






INTRODUCTION

Forum Introduction: Gender, Intimate Networks, and Global Commerce in the Early Modern Period

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Abstract

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, new patterns of knowledge, credit, and capital were created by global expansion. These, in turn, created new opportunities for groups of people who previously had little access to global trade. These individuals—women as well as men—increasingly engaged in commercial transactions, some of them relatively autonomous, others challenged and hindered by various forms of institutional control and constraint. Emphasising the intimate nature of networks means examining the quality rather than the quantity of certain networks, which ultimately facilitates a shift away from well-known historical agents such as influential merchants, powerful politicians, and various nobility and royals. The Gender, Intimate Networks, and Global Commerce in the Early Modern Period forum seeks to add to our knowledge of the diverse ways that intimate economic networks developed in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, in Europe as well as en route elsewhere, among the well-off as well as the relatively poor, and among free people as well as the enslaved.

Keywords: Networks; global; gender; early modern

Gender, Intimate Networks, and Global Commerce in the Early Modern Period

In recent years, the intimate lives of historical agents have come to play an increasingly important role in imperial studies and adjacent fields.¹ For example, Susanah Shaw

¹ David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Maria Fusaro, “Cooperating Mercantile Networks in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Economic History Review* 65:2 (2012): 701–18; Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); Margot Finn, “The Female World of Love & Empire: Women, Family & East India Company Politics at the End of the Eighteenth Century: The Female World of Love & Empire,” *Gender & History* 31:1 (2019): 7–24; David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Francisca Hoyer, *Relations of Absence: Germans in the East Indies and Their Families, c. 1750–1820* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2021).

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Romney has found that intimate networks made up of early modern people's immediate, affective, and personal associations powerfully influenced the form and content of economic engagement in the Dutch Atlantic colonies.² Other scholars have found similar forces at work in the West Indies, the west coast of Africa, and South and Southeast Asia.³ As a framework, the idea of intimate networks allows for attention to both the quantity and the quality of people's social ties.⁴ In particular, the emphasis on quality of ties allows for the appreciation of other actors, including women, non-elite men, interlopers, and enslaved persons. There has been a tendency to assume that poor European women were too distant from the networks of global trade to influence them in any substantive way or that social life on board ships was radically separate from life on land. This forum's contributors are interested in adding to our knowledge of the diverse ways that intimate economic networks, often with women at their centre, could develop in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, in Europe as well as en route elsewhere, among the well-off as well as the relatively poor, among free people as well as the enslaved.

Intimate networks were but one of the myriad of networks that shaped early modern people's lives. Formed by different institutions, types of credit, and relationship, the different networks overlapped and intersected, creating a complex web of economy and sociability.⁵ The intimacy consisted of similarly intricate amalgams of kinships, friendships, and romantic relationships, alongside other types of relationships found in workplaces, in neighbourhoods, or in educational settings.⁶ Francesca Trivellato has influentially argued that participation in commerce generated new conversations between non-kin—people who were otherwise strangers—and she shows how these relationships generated new legal instruments intended to alleviate some of the dangers that accompanied trading with non-kin.⁷ Several of the articles in this forum confirm that some people ultimately relied more on close friends than on family. Relationships created through proximity (living in the same neighbourhood, serving on the same ship, being enslaved by the same master), or a history of several successful business transactions or forms of affinity we can no longer trace weighed more heavily for some people than did family connections.⁸ By focussing on

² Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

³ See for instance Julia Wells, "Eva's Men: Gender and Power in the Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–74," *Journal of African History* 39:3 (1 January 1998): 417–37; Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Deborah Hamer, "Marriage and the Construction of Colonial Order: Jurisdiction, Gender and Class in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Batavia," *Gender & History* 29:3 (2017): 622–40.

⁴ Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 18.

⁵ The analytical concept of networks has been omnipresent and has been employed in historical research for many years with varying success. For the most recent examples of networks of investment, see Edmond Smith, "The Social Networks of Investment in Early Modern England," *The Historical Journal* 64:4 (2021): 912–39. For the role of family networks, see Sophie H. Jones and Siobhan Talbott, "Sole Traders? The Role of the Extended Family in Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Business Networks," *Enterprise & Society*, 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/es0.2021.15>, published online 10 May 2021. For merchants preferring friends over family, see Albane Forestier, "Risk, Kinship and Personal Relationships in Late Eighteenth-Century West Indian Trade: The Commercial Network of Tobin & Pinney," *Business History* 52:6 (1 October 2010): 912–31. For political networks, see Ruth Ahnert and Sebastian E. Ahnert, "Protestant Letter Networks in the Reign of Mary I: A Quantitative Approach," *ELH* 82:1 (2015): 1–33.

