

# Cross-cultural Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic

## Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in Western Africa, 1580-1674

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### Introduction

The importance of the Atlantic Ocean during the Early Modern period has been stressed in a growing number of studies since the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> However, some aspects of the contacts between different cultures and continents have enjoyed little attention. One of these is the role of individuals behind the Atlantic economic system:<sup>2</sup> merchants, businessmen and entrepreneurs.

The histories of families and business networks engaged in the Atlantic have to be classified mainly as monographic, and they often focus on a specific economic activity, such as the trade in sugar, tobacco, slaves, or a specific religious congregation.<sup>3</sup> We are missing, however, a comprehensive study of business networks in the Atlantic as a whole, though in recent years progress has been booked with the work by Studnicki-Gizbert and Games.<sup>4</sup>

In this article we wish to focus our analysis on cross-cultural business networks in the Atlantic and not so much on business networks built solely on kinship, religious or professional affiliations.<sup>5</sup> We will pay special attention to the partnerships established between the “Dutch” (including Dutch and other Northern Europeans settled in Amsterdam), Portuguese Jewish merchants<sup>6</sup> operating from Amsterdam and their African counterparts and/or representatives between 1580 and 1674—that is to say, from the Union of the Crowns (1580-1640)<sup>7</sup> until the bankruptcy of the First Dutch West India Company (WIC). These two events are of great importance to this essay, since they encapsulate the overall historical context in which cross-cultural business networks from Amsterdam were aided or hindered in their operations in the Atlantic. The general overview of the Atlantic cross-cultural partnerships will be set against the case of the networks operating to and from the Western Coast of Africa, by showing to which extent the case of Western Africa differs from the general cross-cultural and inter-faith business characteristics of the Atlantic as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Western Africa will be brought to the fore as a major contributor to the development of the European Atlantic economies and a key player in the newly born Atlantic societies.<sup>9</sup>

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## Sources

The study of the Atlantic business networks requires the analysis of a body of commercial documents that were sanctioned by the existing laws of the time. This paper relies mainly on the information collected from the contracts elaborated by the notaries of the city of Amsterdam from 1580 through 1674. Our general selection is based on a sample of about 16,600 commercial contracts for the period 1580-1776. Of these, we have selected all the contracts for the Atlantic (total of 3,732) and from those, solely the ones pertaining to the period 1580-1674 (1,571 contracts). Since the focus of this research is the Western Coast of Africa, we narrowed our sources further to a total of 341 contracts for the regions of Senegambia; Guinea-Bissau; Cape Verde; Sierra Leone; Grain-, Ivory-, Gold- and Slave Coasts; São Tomé e Príncipe; Loango; Kongo and Angola.

The concentration of these notarial contracts in Amsterdam also means that this study translates the realities inherent to the Amsterdam entrepreneurial community and not necessarily all the cross-cultural dynamics and interactions in the Western Coast of Africa between Africans and Europeans. We will pay special attention to the Sephardic Jewish group (referred to in the sources as the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam) and a mainly Dutch non-Jewish group (composed by Dutch and Northern Europeans of different Christian backgrounds established in Amsterdam).

We have classified as commercial contracts a whole array of notarial deeds concerning property and financial transactions. We have excluded from our research testaments, marriage settlements and urban renting contracts due to their particular nature. Therefore, our analysis has taken special interest in the following typology of contracts: statements, agreements, labour contracts, freight contracts, powers of attorney, commercial credit, bottomries, insurances, loans, mortgages, bills of exchange and purchasing notes for shares, bonds and titles of public debt.

The problems posed by this set of documents are infinite and only a few can be methodologically solved. The information that we can capture is often incomplete, far from uniform and all but systematic. Nevertheless, they remain one of the few Early Modern sources for the study of business behaviour and entrepreneurial development before the Industrial Revolution.

It may come as a surprise that this study includes solely commercial contracts, which implies a mainly private approach to the study of cross-cultural business networks in the Atlantic. In an age dominated by chartered companies, it seems almost counterproductive to only analyse the business activities of private entrepreneurs. As we will explain later in this paper, although the presence of chartered companies in the Atlantic was a reality, their success has been broadly questioned.<sup>10</sup> Whether one agrees with the negative assessment of the role played by chartered companies in the building of an Atlantic system or not, research has demonstrated that private entrepreneurship in competition with the monopolies imposed by different European powers was one of the main features of the Atlantic economic development.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, although chartered companies will make part of this study, they will be mainly considered in relation to the needs, expectations and investments of the private sector.

Dutch and Portuguese merchants in Amsterdam often acted economically and

socially apart, using their own religious, ethnic and family networks.<sup>12</sup> However, some individuals in both groups went beyond their “natural” partnerships, classified by Y. Ben-Porath as “the F-connection”—their families, friends and firms.<sup>13</sup> They often got involved in long-term joint ventures that crossed the boundaries of their traditional networks. For those who crossed their cultural alliances, there was a whole new world to explore.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the different religious backgrounds and the political context at the time, Dutch and Portuguese Jewish businessmen were able to create, maintain and improve their intra-group relationships to serve their economic goals. The Dutch penetration in the Brazilian and Western African trades, both before and after the creation of the chartered companies, is a case in point. The partnerships established with the Portuguese Jews gave the Dutch a certain degree of competitive advantage inside the Iberian Atlantic empires, but it also opened new doors for the Dutch expansion in the region.

The Portuguese Nation, on the other hand, was generally welcomed in the Dutch empire, being the source of much capital investment and know-how used in Western Africa, Suriname and the Caribbean to spur the plantation system. Furthermore, Dutch ports, especially Amsterdam, protected the socio-economic and cultural identity of these former New Christians, some of them forced to leave Iberia after the crackdown by the Iberian Inquisitions on their families, capital and assets.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to understand that these cross-cultural entrepreneurial networks demanded a certain degree of economic balance between two or more willing partners. This degree of balance, translated by the freedom, possibility and willingness to share economic risks and gains, called for a more or less equal juridical status for the different actors participating in a short partnership or a long-term firm. Therefore, when looking at Early Modern cross-cultural networks, there was a clear absence of a social or economic sense of hierarchy within the workings of a specific network. This confirms M. Casson’s theoretical stand that

a network comprises a web of long-term co-operative relationships between firms. It is distinctive because the relationship between the firms is not authoritarian like an employment relationship, and it differs from a spot market relationship because it involves a long-term commitment. It is intermediate between firm and market because, like the employment relationship, it is long-term, whilst like the spot market relationship, it involved firms of equal status.<sup>16</sup>

### **Cross-cultural Networks**

When Philip Curtin published his book on cross-cultural trade in 1984,<sup>17</sup> he identified three main problems that made these kind of business engagements risky and potentially disastrous. The first problem is language. Curtin argues that the absence of a common language may make communication difficult and hinder good relations and therefore prosperous commercial transactions. This hindering of communications potentially increases the amount of resources needed to come to an agreement on the commercial terms of a specific contract.<sup>18</sup>

1 Curtin presents a second problem. The amount of uncertainty in a certain com-  
2 mercial cross-cultural contract increases due to the cultural differences between  
3 two different groups. These differences include religious practices, lifestyle and daily  
4 behaviours. The host society may tolerate these differences in the foreign commu-  
5 nity but not when the latter is forced into direct contact with the former.<sup>19</sup>

6 The third problem is posed by the universal distrust of aliens coming from a for-  
7 eign land. The language barriers and the cultural differences are translated into a  
8 communal fear of all that is exterior to the original host society. Therefore, aliens  
9 are seen as untrustworthy and sometimes even dangerous.<sup>20</sup>

10 In the case of the relationship between the Amsterdam merchants and the  
11 Portuguese Jewish community the obstacles mentioned by Curtin seem to have  
12 had little impact. Portuguese had been a *lingua franca* during the fifteenth and six-  
13 teenth centuries and most of the merchant communities throughout seventeenth-  
14 century Europe (including many within the Amsterdam business elite), and most  
15 parts of the Atlantic World were able to understand Portuguese as a language of  
16 commerce and exchange.

