

Individual Interests Behind the Institutional Façade: The Dutch East India Company's Legal Presence in Seventeenth-Century Mughal Bengal

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VOC officials as well as the Mughal administrators conducted their trading activities in Bengal under different systems of jurisdiction. They both used local brokers and ordinary villagers who became simultaneously part of the VOC and Mughal jurisdictions. But what happened when conflicts broke out between the Company and the Mughal officials? In which jurisdiction did the brokers then participate and why? This article explores such questions through the study of two legal cases involving the VOC in Bengal. It argues that the institutional binary of the VOC and the Mughal as administrative entities were not stable in the face of personal interests and factional ambitions.

Keywords: Dutch East India Company, Bengal, Mughal, brokers, faction.

Secrets, rumours, friendships, rivalries, illicit relations, death and disease—the Indian Ocean has been a site for centuries of action and encounter that cannot possibly be captured, in its entirety, in a single chapter. As Sugata Bose rightly said, its history and historiography are like “a seascape artist ... [using] broad strokes of the brush” which “dipped in the sources of many archives,” would eventually produce a more “textured and complex picture.”¹ Amidst this mosaic, Bengal remained one of the steady regions maintaining its “amphibious” connections and contributing to the existent diversity of the Indian Ocean.² Chinese, Malay, Arab, Persian, and African merchants, scholars, and travellers had frequented this region for a long time prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, and other European trading companies.³ By the seventeenth century, Bengal had turned into a mosaic of different trading groups, who set up their factories and forts along the banks of the river Ganga and its tributaries.⁴

The Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or the VOC), too, asserted its presence here. Beginning from the early years of the seventeenth century, the VOC grew steadily in Bengal in contention with the English and the other European companies.⁵ They had factories in Chinsurah (Hooghly), Malda, Kasimbazaar, Dhaka, and other areas of Pipli, Balasore, and Patna, all of which were clubbed under the VOC possessions in Bengal.⁶ These factories were supervised by a director and his council, who resided at the chief factory of Chinsurah (Hooghly).⁷ Chinsurah came to be acquired by the VOC, along with Baranagore and Bazaar Mirjapur in 1656, as a lease from the Mughal emperor.⁸

The nature of the Company's presence in Bengal has been considered purely commercial in the existent historiography.⁹ Studies on the interactions between the VOC and the local merchants or the Mughal administrators have, therefore, remained mostly confined to a mercantile context. Works of scholars like Om Prakash and F. S. Gaastra have examined these relations for Bengal. While Om Prakash concluded that the Mughal merchant-officials extorted the VOC and the local brokers there, Gaastra argued that the VOC either competed or collaborated with the local merchants.¹⁰ In a broader Indian Ocean setting, Ashin Das Gupta characterised Indian merchants as being in a "partnership" with the Dutch East India Company.¹¹ Subrahmanyam introduced a politico-economic angle by describing the occasional clash between powerful Mughal "portfolio-capitalists" and VOC (and EIC) merchants as "contained conflict."¹² New studies of the local-Dutch relations in Bengal have been developed in recent years by scholars like Markus Vink and E. A. Alpers. They have pointed out not only Bengal's importance in the VOC slave trade in the Indian Ocean but also its extended connection to trans-Atlantic slavery.¹³

These different labels – conflict, partnership, collaboration, competition – created within the existent historiography conform to a neat, binary segregation of two groups: the Indians and the Dutch. But in a fluid setting like Bengal more complex situations arose. For example, one wonders about the position of local brokers who were bound by their contract to the Company's legal purview while simultaneously being subjected to the Mughal jurisdiction in Bengal. What happened in case of a conflict between them and the Company – was it resolved by the *qazi* (an Islamic judge) or brought to the Company's court at Batavia? Or in cases of conflicts among VOC officials, were the brokers getting involved in the Company's legal processes? Such questions can be answered by going beyond the segregation of the "Indian" and "Dutch" to get a better understanding of the ambiguous worlds of these actors. This article aims to do this by examining two such VOC cases involving extra-Dutch actors with a focus on the way these cases were framed before being forwarded to the courtroom to examine the process of gathering evidences and testimonies. In the process, it becomes apparent that overlapping jurisdictions unleashed a process of legal negotiations, adaptations, rejections, and appropriations that paradoxically eliminated and yet reinforced the binary division of Dutch and Indian.

