

# Introduction

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## Establishing the Field: Global History

For almost two decades, historians and academics from a wide-range of sub-disciplinary backgrounds have been situating their research within a global context, crossing boundaries both geographically and methodologically, in such large numbers as to necessitate the emergence of a recognisably new field of enquiry: Global History. From comparative to connective histories, the field is still regarded by many as protean, full of potential possibilities and opportunities to provide a heritage to our own globalised and intensively connected world.<sup>1</sup> However, after almost two decades, this vogue perspective has, in many respects, held the field back from presenting more formalised answers and solutions to the almost unending questions and problems historians continue to throw up as they globalise their research. As recently as 2016, the Scottish Centre for Global History's conference on 'Writing Global History' asked far more questions than one might expect in a field maturing into its third decade. Whilst it is absolutely essential that Global Histories continue to problematise the processes of globalisation, as recently demanded by Sebastian Conrad in his survey of the field, nonetheless the contributions in this volume do seek to provide answers – rather than questions – to some of the key challenges which have been posed by the emergence of Global History.<sup>2</sup> Many of these answer questions directly raised by the notion of the corporation as a protagonist in global history, of course.<sup>3</sup> But each contribution also seeks to address issues which have emerged from the longer heritage of Global History as a methodological field. It is therefore necessary to briefly map these before they can be addressed.

Attempts to formally map the heritage of Global History have proliferated in recent years. Unlike, for example, New Imperial History, which has unfortunately seen very few major methodological survey volumes outside of those by

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1 Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 1.

2 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 67.

3 We use the term 'protagonist' to emphasise the significance of corporations to global history without any triumphalising of their historic role

Kathleen Wilson and Stephen Howe, there is now no shortage of historiographical reviews of the major trends and constituencies of Global History over the past two decades.<sup>4</sup> So much so, in fact, that as the truly protean and formative period of Global History continued to spin out into almost boundless directions, the outcome of Oxford's 'New Directions in Global History' conference in 2012 attempted to provide, almost perversely, boundaries, by breaking the field down into three methodologies of analysis: comparativeness, connectedness, and globalisation. These separate analytical fields as outlined by James Belich, John Darwin, Margaret Frenz and Chris Wickham are valuable in helping to delineate what have previously been somewhat interchangeable approaches to writing Global History.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, whilst these categories represent distinct approaches, they should not be regarded as exclusive. The transregional processes of globalisation, for example, demand an analysis of connections which cross regions, alongside the integrative dynamic of comparative models of, say, constitutions, empires, or, in our case, corporations. Whilst untangling analytical categories is useful, they should not be treated exclusively. Thus the contributions in this volume employ all three analytical approaches. It employs a novel comparative approach in studying a multitude of overseas corporations, and in so doing uncovers a transoceanic corporate sociology which integrated a common global framework in the years 1550–1750.

It has become almost customary to begin any review of this field with Kenneth Pomeranz and the Great Divergence debate which, for many, impressed the need to situate their research more globally to answer long-standing questions which had remained beyond the historian's reach.<sup>6</sup> However, the emergence of historians' concern with situating their research within an increasingly global context depends entirely on the somewhat contentious understanding of the distinctions – or similarities, as it were – with World History, a field which has been transforming our understanding of the global much earlier than the Great Divergence debate of the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> As Merry Wiesner-Hanks has recently pointed out, the notion that World History is the preserve of teaching whilst Global History has emerged as a research

4 Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

5 James Belich, John Darwin, Margaret Frenz, and Chris Wickham, eds., *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

6 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence Debate: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

7 Bruce Mazlish, 'Global History and World History', in Bruce Mazlish, ed., *The Global History Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 16–20.

field is quite reductive.<sup>8</sup> One need only look as far as Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper's recent *Empires in World History* to know that such an argument is specious.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, despite a tendency for World History to be more comparative, there is little in terms of both methodology and subject-matter to separate the two fields.<sup>10</sup> With that in mind, the 'Great Divergence' debate was very much a product of comparing continental civilizations, such as Europe and Asia, and thus the demarcation between World History and Global History as separate fields of enquiry is far less obvious, and rightly so. The work of Eric Jones and David Landes, for example, whilst promoting global comparisons, was also interested in the structural and natural differences between what were fundamentally different civilizations.<sup>11</sup>

### Connections and Networks: Trade, Knowledge and Material Goods

Most scholars associate the emergence of a more distinct Global History with Kenneth Pomeranz's work on the Great Divergence. Although it rests on a comparative analysis of parts of Asia with parts of Europe, it also suggested tentative links between the two distinct economic structures.<sup>12</sup> Pomeranz returned to a more traditional understanding of the suddenness of the Industrial Revolution that was not the product of European exceptionalism, highlighting that the economies of Europe and Asia had shared a range of 'interactions and connections' for centuries.<sup>13</sup> To some extent, Pomeranz reshaped the debate to consider the convergence of global economies, too. Although largely dominated by economic historians, the Great Divergence debate soon transformed itself into a much wider field of investigation. Indeed, histories of the production and circulation of goods and material culture had also become a popular line of enquiry and in itself a new direction in Global History. Prominent

8 Merry Wiesner-Hanks, 'Review: What is Global History?', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 11 (2016): 483.

9 Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

10 Compare Burbank and Cooper with, for example, John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Penguin, 2008).

11 Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor* (New York: Abacus, 1998).

12 Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*.

13 Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*, 25.

amongst these have been the work of scholars such as Maxine Berg whose focus on luxury and consumerism has traced the production of oriental goods and their impact on European society, transforming tastes, demands and even sensibilities.<sup>14</sup>

The formation, exchange and circulation of knowledge has also emerged as a similarly burgeoning field of enquiry. From the medical to the technological, the production and distribution of knowledge relied on global networks, agents and audiences in the early modern period. Such histories bring into sharp relief the crucial role played by subaltern actors in global exchange, as these 'go-betweens' or 'brokers' mediated and channelled the local and the global.<sup>15</sup> In tracing such actors, scholars have been able to uncover the sheer breadth of geographical, cultural, national, linguistic, religious and sovereign borders crossed to produce everything from culinary recipes to travel accounts. The latter proved a particularly significant format of knowledge, as they also incorporated histories, anthropological observations and even diplomatic intelligence that was then distributed to a global audience.<sup>16</sup> However, knowledge was not always an intentional construct created for a domestic intellectual or commercial audience, but rather could be formed through the practice and experience of global environments and patterns of weather in determining maritime routes and port settlements.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the role of trade and commerce in establishing global connections and integrating global actors has been arguably the most significant direction of enquiry in Global History, and one that very

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- 14 Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Maxine Berg, Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs and Chris Nierstrasz, eds., *Goods from the East, 1600–1800: Trading Eurasia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). For earlier approaches, see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Knopf, 1987) and Joan Thirsk, *Alternative Agriculture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
  - 15 C. A. Bayly, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India'. *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 4 (1988): 401–24; Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj, and James Delbourgo, eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (MA: Sagamore Beach, 2009).
  - 16 See, for example, Anna Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge and the Early East India Company World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
  - 17 For instance, see Richard Drayton, 'Maritime Networks and the Making of Knowledge', in David Cannadine, ed., *Empire, the Sea and Global History* (Basingstoke: AIAA, 2007), 72–82. Also Parker, *Global Crisis*.

much unites histories of material culture and knowledge. As Claude Markovits points out, one of the key criticisms aimed at Global History is that it often lacks the empirical foundation of other fields, a critique that can easily be discredited through a study of trading networks, 'as they extend across vast distances and often left significant archival traces'.<sup>18</sup> For Rila Mukherjee, the establishment of long-distance commercial networks created the 'first global age' in the fifteenth century, in which Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia became connected into 'an open, complex, dynamic, nonlinear system' of trade and exchange.<sup>19</sup>

The study of networks has become an all-pervasive methodological approach in the study of global commerce and trade. Networks serve not only to trace the connections between actors, communities and diasporas, but more critically they help us to understand the relationship between these global actors, especially in explorations of transnationality and cross-cultural exchange.<sup>20</sup> The normalisation of networks with global exchange and movement has of course mirrored our twenty-first century integration of networks into everyday life. And, like the latter, despite some concerns, there nonetheless seems no end in sight for the utility of networks as both methodological tool and historical actor in Global History.<sup>21</sup> The sophistication of network analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, by historians over the past two decades has been especially fundamental in understanding the relationship between the local and the global on a number of levels. Historians have shown how particular regions, spaces or people become nodes or integrated into wider circuits depending on the intensity of exchange taking place. Thus the entirety of the British Empire can be reconceptualised as a global 'web' of circuits with nodes in the Atlantic and Asia through which knowledge, goods, people and

18 Claude Markovits, 'Trading Networks in Global History', in Catia Antunes and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds., *Explorations in History and Globalization* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 63.

19 Rila Mukherjee, ed., *Networks in the First Global Age, 1400–1800* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 6.

20 For an excellent survey of networks in the eighteenth century, see Natasha Glaisyer, 'Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire', *Historical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2004): 451–457.

21 For the failure of networks as a historical actor, see David Hancock, 'The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots' Early-Modern Madeira Trade', *Business History Review*, 79, 3, 2005: 467–491. For the concern with networks as a methodology of Global History, see David A. Bell, 'This Is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network', *New Republic*, <https://newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor>, accessed 26 October 2017.

expertise travelled and transformed.<sup>22</sup> Some of the most empirically rich studies have uncovered the expansive networks of Sephardic Jews and Armenian merchants that have operated through multiple oceanic spaces and across numerous continents.<sup>23</sup> The role played by individuals, families and kinship groups in establishing commercial networks was clearly substantial in the early modern period, especially with their ability to negotiate complex interpersonal relationships.<sup>24,25</sup>

Networks were connective, but more importantly they were often transformative, and became key agents in processes of globalisation. Emily Erickson's recent study of the decentred commercial strategy of East India Company captains in Asia observed how networks 'link individual behaviour to larger macro-level social and organisation outcomes'.<sup>26</sup> Becoming part of a wider network, whether commercial, theological, scientific, political or social, integrated the individual into larger institutional structures. Thus when Europeans and non-Europeans joined global networks, they adopted the group's norms and values, but as a member of that collective institution, were also able to exercise agency to reshape the larger network.<sup>27</sup> This could create networks of exchange and interaction, but it also created a conflicted institution in which the rules governing participation were contested by its members. As Francesca Trivellato has pointed out in her study of Sephardic networks, tracing global networks can sometimes 'evoke a romanticized view of merchant communities as harmonious, cohesive, and full of pride'.<sup>28</sup> Even the understanding and practice of trust was amorphous and negotiated.

