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Keeping corruption at bay: A study of the VOC's administrative encounter with the Mughals in seventeenth-century Bengal

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Cover image: Dutch factory with garden in Bengal, possibly the VOC-lodge Kasimbazaar, ca. 1665. On the left there is a tank with birds in water, on the right there is a garden. On the right above, there is a procession of a group of local people.
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Keeping Corruption at Bay:

A Study of the VOC's Administrative Encounter with the Mughals in Seventeenth-Century Bengal

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Introduction: The Politics of Administrative Corruption

It was the winter of 1684. The Dutch East India Company (or the *Veerenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, the VOC) official Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakestein set sail in his ship *Bantam* from Texel in the Dutch Republic towards the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. He was appointed to the position of commissioner-general by the VOC directors in the Republic in order to investigate the Company's activities in certain parts of Asia. He was of course not alone but accompanied by two other officials – Isaac Soolmans and Johannes Bacherus, second and third in rank respectively in this venture. Together they formed a committee led by Van Reede that was instructed to sail out to all the other VOC factories in Ceylon and India (Bengal, Coromandel, Malabar, Surat). The plan was for them to investigate the Company employees in these places to prevent any 'corrupt' or illegal practices. Van Reede and his committee members had the power to put the accused officials on trial at the Company's court in Batavia (present-day Jakarta). But beyond all these special powers, there was something to this operation that deserves the reader's attention. The committee members were explicitly instructed by the VOC directors in the Republic to conduct careful and thorough investigations in all the factories of India and Ceylon, but particularly in those of Bengal for its notoriety in 'corruption'.[1]

Accordingly, after stopping over at the Cape and in southern Ceylon, Van Reede and Soolmans finally arrived in Bengal in 1686 and started their investigations there. It resulted in the production of lengthy reports about their findings in this region where they accused certain Company officials of illegal trade and other malpractices. Consequently, the committee suggested stringent measures (such as building of stronger factories, reduction of excess employees etc.) to gain greater profit and insight into the activities of the Company officials abroad.[2] In his position as the Commissioner-General, Van Reede eventually wrote to the Company's governor-general

[1] NL-HaNA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Copy of the instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik van Reede, lord of Mijdrecht appointed as the commissioner of Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon etc. in Amsterdam, 1684: f.1v.

[2] See Chapter 6 for details.

and *Raad van Indië* in Batavia in 1686. Complaining about the abundant illegal acts he had witnessed in Ceylon and Bengal, he proposed the introduction of an oath of corruption within the VOC administration. Such an oath was likely to encapsulate all possible violations of Company laws in a single domain that could be used for reference in the Company's legal forum. These suggestions of Van Reede and his committee were accepted by the VOC administration in the Dutch Republic and in Batavia and implemented as reforms. The then Dutch Governor-General Johannes Camphuys, along with the members of the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia wrote back saying – 'The incorporation of the oath of corruption in Ceylon, as your Honour are inclined to introduce here, and in other places, is approved by us with the hope that the awaited results will ensue hereafter.'[3] Van Reede and his committee's reports triggered further measures such as the installation of the office of *independent fiscaals* (supervisor of the maintenance of order and the public prosecutor) who were to check on illegal trade and all forms of corruption and report them to the VOC administration in the Republic.[4] But soon this office failed to live up to its expectations and became ineffective in controlling the Company officials in India.

By the early eighteenth century, complaints of corruption soared as the VOC witnessed a number of Dutch *nabobs* (corruption of the term *nawab* implying the title of local Islamic rulers) emerging at its base in Bengal.[5] This coincided with the increase in importance of Bengal from the late seventeenth century as a supplier of major commodities such as raw silk and textiles for

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[3] '*Invoeren van den eed van corruptie op Ceylon, soo als U wel Ed, ook elders gesint te doen, keuren wij voor goet; in hoope dat het beoogde success daar uijt sal volgen*, …'
NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from the governor-general and Council of the Indies in Batavia to Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, the commissioner-general of the VOC stationed in Bengal, 23 August, 1686: f. 364v-65r.

[4] One independent *fiscaal* each was appointed in the factories of Ceylon, the Coromandel Coast, Bengal, Surat, Malacca and the Cape of Good Hope. These independent *fiscaals* stood above the local governors, directors and the councils of the Company in these regions. They were directly accountable to the Company in the Republic. See, F.S. Gaastra, "The Independent Fiscaals of the VOC, 1689-1719," *Itinerario* 9, no. 2 (July 1985): 92–107.

[5] Jos Gommans, Jeroen Bos, and Gijs Kruitzer, *Grote Atlas van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Voor-Indië, Perzië, Arabisch Schiereiland*, vol. 6 (Voorburg: reAsia Maior/Atlas Maior, 2010), 29; Frank Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18de eeuw: Meer in het bijzonder in de vestiging Bengalen* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Canaletto/ Repro-Holland, 2005), 97–98, 206–10; Marion Peters, *In steen geschreven: Leven en sterven van VOC-dienaren op de kust van Coromandel in India* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bas Lubberhuizen, 2002), 39–40.

the Europe-Asian trade.[6] In the face of the growing concerns about corruption and the steady competition that the English East India Company (EIC) offered in the subsequent years, the VOC in the Republic tended to lay increasing emphasis on its monopoly rights over its direct Asian trade. Although the rules for its intra-Asian trade were relaxed in the eighteenth century, the EIC acquired an edge after purchasing the *zamindari* rights of three villages in Bengal in 1698 and eventually, acquiring the *diwani* rights of that province in 1765.[7] The VOC too had three villages leased out to it by the Mughal authorities in Bengal, but it began to suffer a setback from the end of the seventeenth century and its condition worsened in the subsequent years. The acquisition of Bengal in 1795 and in 1825 became the key to the English colonial success which cost the VOC their position in India. By the final decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company had started heading down the path to bankruptcy which ultimately undermined its credibility in the Republic to an irreparable extent. The Company's last charter expired in 1798, and around 1800 the VOC no longer existed in the Dutch Republic.

On the basis of these ongoing developments, the political atmosphere in the Netherlands during the early nineteenth century took a conservative turn and championed the control of the Dutch state over all its trade in the Asian colonies.[8] This, however, changed in the later years of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century when liberal politics began influencing the Dutch education policy and its academia. A narrative about the glorious past of the VOC came to be formed as a result of this liberal turn which fed the image of the Company's superior position in pre-colonial international trade and commerce.[9] A variation in this contention emerged in the

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[6] Pius Malekandathil, "Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India," *Studies in History* 30, no. 2 (August 2014): 139–40.

[7] See Chapter 4 for this.

[8] Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Dutch Scholarship in the Age of Empire and Beyond: KITLV - The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asia and Caribbean Studies, 1851-2011*, ed. Harry A. Poeze, trans. Lorri Ganger (Leiden, Boston: Brill Publishers, 2014), 13–17, 277.

[9] Kuitenbrouwer, *Dutch Scholarship*, 73–74. A prominent example is by J. de Hullu who referred to the *advocaat*, Pieter van Dam's plea for private trade in the 17th century that was not approved by all the chambers of the VOC. It was published in the *BMGN* in 1918. J. de Hullu, "Een advies van Mr. Pieter van Dam, advocaat der Oost-Indische Compagnie, over een gedeeltelijke openstelling van Compagnie's handel voor particulieren,

early 1900s which pointed out that the policy of rigid state monopoly drove certain officials abroad to take to corruption, bringing about the Company's eventual downfall in the eighteenth century.[10] This argument continued for a long time to pervade popular perceptions about the Company and its overseas corruption to almost such an extent that the acronym VOC came to be satirically termed as '*Vergaan Onder Corruptie*' meaning 'perished from corruption'.[11] Chris Nierstrasz in 2015, however, showed that the VOC and its officials were much more flexible than had been shown in the existent historiography and the *Heeren XVII* adjusted, from time to time, to the changing situation in the Republic and abroad.[12] In fact, he convincingly argued that corruption as a problem was not exclusive to any century and was, therefore, not particularly responsible for the VOC's decline. If this is true, it leaves us wondering what was happening to the committee sent under Van Reede towards the end of the seventeenth century. Why was corruption and its redress becoming an administrative concern in the VOC and why was Bengal becoming central to this rising concern? These are the questions that I attempt to address, examine and answer in this dissertation. I plan to do it through a particular emphasis on Bengal and the Company's encounter there with the Mughal authorities, at the time the Van Reede committee was operative in the late seventeenth century.

Historiography

The historiography on the VOC in Mughal India, though extensive, still lacks a socio-political analysis of corruption in the Company as an important episode in its history. For a long time, the

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1662," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde/ Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 74, no. 1 (1918): 267–98.

[10] See Schutte on De Jong and his criticism as a liberal on the monopoly of the VOC, G.J. Schutte, "Introduction," in *Dutch Authors on Asian History*, eds. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, M.E. van Opstall, and G.J. Schutte (Dordrecht: Floris Publications, 1988), 9.

[11] Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)*, vol. 15, TANAP Monographs on the History of Asian-European Interaction (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 27–28.

[12] Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*. For a conventional view on the corruption of the VOC and its decline see, Leonard Blussé, "Four Hundred Years On: The Public Commemoration of the Founding of the VOC in 2002," *Itinerario, European Journal of Overseas History* XXVII, no. 1 (March 2003): 81; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London etc.: Hutchinson, 1977).

dominant historiographical trend in studying the VOC followed an economic hard-line with emphasis on the commercial aspects of the Company.[13] Describing its overseas dynamics, J.C. van Leur in the 1960s described the Indian world of coastal trade as 'handicraft trade, peddling trade' of the Indian Ocean.[14] Such a description fostered the idea of the Dutch East India Company melting effortlessly into the existing commercial whirlpool. A large amount of scholarly work on this aspect of the Company appeared around these years from both Indian as well as Dutch historians. They reiterated the Company's interactions with local merchants and brokers in the then familiar connotations of 'competition', 'collaboration' or 'partnership', invoking Holden Furber's optimistic ideals of pre-colonial Indo-European relations.[15] While they all dealt with commerce as the only reason for the sustenance of the VOC in India, Markus Vink added the idea of expansion to it. Through his concept of the 'emporialists', he attempted to justify the Company's motives for expansion as trying to capture markets rather than territories.[16]

But it took some time before the VOC historiography in general could surpass the commercial analyses and focus on political and social dimensions related to the Company's

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[13] F. S. Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company: Expansion and Decline* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2003); Oscar Gelderblom and Joost Jonker, "Public Finance and Economic Growth: The Case of Holland in the Seventeenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–39. Scholars whose works had a political focus but differed little from the economic historians in emphasising the VOC's commercial character include Blussé, "Four Hundred Years On," 79–92; F. S. Gaastra, "Succesvol ondernemerschap, falend bestuur? Het beleid van de bewindhebbers van de VOC, 1602-1795," in *Kennis en Compagnie: De Verenigde Oost-Indisch Compagnie en de moderne wetenschap*, eds. Leonard Blussé and Ilonka Ooms (Leiden: Uitgeverij Balans, 2002), 55–70; Robert Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters: The Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010). Om Prakash, too, in his works has focused primarily on this commercial aspect of the VOC. Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2012).

[14] J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Publishers Ltd., 1967), 66, 187.

[15] F.S. Gaastra, "Competition or Collaboration? Relations between the Dutch East India Company and Indian Merchants around 1680," in *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 189–201; Michael N. Pearson, "Introduction," in *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia before Dominion*, eds. Blair B. King and Michael N. Pearson (Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 1–14; Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Trade in the Indian Ocean," in *The Cambridge Economic History of India, c.1200-c.1750*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 407–32; Holden Furber, "Asia and the West as Partners before "Empire" and After," *Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 4 (August 1969): 711–21.

[16] George D. Winus and Markus Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified: The VOC (The Dutch East India Company) and Its Changing Political Economy in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Publishers, 1991), 5.

activities in the Indian Ocean. Several scholars from the last decades of the 1990s began bringing these more and more to the fore.[17] Adam Clulow argued that despite repeatedly asserting that their interests were primarily business, the VOC in entire Asia 'displayed a consistent appetite for territorial acquisition, seeing physical control of trading hubs as the swiftest and most secure way to profit.'[18] Jurrien van Goor even went on to brand the VOC as 'an early imperialist' that 'laid the foundation of the Dutch Indies.'[19] These contentions essentially moved the dialogue to a direction where the reasons for and extent of VOC expansion came to be seen as varied for varying regions.[20] Gerrit Knaap argued that the VOC in Asia and Africa had different positions ranging from 'extraterritoriality' to 'suzerainty' to 'sovereignty'.[21] By 'extraterritoriality', he meant to indicate a situation in which the political force(s) of a certain region allowed the VOC to trade in their dominions with special privileges of separate jurisdiction, authority over some villages and so on. This was in contrast to 'suzerainty' where the VOC exercised its influence through the local overlords and 'sovereignty' where the Company wielded direct political control. In this mosaic of different positions, the VOC's presence in Mughal India came to be seen as varied for varied regions. For instance, the Coromandel Coast and Malabar were seen as having VOC

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[17] Jurrien van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism: The Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004); Gert Oostindie, "Squaring the Circle: Commemorating the VOC after 400 Years," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 159, no. 1 (2003): 135–61; Remco Raben, "VOC-Herdenking ontloopt iedere controverse," *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, 2002; Cátia Antunes, "Introduction," in *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000*, eds. Cátia Antunes and Jos Gommans (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), xiii–xx; Erik Odegaard, "Colonial Careers: Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and Career-Making in the Early Modern Dutch Empire" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2018).

[18] Adam Clulow, "The Art of Claiming: Possession and Resistance in Early Modern Asia," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 1 (September 2016): 19.

[19] Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism*, 25.

[20] P. Pott, "Willem Verstegen, een extra-ordinaris Raad van Indië als avonturier in India in 1659," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 112, no. 4 (1956): 355–82; Blussé, "Four Hundred Years On"; Gerrit Knaap, "De 'Core Business' van de VOC: Markt, macht en mentaliteit vanuit overzees perspectief" (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2014); Om Prakash, "European Trade and South Asian Economies: Some Regional Contrasts, 1600-1800," in *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime*, eds. Leonard Blussé and F.S. Gaastra (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1981), 189–205; Gaastra, "Competition or Collaboration?", 189–201.

[21] Knaap, "De 'Core Business' van de VOC," 18.

'suzerainty' while Surat and Bengal shared an 'extraterritorial' status.[22] The result was a shift of focus on research about the VOC in India from mercantile to diplomatic encounters involving the local kingdoms and the Mughal administrators.[23] Recent researches have examined this aspect further in terms of court embassies, interstate understandings and the role of material culture (such as art, books and maps) that maintained and facilitated diplomatic relations.[24]

But to return to 'corruption' within this historiography on the Company in India, not much has been written as of yet about this subject, thereby leaving room for further research. Scholars such as Om Prakash and Femme Gaastra have studied about the VOC corruption in Bengal in the seventeenth century from a purely economic stance, concentrating mostly on the illegal trade of the Company officials.[25] Another detailed work about the corruption of the VOC in India was produced by Chris Nierstrasz who, as mentioned earlier, challenged the notion that corruption led to the decline of the VOC in the eighteenth century. For works dealing with

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[22] Knaap, 19.

[23] Mughal India in the seventeenth century did not mean the entire stretch of the present-day political boundaries of India. There were the different Deccan Sultanates that emerged from the breaking off of the Bahmani dynasty, which Aurangzeb (1658-1707) attempted to conquer during his reign. Apart from this, there were the Nayaka kingdoms in the southern part of India that emerged after the disintegration of the Vijayanagara empire, and there was the Maratha confederacy in parts of western India.

[24] For some examples of works on diplomatic exchanges between the royal courts and the Dutch East India Company officials see, Lennart Bes, "Sultan Among Dutchmen? Royal Dress at Court Audiences in South India, as Portrayed in Local Works of Art and Dutch Embassy Reports, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries," *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 6 (Nov. 2016): 1792–1845; Guido van Meersbergen, "Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Trade in Mughal India and the Problem of Trust, 1600-1630'," in *Beyond Empire: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*, eds. Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 69–87; Guido van Meersbergen, "The Dutch Merchant-Diplomat in Comparative Perspective: Embassies to the Court of Aurangzeb, 1660-1666," in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c. 1410-1800*, eds. Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 147–65; Frank Birkenholz, "Merchant-Kings and Lords of the World: Diplomatic Gift-Exchange between the Dutch East India Company and the Safavid and Mughal Empires in the Seventeenth Century," in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c.1410-1800*, eds. Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 219–36; Michael North, "Production and Reception of Art through European Company Channels in Asia," in *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections*, ed. Michael North (Germany: Ashgate, 2010), 96–100.

[25] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 83-84; F. S. Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst en de corruptie onder het personeel van de VOC te Bengalen, 1669-1673," in *Bestuurders en geleerden: Opstellen over onderwerpen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis van de zestiende, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. J.J. Woltjer bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar van de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, eds. S. Groenveld, M.E.H.N. Mout, and I. Schöffer (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche leeuw, 1985), 126–36.

corruption in a socio-political context, the most relevant references emanate from the works of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ernst van den Bogaart, Markus Vink and Guido van Meersbergen which shed light on the association of ethnography with moral 'corruption' as were found in the Dutch (and in general European) accounts of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[26] These works have not only triggered my interest in the study of 'corruption' in the administrative discourse of the Company but have also left vital hints for exploring its importance in connection with the political atmosphere of the Dutch Republic as well as the regional interactions overseas. Inspired by the highly informative and dynamic analysis of these existent works, I aim to study 'corruption' through the political link between the VOC in the Republic and overseas as distinctive and yet mutually influential units of administration.

Another work that has explored this aspect from an intellectual historical dimension is that of Arthur Weststeijn who provided an explanation for the concerns regarding corruption in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and how they were reflected in the contemporary writings on the chartered East and West India Companies.[27] He argued that the anxieties of a precarious Dutch empire that feared collapse was the reason for its government's paranoia about moral decay and corruption. Weststeijn linked this situation to the classical Roman philosophies that were current in the day and stressed the need for taking this link into account in order to understand the Republic's growing concerns about corruption. In his other work on the philosophy of the De La Court brothers, he pointed out the intellectual stimulus that the

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[26] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Forcing the Doors of Heathendom: Ethnography, Violence and the Dutch East India Company* (Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 2003); Ernest van den Bogaart, *Civil and Corrupt Asia: Image and Text in the Itinerario and the Icones of Jan Huygen van Linschoten* (Chicago and London: The University of Chiacago Press, 2003); Markus Vink, *Encounters on the Opposite Coast: The Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Guido van Meersbergen, "Ethnography and Encounter: Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Contact in Seventeenth-Century South Asia" (PhD diss., UCL, 2015). Mention must be made of Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennysylvania Press, 2015). Another work that extensively engages with VOC ethonography by following this line, though not specifically dealing with corruption is that of Kruijtzer. Gijs Kruijtzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009).

[27] Arthur Weststeijn, "Republican Empire: Colonialism, Commerce and Corruption in the Dutch Golden Age," *Renaissance Studies* 26, no. 4 (Sep. 2012): 491–509.

Republic received in the seventeenth century and the large amount of political theories that were being produced in connection with 'public' service.[28] These theories, to which the brothers Johan and Pieter de la Court themselves contributed, did bring the focus to administrative behaviour and corruption. These works of Weststeijn have been influential in this research to overcome the separation of the two historiographical worlds – the political theories in the Republic about commerce and the VOC's activities in Mughal India (or in the Indian Ocean in general), and to connect the political thoughts and practices of the Company in the Republic with its overseas situation. The Van Reede committee in Bengal provides an excellent opportunity to carry out such an exercise precisely. It allows overseas activities to be analysed against the backdrop of the foreign settings as well as in light of the political developments in the Republic that, in turn, shaped the policies of the VOC at home and abroad. It is also a fruitful source of information about the VOC's presence in seventeenth-century Bengal as seen through the 'Dutch' – 'Mughal' administrative interactions there.

Conceptualising Corruption

Before proceeding further, it is however necessary to understand how 'corruption' has been conceived in this dissertation. The challenge of trying to conceptualise this term for my research is threefold. The primary challenge involves an attempt to find a general definition of 'corruption' at a universal level that can be functional in all sectors. This in turn leads to two subsequent problems. It gives rise to the difficulty of being able to find a definition that not just applies everywhere to everyone but also fits, in this case, all seventeenth-century moral standards. The other problem is to find a definition specifically that works well in both the context of the Dutch and the Mughal administrative worlds in our study. Thus, the primary challenge of trying to clarify the concept or rather perception of 'corruption' includes – (i) a temporal issue, that is, trying to perceive it against the particular setting of the seventeenth century and (ii) a spatial

[28] Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan and Pieter de La Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 14–23.

aspect, that is, contextualising the perception of corruption with respect to the different political settings and their administrative cultures.

To begin with the challenge of seeking to define corruption, one is confronted with a wide range of differing perspectives – namely economic, political, historical, sociological and anthropological. The many approaches that have been adopted over the years for studying corruption are based on a number of theories. They range from the Weberian to the institutional-economics approach, the use of the systems theory, the criminological approach and so on. [29] The most widely used definition for this situation remains that of Michael Johnston. He wrote – 'I define corruption as *the abuse of public roles or resources for private benefit,* but emphasise that "abuse", "public", "private", and even "benefit" are matters of contention in many societies and of varying degrees of ambiguity in most.'[30] His idea of corruption, as is evident from this definition, was thus subjective throughout history and dependent on the three questions of 'who, where and when'. [31] This brings us to the major difficulty in conceiving a stable universal definition of corruption. Opinions on standards of morality and corruption have never been unanimously held. They have differed from one person to another or between different groups

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[29] For an analysis of Weber's ideal-bureaucratic type see, Max Weber, *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York, London: Free Press of Glencoe, Collier MacMillan, 1964), 329–54. For a discussion on Weber's theory see, William D. Rubinstein and Patrick von Maravic, "Max Weber, Bureaucracy, and Corruption," in *The Good Cause: Theoretical Perspectives on Corruption*, eds. Gjalt de Graaf, Patrick von Maravic, and Pieter Wagenaar (Opladen: Barbara Budich Publishers, 2010), 21–35; Naoshi Yamawaki, "Rethinking Weber's Ideal-Types of Development, Politics and Scientific Knowledge," in *Max Weber's 'Objectivity' Reconsidered*, ed. Laurence H. McFalls (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 206–24; P.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians*, vol. 2, The Colonizer's Model of the World (New York etc.: The Guilford Press, 2000), 19–30. For an understanding of the institutional-economics approach see, Ackerman, "The Institutional Economics of Corruption". For the systems theory see, Petra Hiller, "Understanding Corruption: How Systems Theory Can Help," in *The Good Cause: Theoretical Perspectives on Corruption*, eds. Gjalt de Graaf, Patrick von Maravic, and Pieter Wagenaar (Opladen: Barbara Budich Publishers, 2010), 64–82. For a crimonological approach see, Gjalt De Graaf, Patrick Von Maravic, and Pieter Wagenaar, "Introduction: Causes of Corruption – The Right Question or the Right Perspective," in *Introduction: Causes of Corruption – The Right Question or the Right Perspective*, eds. Gjalt de Graaf, Patrick von Maravic, and Pieter Wagenaar (Opladen: Barbara Budich Publishers, 2010), 17–20.