17 The Portuguese Sephardic community on the other hand was a diaspora and as  
18 such accustomed to travel and integrating into foreign cultures. When Spain  
19 expelled the Jews in 1492, most of the families crossed the border into Portugal,  
20 beginning there a new life. Others left to different cities in the Mediterranean and  
21 the North of Africa.<sup>21</sup> Although massively and forcefully converted to Christianity by  
22 the end of the century by an initiative of the Portuguese king, and henceforth  
23 named New Christians, many of the Portuguese and Spanish Jews remained in  
24 Portugal. It is only with the advent of the Portuguese Inquisition during the sixteenth  
25 century that many were forced to leave the kingdom and settle elsewhere.

26 The diaspora of the Iberian Jewry led them to different destinations in and out-  
27 side of Europe. The new possessions of the Iberian kingdoms in the Atlantic Islands,  
28 Western Africa, the Americas, as well as in Asia, presented the perfect opportunity  
29 for a new start, physically far away from the religious and political decision centres,  
30 but still in a known cultural environment, where most of these migrants were able  
31 to recreate their personal stories and therefore engage in a new life away from the  
32 limits imposed by the issues surrounding their “purity of blood”.

33 If some of the New Christians left for the empire, others joined the already pros-  
34 perous communities in the Mediterranean or the newly started settlements in north-  
35 ern European cities. The late sixteenth-century communities grew mostly in Rouen,  
36 Antwerp and Hamburg, where the New Christians held a redistributive function in  
37 the activities surrounding the re-export of colonial products originally sent from  
38 America or Asia to Seville or Lisbon.<sup>22</sup> Although operating outside of Portugal, many  
39 of the Portuguese communities in northern Europe ended up being formal or infor-  
40 mal agents of the kingdom of Portugal and its empire, as was the case of the fam-  
41 ily Nunes da Costa.<sup>23</sup>

42 Many of the New Christians that settled in northern Europe belonged to a com-  
43 mercial and maritime elite meaning that they shared some familiarity with traveling  
44 and adapting to strange environments. This ability to blend into foreign societies  
45 required a certain expertise in communication skills, and thus demanded certain  
46 knowledge of the local languages.

47 The Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, although composed of some

of the families that escaped the fall of Antwerp (1575) and immigrated in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, also grew based on a new immigration wave originated in Iberia after the Union of the Crowns of 1580. The rise of Amsterdam as financial and commercial capital of the world allied with a wholehearted intervention by the Iberian Inquisitions generated a new exodus from Iberia and even from Brazil, where by the end of the sixteenth century the Portuguese Inquisition had been very active.<sup>24</sup>

The evidence of the Amsterdam notarial archives show that some of the commercial contracts under examination were written in Portuguese, especially before 1640. However, many of those concerned the internal relationships of the Portuguese Jews (marriage contracts or testaments). However, the commercial contracts seem to have been mainly written in Dutch and therefore made accessible to the majority. We would argue, then, that the language obstacle pointed out by Curtin as a problem for cross-cultural trade was a weak impediment in the relationship between Dutch and Portuguese Jewish merchants. This because Dutch merchants were probably able to master some understanding of Portuguese due to their direct contact with the language as the commercial *lingua franca*, whilst the Portuguese Jewish merchants would probably master some Dutch due to their Antwerp experience or by quickly learning the language after their settlement in Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup>

The problem of cultural differences and behaviour argued by Curtin as an obstacle to cross-cultural trading relations seems to have had as little impact on the Dutch-Portuguese Jewish relationship as the language. The Portuguese Jews were able to build a synagogue and circulate freely through the streets of Amsterdam at any time. They had freedom of movement, religious congregation and, although living mainly around the St. Anthoniszbreestraat, no legal framework stopped them from living somewhere else in the city. On the other hand, the clothing habits of the Portuguese Jewish elite seem to have fit the fashion trends of the time.<sup>26</sup> Nothing would distinguish these men, women and children from their Amsterdam counterparts. Simultaneously, the status of "melting pot" attributed to seventeenth-century Amsterdam would have provided enough physical cover for the presence of the Portuguese Jews in the city.

One of the things that might have called the attention of many for the Portuguese Jewish group was the fact that many had black servants. Although slavery was forbidden in the Dutch Republic, many Portuguese Jewish families kept their domestic slaves, referring to them simply as domestic servants with the city authorities, which considered this group as part of the extended family. It is only when disagreements broke out into serious physical aggression between the domestic slaves of different households that we are able to identify the true origin of many of these domestic servants and the way they were included in the family unit. However, little is known of the relationship between these slaves and the rest of the family or the daily reaction of the city authorities to the presence of these so-called servants.

A second cultural difference that might have distinguished the Portuguese Jews from many of their Amsterdam counterparts was the role played by Portuguese Jewish women in their husbands' businesses. Many of the Portuguese Jewish women that married important merchants were economically independent from their spouses. More often than not, they would invest their dowry on the firm of their

1 husbands and although many would only care about this investment in case of  
2 divorce or at the moment of settling the spouse's testament after an early death,  
3 others demanded a role in the management of the commercial activities of the fam-  
4 ily business. Little is known of the actual managerial competence and financial  
5 power of these women; however, their names appear often associated with the fam-  
6 ily business as individual investors, negotiating either in their own name or in the  
7 name of their underage children. Although this may have been a widely spread  
8 practice among Portuguese Jewish women, it was not uncommon to have similar  
9 participation on the part of women belonging to certain segments of the  
10 Amsterdam commercial elite, though some protestant groups condemned  
11 women's participation in the world of business. So once again, Curtin's argument  
12 on the dangers of cultural differences does not seem to have been a factor that dis-  
13 tinguished the Portuguese Nation from its non-Jewish counterparts.