But before proceeding further, it is imperative to provide a glimpse of the jurisdictional situation of the VOC in seventeenth-century Mughal Bengal. All local

inhabitants of the area, irrespective of their religious or ethnic distinctions, were subjected to Mughal jurisdiction for both civil and criminal cases.¹⁴ The VOC, on the other hand, much like other foreign groups, was allowed to exercise their own jurisdiction over their own employees.¹⁵ It was in Batavia (modern day Jakarta) that the highest court of justice, the *Raad van Justitie* (Council of Justice) was located. All Dutch East India Company servants who were working in Asia and the Cape, as well as all the *vrijburgers* (free-citizens) living in these places, were to be tried in the Raad van Justitie.¹⁶ The Company was allowed to continue its commercial operations in Bengal only if they abided by the rules of the Mughal firmans. This overlapping legal coexistence was not a problem until conflicts broke out between the Mughal administrators or the local brokers and the Company personnel. It is in this setting of multiple legal dynamics that the following cases unfurl.

Case A: Partners in Crime

In the year 1684, the Heren XVII (the Company's chief board of seventeen directors) in the Dutch Republic sent an investigating committee to check into corruption among its officials working in the Indian factories of the *westerkwartier* (western quarters). This included the coast of Coromandel, Malabar, Surat, Ceylon, and Bengal; instructions were given to make special checks in Bengal.¹⁷ Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1636–1691) was appointed as the commissioner-general of this committee.¹⁸ His position and power rested above all governors and directors in the places he was supposed to visit and investigate. The instructions, nevertheless, explicitly asked him to forward all allegations reported against any official to the *Hoge Regering* (High Government), so that the Raad van Justitie had the final say.¹⁹ Those beyond the Company's jurisdiction suspected or found guilty of corruption were to be left at Van Reede's discretion. This possibly included the local brokers and other villagers whose services were used by the Company, but over whom the VOC had no absolute jurisdiction.

By 1686, the committee had investigated in Bengal and produced extensive reports on persons suspected of corruption. On a quick glance, there was nothing in these names to raise suspicion. There was, however, more to it when examined beyond the surface. On tracing the network of friends and family of the persons accused by Van Reede, a pattern could be immediately discerned. It was evident that only certain people came to be targeted by the committee. The pattern that tied them all together was their connection to the family Van Goens. The story then became much easier to reconstruct. The governor-general of Batavia, Rijkloff van Goens (1678–1681), and his son, Rijkloff van Goens Junior, had been strong political opponents of Van Reede. Their differing opinions and open attacks on each other are apparent in the VOC records that make no attempt to hide this hostility.²⁰ It naturally spilled over into the factions of their respective friends and families who were also a part of the VOC administration. For instance, several charges were made against Jan Pit, the *gezaghebber* (chief) of the factory in Kasimbazaar and assistant to the Company's

director in Bengal. Pit was accused of several offences by Van Reede, from toll evasions to embezzlement of the Company's treasury to forming a "*kleine compagnie*" (small company) for illegal trade.²¹ Martin Pit, who was the brother of Jan Pit, happened to be a member of the *Raad van Indië* (Council of Batavia) at that time. Martin Pit had been recommended for this position by Van Goens Jr., as is evident from a letter written in 1683 to the Heren XVII. It left a vital clue to the close ties between the Pit brothers and the family of Van Goens and explains Van Reede's targeting Jan Pit.²²

It is necessary to understand that in the Dutch elite society of the seventeenth century, political factions constituted the core of survival.²³ Factions were mostly made up of familial relations and close friends. Friendships were often strengthened through intermarriage between families and were secured through distribution of offices among members of the faction. This meant that fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, and sons-in-law were not only family members but also colleagues at work who stuck together. They formed familial-friendly factions that were underlined by common blood ties, similar ideological beliefs, and political affiliations catalysed by shared interests for profit and honour. They recommended each other for appointments and promotions at work and supported each other in times of personal crisis, offering financial help to save social positions. It was thus a mechanism of social defence designed to preserve public image and higher status.²⁴ The presence of multiple different factions meant that they often clashed with each other, with most members of a particular faction becoming political opponents of their rival faction. Though not a frequent practice, sometimes disgruntled members could switch sides and change their factions. Factionalism, thus, remained an indispensable tool for climbing the bureaucratic ladder and formed an integral part of the VOC administration in Bengal.

Van Reede and his committee members had the open support of one of the prominent directors of the Heren XVII, Joan Huydekoper van Maarsseveen indicating that they belonged to the same faction.²⁵ On the other hand, Van Reede's allegations were aimed not just against Pit, but also his friends Martin Huijsman (the former VOC director of Bengal) and Nicolaas Schagen (the then-director of the factory at Hooghly), suggesting that they all belonged to the same faction.²⁶ The Van Goens were also a part of this faction, as can be ascertained from the names of Huijsman and Schagen appearing as recommendations in the same letter by Van Goens Jr. to the Heren XVII.²⁷ What was clearly at play here were factional forces of personal alliance and revenge, under the façade of the larger institutional legal apparatus. It demonstrates the use of institutional facilities and the initiation of legal procedures at a formal level to serve informal ends. The committee under Van Reede was created as an official measure with the intention of finding corruption among the VOC's servants. But in practice, it was reduced to a political tool designed to catering to personal and factional interests.