[30] Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12.

[31] Antoon Dirk Nicolaas Kerkhoff, "Hidden Morals, Explicit Scandals, Public Values and Political Corruption in the Netherlands (1748-1813)" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2013), 9.

dwelling in the same place owing to differences in their perspectives. Time too has been a factor in creating such diverse perceptions.

The seventeenth century, in our case for example, was a different world. The grounds on which one can define corruption in its modern connotation were rather different in the 'early-modern' world. The task of finding a definition of 'corruption' for this period has been likened to 'tracking the snark' by Mary Lindemann, the 'snark' being the imaginary creature that was invented by Lewis Carroll in his poem, 'The Hunting of the Snark'.[32] There are two important technical differences that play a major role in accounting for the peculiarities of seventeenth-century 'corruption'. Firstly, the existence of the economic, political, theological and religious worlds at this time were often overlapping and the segregation of these domains had not happened in the then society as it is understood now. The very understanding of 'corruption' was diverse and the word could be used in administrative vocabulary in several ways. For instance, when talking about 'corruption', the one pressing question that emerges is whether or not the term 'corruption' itself existed in the 'early-modern' vocabulary. If at all, did it actually imply the same meaning as 'modern'-day corruption? Through a lexicographical analysis done by Maryvonne Génaux on the English and French cases, she showed how 'early-modern corruption' represented a diversity of vocabulary and meanings. There was no list of established corrupt practices that one could refer to in the seventeenth century. Using words from dictionaries in the French language and English repertoires, Génaux demonstrated that a diverse vocabulary of 'corruption' made it laden with political implications in the society. The technical meaning in dictionaries was usually combined with the usage of the word in different moral, jurist and humanist context. This made the definition of 'corruption' in these times allusive yet central to the political discourse. Génaux's work confirmed the problem of trying to have a single

[32] Mary Lindemann, *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 116.

definition of 'early-modern corruption' because of the bundled existence of multiple elements that affected the seventeenth-century administrative discourse.

The second major difference lay in the boundaries between 'public' and 'private', which by the seventeenth century was not yet stable and well-demarcated, although existing to a limited extent.[33] The differences in the elements that distinguished the seventeenth-century 'public' and the 'private' from their present-day counterparts, defined a world with very different social values. Such differences are relevant for understanding that 'corruption' was possibly perceived in a different way in the seventeenth century in contradiction to our current definitions. Using the existent literature on 'pre-modern' corruption in this case does not bring one any further either. The distribution of available literature for the seventeenth century remains an unequal process where most of the research is still focussed on 'early-modern' Europe. There are abundant studies of administrative corruption regarding the 'early-modern' states of Italy, France, England and the Netherlands.[34] As regards research on corruption in 'early-modern' Asian societies, there have been considerable scholarly works on the seventeenth- and the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire and on the Ming and the Qing empires in China.[35] But for research on

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[33] Manon van der Heijden, "Conflict and Consensus: The Allocation of Public Services in the Low Countries 1500-1800," in *Serving the Urban Community: The Rise of Public Facilities in the Low Countries*, eds. Manon van der Heijden, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, Griet Vermeesch and Martijn van der Burg (Aksant: Amsterdam, 2009), 23.

[34] Most of these comparative studies focus on comparison within western European societies. See, J.C. Kennedy et al., "Corruption and Public Values in Historical and Comparative Perspective," *Public Voices* X, no. 2 (2008): 3–6; A.D.N. Kerkhoff, D.B.R. Kroeze, and F.P. Wagenaar, "Corruption and the Rise of Modern Politics in Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Comparison between France, the Netherlands, Germany and England. Introduction," *Journal of Modern European History* 11, no. 1 (2013): 19–30.

[35] On China see, Nancy E. Park, "Corruption in Eighteenth-Century China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 4 (Nov. 1997): 967–1005; Shawn Ni and Pham Hoang Van, "High Corruption Income in Ming and Qing China," *Journal of Development Economics* 81, no. 2 (Dec. 2006): 316–36; Edgar Kiser and Xiaoxi Tong, "Determinants of the Amount and Type of Corruption in State Fiscal Bureaucracies: An Analysis of Late Imperial China," *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no. 3 (Oct. 1992): 300–331; Peer Vries, "Introduction," in *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China, 1680s-1850s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 1–68. On the Ottoman Empire see, Halil İnalcık, "Tax Collection, Embezzlement and Bribery in Ottoman Finances," in *Essays in Ottoman History*, ed. Halil İnalcık (Istanbul: Eren, 1998), 173–95; Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: The Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Bernard Lewis, "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire," *Studia Islamica*, no. 9 (1958): 111–27; Caroline Finkel, "The Treachourous Clevernes of Hindsight: Myths of Ottoman Decay," in *Re-Orienting the*

corruption in India, most of the studies are limited to the 'modern' era and to post-colonial India.[36] The book of Bernadus J.S. Hoetjes has been acclaimed as a pioneering work for studying corruption in decolonised India. Hoetjes suggested using the four social devices of 'formal laws', 'public opinion', 'the best opinion or moral standard of the time', and the 'shopfloor codes' for analysing corruption in a particular society.[37] But such devices are difficult to use in a seventeenth-century Mughal Indian context with pluralistic legal jurisdictions, widely varying socio-cultural norms, vague formal/informal rules and the insufficient number of sources for tracing public opinion. All these reasons and the last one especially, namely the lack of proper sources, explains the inadequacy of extensive research on the historical conceptualisation of corruption for Mughal India. Other corruption-related studies pertaining to colonial India, concentrate mostly on the British-Indian civil servants and do not specifically deal with the production of knowledge about India's pre-colonial administration.[38] The situation is not entirely without hope though. A treasure trove of legal sources called the *mahzar-namas* has been rescued recently by Nandini Chatterjee and deserves special mention here.[39] Chatterjee has tried to retrace the Mughal judicial administration and its participants at various social levels from these

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Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East, ed. Gerald MacLean (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 148–74. I am grateful to Prof. Peer Vries and Dr. Hasan Colak for the relevant literature.

[36] An excellent contribution to studying the state in modern India with reference to its corruption as reflected in the public discourse at a grass-root level is done by Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourses of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (May 1995): 375–402.

[37] Cited in Pieter Wagenaar, Otto van der Meij, and Manon van der Heijden, "Corruptie in de Nederlanden, 1400-1800," *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 2, no. 4 (Dec. 2005): 6–7.

[38] There is abundant literature on smuggling in India by EIC servants and the rising *nabob*-culture with rich upstarts entering the ranks of the upper-class English society by making illegal money in India. See, Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 9; John T. Noonan Jr., "The Bribery of Warren Hastings: The Setting of a Standard for Integrity in Administration," *Hofstra Law Review* 10, no. 1 (1981): 1073–1120, HeinOnline; Mithi Mukherjee, "Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke's Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings," *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 589–630, HeinOnline; Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100–140.

[39] Nandini Chatterjee, "*Mahzar-Namas* in the Mughal and British Empires: The Uses of an Indo-Islamic Legal Form," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (April 2016): 379–406; Nandini Chatterjee, "Reflections on Religious Difference and Permissive Inclusion in Mughal Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 3 (Oct. 2014): 396–415.

sources in order to produce more knowledge in this terrain. One can only be optimistic about this ongoing project and hope for its steady contribution to understanding corruption in the Mughal administration.[40] It is partly with the help of Chatterjee's works and the existent literature on Mughal administrative ethos that this dissertation aims to address the aspect of corruption in the historiography of Mughal India.

The extensive, multidisciplinary scholarship on corruption demonstrates that it is not possible to employ a single definition that meets all spatial and temporal coordinates. Here I can only but agree with Davide Torsello and Bertrand Venard who urge to contextualise research on corruption in different areas based on its immediate socio-political surroundings while understanding it as a process and product of these local factors.[41] Such a practical and flexible approach allows corruption to be understood in all its (in)commensurabilities in a connecting, 'global' setting, as has been done in this dissertation.[42] Although corruption involves political, economic, moral and many other domains, in this study I have focused specifically on what I have termed 'administrative corruption' in the context of the late seventeenth-century VOC in general, and of its establishment in Mughal Bengal in particular. In other words, what conduct the VOC was expecting of its servants, both at home and more in particular at its factories in Bengal? Rather than defining administrative corruption, the research question of this dissertation deals primarily with the discussions on corruption at that specific time and place. Indeed, what makes the VOC establishment in Bengal such a fascinating case is its location at the interface of two very different political settings: the Dutch Republic and the Mughal Empire. Hence, in this

[40] The description of this project can be found here - http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/history/research/projects/forms-of-law/, accessed 11 June, 2018.

[41] Davide Torsello and Bertrand Venard, "The Anthropology of Corruption," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (April 2016): 39–40.

[42] By saying 'global' I do not want to make extravagant claims about writing a large-scale world history. All that I mean is incorporating a more holistic approach by putting the ideas of corruption in the context of a non-European empire alongside those in the Dutch Republic's form of governance in the context of the historiography on corruption. For an overview on 'incommensurability' and its influence in studying historical encounters see, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge etc.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1–33.

study I have zoomed in on the VOC in Bengal from both a Dutch and a Mughal point of view. By taking a dual perspective I have attempted to understand how administrative corruption was perceived in two very different political cultures and how this affected Dutch perceptions of VOC servants in the Mughal province of Bengal.

In dealing with the issue of corruption, I will more specifically explore the way accusations of corruption were used for political ends. To study the process of how administrative corruption was conceived and used in making allegations, I have used two parameters. The first parameter involves the difference in political structures which affect the way corruption is perceived in different political systems and the way corruption allegations are used. The second parameter involves the difference in the ideas of morality within different political structures that are manifested in their formal administrative rules. Using these two parameters, I have studied the different contexts in which corruption allegations were formed and used in the administrative worlds of the Dutch Republic and Mughal Bengal.

While such parameters might be helpful in penetrating the world of the Dutch and Mughal administrators, it is worth inspecting whether they are useful in studying an organization that is often seen as 'merely' a trading company. While reflecting on the nature of the English East India Company and its administration, Philip Stern concluded that it was a Company-state. By this he meant that just as the 'early-modern' English state was an evolving hybrid of politics, religion, military, commerce and several other functions bundled together, the English East India Company was also an amalgam of similar features of a corporate body and a state in England.[43] This argument was applied to the VOC by Arthur Weststeijn.[44] Using the discourse of three prominent men who had financial stakes in the Company, Weststeijn concluded that the VOC was considered to be more than just a corporate body by its contemporaries. Sometimes it was

[43] Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.
[44] Arthur Weststeijn, "The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion," *Itinerario* 38, no. 1 (April 2014): 13-34.

seen as competing with the Dutch state, sometimes as an overseas extension of the state and sometimes as a state within the state. Much like the English government, the Dutch state in the seventeenth-century was also a bundle of religion, politics, commerce and other elements which came to be reflected in the institution of the VOC. The Company had its own system and set of formal rules and operated in connection with the metropolis and overseas factories in Asia. It is therefore possible to use the parameters mentioned above for studying the perception of corruption and the use of corruption allegations among the Company officials by viewing the VOC as a Company-state.

The dual perspective of this study requires a scholarly engagement with the political worlds of the Dutch Republic and Mughal India. Hence, I have decided to take Amsterdam and Bengal as representational backdrops in which VOC officials raised corruption accusations. Amsterdam was one of the most important cities known for its commercial dominance in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and the chamber of Amsterdam in the VOC held substantial number of shares. Several prominent regent and merchant families that were part of the urban high society also lived in and officially represented this city. Consequently, Amsterdam became a hotbed of sensational scandals and corruption accusations in the Republic. This explains it being a focal point for the subject of this dissertation. Bengal, on the other hand, despite not being the political core of the Mughal Empire, is an important region for studying non-courtly encounters between Europe and Asia. As a region, it became the political core of British-India in the eighteenth century. But before that, it had been a 'shadow empire' of the Portuguese *Estado da India* in the sixteenth century.[45] In the seventeenth century, after the *Estado*

[45] The term 'shadow empire' was first coined by George Winius to explain how there was a 'Portuguese colonial genius' that emerged in the Bay of Bengal through the network of free agents, beyond the official control of Goa. See, George Winius, "The "Shadow Empire" of Goa in the Bay of Bengal," *Itinerario* 7, no. 2 (July 1983): 83–101. Subrahmanyam, in addition to this contended that from the second half of the sixteenth century, Portuguese private traders were not just confined to riverine commerce but also connected long-distance oceanic trade from Bengal to three other regions – firstly, to Malacca; secondly, to Sri Lanka, Cochin and Goa; and thirdly, to Ormuz through direct trade. See, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24, no. 3 (Sep. 1987): 265–89. Rila Mukherjee

came to be dismissed for its supposed corruption in India, the VOC replaced it in Bengal and this region's importance began growing.[46] It also started attracting the English, the Danish and the French East India Companies which settled there next to each other in close proximity. This was in combination with the Portuguese presence there, formed by the *mestizo* population and the former *Estado* agents who had remained in Bengal and continued living there informally.[47] The presence of the VOC personnel in the midst of these other Europeans made the Company directors in the Republic increasingly worried about their position in this region. A 'shadow empire' of the yesteryears, a problem zone for the VOC, and a growing political base for the English, Bengal witnessed speedy political and socio-economic transitions in India in these centuries. It is because of this dynamism and the fact that the VOC officials here had frequent informal interactions with the Mughal nobles that Bengal is relevant for my study on corruption. Understanding the use of corruption allegations in both the Dutch and Mughal administrative worlds of Amsterdam and Bengal is thus important in contextualising the VOC's operations in these settings. In this respect, it should be mentioned that this dissertation is an attempt to make an analysis of the perception and uses of corruption allegations in Mughal India and the Dutch Republic. In addition, it tries to understand and contextualise the VOC in the Republic and in the Mughal administrative worlds that they are studied.

The process of studying corruption and uses of corruption allegations in the VOC has however two sides to it. On the one hand, there is the discourse on corruption and policies that were implemented to check corruption among the Company officials in the seventeenth century.

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added to this the importance of the island of Sandwip in the Bay of Bengal as a Portuguese node, that arguably lay somewhere between the 'major'/ 'minor' and 'formal'/ 'informal' divisions. See, Rila Mukherjee, "The Struggle for the Bay: The Life and Times of Sandwip, an Almost Unknown Portuguese Port in the Bay of Bengal in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Revista de Faculdade de Letras: História* 9, no. 1 (2008): 67–88.

[46] Nandini Chaturvedala, "Imperial Excess: Corruption and Decadence in Portuguese India (1660-1706)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010), 31.

[47] For an overview of the continued Portuguese presence in the Bay of Bengal, often in the service of other European Companies as well as local rulers see, Stefan Halikowski Smith, "Languages of Subalternity and Collaboration: Portuguese in English Settlements Across the Bay of Bengal, 1620-1800," *The International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 2 (Apr. 2016): 237–67.

On the other hand, there are cases of corruption that emerged as a result of investigations conducted overseas which reveal how the officials actually engaged in such acts. My dissertation tries to combine both these aspects through the operations and reports of the Van Reede committee in the second half of the seventeenth century (roughly between the 1670s and 1680s). In the process, it explores the institutional façade of the VOC with its administrative system and formal rules under which personal connections informally thrived. Such connections are revealed while analysing cases of violation of the rules of the Company which further establishes the relevance of corruption and the uses of corruption allegations in its administration as a Company-state.

Sources

To say that such an endeavour needs to be attempted is easy but translating it into concise historical research is much more difficult. It proves to be particularly challenging when it comes to the selection of sources and their analysis. With the vast stretch of different types of sources for studying 'administrative corruption' in the seventeenth century (thanks to the overlapping economic and political spaces), it is impossible to dedicate equal attention to all of them. The volume of sources for the political administration of the Dutch Republic alone is so huge, that I have used only previous researches done on corruption in the Republic. Besides this, a few pamphlets, books and other published documents that are available through the online databases of Dutch literary productions have also been referred to. Since the core of this dissertation revolves around the Dutch East India Company, it is the VOC archives in The Hague that have formed the major part of my archival research. Both formal reports of the Company, as well as private letters of relevant regents from the Amsterdam chamber have also been consulted. The official Company reports that have been used here include missives dispatched by the governor-general and his Council to the *Heeren XVII* at different points of time, the resolutions drawn up by the *Heeren XVII* for the relevant years, and the correspondences that were sent back from the

Republic to Batavia on matters concerning corruption. As for the private papers, I have consulted the collections of prominent VOC regent-directors like Johannes Hudde and the family archives of the Governor-General Rijkloff van Goens. In addition to that, the personal journal and private letters of the Amsterdam *burgemeester* and VOC director, Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen en Neerdijk (1625-1704) that are currently preserved as a part of the Huydecoper Family documents in the Utrecht Archives have also been used here.

It is necessary to mention at this point that informal alliances are not always spelled out in the sources, least of all in the official documents that are easily available. Yet as crucial elements of this dissertation, such alliances and personal relations cannot be left out of this dissertation. I have, therefore, tried to construct them through networks of family and friends of the relevant administrative personalities. The private journal of Huydecoper, for instance, and other biographical information has helped in this process. The missives and investigation reports of the Van Reede committee also form a substantial part of this dissertation. As my primary case study, it has been used to study the legal cases that were raised by the committee against the accused Company officials in Bengal. In order to comprehend the weight of the Company's presence in the Dutch Republic, the archival documents have been combined with published books, pamphlets and travelogues written about certain VOC officials in Asia, that were later circulated for the wider European audience.[48] Most of the VOC missives and resolutions used here are from the period concerning my case study and do not include all missives from all the years between 1602 and 1700. While it means that this dissertation reflects the Company's situation and policies at that time particularly, it also leaves room for further research on the changing phases of the Company's concerns and policies on corruption (possible through a research project).

[48] For a critical note on the use of archival sources solely for research on the Company in India see, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (New Delhi: Oxford University Publishers, 2005), 9–10.

For the study of the Mughal Indian administrative space, English translations of royal chronicles such as the *Akbarnama* and its administrative extension, *The Ain-i Akbari* (composed by Abul Fazl, one of Emperor Akbar's most powerful and closest *munshis*), the *Shahjahannama* (composed by Inayat Khan, one of Emperor Shah Jahan's *munshis*), the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (which is considered Jahangir's own autobiography) and the *Ahkam-i Alamgiri* commonly attributed to Hamiduddin Khan composed under Aurangzeb have also been used. These sources have been employed in combination with the secondary literature on Mughal administrative culture. However, when it comes down specifically to corruption, the existent scholarly works on the seventeenth-century Mughal Empire are few in number. This can be ascribed to the lack of availability of neatly compiled legal records or cases from the sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century Mughal administration. As mentioned earlier, Nandini Chatterjee has recently demonstrated in 2017 the use of *mahzar-namas* as valuable legal records for the Mughal administration. Her research project possibly awaits further work that may culminate in a historical analysis of administrative corruption in the Mughal Empire.

For this dissertation, I have used royal chronicles as official versions of the Mughal emperors' reign as recorded by their favourite *munshis* or administrators. They are nevertheless problematic, characterised as they are by strong political bias and narrow affiliations. But I have precisely taken that into consideration and seen it as an advantage for studying the politics of corruption through the dialogue of the accuser and the accused. As Harbans Mukhia pointed out, 'Often the (Mughal) historians, as courtiers, were themselves party to one or another faction, or were at the least sympathetic to one or another faction. They were thus eyewitnesses to, when not active participants in, the events they narrated. As such they were frequently aware of the motives that drove nobles or princes or, for that matter, denizens of the *harem*, to undertake an action that would enter their chronicles.'[49] These royal narratives also made it possible to see the ideal administrative behaviour that was approved by the Mughal Empire against corruption and

[49] Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 7.

misconduct. But it is difficult to study the actual practices and uses of administrative corruption that existed beyond these ideal images. The insufficient availability of legal papers and registers, in combination with my own lack of language skills in Persian is the main cause. This explains the limited research on Mughal uses of corruption allegations in this dissertation.

As a significant part of this dissertation focuses on Mughal Bengal, relevant Bengali sources such as the *Mangalkavya* poems have been used for understanding the local socio-economic space of this region. Despite being fictitious compositions, these poems are historically important as they reflect the social, political and economic background of the times when they were composed in Bengal.[50] They lend to some extent a local voice to this story, while tapping into the connections between the regional and the global interface.[51] Added to this, the autobiography of a seventeenth-century merchant, Banarasidas (from Jaunpur) has also been used in this connection. As for the VOC sources, while using information from them generously, it has been my constant endeavour to extract the political intentions, personal motivations and interpersonal interactions behind the available discourse. That is why it is deemed necessary to study the Company's formal problems from an informal angle to unveil the uneven edges behind the polished, official language of the administrators.

Chapter Layout

In the first chapter of this dissertation, the reader is introduced to the Dutch political administration in the seventeenth century in order to understand the atmosphere in which the VOC worked. Through an analysis of its governing system as a Republic, I show how and why administrative corruption gradually became a politicised subject for debate in the public forum. Chapter 2 focuses more specifically on the VOC administration of the seventeenth century and

[50] For the historical validity and importance of this genre of texts see, David Curley, "The "World of the Text" and Political Thought in Bengali Mangal-Kavya, c. 1500-1750," *The Medieval History Journal* 14, no. 2 (Oct. 2011): 183–211; David Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (Washington: Western Washington University, 2008); Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (India: Oxford University Publishers, 2009), 90–122.
[51] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration," 745.

shows the essential connections between the political space in the Republic and the Company's domain. It reveals how the anxieties about corruption in Dutch society had their impact on the Company administrators and what was their reaction in turn to deflect the tension. In Chapter 3, the overseas dimension comes into play. Bengal under the Mughal administration is analysed to provide a context to the VOC's operations. It further tries to decipher how corruption came to be perceived by the Mughal emperors and where and how Bengal featured in this perception. When we have seen how the tension about corruption has built up within the Company in the Republic, Chapter 4 goes on to show how Mughal Bengal played a major role in triggering these anxieties. It investigates the nature of the VOC-Mughal administrative encounter in this region to show how Mughal perceptions of corruption about Bengal added a new dimension to the Company's perception of overseas corruption.

Having analysed the background in which the Van Reede committee was installed and sent, Chapter 5 studies the process of the committee's formation in response to its heightened concerns in the Republic. Chapter 6 looks into the scene of action in Bengal where the committee combats corruption among its officials. Through the study of the legal cases that were sent to Batavia by the Van Reede committee against officials charged of corruption, it is shown how the VOC officials in Bengal inhabited both administrative worlds of the Mughals and the Dutch. The written reports of Van Reede, on the other hand, catered clearly to the demands of the Dutch administrative world but were again not free of entangled influences of the Mughal administrative world. Bengal as a region, however, remained the core of corruption in this discourse as will be shown in this dissertation.

