



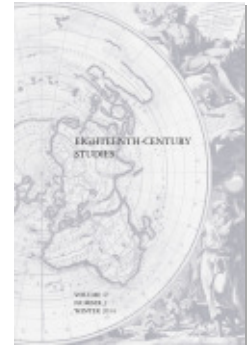
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THE CURRENCY OF KINSHIP: TRADING FAMILIES AND TRADING ON FAMILY IN COLONIAL FRENCH INDIA

Danna Agmon

In the archives of the French colony of Pondichéry, on the Coromandel Coast of India, a local woman known in the French documentary record only as “the Widow Guruvappa” makes several appearances.¹ On multiple occasions early in the eighteenth century, the Widow Guruvappa successfully appealed to both the *Compagnie des Indes orientales*—the French trading company responsible for the colony’s commerce and governance—and to Catholic missionaries active in Pondichéry. The Widow’s late husband, Guruvappa, had been the chief commercial broker employed by the Company in Pondichéry and the letters she wrote offer a rare example in the archives of French India of a woman speaking in the first person.²

The correspondence of the Widow Guruvappa with various colonial and metropolitan French institutions is a revealing instance of the intersection of family and colonial governance in French India. Her case demonstrates how family members of Indian employees in Pondichéry were able to insert themselves into the sphere of influence of the French establishment and to successfully make claims on rights and rewards due to them while drawing on the language of kinship. The fact that such claims could be made by a woman and repeatedly receive favorable hearing is an indication that the *Compagnie des Indes* was willing, and at times even eager, to draw extended familial networks into its complex calculus of decision-making in the colony.

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Scholars of empire have shown how European colonizers used the bonds of kinship and other intimate ties as a technology of colonial rule.³ The rhetoric of the Widow's letters appears, at first glance, to conform to the colonial fantasy of a submissive and child-like native requesting the protection of a paternal, colonial master. But a closer reading reveals that the Widow Guruvappa was able to effectively and strategically draw on the currency of kinship. This essay demonstrates that public and inscribed performances of kinship in colonial French India were a way in which local inhabitants strategically participated in the administrative and political work of colonial governance, and that French and native actors alike drew on the publicity of kinship to advance their agendas.

French imperial action, from the French Crown (itself a familial institution) on down, relied on the family as both a politicized concept and as a daily practice. The strategy of the Widow Guruvappa, who both drew on the access afforded by her network of kin and attempted to forge new, kin-like relations with French newcomers, reveals how the local reality of kinship in India could intersect with the French idea and practice of family. The efficacy of kinship, I argue, cut across different systems of classifying relatedness. Even though French and Tamil inhabitants of Pondichéry held different conceptual and practical understandings of familial relations, kinship was a shared idiom and the foundation of many of their most productive encounters.⁴ The action and theory of kinship was enmeshed within the practice of statecraft and bureaucracy, of commercial transactions, and of religious conversion in eighteenth-century French India. This essay thus demonstrates that a description of the politics of colonial Pondichéry must account for the families of Pondichéry. The colony was a place where French and Tamil families—both actual families and different conceptions of the family—collided and colluded. Local and French family networks in Pondichéry were crucially implicated in the governance and management of the colony, on scales both large and small. Familial relations sustained, enhanced and shaped imperial projects in India.⁵

In addition, I argue that as a result of French reliance on local familial networks, commercial dealings with the French did not necessarily entail alienation from natal kin.⁶ On the contrary, French desire to access such connections could even lead to the strengthening of these ties, as professional go-betweens and other local actors took advantage of imperial opportunities to bolster their standing in their family circles. French officials and traders were intensely aware of the importance of local associations of kin and caste. In their hiring of local employees, they attempted to insert themselves and their interests into such networks, with only partial success. At the same time local, mostly Tamil, agents who came into contact with the French (in both the highest reaches of power and in more humble spheres) could leverage their employment by the French to strengthen their position in natal and affinal networks, by using their authority in the colony to act as patrons and protectors.

This essay unearths the decades-long rivalry between two local powerful and moneyed families who jockeyed for influence in the French colony throughout most of the eighteenth century. I examine the ways in which a Tamil woman of one of these families, the aforementioned Widow Guruvappa, drew on her local familial networks and newly available kin-like relations with the French to advance her position and that of her relatives in Pondichéry. Finally, I discuss how the fam-

ily was similarly a resource for professional and commercial success in the lower reaches of the colony, by showing that interactions between a French officer and his local broker were enmeshed within the structures of family life.

FAMILY, AFFINITY, AND EFFICACY: KINSHIP AND IMPERIAL HISTORY⁷

Recent scholarship on early modern state formation in Europe has highlighted the familial and gendered stresses and commitments that went into the making of early modern states in the Netherlands, France, and England.⁸ The commitments of family, I demonstrate here, were also crucial in the making of colonial authority.⁹ As Carla Rahn Phillips has argued, early modern colonies were not ruled by crowns, but by colonists acting on behalf of the state; these colonists were empowered by their strong, sustained connections to people and places across the sea, in their metropolitan homelands.¹⁰ The study of family life, long neglected in histories of empire, is now at the center of scholarly debates, particularly in the Atlantic world. Historians have effectively demonstrated how a history of a particular family can serve as a revealing account of global empire, in which the traces of kin, connection, and the quotidian both mirror and underlie the structures of imperial ambition.¹¹

The little-studied example of French India is particularly illuminating of the importance of families—indigenous, creole and metropolitan—in structuring colonial rule. In the early years of French presence in India—the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—European colonial authority was much more aspiration than reality. With only a tenuous entry into the trading associations of the Indian Ocean world, French administrators of the *Compagnie des Indes* depended on access provided by their local brokers. Bianca Premo has reminded historians of the “essentially constructed (some might say fictive) nature of all families.”¹² Kin relations and kinship practices must therefore be sought out not only in affinities undergirded by the ties of biology.¹³ In Pondichéry, family served as shared and legible framework for local and French actors, and claims of relatedness could be made across ethnic, religious and geographical difference, pointing to the existence of what has been termed “vernacular kinship.”¹⁴ That is, in the early encounter between French and indigenous actors in Pondichéry, as repeatedly demonstrated in the French archive, the family was a conceptual and practical resource in constant use.

The linkage between family and statecraft would have been familiar in France and India alike. Sarah Hanley has identified the “Family-State compact” in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France, where “social survival and political place depended on professional reputation and judicious family formation.”¹⁵ Much as dynastic tradition in France brought together the institutions of the family and the state, so in India, notes Sumit Guha, “the formation of families and the formation of states were . . . implicated in each other, and were recognized to have been thus by contemporaries in the eighteenth century.”¹⁶ In the encounter between Europeans and local actors in India, familial relations were similarly central in the enactment of colonial rule, and not only in the exalted realm of dynastic power. In India, as in France, the family was a nexus for the definition of personhood, an

anchor for personal and communal history and commitment. In a colony as new and unstable as Pondichéry was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, where almost everyone was a newcomer (the town had been a small fishing village before it was given to the French by a local ruler), families provided an especially crucial context and site for claims-making.