To prove their allegations against Jan Pit and his associates, Van Reede and his committee had to provide evidences. Many of these came in the form of testimonies by local brokers working for the Company. In the reports of the committee, Van

Reede explicitly named three Indian merchants who had collaborated with Pit and the other officials. They were Deepchand (written as Diepsient), Kalyan Das (as Caljandas), and Jai Biswas (as Sijjwiswas), alias Ramsen (as Ramceen). By using their account books, accompanied by testimonies of other brokers, the committee tried to frame Pit (*gezaghebber* in 1683), Huijsman (director of Bengal in 1684), and others of fraud in the Company.²⁸ These officials were charged with having traded illegally in the name of their Indian brokers, while giving them certain commissions in return.²⁹ Another broker named Jadu (written as Satu/Satou) provided his testimony to the committee against Pit and the three brokers, Biswas, Deepchand, and Das. In the sources, his testimony appears to be translated from Bengali to Dutch, and reads as follows:

“I, Jadu, working as a broker in the service of this Honourable Company have, according to the order of the Honourable Lord Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, lord of Mijdrecht, translated with the intention of being committed for the same purpose, the words of Kalyan Das as they have been written in the abovementioned extract from his account books concerning the trade that was conducted between him and the Honourable Company’s servants since the year 1679 to the end of the year 1686 and this has been compared with a corresponding note that has been signed by me, to which I declare to agree as the truth; and I have signed it with my own hands. Hoogli, 15th April 1686 (written below)

This is the signature of Jadu, the broker of the Dutch Company.”³⁰

In the same light, the name of Ramu Dutt (written as Rammoedet), a *bania* (merchant) working as a *factoor* (*gomoshta* or agent) for the Company also surfaced in the committee’s reports. Ramu Dutt confessed to being part of the illegal trade dealings in 1683 when Pit used him to sell Pit’s private goods to Jai Biswas.³¹ Van Reede not only praised Dutt for his testimony but also consolidated his position in the Company. Jadu, too, was highly recommended by Van Reede and assigned the task of assisting in the supervision of textile quality control.³²

The inclusion of these local testimonies was remarkable for two reasons. First, the instructions of the Heren XVII for the committee included the following injunction:

“All the information and evidences should be so provided, that they can help the jurist in making a judgement, by basing his decree or sentence on these available information (as evidences). But if the aforementioned information comprises only of the testimonies given by the moors and the heathens, or extracts from their account books, they should be corroborated by the testimonies of honourable and trustworthy Christians or others who suffice (this criterion).”³³

The fact that the testimony of brokers like Jadu were inherently untrustworthy, despite the oath that they were required to take when entering the Company’s service, implied a typical legal paradox.³⁴ By making the brokers take an oath to adhere to the Company’s rules, they were subtly brought under the Dutch legal purview. But at the same time, creating a hierarchy in their credibility as witnesses led the VOC to resort to what Lauren Benton called out as the “politics of difference.”³⁵ Extending jurisdiction over these brokers indicated their inclusion in the VOC legal structure. But

at the same time, demeaning the weight of their testimonies triggered a formal structuring of difference in the Company's judicial lingo.³⁶

A second aspect worth noting is the motive that led the likes of Jadu to actively participate in the VOC's legal forum. In the year before Van Reede, Isaac Soolmans was appointed as the VOC commissioner for investigating the factories in Bengal. In 1684, a series of testimonies by the brokers revealed that the trio of Biswas, Deepchand, and Das were appointed in the service of the Company from the time Jacob Verburg became the VOC director in Bengal. Soolmans and his secretary, Adriaan van Ommen, reported that this trio of brokers was chosen over Hajiram Tandon (Hasjeram Thenden) and Murali Chaubey (Moereli Sjoebe), despite the two having served the Company faithfully for a long time.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, the broker Jadu declared that Jan Pit had made Jai Biswas the most important broker. Biswas's dominance was so great that he managed to convince the Company to dismiss Jadu from its service by accusing him of fraud.³⁸ Soolmans reported that he later discovered that Biswas was not to be trusted, and therefore wrote to Marten Huijsman, the then-director, about his suspicions. Huijsman, who belonged to Pit's faction, replied to Soolmans by stating that Jadu and Biswas were in the same party and Jadu, therefore, was not a friend of the Company's.³⁹ This earlier conflict involving Jadu and the three brokers led by Biswas made its impact in 1686 (when Van Reede was the commissioner), inducing Jadu to provide his willing testimonies against his fellow brokers to the committee.