Finally, one should remember that writing in English presents its own challenges. Trying to translate certain words while being true to their meanings has always been a struggle for academic researchers. For the sake of avoiding any confusion, therefore (that I have personally encountered with different authors providing different translations for the same word), I have stuck to using the original terms for all administrative positions and other relevant concepts

throughout this text. A separate glossary clarifying their meanings has been attached at the end for further reference. All translations from Dutch to English and from Bengali into English are mine, unless it has been mentioned otherwise. I am, therefore, solely responsible for all mistakes and slips in them, if any. The English transation of Persian and Urdu texts have been taken from other published works and the references have been mentioned in relevant footnotes. All Persian words have been put here without diacritical marks as they should appear in their English transliteration. The plural form of Dutch nouns that should be in their *–en* form have been replaced with a *–s* in English for the convenience of writing in the English language. Similar is the case with Persian plural forms of *–an* and *–ha* that have been changed into the English *–s*.

Last but not least, I wholeheartedly admit that this work does have its limitations. Covering a time span of almost a hundred years is no mean task. Neither do the chapter on the Dutch political system, nor the chapter on Mughal India seek to disregard the detailed scholarship that exists on numerous aspects of seventeenth-century Dutch and Mughal governance. Notwithstanding these limitations however, it is still important to include them as chapters in order to contextualise the VOC in its political setting at home and abroad. The Company's history is not just about share prices, profits and losses, illegal practices, factories and warehouses, ships and maritime policies. It is linked to the people in it – about their pursuit of power, personal interests, alliances and confrontations, about their observations and experiences in assimilating with the 'other'. To be able to bring to light that part of the Company's history, it is essential to place it in the larger political setting where it functioned. To give up on such an endeavour because of an apprehension of limitations, would probably be wasting an opportunity to expose the important connections in the history of seventeenth-century global encounters. It is thus, by building upon the excellent literature that exists for both the Dutch Republic and the Mughal Indian administration, that this dissertation attempts to trace their entanglement through the Dutch East India Company, in terms of corruption as a yet insufficiently explored terrain of historical research.

Chapter 1
Allies in Political Lies: The Administrative World of the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

> I cannot neglect taking this opportunity to address the fact, that through the establishment of the Union it was hoped, that such atrocious and outrageous corruption and intrigues, as has been practiced now for some time, openly and shamelessly, would be condemned and no longer tolerated; since it affected the Generality's finances to not any little extent and considerably loosened it from its principal institutions; and I would not have dared bring forth this affair (since many influential men are engaged in it) had I not known, that many other good and pious men, holding the offices of the States-General, even in the entire Province of Holland, as well as other inhabitants, seeing this work daily, had not abhorred and cursed it and cried for revenge to the great God; and it could also not have been otherwise, that it could not be foreseen that God Almighty would soon inflict some lamentable punishments and miseries on this land, that would cause trouble for the good inhabitants, and for which the lord-regents would not be able to excuse themselves.[1]

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) came to be established in 1602 in the newly formed Dutch Republic, that was governed without a monarch. Throughout the entire span of the seventeenth century, the young Republic witnessed frequent political disruptions, civil unrest and financial turmoil. Its very existence as a combined entity of the constituent seven provinces was

[1] '*Ick en kan oock niet ledigh zijn by dese gelegentheydt aen te roepen, dat by het refideeren van deselve Unie gehoopt werdt, dat mede sal af-gekeurt, ende niet langer toe-gelaten werden al sulcke grouwelijcke ende gantsch ongehoorde corruptien ende kuyperijen, als nu eenigen tijt in't openbaer, ende onbeschaemt ghebruyck geweest zijn; want het niet weynigh de Generaliteyts Finantien ontroert, ende van haer eerste instellingen merckelijck verset hebben: ende en soude dese saeckje niet wel derven op de baen brengen (als vele grooten hun daer mede besigh houdende) in dien ick oock niet en wiste, dat vele andere goede ende vrome Heeren, bekleedende het Ampt als Staten Generael; jae selver de geheele Provintie van Hollandt, ende andere Ingesetenen, het werck daghelijcks siende, niet en hadden een grouwel, ende hetselve vervloeckende waren, ende wraecke riepen tot aen den grooten GODT; ende het en kan oock niet anders wesen, soo daer inne niet en soude versien werden, of Godt Almachtigh, soude eer lange eenighe beklagelijcke straffen ende ellendigheden den Lande doen openbaren, dat voor de goede ingesetenen lastigh, ende voor de heeren regenten niet en soude te verschoonen wesen*.'
Anonymous, *Extract uytghegeven by een liefhebber des vaderlandts, raeckende de Godtloose corruptien ende kuyperyen van den griffier van hare Ho Mo: Cornelis Musch* (1646), A2, (Dutch Pamphlets Online Database, pamphlet nr. 5361).

challenged repeatedly, when political decisions were made. And yet, there was a simultaneous growth of scientific knowledge, culture and commerce around these years that created the essence of the urban culture of certain provinces in the Republic. These developments led to an intricate and elaborate political and social structure. As the above lines from a pamphlet circulated in Holland around 1646 show, administrative corruption became a subject of debate and discussion among the elites in the new socio-political setting and came to garner 'public' attention. The state apparatus was evolving constantly and tried to keep up with the changes, regulating administrative behavioural rules. Such developments, of course, must have had their impact on the VOC administration in the Republic and overseas. It is therefore necessary to study the political background in which discussions against the Company's corruption were initiated, to understand better its importance and perceptions at home and abroad. This chapter, thus, delves into the analysis of administrative corruption among the elite in the political space of the Republic. It raises questions about how corruption came to be perceived and how corruption allegations ended up being used in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. What was its importance in the existing political arena? It is precisely in trying to answer these questions through the developments in the Republic that the reason for the VOC's corruption-control measures overseas can be explored.

Political Institutions

In order to decipher the differing meanings and implications of corruption in different societies, the differences in governing systems should be examined, as these played a crucial role. To understand the perceptions of corruption in the Dutch political administration, it is therefore useful to shed light on its formal institutions of government. The existence of the seven Dutch provinces as a Republic (or the United Provinces) emerged from the treaty of the Union of

Utrecht signed in 1579.[2] After the renunciation of the Spanish rule by the Act of Abjuration in 1581, and the concluding of the Twelve Years' Truce in 1609, the Republic gained its de facto independence. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 officially put a stop to the prolonged Dutch Revolt, that was begun by Willem van Orange (William of Orange). In the end, he emerged as the symbol of victory for Dutch society, ensuring the House of Orange-Nassau a special place within the Republic's political set-up. It marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Low Countries with the Republic as a separate state, eventually consisting of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Groningen, Friesland and Gelderland.[3] When Maarten Prak wrote in 2007, 'it is amazing to see how much has been written in the last twenty years about the subject' meaning the seventeenth-century Dutch history, he was really not exaggerating.[4] The profusion of writings on the political, cultural and socio-economic aspects of the Dutch Republic cannot possibly be recorded in all its entirety.[5] This chapter thus attempts no more than understanding the importance and use of corruption in the political space of the Republic, using the existent literature.

To begin with, the political institutions of the Republic can be roughly divided into three levels of organisation – central, provincial and local. As for the functioning and extent of control at every level, there have been intense debates about its nature of governance that started with Robert Fruin and was carried on by Daniel J. Roorda, John L. Price and more recently by Judith Pollmann and Maarten Prak.[6] While Fruin as one of the pioneers, developed a top-down

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[2] J.C. Boogman, "The Union of Utrecht: Its Genesis and Consequences," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (Jan. 1979): 377–407.

[3] Certain southern provinces like Flanders, Brabant, Luxembourg etc. were for some time still under the Habsburg rule before being gradually incorporated into the Republic. It began initially with the northern provinces such as Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht (and some parts of Gelderland) and the rest of the provinces were absorbed later. See, Boogman, "The Union of Utrecht".

[4] Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age*, trans. Dianne Webb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), x.

[5] Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 39–49.

[6] Robert Fruin, *Geschiedenis der staatsinstellingen in Nederland tot den val der Republiek* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1901); D. J. Roorda, *Partij en factie: De oproeren van 1672 in de steden* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff,

approach of highlighting the political institutions and its functions in details, Roorda and Price went on to examine it from a bottom-up perspective. They argued that it was the city governments and the factions within these governments that were the basic unit of Dutch politics. Roorda surpassed the element of a political 'party' and argued that the urban administrative space was rather composed of factions which were 'bundles of political forces'.[7] Price argued that faction was the only form of political organisation which was 'available for party objectives'.[8] Pollmann's explanations, on the other hand, revealed the operation of simultaneous forces from the top (as a Union of Provinces) and bottom (as city and provincial governments) that advocated the need to maintain the much-needed harmony and stability in the Republic. An entirely decentralised system as modelled by Roorda would have had otherwise resulted in friction and disintegration. Prak too argued along this line. According to him, the system of decentralised governance worked for a Republican setting where the provinces could act in unison in the face of external threats and could turn their attention to local squabbling once the crisis had been dealt with. These narratives altered the way of seeing the political arrangement of the Republic as a regressive system and a continuation of the traditional set-up inherited from Burgundian and Habsburg times, to eventually seeing it as something very 'modern'.

Such debates sprang from the need to understand how well the political rearrangement following the establishment of the United Provinces worked. The question of sovereignty

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1961); J.L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Judith Pollmann, "Eendracht maakt macht: Stedelijke cultuuridealen en politieke werkelijkheid in de Republiek," in *Harmonie in Holland: Het poldermodel van 1500 tot nu*, eds. Dennis Bos, Maurits Ebben, and Henk te Velde (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2007), 134–51; Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age*, trans. Dianne Webb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[7] Roorda, *Partij en factie*, 3-4. For explanations and debates on the term 'party' see, Michel Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists and "Good Government": Popular Political Opposition during the "Year of Disaster" 1672 in Dutch Pamphlets," *The Seventeenth Century* 23, no. 2 (Autumn 2008): 317–18; Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 47.

[8] Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 66.

remained a contested affair in the seventeenth century.[9] At the central level, sovereignty was exercised in the name of the States-General – a body comprising delegates from all the provinces that convened in The Hague. The delegates representing the seven provinces collaborated to discuss matters of war and peace and finance in the Republic as and when it was required, along with the *stadhouders*. To assist with the administration of the States-General, a *Raad van Staat* (the Council of State) existed whose functions evolved gradually and included certain executive tasks such as managing the finances of the *Generaliteit*, controlling the army and making supreme military decisions as well as exercising the judicial powers of the *Generaliteit*.[10] This Council consisted of twelve ordinary provincial delegates – three from Holland, two each from Friesland, Zeeland, and Gelderland and one each from the rest of the provinces, including the *stadhouders*. Besides this, there was the *Generaliteits Rekenkamer* (the Accounts-Chamber of the States-General) meant for controlling the finances of the revenue from the Generality lands. There was also the *Generaliteits Muntkamer* (the Minting-Chamber of the States-General) for keeping the economy of the Republic stable with standard weights ascribed to all the provincial currencies. The States-General also demanded accountability of the Admiralty colleges located in Amsterdam (Holland), Rotterdam (South Holland), Hoorn and Enkhuizen (the North Quarter), Middelburg (Zeeland) and Dokkum till 1645, and afterwards in Harlingen (Friesland), although their delegates came from all the cities and sometimes from other provinces. These colleges regulated all shipping, naval, customs and other sea-related decisions and policies under the States-General.

At the provincial level, there were separate political arrangements for the different provinces of the Republic. In this dissertation, I will however focus on Holland and pay particular attention to Amsterdam as the core of the analysis. The reason for choosing Holland

[9] The concept of sovereignty and where it should lie had been a subject of constant debate in the seventeenth century Dutch political forum. Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 41–44.

[10] The *Generaliteitslanden* (the lands of the Generality) included States Flanders, States Brabant, Maastricht and the Overmaas (added in 1632), Wedde-Westerwolde and States Upper Gelderland (i.e. Roermond and Venlo added in 1713). Between 1597 and 1605, Lingen was counted among the Generality Lands. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Publishers, 1995), 297.

lies in its obvious dominance in terms of its political and financial power in the Republic for the seventeenth century.[11] Holland's financial might stemming from its urban trade and steady taxation implied that even though it had to bear the burden of the greatest share in the finances of the *Generaliteit*, its earnings were still higher than the other provinces (except Zeeland, a close competitor), dependent on agriculture.[12] The States of Holland's physical proximity to the States-General in The Hague where all governmental business was executed also added to its advantage.[13] Within the provincial government, the States of Holland also had its own permanent council called the *Gecommitteerde Raden* (Commissioned Council) that met on a regular basis to sort out its legal, military and financial matters. Besides this, there was the *Raadspensionaris* or the Grand Pensionary (former Advocate of Holland) who acted as an advisor to the States of Holland and was also the spokesperson for the delegation sent from Holland to the States-General. He could in theory hold a tenure of five years and had a considerable say in the political setting of the Republic.[14]

At the local level, there were separate city governments for several cities within a particular province which were represented in the different States of all the Provinces. For Holland, there were the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, Delft, Dordrecht and so on, each having their own representative government. Most of them also voted separately in the States of Holland.[15] Besides this, there was the *ridderschap* (the council of nobles) which too enjoyed a single vote along with the cities. Every city government had a council called the *vroedschap* or *raad* (in Amsterdam there was the *vroedschap*). The members had tenure for life and

[11] To understand how Holland influenced the Union of the Republic see, Boogman, "The Union of Utrecht"; Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism*, 47–48.
[12] Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, 131, 176–77; Israel, *The Dutch Republic, 1477-1806*, 287.
[13] Paul Knevel, *Het Haagse Bureau: 17de-eeuwse ambtenaren tussen staatsbelang en eigenbelang* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverijen Promotheus/ Bert Bakker, 2001), 11.
[14] For more on this position of the *raadspensionaris* or Grand Pensionary see, Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, 183.
[15] Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 19.

fulfilled several functions.[16] Most members usually started out with local administrative offices like that of the *weesmeesters* (members of *weeskamer* administering estates of minor orphans), *kerkmeesters* (the church-overseers), tax collectors and so on, until some of them climbed up to higher positions like that of the *burgemeester*. Most of the judicial and executive powers was vested in the organisation of the *gerecht* (loosely translated as magistracy) that consisted of the *burgemeesters* (burgomasters), the *schout* and the *schepenen* (the aldermen). Each city usually had more than one *burgemeester,* each serving for one or two years and then being ineligible for the office for a similar period.[17] In Amsterdam, the *burgemeesters* had relatively greater power than the *vroedschap,* unlike some other cities such as Rotterdam. The *schepenen* constituted the body responsible for managing the civil and criminal law courts of the cities that were further subordinated to the Provincial Court of Holland (*Hof van Holland, Zeeland and West-Friesland*) and the Supreme Court (*Hoge Raad*), both located in The Hague.

Many ambitious young men trying to make a career in bureaucracy were often known to start off as jurists in minor cities before occupying suitable positions in the *vroedschap* and aiming for the office of *burgemeester*. The *schout* combined the role of the police and the public prosecutor and was responsible for bringing criminals and other prosecuted offenders before the *schepenbank* (a court of law that held office for two years, half of whom were replaced annually to maintain a balance between change and continuity). Every city also had their *pensionaris* (the senior city councillor) and a few secretaries. The delegations from the cities to the States of Holland were accompanied by their *pensionarissen*. These delegates could only give their decisions in the States of Holland according to how they had been instructed by their respective city authorities (*ruggespraak*).[18] If new situations arose where fresh decisions had to be made, the delegates had to refer back to their city governments before any further announcements could be made in the States' assemblies. The *raadspensionaris* would at the end sum up all the decisions made by the

[16] Prak, 171.
[17] Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic,* 26.
[18] Price, 12.

ridderschap and the city councils in the States of Holland, after voting sessions on a particular issue had been conducted.

Within Holland, Amsterdam was one of the most important cities to affect the decisions of the States of Holland. But Marjolien 't Hart argues that there were other cities which were important in certain other respects like that of The Hague as a political centre, or Leiden as a cultural centre.[19] Moreover, the fact that all the cities had equal votes in the States of Holland meant that they too had the power to assert their influence, along with Amsterdam. But significant gaps in the system still left Amsterdam with relatively greater advantages. Decisions in the States of Holland, for example, were not required to be taken unanimously and motions could be passed with a majority vote.[20] In this respect, Amsterdam's huge trading profits and tax income gave it a dominant position to make decisions vis-à-vis the other cities. As a leading investor in the commercial space, it often also enjoyed an edge in the political deliberations, because of the support of smaller cities that were dependent on Amsterdam. With plenty of power and money at its heart, the province of Holland with powerful cities like Amsterdam and political centres like The Hague were in the ascendant regarding the public image of politics and the accompanying discussions on administrative corruption.

The office of the *stadhouder* (stadholder) emerged from the residue of the previous Habsburg government. The person holding this office was supposed to function at the central level but was appointed and approved by the provinces. Though initially there were three *stadhouders*, this number was soon reduced to two. The one was the *stadhouder* of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht (as also of Overijssel and Gelderland) and the other represented Friesland and Groningen (and in certain periods of time of Drenthe as well). Throughout the seventeenth century, the *stadhouders* of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht were from the House of Orange –

[19] Marjolien 't Hart, "Intercity Rivalries and the Making of the Dutch State," in *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800*, eds. Charles Tilly and Wim P. Blockmans (Boulder (Co.): Westview Press, 1994), 196–217.

[20] Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, 171–72.

Maurits van Oranje-Nassau, Frederik Hendrik van Oranje, Willem II and Willem III van Oranje-Nassau.[21] As regards the power of the *stadhouder*, he was the captain-general of the army in the Republic. He also had the power to appoint *schepenen* from the list of nominations sent to him by the *vroedschap* of certain cities in the province of Holland although this did not include Amsterdam and differed from one city to another. The *stadhouder* also enjoyed the privilege of attending the meetings of the States of Provinces, if he wished to at any time. Ölaf Morke has argued that the *stadhouder's* courtly culture and his pompous residence represented almost a princely presence in the midst of a Republic.[22] Others like Jill Stern showed that the Orangists consciously resorted to a propaganda that used the rhetoric of the *stadhouder* as 'the guardian of the principles of the state', much like that of a monarchy.[23]

Thus, in summing up the political situation of the Dutch Republic, one can say that it was a combination of a Republic with traces of princely rule. Formally, it was designed as a decentralised system where the States-General exercised the highest authority in matters of war and peace and finance of all the provinces while acting as the custodian of the *Generaliteitslanden* and other Dutch overseas settlements.[24] All provinces and city governments therefore had their individual say, though certain cities and provinces enjoyed greater political and commercial advantages over the others. Within this set-up, the office of the *stadhouder* operated as a significant political tool of monarchical reminiscence within the Republic. Informally, however, the Republic was able to respond as a single territory with patriotic sentiments in times of crisis, despite its regular decentralised structure. Within this complex of governance, there were the elite regents functioning on the Republic's political forum who were the main movers and

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[21] For the seventeenth century, the *stadhouders* of Friesland and Groningen were Willem Lodewijk van Nassau-Dillenburg, Maurits van Nassau, Ernst Casimir and Hendrik Casimir I van Nassau-Dietz, Frederik Hendrik van Oranje, Willem II van Oranje-Nassau, Willem Frederik van Nassau-Dietz, Hendrik Casimir II and Johan Willem Friso van Nassau-Dietz.

[22] Ölaf Morke, "William III's Stadholderly Court in the Dutch Republic," in *Redefining William III: The Impact of the King-Stadholder in International Context*, eds. Esther Mijers and David Onnekink (Aldershot etc.: Ashgate, 2007), 227–40.

[23] Jill Stern, "The Rhetoric of Popular Orangism, 1650-72," *Historical Research* 77, no. 196 (May 2004): 224.

[24] See glossary of Dutch administrative terms at the end for *Generaliteitslanden*.

shakers and cut across all institutional boundaries. This is elaborated in the next section where their roles have been dealt with in greater detail. Oebele Vries has pointed out that the administration was generally split into a hierarchy of officials – comprising those regents that formed the highest elite group (*regentenambten)*, followed by lower subordinate public servants (*dienende ambten*), the labouring or working groups (*arbeidsambten)* and the rest serving in the remaining smaller offices *(overige ambten)*.[25] It is especially the group of high-ranking officials that this dissertation focuses on, while discussing corruption in the Republic's political administration.

Patronage and Factions

While the above structure clearly indicates that it was the cities and their regents that formed the core of the Dutch political system, it also reminds us of yet another greater force that went beyond these institutions. This was the system of patronage in the elite society that tied together friends and families who went on to form political factions within the administration of the Republic. These factions were responsible for the entire system working the way it did in seventeenth-century Dutch politics. How were these factions formed? There were no written rules that can help us to answer this question. It was not until the time that the 'contracts of correspondence' came to be formally recognised during the tenure of the *stadhouder*, Willem III that the existence of patronage among administrative officials was openly acknowledged.[26] These contracts formally allowed privileged families to have offices reserved for their family members and friends within the administrative apparatus. But the practice had been persisting all along, prior to the official implementation of these contracts. Distributing administrative positions to one's friends and family members as factions was the usual practice for the time among the wealthy regent families. According to Julia Adams, these familial factions were so powerful and crucial to the politico-economic developments of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, that

[25] Cited from Michel Hoenderboom, "Scandals, Politics and Patronage: Corruption and Public Values in the Netherlands (1650-1747)" (PhD diss., Vrije University, 2013), 44.
[26] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 837; Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 25.

they deserve a separate status of political institutions alongside other elements of state formation. Adams called these family units as symbolising the rule of patriarchal patrilineal relations.[27]

Strategic friendships and family alliances formed the core of factionalism and were the mainstay of all relations in elite society. Friendships bore special meanings and implications and so did families containing members connected by blood ties. These people as members of a political faction were obliged to share common ideological affiliations, wealth, honour and status in order to acquire recommendations and offices in the political administration of the Republic.[28] By virtue of this norm, families with fathers, brothers, uncles, in-laws, nephews and cousins were related not only by blood but were also connected as colleagues, spread around the government machinery in different positions. Often intermarriage among the families of good friends turned friendships into extended familial factions. In trying to stress the importance of building strategic marriage alliances, a certain regent's remark from the *vroedschap* of Delft in the eighteenth century revealed the denigrated worth of women in these political families. He once supposedly said in jest – 'My little niece carries a place on the city council under her skirt'.[29] An official would expect his friend to establish marriage links with his family members and exchange favours in return. A 'friend' in the seventeenth century was, therefore, a 'friend' with 'benefits' (*uitwisselen*

[27] Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism*, 9.