⁶ See for instance the examples in Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁷ Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 20. It is important to note that Trivellato is not talking here about slavery, although this idea could suggest the enforced proximity of slavery as well.

⁸ Trivellato, 155–6. For networks shaped by neighbourhoods, see Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community that Shaped England's Trade and Empire, 1550–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 112–4.

networks created within as well as outside extended kinship networks, we expand upon and challenge existing assumptions about how women could form as well as maintain commercial and economic ties.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, overseas expansion increasingly meant that many networks came to be shaped outside of European metropolises. In these new settings individuals had to rely on fewer connections than previously as they were removed from existing networks, voluntarily or by force, temporally and spatially. Emerging European empires in Asia and North America brought together people from different social backgrounds and of varying status, including freedom and unfreedom, which necessitated forming social ties beyond one's immediate social and kinship group. The examples presented in this forum feature geographically and chronologically diverse examples, but they all present cases in which the constant personal negotiations required to create, maintain, and strengthen networks become visible.

Early modern global commercial expansion also necessitated the creation of new patterns of knowledge, trust, credit, and capital, which in turn provided economic opportunities to groups of people who previously had little access to global trade.⁹ European as well as non-European port towns and cities, colonies, factories, and trading stations became connected to one another through multifaceted networks. In turn, these networks allowed some new people—women as well as men—to engage in commercial transactions, some of them relatively autonomous, others characterised by various forms of institutional control and constraint.¹⁰

Relevant here is recent research focussing on large trading companies, which has highlighted the social origins of companies and their embeddedness within the political, commercial, and social lives of early modern people.¹¹ Companies consisted of a skein of entangled networks, intimate as well as less so. Edmond Smith argues that corporations “functioned as communities, with trust reputation and good relationships essential for their success.” Though trading companies like the East India Company grew to be company states, the companies were “restricted and directed by individuals within the complex web of social interactions and relationships.”¹² Trading companies' decisions were the result of constant negotiations between individual networks' agendas.¹³ They

⁹ Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Natasha Glaisyer, “Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire,” *The Historical Journal* 47:2 (2004): 451–76, 451; Edmond Smith, “The Social Networks of Investment in Early Modern England,” *The Historical Journal* 64:4 (2021): 912–39; Ghulam A. Nadri, “The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian Merchants in Surat in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Interdependence, Competition and Contestation,” in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 125–49.

¹⁰ Susan D. Amussen and Allyson M. Poska, “Restoring Miranda: Gender and the Limits of European Patriarchy in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” *Journal of Global History* 7:3 (2012): 342–63; Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Colonial Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007); Rothschild, *Inner Life*; Beverly Lemire, “‘Men of the World’: British Mariners, Consumer Practice, and Material Culture in an Era of Global Trade, c. 1660–1800,” *Journal of British Studies* 54:2 (2015): 288–319.

¹¹ William A. Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History,” *Itinerario* 39:3 (2015): 487–501; William Pettigrew and David Veevers, eds., *The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History, c. 1550–1750*, Global Economic History Series 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

¹² Smith, *Merchants*, 59–60.

¹³ The literature on company decision-making and the influence of interest groups is growing rapidly; see for instance Edmond Smith, “The Global Interests of London's Commercial Community, 1599–1625: Investment in the

influentially shaped European commerce in Asia and (to a lesser extent) in North America, but were in turn shaped by the many different personal agendas of individuals and networks. The different cases examined in this forum were a part of the fabric that constituted the trading companies and they in turn, directly as well as indirectly, “restricted and directed” the trading companies. And vice versa: the trading companies both restricted and provided opportunities for individuals simultaneously.