This opens up the world of local merchants in Bengal, and paints a picture equally dotted with rivalries and factionalism. Family and friendships here, too, tended to form an essential part of mercantile bonds, as is evident from numerous examples among brokers who worked for the Company. Often brothers, sons, uncles, or friends of a certain broker replaced him, when he could not continue working in his position. One of the brokers mentioned above, Kalyan Das, was the son of Rangordas, who had also worked for the VOC.⁴⁰ The young son of Deepchand named Kamalnayan was already considered to be in line to be hired as a broker by the Company, when he came of age.⁴¹ The son of the Company's chief weaver Bolleram, named Ghnashyam (written as Genesam), also worked for the Company.⁴² In the autobiography of a seventeenth-century *bania* merchant, Banarasidas from Jaunpur, such bonds were further confirmed. Banarasidas's friend Dharamdas was also his business partner.⁴³ That family members could also be trading partners is evident: Banarasidas's father, Kharagsen, invested in a joint business with his uncle, Sundardas.⁴⁴ Examples from the Bengali literature of the time also provide hints about such familial mercantile bonds.⁴⁵ The fact that local merchants preferred to keep their family ties within their communities and friends is evident from the incident of Dhanapati's marriage with Khulana, in the *Chandimangal*.⁴⁶ The author, Mukundaram, narrated how Khulana's father, himself a merchant from the *gondhobanik* (perfumes and aromatic commodities trader) community explored all possibilities of a suitable groom for his daughter, keeping in mind the condition that the groom had to be exclusively from the same trading group.

Clearly then, the Indian merchants were also divided among themselves into competing factions that could merge their conflicts with the ongoing factional politics of the Company (see Appendix for Case A). With factions revolving around families and friends on both sides, it is possible to understand why the VOC in Bengal accommodated the local brokers in their legal space and why the brokers, on their part, participated in the Company's legal trials. Both groups often had overlapping interests that tied them to one stretched network for fulfilling their individual and factional ambitions. This case brings forth this point in the backdrop of the VOC's pluralistic legal existence. It shows the use of the Company's formal legal apparatus to serve personal politics while carefully including extra-Dutch actors in its jurisdiction. At the same time, it shows the mechanism of creating differences through reduced credibility of the local brokers' testimonies in their legal participation. Notwithstanding such differences, the merchants in Bengal actively engaged with the Company's legal administration to serve their own competitive needs in alliance with the Company's numerous factions, which dismissed the binary assertions of "Dutch" and "Indian".

Case B: The Death of Bolleram's Widow

If ever there was a case in the Company's legal history that involved all layers of political and judicial authorities – from the Raad van Justitie to the qazi and from the Heren XVII to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb – then this was it. Both Om Prakash and F.S. Gaastra have written about this case.⁴⁷ But the Indian side of the story was quickly passed over, missing the nuances of this unique legal encounter in 1672. It all began when Bolleram Sjoudhuri (or possibly Boloram or Bhole Ram Chowdhuri), the Company's *masterhaspelaar* (seniorHeren XVII in the Republic).

With both the Mughal and the Dutch authorities involved, the case was presented at both the court of the qazi in Bengal and the Raad van Justitie in Batavia.⁴⁸ As the case proceeded to the higher authorities and investigations began things became more and more interesting. The first accusations seem to have come from Herman Fentzel (*koopman* or official in the rank of a merchant in Hooghly) and Jacob Verburg (*gezaghebber* at Kasimbazaar), who announced having seen Ranst torturing the woman. Being present during the interrogation, they saw him hanging the widow with her hands tied with ropes for an hour and treating her like a slave. According to their testimony, thus, the widow succumbed to this torture. The fact that allegations were raised against Ranst by Verburg and Fentzel proves that they were not on good terms with the director and presumably belonged to rival political factions. The animosity possibly owed its origin to the days when Ranst first arrived in Bengal in 1669. Between 1671 and 1672, he was openly accused by Fentzel and Verburg of illegal trade, when the commissioner Willem Volger was present there.⁴⁹ But the friendship between Ranst and Volger prevented the latter from bringing any charges against Ranst. Such politics of factional allegations which we saw at play earlier now makes its intrusion in this incident.