[28] Similar ideological affinities in factions were connected to religious choices as well. On the extent of its practical implications in the Republic, there have been studies about the Dutch 'religious' tolerance in the seventeenth century that emphasised the *stadhouders'* and the prominent regents' informal connections with Catholics and other non-Calvinist groups. See, Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 600. For the policies of tolerance on paper and their practical implications throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see, Judith Pollmann, "From Freedom of Conscience to Confessional Segregation? Religious Choice and Toleration in the Dutch Republic," in *Persecution and Pluralism: Calvinists and Relgiious Minorities in the Early Modern Europe, 1550-1700,* eds. Richard J. Bonney and David J.B. Trim (Oxford: Peter Land, 2006), 123–48. Scholars who have highlighted the limitations of tolerance include, Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad: immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in de 17e-eeuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005); Benjamin Kaplan, "'Dutch' Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision," in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8–26.

[29] Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism*, 86.

van diensten), where 'reciprocity' (*wederkerigheid*) was the underlining factor that kept friendships stable and ongoing.[30]

Building a career in the bureaucratic circles became increasingly important in the course of the century as trade and business began to be pushed to the background in favour of university-educated professions.[31] In fact, a kind of combined training of accounting along with political and juridical learning became the trend.[32] This gave a further thrust to the competition for gaining administrative offices as a serious career. Under such circumstances, strategic cultivation of friendships turned out to be even more crucial. This meant that friends and families allied with a certain faction protected each other's jobs, wealth, repute, social image and shared the fruits of their labour. But there were several of these factions vying for their own self-interests and it could not have been all very happy and cordial. And it was indeed not so! Every time a vacancy appeared in the administration, all the factions had their eyes on it as everyone wanted to install their own men in that vacant post. It resulted in intense factional strife which made it difficult to persist without collective support. Solidarity acted as a defence or a social wall against this factional infighting in the political arena.

However, there were disadvantages and risks involved in this venture as well. Factional solidarity did not necessarily always accrue profit but could also result in loss. If a family or a faction lost its position in the government, it would mean that all the members would run the risk of being disqualified from holding advantageous positions. Opponent factions would then try to block their access to all offices and power bases. Without wealth and connections, the abandoned family would gradually lose its former status and influence. It was a game of political power where groups or factions had either the opportunity to rise together or the ill-fate to fall and lose it all. This, therefore, called for a strategic bonding coupled with calculated moves. It

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[30] Luuc Kooijmans, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1997), 326–27.

[31] Maarten Prak, "Loopbaan en carrière in de Gouden Eeuw," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27, no. 2 (Jan. 2012): 130–40.

[32] Jacob Soll, "Accounting for Government: Holland and the Rise of Political Economy in Seventeenth-Century Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 2 (Autumn 2009): 221.

does not however suggest that every member in a faction would have had to forego his position, if their opponent factions became dominant in the political space. It just meant that the older members, belonging to rival factions, were stripped of the protection offered by a defensive wall of their friends and families and were left vulnerable on the losing side. What also needs to be noted is that these factional bonds were certainly imposing, but not always unbreakable and rigid. Though not a frequent occurrence, members of factions did sometimes change sides. Strategic switching from older factions to new ones also occurred during periods of political crisis, when the powerholders had to be all the more careful about taking sides. Luuc Kooijmans, therefore, quite rightly named this 'the art of survival' to be mastered by the seventeenth- and the eighteenth-century elites.[33]

Perceptions of Administrative Corruption

The governing machinery in the Republic was, thus, a combination of formally decentralised institutions with a parallel system of patronage and factionalism that made personal relations extremely important in the political apparatus of the Republic. It was this given political set-up, along with the functional rules and regulations of right administrative behaviour that eventually went on to shape perceptions of administrative corruption. One can begin with the basic question of whether the word 'corruption' existed at all in the seventeenth-century Dutch vocabulary. The word '*corruptie*', in itself, existed in Dutch as early as the Middle Ages (almost as early as the twelfth century), and probably had been in use throughout the subsequent years.[34] It goes without saying however that its meaning and context differed in all these years. In the seventeenth century, one comes across this word having varying socio-political connotations,

[33] Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*.

[34] See the word '*corruptie*' in *De geïntegreerde taal-bank: Historische woordenboek op internet*. There is further no comprehensive study done as of yet on the terminology and its varying context in the 'medieval' and 'early-modern' periods.

though often not freed from religious rhetoric.[35] An early version of a Dutch to English dictionary dating from the year 1648 gave the translated meaning of the word *corruptie* in English as corruption or dissolution.[36] In 1668, this had become more concrete acquiring a particular administrative connotation, as is evident from the dictionary of Adriaan Koerbagh compiled in that year. It provides synonyms for the word *corruptie* which loosely translates to bribery, violation and the act of corrupting or *corrumperen* by bribing someone with money or misleading someone with gifts for committing misdeeds.[37] In 1669, L. Meijers *Woordenschat* also clarifies '*corruptie*' as '*verderving*' (closest possible translation as depravity) and '*omkooping*' (bribery). In the administrative papers of the regents and in the pamphlets, the word *corruptie* came to be associated closely with other words like '*omkooperij*' (bribery), '*defraudatie*' (fraud), '*fraude*' (fraud), '*maleversatie*' (malpractice), '*kuiperij*' (machinations) and '*mesuse*' (misuse), all of which indicated misdeeds related to pecuniary matters.[38] Being 'corrupt' definitely implied a pejorative meaning, as can be discerned from the set of words used for its remedy, such as '*redres*' (redress) or '*reforme*' (reform).[39]

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[35] I have checked for the word '*corruptie*' in the available databases (dbnl.org, dutchpamphletsonline including the Knuttel and Van Alphen collections) for Dutch literature in the seventeenth century. Till 1650, they tend to be used mostly in the religious context when the author condemns the act of not abiding by his religious views as corruption of the body or soul. At other times, it is used in the context of bodily sickness as corruption or decay of some body part. The first time it appears in a strong political and administrative context is in the *Deductie* of Jan de Witt as '*incorrupte regeering'* (incorrupt government) and later in the work of Pieter de la Court called *Interest van Holland*, ofte gronden van Hollands-Welvaren in 1662. Pieter de la Court, *Interest van Holland, ofte gronde van Hollands-Welvaren* (Amsterdam: Joan Cyprianus van der Gracht, 1662), 5r.

[36] Hendry Hexham, *Het groot woorden-boeck: Gestelt in 't Nederduytsch, ende in't Engelsch* (Rotterdam: Arnout Leers, 1648), 663.

[37] '*Corrumperen*, omkoopen, omkoopen iemant met geld, of iemant door giften en gaaven verleyden, en verblinden, om tot sijn vermeeten te komen; *Corrumperen*, bederven, schenden'; '*Corruptele*, een kwaade invoering, omkooping; *Corruptele*, een verderving, schending, bederf'; '*Corruptie*, een verderving, bederving, schending; *Corruptie*, omkooping.' See, Adriaan Koerbagh, *Een bloemhof van allerley lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet geplant door Vreederijk Waarmond, ondersoeker der waarheyd, tot nu en dienst van al die geen die der nut en dienst uyt trekken wil* (Amsterdam: Adriaan Koerbagh, 1668), 204-05.

[38] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Copy of the instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik van Reede, lord of Mijdrecht, appointed as the commissioner of Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon etc. in Amsterdam, 1684: f. 4v and 5r. For the word '*kuypery'* also see, Anonymous, *Doodt-Stuypen van d'Heer Cornelis Musch* (1646), page not numbered.

[39] NL-HaNA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Concept of the redressal of Company affairs as had been put forward by Coenraad van Beuningen, 1687: folios not numbered.

But to understand what precisely was perceived as corrupt, one can begin by referring to the officially approved rules for regulating proper administrative behaviour. It is important to note in this context, that perceiving 'corruption' was a socio-political process beyond the technicalities of the legal domain. The written laws of course represented the ideal standards of moral behaviour and in cases of corruption charges, the judicial courts could only work with reference to the violation of these written laws.[40] This meant that the accused officials could be tried or found guilty of committing illegal acts in the judicial sphere. These illegal deeds got translated under the broader term 'corruption', as it was recognisable in the socio-political sphere. Illegal acts in the form of violation of formal rules were therefore identified as immoral behaviour and condemned as corruption in the social space. Even today in the Netherlands, there is no direct concept of corruption in the Dutch formal legal system.[41] Using the written laws as a parameter naturally did not mean that non-compliance with them always amounted to immediate corruption allegations. But they at least provided the window through which one could see what was likely to be perceived as corrupt and illegal in seventeenth-century Dutch administration.

The oaths sworn by the high officials while assuming their offices in this respect, provided a clear idea of the standards of administrative behaviour. Such oaths were directed against two explicit prohibitions that set the boundaries of (im)propriety while acknowledging the possibility of corruption. The oaths forbade - (a) undue favouritism in the distribution of offices and (b) the accepting of gifts as a favour for administrative services. The oath to be taken by all the ambassadors and other ministers in the States-General in 1651 contained the following lines – 'I promise and swear that before entering this office, I have not accepted or enjoyed, and that during the tenure of this office and after the signing of this contract, shall not accept any gifts or presents directly or indirectly offered (to me) in questionable or unquestionable

[40] Pieter Wagenaar, "Extortion and Abuse of Power in the Dutch Republic: The Case of Bailiff Lodewijk van Alteren," *International Journal of Public Administration* 34, no. 11 (Aug. 2011): 731–40.

[41] For discussions on law and corruption see, Torsello and Venard, "The Anthropology of Corruption," 25–27.

ways…'.[42] Other oaths to be sworn by officials like the *schout,* the *schepenen* and the *secretaris* also contained similar duties – 'I swear…to help in the preservation and the administration of law and justice, and to the best of my ability help the gentlemen and their officials to get verdicts; without taking advantage (of them) through any reward, favour or partiality, nor to accept any gifts and presents for this, and to respect the (limitations caused by) family relations and friendships, and further to do here everything…'.[43] The oath of the *essaijeur-generaal* (expert on the gold and silver purity of currency) of the United Provinces read as, 'I swear…to maintain and fulfil my duties, without having to accept or amplify in any way from the above-mentioned merchants or others, by virtue of my aforementioned office, any gifts, presents or instructions, and not exercise the powers of my aforementioned office to grant undue favours or harm anyone.'[44] Thus, abstinence from monetary gifts and familial favours was seen as the official ethos, which made bribery and nepotism acts of corruption.

But this constructed image of morality had to suit the political system of the Republic that was a mix of allegiances at different levels – at a personal or city level, a provincial level or finally to the 'fatherland' represented by the States-General. Quite obviously therefore, in a system based on patronage and factional alliances, the ideal of non-favouritism clashed with the regular norm of appointments based on personal relations. In order to deal with this, the written

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[42] '*Ik belove ende sweere dat ick, voor't aengaen vande handelinge niet en hebbe genomen nochte genooten, dat ick gedruijrende deselve mochte oock naer het besluijt van het tractaet, niet en sal nemen oft genieten eenige giften ofte presenten directelijk of indirectlijk op eeniger manieren bedenkelijk oft onbedenkelijck maer dat ick ter contrarie bij aldien…so waerlijck moet mij Godt Almachtigh helpen.*'
NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, inv. nr. 12532, Applications of the oath of the men who were to make contracts on behalf of the States-General with ambassadors of foreign kings, Republics, princes, aristocrats and other lords etc., 23 February, 1651: folios not numbered.

[43] '*Ick sweere…het recht en justitie helpen besitten en administeren, en near mijne besten verstande ter manisse des heeren offt sijnen officieren helpen vonnis raemen; sonder daer in te gebruijcken eenigh port, faveur ofte partialiteijt, giften ofte gaven dienthalven te nemen, maegschap off vrientschappe te respecteren, en voort alhier des geene te doen, …*'
NA, Staten-Generaal, inv. nr. 12532, Oath of the *schepenen* (aldermen) of Delft, not dated: f. 49r.

[44] '*Ick sweere…onderhouden en volbrengen, sonder dat ik in eenige manieren van de voorn. Cooplieden ofte anderen uijt vorsake van mijn voorsc officie eenige gifte gaven ofte gelasten zal moeten neemen ofte amptieren bij de welke ik in't exerceeren van mijn voorsc. officie ymant soude mogen favoureren ofte agterdeel doen,…*'
NA, Staten-Generaal, inv. nr. 12532, Oath of the *essaijeur-generaal* of the United Provinces of Netherlands, not dated: folios not numbered.

regulations found a way through its invention of skills required for government work. These skills were mostly based on the personal character traits of potential candidates. Along with basic university training; experience, honour, industriousness and the humanist virtues of honesty and integrity were considered important for determining an official's skill and administrative capability.[45] On a certain occasion, the Amsterdam *burgemeester*, Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen (Jr.) was requested by his sister, Constantia to grant her brother-in-law, Coenraat van Westerhoff an administrative position. But after every opportunity of offering a position to Coenraat failed because of Coenraat's own irresponsible behaviour, Huydecoper became reluctant to vouch for Coenraat's character. Despite persistent pressure from Constantia and her husband, Huydecoper wrote back telling Constantia that he would see to it that the number of rogues in Amsterdam was not increased, which is why he would not give Coenraat a job.[46] Govert Brasser succeeded Johan van Goch, as the *thesaurier-generaal* (the official in charge of the treasury of the States-General) but despite having the required professional skills and training, he still had to survive several political intrigues before gaining his position.[47] Jacob Cats, the politician and poet from Zeeland, served in the position of the *raadspensionaris* and had all the right family connections. But his administrative abilities were questioned by many and praised by others.[48] Willem Frederik van Nassau-Dietz, the *stadhouder* of Friesland had to dismiss Cornelis Haubois from his office since his fellow regents complained of his character.[49] There was thus space for the recognition of skills but these skills were often influenced by private contacts and personal character traits, rather than by adopting our 'modern'-day eligibility criteria of merit and

[45] M.P. Hoenderboom and A.D.N. Kerkhoff, "Corruption and Capability in the Dutch Republic: The Case of Lodewijk Huygens (1676)," *Public Voices* 10, no. 2 (2008): 9–10, 19–21; Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten, and Michel Reinders, "Introduction," in *Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic*, eds. Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten, and Michel Reinders (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 1–19.
[46] Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 141–43.
[47] Knevel, *Het Haagse bureau*, 59.
[48] Knevel, 153.
[49] Geert H. Janssen, "Patronage en corruptie: Publieke en private rollen van een stadhouder in de Republiek," *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 2, no. 4 (Dec. 2005): 54.

open competition. The political arrangement of factional alliances also ensured the retaining of the practice of gift-giving as an essential part of maintaining contacts. But the existing bribery rules acquired new connotations that prohibited the direct exchange of money as a favour for the execution of administrative tasks.[50]

Corruption, as such, formed the flip side to loyalty in the Dutch Republic.[51] Loyalty to the States-General and the 'fatherland' as well as to different provinces and cities was defined by written rules in the public forum. But the informal existence of patronage relations also necessitated loyalty to friends and factions in practice. Loyalty was thus to be manifested through adherence to both the written rules as well as the unwritten norms, necessitated by the governing structure of the Republic. The ability to strike a balance between these loyalties was proof of an official's skills and administrative calibre. Individual moral character in this process came to be regarded as an integral part of governmental ethics, along with professional skills for holding administrative positions. Being 'corrupt' thus implied resorting to favouritism and bribery which was being disloyal to the formal institutional rules, while also being disloyal to informal factional allies and benefactors. The perception of 'corruption' as it emerged was, therefore, juxtaposed to a complex governmental ethos of multiple loyalties shaped by the incongruous rules and political structure of the Republic. But this inevitably led to complications when corruption allegations were made. There were occasions when situations turned ugly, triggering accusations of bribery or nepotism against certain officials. But the question that remained was, when and why were these accusations made in the Dutch Republic. Under what circumstances, did certain actions come to be regarded as 'corrupt'? Finding an answer to this has been the most confusing part of studying administrative corruption in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, a problem which has given rise to an increase in the number of researches on corruption in recent years.

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[50] See Knevel, *Het Haagse bureau*, 146–47, 162–63.

[51] Michiel van Groesen and Judith Pollmann, "Inleiding," in *Het gelijk van de Gouden Eeuw: Recht, onrecht en reputatie in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden*, eds. Judith Pollmann and Michiel van Groesen (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 9.

Debates on Corruption and Uses of its Allegations

In their introduction to the special issue on corruption in the 'pre-modern' Netherlands entitled 'Corruptie in de Nederlanden, 1400-1800', Pieter Wagenaar, Otto van der Meij and Manon van der Heijden argued that it was the informal norms rather than formal laws that determined (un)acceptable administrative behaviour.[52] When these norms were violated, allegations of corruption were raised in the Republic. Separate case studies by other authors, such as Michel Hoenderboom and Toon Kerkhoff who worked on the project, 'The Genesis of Public Values', also used this idea of the violation of informal norms as the reason for corruption accusations. In their case study on Lodewijk Huygens (the *schout* of Gorinchem), they showed how norms or shop-floor codes, as discussed by Simon Hoetjes, could be used for studying the situation of corruption in the 'early-modern' Dutch Republic. Hoetjes named four sources – formal legal codes, public opinion, the best opinion and morality of the time and shop-floor codes for use as analytical tools in studying corruption.[53] Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff placed these elements on a spectrum, placing the legal codes on the one end and public opinion and best opinion on the other. The legal code as formal laws, they argued, were not sufficient to be used to study corruption in the Republic since most of the time such laws were imprecise and not always put into practice. The pamphlets and philosophies representing public opinion and best opinion, on the other hand, reflected the 'ideal' situation but did not portray what happened in practice. In between the two ends of this spectrum, they located the 'shop-floor' codes or what they called norms, as the real standards linking theory and practice. These codes of conduct, according to them, determined the limits of acceptable official behaviour in public service. The subsequent violation of these codes led to the eruption of corruption allegations. Hoenderboom and

[52] Wagenaar, Meij, and Heijden, "Corruptie in de Nederlanden," 3–21.
[53] See for the NWO project, http://www.nwo.nl/onderzoek-en-resultaten/onderzoeksprojecten/i/04/2104.html, accessed 30 December, 2017; Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff, "Corruption and Capability," 7–24.

Kerkhoff showed how Lodewijk Huygens actually transgressed these shop-floor codes or norms that led to his exposure as a corrupt official in the public space.

In the Dutch administrative space, there were several unwritten practices which could qualify as shop-floor codes or norms. Regents, for instance, were often used to making payments through private money which needs to be distinguished from the usual practices of gift-giving.[54] Appointment of officials and rotation of their offices were usually made on the basis of seniority.[55] Shop-floor norms also complemented the inadequacy of a not so well-formulated and incomplete written code of rules. Hoenderboom in his dissertation 'Scandal, Politics and Patronage' took this standard of shop-floor codes further.[56] Using five cases of corruption accusations against officials in the Dutch Republic who were working between the 1630s and 1750, he argued that it was the transgression of 'shop-floor' codes that actually brought these officials to their ruin.

As Hoenderboem and Kerkhoff argued, such shop-floor codes included appointment by patronage based on unwritten norms of seniority and rotation. Besides this, for Amsterdam, much like other cities, there were the *verboden graden* (forbidden grades) which did not allow certain candidates and officials of specific blood relations to be considered for appointment in the city council.[57] It is conceivable that if these norms were violated, the daily functioning of patronage would suffer a rude intervention and trigger accusations of undue favouritism from fellow officials. Similarly, Geert H. Janssen in his work – 'Patronage en corruptie' – provided a means of distinguishing the accepted norms from the unacceptable, by using the practice of gift-giving and the patronage system as an indicator.[58] He concluded that as long as gifts were not big and conspicuous and did not involve money directly, they were acceptable. This was an

[54] Knevel, *Haagse bureau*, 162-63.
[55] Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff, "Corruption and Capability," 17-18.
[56] Hoenderboom, "Scandals, Politics and Patronage".
[57] Jan Wagenaar, *Amsterdam in zyne opkomst, aanwas, geschiedenissen, voorregten, koophandel, gebouwen, kerkenstaat, schoolen, schutterye, gilden en regeeringe*, vol. 12 (Amsterdam: Yntema and Tieboel, 1768), 24.
[58] Janssen, "Patronage en corruptie".

unwritten norm and accusations of bribery appeared only when such norms were broken. But in the private space these norms did not apply.

Regarding patronage, Janssen showed how the *stadhouder* of Friesland, Willem Frederik van Nassau-Dietz had to act against his own clients who were charged with corruption by the other regents. He needed to do this to prove himself a good patron. The moment a client broke the traditions and norms of public administration, he could be labelled as corrupt which could in turn jeopardise his patron's position as well. Patronage, therefore, also operated in a way that regulated the preservation of norms in public administration. Violation of these norms provoked corruption charges. The alternate argument that was added to the argument of violation of norms was by Pieter Wagenaar again, through his case study of 'Hugo van Arckel, Dike Warden of the Krimpenerwaard'.[59] Wagenaar proved that the violation of norms was not always the underlying factor for the initiation of corruption charges against certain officials. As Van Arckel's case failed to fit into the explanation regarding the violation of norms, Wagenaar explained it in the light of the changing political and military context in which Van Arckel was operating. Van Arckel's measures of compensating for a shortage of money through additional taxes was not exposed as corrupt (even though they violated the formal rules) as long as the political situation in the Republic preserved his patron's power. With the fall of this patron in a politically changing environment, Van Arckel's opponents began to allege that his actions too were corrupt, which culminated in his downfall.

While various scholars have concentrated on different theories and methodological approaches to describe the practice of corruption, little attention has been paid to the political situation within the Republic of this time. Given that it was riddled with factional infighting, intense competition for career-building, unstable political situations, and multiple loyalties to provinces, cities, individual patrons, families and friends, the chances were high that these factors

[59] Pieter Wagenaar, "Classical Corruption: Hugo van Arckel, Dike Warden of the Krimpenerwaard, and the Corruption of His Time," *Public Voices* 10, no. 2 (2008): 44–57.

affected the rise of corruption allegations from time to time. To provide a complementary argument therefore, I would propose that the use of corruption allegations was a political tool in the Dutch administration that triggered its growing importance in political discourse. Factional rivalries in fact played a significant role in accusing one's political opponent of being corrupt. It paved the way for perceiving corruption in a way that merged personal disloyalty with general disloyalty towards the Republic and its political institutions.

The Political Use of Administrative Corruption

Competing factions, as I will argue here, used corruption charges against their political opponents in order to oust them from their administrative positions. A show of legitimacy was preserved in this manner where opponents were first discredited openly as inefficient administrators and then removed from their offices with a valid reason. It was precisely during this process of framing corruption charges that the boundaries of what could be called corrupt became stretched or retracted. Not surprisingly then, the legal sentences passed by the provincial courts or the supreme court were often printed and circulated as political pamphlets for the general audience to refer to as precedents in the future.[60] This mechanism of using corruption allegations as a political tool, in fact, sustained the entire political system of the Republic that was ridden with factional discord. But how was it all implemented? Every time a member or members of a particular faction were accused of corruption, the charges mostly emanated from the members of the opposing faction. The intention of the plaintiffs was to remove the accused from their offices or to stain their character by calling into question their administrative capability. Collecting evidence or manipulating people would have been easier, if the dominant faction had had greater support in the political institutions. The goal of the opposing faction was then to install their own men in these same offices in order to wield greater political power in the

[60] Hoenderboom, "Scandals, Politics and Patronage," 111; Roeland Harms, "Thievery of Literature. Consequences of the Interaction between Politics and Commerce for the Form and Content of Pamphlets," in *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*, eds. Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 42–44.

administrative machinery. The threat to personal reputation made favouritism work, if not always smoothly, yet reasonably well to make change possible in the political sphere.