14 Last but not least, Curtin implies the existence of a third problem related to cross-  
15 cultural relationships: the problem of exclusion and mistrust of outsiders. We would  
16 argue that this impediment would not apply for the potential contacts between the  
17 Portuguese Nation and the hosting society. Amsterdam was the seventeenth-centu-  
18 ry model of an Early Modern "melting pot". The city had been on the cross-roads  
19 of several protestant refugee waves, mostly from Catholic dominated areas. On  
20 arrival, many of the Protestants split into dissent groups of the main protestant  
21 structures, and slowly but steadily the number of religious immigrants grew.<sup>27</sup> The  
22 Thirty Years' War helped to increase the amount of refugees in the whole of the  
23 Northern Netherlands, particularly in the maritime provinces of Holland and  
24 Zeeland. The war refugees, many of them fleeing either armies or religious perse-  
25 cution took refuge in the main Dutch cities looking for work, which they found in  
26 the booming shipping activities in Europe and overseas.<sup>28</sup> The high wages of the  
27 Republic also attracted specialised workers, many of them originating in the small-  
28 er fishing and trading ports of Scandinavia and the Baltic. All in all, Amsterdam was  
29 a multicultural city, where language, religion, and cultural particularities did not  
30 threaten the host community, which was all too happy to receive the newcomers  
31 since they were known to perform the trades and jobs the common Dutch were not  
32 able or willing to do.

33 Given the characteristics of Amsterdam in the beginning of the seventeenth cen-  
34 tury, it is difficult to conceive of a Dutch hosting society averting the Portuguese  
35 Nation either for their language, religion or social behaviour, if any was visible. Both  
36 groups understood, spoke and/or wrote common languages; religious toleration  
37 and freedom was available to all religious minorities in Amsterdam (and those went  
38 far beyond the privileges given to the Portuguese Jews); and social behaviour  
39 seemed to fit the demands of Amsterdam society at the time (with the exception,  
40 perhaps, of the keeping of domestic slaves). Therefore, we would argue that  
41 although Curtin's premises may be viewed as general and mostly accurate, they did  
42 not translate the reality of late sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century Amsterdam.  
43 Although it might be too daring to state that the Portuguese Nation was integrated  
44 and perfectly functioning as part of Dutch society, it may be stated that they worked  
45 within Dutch society to achieve economic and cultural success.<sup>29</sup>

46 As we were able to see, the obstacles considered by Curtin as hindering factors  
47 for cross-cultural business relationships seem to have been mostly absent from the

interactions of the Dutch and Portuguese Jews operating from Amsterdam. Nonetheless, other limitations may have characterised the relationship between these two groups. To understand the exchanges between Dutch and Jewish merchants we will turn our attention to the portrayal of the networks created between these two groups while operating in the Atlantic. In order to characterise these networks we have chosen to look into the zoning of the contracts and analyse the main areas of engagement of cross-cultural networks in the Atlantic and explain their preponderance in some regions to the detriment of others.

**Zoning**

Amsterdam’s private investment in the Atlantic was confined to six main regions: North America, the Caribbean, the Spanish West Indies, the Wild Coast, South America, and Western Africa. Generally, in the period 1580-1674, Amsterdam private entrepreneurs directed their investment mainly to the Caribbean islands, the Wild Coast, South America and Western Africa. North America, the Spanish West Indies and the Wild Coast, although important to a minority of investors, never attained as much interest as the other three areas:

*Amsterdam Private Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic, 1580-1776*



Source: sample based on records kept at Gemeente Archief Amsterdam (henceforth GAA), Notarieel Archief (henceforth NA).

Looking closer at Amsterdam’s private interests in the Atlantic during the life span of the first WIC—created in 1621 and bankrupted in the 1670s—we notice a trend

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1 contrary to what one might expect when private individual investment is forced to  
2 face corporate chartered monopolistic commercial goals.

3 On the eve of the creation of the WIC in 1621, some voices rose against the idea  
4 of a chartered company for the Atlantic. These echoes came mostly from private  
5 entrepreneurs already operating in the Atlantic—mostly to the Western Coast of  
6 Africa, Brazil and North America—with or without the knowledge and cooperation  
7 of the Portuguese and the Spanish. Little is known about this opposition and the  
8 political and economic reasons behind it. However, it was clear to some of the mer-  
9 chants of the opposition party that they were not willing to withdraw their invest-  
10 ments from the area unless the newly formed company would pay significant dam-  
11 ages and allow a fair amount of time for the group to relocate their investments.<sup>30</sup>

12 We did not find the evidence for or against the actual fulfilment of the demands  
13 of the private merchants *vis-à-vis* the WIC. What we know is that private entrepre-  
14 nership in the Atlantic for the period of the first WIC was mainly active in the areas  
15 where the company tried the hardest to wage a full scale war against the Portuguese  
16 and Spanish Atlantic empires, considered by some historians a global war against  
17 Iberian might.<sup>31</sup> This aggressive stand by the WIC should be seen as a sign of Dutch  
18 corporate interest in the Atlantic in the general movement of Dutch expansion over-  
19 seas during the Golden Age, and simultaneously as a weapon to fight for the inde-  
20 pendence of the United Provinces of the Northern Netherlands by hurting one of the  
21 main sources of income of the Spanish Crown, which for the period 1580-1640 also  
22 held sway over Portugal and its empire overseas.

23 The WIC had two main goals. The first was the rapid acquisition of species, gold  
24 or silver, gained by interfering with the routes of the Spanish silver imports either by  
25 capturing the silver galleons or by establishing direct trading relationships with the  
26 Spanish West Indies or by prying on the Portuguese gold and ivory trading outposts  
27 in Western Africa. The second was to take hold of the sugar profits provided by the  
28 Portuguese plantations in Brazil and inherently control the sources of slave work  
29 force in Western Africa. Although these company goals seem to have been straight-  
30 forward and original, we argue that they were less the product of the goals set by  
31 the WIC itself, than the result of the already existing knowledge and previous Dutch  
32 presence in the aforementioned areas prior to the creation of the company. To a  
33 certain extent, the corporate WIC was taking hold of mainly pre-existing private  
34 know-how and experience. This being the case, it would explain that in spite of the  
35 presence and aggressive stand of the WIC in Africa, Brazil and the Caribbean, pri-  
36 vate entrepreneurship was mainly directed to those same areas, as much as that  
37 had been the case before the formation of the company.

38 One might expect that the presence of private and corporate interests in the  
39 same business (trade) taking place in the same geographical areas might have been  
40 the source of conflict. That seems to have been the case, but only at a very local  
41 level. This was because the WIC, contrary to the Dutch East India Company (VOC),  
42 was unable as a chartered company to impose, survey and enforce its monopoly.  
43 From the outset, the WIC had been underfunded, faced with opposition from differ-  
44 ent political and economic interest groups and much at odds with the political posi-  
45 tion of the States General in The Hague on what concerned the Dutch relationship  
46 with the Habsburg dynasty. Therefore, given the circumstances, the WIC needed  
47 the cooperation of the private sector to uphold its goals and to fulfil its original char-



ter. Private shipping, crews and troops were often subcontracted from private merchants, more often than not on credit, leaving the company and the private group supporting it heavily dependent on each other's successes and failures.<sup>32</sup>

The disastrous economic and military intervention of the WIC in Brazil and Angola drove the company to technical and practical bankruptcy, since the corporate economic structure had been plagued by the issuing of permanent and incessant war against Portugal, spending much of the resources assigned to it by both shareholders and extraordinary subsidies by the States General. The Hague refused to renew the company's privileges and only after the French invasion in the beginning of the 1670s did the States General agree to a new chartered company for the dealings in the Atlantic.