At the qazi's court, Verburg and Fentzel's allegations were strengthened by the accusations of Malik Qasim and Shaista Khan.⁵⁰ They blamed the Company under Ranst's authority of being reckless and not paying the due customs. Interestingly, they also accused the VOC of causing damage to the inhabitants of the villages in Bengal.⁵¹ The *diwan* (revenue and finance official) of the province, Rai Nandalal, in fact sided with Verburg, claiming that the directors before Ranst had never been such a problem and had not caused so much trouble as Ranst did in Bengal.⁵² In his defence, Ranst provided an apologia where he mentioned that Shaista Khan was anxious to protect his own trade from being hampered by the Company's presence and, therefore, made these false allegations.⁵³ Besides this, he along with his assistant Pieter Hofmeester, sought the help of Binod Ray (written as Binoortray), the son-in-law of Bolleram's widow. Binod Ray said that his sister-in-law had consumed opium because of the disgrace she faced after the interrogation at the Company's lodge. This caused her death, rather than the allegations of torture. The *onderchirurgijn* (junior physician) of the Company confirmed to this by claiming to have found traces of poison in the widow's blood. In addition, some Mughal administrators helped Ranst draft a complaint against Malik Qasim to be sent to the emperor Aurangzeb.⁵⁴ They were possibly, as Gaastra concluded, men waiting for a chance to displace Malik Qasim from his position. This case was eventually settled when the Heren XVII decided to pay the money demanded, freeing Ranst of the charges brought against him.⁵⁵ But they simultaneously sent Johannes Bacharus to the emperor Aurangzeb to plead their case and reclaim the money. (Ranst, nevertheless, had to be removed from his directorship, as fresh charges of financial mismanagement and illegal trade brought against him were proven – a story that is beyond the scope of our current discussion).⁵⁶

This quintessential example of how jurisdictional overlaps led to problems in issuing clear legal pronouncements reveal two common factors, as seen in the previous case also. This includes the interplay of factional forces among Company officials while dispensing formal justice at Batavia, and the use of local agency and factional strife, combined with the Company officials' own factional politics (see Appendix for Case B). In this incident, the factional struggle of Verburg-Fentzel against Volger-Ranst-Hofmeester determined how and where the allegations were to be made. Mughal administrators like Malik Qasim or Shaista Khan were no ordinary broker but powerful "merchant-officials," who could force the very Company to bend to their jurisdiction.⁵⁷ Yet factional differences among themselves led some of these men to make room for the Company's legal politics within the Mughal administrative framework.

But there is another element in this case that needs to be pointed out. This was the refusal of the Heren XVII to accept Ranst's faults. The *Haagse besogne* (committee for handling the papers received from Asia) concluded that Ranst was innocent and had been falsely framed by Shaista Khan and his officials.⁵⁸ It revealed the Company's tendency to minimise the credibility of alternative, contesting legal authorities like the Islamic court relative to the VOC court. This is also clearly reflected in generic

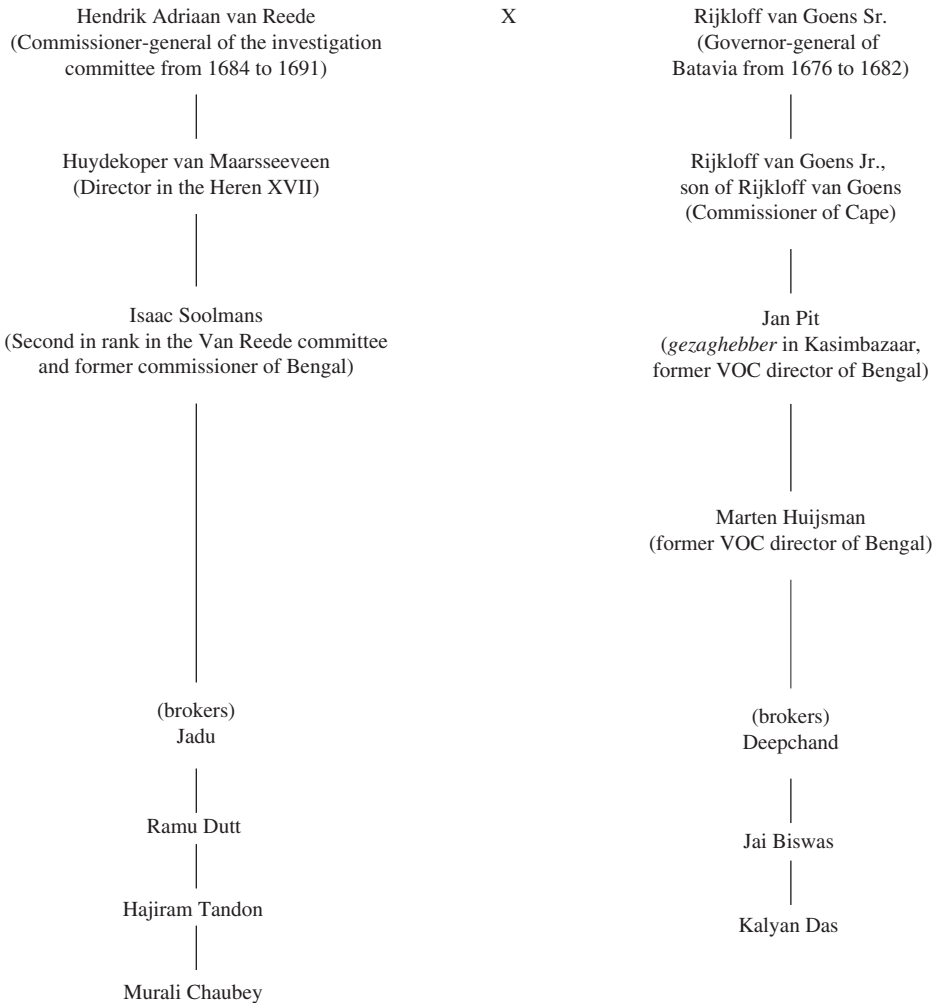
VOC discourse about the inefficient administration of justice in the qazi's court. James Tracy points out how VOC officials regularly denounced the legal system of the Mughal empire as inferior to the Christian ethics and justice manifested in Dutch laws.⁵⁹ A farce was made of these claims when Company officials actually tried to break into the legal machinery of the Mughals by offering bribes to the qazi or the concerned parties. They spoke about this openly, while simultaneously venting their frustrations about their failed attempts to disturb the qazi's administration.⁶⁰ But their consistent efforts in writing about the "difference" of the Mughal legal system while trying to get a hold on it through informal means unfurled the process of pushing, goading, negotiating, and adapting to assert their formal presence in the midst of plural jurisdictions.