Before providing examples to establish this point further, it is important to mention J. L. Price's work on Holland's factional politics revolving around the crisis years. He has, for instance, given an account of how in 1618, 1650 and 1672, the process of factional infighting led to the toppling of men from a politically less advantageous faction by their opponents, who replaced them in better political positions.[61] He first talked about 1618 when Prince Maurits as the *stadhouder* came into conflict with the *landsadvocaat* of the States, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. This conflict was limited not just to these two prominent political figures of the Republic but extended to their factions as well. Consequently, when Van Oldenbarnevelt was executed as a traitor, the men closest to him in his faction were also removed from their positions and Maurits' men took over the government. The entire trial was more of a political show rather than a just jury judging Van Oldenbarnevelt. After 1650, when the Republic had no suitable *stadhouder* and the *raadspensionaris* Johan de Witt along with his brother Cornelis de Witt had taken over political power, his faction appealed for the removal of the office of *stadhouder*. Men who were allies to the former *stadhouders* Frederik Hendrik and Willem II now belonged to the opposing faction of the De Witt brothers and attempts were made to remove them from office. Most offices in the States of Holland, consequently begun to be occupied by the De Witt family members and friends. After the political turmoil of 1672 when the Republic had survived the blows of French, English and German invasions; the tables were turned. The *stadhouder*'s office was resumed by Willem III and the regime of the De Witt brothers came to a terrible end with their political murder in The Hague. The factions that were closer to the *stadhouder* now resurfaced in the political institutions and held important administrative offices, while most of the men from De Witt's faction were removed.

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[61] Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 40–45.

It is to some extent using this analysis of Price that I attempt to show that corruption allegations started to play a prominent role in the game of factions. Most of the time such allegations of corruption were used by the winning faction against its opponents to discount them of their administrative capability. Van Oldenbarnevelt's execution was provoked by allegations of treason and partly of corruption raised by his political rivals. They blamed Van Oldenbarnevelt for siding with the Catholic French against the hard-won Calvinistic faith, which according to them was the 'true religion' of the Dutch population. He was accused of bribery and denounced as a traitor for violating the laws of the States-General.[62] This example also illustrates the importance of loyalty to the 'fatherland' and the use of corruption allegations such as bribery in the administrative forum. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the word 'corruption' had become integrally connected to politics and appeared repeatedly in pamphlets and official reports. It can be seen in the accusation against Cornelis Musch, the *griffier*, as has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The author of the pamphlet accusing Musch, charged him with squandering 30,000 guldens from the treasury, accepting bribes from the enemy of the Republic, France, and amassing undue power for himself to the point of acquiring 'God-damned monopoly'.[63]

It is evident that the charges against Musch and his allies who had been closer to the *stadhouders* Frederik Hendrik and Willem II, emanated from the opposing faction propagating Republicanism. Proper administrative behaviour now came to be presented with the rhetoric of Republican ideology. The political factions who supported Republican ideas promoted peace and *burgerschap* (importance of how citizens should act according to their duties), industriousness and

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[62] Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was charged with sedition and disloyalty to the Republic, for harbouring remonstrant sympathies, for abusing the *burgemeesters*, *schepenen* and *vroedschappen* of Holland for his own ends, for having embezzled money and for bribing the French government and other officials. He offered his defence against these allegations on 20 April, 1618. See, Joannes Naeranus, *Waarachtige historie van 't geslacht, geboorte, leven, bedrijf, gevangenisse, examinatie, bekentenisse, rechters, brieven, laatste woorden en dood, van wijlen den Heer J. van Olden-Barnevelt; Ridder, Heere van den Tempel, Berkel, Rodenrijs, advocaat en groot-zegel-bewaarder van Holland, & c. neffens sijn remonstrantie aan haar Ed Groot Mog. mede de sententien van hem en de andere gevangene* (Rotterdam, 1670), 146–99.

[63] Anonymous, *Extract uyt-gheven by een liefhebber des vaderlandts*, folio not numbered.

economic prosperity as the elements of appropriate governance.[64] The politics of the De Witt regime, that was based on Republican ideology, heightened the political significance of 'corruption' in the administrative space further. The *Deductie* of Johan de Witt stressed the creation of a government based on Republican values that would lead to the establishment of an '*incorrupte regeering*' (incorruptible government).[65] He attributed corruption to the luxurious life and courtly pomp of the *stadhouder* and contrasted it to the diligence and humility that characterised *burgerschap*. The ostentatious use of corruption allegations as a political tool served him well in the factional battle between the winning side of the De Witts and the shaky position of the *stadhouder* and his friends. Interestingly, however Johan de Witt never objected to the distribution of offices among one's kith and kin as going against his moral principles.[66]

Another voice that emerged strongly from the Republican wing was that of Pieter de la Court. Through his treatise *Interest van Holland ofte gronden van Hollands-welvaren,* De la Court appealed to his readers to relinquish the position of *stadhouder* by frequently referring to corruption as the vice of rule by a monarch (or one man). One of the extracts from his work reads as follows –

> Moreover, as long as the province of Holland does not turn over its sword (of state) and its governance to the Captain-General (the *stadhouder*), there are high hopes of recovery from all defects and weaknesses that have been left over from the old system; for the cities that have suffered the most damage from the corruption of the *Generaliteit* and the provincial governments, are the same as those whose regents had benefitted the least from their bad government (*wiens regeerders het minste door die quade regeringe werden gebaat*). All the more they are the most powerful cities as Amsterdam, Leyden, Rotterdam, Haarlem and so on, and it has truly depended on their very own cautious and courageous

[64] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 92–99.
[65] Serge ter Braake, ed., *Deductie van Johan de Witt: Manifest van de ware vrijheid uit 1654* (Arnhem: Sonsbeek Publishers, 2009), 173.
[66] Boogman, "The Union of Utrecht," 394–95.

> resolutions to make themselves (the cities) capable of withstanding external violence by building good fortifications.[67]

Yet another extract from his text pointed to corruption as the primary evil that infested the entire land under the administration of the former *stadhouders*. He wrote –

> Although it is clear from the above statements, that the citizens of a Republic live infinitely happier than the subjects of a land ruled by a Prince or one who stands as the head (among others); the contrary is always believed in countries where there is a monarch, or in Republics where someone is climbing to a position for becoming one. For not only the civil servants, aristocrats, noblemen and soldiers, but also everyone else who would want to be one (monarch), having enriched themselves through the corruption of the government, and looking for their own greatness, have elevated the monarchical government up to the Heavens, for their own profit, as if it had descended from there; although the Lord God in all his mercy, had installed nothing other than a Republican government, and thereafter in his wrath had chosen a Prince over it, and to add to that, all the bloodsuckers of the state and the human race, despising the Republics as if they were mere filth and having churned elephants out of mice (having exaggerated and misreported), have measured out its failures in detail, and have made obscure its virtues, while knowing that they would not be punished by anyone for doing that. To all of this, the common men, ignorant of knowledge and judgment, have said Amen.[68]

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[67] '*Daarenboven zo lange als de Provintie van Holland het zwaard en de Regeringe aan geen Kapitain Generaal over geeft, is daar goede hope van beterschap aller gebreken en zwakheden die uit den ouden zuerdeessem noch overgebleven zijn; want de Steden die door de corruptien van de Generaliteit en Provintiale Regeringen de meeste schade lijden, zijn even de zelve, wiens Regeerders het minste door die quade regeringe werden gebaat: En daarenboven zijn het de machtigste Steden, als Amsterdam, Leyden, Rotterdam, Haarlem &c. en 't hangd voorwaar maar van voorzichtige en couragieuse resolutien van zijn eigen zelfs, om de voorsz. Steden door goede fortificatien en gevolge van dien bequaam te maken tegen geweld van buiten.*"
Court, *Interest van Holland*, 142.

[68] '*Hoewel uit het voorgaande blijkt, dat de ingezetenen van een Republiek oneindelijk gelukkiger zijn, als de onderdanen van een land, geregeert door een Heer ofte een uitstekend hoofd, zo zal nochtans het contrarie meest altijds werden gelooft in Landen, daar een Heer is, of in Republiken daar iemand op den trap is om Heer te werden. Want niet allen de Officianten, Hovelingen, Edelluiden en Soldaten, maar ook alle die het geren zouden wezen, door de corruptie der Regeringe zich verrijkende, ofte hare grootsheid zoekende, verheffen de Monarchale regeringe, om eijgen profijt, ten Hemel, als daar uit nedergedaald zijnde: Hoewel God en Heer geen dan een Republikse regering genadiglik ingesteld, en daar na in zijnen toorn een uitstekend hoofd over de zelve gekoren heeft, En daarenboven derven alle die bloedzuigers van den Staat, en van het menschelijk geslacht, de Republiken tot in den drek verachtende, en van muizen olifanten makende, de feilen der zelver breed uitmeeten, en de deugden verduisteren, omdat zy weten daar over van niemand te zullen werden gestraft. Waar op alle 't gemeene volk, ontbloot van kennis en oordeel, zegt Amen;*.'
Court, 4v–5v.

Such clear and recurrent associations of corruption with the *stadhouder* and the pro-Orange factions as used by the Republicans, increasingly made administrative behaviour and governmental corruption a burning political agenda.

But the events of 1672 changed the situation, as the *stadhouder's* office was restored in the person of Willem III. In his new position, Willem III gained considerable influence with his faction in the States-General, after the political murder of the De Witt brothers. The pro-Orangist campaigning in these years gained support on the basis of corruption accusations against the De Witts and their faction.[69] Willem III's factional allies accused the De Witts and their friends of behaving like regent oligarchs and failing to fulfil their promises and duties. Among the various pamphlets that were circulating around this time, one by Wouter Schouten called 'Moedt-schepping op Nederlants droevige val' ('Encouragement on the Sad Fall of the Netherlands') set out a number of reasons for the political hardships that the Republic had to face. One of them was the corrupt lifestyle of the anti-Orangist regents that Schouten blamed for being responsible for the crisis –

> We have excelled in everything that displeases God,
> In great wantonness, and proud arrogance.
> …
> Who had ever seen our land so full of courtly habits,
> And wicked cheats? How has arrogance taken over (so much)?
> Bankruptcy, bad cheats, foul appeals,
> Drunkenness, licentiousness, and great gluttony,
> Insufferable scourge, untimely chaos
> All of these have inflicted on us a curse.
> …
> Our land which is only apt for God to reside,
> There all the clothing had to be in French fashion:
> What pomp and splendour each one here has displayed,

[69] Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists," 315-16, 321.

Anyone who was dressed sober, oh he was a monk.[70]

Many men from the De Witt faction were consequently removed from the States of all provinces by the *wetsverzettingen* on grounds of their disloyalty and maladministration.[71] Those who had been in the anti-De Witt factions, lent their support to Willem III and gained the vacant offices in return.

However, two important points need to be stressed here before further conclusions may be drawn. The first point concerns Price's focus on crisis moments, as markers of important factional changes in seventeenth-century Dutch history. While reviewing all the corruption allegations, there seems to be no correlation between crisis and factional strife and the use of corruption allegations. Factional rivalries and political contestations continued all the time in the Republic and therefore corruption too was used, now and then, as a convenient tool for this purpose. Corruption accusations and removals happened even in times of peace, in fact all the more since the local tensions were then brought to the fore and external worries were pushed aside. Case studies of local officials charged with corruption and tried in the courts show different periods of time that do not necessarily indicate any urgent political crisis. However, they all show that the charges were initiated by the members of opponent factions with the purpose of removing them from office.

In the case of Lodewijk Huygens, the *schout* of Gorinchem, allegations of extortion and corruption were raised against him by the opposing faction led by Jacob van der Ulft. These

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[70] '*Wy hebben uytgemunt in al wat Godt mishaegden, /In grootste dertelheyd, in trotse hovaerdy;/…Wie sagh ons Landt voor heen soo vol van hoofse grepen, /En boose linckerny? hoe greep de hoogmoedt stant? /Banckroeten, vuyl bedrogh, en listige Pleydoyen, /uytsuypery, ontucht, en grove gulsigheudt, /Onlijdelijck gevloeck, ontijdigh rinckelroyen /Die hebben al-te-mael een vloeck op ons geleydt/… Ons Landt, daer Godt alleen behoorden in te woonen, /Daer moest de kleedingh al naer Fransse moode zijn: /Wat pracht, wat pronck en prael dorst elck daer niet betoonen, /Wie maer iet ned'righs droegh, ô die was al te fijn.*' Wouter Schouten, *Moedt-schepping op Nederlants droevige val: Aen alle edelmoedige, vrome, getrouwe inwoonderen van ons vaderlandt, lievelingen van hare soo diergekochte vryheydt, en vyanden van de Fransse en Munstersse slavernye, mede-gedeelt.* (Haerlem: Johannes Theunisz. Cas, 1672), f. A3-B.

[71] *Wetsverzettingen* were unusual emergency changes in the membership of the *magistraat* and *vroedschappen* which were made by the *stadhouder* on certain occasions as happened in 1618 and 1672. Price writes that the *stadhouder*'s 'right to carry out such changes was highly dubious in law, but his actual power to do so was established in practice in these years.' Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 39.

tensions erupted in the years after 1672 when Huygens and his faction opposed Van der Ulft and his men.[72] Similarly, the trial of Lodewijk van Alteren (*baljuw* of Kenmerland) in the *Hof van Holland*, was initiated in the years around 1664 when there were no apparent signs of crisis or political instability.[73] Andries Hessel van Dinther, the *baljuw* of Bijerland, was dismissed from his office on charges of extortion and corruption by the *Hof van Holland* in 1660.[74] His successor was Cornelis de Witt, whom he accused with counter-charges of extortion in 1662. De Witt was at that time acting in the dual capacities of the *ruwaard* of Putten and the *baljuw* of Bijerland.[75] But both of these allegations were not made at any particular crisis moment that Price mentions in his political history of the Dutch Republic.

Even though these incidents happened in the years that did not necessarily witness any political crisis, they show how corruption charges were still used by rival factions as a political tool for playing out their power politics in the Republic. For instance, in the case of Van Dinther, he was restored to his official position by 1672, thanks to the patronage of Willem III as a result of his opposition to the De Witts.[76] Another example is that of Jacob van Zuijlen van Nijevelt, the *baljuw* of Rotterdam who took up office in 1676.[77] In 1690, he passed the death sentence of Cornelis Kosterman for a crime of manslaughter involving an incident on the night of the 28th August. The *burgemeesters* in the city who were supposedly in an opposing faction to that of Van Zuijlen, and were friends of Kosterman, spread accusations of extortion and corruption against him (Van Zuijlen) which ignited a riot leading to the plundering of his house. The case went up to the provincial court and the *stadhouder,* Willem III was asked to investigate. His interrogation report betrayed his factional support for Van Zuijlen. The questions were clearly biased in favour of Van Zuijlen. In the end, Van Zuijlen was acquitted after he had managed to gather

[72] Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff, "Corruption and Capability," 12.
[73] Wagenaar, "Extortion and Abuse of Power," 731–32.
[74] Hoenderboom, "Scandals, Politics and Patronage," 56.
[75] Hoenderboom, 61.
[76] Hoenderboom, 69.
[77] Hoenderboom, 89.

testimonies from the men of his faction that included several *schepenen* and ex-*schepenen*. This incident also showed the use of corruption accusations at a time when there was no obvious political crisis. Factional rivalries were definitely operating in all these years.

While all these examples show that factional infighting was not just limited to moments of crisis as Price suggested, they nevertheless reinstate the argument of corruption allegations being used as a political tool in the Republic. Most of these corruption allegations were raised by opposing factions to discredit the administrative capability and political credibility of the accused. Accusations were also made in the courts sometimes involving pamphleteering, as in the case of Van Zuijlen, so that all of it was made public. But these factional interplays were not always successful. It was also not an easy strategy to push people out and install men of one's own choice smoothly. Factional infighting was a messy business with uneven results and such attempts often resulted in failure. Rival factions, for instance, often had to coexist and work together in the States of Holland despite ideological and political differences. The regent, Gillis Valckenier and his faction opposed the De Witts, but they were still compelled to work together in the States of Holland for some time before 1672. Valckenier eventually managed to gain prominence after he allied with the *stadhouder,* Willem III. The *stadhouder* of Friesland, Willem Frederik van Nassau-Dietz was patron to the *burgemeester* of Sneek, Cornelis Haubois and his (Haubois') opponents at the same time. But the conflict escalated and Willem Frederik had to drop Haubois as his ally.[78] The faction of Adriaan Pauw had to work with their opponents belonging to the faction of Van Oldenbarnevelt, together in the States of Holland.[79] Both the Pauws and the Bickers worked as opposing factions in the States of Holland at the same time

[78] Janssen, "Patronage en corruptie," 54.

[79] Adriaen Pauw (1585-1653) became the *pensionaris* of Amsterdam in 1611 and continued till 1627. Besides this, he was also one of the directors on the board of the VOC from 1618 and he continued there till 1641. This was the same time, as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was the *landadvocaat* in the States. Pauw and Van Oldenbarnevelt belonged to rival political factions, and Pauw as a member of the judicial bench, later tried and executed Van Oldenbarnevelt, along with the others. Thereafter from 1631-1636 and from 1651-52, he served as the *raadspensionaris* and *grootzegelbewaarder* (the chief keeper of the seal) of Holland and Westfriesland. Johan E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578-1795* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963), 192.

and vied for alliance with the *stadhouder* Frederik Hendrik.[80] The rival factions of Gillis Valckenier and Henrick Hooft also worked in the States at the same time after 1672.[81] Moreover, the factions themselves were sometimes not stable as can be seen from the example of the Witsens. Members of the Witsen family had once been allied with the Pauws but after a quarrel with them, they moved over to join the faction of the Bickers who were the strongest anti-Pauw opponents of the time.[82]

From these examples, one can deduce that the *stadhouder's* office and the States of Holland were two important political platforms used by the factions in Amsterdam and other major cities in Holland. In these settings, they struggled to gain prominence over each other. For this, the members had to sometimes collaborate and manipulate each other according to their own political convenience. The *stadhouder* too wanted to retain his position and did not want the *raadspensionaris* of Holland to overpower him in the Republic. The States of Holland on the other hand, did not want other provinces to be united with the *stadhouder* in case its supremacy might be suppressed. The other provinces did not want the States of Holland to have all the authority, despite knowing that they did have a clear edge in this political struggle. Factional strife and the mechanism of using corruption allegations provided automatic checks and balances in this entire arrangement. If any one of the elements in this arrangement was missing, it could create an

[80] Andries Bicker was no longer part of the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam after falling out with the Pauws who were in alliance with the *stadhouder*, Willem II. But in 1650, he was installed back to his position and served thereafter in different offices, including being the ambassador with Jacob de Witt and others to Sweden in 1651. The other members of the Bicker family who served in the *vroedschap*, next to the Pauws were Roelof Bicker (1640-56) and Jacob Jacobz. Bicker (1625-1626). Elias, 346.

[81] According to Elias, Valckenier had his alliance with Cornelis Claming van Oudtshoorn, Joan Munter, Nicolaes Pancras, Joan Huydecoper van Maarseveen, Joannes Hudde and cousin of Valackenier, Cornelis Geelvinck, a brother-in-law of Munter, and Louis Trip. On the other side, was Henrick Hooft and Cornelis van Vlooswijck. See, Elias, cxxvi–cxxvii, cxxx.

[82] The Bickers were connected to the Witsens through family alliances (Cornelis Bicker was married to Aertge Witsen). But previously, through the wedding connections of Jonas Cornelisz. Witsen, the Witsens were related to the Pauws. Jonas Cornelisz. Witsen (1596-1626) married Weyntge Jansdr. Swaerooch in 1590, the daughter of Jan Pietersz. Swaerooch. His sister-in-law was Weyntgen Heyckens who was married to Pieter Pauw. Elias, 239–240.

imbalance in the Republic. At the same time, it also filled in the gaps between the formal and the informal layers of Dutch governance, keeping the administrative machinery running.

Politics and the Public

The question that has, however, remained unaddressed so far is why corruption became important in the Dutch Republic. Why did it attract such heightened attention in this political setting? The answer lies in the emergence of a new political arrangement which further led to the production of new ideas and theories on the Dutch political front. The so-called 'scientific revolution' of the seventeenth century in Europe sustained the 'historical laboratories of politics' in several countries of the world.[83] The Dutch were a leading society in this endeavour where new theories and philosophies were invented and discussed to justify their existence as a Republic (*res publica* or affairs of the people). With the aid of a robust printing culture, these ideas came to be disseminated widely among the 'citizens' in the political arena.[84] One of the most prominent ideas of the day emanated from the works of scholars with possible Cartesian leanings and one such group of political theorists emerged in the Dutch Republic.[85] They came to be labelled as the 'Radical Cartesians' by Tammy Nyden-Bullock.[86] Leiden University, among other places, became a hub of such academics as Lambertus van Velthuysen, Pieter de la Court and Benedict Spinoza, whose theories were spread among the wider audience in the second half of the seventeenth century. These scholars did not invoke Descartes directly but used his worldview (his methodology of scepticism that inspired his works on mathematics, natural

[83] Hans Willem Blom, *Causality and Morality in Politics: The Rise of Naturalism in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Political Thought* (Rotterdam: Offset drukkerij ridderprint, 1995), 9.

[84] For an overview of fables being part of this process of spreading political ideas see, Arthur Weststeijn, "The Power of "Pliant Stuff": Fables and Frankness in Seventeenth Century Dutch Republicanism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (Jan. 2011): 1–27, Project MUSE.

[85] Robert J. Roecklein, *Politicized Physics in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: Essays on Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza* (Lanham etc: Lexington Books, 2014): 62. For an overview or summary of the ideas of Descartes on physics, physiology and psychology see Zbignieuw Drozdowicz, *Cartesian Rationalism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Edition, 2015), 109-38.

[86] For the Dutch Republic see, Tammy Nyden-Bullock, "Radical Cartesian Politics: Velthuysen, De La Court, and Spinoza," in *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism*, ed. Wiep van Bunge, vol. 15, Studia Spinozana (Rotterdam: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), 35–65.

science and metaphysics), in combination with the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, Machiavelli and other existing theories which in turn they applied to Dutch politics.[87] They also varied from each other in their interpretations and the extent to which they accepted all of Descartes' ideas, connecting them to the politics of the Republic. To what extent such theories inspired the regent-administrators in the execution of their political decisions is a matter of debate that requires more research in future which this dissertation does not engage with elaborately.