In the life cycle of the first WIC (1621-74), the company had conquered and lost the North Eastern Brazilian *capitanias*, as well as Luanda and adjacent territories in Angola, the Islands of São Tomé and some of the settlements in the Cape Verde archipelago. However, the company was able to hold its tenuous presence in the Gold Coast, especially after the conquest of Mina Castle (present-day Elmina) and the forts of Axim and Shama, all important commercial entrepôts in Western Africa, maintaining its grasp on the Wild Coast around what would later become the colony of Surinam, and clinging to the territorial acquisitions in the Caribbean.

So far we are able to understand that, in general, private and corporate entrepreneurship competed for the resources offered by the Atlantic. Either by clear and upfront competition or by long-term cooperation, private and corporate interests found a way to coexist in the same line of business in the same areas of interest.

Following the zoning of the general Amsterdam private interest in the Atlantic between 1580 and 1674, we turn now to the specific cross-cultural private partnerships built around the Atlantic business. For this period, we noted earlier that Brazil and the Western Coast of Africa had been the main areas of investment for the private interests operating from Amsterdam. However, Table 1 shows that cross-cultural trade was more intense in the areas where Amsterdam's private interests in general were less important, in this case in North America and the Spanish West Indies, where cross-cultural trade represented 37.7% and 33.3%, respectively, of the

*Table 1. Amsterdam-based cross-cultural private entrepreneurship in the Atlantic, 1580-1674 (as a percentage of the Amsterdam-based private entrepreneurship in the Atlantic withdrawn from a sample of 16,500 notarial contracts).*

Areas	Cross-Cultural (%)
North America	37.7
Caribbean	22
Spanish West Indies	33.3
Wild Coast	22.2
South America	28.1
West Coast Africa	17.1
Average Cross-Cultural (%)	26.7 (28.7 exc. Africa)

Source: sample based on records kept at GAA, NA.

1 total Amsterdam private entrepreneurship in these areas. Cross-cultural entrepre-  
2 neurship in South America (mainly Brazil) and the Western Coast of Africa were far  
3 below this level with 28.1% and 17.1%, respectively.

4 The cross-cultural private intervention in the Spanish West Indies and North  
5 America calls for an explanation, since these were the areas where neither WIC nor  
6 private entrepreneurs seem to have been very active between 1580 and 1674. There  
7 are four possible arguments that may explain this fact. First, it is valid to argue that  
8 private cross-cultural partnerships were needed in North America and the Spanish  
9 West Indies because private entrepreneurs were looking for a new area of business  
10 and therefore willing to divert the added risks from their natural networks (i.e. net-  
11 works based on kinship or religious affiliations) in order to avoid the collapse of their  
12 other businesses. But if that was the case, the works by Peter Mathias, Avner Greif  
13 and others need to be revised on what concerns the high risks involved in cross-  
14 cultural trade.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps what was highly risky was not the network in itself and its  
15 social composition, but the goals set by cross-cultural partnerships, in this case the  
16 establishment of a presence in areas that demanded heavy investment and there-  
17 fore a higher amount of risk for an investor's overall operation. If we accept the high  
18 investment risk posed by these new areas, we cannot ignore that they were the most  
19 peaceful in the Dutch Atlantic at that point, since full scale war was mostly being  
20 waged in the South Atlantic.

21 A second possible argument, contrary to what we have defended above, is the  
22 fact that the Spanish West Indies and North America were the least dangerous areas  
23 in the Atlantic between 1580 and 1674, which may be the reason why cross-cultur-  
24 al networks were more intense in those areas. If we do not contest the current opin-  
25 ion brought forward primarily by institutionalist historians, that cross-cultural part-  
26 nerships were more dangerous than same-group partnerships, we would argue that  
27 only in a more or less stable environment was it possible for these cross-cultural  
28 networks to thrive.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, a geographical area that did not impose many  
29 obstacles in itself, would be the perfect environment for the development, mainte-  
30 nance and success of these business arrangements.

31 Third, one can argue that the lack of interest by the WIC in these areas opened  
32 the window for private investors. The absence of a corporate competitor might have  
33 been attractive to private entrepreneurs, reducing their transaction costs and allow-  
34 ing for a larger margin of risk, transferred to the cross-cultural nature of the firm.<sup>35</sup>  
35 As a matter of fact, the WIC granted private entrepreneurs access to the Caribbean  
36 after 1638 and to North America after 1648, as a means to face the financial diffi-  
37 culties it endured and simultaneously promote Dutch settlement in those areas.

38 Last, but not least, the cross-cultural private interest in North America and the  
39 Spanish West Indies perhaps has to be sought not so much on the social compo-  
40 sition of the partnerships, but on the nature of the business itself. Amsterdam was  
41 a staple market<sup>36</sup> and we contend that that was one of the main characteristics of  
42 private entrepreneurship associated with the European trades. The redistributive  
43 nature of Amsterdam implied that private know-how and business options associ-  
44 ated with the workings of the staple market were transferred into other regions. The  
45 role played by the private investment in North America and the Spanish West Indies  
46 seem to have fulfilled this role. In fact, Amsterdam firms participated in local trad-  
47 ing routes with both the indigenous population and European settlers, insuring the

provision of food-stuffs and primary consumption goods locally produced and transported through the local networks. This transposition of a business model was not new for the Amsterdam merchants. In fact, the system they used in the Mediterranean and the Baltic were identical, though running at different paces and adapted to the local demands imposed by existing political powers.

### **An Insight on Western Africa**

The Dutch and Portuguese Jewish businessmen based in Amsterdam and other Dutch port cities started their economic activities with Western Africa in the late 1580s. Prior to the chartering of the WIC, Dutch merchants were organised in small commercial companies, such as the *Compagnie van Guinea*, the companies of Nicolaes Balestel, Hans Philips Thijssen, Adriaen, Marten and Guillaume Papenbroeck, or the company of Hans Willemsen Elbinck. In addition, there were many private merchants engaged in this trade single-handedly or in short-term partnerships. Frans Jacobsen Hinloopen, Samuel Bloemert, Lucas van de Venne, and Pieter Sijmonsz Snellinck, all merchants in Amsterdam are cases in point.<sup>37</sup> The Portuguese Sephardic Jews were mainly organised in short-term partnerships. Gaspar Sanches, Gaspar Nunes, Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga, Duarte Fernandes, Diogo da Silva, and Diogo Nunes Belmonte were the most prominent investors in the Western African trade.<sup>38</sup> Working side by side with these merchants, there was a small group of entrepreneurs responsible for safeguarding of the voyages through insurances, bottomries, and other legal instruments. This was the case of men like Jan Jansz Smith, Albert Schuijt, Claes Andriaesz, the partnership Barent Sweets & Jan de Clerck, Willem Pauw, Anthoni van Diemen, Wijbrant Warwijck, and Salmon Voerknecht.<sup>39</sup>

Between the 1590s and 1623, Dutch and Portuguese Jewish merchants operated in routes linking the Republic to Senegambia and the Guinea-Bissau region,<sup>40</sup> the Cape Verde Islands,<sup>41</sup> the Gulf of Guinea, the Loango, the Kongo, and Angola.<sup>42</sup> Ships often called at Brazil or in the Spanish Americas, where Dutch and Sephardic merchants shared interest in the import and export of Brazilian sugar, dyewood, tobacco, cacao and slaves. The trade with Western Africa was dominated by the imports of ivory, gold, wax, hides and exotic animals.<sup>43</sup>