While the history of the family has been central to French historiography for decades, the same could not be said for the historiography of South Asia.¹⁷ As historian Indrani Chatterjee has noted, “[t]he history of the family has long been the poor relation in the great household of South Asian history.”¹⁸ In this historiography, caste has served as a central structuring analytic in discussions of both intimate and official power relations, a focus stemming in part from the much-commented upon centrality ascribed to caste in and by the nineteenth-century British Raj. While I discuss the caste position of local Tamil actors and its importance for French employers, kinship is offered here as an alternative prism: more than caste, the ties of family emerged as a crucial shared component in the interactions between Frenchmen and local actors.¹⁹ As a conceptual framework used by French and Tamil actors alike, the concept and practice of family, rather than that of caste, was ripe for mutual exploitation in cross-cultural encounters in India. While the analytic focus on caste highlights the ways in which “colonizers” and “colonized” differed from one another, the emphasis on kinship makes visible the shared world that existed in Pondichéry at this early stage of European empire in the Indian Ocean.

INHERITING POWER: THE BROKER DYNASTIES OF PONDICHÉRY

The *Compagnie des Indes*, chartered by King Louis XIV, held and governed the town of Pondichéry beginning in 1674. The traders of the *Compagnie des Indes* were also the administrators of the colony, charged by the Crown and the Directors of the Company with a triple mission: to colonize, profit, and advance the cause of Christianity.²⁰ To do so, French traders relied on a cadre of local men employed as their commercial brokers. French reliance on these professional go-betweens attempted to resolve the double-edged problem of unfamiliarity—both French unfamiliarity with Indian mores and markets, and the foreignness of French actors trying to establish themselves in the subcontinent.

The extent to which employees of the *Compagnie des Indes* accepted that their local employees brought with them both the advantages and responsibilities of familial entanglements should not surprise: the *Compagnie des Indes* was itself an institution in which advancement often relied on the associations of kinship.²¹ Much as the position of chief broker was an inherited one in Tamil families and personal brokers recruited family members into the households of their employers in Pondichéry, French traders maintained and benefited from family connections within the institutional setting of the Company. The Company was, by some measures, a familial body: having a father who was Company employee virtually guaranteed a post for the son.²² This was true in the lower ranks of the Company, as well as in its highest reaches: when a Director of the Company in Paris died or withdrew, his spot was often inherited by a relative.²³ The *Compagnie des Indes*

was not unique in this regard among European trading companies in India. For example, in the case of the English Company, members of only three families supplied ten members to the Council in Bengal early in the eighteenth century.²⁴ In Madras, members of a handful of families became “dynasties of recruits” for the Company over many generations.²⁵

Compagnie des Indes traders stationed in India also sought to secure the patronage of powerful officials by creating kin relations with them through the vehicle of godparentage. The highest officials in the colony and their wives frequently appear in the Pondichéry notarial record as godparents to children born in the colony.²⁶ The reliance on family as a fount of patronage was by no means exclusive to the *Compagnie des Indes*, but was rather a defining feature of early modern French society, where a “bond of kinship underlay many patron-client ties.”²⁷ French traders and Indian inhabitants therefore drew on a shared understanding of familial patronage, one that allowed for the consideration of local familial affinities and rivalries in the governing of Pondichéry, the hiring decisions made by the *Compagnie des Indes*, and the interactions between individual traders and their Tamil employees. And although early modern French society was a patriarchal one, matrilineal kinship and the ties of marriage were as important as patrilineal ties in the realm of patronage.²⁸ Since Dravidian kinship structure allows for both matrilineal and patrilineal ties, this was another realm in which French and Tamil actors might have found a common language.

Commercial brokers were a well-established feature of the Indian Ocean world long before the arrival of Europeans in the region; one scholar has argued that to the extent to which the Indian Ocean was an integrated world-system, it relied on the work of commercial brokers.²⁹ And while Europeans were not the only ones to employ commercial brokers to facilitate trade, European trade companies in the Indian Ocean had no established networks of kinship or origin upon which they could draw for support, and thus depended even more heavily on their brokers.³⁰ The services provided by commercial brokers in India were diverse: under French employment, their main task was to ensure that enough merchandise flowed into French hands, so that the ships leaving Pondichéry’s port were fully stocked with cloth and other commodities to be sold in European markets. To this end, brokers negotiated with regional merchants who supplied goods, but also set up both farming operations and artisanal centers where raw materials were produced and transformed into commodities. In return, brokers received a percentage of the sale they had made possible. Brokers could serve both the Company and individual Frenchmen.

At the very loftiest position was the chief commercial broker to the French Company in Pondichéry, known as *courtier et chef des malabars*.³¹ The double title points to two different aspects of these men’s position at the crossroads of two cultural systems. As *courtiers*, they were enmeshed in a French system of service, with a commitment to furthering the agenda of the French Company and the Crown. But simultaneously, they were “*chefs des Malabars*,” local leaders of the Tamil community and therefore responsible also for representing the interests and voices of local merchants and workers back to the Company.

In Pondichéry, the powerful position of *courtier et chef des malabars* moved back and forth for more than a century between members of two families. Being employed as a commercial broker by the French trading Company was thus to a large extent a hereditary position.³² For convenience, I will refer to these two families as the Mudali and Pillai families. Both Mudali and Pillai are titles associated with the Vellala caste group, high-ranking agricultural landlords.³³ The two families competing for the highest post available to Indians in the colony were of the same caste, though the Pillais were Hindu and the Mudalis Christian.³⁴

The decades-long rivalry between the Pillai and the Mudali families for colonial influence demonstrates several important facts about the connection between the structures of the family and the structures of the colonial project. First, the Company was keenly aware of the familial links tying together its employees, and openly eager to pursue and take advantage of these links. By repeatedly appointing members of the same families to key positions, Pondichéry's French officials were attempting to forge enduring ties of loyalty and familiarity, grafting colonial relationships onto pre-existing ties. Second, from the viewpoint of local employees, involvement with French institutions was desirable, in part, because it did not entail alienation from one's community of origin. On the contrary, since go-betweens were called upon to draw on the ties of family and caste, and given opportunities to engage members of their family in prominent positions, such employment actually served to strengthen the enduring stickiness of such ties.

