-Brazilian crews recruited locally; some of them were enslaved Africans and were the property of the ship owners themselves. In this respect, these eighteenth-century Portuguese-Brazilian networks and their modus operandi might be regarded as an exception within the broader context of the transatlantic slave trade, since none of the major slavery-based colonial economies in the English, French, and Dutch Atlantic empires engaged in the direct slave trade with Western Africa or were even authorized by their European colonial masters to build or equip ships for intercontinental trade.

To finance part of the slave ventures some of these merchants did get credit from local sources at least 30 percent interest. Capital required for the voyages could also be obtained by the ship owner by freighting space on the hold of the vessels to individuals, who often invested a small amount of money in commodities to receive, in exchange, one or two slaves from the Costa da Mina. In some cases, however, credit and insurance also appear to have been provided by business partners based in Europe, namely in Portugal and England. This evidence suggests that during the eighteenth century there might have been investment of foreign capital into the Portuguese slave trade as had been the case in the seventeenth century. Further research, however, is needed to assess the levels of investment of financers from other nations in the Portuguese-Brazilian slave trade.

84 Ibidem.
Final Remarks

The complex connections described above demonstrates clearly that the commercial interests of private merchants involved in the slave trade living in Europe and various colonial areas transcended the political and geographical borders of the various early modern European empires. In addition, it shows that, in many cases, the selection of business partners fell outside of their natural group, i.e. the family, friends and the firms. Portuguese, Brazilian, Sephardic and Dutch merchants operating from the Republic, Portugal, and other Atlantic areas commonly established commercial webs encompassing several Atlantic Empires – Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and even English. To operate their slave trade networks, they chose associates not according to kin, ethnic, religious or cultural background, but rather business interests. Choosing partners outside of the natural groups appears to have been a way not only to reduce risks associated with trafficking, but also to draw capital from different sources into the business, to amalgamate know-how about European and colonial supply and consumption markets, and about the modus operandi through the bureaucratic apparatus of monopolies and their surveilling institutions, either to cooperate and/or circumvent constraints imposed on commercial and financial transactions.86 Many of these webs operated their businesses in areas under the control of the monopolies of various European States and/or State-sponsored companies. Individuals connected through these networks carried out transactions between merchants and commercial agents or representatives of different States, commercial companies and ‘nations’.

In the eyes of monopoly holders in Lisbon, the Dutch Republic and England, the activities of private merchants and the transactions carried out between them and the officials of the companies in various regions of Western Africa had simultaneously a legal and illegal dimension. The data analysed here is very telling for how private merchant activities and their networks could find ways to circumvent the regulations established by the holders of monopolies on the slave trade, whether they were States or State-sponsored companies. The information discussed here also clearly highlights how the official representatives of the monopoly holders on-the-spot, such as royal or Company officials, not only surveilled the activities of private merchants, but also engaged

86 Cooperation with partners outside of the natural groups as means to reduce risk was not only a strategy employed in the slave trade, but also in other commercial activities developed in the early modern Atlantic world.
in exchanges deemed legal by the monopoly holders. They also found ways to defy the regulations issued by the monopoly holders in Europe, involving themselves in transactions regarded as ‘illegal,’ either in their own name, or on behalf of the Company. The latter would often be carried out under the argument that these types of transactions would be beneficial for the monopoly in obtaining a better position than other rival monopolies in the local, regional and international markets.