It is impossible to present exact figures on the volume of the exchanges, since information about the journeys, the ships and the capital investment are not systematically inscribed in the sources. However, based on the archival information available and the data provided by W.S. Unger,<sup>44</sup> we have estimated that private merchants would have carried out an average of 20 voyages per year, i.e. 500 in total for the period between 1599-1623.<sup>45</sup> After the establishment of the WIC, the private merchants in the Republic had to officially suspend their activities in Western Africa. However, many continued to sail to these areas, either at the service of the Company transporting soldiers, ammunitions, victuals and commodities, or for their own account. To circumvent the WIC's monopoly, these merchants used several strategies, including using foreign passports, departing from ports outside the Republic or advising skippers to avoid trading or calling at ports or areas under the direct administration of the company, as we have argued elsewhere.<sup>46</sup>

The presence of private merchants from the Republic in the areas under WIC

1 jurisdiction increased visibly after they had been granted permission to participate in  
 2 the Brazilian trade, the Angolan slave trade, and the commerce with New  
 3 Netherlands in 1638, 1647, and 1648, respectively.

4 The official opening of the WIC monopoly to private merchants provoked the  
 5 expansion of the number of circuits where private interests were vested, as was the  
 6 case of Brazil, the Caribbean, the Guianas and North America, whereas the end of  
 7 the Thirty Years' War with the Habsburg Empire (1648) and with Portugal (1662)  
 8 granted these merchants access to the Iberian colonial consumption markets.

9 The gradual opening of the WIC monopoly was partially due to the company's  
 10 difficulties in ensuring the shipping of commodities, staff, soldiers and ammuni-  
 11 tions. Therefore, this shift in the Company's policy also meant an increasing num-  
 12 ber of agreements between the WIC and private merchants based in the Republic  
 13 and other European port cities to guarantee shipments. These partnerships  
 14 between the company and private traders involved both Dutch and Portuguese  
 15 Jews and therefore justify our analysis of private entrepreneurship and cross-cultur-  
 16 al interactions during the rule of the WIC.<sup>47</sup> An example of cross-cultural partners  
 17 involved with the company and operating in the name of their partnerships are  
 18 Henrico Matias, Johan van Wickevoort & Co., or the Sephardim Abraham Cohen  
 19 and Joseph de los Rios.<sup>48</sup>

20 It is within this context that cross-cultural interactions between Dutch and  
 21 Portuguese Sephardim merchants based in Amsterdam took place. In contrast with  
 22 North America and Spanish West Indies, the Western Coast of Africa seems to have  
 23 been, in the general context of the Atlantic, the region with the least percentage  
 24 (17.1%) of cross-cultural business engagements, that is to say roughly one-sixth of  
 25 the total Amsterdam private investment in the region. Table 2 shows that the level  
 26 of cross-cultural partnerships was especially low during the time of the Spanish  
 27 embargo imposed by Philip II on Dutch ships and products being traded in Iberian  
 28 ports in Europe and overseas. A similar trend occurred between 1621 and 1654,  
 29 when the hostilities between the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese in the context of  
 30 the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and in the context of the Dutch Atlantic expansion  
 31 reached their zenith and the power of the WIC had reached its highest point.  
 32 Conversely, during the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-21) and from the mid-1650s  
 33 onwards, the level of cross-cultural contracts increased. It seems that during  
 34 periods of military hostilities and embargoes, merchants were reluctant to engage  
 35 in cross-cultural partnerships, while during periods of peace they frequently sought  
 36  
 37

38 *Table 2: Dutch and Sephardim cross-cultural contracts for the Western African trade (c. 1590-1674)*

39	40	41	42
	Periods	Total nr. of contracts	% Cross-cultural contracts
41	1580-1608	28	11
42	1609-1621/3	100	26
43	1624-1654	93	14
44	1655-1674	120	20
45	Total	341	

46  
 47 Sources: sample based on records kept at GAA, NA.

cooperation outside their social, religious and ethnic group. This difference between periods of war and peace may be justified by the fact that cross-cultural partnerships were theoretically riskier—if one follows the institutionalist historiography—and therefore better to carry on in times of peace, since they would be an added factor of risk in times of conflict.<sup>49</sup>

The lower amount of cross-cultural engagements for Western Africa when compared to the cross-cultural investment in the Atlantic in general may have been a four-fold problem. First, cross-cultural partnerships were less needed in the Amsterdam market than they were required *ad hoc*. Voyages to Africa could be organised in Amsterdam without heavy participation of alien partners because all the contacts one needed to accomplish trade were present in Africa and not in Europe. Locally, Dutch and Portuguese Sephardic merchants joined forces to establish contacts with the African authorities and populations, the Portuguese and Luso-Africans often being the intermediaries between the Dutch and the local Africans.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, cross-cultural partnerships needed to be sought at the local level rather than at European level.

Second, Western Africa was a trading region for most Europeans, with the exception of the Portuguese, who promoted settlement from a very early stage onwards. The economic interest in the area relied on the import of ivory and gold to Europe, and the transport of slaves to the Americas. The first two commercial activities did not require high financial investments because these were products acquired with direct exchanges of other products of either European or African origin, acquired through the local intra-African routes. In this case, and contrary to what happened with the commercial context in the Americas, African commodity trade demanded little direct capital investment, except on ships, crews and provisions. The slave trade however did require higher investments. The scale, complexity and credit granted to slave buyers could delay return-profits up to two to three years.<sup>51</sup> However, prior to the 1630s, the Sephardim merchants engaged in this business appear associated mainly with partners of the same kin or religious group, relying exclusively on outsiders to insure their commercial ventures. In the 1650s-1670s, with the expansion of the slave trade associated with the transfer of the plantation complex to the Caribbean, the Wild Coast and North America, the capital needed to operate the business increased and a growing number of partnerships were established. However, they did not always involve Dutch and Portuguese Jewish merchants.<sup>52</sup>

The majority of the cross-cultural interactions between Dutch and Portuguese Sephardic Jews operating in Amsterdam in this period were therefore financial, assuming the form of maritime insurances. The Portuguese Sephardic Jews chose to insure their vessels and cargoes with Dutch entrepreneurs to spread the risks of the business outside the group. When on March 16, 1611, Gaspar Nunes, João Lopes and António Nobre, Jewish merchants from Amsterdam, freighted *Die Fortuijn*, property of Pieter Bodaen, Gillis du Pluis and Claes Claesen for a trip to Portudal and Rufisque in the Petite Côte of Senegal; they knew they were engaging in a dangerous agreement.<sup>53</sup> There were plenty of risks involved in the Western African trade. These risks were covered by insurance policies that safeguarded ships operating in the coastal and the long-distance circuits. However, only few businessmen could afford the start up capital to cover the risks posed by the pro-

1 tection of third parties property in Western Africa. Jan Jansz Smits, merchant in  
2 Amsterdam, is a case in point.