Conclusion

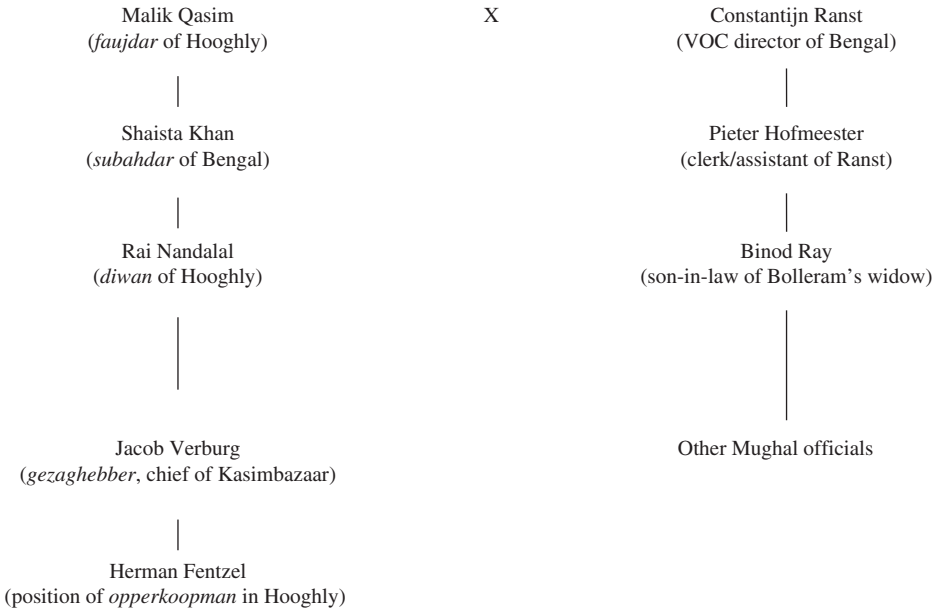
Two cases of the VOC administering justice against its own employees have been examined here, in the backdrop of seventeenth-century Mughal Bengal. The process of their formation and execution with the involvement of extra-Dutch local actors as witnesses and plaintiffs has been studied. Exploring the legal dimensions of the VOC's presence in Bengal highlights the ambiguities and overlaps in exercising the Company's laws at a time and space where the Mughal jurisdiction was also simultaneously in operation. Unravelling the way these cases were framed and presented at the VOC court, therefore, helps bring about the nuances of the local and VOC relations. Three major aspects could be discerned from the cases discussed above. First, it was evident that the Company's formal legal machinery served as a façade for its inner personal factions. In both of the cases analysed here, Company officials remained embroiled in factional strife that culminated in raising allegations against opponent colleagues at the court in Batavia. Initiating a legal procedure in such instances, however, often required bringing in local parties to the story to frame the charges. This, in turn, increased the permeability of the VOC jurisdictional domain and made it more vulnerable to external penetration. But at the same time, non-Dutch actors were not officially allowed to be brought before the Company's legal forum. Yet there were occasions when their participation was inevitable or when the VOC officials in Bengal could themselves become an involved party in the trials at the Mughal qazi's court, as exemplified in the second case above. In all these circumstances, the Heren XVII denied the Mughal legal administration and non-Christian Company officials their full credibility on paper. Here we see a second aspect: the Company's tendency to subtly assert its position in the legal hierarchy above alternative jurisdictional domains and non-Dutch actors. The local brokers nevertheless participated in these legal processes, not just because of their contractual obligations to the VOC but also in their own interests. As has been shown here, they themselves were driven by competitive factional forces that could be merged with the Company's inner administrative factionalism. Thus, the third aspect of the Company's presence was this element of local participation, triggered by the brokers' own personal and