22 Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

23 Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*; Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (London: University of California Press, 2011).

24 Charles H. Parker, *Global interactions in the early modern age, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 78–9.

25 David Veevers, "Inhabitants of the Universe": Global Families, Kinship Networks, and the Formation of the Early Modern Colonial State in Asia', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (March, 2015): 99–121.

26 Emily Erickson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: the English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 22.

27 For the debate on transformative networks, compare the following: Avner Grief, 'Reputation and Coalition in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 49, no. 4 (1989): 857–82; Douglass North, 'Institutions', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1991): 97–112.

28 Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: the Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 12.

Finally, the role of trade not only helps us understand global dynamics of exchange and relationships of negotiation, but essentially provides goods and objects themselves with global histories. New research on cotton, for example, has recast it from a colonial resource imported by European metropolises, to a global commodity that transformed the early modern world economy, with Asian manufactured cotton-goods spreading as far afield as Japan and the Atlantic, and even contributing to the industrialisation of Europe.<sup>29</sup>

### New Directions: Integrative Histories

Whilst far from proclaiming that we are all global historians now, the fundamental shift modern globalisation has created in our approach to, and understanding of, the past (as well as the way in which we research and write it), makes it increasingly unlikely that Global History will plateau or become contented with the tracing of global connections and interactions. Rather, it appears that the field is in a period of crescendo. The formative period of Global History was undoubtedly one of comparisons and connections – breaking free from strictly national perspectives and methodologies, and situating historical places, events and people within a wider, interconnected geographical context. The result has been to appreciate the way in which nationally or locally driven processes possessed unknown global contexts and dimensions. There appears, however, an increasing need to appreciate the distinction between the global connections of objects, people, places and events, for example, and the process of intensification and concentration of connections which was capable of durable and broad global transformations. Beyond the macro-economic of, for example, the Great Divergence debate, the large-scale integration of separate regions and networks is a meta-narrative of globalisation which still remains largely pervasive despite over two decades of Global History.

Indeed, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a new direction in Global History that has moved beyond the comparative and the connective, and is now concerning itself with perhaps the ultimate task of this field: the integrative.<sup>30</sup> This transition has involved moving deeper, beyond the novel appreciation of the global, to a far more complex and profound exploration of transoceanic integration, in which, for example, the Atlantic and Asia did not

29 For example, see Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: the Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2015).

30 Conrad, *What is Global History*, chapter 5.



just share globetrotting connections, but were actually integrated into wider spaces of, for example, migration, trade, governance, and knowledge. That is not to suggest that histories of global integration have not existed. As early as the mid-twentieth century with the French historian Fernand Braudel's conceptualisation of a Mediterranean World, a host of conceptual and analytical frameworks of regional integration have gradually sprung up, especially that of the Indian Ocean World.<sup>31</sup> There is undoubtedly a regionalism to such research, one of seas, oceans and bounded maritime spaces. But they are also intensely aware that they are working towards an even deeper integrative methodology. The transition of national based studies of the Atlantic to a broader 'Atlantic World' is perhaps the most prominent (and certainly most popular) example. As David Armitage and Michael Braddick have argued, such a region was created by 'a complex of evolving connections' which drew not just on the European and American seabords, but also of West Africa, South America and the Caribbean.<sup>32</sup> This has been the enduring appeal of a broader 'Atlantic World', one that clearly 'displays more openness to multidirectional effects'.<sup>33</sup>

There are, of course, problems with Mediterranean, Indian and Atlantic 'Worlds', as those historians who adopt such analytical and conceptual frameworks are well aware. As Carole Shammas notes of the 'British Atlantic World', it is difficult to evaluate transnational connections, spaces and networks 'if it is prefaced by the name of an empire or nation-state'.<sup>34</sup> It is important to recognise that few historians of the Atlantic or Indian Ocean 'Worlds' would consider themselves strictly operating within the field of Global History, but rather more often those of Postcolonial or New Imperial Histories. Nonetheless, their integrative approach to a variety of national and geographic constituencies ensure that, as Armitage and Braddick were conscious when they promoted the oceanic framework of a 'British Atlantic', such work is part of a broader contribution to 'global histories'.<sup>35</sup> Belich *et al.*, however, would argue that these

31 The conceptualisation of an Indian Ocean World owes much to K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985). For a synthesis of recent research, see Michael Pearson, ed., *Trade, Circulation, and Flow in the Indian Ocean World* (Basingstoke, 2015).

32 David Armitage and Michael Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic world, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 5.

33 Carole Shammas, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, eds., *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (MA: Baltimore, 2005), p. 2. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet, eds., *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World* (Penn, 2005).

34 Ibid.

35 David Armitage and Michael Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (New York, 2002), p. 9.



crucial frameworks are nonetheless 'sub-global', and as such fail to provide a broader narrative for globalisation.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, the alternative integrative histories to 'sub-regions' are those that follow Immanuel Wallerstein's *World Systems*, in which a network of global economic exchange eventually tied the world into a single capitalist order.<sup>37</sup> However, the fundamental reason why such research does not lend itself as a foundation for a new direction in integrative global history is its Western-centric analysis. As Maxine Berg has recently argued in her review of the field, 'the challenge is to convert Europe from a knowledge subject to an object of global history'.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately such Euro-centric analysis permeates most 'integrative' histories. As the opening salvo of Armitage and Braddick's *British Atlantic World* makes clear, 'This new social and economic world was mostly a European creation'.<sup>39</sup> This statement can hardly be sustained in light of expansive research on the hybridity of European settlement, as well as the prominent agency of non-Europeans, in the Atlantic.<sup>40</sup> Though this is perhaps largely due to the volume's predominant focus on the North Atlantic, at the expense of its southern counterpart. Nonetheless even more admirable attempts to break free of the narrow Atlantic World and integrate various basins into the wider concept of an 'Oceanic Empire' have continued to perpetuate Europe as a 'knowledge subject', choosing to analyse 'diverse peoples' only within the context of how they 'found themselves pulled within British spheres of influence'.<sup>41</sup> Moving forward, integrative global histories present a tantalising opportunity to recast Europe's agency and bring to the fore a narrative of globalisation which reflects (though not necessarily privileges) the more realistic contribution of non-Europeans to processes of transoceanic integration. It is the intention of this volume to address this important issue by rethinking what has previously been depicted as the quintessential European agent of expansion, the overseas corporation, and instead to recast it primarily as a transnational vehicle for concentrating and promoting the agency, actions and interests of non-Europeans in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Asia and Pacific regions.

36 Belich, et al., *Prospect of Global History*, pp. 3–4.

37 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974).

38 Maxine Berg, ed., *Writing the History of the Global* (Oxford, 2013), p. 5.

39 Armitage and Braddick, *British Atlantic*, p. 1.

40 An excellent example is Ray A. Kea, 'From Catholicism to Moravian Pietism: The World of Marotta/Magdalena, a Woman of Popo and St. Thomas', in Mancke and Shammas, *Creation of the British Atlantic*, pp. 115–138.

41 H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke and John G. Reid, *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 3.

## Corporations as Cross-Regional Actors

This is the juncture at which the field largely arrives today: a need to converge the diverse enquiries of Global History with the local, regional or national histories of other fields. Far from subsuming these categories, a 'New Global History' must confront and adapt these traditional narratives, especially those of a national perspective. Indeed, the current nationalist renaissances in places such as the United States and Britain are predicated on the false conceptualisation of globalisation as an unwanted interloping force in modern society. And yet, the very intensity of the emergence of the nation-state and national histories from the nineteenth century onwards were themselves products of increasing global connections and comparisons. As the late C. A. Bayly argued, 'all local, national or regional histories must, in important ways ... be global histories'.<sup>42</sup> But global histories ought not to lose sight of the significance of local, regional, as well as national identities and institutions to the way in which the globe was experienced and imagined. Global trading opportunities have often been sought to advance national interests, and national concerns have more often compelled states to place barriers across global trade.