3 Smits initiated his insurance activities in 1612. The core of his activities covered  
4 ships destined to Western Africa and other areas in the Atlantic, as was the case of  
5 Brazil and the West Indies. In general, Jan Jansz Smits worked in partnership with  
6 Claes Adriaensz, Barent Sweets and Albert Schuijt.<sup>54</sup> A significant number of the  
7 insurances backed by Smits partnerships with Adriaensz, Sweets and Schuijt were  
8 destined to protect the property and interests of Portuguese Jewish merchants  
9 living in Portugal or in Amsterdam. For example, in 1612, Jan Jansz Smit, in asso-  
10 ciation with Claes Adriaensz, Jan de Clerk and Jasper Grevenraet, insured a cargo  
11 of hides, elephant tusks, gold and other merchandise for Diogo da Silva on board  
12 the *St. Jacob*. Skipper Harpert Martens from Rotterdam was to load these goods  
13 and sail from Cape Verde to Amsterdam.<sup>55</sup>

14 Diogo da Silva was not the only Portuguese Sephardic merchant to insure his  
15 business with Dutch Amsterdam businessmen. Actually, the Dutch entrepreneurs  
16 provided 79% of the insurance for the Western African trade, against 21% safe-  
17 guarded by Jewish businessmen. Furthermore, of the total Dutch share of the  
18 insurance market for Western Africa, 65% of the policies were issued by Dutch  
19 entrepreneurs to Jewish merchants, with the remaining 35% to safeguard Dutch  
20 commercial activities in the area.

21 For the period of the WIC's strict monopoly over the Atlantic (1621-37), informa-  
22 tion on the insurance activities of the aforementioned entrepreneurs is scarcer.  
23 However, there is some evidence—especially for the 1650s, 1660s, and 1670s—  
24 due to the opening of the WIC monopoly to the participation of private merchants.  
25 For instance, on January 9, 1663, Joseph de los Rios, Sephardic merchant of  
26 Amsterdam, insured the casco of *De Liefde* that was sailing between the Mase River,  
27 Guinea and Cadiz. The 20,000 *florins*' insurance had been settled between De los  
28 Rios, Carlo Ghijsbert and Volckert Gerritz & Co. (insurers in Amsterdam) through  
29 their agent Joan van den Velde (broker in the same city).<sup>56</sup>

30 The insurance policies safeguarded by Dutch businessmen to members of the  
31 Portuguese Nation from Amsterdam were not exclusively destined to members of  
32 the Nation. The Portuguese Sephardim from Amsterdam acted as contacts for mer-  
33 cantile groups in Portugal that obtained their insurances in the Republic. Often, they  
34 were the commercial partners or representatives of Iberian merchants operating  
35 from Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. For instance, João Soeiro, *contratador*<sup>57</sup>  
36 of the Cape Verde and Senegambia royal monopoly in Lisbon (sanctioned by  
37 Madrid) between 1608 and 1614 made use of his connections with the Sephardic  
38 Jews to freight and insure ships in Amsterdam. Soeiro's main contacts in  
39 Amsterdam were Gaspar Fernandes, Gaspar Nunes, Duarte Fernandes, Pedro  
40 Rodrigues da Veiga, as well as Diogo da Silva and Diogo Dias Querido, all mer-  
41 chants in Amsterdam and connected to Soeiro via their common agents in Guinea,  
42 Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues, both factors of the *contratador* on  
43 the coast.<sup>58</sup> On January 19, 1611, Diogo da Silva and Diogo Dias Querido sent  
44 some goods in the *Santiago* (skipped by Herbert Marselssen from Rotterdam)  
45 which travelled from Rotterdam to Portudal and Joal (present-day Petite Côte of  
46 Senegal). The value of the cargo amounted to 3,120 Flemish pounds, destined to  
47 Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues, responsible for the trade on the

coast of Guinea. Hides, ivory and other African goods were to be bartered for the European cargo. Skipper Marselssen was to stay six months there and then return to the Republic. Barent Adriaen Andriesz, Wijbrant Warwijck and Anthoni van Diemen insured ships and cargo from Portugal to Senegambia, while Claes Andriensz, Jaspas Grevenraet, Barent Sweerts and Jan Jansz Smits insured the return cargo to the Republic.<sup>59</sup>

The cross-cultural insurances were a strategy closely related to the process of capitalisation of the Western African trade. This process involved a complex system of direct exchange of goods, not only in Africa but also in the American markets, and the circulation of bills of exchange that could only be cashed in Europe. The high risks involved in this kind of business and the delay on the return of investment may explain why the Portuguese Sephardim operating in Western Africa had financial partnerships with members outside their own mercantile group by placing risks associated with the transport and capitalisation outside of the group.

Insurance was but one example of cross-cultural business exchanges for Western Africa. Short-term commercial partnerships were an essential pillar of cross-cultural dealings between merchants of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam and their Dutch counterparts.<sup>60</sup> Diogo Vaz de Sousa, a Portuguese Sephardic merchant established in Amsterdam, operated in the trade with Cape Verde together with Adriaen Ryser, Gerrit de Beer, Pieter and Jacques de Bari, all merchants in Amsterdam. On 4 October 1619, Sousa and his partners agreed to a voyage to Cape Verde on the *De Swarte Beer*, under skipper Adriaen Claessen from Amsterdam. The cargo had an estimated value of 1,500 Flemish pounds, half of which belonged to Diogo Vaz de Sousa and the other half to the other partners. Sousa was supposed to travel on board the ship as supercargo and conduct the trade in Cape Verde. Part of the returning cargo was to be hides from Cape Verde. Bento Osório, also a merchant in Amsterdam, gave surety on behalf of Diogo Vaz de Sousa. As a matter of reference, Bento Osório, a distinguished member of the Portuguese Nation in Amsterdam, offered strong support to Sousa's endeavour and vouched for his honesty.<sup>61</sup> These cross-cultural commercial partnerships continued to take place under the monopoly of the WIC, especially in the 1650s and 1660s. On June 14, 1655, Abraham Cohen, Sephardi merchant in Amsterdam, gave commercial credit to Quirijn Sprange, also merchant in the city. The credit was to pay for a cargo of linen and other goods transported by Hendrick Carsou on board the ship *Castel da Mina*, sailing from Recife (Brazil) to Guinea.<sup>62</sup>

Partnerships like these ones were short-lived, sometimes just for one or two voyages, and could be easily dissolved if problems arose between the partners. The short-term and flexible character of these partnerships meant that merchants could easily change their commercial associates and redirect capital from one business to another fairly quickly. This flexibility was essential for the expansion of the business, not only in terms of capital invested, but also on what concerns the diversification of activities and areas of intervention. However, these type of short-lived associations precluded the survival of long-term commercial and financial partnerships.

Last, but not least, the low participation of cross-cultural partnerships for the dealings in Western Africa may be connected with the inherent characteristics of the trade, the supply and the consumption markets in Europe, Western Africa and the

1 Americas. The African goods in demand in Europe were mainly gold, ivory, hides,  
2 wax and ambergris. However, their supply was limited and, therefore, these com-  
3 modities were easily absorbed by the European markets, regardless of the high  
4 prices, which translated into high profits for the merchants. Consequently, the dif-  
5 ferent groups of merchants operating in this specialised trade did not need to estab-  
6 lish cross-cultural commercial partnerships to control the volume and therefore the  
7 prices in the European markets.