In the Pillai family, a man named Nayiniyappa was the first to be appointed *courtier et chef des malabars* in 1708.³⁵ The post was subsequently held, in turn, by his eldest son Guruvappa (chief broker in 1722–24), his relative (likely nephew) Ananda Ranga Pillai (1746–61), and his (likely) great-great-nephew Tiruvangadan (1790s). The Christian brokers employed by the French had a history of service that stretched back even earlier, to the very first days of the colony's existence as a French holding. The founder of this dynasty was Tanappa Mudali (Modeliar), also known by his Christian name, André (sometimes referred to as Lazare).³⁶ According to the voluminous diary kept by Ananda Ranga Pillai, who served the French Governor Joseph Dupleix as chief broker, the Christian Tanappa André left the village of Poonnamallee (Poonthamalli) near Madras, and arrived in Pondichéry on 17 January 1674, at the express invitation of the town's first Governor, François Martin.³⁷ His son, Lazare Moutiappa, followed him as courtier, and was replaced by Nayiniyappa in 1708. His grandson was Kanakaraya Pedro Mudali (Modeliar). It was this Pedro who was appointed chief broker when Nayiniyappa was arrested in 1716 on charges of tyranny and sedition. When Nayiniyappa was posthumously cleared of these charges, Pedro was replaced by Nayiniyappa's son Guruvappa. But when Guruvappa died two years later, in 1724, Pedro was reappointed to the post. He served again as chief broker to the Company in the period 1724 to 1746, when Ananda Ranga Pillai, Nayiniyappa's relative, became chief broker. As this somewhat bewildering account demonstrates, the post of chief broker was an exclusive commodity enjoyed for decades only by members of these two competing families, oscillating repeatedly between the two.³⁸

The struggle between these two families for the post of chief broker made itself present in the French documentary record in 1724, when Guruvappa died and a replacement needed to be found. The details of this struggle, as well as the

very fact of its inscription in the French colonial archive demonstrates, first, that the French were well-versed in the details of these families' lives; and second, that both French and Tamil actors made their claims with reference to kinship, suggesting there was a clear link between the institutions of the colonial state and the institution of local families.

There were multiple contenders for the job following Guruvappa's death. From the Pillai family, both Moutiappa (Nayiniyappa's second son and Guruvappa's brother) and Tiruvangadan (Nayiniyappa's brother-in-law)³⁹ lobbied for the post of chief broker. From the rival dynasty, the Christian Pedro vied for the role; he ultimately won the day and was appointed to the post once again. French correspondence devoted to this struggle reveals that colonial officials were cognizant of the power and influence attendant on the post. At one point the authority bestowed by the appointment seemed so intimidating to the French trader-administrators that they decided they would be better off with no chief broker at all. The French Governor at the time of Guruvappa's death, Beauvillier de Courchant, discussed the problem: "Le Chevalier Gouruapa étant mort et Tiruvangadan étant homme à prendre trop d'autorité si on le faisait courtier, nous déclarâmes aux noirs qu'il n'y avait plus de *modeliar*" [The Chevalier Guruvappa having died, and Tiruvangadan being the kind of man to take on too much authority were we to make him courtier, we announced to the Blacks that from now on there will be no *modeliar*] appointed in Pondichéry.⁴⁰

However, Governor Beauvillier de Courchant was not to have his way, since he encountered too much opposition from high-ranking French officials, who insisted that a local courtier must be hired. The Governor also wrote that he himself came to the realization that he could not successfully perform his work without the assistance of a broker, who would warn him in advance of all the rumblings and events in the town's Indian community. When the colony's Council discussed the matter, everyone agreed that it would not be prudent to appoint Tiruvangadan to the job, "as he would surely abuse it," but they also agreed that a courtier must be appointed.⁴¹

Nayiniyappa's second son, Moutiappa, also lobbied for the job, enlisting the help of his brother's wife, the Widow Guruvappa, and the missionaries of the *missions étrangères*, a Parisian society devoted to conversion in Asia with an outpost in Pondichéry. Governor Beauvillier de Courchant wrote to Paris to explain his objections to Moutiappa, alerting the Directors that the man was the least suited of all the candidates to the post of *modeliar*. Not only had Moutiappa stolen money and jewels from his brother, but "il est garçon d'une très mauvaise physionomie, d'un mauvais regard, et il n'est propre qu'à se faire hait de tous . . . enfin on ne lui connaît aucune habilité; d'ailleurs il est trop jeune et il n'a jamais voulu se faire chrétien." [he is a young man of very poor physiognomy, of ill regard, who is hated by everyone. . . . In short, we don't see any talents in him. Furthermore, he is too young, and he would never want to become a Christian.]⁴² This passage reveals that the French Governor was intimately acquainted with squabbles within the Pillai family, and counted them the very first among the reasons that rendered Moutiappa unsuitable for the job of chief broker. Without the strong support of a family network of connections and commitments, Moutiappa would not be an effective courtier. This passage also reveals that intra-familial rivalry could be just as important as inter-familial rivalry in encounters with the French administration.

According to the Governor, Pedro, the native Christian from the rival broker dynasty, was chosen for the job because he was beloved by the locals and he would never take for himself more authority than that explicitly granted to him by French employers. But Pedro had other attributes that made him especially suitable for the job, other than his allegedly retiring nature. In the French account, Pedro's family connections made him eminently suitable for the post, since it was recounted that his father had been "an excellent courtier" and his uncle "a very honest man."⁴³ Pedro remained in the post for more than twenty years. When he died in 1746, the balance of power shifted again to the Pillai family, when Ananda Ranga was chosen as the colony's chief broker over Pedro's younger brother, Chinna.⁴⁴

A 1702 letter from Pondichéry's Superior Council revealed in greater detail the familial networks that undergirded hiring decisions in the colony. Referring to the Mudali family, the Council wrote, "les principaux emplois qui conviennent aux gens du pays . . . sont occupés par une ancienne famille de chrétiens qui à commencer à servir le Roy à St. Thomé sous M. De la Haye en 1672 et employés depuis par votre compagnie encore à présent." [The principle jobs suitable for local people . . . are held by an old Christian family, who began serving the King in St. Thomé under M. de la Haye in 1672, and have been employed by your Company ever since.] The letter went on to name specific examples of Tamil Christians who held prominent positions in the Company's ranks: "l'interprète qui est le plus considérable, les gens pour assister au bord de la mer à la réception des droits, et à la grand place pour l'entrée et sortie des marchandises . . . sont de cette famille." [The most important interpreter, the people who work on the waterfront assisting in the reception and departure of merchandise . . . are all of this family]. Working as a commercial broker thus had immediate benefits for members of one's extended family, providing employment opportunities. Furthermore, it was French *colons* who conceived of the jobs as traveling along familial lines, calling attention to the fact that brokers, interpreters, and laborers at the docks were all related. That said, the power of native Christian families to extend their hold on Company positions was limited by Christianity's lesser position in India, and the attendant financial consequences of the religion's lowly status: "les marchands qui fournissent les toiles à votre compagnie sont à la vérité tous gentils, mais que l'on nous présente un chrétien excepté ceux qui sont au service a qui l'on puisse confier cent pagodes." [the merchants who furnish the company with cloth are all, it is true, gentiles, but show us a Christian, other than those [already] in our service, whom we could trust with a hundred pagodas.]⁴⁵ Furthermore, we should question the council's premise that it was the family's shared Christianity that ensured them all jobs. Rather, it seems just as likely that the familial association—regardless of confessional standing—made jobs travel across and between generations of one family, with one relative securing a position for another. The fact that the Pillai family enjoyed similar benefits, despite its continued Hindu practice, indicates as much.⁴⁶