No single institution integrates the local, regional, national, and global settings more than the trading corporation. If global history continues to focus on global comparisons, connections, and globalisation, the corporation ought to be a protagonist in global history. These bodies have long been of great interest to historians of various sub-disciplinary persuasions. For historians of empire, trading corporations have been depicted as innocent commercial prefaces to full-blown state-sponsored empire – as self-financing dress rehearsals for the deployment of colonial power without the need for state subsidy.<sup>43</sup> Business historians – whose primary chronological focus has been the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – have occasionally looked back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century trading corporation for evidence of the early modern inspiration for modern joint stock corporations.<sup>44</sup> As such, they have anachronistically projected modern governance arrangements – board room power – onto more complex and decentred institutions and have overstated false

42 C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (London, 2005), p. 2.

43 See for example James D. Tracey, ed., *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

44 A conspicuous example is Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational* (London: Pluto Press, Second Ed., 2012).

distinctions between centre and periphery. They have also written histories of separate firms – rather than comparative histories of the corporate type. Both liberal and Marxian strains in economic history have – following Adam Smith – used trading corporations as evidence of the capitalist desire to siphon economic opportunities into privileged silos. As such, they have grossly over-emphasised the extent to which the trading corporations were monopolies that had to be liberated by free trade.<sup>45</sup> Historians of corporations in general have too often reduced the meaning and significances of corporate activity to the corporations' own mercantilist posturing in print.<sup>46</sup> The propaganda of the companies simplifies and obscures their complex global dynamics. Legal historians have been the most resourceful in noting the similarities between the trading corporations and their municipal forbears, but they have been myopic in using narrow and strictly juridical interpretations of corporations that limit these complex institutions to their charter provisions or the initiatives of their directors – ignoring the corporation's unique aptitude for relationship formation.<sup>47</sup>

Despite its significance in managing and governing Europe's overseas trade, the corporation has been analysed and understood within a predominantly national context: as Dutch, or English, or French companies, competing around the world for a slice of the mercantilist spoils.<sup>48</sup> Interest in Europe's East India Companies, for example, has never been stronger, and yet with every new monograph the gulf between what were essentially common (and often interlocked) models of overseas monopoly becomes wider and more

45 David Ormrod, 'The demise of regulated trading in England: the case of the Merchant Adventurers, 1650–1730', in *Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship in Early Modern Times. Merchants and industrialists within the orbit of the Dutch staplemarket*, ed. C. Lesger & L. Noordegraaf (Amsterdam: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1996), 253–68; R. C. Nash, 'The organization of trade and finance in the British Atlantic economy, 1600–1830', in *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organisation, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, ed. Peter A. Coclanis (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 97–8. For the Marxian tradition see Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003); and A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), V.1.98–119.

46 Steve Pincus, 1688: *The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

47 For recent examples see Edward Cavanagh, 'Corporations and Business Associations from the Commercial Revolution to the Age of Discovery: Trade, Empire and Expansion without the State, 1200–1600', *History Compass*, vol. 14, 10, (2016): 493–510.

48 For European corporate competition in Asia, see Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800* (Ontario: University of Minnesota Press, 1976).

nationally-focused.<sup>49</sup> Even more narrowly, the various corporations of any particular nation, and especially those of the English, have largely been understood as individual entities, following separate developmental trajectories in different cities, regions, and oceanic basins. For example, Phil Withington's powerful study of the enfranchisement of corporations in early modern England focuses on the role of civic corporations and livery companies, but hardly mentions overseas corporations, whose own enfranchisement had arguably the biggest impact on state formation, the Crown, and political economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> More crucially, the global enfranchisement of overseas corporations through their engagement with non-European states and communities ensured that the latter had a role to play in England's domestic state formation. Histories of England's overseas trading companies have similarly failed to draw upon the longer history of the domestic corporation, whilst companies operating in different oceanic regions have only recently been opened up to comparative (but not integrative) treatment, those operating in the Atlantic and their counterparts in Asia meeting analytically for the first time.<sup>51</sup>

The corporation therefore has been proscribed differentiated histories: business, mercantilist, national, domestic or foreign; civic, humanistic or commercial; European, Atlantic or Asian. Whilst these distinctions are vital, they have nonetheless led to the absence of an independent global history for the corporation itself, in favour of its subordination to larger national or regional narratives of governance, society, exploration, liberty, commerce, and conquest.<sup>52</sup> And yet the durability of corporate governance styles associated with regulated companies rather than joint stocks challenges this view.<sup>53</sup> Indeed,

49 For new research on the French Company, see Felicia Gottmann, *Global Trade, Smuggling, and the Making of Economic Liberalism: Asian Textiles in France, 1680–1760* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); for the Swedish and Danish Companies, see Hanna Hodacs, *Silk and Tea in the North: Scandinavian Trade and the Market for Asian Goods in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); for the English Company, see Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

50 Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

51 See the contributions in Bowen et al., *Britain's Oceanic Empire*.

52 An excellent example of this is James D. Tracey, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

53 William A. Pettigrew and Tristan Stein 'The Public Rivalry between Regulated and Joint Stock Corporations and the Development of Seventeenth-Century Corporate Constitutions', *Historical Research*, vol. 90, 248, (2016): 341–362

Henry Turner's recent *Corporate Commonwealth* has demonstrated that the sheer breadth and longevity of the corporation in domestic English history demands a far more open and overarching approach to the study of corporations. For Turner, the corporation was a durable actor that encompassed not just the joint-stock or regulated companies, but indeed included the state, the *universitas*, the theatre, and other artificial persons. The corporation, he argues, 'focuses our attention on this problem of scale; it invites us to analyse the forces of translation whereby wholes become parts and parts become wholes again'. The durability and longevity of the corporation in all its forms 'provoke a necessary shift in our account of political agency and will result ... in a displacement of the concept of the state'.<sup>54</sup> In this light, corporations were networked institutions which operated across scales at an ontological level. In essence, corporations made ideal global actors, capable of integrating the local, the national and the global.

The corporation as a global actor has yet to be explored, although recent research has shed light on the considerable agency exercised by corporations in certain global theatres. Most significantly, Phil Stern's *Company-State* exposed corporations as sovereign and constitutional actors, capable of acquiring, negotiating and projecting social, political and judicial authority autonomous of the nation-state.<sup>55</sup> Whilst Stern focuses on the English East India Company, nonetheless his study sheds light on the rich range and heritage of corporate rights, structures and foundations that transformed early modern England, shaping wider debates about sovereignty, political economy, jurisprudence, sociability, morality and civility.<sup>56</sup> As valuable as such research is in recognising the significant agency of corporations as independent political actors, these new directions are still, essentially, national and imperial histories. And yet some scholars have depicted the corporation as an agent of (and vehicle) for transcultural interaction. Rather than viewing these companies exclusively as projectors of European power or as the precursors to modern multinational companies, for Sanjay Subrahmanyam corporations have provided a means to depict European expansion into Asia as a political discourse that connected two regions (in much the same way that Atlantic history stressed how

54 Henry Turner, *Corporate Commonwealth: Pluralism and Political Fictions in England, 1516–1651* (London: University of Chicago press, 2016).

55 Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

56 For the impact of overseas corporations on these elements within the domestic state, see William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

European and indigenous American contact produced a 'new world' for both groups).<sup>57</sup> Far from peaceful, however, these connected histories show how international migration affected the power dynamics of groups in both areas of embarkation and disembarkation and produced arenas of 'contained conflict' rather than cross cultural partnership.<sup>58</sup>

Corporations, then, have yet to be proscribed a global analytical framework. Yet if corporations acted uniformly and simultaneously in the seventeenth century in Europe and across the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Asia and Pacific, as this volume will demonstrate, then they present the prospect of a transoceanic global history that has not yet been considered, one that provides us with a clear framework of global integration. Corporations were extremely adaptive, and trading companies especially 'integrated the diverse constitutional mechanisms granted to them from the various states they subordinated themselves to'.<sup>59</sup> Yet in doing so, corporations were themselves reshaped by the non-European communities and states to whom they became subordinate. Operating across national, sovereign and oceanic borders, Europe's vast range of corporate bodies spread across the globe in an integrative and adaptive dynamic that bound together a staggering number of social, political, cultural and economic constituencies. David Armitage has recently expostulated upon the possibilities of a new 'constitutional turn' in Global History, one that provides a unique opportunity to rediscover the considerable global role played by that quintessentially global actor: the corporation.<sup>60</sup> In understanding the ways in which seemingly European enterprises were reshaped by their engagement with non-Europeans in every corner of the globe in the seventeenth century, it will be possible to fulfil the two most significant aims of Global History as stated here: exploring transnational contexts and connections, and understanding globalisation as an integrative process on a transoceanic scale. The contributions in this volume take up this unique opportunity to propose a conceptual and analytical framework based upon the notion that the corporation acted as a protagonist of globalisation in the years 1550–1750.

57 The classic example of this is Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

58 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3, 1997: 735–762.

59 William A. Pettigrew, 'Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and the Local in Seventeenth-Century English History', *Itinerario*, vol. 39, no. 3 (January, 2016): 491.

60 David Armitage, 'Wider Still and Wider: Corporate Constitutionalism Unbounded', *Itinerario*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (2015): 501–503.



Of course, the methodology proposed by this volume, of using European corporations to construct a meta-history of globalisation, opens itself up to accusations of the very Eurocentrism which this volume attempts to address. A key aim of this volume is to redefine the traditional conceptualisation of the overseas corporation as a uniquely European construct, attempting to project narrow nationalist interests, to a transnational enterprise in which over the course of the early modern period, non-Europeans not only became key stakeholders in trading companies through European dependence on their commercial expertise, diplomatic access, sources of knowledge, powerful cultural practices and overwhelming military resources – to name a few – but in actual fact assumed controlling stakes to the extent that even metropolitan European authorities were forced to concede to the interests and demands of non-Europeans in distant communities and markets. European corporations may have originated in London, Paris and Amsterdam, but their desperate need to adapt to overseas environments made them more susceptible and vulnerable to outside influence, and, ultimately, to a degree of control. This volume therefore proposes a narrative not of European influence or expansion in the early modern global world through the study of the corporation, but a process of globalisation in which Native American chieftains, West African slavers, Persian monarchs, Arab merchants, southern Indian *nayaks*, Sumatran pepper farmers, Chinese migrants and Japanese officials became major stakeholders in the same trading companies, transforming them into something not entirely European or non-European, nor entirely local or national, but what this volume would argue as something that became truly global. This volume proposes that the overseas corporation presents the best opportunity to capture the integration of the globe in the early modern period, both archivally and in the historical processes of globalisation these facilitated.