8 The volume and type of European products sent into the Western African con-  
9 sumption markets demonstrate that this was also the case for the latter. The  
10 Europeans did not ship bulk products to Western Africa. They supplied the African  
11 markets with a very specific range of products for the consumption of the African  
12 elites.<sup>63</sup> Hence, the European products did not play a key role in the African  
13 economies. In this sense, the establishment of cross-cultural commercial partner-  
14 ships between European merchants to defend the position of their commodities in  
15 the African markets by controlling prices or demand was of little relevance, and  
16 literally impossible, given the control exerted by African and Eurafrikan traders  
17 locally.

18 The significance of cross-cultural partnerships is best reflected by powers of  
19 attorney and labour contracts. Western African business in general demanded the  
20 permanence of factors and representatives of the Amsterdam merchant communi-  
21 ty in the posts and settlements so that they might take part in specific commercial  
22 expeditions or send economic agents to key locations in the commercial circuits.  
23 Local factors and representatives were to establish cooperative relations with other  
24 economic agents as was the case with the Portuguese, other Europeans,  
25 Eurafrikans and Africans.

26 Between c. 1590 and 1623, the private merchants from Amsterdam made use  
27 of two different types of economic agents for the Western African trade: the super-  
28 cargoes on board the ships and the factors sent ashore. For this reason, Dutch  
29 merchants and their Portuguese Sephardic partners in Amsterdam signed out  
30 powers of attorney and labour contracts so that they might have a common repre-  
31 sentative in Western Africa to defend their economic interests. For instance, in 1607  
32 Elias Trip (merchant in Dordrecht), Jan Kuysten (merchant in Amsterdam) and  
33 Manuel Telles Barreto (a Portuguese from Madeira) freighted the *De Maecht* (skip-  
34 pered by Hendrick Reijerss) to sail to the Congo River and Angola. The Portuguese  
35 merchant travelled with the crew as supercargo, having as his main goal the pro-  
36 tection of Trip and Kuysten's interest in those areas. The Portuguese Sephardic  
37 Jews established in Amsterdam had similar practices. For example, on 24  
38 December 1610, Gaspar Sanches and Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga freighted the ship  
39 *Het Vliegende Hert*, skippered by Heyns Claessen, to travel from Amsterdam to  
40 Portudal. Pedro da Veiga and his brother Gaspar Fernandes travelled on board the  
41 ship to trade the merchandise on the coast.<sup>64</sup> The practice of hiring supercargoes  
42 to travel on board the ships continued after the establishment of the WIC, despite  
43 restrictions issued by the Company. For instance, between February and June 1647,  
44 Pieter Meijnersten of Hoorn (skipper of *De Endracht*) had conducted trade in  
45 Calabar on behalf of António Mendes, Pedro Dias & Co., who were Portuguese mer-  
46 chants in Rouen. Meijnersten's services were hired in Amsterdam through their  
47 representative in the city, Isaac the Carvalho, Portuguese Sephardim.<sup>65</sup>



Private factors and agents on shore were also no longer allowed in Western Africa. However, the Company did not have enough means to patrol the entire coast. As a consequence, in areas out of the reach of Company patrolling, private merchants manage to hire representatives to stay and conduct trade on the coast, and often these practices involved cross-cultural exchanges. A case in point is the recruitment of Pieter Tilhaye and Jan Jansz, of Amsterdam. They had been hired by António Luís and David le Cordier, respectively Portuguese and French merchants in Amsterdam, to travel on board the frigate *Abrahams Offerhande* sailing to the island of Boavista in Cape Verde on 25 September 1659. The two men were to stay in Boavista and conduct trade between the Cape Verdean Islands and between these and the coast using a prefabricated bark they had carried along.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes, even merchants directly associated with the Company for the transport of commodities and enslaved Africans to WIC possessions had representatives in territories outside Dutch control. Henrico Matias is a case in point, having extensive trade connections within the “Dutch Atlantic” and the “Iberian Atlantic”.<sup>67</sup>

These economic agents made the connection between the African ports and the international trading circuits linking these ports with the Americas and Europe. Behind these commercial agents was another layer of economic actors: those establishing the connection between the African coastal areas and the supply markets of African goods located deeper in the continent.

The study of cross-cultural partnerships established in the Western African context between Europeans (Christians and Jews) and Africans can be quite challenging, since they were not endorsed by legal documents. Therefore, they cannot be measured in quantitative terms. In order to assess the type and nature of these trading relationships we rely on the qualitative information available in the journals of voyages carried out by merchants based in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, the GAA source materials for the study of Eurafricans are very scarce, due to the nature of the Notarial Contracts. As explained earlier, there were mainly deeds signed between businessmen, entrepreneurs and their representatives to safeguard their economic interests; therefore African and Eurafrican traders on the coast were not the prime concern, unless they directly or indirectly affected the interests of the former.

This methodological approach naturally has its risks, since it prevents us from capturing all features of the cross-cultural interactions established between the European and their Eurafrican and African partners in the business. But, given the lack of African primary sources for the study of sub-Saharan African History in general, and the analysis of trading activities in Western Africa in particular, European written documents offer one of the few possibilities to shed some light on the cross-cultural transactions taking place in the Western Coast of Africa during the Early Modern Period.

Free Africans, Europeans settled on the coast, along with their descendants, were the connections between these two worlds.<sup>68</sup> The first layer of intermediaries in these transactions was, often, a group of agents of the local African authorities, responsible for the collection of taxes and for the enforcement of local commercial practices. In the island of Gorée and the Petite Côte of Senegal, before the ships could be anchored and the merchants could go ashore and trade, a fiscal agent of the local African ruler would come on board to collect duties. After the payment,

1 the chief and junior factors could go ashore and dispatch the lighter ships to ports  
2 along the coast, such as Portudal, Rufisque and Joal. However, at each new port  
3 they had to pay local duties. These custom duties were paid in kind, using products  
4 such as iron bars, alcoholic beverages, glass beads, and so on. For instance, in  
5 1606 the chief factor of the *Roode Hart*, Edwoudt Hendrickxssen, only obtained  
6 permission to trade on the island of Gorée after paying customs to the fiscal officer  
7 of the local ruler. On arrival at Joal he again had to pay custom duties to African  
8 authorities there.<sup>69</sup> Further southeast, in places such as Accra, Cameroon, Corisco  
9 Bay, and Rio del Rey, trade was conducted on board the ships.<sup>70</sup> Over time the WIC  
10 employees and, later, the private traders from the Republic, were authorised by the  
11 African rulers to have trading posts. The Company personnel and the private traders  
12 would then be forced to pay duties and to follow local rules regarding trade, such  
13 as monopolies imposed by local African polities over certain goods, the primacy of  
14 important African middlemen, etc.<sup>71</sup> These practices were imposed on the “Dutch”,  
15 Jews and Portuguese traders without exception.