The drive behind the intense production of such political theories in the Dutch Republic emerged out of the need for finding solutions on questions of 'sovereignty' and the 'reason of state'.[88] With the political institutions constantly disagreeing on the issue of who held the sovereign status and what could be the true interest of the Dutch state, administrative behaviour and right conduct in politics began becoming central to these theories. Added to this, were the anxieties of civil decay stemming from the huge influx of riches coming from the flourishing commerce of the chartered East and West India Companies where several regent-administrators held shares.[89] But there was another vital force that worked from the bottom and necessitated the production of these political theories and pamphlet literature. These were the citizens in the Republic who engaged indirectly in the political debates of the seventeenth-century. Their presence played a massive role in not only producing theories but also bringing the focus on right administrative conduct in the political space.

Roorda had argued in his work that the regents in the Republic were able to manipulate the 'public' through their political provocations.[90] But researches by other scholars put forth a different image of the Dutch 'public' space in politics. Paul Knevel showed how the *schutterij* (militia) displayed political awareness in the cities of the Dutch Republic.[91] Jill Stern showed how the active presence of the people and their activities influenced and shaped the political rhetoric

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[87] Nyden-Bullock, 35; Blom, *Causality and Morality*, 69.
[88] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 41.
[89] Weststeijn, "Republican Empire," 491-509.
[90] For this discussion see, Roorda, *Partij en factie*, 57. Also see, Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists," 317-18.
[91] Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer: de schutterijen in Holland, 1550-1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

of the Orangists.[92] Michel Reinders assertively included the *burghers* as a part of the Dutch political sphere and pointed them out as "a politically significant group with their own political ideas, power and grievances".[93] Through his study of the pamphlets circulated during the upheavals of 1672, Reinders showed that there were open debates between the politicians and the *burghers* which often revolved around subjects such as the capability of the regents in administering their offices.[94] It revealed the importance of the citizens in the political domain and showed how their presence affected the increased focus on right administrative behaviour of which accusations of corruption were an integral part.[95]

To what extent was this public awareness actually visible in the Republic and who were the so-called 'public'? Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer pointed out that the visible presence of public opinion could already be detected as early as the sixteenth century.[96] In the subsequent years, the circulation of political information increased and with it the political awareness of the public. By the seventeenth century, a high literacy rate and the flourishing Dutch literary market, that Guido de Bruijn described as 'cockaigne for printers, booksellers, gazetteers and pamphleteers', helped maintain such developments at a steady pace.[97] While Craig Harline showed the power of pamphleteering to intensify political awareness, Reinders talked about petitioning as another means of exerting public presence in the political space of the Dutch Republic.[98] The common men travelling in the barge and discussing the political state of affairs

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92 Stern, "The Rhetoric," 202-24.

93 Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists," 318.

94 Reinders, 319-20.

95 Reinders, 315. Also see Femke Deen, David Onnekink and Michel Reinders, "Pamphlets and Politics: Introduction," in *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*, eds. Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 15.

96 Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer, "Introduction," in *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke*, eds. Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 1–9.

97 Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, 189, 233; Guido de Bruijn, "Political Pamphleteering and Public Opinion in the Age of De Witt (1653-1672)," in *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*, eds. Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 63.

98 Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987); Michel Reinders, ""The Citizens Come from All Cities with Petitions": Printed

became one of the most used themes for the pamphlets that were printed and circulated.[99] Not only were these numerous pamphlets and petitions functional in boosting the presence of public opinion, but they also generated rumours in the society that played a major role in spreading political tidings.[100]

Those, whose opinions mattered as the 'public' in the seventeenth century, were in fact a limited number of inhabitants called *burghers* or 'citizens'.[101] Throughout the years, they distinguished themselves from the other inhabitants and foreigners by acquiring a set of political rights and duties in the cities and by paying taxes to the government.[102] Those citizens who were of a higher order and belonged to the elite families of regents functioned at multiple levels, holding two or more offices simultaneously. Manon van der Heijden provided the example of the cloth merchant, Cornelis Jacobszoon Back, who was not only appointed as a member of the *vroedschap* and the *schepenbank* of his city several times between 1596 and 1625, but also performed several other tasks like that of the city book-keeper, the commander of the *schutterij*, the overseer of textiles and wheat, and being the wardens of the church building, the leprosy-house and the

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Petitions and Civic Propaganda in the Seventeenth Century," in *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*, eds. Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 97–120; Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists".

[99] Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture*, 54.

[100] Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer, "Introduction," in *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke*, eds. Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 5. Note that the word pamphlet or *pamflet*, in itself, was not used in the seventeenth-century and all the publications around this time, went by the names of *libellen* (libels), *maren* (tidings), *paskwillen* (pasquils), *blauwboexkens* (little blue books), *briefjes* (letters) and *boekjes* (booklets) appearing in different forms: songs, edicts, poems, petitions, letters and tracts among others. See, Deen, Onnekink, and Reinders, "Pamphlets and Politics: Introduction," 10.

[101] According to Prak – 'The nerves of the city…were more likely the "*burghers*", a term with great many meanings. *Burghers* could mean poorters, those people who possessed full rights of citizenship. In a more general sense it also referred to established folk, people firmly rooted in society. Militiamen were popularly known as *burghers*, and the guilds organized the *burgher* trades (*burgerneringen*). *Burghers* of all descriptions, therefore, were the property owners who comprised the middle classes.' For the concept of *burghers* see, Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age*, 158–59; Prak, 216–20.

[102] Jan Luiten van Zanden and Maarten Prak, "Towards an Economic Interpretation of Citizenship: The Dutch Republic between Medieval Communes and Modern Nation-States," *European Review of Economic History* 10, no. 2 (Aug. 2006): 116.

local hospitals.[103] Although, not all citizens had access to the dominant political circles, they did have political rights and asserted their presence in the public society of the Dutch Republic. In addition to this, in return for paying taxes and doing various voluntary services to the community, they could demand greater political transparency and accountability from the city administrators.[104] However, not all citizens were part of the ranks of regent administrators and this distinction between the two was clearly maintained and emphasised upon. Reinders points out that this was why the pamphleteers on both the Republican side as well as that of the pro-Orangists in the years before and after 1672 harked back repeatedly to the idea of 'obedience' of the governed towards their governors.[105] The De la Court brothers, too, were not in favour of inclusion of the non-regent 'ignorant rabble' who did not understand politics at all.[106]

The presence of the citizens, was therefore nothing close to democracy as such. Citizenship rights could be purchased, subjected to the approval of the *burgemeesters* and it was mostly the moneyed ranks of society who could do that.[107] But citizenship rights could also be acquired through marriage, inheritance or gifts in the seventeenth century, opening the doors to those sections of the society who did not belong naturally to the elite regent families.[108] But there were certain limitations to those who were eligible for acquiring citizenship rights. There was discrimination on the basis of 'religious correctness' when it came to granting citizenship to Catholics and other non-Calvinist 'minority' groups in provinces like Utrecht, Overijssel and Gelderland.[109] While for the province of Holland, Catholics were reportedly not such a problem,

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[103] Manon van der Heijden, *Civic Duty: Public Services in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 1–2.
[104] Zanden and Prak, "Towards an Economic Interpretation of Citizenship," 119.
[105] Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists," 316, 319, 325–27.
[106] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 67.
[107] Zanden and Prak, "Towards an Economic Interpretation of Citizenship," 121.
[108] Erika Kuijpers and Maarten Prak, "Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling: burgerschap in Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw," in *Burger: Een geschiedenis van het begrip 'burger' in de Nederlanden van de Middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw*, eds. Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 119.
[109] Maarten Prak, "The Politics of Intolerance: Citizenship and Religion in the Dutch Republic (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries)," in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. R. Po- Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159–75.

it was those from a Jewish background who were restricted from obtaining citizenship as foreigners.[110] Despite all these restrictions, the presence of citizens with their citizenship rights influenced the political debates of this century and intensified pamleteering on both sides. It inevitably garnered attention on the behaviour of the regent-administrators and their accountability in the public domain.

Under these circumstances, charges of corruption against an administrator openly discredited him in his office as his administrative efficiency was challenged. The stain on his personal character gave him the image of someone who was considered incapable of holding a post. This fed into the citizens' political consciousness and brought in the desired impact – primarily, the dismissal of the credibility of an accused administrator. On the other hand, an official's lofty promises of establishing an incorrupt and good government for the public drew applause and hope and admiration for his personality. Knevel pointed out abundant examples that showed how prominent officials in the government described their own duties as difficult and taxing, where they sacrificed their private lives in the service of the 'common good'.[111] This, in turn, made them appear more capable of performing administrative tasks, strengthening their own claims and those of their factions to hold public office, so setting in motion the process of using corruption allegations to achieve political power within the public gaze.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the growing importance of corruption in the political forum of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic has been studied. The struggle of the Republic for its credibility as a political system generated numerous political debates and theories around this time. Such theories went on to fan the formation of stricter rules on administrative manners and conduct.

[110] Prak, 171. On the context of the citizenship status of Jewish refugees, Prak writes that, 'The competition between the cities put Jewish refugees in a strong position to demand favourable settlement terms. Among other cities, Amsterdam allowed its Jewish immigrants to acquire citizenship in 1632, subject to certain conditions.' For a detailed account of the status of Jewish immigrants in the seventeenth-century Dutch society see, Prak, 216–20.

[111] Knevel, *Het Haagse bureau*, 155–56.

In a setting of overseas trade and conquests, although wealth and opulence became a concern, it was encouraged as long as it did not culminate in visibly decadent courtly lifestyles. To suit the circumstances, an impersonal code of administrative ethics, thus, evolved that forbade bribery, nepotism and an unworthy show of opulence in political behaviour. But alongside these rules, factionalism in political practice also thrived. With administrative corruption becoming a political agenda, factional politics imbibed it in their infighting and used corruption accusations against their opponents for their own convenience. The urge to bring about a reformation of administrative moral conduct, therefore, became combined with the urge to align factions in the administrative domain. What speeded up the process was the presence of citizens who claimed accountability of the regents and their behaviour. This was manifested in the vibrant pamphleteering culture, the print machinery churning out copies of books in large numbers, bold illustrations and other material that provoked debate on corruption. Consequently, political theories and rhetoric of the day were infused into popular discourse of corruption. Corruption allegations as such became a regular part of the Republic's political and factional existence by the late seventeenth century. The following chapter will look into the influence of these developments within the VOC administration that was conceived at the beginning of the seventeenth century and operated continuously in the Republic throughout the subsequent years.

Chapter 2

The Company They Keep: Studying VOC Corruption in the Dutch Republic

> Twice of five goes on to make ten,
> Keep one and set down the zero then.
> The 1 remains for all the gentlemen (the directors),
> And the 0 is what the shareholders gain.[1]

Pieter de la Court penned the above lines in support of his plea to make Holland the core of commerce by doing away with the monopolies of the chartered Companies.[2] His was not a solitary voice and as has been discussed later in this chapter, the Dutch East India Company faced continual challenges against its monopoly throughout the seventeenth century, both from inside as well as from outside its administrative organs. But it carried on enjoying the privileges granted by the charters of the States-General, banking on the propaganda that it was establishing an exemplary structure for conducting world trade.[3] The VOC consequently came to be presented as the face of the Dutch Republic in the global platform of territorial possessions and commercial profits.[4] Back home, it remained the largest employer in the labour sector, second

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[1] '*Tweemaal vijf is tien, /Ik zet nul and how ien. 1 voor de quanten, /En 0 voor de participanten.*'
Court, *Interest van Holland*, 45.

[2] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 234.

[3] The charter of the States-General granted to the VOC in 1602 was renewed and extended frequently in the years 1622, 1647, 1665 and 1696 for the seventeenth century.
See, NL-HaNA, VOC, Octrooien, inv. nr. 1, Charter granted by the States-General to the *Heeren XVII* for maintaining monopoly of trade in the Cape of Good Hope and the area west of the Straits of Magellan for 21 years, 20 March, 1602: folios not numbered; NA, VOC, inv. nr. 2, Charter extended by the States-General for a period of 21 years with the changes brought about, 22 December, 1622: folios not numbered; NA, VOC, inv. nr. 4, Charter extended by the States-General for a period of 25 years, 1647: folios not numbered; NA, VOC, inv. nr. 5, Charter extended by the States-General to the year 1700, 1665: folios not numbered; NA, VOC, inv. nr. 6, Charter extended for a period of 40 years from 1700, 1696: folios not numbered.

[4] This has been elaborately discussed later in this chapter. For examples see, Gerrit van Spaan, *Het nieuw Oostindisch huis gebouwt in de boomtjes tot Rotterdam, nevens de opkomst van de Oostindische Compagnie met de voornaemste land- en zee geweesten* (Rotterdam: Engelbertus Solmans, 1698), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 14400); Anonymous, *Lof der Oost-Indise Compagnie ende de E. Heeren bewinthebberen van dien waer onder anderen aen-ghewesen*

only to the Dutch army.[5] It also boosted special educational programmes like the maritime studies that were often sponsored by different *kamers* (chambers) of the Company.[6] Thus, on the socio-political and economic front, the VOC remained a prominent organisation with much at stake and a credible image to preserve for its investors in the Republic.

But, as Nicolaus de Graaff would have us believe, the contemporary society in the Republic was not always particularly impressed with the VOC administrators and their overseas management. The general perception was that nobody would go to Asia for 'a simple monthly salary, unless there was something more to gain there'.[7] Complaints against the directors and their mismanagement with the finances were often heard through petitions and pamphlets that were further accompanied by pleas for reform.[8] The complaints of corruption in the VOC administration intensified over the years and came to be squarely associated with the Company

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wort, hoe nootsakelijck het is voor ons vaderland in dese occurentie van tijden haer versochte octroy niet te weygheren (Amsterdam: Hendrick Jansz. Visscher, 1646), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 5358).

[5] Prak, "Loopbaan," 135.

[6] Prak, 138.

[7] Nicolaus de Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel van Nicolaus de Graaff*, eds., Marijke Barend-van Haeften and Hetty Plekenpol (Leiden: KITLV-uitgeverij, 2010), 99. There are, however, contrary contentions that argue on the basis of few examples that several men joined the VOC for reasons other than economic plans. They reflected the desire to explore Asia as driven by pure curiosity as well as the desire to make paintings of the eastern landscape along with its local populace, plants and animals. For this argument see, Roelof van Gelder, "Noodzaak of nieuwsgierigheid: Reismotieven van Oostindiëgangers in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw," *Indische Letteren* 8, no. 2 (1992): 51–60.

[8] Simon van Middelgeest, *Den vervaerlijcken Oost-Indischen eclipsis vertoont aende vereenichde provincien door de participanten van d' Oost-Indische Compagnie met een oodtmoedich beklach aen de hoogh-moghende heeren Staten: Over de groote abuysen ende disordren deser Compagnie mits de groote swaricheden die uyt dese te verwachten staen* (1625), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3585); Ymant Adamsen pseud. of Simon van Middelgeest, *Den langh-verwachten donder-slach voorsien en vooseyt in den Oost-Indischen eclipsis een swaer-luydende discours, teghen de ontrouwe bewinthebbers, ende ongherechtighe ghewinhebbers van de Indische Compagnie* (1625), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3585 B); Simon van Middelgeest, *Nootwendich discours oft vertooch aan de hooch-mogende heeren staten generaal van de participanten der Oost-Indische Compagnie tegens bewinthebbers* (1622), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3348); Anonymous, *Kort onderricht der participanten rechtveerdighe klachten over de bewinthebbers van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* (1622), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3355); Anonymous, *Tegen-vertooch, by eenighe liefhebbers van de waerheyt ende haer vaderlandt, ende mede participanten van de Oost-Indische Compagnie aen de Ed. Hog. Mo. Heeren Staten Generael op seecker vertooch op eenige gein?? participanten soo sy haer thoonen in't openbaren druck uyt ghegheven, ende hare hoog: moog. doen behandigen tegen de regieringe van de bewint-hebberen van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Jacob Pietersz., 1622), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3347); Anonymous, *Vertooch aen de Ed. Ho. Mo. Heeren Staten Generael aengaende de tegenwoordige regeringe van de bewinthebbers van de Oost-Indische Compagnie, ende hoeveel dat den staedt van't landt daer aen ghelegen is, dat deselve voortaen door goede ordere better mach geregeert worden* (1622), (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3345).

officials working abroad. This was reflected in anonymous pamphlets and popular books published in the Dutch Republic which provided information on the malpractices and illegal trade of the VOC personnel working abroad.[9]

The ensuing anxieties and apprehensions about the overseas officials were reflected in the Company's frequent resolutions against illegal trade.[10] A historical analysis of such policies makes it likely to conclude that corruption was the primary reason for the bankruptcy of the VOC.[11] But this idea has been recently challenged and revised. Concepts of malpractices and illegal trade were subject to the constant policy changes of the Company throughout the years of its operation in the Indian Ocean. There is little truth in the claim that they increased in certain years or that the administration had to impose stronger measures for controlling the illegal trade because it reportedly grew out of hand at times. Chris Nierstrasz, in fact, concluded that corruption was not a greater problem in the eighteenth century than it had been in the seventeenth.[12] The question remains as to why then the Company's ranting about corruption and the necessity for reforms kept growing. Why was it necessary to have corruption included as an important part of the Company's administrative vocabulary? What did corruption mean in the context of the VOC, as it was framed by the directors in the Republic? This chapter will undertake the task of finding the answers to these queries. By going beyond quantitative details,

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[9] Hullu, "Het Oost-Indische sacspiegeltje," 173; Anonymous, *Oost-Indisch-praetjen voorgevallen in Batavia, tusschen vier Nederlanders den eenen een koopman, d'ander een krijghs-officier; den derden een stuyrman, en den vierden of den laesten een krankebesoecker*, ed. A.J.E. Harmsen (Leiden: published by Wiebe Koek en Cheng Weichung, 1663), (Knuttel 8756); Schouten, *Het Oost-Indische voyagie*, 372.

[10] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letters of Coenraad van Beuningen, Pieter van Dam, Rijkloff van Goens and Johannes Camphuys with supplementary attachments, besides other things related to the general redress of the affairs of the East India Company from the years c. 1676-89: folios not numbered. Also see, J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek, 1602-1811, eerste deel 1602-1642*, vol. 1 (Batavia, 's Hage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1885), 3, 5, 42, 47, 123-24, 217-18, 238, 254, 330-32, 339, 465; J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek, 1602-1811, tweede deel 1642-77*, vol. 2 (Batavia, 's Hage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1886), 99-100, 101, 102, 108, 112, 118, 121, 1125, 172, 200, 202, 230, 239, 270, 329-330; J.A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek, 1602-1811, derde deel 1678-1709,* 91.

[11] See the introductory chapter of this dissertation and the section on 'Historiography' for scholarly debates on VOC corruption.

[12] Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 6.

it will seek to explore corruption through the existing political connections between the Company administration and the Dutch Republic.

The Organisation of the VOC

The VOC came to be established in 1602 and from then till the final days of its demise remained busy experimenting, growing, evolving and adjusting to keep up with the dynamic political setting of the Republic. Before it started off, there had already been a group of small companies referred to as the *Voorcompagnieën* which were funded by the wealthy merchants from different cities in the Republic.[13] Some of these companies launched a number of expeditions for finding alternative routes to reach the Cape of Good Hope and the Indian Ocean. Consequently, they began competing fiercely against each other, as a result of which, they brought about net losses for themselves and their investors. This was coupled with the danger of being militarily weak as separate units on the high seas and thereby becoming vulnerable to the Portuguese fleets in foreign waters.[14] Noting that this was not leading to anything resembling a profitable enterprise, the then *landsadvocaat*, Van Oldenbarnevelt picked up the reins and took control of affairs.[15] By proposing to merge all the companies into a single monopolistic concern, he sowed the seeds of the first united Company in the Republic, resulting in a cooperation of the big merchant magnates. His proposal materialised, albeit reluctantly in certain quarters of the different city governments, and the VOC came to be finally founded in 1602, legitimised by a formal charter of the States-General on 20th March of the same year.[16]

This charter ensured a union of the merchants and political elites with commercial stakes in the Company's ventures and allowed most *burghers* to be shareholders in the Company

[13] For a list of these small companies see, Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 19.
[14] During the Eighty-Years War in Europe, the conflict between the Netherlands and Spanish-Portugal (1580-1640) was extended to the trading sector with attacks on naval fleets on the high seas and in various territories in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic.
[15] Naeranus, *Waarachtige Historie*, 184.
[16] Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek* 1: 1–2.

according to their potential.[17] This privilege was sealed with the promise of securing dividends when the profits reached 5% in cash of the original capital. As an arrangement, it led to the creation of the first concept of a stock market that went on to pervade economies the world over. Such mechanisms of pooling capital and naval resources to merge into a single unit was also existent among the merchants of London around 1599-1600 and the VOC followed this pattern.[18] A charter in 1602 was granted to the VOC with the right to monopolise trade between the Republic and Asia for the next twenty-one years, besides laying the basis for its organisation into different chambers.[19]

The Company came to be organised along the lines of the political structure of the Republic and was dominated primarily by investors from Holland and Zeeland, and was comprised of six chambers, Amsterdam, Zeeland (Middelburg), Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn and Enkhuizen.[20] The extent to which the tasks of maintaining fleets, bearing the cost of fitting out and engaging personnel, and the sale of goods were distributed, was fixed by the charter of 1602 and distributed between the cities and their chambers. This meant that Amsterdam had to be responsible for half of these functions within the VOC administration, followed by Zeeland which shared a quarter of it, while the rest of the chambers were to have 1/16th of the total. Every chamber had its own directors, the proportion of whom was assigned by the charter of 1602 granted by the States-General. There were 20 directors assigned to Amsterdam, 12 to Zeeland and 7 each to the other chambers. There were 76 directors in total at the beginning, but this number shrank throughout time to 60 when a few directors who died were not replaced by further nominations.

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[17] For Jewish investors in the VOC see, Ab Caransa, *Vrijmetselarij en jodendom: De wereld een tempel* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 71; F.S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2007), 34.

[18] Claudia Schnurmann, "'Wherever Profit Leads Us, to Every Sea and Shore…': The VOC, the WIC, and Dutch Methods of Globalization in the Seventeenth Century," *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 3 (Oct. 2003): 475.

[19] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:1.

[20] Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 20.