### The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History

This book offers a new account of the distinctive role that corporations played in global history in the period 1550–1750. It also offers a re-appraisal of what the corporation was in its global setting. This period provides the critical time for the intensification of cross-cultural relationships between European and non-European cultures. It was also the phase in which corporate bodies played the most important part. The prominent global historian, John Darwin has called this period the age of ‘equilibrium’ during which European and non-European states and empires interacting on roughly equal terms and therefore structured global relationships that were not simply



colonial or imperial in character.<sup>61</sup> Corporations played a central role in calibrating this equilibrium and facilitating these relationships. As agents of commercial and knowledge exchange and the default means for European states to integrate their commercial interests in this period, trading corporations ought to be essential actors in any account of global exchange. Although their leadership was at times cultural supercilious to non-European peoples, corporations (and the people who worked with and for them) did not typically seek imperial overlordship in this period and instead understood that their commercial successes depended upon their ability to encourage trade that satisfied European and non-European interests.<sup>62</sup> Corporations moved peoples, knowledge, goods, ideas, buildings, art, literature, scholarship across cultural barriers, around continents; they traded with and governed diverse communities. Corporations integrate the comparative, connected, globalised imperatives of Global History into a single, formal, institutional framework. They were protagonists in global history.

Andrew Zimmerman has urged the need for historians to ‘think rigorously about the categories we use to analyze the past’, suggesting that a new global historical sociology and transnational history could work to erode traditional Eurocentric models.<sup>63</sup> This book proposes to emphasise the underappreciated features of the overseas corporation’s distinctive global sociology.<sup>64</sup> Whether as regulated trading companies, as joint stock trading corporations, as the colonising corporations, or as the municipal corporations established overseas, corporations brought a distinctive civic culture to overseas activities; they brought characteristically deliberative and responsive constitutional mechanisms to cross-cultural interaction, and combined commercial and governmental ambitions into creative tensions in ways that integrated European and non-European interests. This distinctive global sociology can best be

61 Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405*, ch. 3.

62 For the failure of corporations and their servants to satisfy non-European constituencies, and the disastrous impact this could have, see the expulsion of the English East India Company from Bencoolen, in David Veevers, ‘“The Company as their Lords and the Deputy as a Great Rajah”: Imperial Expansion and the English East India Company on the West Coast of Sumatra, 1685–1730’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2013): 687–709.

63 Andrew Zimmerman, ‘Conclusion: Global Historical Sociology and Transnational History – History and Theory Against Eurocentrism’, in Julian Go and George Lawson, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 241.

64 Philip J Stern, ‘Parasites, Persons, and Princes: Evolutionary Biology of the Corporate Constitution’, *Itinerario*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (2015): 512–515. Stern here stresses that while the corporation shared the same biology with the state, it exhibited a different sociology.

understood by adopting a comparative and even integrative approach to trading corporations. Although these two approaches may seem distinct, they are actually reinforcing. Only by comparing the broad range of England's corporations can the common global framework which they established be traced. Corporate history has most often been written with reference to a single corporation.<sup>65</sup> Our approach tests some of the insights developed with reference to single corporations – and most often this has meant the English or Dutch East India Companies – with reference to the other corporate entities to assemble a global field of view for corporate history. Trading corporations sometimes targeted each other's privileges, they often shared legal foundations, commercial strategies, and courtroom representation, overlapping personnel, and resources of capital.<sup>66</sup> Such cross-corporate interdependence was, in some ways, even more prominent between foreign corporations. England's largest corporation, the East India Company, benefitted substantially from foreign investment. By the end of this period, in the mid-eighteenth century, almost a third of Company stock was foreign owned, approximately 88% of which was held by those resident in the United Provinces.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, its settlements in Asia were heavily funded by foreign merchants. This was the case for Fort St. George in India, where the interest alone on loans largely contracted from Portuguese merchants in the first three years between 1639 and 1642 was estimated at £5,000.<sup>68</sup> The transnational constituencies of the Company were also reflected in its personnel, its expertise and its shipping resources.

While the corporation's iconography, their domestic governance practices, and their personnel looked homogenous at home, the corporations experienced, however, very different careers overseas. These differences can only be explained by the global circumstances of their trades. Some lasted for only a few years – such as the Virginia Company (1607–1624). Different nation's corporations were supposedly locked into ruthless competition overseas. The rivalry between the Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa (1660–1671) and the Dutch West India Company in Africa prompted a series of wars between the Dutch and English during the second half of the seventeenth century.

65 Stern, *Company-State*.

66 William A. Pettigrew and George Van Cleve, 'Parting Companies: The Glorious Revolution, Company Power, and Imperial Mercantilism', *Historical Journal*, vol. 57, 3, (2014): 627.

67 H. V. Bowen, 'Investment and Empire in the Later Eighteenth Century: East India Stockholding, 1756–1791', *Economic History Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (May, 1989): 200.

68 Consultation held at Fort St. George, Madras, 29 December 1642, in William Foster, *The English Factories in India, 1637 to 1641: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, British Museum, and Public Record Office* (Oxford, 1912, 8 vols.), vol. 7, 70.

Certain companies were much more commercially successful than others. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the English Levant Company was the most successful company by revenue. By the early eighteenth century, the English East India Company had emerged as the only viable trading company and endured for over a hundred and fifty years. But the ability to make money did not – on its own – determine longevity. Part of the explanation for this longevity is that domicile states could not entertain the possibility of corporate failure because they would lose access to the overseas infrastructure that these companies had established. The Royal African Company famously made little profit, but became the largest single contributor to the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and endured for eighty years because the English state feared the results of abandoning the company's West African forts.<sup>69</sup>

The integration of a broader corporate framework which emerges from a comparative treatment of corporations suggests that the main explanations for corporate success derive, however, from a careful assessment of the relationships that corporations formed overseas – not just with their own officials, but also with their non-corporate constituencies, from interlopers to non-European hosts.<sup>70</sup> Their divergent fortunes were often the result of commercial and constitutional differences in their overseas trading hinterlands. In this, the ultimate victor was the English East India Company and its distinctive mode of operation can only be understood if placed into the context of its Dutch and French rivals, as well as its English forbears and antecedents. The East India Company more successfully defended its monopoly privileges at home by merging with its lobbying opponents and erecting a grand superstructure for free English trade on the Indian subcontinent that enfranchised the entrepreneurial instincts of its overseas factors and their Indian trading partners.<sup>71</sup> Corporations were homogenous franchises of state authority at home. It was their *sui generis* qualities as global protagonists that determined their careers. Take, for instance, Thomas Pitt. In the 1670s and 1680s, Pitt proved one of the most successful interlopers in Asia, trading freely between Persia and the Bay of Bengal, even gaining his own trading concessions from the Mughal governor of Hugli, where he set up a trading factory in 1683. Despite attempts to prosecute Pitt in England, and even arrest him in Asia, ultimately the East India

69 Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*.

70 Søren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London, 1660–1740*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005), 264; Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: the Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the Period of its Decline (1740–1796)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

71 Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*.

Company chose to integrate Pitt into their operations. As the Court of Directors declared to their servants in Bengal in 1694, 'we have agreed with the Principall Interlopers ... and that we hope is the end of all our long quarrells and contentions'.<sup>72</sup> Three years later, Pitt was offered the governorship of Madras, which he took up and administered until 1707.

### The Distinctive Global Sociology of the Corporation

What did this distinctively corporate sociology for global interaction consist of? We highlight five qualities: First, corporations were subordinate to state authority at home and abroad.<sup>73</sup> This allowed them to establish durable trading relationships overseas. Second, corporations were – in effect – processes of negotiation with external constituencies: foreign merchants, interlopers, European rivals, and foreign states. In their global operations, they were not monopolies. They were subject to intense competition wherever they operated. Nor were they exclusive entities. Their membership was porous and responsive to outside influence and their interactions with internal and external constituencies was deliberative. Third, corporations were constitutions that facilitated the effective structuring of these international relationships (which were themselves constitutional in character). Fourth, in their global operations, corporations were autonomous from the oversight of their domicile state. This allowed them to act with the juridical agility to develop styles of governance overseas that were unthinkable at home. This autonomy allowed corporations to be jurisdictionally evasive. They occupied the jurisdictional free-space between nation states and assumed their own corporate identities and aspired to sovereignty. This meant that they could shed their national skin. Fifth, corporations were integrative; they connected global realities with local, regional, and national interests, debates, and posturing.

#### i *Corporations as Subordinate*

Such corporations, of course, were not the only European means for governing overseas trade and cross-cultural interaction. The English, to take one national tradition, used multiple constitutional forms to interact with non-European contexts. These included proprietary grants (based on feudal principles),

<sup>72</sup> British Library, APAC, IOR/E/3/92, court of directors to Bengal, London, 3 January 1694.

<sup>73</sup> Attorney General Sir Robert Sawyer described corporations as 'subordinate governments' in the *quo warranto* proceedings against the Corporation of London in 1683. See Howell, *State Trials*, Vol. VIII, 1158–66 and 1178 and Halliday, 207.

which conferred considerable autonomy on proprietors. The English state used proprietaries in much of colonial North America, in Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and the Carolinas. However, there were important structural differences between proprietary colonies and corporations. Corporations mixed governmental and commercial agendas and set the two into creative tension. They raised money from (hundreds and sometimes thousands of) investors and would need to uphold the interests of those investors to endure. This capital (as well as the company's ability to borrow large sums of money) provided them with the resources to cultivate state support. The state renegotiated the corporations' privileges on several occasions. Proprietary colonies participated in trade, but they were primarily conceived as land holdings and mechanisms for settlement. The personal property of a few absentees, they had to satisfy far more narrow concerns. The proprietary colonies were often the result of state payments (to settle debts – as with those to William Penn's family) and did not lend money to the Crown. Their charters were less frequently re-negotiated. The state took sporadic interest in these ventures and so they became largely personal fiefdoms. William Courteen's proprietorship of Barbados, which was granted to him in 1627, had to contend with a rival claim from the Earl of Carlisle. Despite initially colonising the island, Courteen effectively lost control following a military coup by rival agents in 1629, with the loss of some £10,000 worth of investment.<sup>74</sup> Following his violent ejection from the Caribbean, Courteen and his sons adopted a joint-stock corporate model for their subsequent venture into Asia, launching the Courteen Association in 1635 with support from the Crown. Much like Thomas Pitt later, the East India Company ultimately merged the Courteen stock and its personnel into their own operations in 1657.<sup>75</sup>

The English and other European states also resorted to direct state intercession – such as the Portuguese state's *Estado da Índia* to manage overseas interests. Direct state rule was expensive and inhibited the infusion of non-European interests into the commercial relationships that trading corporations established. Furthermore, states could not subordinate themselves to foreign states – a problem that corporations – as subordinate entities – did not have. The comparison between the two territories in Catherine of Braganza's dowry to the English King Charles II confirms this. In 1661, the dowry brought the North African port town of Tangier and the islands of Bombay into English

74 Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire and War* (London: Windmill Books, 2011), 14–24.