16 The second layer of intermediaries in these commercial activities was formed by  
17 three main groups: free Africans of different backgrounds, Europeans settled on the  
18 coast and their Eurafrikan descendants. Since the 1590s the private traders from  
19 the Republic relied on the mediation of free Africans to access the African products  
20 in demand in the European markets. For example, between 1612 and 1623 the pri-  
21 vate merchants from the Republic trading in the Gold Coast relied on free Africans  
22 from the Akan and the Ga peoples as middlemen for their commercial contacts  
23 between the hinterland markets and the lodges in the coast. In Elmina, for instance,  
24 these activities were performed by the wealthiest inhabitants of the village next to  
25 the castle.<sup>72</sup> After the establishment of the WIC in the Gold Coast free Africans con-  
26 tinued to be recruited by the Company to perform commercial activities. In order to  
27 guarantee the supply of African goods to the forts, entrepôts and lodges, both for  
28 commercial and logistical purposes, the WIC signed contracts with powerful African  
29 traders operating as middlemen between the supplying markets in the hinterlands  
30 and the establishments of the Company in the coastal areas.<sup>73</sup> The commercial  
31 know-how of the African brokers was essential for both the survival of the  
32 Company’s civilian and military staff and for the supply of African goods to the inter-  
33 national consumption markets in the Americas and Europe. Locals were also hired  
34 for the coastal shipping. Their knowledge of the shores, the estuaries of the rivers,  
35 the wind system of the Guinea Gulf and their sailing expertise in the small canoes  
36 used for coastal navigation were essential for the Company. They guaranteed the  
37 transport of employees, information, products and provisions between the different  
38 posts.<sup>74</sup>

39 Thus, free Africans were recruited to perform mainly commercial and shipping  
40 activities that required a specific know-how and, therefore, could not be performed  
41 successfully by Europeans. Their expertise in coastal navigation and their know-how  
42 on the hinterland trade, as well as their high resistance to tropical diseases, were  
43 essential for the commercial success of the Company, not only on the coast, but  
44 also in the Atlantic in general. Hence, in order to succeed economically the WIC  
45 and the “Dutch” private traders had to rely on the cooperation of the free Africans,  
46 despite running the risk of being overwhelmed by the African rulers at any moment,  
47 as was often the case after the 1660s.<sup>75</sup>

Europeans settled in the Western African Coast and their Eurafrican descendants were another important group linking the merchants from the Republic based on the coast with the African supply markets located in the hinterland, especially in the coastal areas between Senegambia and Sierra Leone, though there are also some examples for the Loango and Kongo regions. In these regions, together with their African partners<sup>76</sup> and Eurafrican offspring (also known as Luso-Africans, *lançados*, and *tangomaos*) they formed local elites.

These Eurafricans lived not only in the ports, but also in the jungle under the authority of the local African rulers, and in some cases they even had family ties with these authorities.<sup>77</sup> Their power-base resided on the control of extensive commercial networks linking the coastal areas to the hinterland markets. In most cases, this control was won through marriages with local African women already involved in these trading activities. Therefore, they became important middlemen between the hinterlands and the coastal areas, where the European merchants were settled, and played a key role in the development of the coastal trade in Western Africa.

Due to their key role as brokers, they were often perceived as a threat to the economic interests of the Portuguese Crown and the Portuguese businessmen. This idea was reinforced by the connections of these middlemen with the European competitors of the Portuguese operating in Senegambia, Loango, Kongo, Angola and Benguela, such as the merchants from the Dutch Republic. For instance, Pieter van den Broecke, on his first voyage to Cape Verde (1605-6), rented a house from a respected African woman to conduct trade in Portudal together with the constable Jan Pieterssen van Sweden for a period of five months.<sup>78</sup> During the second voyage to West-Central Africa, Pieter van den Broecke established contacts with several Portuguese and Eurafricans in several places on the coast. On May 26, 1610, Van den Broecke bought redwood, elephant tusks, and *taccola* (Takula, dye-yielding plant) at Mayoumba from a Eurafrican of Portuguese descent named Luis Mendes. During the same journey, on May 17, 1610, Van den Broecke reported that the master of the ship *Mauritius* trading under his supervision also went up the Cacongo River to trade with a Portuguese merchant named Manuel da Costa. Finally, on his third voyage to Angola Van den Broecke met at Mayoumba another Portuguese: “[his] great friend Francisco Delmende Navero”.<sup>79</sup>

These commercial transactions continued under the rule of the WIC. The WIC employees did not penetrate into the interior, so much so that on the Gold Coast, and in São Tomé and Angola, the employees responsible for the trade relied on middlemen to bring the African goods and foodstuffs from the remote areas in the interior to the coast. For instance, during the WIC government over Angola, the factors of the Company benefited from the economic cooperation of some Portuguese and Eurafricans who had access to the hinterland and supplied the Company employees with African goods and slaves to be exported to the American and European markets. They also provided the WIC employees and military personnel with logistics for their survival.<sup>80</sup> The Gold Coast also witnessed the emergence of a group of Eurafricans, offspring of interracial marriages between local women and employees of the WIC, as well as staff members of the Danish, Swedish and English African Companies. Among the Dutch, these Eurafricans became known as *tapojers* and were recognised as key players in the negotiations between the WIC officials and the traders, especially in the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>81</sup>

1 However, given the circumstances of Euraficans' settlements and the limitations of  
2 the primary sources, it is extremely difficult to identify who these men were. Thus,  
3 examples of these interactions are difficult to find and their number is still scarce for  
4 the period under study. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that they were essential cul-  
5 tural and business brokers in these areas.

## 6 7 **Conclusion** 8

9 Cultural differences between Dutch merchants and their Portuguese Jewish coun-  
10 terparts do not seem to have interfered in the partnerships both groups created to  
11 defend their interests in the Atlantic, since this area attracted about one quarter of  
12 cross-cultural investment of total Amsterdam private investment in the Atlantic.  
13 However, not all the areas in the Atlantic were evenly attractive for cross-cultural  
14 partnerships of this kind. Western Africa is a case in point.

15 As we have seen earlier, of the total Amsterdam private investment in Western  
16 Africa, roughly one-sixth was in the hands of cross-cultural partnerships that prefer-  
17 ably operated in periods of peace rather than moments of conflict. Most of the  
18 investments conducted by these cross-cultural partnerships were based on insur-  
19 ances, labour contracts and powers of attorney—the former used to provide secu-  
20 rity for trade and shipping, the labour contracts and powers of attorney to provide  
21 for representatives and agents of the Amsterdam interest-groups in the area. Even  
22 though cross-cultural partnerships between Europeans (Christians and Jews) leave  
23 a more extensive paper trail, the cross-cultural partnerships between Europeans of  
24 different religious beliefs and Africans were just as important, since they often con-  
25 trolled, regulated or determined the terms of business in the Western Coast of  
26 Africa.

27 The intensity of cross-cultural dealings and contacts seems to increase once we  
28 stop looking into the intercontinental business setting and instead focus on the hin-  
29 terland-coastal transactions. At that level it is clear that partnerships initiated and/or  
30 contracted in Amsterdam between people from different backgrounds were not  
31 only cross-cultural in nature, they also included people of different ethnic groups  
32 and religious beliefs, and even operated across competing empires. In general  
33 these cross-cultural, trans-“national” and clearly trans-imperial transactions were  
34 not a particularity of the Western African trade, but a common feature throughout  
35 the Early Modern Atlantic world.

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