factional ambitions. By summing up these arguments, it can be concluded that the legal practices of the VOC in Bengal went beyond the binaries of “Dutch” and “Indian” and were more muddled and dynamic than has been perceived in the historiography so far. And yet it also shows how this encounter formalised “difference” on paper through the informal means of negotiations, adaptations, and confrontations during its plural jurisdictional existence.

APPENDIX FOR CASE A



APPENDIX FOR CASE B



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Notes

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1 Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 5–6.

2 Mukherjee and Seshan, “Approaches,” 149.

- 3 Mukherjee, "Mobility in the Bay of Bengal," 109–29.
- 4 Abu'l Fazl Allami, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. 2, 129.
- 5 Prakash, "The Dutch East India Company in Bengal," 267–8.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 258–87.
- 7 Hooghly, as the former Portuguese settlement, was used by the VOC in the beginning. But after it was washed away in the flood of 1656, Chinsurah came to function as an alternative post of the Company. However, the VOC records continued to be refer to it as Hooghly. See Gommans et al., *Grote Atlas*, 28.
- 8 This is recorded in the missive of Van Reede, while describing his stay as the commissioner in Bengal in 1684. The villages were leased out earlier in 1656. NA, Letter from Hendrik Adriaan van Reede from Hooghly to the Heren XVII 9 December 1686, VOC 1421: 75v.; Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 40.
- 9 Knaap, "De "Core Business" van de VOC," 19; Prakash, "European Trade," 196.
- 10 Prakash, "The Dutch East India Company in Bengal," 280–5; Gaastra, "Competition or Collaboration?" 189–201.
- 11 Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants," 122–33.
- 12 Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History*, 1–20.
- 13 Vink, "The World's," 140–2; Alpers, "Africa and Africans," 67.
- 14 To clarify further, it has been shown in recent research that both the Islamic and non-Islamic plaintiffs in the Mughal empire had their criminal as well as civil cases registered at the Mughal qazi's court. Chatterjee, "Reflections," 396–415.
- 15 The EIC, too, were subjected to the qazi's jurisdiction in cases involving locals or even the VOC officials. See Fawcett, *The English Factories*, 200.
- 16 The *vrijburgers* were those European servants who had completed the tenure of their contract with the VOC and were allowed to either repatriate back or settle as married or unmarried citizens in Asia and continue trading on their own account (in goods over which the VOC had no monopoly). They were allowed to live only in certain restricted areas with the permission of the Governor and the Council. They were nevertheless subjected to the jurisdiction of the VOC in Asia. For details see Chijs, *Plakaatboek* vol. 1, 46–52; Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 107–9.
- 17 Corruption here largely referred to actions that were considered illegal in terms of violating the Company's statutes. The word "corruption" (*corruptie*) was clearly present in the administrative vocabulary of the time. See NA, Letter of Van Reede from Hooghly to the Governor-General and the Raad van Indië 18 March 1686, VOC 1421: 235v.; NA, Letter to Van Reede in Bengal from Camphuys and the Raad van Indië in Batavia 23 August 1686, VOC 1421: 364v., 365r., 365v.; Lindemann, "Dirty Politics," 582–604; Janssen, "Patronage en corruptie," 47–67. For corruption of the VOC in Bengal in the eighteenth century see, Lequin, *Het personeel*.
- 18 NA, Resolution of the Heren XVII in Amsterdam 20 Oct 1684, VOC 109: fol. not numbered.
- 19 NA, Instructions for Van Reede from the Heren XVII in December 1684, CH 38: fol. not numbered.
- 20 NA, Fragment-report about Ceylon and the actions of Van Goens 30 November 1680, Archives of Family Van Goens 18: fol. not numbered; Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan*, 9, 51–2. For the conflict between Van Reede and Van Goens Jr. see Hulshof, *H. A. van Reede*, 48.
- 21 NA, Letter from Van Reede in Bengal to Heren XVII 9 December 1686, VOC 1421: 37v.–38r.
- 22 NA, Letter written by Rijkloff van Goens Jr. in Amsterdam to Johannes Hudde, 14 September 1683, CH 5: fol. not numbered.