75 See Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Princeton University Press, 1993), 170–179.

control. Both were ruled by the English Crown initially, but the Crown transferred Bombay to the East India Company in 1664.<sup>76</sup> In Tangier, the Crown officers struggled to provide the necessary fealty to the expanding Moroccan empire of Moulay Ismael.<sup>77</sup> The East India Company, however, could readily subordinate itself to foreign states in India. The same was true of the Royal African Company in Cape Coast. The Corporations were uniquely predisposed to subordinating themselves to foreign states.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, states could not justify their control over foreign territories with reference to their subordination to the local rulers of those territories. Corporate entities often justified their existence and explained their power with reference to the trading privileges they had established overseas – effectively arguing that they owed more to their international relationships than their domestic ones.<sup>79</sup> Merchants could also interact with non-European environments as free agents. While this was widespread in practice, most global interactions took place under the formal umbrella of state governance in one form or another and interloping merchants often relied upon the infrastructure of corporations – such as forts or remittance structures – to prosper. The interloper Thomas Bowrey travelled to Asia on an East Indiaman in 1668, was employed by the Chief of Masulipatam, had his pepper purchased by Company factors, traded under a Company pass, and enjoyed the rights and protections which came with living at Company settlements. When he was imprisoned by the Indian governor of Porto Novo in 1687, he appealed to the Company's factory there for succor, 'as hee own'd the Right Honble. Companys Protection'.<sup>80</sup>

## ii *Corporations as Processes of Negotiation*

Despite their monopolistic pretensions successful transnational trading corporations learned to operate in ways that favoured those beyond their

76 Tristan Stein, 'Tangier in the Restoration Empire', *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 4 (December 2011): 985–1011.

77 John F. Richard, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 239–242; Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

78 Paul Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

79 For an example see 'Reasons humbly offered by the Governor & Company of Merchants trading into the Levant Seas', TNA SP 105/144, p. 80; and *Argument for a Regulated Company or Open Trade to the East-India Answered*. See also Philip J. Stern, "A Politie of Civill & Military Power" Political Thought and the Late Seventeenth-Century Foundations of the East India Company-State', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 47, 2, (2008), 266–7.

80 Porto Novo to Madras, 14 May 1687, in Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1903), 31.



membership. In this, they followed the tendencies of their municipal forbears. Scholars of municipal corporations have been most sensitive to the corporation's traditional deliberative, participatory culture. Philip Withington, has stressed the internal civic traditions within the corporation and has viewed these traditions as formative of national state political repertoires.<sup>81</sup> Withington regarded the corporation's civic culture as the provider of the 'social depths' of state authority. But historians of early modern Europe have not, on the whole, projected this understanding of the distinctively inclusive sociology of the corporation onto the global field of view of the trading corporation. Scholars have instead focussed excessively on the internal governance of corporations – and especially the 'agency problem' of managing overseas officials in ways that benefitted the corporate whole. These scholars have continued to fixate on the trading corporation's exclusive, monopolistic veneer.<sup>82</sup>

Corporations as global actors ought therefore to be understood primarily in terms of their changing relationships with internal and external interests. Early modern corporations were not static institutions but processes of negotiation between various interests: with the states at home and abroad who extended commercial privileges to them; with their workforces, with lobbyists, interlopers, and the non-European suppliers and brokers who facilitated their trade. Corporations boasted deliberative governance rules that allowed owners to influence their activities. But corporations were much more than the narrow interests of their directors and governors. Successful corporations proved highly responsive to a variety of outside interests including their labour force, as well as the state officials.<sup>83</sup> They were also acutely sensitive to their moral and social profile and the need to be seen to contribute to the social fabric of their communities through charitable schemes, principally in Europe.<sup>84</sup> Corporations were designed to be structures that bound individuals into one legal personality, but careful study of the prosopography of corporate communities

81 Philip Withington, 'Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England', *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (Oct., 2007): 1016–1038.

82 Ann M. Carlos, 'Bonding and the Agency Problem: Evidence from the Royal African Company, 1672–1691', *Explorations in Economic History*, 31, (1994): 313–335; Santhi Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company' *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2005): 496–523.

83 Edmond Smith, 'Socially Responsible and Responsive Business in Seventeenth Century England' in William A. Pettigrew and David Chan Smith, eds., *A History of Socially Responsible Business c. 1600–1950* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 65–93

84 William A Pettigrew and Aske Laursen Brock, 'Leadership and the Social Agendas of the Seventeenth Century English Trading Corporation' in Pettigrew and Smith, eds., *A History of Socially Responsible Business*, 33–36.



proves that corporate entities provided a structural form for diverse groups of people – often with conflicting ideas and differing political persuasions – to enter and exit corporate membership. They allowed for the formation and reformation of commercial networks. As a negotiated and inclusive constitutional actor, the corporation provided durability and longevity through the ‘immortality’ of its corporate identity, allowing new sets of individuals with different adaptive views to consistently reshape it.<sup>85</sup>

These deliberative, responsive, and protean characteristics of corporations also extended to the corporation’s external relationships. For these bodies to succeed commercially, they had to establish effective relationships with outside constituencies which included interlopers, European competitors, and most important, foreign merchants and states. Their commercial imperatives encouraged corporations to serve the interests of non-European peoples. In so doing, trading corporations appeared to finesse a double standard. At home, company members justified their monopolistic corporate trading privileges with reference to the need to intimidate the non-Europeans they traded with.<sup>86</sup> Overseas, however, corporate actors learned that non-Europeans provided the ‘social depths’ of their political power and, therefore, the sources of their commercial durability.<sup>87</sup> Company officials stressed the need to suplicate their commercial ambitions to the local commercial interests of their non-European hosts.<sup>88</sup> They often cemented relations with those hosts by describing how their corporate activities advanced the commercial ambitions of their local merchant contacts and their society at large.<sup>89</sup>

### iii *Corporations as Constitutions*

Their inclusivity, their responsiveness to outside influence, their skill at forming relationships with external constituencies and capturing differences within

85 Aske Laursen Brock ‘The Company Director: Commerce, State, and Society’, PhD. Thesis University of Kent, 2017.

86 See especially Josiah Child, *A Treatise Wherin is Demonstrated* (London, 1681), 38.

87 Philip Withington, ‘Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England’, 1024; Miles Ogborn, *Global lives: Britain and the world, 1550–1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 87–93; Farhat Hasan, ‘Indigenous Cooperation and the Birth of a Colonial City: Calcutta, c. 1698–1750’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February, 1992): 73.

88 Ralph Preston to court of committees, Amadaver, 1 January, 1614, in Foster, *Letters Received by the East India Company from Its Servants in the East*, 261.

89 BL, APAC, IOR/G/19/21, Yale to ‘his most Imperial Majesty Jeanepatwan [?] Emperor of the Island of Sumatra and Territories thereof’ Madras, 12 Sept. 1687, (f. 33v); IOR G/19/21, Yale to the ‘Emperor of the Island of Sumatra and Territories thereof’ [the ruler of Bengkulu], Madras, 12 Sept. 1687, (f. 33v).

their membership all depended upon the corporation's inherently constitutional quality. Trading corporations were – in essence – constitutions that mobilised capital at home and facilitated commercial relations overseas. Trading corporations codified constitutional practices at home – such as the rights of members and the powers these members were subject to – and exported these to non-European contexts where they experimented with and adapted to unusual constitutional techniques.<sup>90</sup> Their charters were early examples of written constitutions. Their privileges derived from their place of subordination to the state. They used their autonomy from state oversight overseas to become constitutionally creative entities overseas.<sup>91</sup> English corporations integrated spaces enfranchising non-Europeans with one constitutional device and alienating the English with others. The East India Company used its sovereignty overseas, for example, to develop corporate spaces with constitutional provisions that would have been unthinkable at home. In 1667, for example, the company sustained the English Crown's policy of extending subject rights to Portuguese Catholics in Bombay<sup>92</sup> The attempts to use their jurisdictional agility made overseas contexts into test cases for the practical possibilities of various forms of government. Trading corporations fetishised the written contracts they negotiated with foreign states. These became constitutive of what the corporations purported to be. Taken together, trading corporations' distinctively adaptive constitutional arrangements became constitutive of a composite, and pluralist, transoceanic framework. Trading companies thus helped structure what Lauren Benton has described as a 'single international legal regime' that integrated the globe on the basis of the common and mutually understood practice of permitting corporate and communal groups' legal authority and autonomy.<sup>93</sup> But within this transnational corporate constitutional framework, remarkable constitutional diversity developed. The trading corporation could be both the agent of constitutional coherence but also the harbinger of constitutional diversification. Just as Michael Braddick and Steve Hindle have noted corporations' roles in helping to form an English state structure based upon the relationships between multiple participatory institutions,

90 Philip J. Stern, 'Rethinking Institutional Transformations in the Making of Modern Empire: The East India Company in Madras', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 9, 2 (2008).