Geographically, the forum covers Europe and the West and East Indies. They were, of course, very different worlds, socially and commercially. In the Indian Ocean world, the various European East India Companies, powerful indigenous empires, and many smaller polities created a complex skein of overlapping jurisdictions, commercial agendas, and competitive political and military interests.¹⁴ Competition was rife in the West Indies too, but it consisted of rivalries between European powers for territory, trade, and control of the seas, and it was overlain by the systematic use of violence aimed at controlling the large population of enslaved people on which the economies of most European colonies depended. Commercially speaking, moreover, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic worlds generated different kinds of networks.¹⁵ In the Indian Ocean world the large European trading companies inevitably absorbed a lot of trade, and they also actively sought to enforce and extend their monopolies. There were plenty of private traders in the East Indies, but both European and indigenous traders were often at loggerheads with one or another of the companies.¹⁶ European private traders found themselves forced to trade primarily in the commodities the companies were not interested in, or else engage in various kinds of subterfuge. By contrast, trade in the West Indies occurred largely outside of corporate monopolies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was comparatively unregulated or regulated at the island level.¹⁷ On both sides of the globe,

East India Company,” *Economic History Review* 71:4 (1 November 2018): 1118–46; Julie M. Svalastog, “Challenging Porous Frontiers: Atlantic Merchants and the Potential of the Indian Ocean, 1640–1650,” *Journal of Early American History* 9:2–3 (10 December 2019): 145–62; Joris van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company: Economic Interests and Political Decision-Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

¹⁴ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, eds., *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500–1800*, European Expansion and Indigenous Response, vol. 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Pieter C. Emmer and Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Looking Out from Goa, 1648: Perspectives on a Crisis of the Estado da Índia,” *Modern Asian Studies* (2021): 1–40.

¹⁵ A number of individuals had interests in both spheres, maximising their commercial options and becoming citizens of the world. There are many studies of the eighteenth century in particular examining these people; see for instance Hancock, *Citizens*; Rothschild, *Inner Life*. To a lesser degree this was also the case in the seventeenth century; see Aske Laursen Brock and Misha Ewen, “Women’s Public Lives: Navigating the East India Company, Parliament and Courts in Early Modern England,” *Gender & History* 33:1 (2020): 3–23.

¹⁶ The relationship between trading companies and private traders was influential in shaping company and imperial settlements; see Margaret R. Hunt and Philip J. Stern, “Bombay: The Genealogy of a Global Imperial City,” *Urban History* 48:3 (2021): 467. For private traders’ and interlopers’ relationships with the company, see David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003); Timothy Davies, “British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Goods from the East, 1600–1800: Trading Eurasia*, ed. Maxine Berg et al., *Europe’s Asian Centuries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 154–67; Søren Mentz, “Merchants and States: Private Trade and the Fall of Madras, 1746,” *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 2:1 (2018): 33–56.

¹⁷ This is not to say that companies did not operate here—for instance, the Dutch West India Company was quite influential in the Americas for more than a century—but they found it more difficult to uphold a monopoly or enforce their rights concerning trade and mobility of individuals. See for instance Henk Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC: Opkomst, bloei en ondergang* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994); Nuala Zahedieh, “Regulation, Rent-Seeking, and the Glorious Revolution in the English Atlantic Economy,” *Economic*

these systems seemingly limited individuals' autonomy, often in drastic ways. Recently, Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia have argued that free agents were instrumental in shaping early modern empires through their challenges to states and monopolies. They frequently worked under a larger company carapace as company employees or imperial agents, but once they began working towards their own goals, they became agents of informal empire.¹⁸ They exploited formal structures to build their own networks through intimate and at times fragile connections. In other words, companies and state monopolies could also provide new opportunities to exploit emerging local, regional, and global markets by providing more durable structures than private individuals typically could.¹⁹

The forum examines the intersections between intimacy and the economy, but the contributions differ in scope and focus, influenced by varying geographies, institutions, and opportunities, as well as by record survival. Each article provides a different piece of the puzzle to show how people carved out room for manoeuvre that would allow them to participate in commerce despite other disadvantages. In theory, family was a major trust-basis for long-distance networks of trade. This is certainly the case for some of the individuals and groups discussed in these articles. Many European women, up and down the social spectrum, had male relatives who went either to the West or East Indies. For women left "at home," the extension of their individual networks through marriage was often key. The coming together not only of two individuals, but of two families and their extended networks, were important in expanding opportunity.²⁰ Some wives took advantage of this to become small-time entrepreneurs and even to engage in much more substantial operations.²¹ Women who travelled and women who stayed behind played a similar role in information networks, intermingling important news of the family with commercial news; they were also heavily involved in the credit arrangements that permitted their male relatives to carry on trade while also trading independently.²² Lately, Sophie Jones and Siobhan Talbott have brilliantly demonstrated how essential the role of female relatives' labour was in creating and maintaining commercial networks. They were not merely acting for the male heads of households but were autonomous agents in the economy, utilising the extended network uniquely afforded by marriage.²³ As Susanah Romney has aptly phrased it, "marriage made people kin, and ink put that kinship to economic use."²⁴

History Review 63:4 (2010): 865–90; Cátia Antunes and Jos J. L. Gommans, eds., *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600–2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁸ Antunes and Polónia, "Introduction," *Beyond Empires*, 8; Cátia Antunes, "Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis," *Portuguese Studies* 28:2 (2012): 185.