Seventeen representatives, from the directors of all the chambers, met collectively twice a year for some weeks in Amsterdam (Holland) and Middelburg (Zeeland) alternatively and acted as the supreme decision-making body of the VOC administration. This board of seventeen directors was known as the *Heeren XVII* (the Gentlemen Seventeen) and comprised 8 representative directors from Amsterdam, 4 from Zeeland and 1 each from the other cities with the additional seventeenth member (in rotation) being appointed in turn by Zeeland or one of the smaller chambers. But the Company needed the support of other cities and provinces as well, for its survival.[21] This meant opening up the doors of the Company's main chambers to representatives from other parts of the Republic, beyond the limits of the cities of Holland and Zeeland. For this purpose, several positions of *ordinaris* and *extra-ordinaris* directors were instituted in the VOC administration. In 1645, Leiden and Haarlem acquired the right to appoint one *ordinaris* director, while in 1696 the *ridderschap* of Holland acquired two positions for *ordinaris* directors. These positions came to be attached to the smaller chambers – one representing the *ridderschap* that alternated between the chambers of Hoorn and Enkhuizen (every three years) and the other between Delft and Rotterdam (depending on whichever chamber had a vacancy arising from death or resignation). Besides this, the chamber of Amsterdam came to contain 5 *extra-ordinaris* directors from other cities and provinces (Utrecht, Gelderland, Friesland, Dordrecht and Gouda) while the chamber of Zeeland acquired 1 *extra-ordinaris* director. Delft, too, had 1 *extra-ordinaris* director represented by Overijssel, and Rotterdam shared with Amsterdam the position of the *extra-ordinaris* director from Dordrecht. These directorial settlements became relatively more pronounced in the VOC administration after 1700.[22]

It is also noteworthy that much like the composition of the political insitutions in the Republic, the administrative machinery in the Company also kept evolving so that all of these positions were added, scrapped or modified along the way by means of consecutive charters and

[21] Pollmann, *Religious Choice,* 179.
[22] Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 34.

other VOC resolutions. To assist the *Heeren XVII*, there were three important organs. The first was the board of the *rekeningopnemers* who examined the general accounts together with the directors. The second group was the board of *keurvorsten* that operated from each chamber as an electoral college and was convened when a director's position fell vacant. They had the responsibility of proposing three possible candidates for this vacant post, in consultation with the rest of the existing directors. Finally, there was the board of *beëdigde hoofdparticipanten* consisting of 9 members to voice the concerns of the major shareholders.

The *Heeren XVII* also received from 1649 onwards the assistance of a special committee based in Den Haag called the *Haags Besogne* which consisted of 12 members – 4 directors from Amsterdam, 2 from Zeeland and 1 each from the rest of the chambers. Their task was to read, analyse and examine the accounts, papers and letters exchanged between the *Heeren XVII* and the administration in Batavia, in order to draw up a compiled report annually that was called the *Haags Verbaal*. Besides this, there was an *advocaat* (secretary who was the head of the office and first councillor of the Board of Directors) who worked in a secretarial capacity for the Company and the *Heeren XVII*. The chambers of Amsterdam and Zeeland, too, had their small assisting committees such as the *Commissie van ontvang* (for helping with financial administration), the *Commissie van de rekenkamer* (for controlling the accounts) and the *Commissie van equipage* (for all affairs related to the ships, ship-building and the employees). Besides this, the chamber of Amsterdam had a separate *Commissie van het pakhuis* for regulating the administration of the merchandise in the warehouses and organising the auctions in Amsterdam (all 'chambers' had their own auctions).

The VOC, in itself, was thus formally an extension of the decentralised political administration in the Dutch Republic and remained integrally connected to its cities and provincial arrangements. However, even though the VOC reflected the Republic's decentralised organisation, it presented itself to be used as the 'national' device for representing the interests of

the United Provinces as the 'fatherland' on the global forum.[23] This was evident in various ways through the language used by and for the Company in the Republic. Firstly, there was the rhetoric of pamphlets that eulogised the Company as a single unit representing Dutch overseas interests in the global forum. In 1646, the author of a pamphlet entitled *Lof der Oost-Indise Compagnie ende de E. Heeren bewinthebberen enz.* (The Praise of the Dutch East-India Company and the honourable Directors etc.) opened his address with the following lines –

> My lords (addressed to the *Heeren XVII*),
> Some time ago, one of my good friends and acquaintances, came to visit me, and among other things, spoke with great affection and inclination of your Honourable skilled and praiseworthy Company, and we could not but be bewildered thinking, how in such few years, with such good policies, your Honourable gentlemen have managed to raise this (Company) to such a great power and wealth? And among other things, we have had then discussed and considered, how useful and important its prosperity was for our fatherland.[24]

This rhetoric was further extended to the global forum as he remarked –

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[23] This does not indicate the word 'nation' in its present-day connotation. It implies roughly a territorial unit with sovereign power competing with the other trading empires. What is also worth noting is that the word '*natie*' (nation) was in use during this period in the Dutch vocabulary, though not implying its meaning in today's political context. It cannot be ignored that Amsterdam was dominant in influencing much of the image of the VOC that was being sold to the outside world. This is evident from its sponsored painting of the apotheosis of the VOC by Nicolaas Verkolje in 1701 or for that matter, the fact that foreign delegates and royal members were received in Amsterdam by displaying the cabinet of exotic objects collected by the VOC directors-burgemeesters, most of whom were from Amsterdam. See, Siegfried Huigen, "Introduction," in *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, eds. Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong, and Elmer Kolfin (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–2. For the painting, see the online collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam – https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-4290.
Also note the mention of the steadily growing occurrence of this word in the seventeenth-century VOC records by Gijs Kruijtzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009), 23.

[24] '*Myne Heeren,*
Weynigen tijt geleden, eenen van myne geode vrienden ende bekende, my comende besoucken, ende onder anderen onderhouden van U. E. Deftige, Treffelijcke ende Manhafte Compagnie; dewelcke neffens my met eene behoorlijcke affectie ende inclinatie daer van sprekende, ons selven niet genoech connende verwonderen, Hoe in soo wynighe jaren deselve door U.E. goet beleyt tot soo grooten Macht ende Rijckdommen ghecomen was? Ende onder anderen discourerende ende considererende, hoe nut ende noot sakelijck 't prosperen van deselve voor ons vaderlandt te wesen: …'.
Anonymous, *Lof der Oost-Indise Compagnie, ende de E. Heeren bewinthebberen van dien waer onder anderen aen-ghewesen wort, hoe nootsakelijck het is voor ons Vader-Land in dese occurentie van tijden haer versochte octroy niet te weyghreren* (Amsterdam: Hendrick Jansz. Visscher, 1646), f. A2, (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 5358).
I am aware that this is a pro-Company pamphlet produced at a time when the Company's charter was about to expire and needed to be renewed soon. However, the intention here is to draw attention on the rhetoric used to appeal to the Company and its directors.

> All nations admire it: have their mouths full of it, and wonder how it is possible that private capital with so much power (that in itself is understood as royal treasury) could so quickly not only dominate but also increase daily, to augment and prosper…If one makes comparisons among foreign nations in terms of their wealth/ it (the Company led by the *Heeren XVII*) is set on the rank of the greatest; there are even many who compare it to some of the kings: and truly, there is no other prince in all of this Christian world that can or even dare to match up to its power.[25]

Earlier in 1647, Johan van Heemskerk (a poet and advocate) had published his first completed version of the *Batavische Arcadia*, in which he gave an impression of the Dutch glory in settling in Batavia. One of the extracts from his work contained the following lines –

> You know…that our fatherland, although small in its very perimeters, has still extended its powerful arms, in pursuing the Spaniards, our arch-rivals, to the East and West Indies: and that the name of Holland has been made famous, in our era, by its navigation, in places where the sun both rises and sets. Our countrymen, by building, much to their praise, a new town in the Far East have brought to life again the former glory of the once renowned Batavia, for which our forefathers have always been known so well: and have made themselves, with their small country so unbeatable and well-known to both their friends and foes.[26]

By 1698, another pamphlet by Gerrit van Spaan (a writer who wrote among other things on the *Oost-Indisch Huis* of Rotterdam) reinforced this point. Van Spaan wrote –

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[25] '*Alle natien admireren deselve; hebben haer mont vol ende verwonderen haer hoe het moghelijck is dat particuliere vermogen soodanige macht (die in sich selven een coninclijcke schat begrijpt/ soo voorspoedigh niet alleen domineren/ maer dat meer is/ daghelijck toenemen augmenteren ende prospereren…Als men by vreemde potentaten eenige comparatie maecht van rijckdommen/ setmen deselve in den graet van de grootste; ja selver zijnder vele die haer met die van sommighe coninghen vergelijcken: Ende voorwaer en connen gheen princen in Christenrijck ghevonden worde die haer met hare macht connen ofte derven egaleren.*'
Anonymous, *Lof der Oost-Indise Compagnie,* f. A3

[26] '*Ghy weet…dat ons Vaderlandt, hoewel kleyn in syn eyghen om-vangh, nochtans syne machtighe armen, in 't vervolgen van den Spanjaert, onsen erf-vyandt, uyt-ghestreckt heeft selfs tot in Oost en West Indiën; en dat den Hollandschen naem in onse eeuwe door de Zeevaert beroemt gheworden is beyde daer de Son op en daerse onder gaet. Hebbende onse Lands-luyden, tot haeren grooten lof, in't uyterste van't Oosten, met het bouwen van een nieuwe stadt weder levendig ghemaeckt den ouden naem van het eertijts vermaerde Batavia, daer onse voorouders hier voren so heerlijck by bekent zijn gheweest; en haer selven, met haer kleyn Landeken, by vrienden en vyanden, soo ontsachtelijck en ruchtbaer door hebben gemaeckt.*'
Johan van Heemskerk, *Batavische Arcadia, waer in, onder't loof-werck van liefkooserytjes, gehandelt werdt, van den oorspronck van't Oud Batavien, vryheydt der Bataviers, vrye zee, zee-vonden, vinders van verburgen schatten, verbeurt-maecken van goederen, uyt-perssen der waerheyt door pyningen, onheyl van de lanckwyligheydt der rechts-plegingen, en andere diergelycke ernstige saken meer* (Amsterdam: Gerrit Jansz., 1647), 150–53.

> Thus, the Company being honourably chartered/ is administered in a highly praiseworthy manner by gentlemen of wisdom/ who from time to time, have no scruples in buttressing/ the enemies' plans and ploys with all their goodness and blood; / so that to this day,/ one might speak (in amazement) of it./Europe stands as of yet and watches with open eyes:/ How they speak daily about it, and get exalted over (the fact)/that such a handful of people with so limited power/ could have been able to bring so many empires (*rijken*) under their control.[27]

This notion accords well with Judith Pollmann's contention that beyond the plural political attachments of cities and provinces, the Republic propagated the idea of a united power to avoid conflicts and external crisis.[28] The VOC with its overseas operations, as well as its status as the Company representing a single Dutch interest within Europe, thus attempted to uphold an image of a unique Dutch identity for the outside world.[29]

Secondly, this representation of a united Dutch interest was also evident in the VOC's language of loyalty to the Republic and its Reformed religion, vis-à-vis other non-Christian and non-Calvinist presence in overseas lands.[30] The different cities represented in all the chambers of the Company administration, therefore, found solidarity in this united appeal of loyalty to the 'fatherland' and its Reformed faith.[31] The *Heeren XVII* used it freely to imbue their officials

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[27] '*Dus is de Compagny wel eer geoctroyeert, /Door Heeren van verstand zeer loff'lijk geregeert/ Van tijd tot tijd, en die in't minst haar niet ontzagen/ Om met haar goed en bloed des vijands lift en lagen/ Te stutten; dat men nu op dezen zelven dag/ (Als met verwondering) daar wel van spreken mag./ Europa staat als nog en kijkt met open oogen:/ Hoe spreekt 'er daaglijks van, en is als opgetogen, /Dat zoo een hand vol volks, en met zoo weinig magt, /Zoo vele rijken heeft ten onderen gebragt*.' Gerrit van Spaan, *Het nieuw Oostindisch huis gebouwt in de boomtjes tot Rotterdam, nevens de opkomst van de Oostindische Compagnie. Met de voornaamste land- en zee gevegten* (Rotterdam: Engelbertus Solmans, 1698), 50, (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 14400).

[28] Judith Pollmann, "Eendracht maakt macht," 138. Julia Adams points out that the appeal to the 'fatherland' was part of the general European elite hagiographies of the time, much like other characteristic elements such as that of family line, honour, alliance, state, God, war, manhood, antiquity, paternal authority and maternal fecundity. But in the Dutch case, this was integrally connected with their 'celebration of oceangoing commerce.' See, Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 96.

[29] On a whole, the VOC as a United Company was officially designed to represent Dutch interests on the overseas waters, though whether or not it operated abroad as a joint body informally in practice is a different issue altogether. See, Antunes, "Introduction," xviii–xix.

[30] See the next footnote for this. Also see, Kruijtzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 35.

[31] The oath of the governor-general of the VOC stresses the elements of *'getrouwheid'* (loyalty) and '*naarstigheid*' (industriousness). The members of the *Raad van Indië* were required to take an oath that instructed them to

abroad with the spirit of upholding the Dutch flag against their Iberian, English, French and other European competitors. As is evident from the reports that appeared in the newspapers of the Dutch Republic, information about the VOC's naval achievements in competition with other trading nations seemed to be the biggest item of curiosity, particularly news about the cargoes and losses of ships and other equipment on the high seas.[32] This demonstrated the desire of the *Heeren XVII* (who were also political personalities) to emphasise their overseas feats as achieved by a united Dutch power in the world, manifested in the Dutch East India Company (and the WIC as well).

Thirdly, as Andrew Fitzmaurice argued, the language of the Company was so designed that the purpose of its existence was connected to the idea of the self-preservation of a nascent Republic, which was being challenged repeatedly by its surrounding political contenders in

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keep the following qualities in mind while choosing a governor-general – '*op het allerhoogste letten op den vroomsten, getrouwsten en ervarentsten persoon, inzonderheid wezende van de gereformeerde religie.*' (to be aware to their utmost of choosing the most loyal, trusted and experienced person, especially one who has been of the Reformed faith). The ideal standard of loyalty that was expected to be professed by the other Company servants like the commanders, the *schippers*, the predicants etc. can be judged from the following oath that they were required to undertake – '*Wy belooven ende sweeren, dat wy de doorluchtige Hoog Mog. Heeren Staeten-Generael van de Vrye Vereenichde Nederlanden als onse hoogste ende souveraine Overheyt, syne Princelycke Excellentie Frederik Hendrik by der gratie Godts, Prince van Orangien, Grave van Nassouwe etc. ende de Bewinthebberen van de Vereenichde Nederlandsche Oost-Ind. Comp. in deselve landen, als oock den Heer Gouverneur-Generael ende Raeden van India, mitsgaders oock alle commandeurs ende bevelhebbers, die gedurende dese reyse te waeter ofte lande over ons gestelt sullen werden, gehouw ende getrouw te wesen…*' (We promise and pledge, to remain true and loyal to the esteemed honourable lords of the States-General of the independent United Provinces of the Netherlands as our highest sovereign government, his excellency Prince Frederik Hendrik by God's grace, Prince of Orange, Count of Nassau etc., and the directors of the VOC of the same country, as well as the honourable governor-general and the Council of the Indies, along with all commanders and overlords, who during this journey have been appointed above us, both on land and in sea). See Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, 1: 22, 354-55.

[32] The newspapers available through the digital library of Delpher.nl provides information about the political events of monarchies in Asia, about the ships and cargoes of the VOC that arrived in the Netherlands and that of France, England and Denmark overseas or about shipwrecks and loss of cargo. For some examples see, Anonymous, "Wt Ceulen den 9. Februarij," *Tijdinghe uyt verscheyde quartieren.*, February 15, 1622; Anonymous, "Oost-Indien," *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant*, May 4, 1675; Anonymous, "Oost-Indien," *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant*, August 30, 1691; Anonymous, "Oost-Indien," *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant*, June 23, 1697. It is true that this information has been derived from the newspapers put in the database of the Delpher, but it is by no means wholly representative of the Dutch seventeenth-century media. See, Michiel van Groesen, "Digital Gatekeeper of the Past: Delpher and the Emergence of the Press in the Dutch Golden Age," *Tijdschrft voor Tijdschriftstudies* 38 (Dec. 2015): 9–19; Adriaan van Berkel, *The Voyages of Adriaan van Berkel to Guiana*, eds. Martin van den Bel, Lodewijk Hulsman, and Lodewijk Wagenaar (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2014), 17–18.

seventeenth-century Europe.[33] The growing concern about the United Provinces' vulnerability led to the production of a strong rhetoric for Dutch commercial conquests.[34] It is, with respect to this, that the VOC came to be championed as the primary vehicle for furthering such interests to earn profits, while representing Dutch sovereign claims in overseas territories. Nicolaus de Graaff wrote –

> …without money, one cannot wage wars and without trade and navigation a land, especially as our Netherlands, cannot exist, on which it is actually and principally dependent; of which the shipping and trade of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indise Compagnie* (VOC) has been the foremost in enriching the Netherlands, for the flourishment and welfare of all its inhabitants; and have had made it so rich and powerful, within a short span of time, that it currently dares to face the most competent potentates in this world in times of war.[35]

The VOC as the legitimate face of the Dutch power was strenghthened, as reflected in this extract, through its purpose of earning profits for the self-preservation of the Dutch state.[36]

Fourthly, the image of the VOC as an extension of united Dutch power was also mirrored in the privileges granted to it by the charters of the States-General. The Company was

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[33] Andrew Fitzmaurice argued that seventeenth-century European empires were created through the idea of the reason of state, manifested in discourses of greatness and self-preservation, that was extended to the policies and actions of the quasi-sovereign trading corporations like the East India Companies. However, he also contended that for overseas survival, that is 'to become "great", it was necessary to negotiate with existing indigenous authorities in the territories concerned and either to assimilate those peoples or produce hybrid jurisdictions.' See, Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Dutch Empire in Intellectual History," *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (June 2017): 97–109.

[34] Koekoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long Term Global Perspective," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (June 2017): 85–87. For a critical note on breaking free from exclusive reliance on Dutch-oriented historiography for studying the Dutch empire, as has been traditionally done so far, see, Susan Legêne, "The European Character of the Intellectual History of Dutch Empire," *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (June 2017): 110-120.

[35] '*…sonder geld kan men niet oorlogen en sonder koophandel en schipvaart kan het land, insonderheid ons Nederland niet bestaan, dat eigentlijk en principaal aan den selve hangt; van de welke schipvaart en koophandel dat de Veerenigde Oost-Indise Compagnie wel de voornaamste is die de Nederlanden doet verrijken, ende ook alle ingesetenen doet floreren en wel varen, ende ook in korte jaren so rijk ende so magtig heeft gemaakt dat het tegenwoordig de magtigste potentaten des werelts in tijden van oorlog 't hooft durf bieden.*'
Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, eds. Marijke Barend-van Haeften and Hetty Plekenpol, 83.

[36] For the commercial 'reason of state' also see, Jan Hartman and Arthur Weststeijn, 'An Empire of Trade: Commercial Reason of State in Seventeenth-Century Holland,' in *Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World*, eds. Sophus A. Reinert and Pernille Roge (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11–31.

allowed to conclude treaties with local princes and potentates, as well as build fortresses and appoint officials of justice and governors in all the places, where it was based abroad.[37] This meant that the Company virtually came to enjoy those powers which were essentially reserved exclusively for the state – precisely that of building forts, waging wars, minting coins, conducting diplomatic missions and taking other important political decisions. In itself, the VOC administration therefore seemed to belong to the quintessential category of what Philip Stern identified as a 'body politic', festooned with 'bundles of hyphens' that represented the Company's pluralistic, hybrid character and its unwritten share of the Republic's sovereign powers exercised abroad.[38] All the officials of the Company were supposed to owe their allegiance to the States-General and execute their duties abroad in its name.[39] The basis of the VOC, thus, lay in displaying it as a unit of solidarity with the Dutch Republic, against threats of dissipation, especially while living together in close proximity with non-Christian locals and non-Calvinist Europeans in foreign lands.[40]

The last point showed how the Company facilitated control over their men abroad. It had an elaborate system set-up in Asia that exercised quasi-state powers, delegated to it by the *Heeren XVII* through the charters of the States-General. The headquarters for all VOC factories and settlements spread across the Indian Ocean was situated at Batavia. A walled city with a fort (that was called the 'castle') came to be built there, following Jan Pietersz. Coen's conquests in

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[37] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:1–2; Knaap, "De 'Core Business' van de VOC," 13.

[38] The phrase – 'bundles of hyphens', has been borrowed by Stern from Harold Laski. Stern, *Company-State*, 6, 9.

[39] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:2. But this clause, though theoretically agreed upon, did not guarantee unquestioned loyalty in practice. All oaths were naturally sworn in the name of the States-General but the officials did not hesitate to put their individual interests before the expected standards of the States-General, as and when opportunities arose.

[40] A few works rightly attempt to discuss or refer to the need for greater investigation into the Dutch overseas empire in its religious context. Tracy, "Asian Despotism? Mughal Government as seen from the Dutch East India Company Factory in Surat." *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, no. 3 (1999), 256–80; Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Visions of Dutch Empire," 86.

1619, and its administration was referred to as the *Hoge Regering* (the High Government).[41] It was headed by the *gouverneur-generaal* (governor-general) appointed by the *Heeren XVII* along with a 9-member committee called the *Raad van Indië* (Council of the Indies). All factories, forts and trading posts in every region of Asia and the settlement at the Cape of Good Hope were subjected to the authority of the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia and all letters dispatched there were instructed to be always addressed in the name of the then governor-general and his Council. Within the *Hoge Regering*, the other very important body was the *Raad van Justitie* (Council of Justice) which enjoyed jurisdiction over all Company servants and *vrijburgers* (free-citizens) for civil and criminal cases in Asia and the Cape.[42] The other administrative bodies were the *College van schepenen* (board of aldermen), *College van weesmeesteren* (board of administrators supervising the property of orphans below 25 years of age) and *College van heemraden* (board of administrators over the *ommelanden van Batavia* or surrounding areas outside Batavia) for the city of Batavia and its surroundings. Jurisdiction over local affairs in Batavia and its *ommelanden* was maintained by the *baljuw* of Batavia and *landdrost*, in a similar fashion to how it was in the Dutch Republic. The presence of these administrative bodies and their functions provided proof of the quintessentially fragmented and overlapping sovereign existence of the VOC in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

The Dutch East India Company held different political status and privileges in the areas where they had set up their bases, in the Indian Ocean.[43] That did not, of course, mean that the

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[41] For more on the governance of the Company in Asia, see TANAP website; Hendrik E. Neimeijer, 'The Central Administration of the VOC Government and the Local Institutions of Batavia (1619-1811) – an Introduction', in *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*, eds. G.L. Balk, F. van Dijk, and D.J. Kortlang (Leiden: Boston, Brill, 2007), 61–86.

[42] For more on the *Raad van Justitie* see, Carla van Wamelen, *Family Life onder de VOC: Een handelscompagnie in huwelijks en gezinszake* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 74–134. The *vrijburgers* (free-citizens) 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, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek,* 1: 46-52; Wamelen, 107–9.