91 Pettigrew, 'Corporate Constitutionalism'.

92 Stern, 'A Politie of Civill and Military Power', 253.

93 Lauren Benton, 'The Legal Regime of the South Atlantic World' in Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 49–59.

their constitutional activities on the global stage wove together a global framework for cross-cultural interaction.<sup>94</sup>

iv *Corporations as Autonomous and Jurisdictionally Evasive*

While trading corporations experimented with different forms of government for their investors, for their servants, and for their trades, they also acted as states in their own right. Historians of early modern England have shown how corporations – as autonomous entities – assisted in actualising state power.<sup>95</sup> Some of these insights have been projected onto a global context by Philip J Stern in his account of the seventeenth century history of the East India Company.<sup>96</sup> For Stern, the international setting encouraged the corporation to assume the role of a state whose activities reflected back onto its domicile state, but who would often associate itself with its own transnational and separate corporate interests. The Royal African Company of England, for example, worked like other trading corporations in siding with non-European states and used evidence of constitutional subordination to them to advance their commercial and political agendas at home. To this end, corporations often assumed transnational powers. They operated on behalf of the state, but also apart from the state. In 1705, for example, the Royal African Company sealed an alliance with the French Senegal Company in Africa at a time when the English and French states were at war in Europe. The Royal African Company propagandist, Charles Davenant, defended that company from allegations that it made a separate peace with the French on the basis that trading companies ‘are impowered to make Treaties of Peace and Commerce (and War too upon occasion) in any of those parts; according as they find the same suit best with their respective Circumstances at the time; without regard to Peace or War in *Europe*’.<sup>97</sup> Corporate power could therefore extend beyond state to transnational power. The constitutional malleability of corporations allowed them to both subordinate and exert themselves at the same time across multiple sovereign, national and cultural spaces. As such, trading corporations channelled

94 Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England*; Steven Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002).

95 Kathleen Wilson, ‘Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 116, no. 5 (2011): 1294–1322.

96 Stern, *The Company State*.

97 Charles Davenant, *Reflections upon the Constitution and Management of the African Trade, etc.*, in Charles Whitworth, ed., *The Political and Commercial Works of That Celebrated Writer Charles D’Avenant, LL.D. ...*, V (London, 1771), 34.

agency for both European and non-European initiative and provided opportunities for the pooling of both.

#### v *Corporations as Integrative of the National and Global*

Corporations integrated local, national, and global contexts more than any other single institutional type. The corporation had been, since the Middle Ages, a primary tool for local government in England and throughout Europe. It was the legal entity used to govern particular towns, guilds, fraternal organizations, and colleges.<sup>98</sup> During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these entities transformed themselves into global organisations. Just as corporations brought the world to European cities – in the form of goods, ideas, and peoples, they also brought English people and cultures to non-European contexts and helped alter their character.<sup>99</sup> Corporations also often depicted themselves as bodies designed to further the national interest. In print, they often described how they would ensure that the international trades they participated in would be managed to further the interests of their domicile nation. A full appreciation of their global sociology suggests, however, that corporations often succeeded when they learned to assist foreign commercial interests and often placed their own commercial concerns ahead of the national interests.

Central to the corporation's distinctive integration of the separate global, national, and local settings for corporate activity was the constant dialogue between the corporation's constitutional privilege at home and abroad and a commercial strategy that calibrated the trading interests of the corporation and its extra-European trading partners. Corporations required political support and constitutional privilege to gather and protect investment. Sustaining this support and privilege depended upon the establishment and maintenance of trade. Durable trading relationships depended upon the countenance of foreigners. Corporations therefore relied upon the agency and initiative of their non-European customers and suppliers. In bridging corporate, national and supranational contexts, trading corporations appeared to finesse a double standard. At home, they justified their monopolistic corporate trading privileges with reference to the need to intimidate the non-Europeans they traded with.<sup>100</sup> Overseas, however, corporations learned that non-Europeans

98 See especially Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepard, eds., *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

99 Batavia is the best example, as explored by Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht: Floris Publications, 1986).

100 Child, *A Treatise Wherin is Demonstrated...*, 38

provided the 'social depths' of their political power and, therefore, the sources of their commercial durability.<sup>101</sup> Brokering this double standard of exclusivity at home and inclusivity overseas became intrinsic to the corporation's survival by the end of the seventeenth century. This brokerage – and the ways it integrated local and global worlds – became a determinant for corporate success.

### Scope and Breadth

The corporations' significance as protagonists in Global History therefore stems from the interplay between different regions with different interests all operating under the umbrella of the corporation, but not with its full cognisance. The corporation was a network of interests – both inside and outside the corporate membership – tied together by trade and constitutional agreements and supported by multiple states. Subordinate to the domestic and foreign states it negotiated with, but also autonomous of both and with sovereign constitutional powers in its own right, the corporation straddled sovereignty and subordination in often-creative ways. Collapsing the distinctions between the public and private realms, blending centre and periphery, deployed in Atlantic and Asian zones of operation, the companies asserted, mutated, hybridised governmental thinking and practice throughout the seventeenth century. Instead of stressing either the trading corporation's impervious, state-like features or its business operations, our approach views the corporation as shifting, porous communities across and within which various forms of cross-cultural dialogue occurred. Our depiction of corporations broadens the field of view of corporate history away from a narrow juridical interpretation of corporate activity that views trading corporations as vehicles established solely to further the interests of their owners to a more capacious view that notes the breadth and complexity of corporations' relationships with constituencies outside their formal membership such as rival merchants, non-European states and hosts.

Trading corporations were neither rigidly nationalist nor monopolist entities who operated without responding to the interests of external constituencies. They learned that various ostensibly rival entities – including other European companies and interlopers themselves could help to advance their trades. The English East India Company became successful in comparison to other English companies and, eventually, its European counterparts, because

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101 Withington, 'Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England', 1016–1038, 1024.

it learnt how to motivate its overseas officials through liberating their access to private trade – effectively turning malfeasance into corporate strategy. This was in contrast to the Dutch VOC, who struggled to compete with the English Company in the eighteenth century largely due to its strict regulations against the private trade of its servants.<sup>102</sup>

By facilitating private trade, the English East India Company could establish durable commercial relations in its trading hinterlands, something that the Royal African Company could not.<sup>103</sup> Nor were corporations solely global, nor statist, nor forerunners of modern companies. Although trading corporations originated in Europe, they were quickly reshaped and reformed through their subordination to, and growth within, non-European spaces, markets, sovereignties and societies. Corporations were less European agents of trade and expansion, but rather global conduits for the importation and redistribution of non-European ideas, goods, people, and practices. Corporations therefore recast Europe from the ‘knowing’ subject to the ‘object’ of Global History, and that is how this volume analyses them.

This volume assembles this new account of what the global significance of trading corporations was largely with reference to a single cohort of companies – those established in England. The English used corporations to establish durable commercial relationships with three continents: Africa, North America, and Asia. These corporations moved peoples and goods into global circulation and helped England establish lasting diplomatic relationships with two of the world’s most powerful empires: the Moghul and Ottoman Empires. Beginning with the joint stock Russia (or Muscovy) Company in the 1550s, which established a privileged trading relationship with the Russian Tsars, continuing with the Levant (or Turkey) Company in the 1580s, which traded to the Ottoman Empire, and culminating in 1600 with the East India Company, which sought access to the spice trade in South East Asia but settled into a bullion and textiles trade with the Indian sub-continent, corporations provided the English with their default spearhead to the non-European world.<sup>104</sup> Corporations also established the first waves of sustainable English settlement in

102 See Nierstrasz, *In The Shadow of the Company*.

103 Pettigrew and Van Cleve, ‘Parting Companies’.

104 On the early histories of the Muscovy, Levant, and East India Companies, see T. S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956); A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (Oxford: Routledge, 1935); Susan Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578–1582* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); K. N. Chaudhuri, *The East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company, 1600–1640* (London: Routledge, 1964).

mainland North America with the Virginia Company from 1607 and the Massachusetts Bay Company from 1629 and established commercial relations with the fur traders of the North American Arctic via the Hudson Bay Company from 1670.<sup>105</sup> From 1660, the Royal African Company (originally the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa) monopolized England's trading relationship with West Africa and became the largest human trafficking organization of the period of the transatlantic slave trade and played a critical part in financing the development of the English Caribbean.<sup>106</sup>

However, this volume does not suggest that English corporations were any more or less important than those of their European counterparts. This is partly due to the fact that, as all overseas corporations underwent substantial change through the participation and agency of non-Europeans, different European corporations adapted to and adopted similar trajectories of development overseas as they engaged with the same non-European communities and states. This dynamic served to erode the differences between them. Furthermore, while English corporations may have emerged economically and politically dominant in some regions of the globe after 1750, such as the Indian Ocean, for most of this period they were often weak latecomers to global regions, attempting to emulate their European predecessors or failing to rival them altogether, learning painful lessons along the way. Rather, it puts forward English overseas corporations as a representative case-study of the way in which all European enterprises overseas were transfigured and transformed by non-Europeans. And while the English case studies form the main contribution to the analytical framework put forward in this volume, it seeks to place these within the context of French, Iberian, Scandinavian and Dutch experiences in a number of responses by specialists of overseas corporations from those countries in the latter part of the volume.

### Part One – Aspects of the English Corporation

Part One of the book examines how ten sub-themes of corporate activity offer particular insights into how corporations acted as global protagonists. These themes are: building, family, gender, governance, literature, migration, political-economy, religion, scholarship, and science. In each case, these

<sup>105</sup> See also Elizabeth Mancke, 'Chartered Enterprises and the Evolution of the British Atlantic World', in *The Creation of the British Atlantic World*, ed. Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 237–262.

<sup>106</sup> Davies, *The Royal African Company* and, more recently, Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*.



thematic examinations of global corporate activity illuminate the distinctive international mechanisms that corporations provided for cross-cultural interaction. Each chapter shows the global fruits of the corporation's distinctive global sociology.