¹⁹ H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English Speaking World, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *The Forgotten Majority: German Merchants in London, Naturalization, and Global Trade, 1660–1815* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Sheryllynne Haggerty, "'Miss Fan can tun her han!' Female Traders in Eighteenth-Century British-American Atlantic Port Cities," *Atlantic Studies* 6:1 (1 April 2009): 29–42; Sheryllynne Haggerty, "'Ports, Petticoats, and Power: Women and Work in Early-National Philadelphia," in *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800*, ed. Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²¹ Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 103.

²² Rothschild, *Inner Life*, 193; Francesca Trivellato, "Merchant's Letters across Geographical and Social Boundaries," in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 3, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80–103; Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*, paperback ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²³ Jones and Talbott, "Sole Traders?," 25.

²⁴ Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 110.

During the same period in which kinship, including marriage, came to create ties over larger distances, European expansion forcibly dispossessed many people from the kinds of connections that would normally be utilised for economic purposes. European expansion created massive disruptions in family ties, most notably with respect to Indigenous Americans, Africans, and some Asians, who were separated violently from their natal and affinal families. Moreover, colonial legislators realised the necessity of regulating sexual intimacy because claims to kinship could complicate questions concerning inheritance in societies in which the concept of “race” opened up the possibility of a person being considered property.²⁵ Enslaved people established new kinds of connections, involving other enslaved individuals, former slaves, newly forged (or fictive) kinship ties, and even their enslavers or former enslavers, but these were both hard-won and precarious. As one of the contributors to this issue shows, this did not preclude entrepreneurial activity, although the character of economic participation was different and the realm of possibilities considerably narrower. These were intimate ties of a much more troubled kind.

Intimate networks were naturally not limited to Europeans. The networks came into existence precisely because empires and companies brought a great diversity of people together, willingly and unwillingly.²⁶ When Europeans began trading to Asia in greater numbers in the sixteenth century, it was fairly common for foreign traders to marry a local wife temporarily. Thus women would act as intermediaries, and helped hapless foreigners navigate local customs; on the west coast of Africa, so-called *cassare* weddings served a similar purpose.²⁷ Barbara Watson Andaya argues that local wives were indispensable for successful trading, because in Southeast Asia women, not men, were in charge of retail sales. An alliance with the right woman could greatly improve business.²⁸ Though the increase in international trade disadvantaged the majority of Southeast Asian women, it also provided opportunities for some.²⁹ A few Asian and mixed-race women were even able to enter the European colonial elite through marriage, not least because, in some cases, elites were more wary of low status Europeans entering their ranks than they were of locals.³⁰ On the other hand, Sophie Rose and Elizabeth Heijmans have recently shown that legal double standards concerning extra-marital relations that already existed in the Netherlands were enhanced in Dutch colonies, where they were

²⁵ Jennifer Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021); Christine Walker, *Jamaica Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Léo Elisabeth, *La Société Martiniquaise Aux XVIIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2003); John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Michael D. Bennett, “Caribbean Plantation Economies as Colonial Models: The Case of the English East India Company and St. Helena in the Late Seventeenth Century,” *Atlantic Studies* (7 March 2022): 1–32; Caroline Dodds Pennock, “Aztecs Abroad? Uncovering the Early Indigenous Atlantic,” *American Historical Review* 125:3 (2020): 787–814.

²⁶ Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 16.

²⁷ Pernille Ipsen, “The Christened Mulattresses: Euro-African Families in a Slave-Trading Town,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 70:2 (2013): 371–98.

²⁸ Barbara Watson Andaya, “From Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Women's History* 9:4 (1998): 14.

²⁹ Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, 105.