THE WIDOW GURUVAPPA'S LETTERS

Women might have not enjoyed visible markers of authority in the colony, but that did not mean they were not able to exert considerable influence on the shape of the colony's affairs. Women could draw their authority from their position in domestic or familial networks, but that influence extended beyond the confines

of the home. In Pondichéry, the woman most visible in the historical record for doing so is Jeanne Dupleix (1706–56), a native of Pondichéry of mixed French and Luso-Indian descent, who was the wife of the French Governor Joseph Dupleix.⁴⁷ But not only women as influential as Jeanne Dupleix were able to make their mark felt in the colony. In the third decade of the eighteenth century, an Indian woman who drew on her status as a wife and daughter-in-law was able to make herself heard as far afield as Paris, and managed to mobilize support on her behalf among *missions étrangères* missionaries and Company officials in both Pondichéry and in the metropole.⁴⁸ This woman, the aforementioned Widow Guruvappa, interacted with colonial institutions in affect-laden language, in exchanges that represent ingenuity, creativity, and strategic bonding.

The Widow Guruvappa was likely not literate in Tamil or French; one of the letters in which she speaks in the first person concluded with the note “C’est ici [X] la marque qu’a fait la veuve du chevalier Gouruapa, ne sachant pas écrire son nom.” [this is the mark [here an X appears] made by the widow of the Chevalier Guruvappa, who does not know how to write her name.]⁴⁹ It is unlikely that she spoke the French in which her letters were composed.⁵⁰ But although the letters were almost certainly co-authored by a French assistant, there are indications the woman herself was intimately involved in the production of these texts.⁵¹ Other than the use of the first person, one of the letters also contains information about her early childhood, which was likely provided by the Widow Guruvappa herself. The fact that the Widow found it necessary and expedient to make her claims in French, using the French terminology of kinship, reveals that effective claim-making in French India necessitated navigating various affiliations and idioms.

In the years following her husband’s death, the Widow Guruvappa lobbied extensively to receive support from French institutions, writing to the Company’s Directors, to the Directors of the *missions étrangères* seminary in Paris (MEP), and, it seems safe to assume, also contacting the Council in Pondichéry and the *missions étrangères* missionaries living in the colony.⁵² In her letter to the *missions étrangères* seminary in Paris, she explicitly attempted to evoke a familial relationship she enjoyed with the missionaries in Pondichéry, writing that they had bestowed on her “l’honneur de le recevoir et traiter chez vous comme votre enfant.” [the honor of receiving her and treating her as your child in your house.]⁵³ Two separate rhetorical threads exist in the Widow’s communications with the Company and the MEP establishment. On the one hand, by requesting that the post of broker be given to her husband’s brother, she was clearly attempting to bolster the position of her kinsmen in the colony and by extension her own. That is, the protection she solicited from the Company was configured and accessed through pre-existing networks of family and marriage. Yet on the other hand, she also worked to establish a fictive kin relationship with French institutions, so as to enable her to draw on their support and commitment by positioning herself as a child entitled to their protection.

Even though she had powerful relatives who had long been in the habit of conferring with the colony’s highest ranking French officials, she intimated that her act of writing to the Directors of the Company in Paris was a surprising one, perhaps even a transgressive one. “Que direz-vous de la liberté que je prends de vous écrire,” [What will you say of the liberty I take in writing you] she began a letter of 12 August 1724. “J’avoue que c’est une témérité très grand a moi que

d'abuser ainsi de votre patience en vous importunant, mais lorsque je pense à cette équité et justice qui vous fait admirer généralement de toutes les nations, j'ose me flatter messieurs que vous avez assez de bonté pour moi que de me pardonner, et jeter sur une pauvre veuve affligée vos yeux de compassion." [I admit that it is a great temerity on my part to thus abuse your patience and importune you, but as I think of the equity and justice which have made you so admired among all nations, I dare to flatter myself, *messieurs*, that you will have the goodwill to forgive me and cast compassionate eyes upon a poor, afflicted widow.]⁵⁴ This letter was written shortly after her husband's death of dropsy and implied that the Widow had a right to expect assistance from the Company, since her husband had served as courtier to the great satisfaction of the Superior Council. Her claim on the Directors' time and effort was also couched as depending on a long trajectory of family loyalty, mentioning the decades of her husband's father, Nayiniyappa's, involvement with the Company. The Widow Guruvappa had very specific ideas about the ways in which the Company should assist her. "J'ai l'honneur de me prosterner a vos pieds pour vous supplier de m'honorer de votre protection, et toute notre famille, et de faire remettre mon beau frère Moutiappa dans le poste de son frère mon mari. J'ose espérer messieurs qu'il ne se rendra pas indigne de la grâce que vous lui accorder." [I am honored to prostrate myself at your feet and beg you to honor me with your protection, and to appoint my brother-in-law Moutiappa to the position held by his brother, my husband. I dare to hope that he [Moutiappa] will not prove himself unworthy of the grace that you will grant him.]⁵⁵

Moutiappa was not given the job, due to his lack of suitability discussed above, but it is noteworthy that the Widow Guruvappa took it upon herself to make a recommendation to the Company on whom it should hire to deal with its business transactions. The Widow positioned herself as a stakeholder in the Company's hiring practices on more than one occasion. In a letter she wrote in 1726 to the *missions étrangères* missionaries, she involved herself directly in the ongoing rivalry between the Pillai family and Pedro, the broker who was appointed to replace her husband Guruvappa. She proclaimed that Pedro should be "chased out of the office of *modeliar*," since he did nothing except under the direction of the Jesuits.⁵⁶ The Widow was addressing the letter to missionaries of the *missions étrangères*, who were rivals of the Jesuits in Pondichery's field of conversion. By choosing to associate Pedro with the Jesuits in her letter, the Widow was showing a keen understanding of the internal split that typified the French missionary project in India.

The Widow Guruvappa's attempts to create an alternative or supplementary kin network with the French might have been influenced by her precarious position within the Pillai family following her husband's death. French records (as well as the Widow's letters to Paris) attest to the fact that after Guruvappa's death, the family was involved in an inheritance battle, and a widowed woman would have been vulnerable. In a letter to Paris dated 15 August 1725, the Council mentioned the internal squabbles in the Pillai family: "Depuis la mort de Chevalier Gourouapa sa veuve étant en différend avec les héritiers du défunt, nous lui avons adjugé ce revenu pour sa subsistance sa vie durant." [Ever since the death of the Chevalier Guruvappa, his widow is fighting with the deceased's heirs, we have awarded her

this revenue for her subsistence for the duration of her life.]⁵⁷ Again and again, the Widow Guruvappa managed to obtain the support of the Frenchmen she petitioned.