In the first chapter, William Pettigrew, examines how corporations focussed debates about political economy – prevailing ideas about the relationships between commerce and governance – in their European and non-European fields of operation. From the outset, trading corporations had to justify their privileges with reference to the broader social and commercial advantages they generated for the state and public. In making their case, they developed a recognisable corporate discourse of political economy that proved formative for mercantilist ideologies and policies. The tropes of this discourse structured opposing arguments that proved formative for liberal political economies of the eighteenth century. A central focus of this discourse was the debate about monopoly, but the debate also confronted questions about sociability, the civility of non-European peoples, and theories of economic growth. The corporation's inherent calibration of commercial and governmental agendas sustained a role for constitutional and political variables in economic outcomes. As structures that gave individual personality to dynamic networks of individuals, the corporation helped to absorb and shape writing about political economy and gave that writing a public role. As an intermediary institution between cultures, these debates about political economy channeled the experiences of international contexts into domestic public debates. In this way, corporations can help us to demonstrate the global contexts in which mercantilist doctrine emerged and altered and can show how non-Europeans peoples interactions with European corporations prompted and structured transnational debates about political economy.

In chapter two, Michael Bennett, examines the prominent role that corporations played in transporting free and unfree migrants across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. The global networks of exchange forged by overseas trading corporations during the early modern period facilitated the movement of people over long distances, and directed migration flows to regions of America, Africa, and Asia which were of commercial interest to English colonisers. By using their chartered monopolies to integrate these various colonial regions, and by successfully negotiating the competing interests of both the English state and non-European empires, corporate bodies were particularly effective in mobilising free planters, co-religionists, overseers, artisans, servants, slaves, and coolies to 'people' nascent English colonies and trading outposts. The constitutional and governmental structure of corporations, which encouraged the sharing of expertise and the regular changeover of members,

enabled policies relating to labour and migration to constantly evolve and be re-shaped to better suit the shifting economic and geopolitical circumstances of the early modern world. The dynamic approaches taken by corporate bodies towards empire-building encouraged experimentation and transnational interaction. An inclination to learn from other European and non-European empires meant that corporations were especially effective at inventing new methods of stimulating migration and producing innovative labour systems during the seventeenth century.

In chapter three, Aske Laursen Brock, assesses the importance of networks to the distinctive global sociology of corporations. Brock explores how trading companies relied on global networks to ply their trade and secure the position far from British shores. The companies constituted a very fertile and durable global space for exchange and dissemination of commodities, information and ideas over large distances. To successfully do this, the forming and strengthening of networks with other numerous agents, companies, and English trading companies with knowledge of long distance extra-European trade became increasingly important. Between 1550–1750 new connections were formed to answer the changing political and commercial realities globally and domestically. England developed from a peripheral power in Europe to a country at the centre of a global commercial imperial web. Corporate interests spanned from America and the Caribbean to South-East Asia and from Russia to southern Africa. Some corporations were designed to participate in colonial ventures and brought about vast migrations and placed large landmasses under direct corporate control. Others were dedicated to trade and shipping, exporting and importing products from England and around the world. The early modern corporations were created by networks and would come to facilitate a space globally where new networks was formed and, in time, strengthen the corporations. Partnerships and other looser associations did not create durable ties that lasted multiple decades and generations like corporations. For Brock, it is only by studying the social networks of company employees in Britain and overseas it is possible to understand how decision making worked, how the early modern knowledge economy developed and how knowledge became a commodity for commercial agents tied together in patronage and/or kinship networks. The networks were not stronger than their weakest links, and the study of them emphasize the agency of otherwise overlooked people such as corporate women and local people. Global corporate networks are crucial to understand the development of the British political economy and the later British Empire.

In chapter 4, Liam Haydon considers the role of the global corporation in making literature, and the role of print culture in making the corporation.

Historians of the corporation have recognised the importance of writing to corporate activity, and the creation of corporate identity, but have not considered the corporation's relationship with fictional, or literary, texts. Conversely, literary scholars have noted the profound impact of global political economies in early modern literature, though often without observing the centrality of the corporation to the development of that political economy. Moreover, these sorts of studies have tended to be historicist in approach, aiming to embed the literary text in economic activity without a conceptualisation of literature's role in creating the fictions and narratives on which the early modern trading company relied. Haydon considers a varied set of texts, including drama, pagentry, and poetry, as well as fictional and 'factual' prose from across the globe, to try and capture something of the interplay between fiction and economics. The functioning of a state or economy, the relationship between Europe and its 'others', even the ontology of the corporation itself, relied on language which was deployed, tested and refined in contemporary literature. Corporate ideas about trade and international relations took on cultural capital in early modern London, and around the globe. This process was part of a larger intellectual network, in Europe and beyond, which, through history, theology and early attempts at anthropology, sought to understand and historicise European relations with their new trading partners. At stake in all of these texts is the language of social, political and economic development, and the creation of a narrative framework which allowed the representation, and testing, of corporations and their ideas.

In Chapter 5, Haig Smith, examines how throughout the early modern era, corporations provided the main institutional framework to organise and police the commercial, political and religious lives of their members. English company charters for the majority of the seventeenth century gave general religious and social obligations, both domestically and abroad, to advance English Protestantism in America, India, Japan and the Levant. Extending Protestantism into religiously cosmopolitan and diverse environments abroad led to attempts to police the religious lives and behaviour of the companies' English personnel to secure the company's leaders various religious, political and commercial aims. The commercial and religious aims of the company became entwined as the companies' flexible governments developed various forms of religious control shaped by local circumstances and global experiences. Corporate structures both provided the legal space and protection to establish diverse but connected forms of autonomous English governmental authority across the globe. An assessment of religious control in England's overseas companies allows further analysis into how overseas companies developed into corporate political bodies that established and advanced their own sovereignty. By understanding

how corporate control of religion became a mechanism through which corporate structures directed and governed people overseas we can see how companies formed governments over its own employees. Moreover we can see how company employees as well as, local peoples and foreign environments, shaped the religious and governmental identities of those in the trading corporations. By doing so this expands our understanding into how early modern English people regulated the political and religious behaviour of its employees, corporators and the communities it governed. Furthermore, through an assessment of how religious governance and control regulated interaction between religious communities, we are better able to recognise the role and involvement of numerous faiths, including Hindus, Muslims, Catholic, Jews and Armenian, in the development of English Protestant authority abroad.

In chapter 6, Edmond Smith views corporations through the lens of governance. The development of new forms of trading and colonial corporation in the latter half of the sixteenth century provided an effective means of regulating the behaviour of people in England and overseas. Livery and urban corporations had played an important role in how commerce was organised in England, providing a framework for commercial education, institutions and law that became central pillars of the new corporate bodies that facilitated global exchange. Across the multiplicity of corporations that governed English activities across the world we can see a set of shared social and cultural conditions that provide an effective means of approaching global history. Through corporations the early modern world became increasingly connected; examining how they were governed in a comparative framework reveals what different corporations shared, but more importantly how they negotiated and adapted to different environments.

Effective corporate governance helped establish and integrate transoceanic frameworks that facilitated migration, commerce, and knowledge exchange on a global scale. This chapter will examine the role of governance in four distinct areas: how the corporation was a process of negotiation between its internal constituencies, within states, and between communities around the globe; the ways corporate discourse and opposition shaped non-corporate spaces through debates about free trade, interloping, sovereignty, the state, and jurisprudence; how constitutional malleability of corporations allowed them to both subordinate and exert themselves at the same time across multiple sovereign, national and cultural spaces; the process by which they were quickly reshaped and reformed through their subordination to, and growth within, non-European spaces, markets, sovereignties and societies. To assess these four key areas, the paper will survey how corporate governance developed between 1550 and 1750, focussing in particular on how it sought to regulate

the behaviour of employees overseas in Europe, the Levant, the East Indies and the Atlantic World. From this foundation, the chapter will examine three case studies about how governance adapted to different circumstances. First, it will examine the ways the East India Company sought to build the governance practices of London's traditional companies into the disparate trading environment of the East Indies – particularly focussing on the challenges faced of integrating ambassadorial, naval and merchant authority in dealings with the Mughal Empire. The second case study will consider how corporate governance provided a flexible structure for employees that allowed them to interact effectively with diverse peoples and societies overseas. Using the Levant company as a focal point this case study will explore the different way English people in the Ottoman Empire interacted with numerous ethnic, religious and political groups, adopting new modes of doing business and living while remaining loyal and law-abiding within the accepted parameters of corporate culture. The final case study will consider how corporate governance continued to affect the organisation of English overseas activities beyond the specific boundaries of corporate control. To do so it will examine the development of Caribbean colonies that were operated by figures who were culturally dependent on their corporate upbringing and networks in early modern London.

In chapter 7, David Veevers analyses the corporation through the lens of gender. He highlights how the relationship between gender and the primary protagonists in England's overseas expansion, corporations, has yet to be investigated. As trading companies were, first and foremost, constitutions for the regulation of trade and the government of inhabitants within their jurisdiction, Veevers argues that they were therefore crucial sites of gender formation, in which male and female identities and relationships were proscribed and ordered within a corporate structure. Senior company officials, for example, legitimised their authority by drawing on patriarchal ideas of absolutism and divine right, projecting themselves as the *paterfamilias* of the settlements and subjects under their government. However, as trading companies expanded in Asia and the Atlantic in the years 1550 to 1750, Veevers notes that their constitutional parameters gradually became more malleable and shifting. This process meant that covenanted servants and their female relations increasingly operated within a decentred corporate framework, one that provided them with the opportunity to reshape and reimagine their own sense of gender to an extent less possible in their domicile nation-states. This allowed women, for instance, to exploit a degree of independence to become partners in the business of their male relations and even private traders on their own account. In more extreme ways, they could even facilitate or instigate conspiracies in an effort to shift the balance of power within particular factions or settlements, to suit the

interests of themselves and their families. Furthermore, as the family became a significant actor in establishing expansive Company networks of trade, settlement and movement, men and women crossed cultural and national borders to integrate a number of foreign constituencies into the Company through sexual relations and even marriage. The ingratiation of non-Europeans was crucial for the success of England's trading companies, and the process transformed corporate settlements into transnational sites of exchange and cooperation, expanding populations and markets, whilst also acting as recruiting grounds for commercial brokers, soldiers and translators. Veevers concludes by illustrating that with the establishment of mixed-race families, non-Europeans were able to exert a degree of agency to shape the corporate landscape around them, challenging and often subverting the order of gender in Company settlements.