³⁰ This was not a harmonious period of interracial relationships, but rather placed Asian women at the centre of changing hierarchies undermining previous structures; see Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). This is particularly true of the Dutch colonies in Indonesia; see Deborah Hamer, “Marriage and the Construction of Colonial Order: Jurisdiction, Gender and Class in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Batavia,” *Gender & History* 29:3 (2017): 622–40, 634–6.

heavily influenced by race, enslavement, religion, and class.³¹ Intimate connections did not come without (significant) downsides. If an individual ended up in court or if the marriage did not work out, gender, race, and distance from events or from natal kin could be used against women and endanger their continued prosperity.³² Moreover, Rose and Heijmans have recently shown that race, enslavement, religion, and class heavily influenced existing legal double standards concerning extra-marital relations in Dutch colonies.³³

The articles in the present issue seek to create a broader understanding of intimate networks' integral role in the creation of early modern global capitalism and culture by focusing on the relationship between the social and economic lives of women and plebeian men in the early modern period. This is a call for more research into the various mechanisms that shaped early modern networks rather than a definitive picture of global commerce.

In "Capital and Kin: English Women's Transatlantic Networks and Property in Barbados," Misha Ewen examines how women in England forged relationships with brokers and used various economic and legal methods to manage their wealth and property in Barbados during the seventeenth century—property that included enslaved Africans. English women developed new tools and competencies in the context of plantation slavery, including appointing attorneys to oversee their affairs. Whilst women frequently drew upon familial networks, their intimate ties stretched to include close friends and associates who were sometimes entrusted with their affairs in preference to kin. A trusted and skilful proxy was essential for long-distance business management, and this was not a role that kin could always adequately perform.

Margaret Hunt's essay "An English East India Company Ship's Crew in a Connected Seventeenth-Century World" uses a series of court cases related to a single late seventeenth-century English East India Company ship, the *Modena*, to argue for a more "connected" understanding of early modern long-distance voyages and trade and of the largely non-elite men who sailed the ships. It particularly critiques Michel Foucault's notion of the heterotopic ship, supposedly detached from the ties and rules that obtained on land. Her essay asks: what were the ties that bound a crew together, and what did that have to do with maritime communities? Is the belief that sailors were "allergic" to the ties of marriage and family really supported by the evidence? If not, how did these intimate connections work in a global context? What were the different roles of women and men in sustaining connections, how did these connect to issues like credit, long-distance trade, and inheritance? What happened when these ties were disrupted by tragedy such as the death of a sailor, or an entire ship being lost at sea?

During the same period when the relatives of the *Modena's* crew sued prominent members of the English East India Company for justice, the feme sole trader Catherine Nicks was apprehended by soldiers employed by the same company for infringing on its monopoly. In "Your Sister Grows Rich by Her Great Trade': Catherine Nicks's Intimate Economy," Aske Laursen Brock introduces an intimate network that spanned Europe and Asia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, underlining how women created opportunities for themselves and their extended network. Using the case study of Catherine Nicks, the article examines how the East India Company's network, in spite of the company's desire for impermeable monopolies, lent itself to people—including some women—who could seek personal and familial gains underneath the larger corporate umbrella.

³¹ Sophie Rose and Elizabeth Heijmans, "From Impropropriety to Betrayal: Policing Non-Marital Sex in the Early Modern Dutch Empire," *Journal of Social History* 55:2 (2021): 315–44.

³² See for instance the famous case of Cornelia van Nijenrode, discussed in detail in Leonard Blussé, *Bitter Bonds: A Colonial Divorce Drama of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2002). See Rose and Heijmans, "From Impropropriety to Betrayal," 336–7; see also Hoyer, *Relations of Absence*.

³³ Rose and Heijmans, "From Impropropriety to Betrayal," 336–7.

The volume continues with Lucas Haasis's "Buying Patience: Ordering and Purchasing Wedding Jewellery and Furniture through Intimate Networks during Eighteenth-Century Mercantile Marriage Initiation and Preparation." Whereas Catherine Nicks found a way of positioning herself within a transnational trading network, actively forming connections outside of her marriage, Haasis shows that women also found ways to assert themselves from within more intimate settings. Haasis focusses on the earliest stages of marriage—the betrothal period and concrete preparations for living together. The article shows that the importance of marriage for both merchant and wife afforded women with some economic influence and room for negotiation. Haasis demonstrates how Ilsabe Engelhardt, future wife of the Hamburg merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, had her say in the run-up to their marriage by requesting and ordering from her future husband precious jewellery and furniture as compensation for his repeated postponements of their marriage. Marriage in mercantile circles was often not only a commercial business for merchants; it was also an investment on the part of the future wife.