It is suggestive that the 1725 inheritance struggle between the Widow and her husband's family was settled by the French Council, and not in the Chaudrie court, which normally heard civil disputes among Indian parties.⁵⁸ The fact that the Council addressed the case points to the importance of the family in the colony, but is perhaps also indicative of the Widow's savvy, since women in French courts were, by and large, more likely to prevail than in equivalent Indian contexts. Sara Chapman has studied the history of the Pontchartrain family (a family whose members happened to play a key role in the French project in India as royal ministers), and has shown how, in this admittedly extremely elevated sphere, women could benefit from networks of patronage.⁵⁹ By addressing the Council, the Widow Guruvappa was perhaps trying to make a similar claim for herself in the colonial economy of entitlement and indebtedness.

A special circumstance of the Widow's personal history perhaps helps explain why she was so successful in making demands on the Company and missionaries: she was a Christian. She had been engaged to Guruvappa when she was a child, she wrote, prior to his voyage to France. While in France, Guruvappa converted to Christianity, and through him, "j'ai eu la bonheur" [I had the joy of] also embracing the same religion.⁶⁰ The missionary framework offered to converts an alternative kin network, since converts became the children of Christ, and by extension the children of the missionaries. By calling attention to her Christianity, the Widow was astutely positioning herself as one entitled to the help of the missionaries.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BROKER IN FRENCH HOUSEHOLDS

The Pillai and Mudali families stood at the highest reaches of the colony's hierarchy, so it is perhaps not surprising that they were able to spread the benefits they enjoyed through wide circles of their kin. Men like Nayiniyappa, Pedro, or Ananda Ranga Pillai were outliers, some of the most influential actors in the colony. But even commercial brokers to individual traders, who filled much more humble positions, could procure similar benefits for their family members. Such valets-cum-brokers, who managed the households of French traders but also facilitated any personal trade with which their employers tried to bolster their income, moved in more modest spheres than the *chefs des malabars*. But in their worlds, they also discovered that employment by the French was a good that could be shared by family members. An example is provided by the household of Louis-François de Paulle de Mautort, a captain of a French regiment who arrived in India in 1780.⁶¹ When describing in his memoirs the composition of his household in Pondichéry, Mautort seemed surprised to discover it was quite so numerous: "En faisant le récapitulation des gens qui composaient ma maison, je me trouvais en avoir vingt." [When tallying up the people who made up my household, I find that there were twenty of them.]⁶² These servants were living in Mautort's household along with their wives, children or other relatives, "de manière que je faisais vivre chaque mois, plus de quarante individus" [so that each month I was providing for the upkeep of

more than forty individuals] (*M*, 265). When Mautort left Pondichéry for a military campaign, several members of his household accompanied him. But the group became even larger after some travel, again somewhat to Mautort's surprise. "En partant, je m'aperçus que ma caravane était plus que doublée, et voici comment: les femmes, les enfants, les frères, les sœurs, les pères, les mères des personnes que j'avais à mon service, n'osant sans doute partir avec moi de Pondichéry de peur que je m'y opposasse, s'étaient donné rendez-vous à Vilnour. Mon daubachy avait aussi sa femme, qui était jeune et jolie" [I noticed that my caravan had more than doubled in size, and here's how: the wives, the children, the brothers, the sisters, the fathers, the mothers of the people I had in my service, who did not dare leave Pondichéry with me out of fear I would oppose it, had met in Vilnour. My dubash [broker] also had his wife, who was young and beautiful] (*M*, 228).

Other sections of the memoir reveal that Mautort's dubash was responsible for the size of the household, and Mautort prided himself on his complete dependence on his broker in such matters. He recalled: "Muni d'un bon daubachy, mes soins domestiques se simplifiaient beaucoup. Je n'avais que mes ordres à lui donner, et souvent il m'éclairait des ses avis qui prévalaient sur mes premières idées. Je lui laissai la mission de me pourvoir des gens qui m'étaient indispensablement nécessaires, et, à coup sûr, son choix valait mieux que le mien" [Armed with a dubash, my domestic cares were greatly simplified. I only had to give him my orders, and often he improved upon them with suggestion to my original ideas. I entrusted him with the mission of hiring the people necessary to me, and, sure enough, his choice was better than mine] (*M*, 208). Hiring decisions made by the broker were based on familial affiliation, as is demonstrated again and again, and Mautort depicted himself as being incapable of curtailing such practices, despite his best efforts. "Mon daubachy avait un frère. . . . Depuis longtemps il me priait de le prendre à mon service. Jusqu'à ce moment, j'avais résisté. Voyant que j'augmentais mon train [with another employee], il revint à la charge et me détermina à l'engager en qualité de pion" [My dubash had a brother. . . . For a long time he had asked me to take him into my service. Until this moment, I had resisted. Seeing that I had added [an employee] to my retinue, he [the dubash] once again made this request, and convinced me to engage his brother as a pion] (*M*, 264). As Mautort admitted, he had no need of this pion, so that his hiring was, as he admitted, pure luxury. The luxury, however, was as much enjoyed by the dubash as by Mautort, since the broker was able to extend material help to his brother.

Other members of the dubash's family also came into Mautort's household: "Peu de temps après, mon daubachy me demanda la permission de placer encore auprès de moi un des frères de sa femme. . . . C'était un enfant d'une douzaine d'années. Je résolus de ne lui rien payer, vu qu'il m'était absolument inutile. Il entra donc à mon service à cette condition; mais, comme toute peine vaut salaire, et que je trouvais alerte et toujours prêt à bien faire, je ne pouvais me dispenser de lui donner de temps en temps quelque chose pour son entretien" [A short time later, my dubash asked my permission to present before me one of his wife's brothers. . . . He was a twelve year old child. I resolved not to pay him anything, as he would be absolutely useless to me. He thus entered into my service under this condition. But, as efforts deserve payment, and since I always found him to be alert and eager to do well, I could not help but occasionally give him something for his upkeep]

(*M*, 265). In Mautort's household, it seems as if the responsibilities of the dubash also became the responsibilities of his employer, whether he liked it or not.⁶³ Mautort's various stories about the role the dubash filled in his life in India show that in contracting the man, Mautort also received both the benefits—and at times the inconvenience—of his extended family network. For the dubash, employment in the French household was an opportunity to broaden and cement his influence and prominence within his own family circle, by acting as a patron and benefactor.