- 23 Kooijmans. *Vriendschap*; Adams, *The Familial State*.
- 24 Wagenaar. "Extortion and Abuse," 731–40; Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff, "Corruption and Capability," 7–24.
- 25 Huydekoper wrote in one of his letters: "I had contributed a lot to the advancement of the lord of Mijdrecht." UA, Letter written by Joan Huydekoper van Maarsseveen from Amsterdam to Simon van der Stel in the Cape, 7 October 1685, FH 60: fol. not numbered.
- 26 For the trial of Schagen see, McVay, "Private Trade," 69–86.
- 27 NA, Letter from Van Goens Jr. in Amsterdam 14 September 1683, CH 5: fol. not numbered.
- 28 NA, Account books of the three Company's merchants and their embezzlement with the Company's officials in Hooghly 15 December 1686, VOC 1422: 1094r.
- 29 NA, Memoire for Jacob Verburg by director François de Haze 22 June 1675, VOC 1313: 156r.v.
- 30 NA, Extract from the account book of Kalyan Das 15 April 1686, VOC 1422: 1081r.–1086v.
- 31 NA, Extract from the account book of Jai Biswas in Hooghly 15 April 1686, VOC 1422: 1092r.; Compendium of illegal trade accounts conducted by Jan Pit in Hooghly 15 December 1686, VOC 1422: 1168r.
- 32 NA, Instructions and Regulations of the commissioner Van Reede for the succeeding directors in Bengal 26 February 1687, HR 241: fol. not numbered.
- 33 NA, Instructions from the Heren XVII for Van Reede as the commissioner written in Amsterdam December 1684, CH 38: 3r.
- 34 Chijs, *Plakaatboek*, vol. 1, 308.
- 35 Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures*, 17, 147
- 36 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 37 NA, Letter written by the secretary, Adriaen van Ommen to Marten Huijsman and his council in Hooghly 1 September 1684, Aan. 9615: 405.
- 38 NA, Letter written by Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman in Hooghly 10 November 1684, Aan. 9615: 517.
- 39 NA, Letter from Marten Huijsman to the commissioner-general, Isaac Soolmans in Hooghly 10 November 1684, Aan. 9615: 519–21.
- 40 NA, Instructions of the commissioner Van Reede for the succeeding directors of Bengal 26 February 1687, HR 241: fol. not numbered.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 NA, Memoire for Jacob Verburg and his assistant, Jan Pit by François de Haze 22 June 1675, VOC 1313: 157.
- 43 Chowdhuri, *Ardhakathanayak*, 149–51.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 45 For the description and historical validity of the *Mangalkavya* texts see Curley, *Poetry and History*; Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History*.
- 46 Chakraborty, *Kabikankan*, 74.
- 47 Prakash, "The Dutch East India Company in Bengal," 286; Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 126–36. Recently this has also been referred to by Guido van Meersbergen and me. See, Meersbergen, "Kijken en bekeken," 203. Parts of this article were published in Sur, "The Dutch East India Company," 84–8. Om Prakash reads the name Bolleram as Bhola Ram and later Gaastra too uses it. In my previous article, I chose Boloram because it sounded phonetically more plausible. Here, I have retained the name Bolleram as it was found in the sources.
- 48 I cannot reconstruct with certainty the part of the qazi's trial from the Dutch sources. However, what is important to note here is the fact that it is referred to in the official reports of the VOC for the case of Ranst.
- 49 Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 86; Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 128.
- 50 The qazi is described as the "*moors prester*" (Islamic priest). NA, Report on the case of 1960 rupees extracted from

- the Company by the Moors in Bengal, HC 36: fol. not numbered.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Gaastra, “Constantijn Ranst,” 130.
- 53 NA, Letter written in his defence by Constantijn Ranst to the Heren XVII in Amsterdam 12 May 1682, CH 36: fol. not numbered.
- 54 Gaastra, “Constantijn Ranst,” 130–1.
- 55 NA, Report from The Hague signed by Martin van der Goes and others 18 February 1682, HC 36: fol. not numbered.
- 56 After his clerk/ assistant Hofmeester died, his widow gave away some of the papers to another Company official, Van Leenen, who used these papers with the Verburg faction to accuse Ranst of corruption. See, Gaastra, “Ranst,” 131–2.
- 57 Subrahmanyam and Bayly, “Portfolio Capitalists,” 401–24.
- 58 NA, Advice from The Hague on the case of Constantijn Ranst 18 February 1682, CH 36: fol. not numbered.
- 59 Tracy, “Asian Despotism,” 276–80.
- 60 Ibid., 277; NA, Letter from Van Reede in Bengal to Heren XVII in Amsterdam 9 December 1686, VOC 1421: 77r.v.