In Chapter 8, Emily Mann examines corporate initiatives and investment in the construction and maintenance of fortified settlements on three continents – America, Africa and Asia – through the long seventeenth century, this paper will demonstrate how in each case the corporation, like the built spaces it created, was a process of negotiation between its internal constituencies, within states, and between communities (and other corporations) around the globe. The connected, comparative approach over space and time will illuminate how the experience of one company influenced not only the attitudes and activities of commercial counterparts, but also the ideas and expectations of shareholders and the state. In particular, the paper will consider the corporate/colonial business of building in the context of the emerging fiscal-military state and its global frame. At the same time, the paper will enhance understanding of the material impact that trading corporations had on overseas territories and their inhabitants, and of the impact that building and maintaining fortifications overseas had on the development of corporate and state constitutions. In and around these entangled spaces, corporate cultures came into contact with others, and European practices and ideas were challenged and reshaped by non-European customs and conditions. This paper's focus on fort-building facilitates discussion of the corporation's operations on local and global levels, and across commercial, state and transnational spheres, and in so doing sharpens awareness of the interactions and tensions between them.

In chapter 9, Anna Winterbottom highlights the scientific interactions, formal and informal, between members of a wide variety of corporations, from trading companies to the Royal Society, and even European universities, to understand the crucial role of knowledge-gathering in this period. Winterbottom argues that as well as drawing parallels between these relationships, there were also differences. The particularities of each of these relationships – centrally, the particular global connections that they sought to navigate and



understand – would in fact shaped the distinctive national characters of science and colonialism that would emerge by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this chapter, Winterbottom explores the terminology of the early modern period, in which it was more accurate to speak of ‘useful knowledge’ and of ‘natural’ and ‘mechanical philosophy’ than of science.

First, useful knowledge was central to both savant institutions and the trading companies in this period. Both organisations concerned with natural philosophy – like the Royal Society – and trading companies – strove to prove their usefulness throughout this period. As the introduction to this volume makes clear, European trading companies in this period had to please multiple constituents, including European and non-European rulers, their own shareholders, and their critics, again, at home and abroad. Similarly, organisations like the Royal Society had to convince royal and governmental funders, sceptical publics and their own correspondents and informants, that their inquiries were practically useful rather than nonsensical and possible heretical fantasies. Winterbottom’s chapter concludes by discussing the various forms of natural and mechanical knowledge that were produced in and circulated around trading company settlements and how they were interpreted, codified, and compiled both within the settlements and by metropolitan institutions, scholars, and artisans, before often being recirculated and reinterpreted within the company network. In doing so, the chapter will demonstrate how the non-European context of the activities of the trading companies actively shaped the co-creation of science and colonialism in the early modern period.

In chapter 10, Simon Mills traces how scholars intersected with the corporations of early modern England, focusing predominantly on England’s commercial endeavours in Africa, the Levant, and East Asia. Uncovering some of the links between English scholars and the merchants, diplomats, and consular staff stationed across the globe, Mills takes a fresh look at stimulus provided to various fields of scholarly enquiry by the expansion of the early modern trading corporations. Secondly, the chapter will consider the extent to which the corporations could themselves assimilate scholarly practices into their global activities. One focus here will be the chaplaincies, established to serve the mercantile communities from Algiers, to Aleppo, to Surat, which provided a key link between the trading companies and the universities. We shall see too some of the ways in which the companies’ connections with local actors could be bound up with scholarly interests. Although the central governors of the Levant Company in London were concerned in only a limited capacity with scholarship, this would change as a consequence of the East India Company’s developing colonial ambitions. The final part of the chapter will thus look again at the connection between scholarship and British India, stressing



the continuity with earlier practices in order to suggest a more historically-nuanced approach to the relationship between the emergence of 'oriental' studies and colonialism.

## Part Two – European Perspectives

Part Two subjects the case studies that are largely drawn from the English companies to comparison with Dutch, Scandinavian, French, and Iberian contexts. Trading corporations emerged in several European nations in the period 1550 to 1750, and while they undoubtedly operated in different domestic environments, they also shared significantly similar overseas experiences with their English corporate counterparts. The chapters in this part will critically examine the English experiences outlined in Part One, and explore the way in which the distinctive global sociology of corporations was not confined to England, but was rather characteristic of all European trading companies in the early modern world.

In chapter 11, Lisa Hellman compares the Scandinavian overseas experience to the English case studies provided in the proceeding section. She argues that to consider the overseas corporation as global protagonists is part of a much-needed turn in which global historians are not just discussing the potential of global history but are using its methodological approaches and insights to provide new answers, and new frameworks. Hellman points out that different European corporations provide very different clues to a new, integrated, history of the corporation as such – that affects this volume's aim of exploring the corporation as a global actor, but is even more important for its endeavour to elucidate the formation of the corporation as a global process in and of itself. She goes on to explore how including Scandinavian overseas corporations, such as their East India Companies, Levant Companies, African Companies and West India Companies, also slightly changes the picture of European overseas ventures. These corporations were established in countries with much less successful colonial and imperial venture than that of the British ones. As such, they add to the variety, and 'messiness' of early modern globalisation. The Swedish East India Company, for example, focused solely on trade with China; it was a chartered company, but acted as a small interloper in the trade with an expanding and powerful Asian empire. Hellman argues that the crucial fact is not only that the European corporations differed, they also affected each other, which is why they should not be studied separately. Rather, they show how the global history approach of going beyond the nation state offers a new view on an old story. Indeed, one could argue that the British corporations

are difficult to understand without taking into account cooperation and competition with other actors, including local and regional actors and networks – as well as other European corporations.

In chapter 12, Leonard Hodges explores early modern French chartered companies, and their role in transporting state sovereignty abroad. He argues that historians have traditionally arranged Dutch, British, and French overseas corporations on a sliding scale between private and state control. The Dutch are typically seen as running first and foremost a business organisation overseas, while French overseas enterprises barely rank above the Portuguese as appendixes of the state. The often-unspoken assumption is that the British sit serenidipitously somewhere in the ‘Goldilocks zone’ between these extremes. Insofar as the metropolitan context is concerned, it is impossible to overlook the long shadow of the state in the organisation of the French East India Company, for example. Hodges suggests that rather than limiting ourselves to metropolitan perspectives, it is crucial to set the French East India Company more firmly in its Indian context. One of the most enduring puzzles of the French Company is how, under its aegis, the French engaged in a dress rehearsal for empire-building in the Carnatic and Hyderabad, setting the stage for the eventually more successful British intervention in Bengal. In return for military support provided to Indian rulers, for a brief period the French gained the right to raise revenue across large swathes of territory and wielded the trappings of Mughal sovereignty, with many individuals making significant personal fortunes. In this respect, the idea of the corporation as a protagonist in global history is to be especially welcomed in offering the chance to reframe a largely outdated historiography on the French East India Company’s role in imperial expansion.

Hodges argues that, with a few exceptions, this literature has remained rooted in the Third Republic ‘great man’ school of history, overshadowed by the contentious figure of Joseph-François Dupleix, Governor of French India from 1742 to 1754. Instead, the many thoughtful chapters in this volume suggest a number of starting points for recalibrating our understanding of the French East India Company, and the important role it played during this crucial period. His chapter concludes by revealing how, even though overseas French enterprises were often characterised as an appendix of the state, the French East India Company was able to integrate and respond to non-European interests in its own particular way. Changing metropolitan governments, as well as French Catholicism are certainly complicating factors, yet what is striking is how this response can itself be conceived as an act of state-building, the appointment of a Director integrated into the ministerial patronage system which characterised the *Ancien Régime*. Phillip Stern may have taught us to see how companies could be states, but the French case shows that states could be companies.

In chapter 13, Edgar Pereira compares the English overseas experience with that of the Iberian powers, Portugal and Spain. His chapter provides an etymological analysis on the concept of 'corporation' within its Iberian context, pointing out its rich and long history in Spanish and Portuguese society, law and political order, making insightful comparisons with the place of 'corporations' in English society. Pereira then deploys the volume's conceptualisation of corporations as adaptive constitutions to the Spanish and Portuguese overseas experiences to challenge entrenched understandings of their colonial dominance. Instead, he explores the responsive nature of, for example, the *Estado da Índia*, and highlights its malleable and fluid nature. By drawing on examples of Iberian trading companies from Asia to the West Coast of Africa, Pereira is able to refute historiographical accusations that Iberian companies lacked the durability of their north European counterparts or the centrality to Spanish and Portuguese overseas interactions. He most notably points out that in the eighteenth century, corporations came to dominate Iberia's engagement overseas, whether as the Royal Company of Havana or the Company of Barcelona. The chapter concludes by demonstrating that we can confidently talk of a Spanish or Portuguese corporate Atlantic in perhaps more ways than the English.

In the volume's final chapter, Chris Nierstrasz explores the global sociology of perhaps the most prolific corporations in the early modern world, those of the Dutch. His chapter argues that the study of Dutch companies more often than not have had a strong national bias that stands in the way of more abstract conceptualization of their essential form. National historians have a hard time jumping over their own shadow and acknowledging that companies are part of similar institutional developments elsewhere. Nierstrasz calls for a more general conception of Dutch corporations in order to understand that, for instance, the Dutch East India Company was not so different from the West Indies Company in their constitutional form. This chapter of the book specifically analyses the Dutch VOC to tease out the ways in which the volume's claim for the 'distinctive Global Sociology of the Corporation' can also be applied to Dutch overseas trading companies. Nierstrasz's chapter delves into the position of Companies within the field of Global History and will then try to relate the distinctive Global Sociology of the Corporation to the Dutch VOC. He argues that, although a more general conceptualization of corporations is necessary, it must also be acknowledged that similar global constitutional frameworks could often also create different local outcomes.