CONCLUSION

In order to understand the way a colony is governed, not only the formal institutionalized venues of power need to be taken into account. Colonial sovereignty is also constructed and shaped in more informal spaces of empire. Pondichéry's fate—the multitude of small and large decisions that made up the governance of the colony early in the eighteenth century—was decided in multiple locations. There were the expected sites of decision-making: the offices of the Company in both Paris and in India, the halls of Pondichéry's military fort, the meeting rooms of the colony's Sovereign Council. But other, less expected sites were just as important: the homes of both French officials and the Indian men they employed, the streets of the city in both the so-called "White Town" and "Black Town" and the permeable border between the two, kitchens and schoolrooms, bedrooms and backyards. A rumor flung between windows or exchanged among market stalls could quickly reverberate in the colony's official hallways of government. The exchange of gossip between a servant and his master, the long-held grudges nurtured through generations of families, inculcated in children like precious inheritances—all these moments contributed to the decisions made in the official governance of the colony.

This essay has argued that the family was a nexus for the enunciation of various agendas in the governance of Pondichéry. Family members worked together to further their agendas, taking advantage of the heightened loyalty and commitment afforded by the ties of kinship. Sharing the idiom and practice of family networks, both European and local actors were able to draw on the ties of kinship such as consanguinity, marriage or godparentage. The benefit of an extended family network derived from the fact that longstanding familial ties enabled one to extend relationships across time and space, securing support through successive generations and in different locales (for example, enjoying the boomtown opportunities of Pondichéry while also drawing on the established trade of Madras).

In her study of Hyderabad in the nineteenth century, Karen Isaksen Leonard examined practices of marriage, adoption, and inheritance in family mercantile firms and identified flexible familial strategies as central strategies for mercantile success. Like Francesca Trivellato, who offers "communitarian cosmopolitanism" as a framework for understanding how trade was carried out among far-flung Sephardic Jewish communities, Leonard suggests that mercantile success depended on fostering close relations with a wide variety of political actors.⁶⁴ The ability to create relations across a diverse group of actors, and the efficacy of couching such relations within a shared idiom of kinship, were very much on display in Pondichéry early in the eighteenth century. Public performances of kinship, inscribed in colonial archives, served as a central tool for the negotiation and articulation of power in the colony.

An anthropologist of the Andes recently suggested that “[i]t is important to identify sites where, despite anxious talk to the contrary, kinship and economy are simultaneously co-produced.”⁶⁵ Pondichéry, at the turn of the eighteenth century, was one such site. The importance of familial networks for the successful commerce and governance in Pondichéry need not be rescued or salvaged by the historian. On the contrary, French traders who served as government officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* in India were keenly, even desperately, aware of the ways their actions were impacted and guided by the flow of information and action in local networks of kinship. When they had to decide whom to hire or fire or how to conduct themselves in the face of the colony’s public opinion, French traders were careful to take into account the influence of these networks. At the same time, Tamil actors were quick to act upon opportunities to benefit from family ties and to enhance their value through interaction with the French. In this way, the pre-existing bonds of kinship in French India were publicly produced, strengthened, and performed in relation to the French commercial project and the colonial state.

NOTES

1. Guruvappa was her husband’s name; the Widow’s own name is never mentioned. Durba Ghosh has insightfully discussed both the problems posed and the productive space exposed by the “namelessness” of local women in the archives of colonial India. Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 15–31.

2. There are at least two letters in which the Widow uses the first person to make her claims: Archives des missions étrangères de Paris [hereafter cited as MEP], *Lettres*, Vol. 992:1–3; and Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence [hereafter cited as ANOM], Fonds des colonies [hereafter cited as COL] sous-série C², registre 73, fols. 29–30. Nevertheless, the letters are clearly highly mediated artifacts, an issue discussed in greater detail below. The Widow’s gender makes her case exceptional, but not unique. There are examples of Indian women appealing to the English authorities in Madras regarding a dispute of property rights in late seventeenth-century Madras. Lalitha Iyer and Kanakalatha Mukund, “Herstory: Women in South India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Indica* 32, no. 1 (1995): 31.

3. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995).

4. Bhavani Raman, who has examined the *kacceri*, the offices of the English East India Company in Madras in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, has made a related argument. In her account, the reliance on familial networks greatly strengthened the hierarchical authority of British Company masters, while simultaneously providing subordinates with power over local inhabitants. Bhavani Raman, “The Familial World of the Company’s Kacceri in Early Colonial Madras,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 9, no. 2 (2008); Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012). The example of French India is markedly different, in that working relations between French administrators and moneyed commercial brokers did not allow for such clear hierarchical distinctions. Affiliation with the French Company did not necessarily entail subordination, and therefore French reliance on local family networks did not always position European newcomers as patrons. French trader-administrators, cognizant of their profound dependence on local markets and patterns of familial obligation and patronage, largely refrained from attempts to restructure or displace these patterns, as would become common in later colonial projects.

5. For an insightful elaboration of an argument that links the domain of family and the formation of the British colonial state in the context of nineteenth-century Western India, see Rachel Sturman, “Property and Attachments: Defining Autonomy and the Claims of Family in Nineteenth-Century Western India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 3 (2005): 611–37.

6. This holds true not only for commercial transactions but also for conversion to Christianity. Despite missionaries’ claims regarding the spiritual rebirth of neophytes, Catholic conversion in French

India was similarly diffused along local networks of family and caste; on this, see Danna Agmon, "An Uneasy Alliance: Traders, Missionaries, and Tamil Intermediaries in Eighteenth-Century French India" (PhD Diss., Univ. of Michigan, 2011).

7. I use the etic terms "kin" and "kinship" and the emic term "family" interchangeably to refer to immediate and extended consanguine relations (fathers, mothers, siblings, children, cousins, parents' siblings, etc), non-consanguine kin (such as affines and godparents), as well as people identified in the sources as relatives, with no specific information given about the nature of the relationship. In this my usage diverges from frameworks that have posited the family as an analytic unit "sharply differentiated from the larger associations of kin and community." David Herlihy, "Family," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 1 (1991): 1. For the debates in feminist historiography on both the usefulness and slippery nature of the family as an analytic category, see Rayna Rapp, Ellen Ross, and Renate Bridenthal, "Examining Family History," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1979): 174–200. Anthropologists engaged in what is sometimes known as "new kinship studies" have recently attempted to bring together the emic and etic understandings of human bonds. This work has focused on how people conceptualize who counts as kin and charts the moral, imaginative, reproductive and conceptual effort involved in determining relatedness. Such attempts appear and are discussed in Janet Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); Sarah Franklin and Susan Mackinnon, *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001); Linda Stone, ed., *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

8. Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005).

9. This focus on the conjuncture of family and global structures participates in ongoing debates. Patrick Manning has suggested that following families is an especially effective method for tracing global patterns of migration. Patrick Manning, "Frontiers of Family Life: Early Modern Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 315–33. Using the example of a British governing family from colonial India, Margot Finn has shown how an "imperial kin network" was also crucial for the making of families in the metropole. Margot Finn, "Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State," in *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, ed. David Feldman and John Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 102. On the intersection of the "new imperial history" and the history of the family, see Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).