In "Petites Affaires: *Pacotille* Commerce and the Intimate Networks of Free Black Women and Women of Colour in the Eighteenth-Century French Colonial World," Annika Raapke examines *pacotille* commerce and commercial networks among free women of colour. This focus provides a lens on female economic activity and trade and intimate networks in the ancien régime Caribbean colonies. Surviving documentation of *pacotille* commerce allows us to see women of very different backgrounds as knowledgeable and skilled agents within the socioeconomic framework of eighteenth-century global trade. Specifically, we discover women who combined their knowledge of the male-dominated trading spheres with their own intimate networks in profitable ways. This essay explores not only what these women knew about long-distance trade, but also how they used their local expertise and worked their intimate networks for personal gain in the eighteenth-century French colonial world.

Each contribution considers singular cases to highlight the complex nature of the early modern economy; showing how the lives and experiences of individuals and groups can be used as keyholes through which glimpses of past worlds can be seen.³⁴ Lawrence Stone has convincingly argued that by focussing a "searchlight" on particular actors in specific contexts, a "whole social system and set of values can be brilliantly illuminated."³⁵ The cases examined here allow us to attain a better understanding of the relationship between these beliefs and values on the one hand and intimate social connections on the other.³⁶ In addition, they help us understand how these relationships were operationalised for survival and economic gains depending on time and place. The cases presented here in many ways represent what Edoardo Grendi has referred to as the "exceptional normal": people in history seemingly on the margins, who if studied in detail, can shed light on broad socioeconomic phenomena and developments.³⁷ Their cases represent "telling examples," highlighting presumed absences in the source material. Though the cases might appear exceptional, they were actually common, reflecting on agentic norms of European

³⁴ John-Paul A. Ghobrial, "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory," *Past & Present* 222 (2014): 51–93, 58; Hans Medick, "Mikro-Historie," in *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie—eine Diskussion*, ed. Winfried Schulze (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994): 40–53, 44. See John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural and Social History* 7:1 (2010): 87–109.

³⁵ Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present* 85:11 (1979): 3–24, 13–14.

³⁶ Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals & New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 32.

³⁷ Edoardo Grendi, "Micro-analisi e storia sociale," *Quaderni storici* 35 (1977), 512; Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?," *California Italian Studies* 2:1 (2011): 4–5. See Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "Was ist Mikrogeschichte?," *Geschichtswerkstatt* 6 (1985): 48–52.

societies.³⁸ The events discussed in this forum’s cases—be it free black women’s *pacotille* trade, the negotiation of a marriage, or the ties that bound a ship’s crew together—represented trivial, common, and usual practice for the contemporaries.³⁹ The “common past patterns of action which were collectively shared and performed by several people or groups of people in the past,” were, rather than being unusually cosmopolitan in nature, the result of early modern people coming to terms with a spatially expanding world, in which connections over vast distances became more common.⁴⁰

Early modern people’s relationships oscillated between extreme dependencies upon, and an almost nauseating intimacy with, relative strangers on the one hand, and positions of misplaced trust or misconstrued ties resulting in fragile personal economies on the other. Beyond the organisations and institutions that traditionally defined and shaped networks, early modern women and men embraced (or were thrust into) new associations, which provided novel economic opportunities but which entailed other shortcomings. This forum’s focus on women and the particularities of gendered intimate networks within a broad chronological and geographical scope reveals a sharper, more complex and diverse image of economic and social agency in the early modern world.

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³⁸ On telling examples, see for instance Lara Putnam, “To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Social History* 39:3 (1 March 2006): 615–30, 616. For the case of agentic (gender) norms, see Allyson M. Poska, “The Case for Agentic Gender Norms for Women in Early Modern Europe,” *Gender & History* 30:2 (July 2018): 354–65.

³⁹ Concerning the analysis of past practices see Lucas Haasis and Constantin Rieske, *Historische Praxeologie: Dimensionen vergangenen Handelns* (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand GmbH, 2015).

⁴⁰ Lucas Haasis, *The Power of Persuasion: Becoming a Merchant in the 18th Century* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022), 67. Jan de Vries has recently argued that global microhistorians’ focus on individuals who were unusually cosmopolitan has led to misleadingly hopeful conclusions concerning a heavily connected cosmopolitan past with an overt accentuation of the positives of global encounters; see Jan de Vries, “Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano,” *Past & Present* 242:14 (21 November 2019): 23–36, 29.

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