10. Carla Rahn Phillips, "The Organization of Oceanic Empires: The Iberian World in the Habsburg Period," in *Seascapes. Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 71–86.

11. Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011). Rothschild's study is part of a wave of recent works in Atlantic and British history that examine the global mobility of families and individuals in early imperial contexts. Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); Sarah M. S Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008). Scholars have begun to consider the gendered history of the French family in its imperial, mostly Atlantic, context (see for example Jennifer L. Palmer, "What's in a Name? Mixed-Race Families and Resistance to Racial Codification in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 [2010]: 357–85.), but not to the same extent.

12. Bianca Premo, "Familiar: Thinking Beyond Lineage and Across Race in Spanish Atlantic Family History," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 70, no. 2 (2013): 297.

13. In anthropology, David Schneider's work galvanized scholars to actively reimagine kinship beyond the limits of biological reproduction and to question "the assumption that Blood is Thicker Than Water." David Murray Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1984), 174.

14. On “vernacular kinship” see Nara B Milanich, *Children of Fate: Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850-1930* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2009), especially chapter 5. Originally cited in Premo, “Familiar,” 298.

15. Sarah Hanley, “Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France,” *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 6.

16. Sumit Guha, “The Family Feud as a Political Resource in Eighteenth-Century India,” in *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), 78.

17. The scholarship of the French family under the Old Regime is much too vast to review here, but an excellent overview of the state of the field is Suzanne Desan and Merrick, Jeffrey, eds., *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France* (Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2009), xi–xxvi. Important earlier examples from the *Annales* school are collected in Robert Forster and Orest A. Ranum, *Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

18. Indrani Chatterjee, ed., *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), 3. Other scholarship which has attempted to address this lack can be found in Ákos Östör, Lina Fruzzetti, and Steve Barnett, *Concepts of Person: Kinship, Caste, and Marriage in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982); Patricia Uberoi, *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

19. It is worth noting that the category of caste technically encompasses that of family (castes are endogamous—members of the same kin group, as a general and widely practiced rule, belong to the same caste), but the reverse is not true (not all members of the same caste are related to one another). That said, anthropologist Helen Lambert writes that in studies of India, “the endogamous character of caste groups has produced a very limited treatment of kinship as necessarily confined to the relationships that exist within castes.” Helen Lambert, “Sentiment and Substance in North Indian Forms of Relatedness,” in *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*, ed. Janet Carsten (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 73. For an in-depth discussion of caste as a historical and particularly colonial phenomenon, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001); Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

20. Most studies of the French Company in the Indian Ocean have focused on its commercial and institutional history. See Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Paris: Indes savantes, 2005); Jacques Weber, *Compagnies et comptoirs: l’Inde des français: XVIIe–XXe Siècle* (Paris: Société française d’histoire d’outre-mer, 1991). I focus instead on its action as a governmental, state-like body, with explicit imperial and territorial pretensions, and seek to unearth on-the-ground interactions in Pondichéry. In this, this work is akin to Philip Stern’s study of the English Company in the seventeenth century, which serves as a corrective to the view that the British somehow stumbled onto an empire in India. Philip J. Stern, *The Company-state: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011). Such imperial ambitions were even clearer in the French case than in the British one, given the French Crown’s direct involvement in the Company from its very moment of inception.

21. For a fascinating account of the importance of family in advancing global early modern European commerce, see Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

22. Catherine Manning, *Fortunes à Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719–48* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 57.

23. Paul Käppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin: Etude sur l’histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l’Inde sous Louis XIV (1664–1719)* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1908), 385.

24. Philippe Haudrère, *Les Compagnies des Indes orientales: Trois siècles de rencontre entre orientaux et occidentaux (1600–1858)* (Paris: Ed. Desjonquères, 2006), 180.

25. David Washbrook, “South India 1770–1840: The Colonial Transition,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 489.

26. For the Pondichéry notariat, see ANOM, INDE, série P.
27. Sharon Kettering, "Patronage and Kinship in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 2 (1989): 409.
28. *Ibid.*, 421–422, 426.
29. M.N. Pearson, "Brokers in Western Indian Port Cities: Their Role in Servicing Foreign Merchants," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 3 (1988): 472. For more on the importance of commercial brokers in Indian Ocean trade, see Joseph J. Brenning, "Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves of Seventeenth-Century Coromandel," *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 3 (1977): 321–40; A. Das Gupta, "The Broker at Mughal Surat," *Review of Culture (Macao)* 13–14 (1991): 173–80; G.V. Scammell, "Indigenous Assistance in the Establishment of Portuguese Power in India," *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 1–11.
30. Pearson, "Brokers in Western Indian Port Cities."
31. In Madras, these brokers were known as dubashes. The issue of nomenclature of such brokers in Pondichéry is a surprisingly thorny one. Although "dubashes" is the term commonly used in South Indian historiography to refer to these commercial brokers, the term appears only rarely in French sources of the period. The French equivalent term, usually rendered *daubachy*, does show up in French documents, but the earliest mention I have found dates from 1733, when it was used in a legal dossier of a case heard in 1733 by Pondichéry's sovereign council. ANOM, INDE, série M/46.
32. This was not unique to Pondichéry: in the French holding of Chandernagor in Bengal, the family of one Indranarayan Chaudhuri held the post of broker for decades. The position was also hereditary in Ceylon, where Europeans employed local men in a similar position. For Ceylon, see Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (New Delhi: Navrang in collaboration with Lake House Bookshop Colombo, 1995).
33. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols. (Madras: Government Press, 1909), 1:84.
34. Tamil naming practices do not assign a family name, but the titles Mudali (or Modeliar) and Pillai were associated with these families in the French archive. On the joint use of the Mudali and Pillai suffixes by the Vellala caste, and the caste members' association with colonial bureaucracy in Madras and Pondichéry, see Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750–1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1979): 20, 24. For more on the dubashes of Madras and their caste position, see Susan Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1984): 1–31.
35. Nayiniyappa was removed from his post and imprisoned in an event that came to be known as *l'affaire Nayiniyappa*. The affair's details, implications, and meaning are discussed in my book project (in progress), titled *The Nayiniyappa Affair: Commerce, Conversion and a Colonial Scandal in French India*.
36. For a rare but incomplete discussion of this family, see Ajit Neogy, "Early Commercial Activities of the French in Pondicherry: The Pondicherry Authorities, the Jesuits and the Mudaliars," in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K.S. Mathew (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 333–40.
37. Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, 12 vols. (Madras: Printed by the superintendent Government press, 1904), 2:150, 12:87. Eugene Irschik describes Poonamalee as a locale that "formed a base for the growth of power of many Kondaikatti vellala families"—perhaps the caste subgroup to which Lazare and his descendants belonged, since Kondaikatties were known as Mudalis. Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 34–35.
38. It is possible, though there is no clear indication of this in the archive, that the French deliberately pitted one family against the other, with the position strategically oscillating between the two. For a comparable example in Madras see Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," 4–5.

39. Here the translation of kinship terminology into French or English does not adequately reflect the Tamil terms. The term *beau-frère*, used to refer to Tiruvangadan in French sources, might have referred to Nayiniyappa's sister's husband, his wife's brother, or both at the same time, due to the practice of cross cousin marriage (Dravidian kinship terminology reflects the assumption that one could marry one's mother's brother's child or one's father's sister's child). On the rule of cross cousin marriage in Dravidian kinship, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981). On the general problem of describing South Asian kinship in English, with its relative paucity of kinship terminology, see Sylvia Vatuk, "‘Family’ as a Contested Concept in Early-Nineteenth-Century Madras," in *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), 161–91.

40. ANOM, COL C²/73, fol. 23. All translations are my own.

41. *Ibid.*

42. ANOM, COL C²/73, fol. 23v.

43. ANOM, COL C²/73, fol. 23. Correspondence between the Company Directors in Paris and the council in Pondichéry in 1725, 1726, 1727 and 1729 reveals that the Parisian directors wanted to dismiss Pedro; the council resisted and he retained his position until his death in 1746.

44. Ananda Ranga Pillai's journal describes this struggle, and is (understandably, considering their rivalry) scathing about Chinna. Pillai, *Private Diary*, 1:314, 406.

45. Bibliothèque nationale française [hereafter cited as BNF], Manuscrits français 6231, fol. 29v.

46. Nayiniyappa's son Guruvappa did convert to Christianity, but subsequent family members employed by the Company were Hindu.

47. On Jeanne Dupleix, see M. I Guet, *Origines de l'Inde Française: Jan Begum (Mme Dupleix) 1706–1756* (Paris: Librairie Militaire de L. Baudoin, 1892).

48. The suggestion that the Widow Guruvappa's "voice" can be discerned in the archive is problematic; historians' ability to extract the agency of historical subjects in such instances has long been debated. A foundational work on this thorny question is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. Recent work on the problem of ascribing agency to women in the colonial world, focusing on women who were litigants in colonial courts, is in Bianca Premo, "Before the Law: Women's Petitions in the Eighteenth-Century Spanish Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 2 (2011): 261–89. Rosalind O'Hanlon warns of the dangers of imagining a unitary subaltern subject molded in the "classic form of Western humanism." Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 191. My concern here is not with the Widow's actions as a self-aware historical subject-agent—such claims would be most difficult to reconstruct, given how little we know about the production of these letters and the exact nature of the Widow's involvement in the crafting of the text. What the letters do make clearly apparent is the existence of political and governmental field in which the bonds of family and kin of different historical origin (French and Tamil) were woven together.

49. MEP *Lettres*, Vol. 992, p. 3. Guruvappa was given the title of *Chevalier* of the order of Saint Michel during a trip he took to Paris in order to clear his father's name. On the trip and Guruvappa's transformations therein, see Danna Agmon, "Intermediaries on the Move: Mobility and Stability in the Making of Colonial Go-Betweens in Eighteenth-Century French India," in *Intermédiaires culturels/Cultural Intermediaries*, ed. Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding and Ellen R. Welch (Paris: Honoré-Champion, forthcoming 2014).

50. Well into the final decades of the eighteenth century, Portuguese remained the lingua franca used by the colony's French and Indian inhabitants. Even the *Compagnie des Indes*'s chief brokers used Portuguese to communicate with their French employers.

51. It is unknown if the Widow Guruvappa was responsible for the creation of any Tamil documents, and the survival of such documents would be unlikely. The documents produced in Tamil by local scribes in this period would have been written on palm leaf [*olai*], which is quick to disintegrate and difficult to preserve. Raman, *Document Raj*, 12. This makes the inscription and preservation of

the Widow's claims, albeit in French, even more meaningful. I have not been able to determine who served as the scribe or co-author of the letters. On the largely invisible role of scribes in the making of colonial archives, see Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010).

52. The fact that these claims repeatedly received favorable response by French authorities speaks to the Widow's position in the colony, but also to the liminal status of widows in French society. In early modern France, widowed women could serve as heads of households, and enjoyed the legal and economic benefits attendant on that position. Even if widows often found it difficult to take advantage of the benefits due to them in an intensely patriarchal society, as Julie Hardwick has shown, the conceptual and legal framework for their autonomy was in place. Julie Hardwick, "Widowhood and Patriarchy in Seventeenth Century France," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 1 (1992): 133–48.

53. MEP, *Lettres*, Vol. 992, p. 2.

54. ANOM, COL C²/73, fol. 29. The widow's letter to Paris was not an isolated occasion. On 28 Dec. 1726, the Directors in Paris wrote to the Council in Pondichéry, referring to another letter they had received from the Widow, and ordering the council to assist her. *Correspondance du conseil superieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie [des Indes]*, 6 vols. (Pondichéry: Société de l'histoire de l'Inde française, 1920), 1:24–25.

55. ANOM, COL C²/73, fol.29v.

56. MEP, *Lettres*, Vol. 992, p. 2.

57. ANOM, COL,C²/73, fol. 210v.

58. On the Chaudrie, see Jean-Claude Bonnan, *Jugements de la tribunal de la Chaudrie de Pondichéry 1766–1817* (Pondicherry: Institut française de Pondichéry, Ecole française d'Extrême Orient, 2001).

59. Sara Chapman, "Patronage as Family Economy: The Role of Women in the Patron-Client Network of the Phelypeaux de Pontchartrain Family, 1670–1715," *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (2001): 11–35. See also Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *Historical Journal* 32, no. 4 (1989): 817.

60. MEP, *Lettres*, Vol. 992, p. 2.

61. The literature on the household has been especially important in British historiography; see for example Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007). In the French context, see Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1998).

62. Louis-François de Paulle de Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d'Austrasie Chevalier de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1895), 265, henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as *M. Mautort's* surprise at the extent of his household staff suggests that his conception of service differed markedly from concurrent French ideologies regarding service. Sarah Maza has argued that core job of servants in ancien régime France was to signify to the world the power and status of their masters, in a way quite distinct from Mautort's haphazard acquisition of staff. Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983).

63. It should be noted here that Mautort's memoirs were written at a later period, closer to the paternalistic colonial-speak of the so-called "civilizing mission," so such claims should be taken with a grain of salt.

64. Karen Isaksen Leonard, "Family Firms in Hyderabad: Gujarati, Goswami, and Marwari Patterns of Adoption, Marriage, and Inheritance," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 4 (2011): 827–54, esp. 832.

65. Jessaca B. Leinawever, "Toward an Anthropology of Ingratitude: Notes from Andean Kinship," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 560.