[43] Prakash, "European Trade and South Asian Economies," 189–205.

individual Company servants were deterred from pursuing their own interests and political ambitions abroad. Nor does it mean that their interests always coincided with that of the *Heeren XVII's* instructed goals. For instance, the Company's varied means of establishing sovereign claims overseas involved certain subtle methods such as trying to penetrate the domains of local jurisdiction, securing a better military position through fort-building projects or producing thick layers of ethnography stereotyping the lesser 'other' than the superior 'self' in implementing good governance.[44] Most of these measures required abundant supply of financial resources, the availability of which was subject to the *Heeren XVII*'s approval. Plans for military engagements and fortification projects entailed huge expenditure that stirred frequent disagreements and debates among the different chambers within the Company administration.[45] The differences among the representatives of all the cities and provinces in the VOC became prominent on such occasions. There is no denying the fact, therefore, that the image of the VOC as a united Company which was projected in Europe was not consistent with its perceived reality, either in the metropolis or in Asia.

Despite this, there was a trend for creating an official narrative that identified the Dutch officials as a distinct group catering to the needs of the Republic. The directors of all the chambers of the VOC were required to swear that they would remain trustworthy to the administration of the Company and not betray the injunctions of the charters and the resolutions. No one was allowed to hold shares in any English, French or other European trading company outside the VOC as a mark of loyalty to the 'fatherland'.[46] The organisation of the VOC therefore remained a complex of individual interests, combined with various city and provincial interests that were woven together to write a story of a united Dutch interest via-a-vis other European and non-European powers on paper.

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[44] Clulow, "The Art of Claiming".

[45] Sinappah Arasaratnam, "Monopoly and Free Trade in Dutch-Asian Commercial Policy: Debate and Controversy within the VOC," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (Mar. 1973): 1–15.

[46] Pieter van Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, ed. F.W. Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1927), Book I, Part I, 198.

Factionalism in the VOC

Within this institutional maze, the composition of the Company's administrative set-up was an elite affair, surrounded by key figures from prominent political families in the Republic. It was often the case that political elites worked both for the administration of the Company in the Republic as well as within the political institutions of city governments. A classic example of such overlap can be found in the case of the appointment of a director to a vacant position for the chamber of Amsterdam. In this case, the *burgemeesters* were allowed to choose from the list of nominations because they were supposed to have the '*vaste kennis*' (required knowledge) about the capabilities of the candidates.[47] This meant that *burgemeesters* from city governments often chose themselves to hold the position of directors for different chambers in the Company or at best to assign these to men from their political factions.[48] Coenraad van Beuningen, for example, was both a *burgemeester* and a director of the VOC (representing Amsterdam in the *Heeren XVII*) simultaneously in the years 1681, 1683 and 1684. This was also the case with Gerrit Pietersz. Bicker, who became one of the founding members of the VOC and functioned there as a director from 1602 onwards while being appointed simultaneously as a *burgemeester* of Amsterdam in the following year (he was also a *schepen* and held other minor offices as well). Reynier Adriaensz. Pauw too belonged to this category of being one of the founding directors of the *Heeren XVII* in 1602 while being appointed as a *burgemeester* in 1605 around the same time (he already held a position in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam from 1590 and several other offices as well). Lambert Reynst was given the office of a director in 1667 and between 1667 and 1672 he was chosen as a *burgemeester* three times. Andries Bicker was a member of the *Heeren XVII* but also a *burgemeester*, a member of the *vroedschap* and went on to gain important positions in the

[47] F. S. Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC: De financiële en commerciële politiek van de bewindhebbers, 1672-1702* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1989), 25.

[48] It is to be noted that *burgemeesters* were chosen annually which meant that these were not permanent positions unlike the directorship of the VOC where directors could practically be in office throughout their lifetime.

admiraliteit (admiralty) of Amsterdam and the *weeskamer* (committee for managing orphans) while having been a *schepen* before.[49] Adriaen Pauw was also known to be one of the directors among the *Heeren XVII* who had earlier held the office of a *pensionaris*, and became a member of the *vroedschap* and the *rekenkamer* in the States of Holland, ending his career as a *raadspensionaris* for the States-General.[50] Gerrit Jacob Witsen was a *burgemeester*, a member of the *schepen* and even presided over it for some time, besides being on the list of the VOC directors.[51]

Consequently, these common links also ensured the simultaneous transfer of families and friends from the political to the administrative space of the Company. In 1650, for instance, the Bicker-De Graeff league was so strong as a political faction that they occupied the most important positions in Amsterdam being members of the *vroedschap* as well as in the directorial boards of the chartered East and West India Companies.[52] Their predominance as an administrative family has been recorded by a pamphleteer in 1650 who wrote –

> …You ask, who is the director of the East and West-India Companies; who is sent to The Hague to the assembly of the Provincial States? Who is the *burgemeester*? Who is the *schepen*? Who is the colonel of the citizens' guard? Who is the supervisor of the dykes (*dijk-graff*) in the board regulating the water-laws? And were you to ask ten more times about such other offices, and I will not lie, if I always reply – the Bickers.[53]

Such examples abound the administration of other cities as well and show how links were established between the political institutions and the Company administration, through such personalities and their family and friendship networks. A word of caution though should be added here in relation to the idea of familial relations, as has been argued by Suze Zijlstra in her

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[49] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 346.

[50] Frouke Wieringa, *De VOC in Amsterdam: Verslag van een werkgroep* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1982).

[51] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 168.

[52] Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism*, 99–101.

[53] '*…vraegt gy, wie is Bewinthebber van de Oost- ende West-Indische Compagnie; wie Afgesonden in den Haag ter Vergaderinge van de Staten? wie Borgermeester? wie Schepen? wie Coronel van de Borgerije? wie Dijk-graef van het waterrecht? en vraeght noch so vry tienmael van andere Ampten, ende ik sal sonder leugen altijt mogen antwoorden Bickers*.'
Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, XCII.

work on the Dutch merchants in the seventeenth century.[54] From the correspondences within Dutch families operating as trading partners, she concluded that the understanding of family in the Dutch society did not automatically eliminate the need to prove solidarity to each other. Much like formal business partners, family members trading together were expected to provide explanations for loss of goods, financial accounts and other commercial details that were needed to preserve credibility as partners in the market. This leads us to assert that family or 'friendship' bonds in the political and commercial space did not imply that there were no obligations to provide proof of loyalty. But families were expected to maintain their solidarity by sticking together as a cluster through both good and bad times.

The family Huydecoper, for example, stuck together in times of distress despite their diasgreements and strained personal relations. Luuc Kooijmans mentions that although Joan Huydecoper van Maarseeveen (Jr.) had his differences with his father Joan Huydecoper, lord of Maarsseveen (1599-1661) and his mother-in-law, Sophia Trip, he had to maintain cordial relations with them to preserve the family's public image. Besides this, there was the question of inheritance as well as Huydecoper's political career which was at stake, if he had a conflict with his family members.[55] In the family Van der Meulen, one of the brothers, Andries, advised his other brother Daniel to resolve all disputes with his wife and his brother-in-law, over the share of Daniel's inheritance. This was needed to show solidarity which, according to Andries, was crucial for preserving their social status and reputation as a family.[56] Joan Huydecoper (Jr.) wrote that his principles lay in extending support to his family and friends first, by providing them with jobs and other administrative opportunities, in spite of all personal discord.[57] Similarly, the Amsterdam regent Johan de Witt, deemed it essential to call all his distant family members as

[54] Suze Zijlstra, "To Build and Sustain Trust: Long-Distance Correspondence of Dutch Seventeenth-Century Merchants," *Dutch Crossing* 36, no. 2 (July 2012): 128.
[55] Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 125.
[56] Kooijmans, 12.
[57] Kooijmans, 143–44.

cousins, who used his name regularly in acquiring official positions.[58] Blood ties and friendships based on reciprocal obligations, thus, formed the basic unit of bonding among these administrative elites. Consequently, familial and friendship relations remained as much the core of the VOC administration as it had been for the political institutions in the Republic. The ongoing factional politics in the Republic, thus, could not have been far removed from that of the Company's administration, owing to the overlapping networks connecting both the VOC and the political institutions of cities and provinces.

Moreover, since it was the same people who invested in the Company as well as running the government, there were deeper financial connections established between the two governing bodies. Every attempt was made to save the Company and provide financial support, whenever needed, with the result that the Company's money also flowed into the state machinery during wars and other crisis moments. In the disaster year of 1672, when the finances were hard hit, the *Heeren XVII* along with the other directors suspended their payment on the Company's bonds. The States of Holland and Zeeland at this time, which were naturally filled with many men from the VOC boards of directors, took over the burden onto their own shoulders. A loan of 2 million guilders was forwarded by the directors as bonds in the name of these provincial governments, in return for a guarantee of protection against the protests of the creditors.[59] In 1673, these bonds in the name of the States were transferred by the directors to the share-holders who were eager to obtain their dividends after a patch of rough financial years.[60] Beyond the institutional perspective, if one considers the fact that most of the officials in both the political bodies as well as in the VOC administration shared common commercial and political links, it is understandable that the leading political families would try to protect the Company where they had financial stakes involved.

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[58] Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism*, 77.

[59] Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 27. It is to be noted that creditors were those who held different bonds issued by the VOC and did not immediately imply all shareholders that included the directors themselves.

[60] Gaastra, 28.

There was, thus, an integral connection between the political administration of the Republic and the VOC, as is evident from the above-mentioned factors. These consisted of the fact that – (a) the very foundation was laid through the political intervention of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, with the States-General being involved and the Company exercising its authority overseas in the name of the States-General, (b) the arrangement of the chambers was in accordance with the Republic's fragmented political anatomy while a united image was still sustained on the global forum, (c) the administrative ties between the Company and the Republic's office-holders were often overlapping and (d) the economic inter-dependence of these two bodies led them to support each other in times of crisis. Such an intertwined administrative existence (more of which has been shown through examples of factions later in this chapter), meant that the way corruption came to be perceived and fashioned in the political space, must have had its influence in the VOC administration as well. So how did the perception of corruption evolve within the VOC administration, in the context of the ongoing socio-political developments of the Republic?

Perceiving Corruption in the Company

In his recent work on VOC corruption, Chris Nierstrasz wrote that 'Corruption was never really explicitly defined', but 'incidents of embezzlement, nepotism, and illegal private trade' did exist.[61] All these terms, according to him, fell under 'the umbrella definition of what is now called corruption as all are considered activities which militated against the true interests of the Company and inhibited its profits.'[62] Even though this is true, it is possible to modify this argument by adding that the VOC at least resorted to the explicit use of the word '*corruptie*' (corruption) along with the verb form, '*corrumperen*' (to corrupt) in their administrative

[61] Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 15:4.
[62] Nierstrasz, 15:4–5.

documents.[63] In addition, there were of course descriptions of certain activities that appeared frequently such as '*vuile handelingen*' (foul trade), '*malversatie*' (malpractices), '*fraude*' (fraud), '*fourberies*' (treachery) and so on to indicate illegal acts in the Company's domain.[64] The word '*corruptie*' does not occur very frequently at the beginning of the Company's rule-books but it seemed to have caught up quickly in a few years since its initiation in the political platform of the Republic in the 1650s. An oath of the notarial officer (*notaris*) drafted in 1625, shows the use of the word '*corrumperen*' in the following manner – '(The notarial officer) shall in the administration of his service…not let himself be corrupted by gifts or presents, money or any goods or anything by anyone'.[65] Gradually, much as in the political space of the Republic, the word '*corruptie*' seemed to become a part of the administrative vocabulary of the Company's oaths. The existent labyrinth of rules, set through numerous *resoluties* (resolutions) of the *Heeren XVII* since 1602, and incorporated into the Statutes of Batavia (codified in 1642), always fell short of controlling all violations. The *Heeren XVII*, therefore, had to constantly struggle to engineer specific terms for regulating all activities of the Company overseas. The adoption of a more holistic and looser term such as '*corruptie'* at this point solved this problem of the insufficiency of written rules.[66] It came to be inserted into the general rules and codes of conduct, such as that of the qualifications for the members of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia. There is explicit mention there of, among

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[63] Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book I, Part II, 335; Dam, Book II, Part II, 383; Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek* 1: 160. Also see, NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to Camphuys and the *Raad van Indië*, 18 March, 1686: f. 235v; VOC 1421, Missive from the Governor-General Johannes Camphuys and the *Raad van Indië* to Van Reede, 7 September, 1685: f. 364v; f. 365rv.

[64] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII,* 9 December, 1686: f. 32r, f. 55r; NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede from the *Heeren XVII*, appointed to Bengal, Coromandel and Ceylon, 1684: f. 1v.

[65] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 160.

[66] On the insufficiency of written rules of the Company see, Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17. On the VOC's struggle to sustain control over its officials see, Julia Adams, "Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 1 (Feb. 1996): 12–28. For an understanding of the presence of VOC officials as a 'web of empire' operating not always in cohesion with the VOC in the Republic which made it difficult to control them with written laws see, Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, "Introduction," in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*, eds. Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 9–11.

other things, the requirement of the members to stay away from all kinds of 'thoughts of corruption' (*buyten alle gedachten van corruptie te houden*) during the period of their service.[67] By the time the *Heeren XVII* was planning to send a commissioner for redress of the Company's affairs overseas, Johannes Hudde wrote about the enormous 'corruption' (*corruptie*) of the VOC in the Indies.[68] The reports of the Van Reede committee and the missives of the governor-general and *Raad van Indië* also used the words 'corruption' (*corruptie*) and 'to corrupt' (*corrumperen*) quite a number of times.[69] The issue seemed to have escalated to such an extent that by the 1680s there was particular insistence on the inclusion of an 'oath of corruption' (*eed der corruptele)* for all VOC officials, especially those working outside the Republic.[70]

This concept of 'corruption' in the Company was juxtaposed to right behaviour, which inevitably embodied a similar balance, as in the Dutch Republic, between respecting formal rules and maintaining informal obligations. For example, the formal oaths of the governor-general and other high officials contained the same usual prohibitions against favouritism and bribery as those of the administrators in the Republic. The oath of the governor-general contained the following injunctions –

> …that he should not engage himself or let anyone else, directly or indirectly, trade in the least amount: no porcelain, ornaments, or other goods should be sent from the Indies, either for himself or for any other person, and should try his utmost to prevent and hinder the same being done by anyone under his powers; that during the nomination and appointment of the members of the councils, both in the *Raad van Indië*, as well as the councils of other states and offices, he shall choose only the most faithful, loyal and

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[67] Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book III, 89.

[68] Cited in Stapel, ed., *Beschrijvinge,* Book I, Part I, x.

[69] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to Camphuys and the *Raad van Indië*, 18 March, 1686: f. 235v; VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from the Governor-General Johannes Camphuys and the *Raad van Indië* to Van Reede, 7 September, 1685: f. 364v; f. 365rv.

[70] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Camphuys and Council of the Indies to Van Reede, 18 March, 1686: f. 235r; VOC inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Camphuys and Council of the Indies to Van Reede in Hooghly, 16 November, 1686: f. 262r; VOC inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Camphuys and Council of the Indies to Bengal, 23 August, 1686: f. 365v.

> experienced people, without any favours, jealousy or conditions of friendship or familial relations or enimity compelling him to do otherwise.[71]

In his oath, the *baljuw* was required to adhere to the following instructions –

> I promise and swear, that I shall promote good, righteous and true justice for everyone equally, who would seek it, without consideration of accepting any reward, (or having) hatred, jealousy or friendship with someone and without favouring someone more than the other beyond the rightful causes…[72]

All other oaths were formulated along the same lines and forbade undue favouritism and acceptance of bribes for executing administrative tasks.[73]

But at the same time, they were also obliged to comply with the factional favours because of the overlapping networks between the *Heeren XVII* and the political administrators in the Republic. This subject will be dealt with in more detail in the section following this. What it meant was championing the show of loyalty towards the 'fatherland' by adhering to the Company rules while professing loyalty towards one's political allies at the same time. It was a precarious balance in which factionalism determined the distribution of positions, and was not seen as unacceptable, as long as there were no transgressions of the normative borders. An incident revealing Huydecoper's exasperation at a letter written to his wife by one of his nephew's wife in Asia, makes this point about transgression of norms evident.[74] The letter said that if Huydecoper helped his nephew become an *extraordinaris* member of the *Raad van Indië,* his

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[71] '*…dat hij voor zich zelven of voor andere particulieren geene de allerminste negotie directelijk of indirectelijk zal doen of laten doen; geene poseleinen, gentilessen of eenige andere goederen voor zich zelven of andere particulieren uit Indië zenden, ook 't zelve naar zijn uiterst vermogen aan alle personen, die in dienst zijn, weren en verhinderen zal; dat hij in 't nomineren en stellen van raadspersonen, zoo in Rade van Indië, als in alle andere staten en officiën, zal verkiezen de vroomste, getrouwste en ervarenste personen, zonder door hundt, afgunst of door eenige consideratie van vriendschap, maagschap of vijandschap anders te doen*.'
Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*,' 1:21–22.

[72] '*…ick beloove ende sweere, dat ick sal bevoirederen goede, oprechte ende waerachtige justitie aan allen ende een yegelycken, die sulcx versoecken sullen, sonder aenscou te nemen op winninghe, haet, nydt ofte vriendschap van yemanden ende sonder eenich persoon meer te favoriseeren dan recht ende reden toelatende syn*.'
Chijs, 1:137.

[73] Chijs, 1:147, 152, 158, 161, 186, 351, 354, 356, 357, 360, 380, 386, 408.

[74] The Dutch equivalent for both the words nephew and cousin is *neef/ nevens* (pl.). It could thus also be a cousin of Huydecoper's instead of being a nephew. In fact, the word *neef* was rather commonly used for such relations as the *achter-neven* implying grand-nephew or any connections through sons of brothers in the family.

nephew would be willing to offer the first two years of his salary to Huydecoper. This outraged him (Huydecoper) who wrote back saying –

> I must confess that I have never come across anything more outrageous and scandalous than this…that I must find it necessary, against my honour and oath, to sell offices for my profit and consequently, let my good name and fame be defiled by such a dirty and unwarranted gain.[75]

In the end, he refused to promote his nephew and grant the requested position. This was in sharp contrast to Huydecoper's usual character of obliging his friends and family members with such requests. His act laid clear the norm that such requests were tolerated, as long as they were not accompanied by extravagant gifts or direct money, though there were strong expectations of reciprocal obligations. Corruption in the VOC, thus, as understood from this perspective, had a similar dimension to that of the political administration in the Dutch Republic when it came to gifting and patronage norms. Money was not acceptable and seen as an act of bribery against right administrative behaviour.

However, besides bribery and undue favouritism being condemnable practices, what corruption mainly implied in the context of the VOC was the violation of the Company's monopoly. Adherence to this was equated with loyalty towards the *Heeren XVII* and the 'fatherland' (as an extended concept of the *Generaliteit*). This added an extra aspect that stretched the perception of corruption for the VOC administrators. Monopoly in the VOC was active at three levels which included – (i) the Company's Europe-Asian trade (ii) the Company's intra-Asian trade and (iii) a monopoly on certain commodities and spice-producing areas backed by brute force.[76] Non-adherence to this rule proved to be the most visible aspect of perceiving corruption in the VOC administration. It was equated with disloyalty to the Republic, to its commercial spirit and a disdain of the personal integrity of Company officials. The part of the

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[75] '*Ick moet bekennen dat mijn noijdt ergelijcker, noch schandaleuser saeck is voorgekomen…dat ick tegens eer en eedt mijn voordeel met het verkoopen van considerable ampten genootsaeckt soude sijn te soecken, en gevolwlijck mijn goede name en faem door soo een vuijl en ongeoorlooft gewin komen te besoedelen.*'
Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 144.

[76] Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 15:74.

monopoly quotient, however, was applicable to high officials of the Company who functioned outside the Republic in the lands and waters of the Indian Ocean (like commanders, Governors, shippers and so on). This is why allegations of corruption were raised mostly, in this regard, against VOC employees serving in overseas functions.

There has been a large body of literature on 'corruption' in the Company, particularly in Asia and specifically concerning individual VOC officials throughout the seventeenth century. The ones that immediately come to mind with reference to the VOC in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century India include the works of scholars like Om Prakash, Femme Gaastra and Chris Nierstrasz.[77] However, there appears to be a lesser interest in the case studies within the Republic at the same time. It was not that they never happened but the overriding concern of the directors, that was prominent in all the official reports, was largely about the maintenance of the monopoly in overseas affairs.[78] Thus, the 'total disorder and corruption of our [the Company's] business in the Indies' about which Johannes Hudde, one of the *burgemeester-cum-*directors from Amsterdam complained, seemed to provide a more exciting theme to the historians than the bookkeeping frauds of different chambers in the Republic. Gaastra has fortunately paid some attention to such cases in his work *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC, 1672-1702,* but there has been little of this that has been researched further.[79] Notwithstanding the recent

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[77] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*; Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst"; F. S. Gaastra, "Private Money for Company Trade: The Role of the Bills of Exchange in Financing the Return Cargoes of the VOC," *Itinerario* 18, no. 1 (June 2011): 65–76; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*. Note that these are works that engage directly with corruption in the Company. But besides them, there are several other scholars who have worked on the numerous aspects of the Dutch in India.

[78] In the years before the first investigation committee was formed in 1626, there were rampant claims of disorder and abuses among the Company directors, due to conflict with the investors. See, Simon van Middelgeest, *Den vervaerlijcken Oost-Indischen eclipsis vertoont aende vereenichde provincien door de participanten van d' Oost-Indische Compagnie met een oodtmoedich beklach aen de hoogh-moghende heeren Staten: Over de groote abuysen ende disordren deser Compagnie mits de groote swaricheden die uyt dese te verwachten staen*, 1625 (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3585); Ymant Adamsen pseud. van Simon van Middelgeest, *Den langh-verwachten donder-slach voorsien en vooseyt in den Oost-Indischen eclipsis een swaer-luydende discours, teghen de ontrouwe bewinthebbers, ende ongherechtighe ghewinhebbers van de Indische Compagnie.* 1625 (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3585 B); Simon van Middelgeest, *Nootwendich discours oft vertooch aan de hooch-mogende heeren staten generaal van de participanten der Oost-Indische Compagnie tegens bewinthebbers,* 1622 (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3348).

[79] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 65–66; 68.

research on intellectual history of the VOC in the Republic, the focus for studying the Company in the Republic has been on the production of knowledge by prominent regent-directors while corruption has remained an overseas affair.[80]

Monopoly in this debate formed the core element of discussion for understanding why the *Heeren XVII* was reluctant to relax its restrictions, despite contentions that this could have had lessened corruption among its overseas personnel. Intermittent pleas to relax the monopoly were made throughout the entire span of the seventeenth century, even by those from within the Company's administration.[81] But it was never formally done away with, though challenged by men from both within and outside the VOC administration. During the 1650s particularly, with the coming of the Republicans to the political forum, it was explicitly talked and heard about in the VOC domain. The ideology of 'free trade' and 'liberty' that hung in the air began to exert pressure on the Company's directors. The philosophy advocated giving up of the VOC's long-guarded privileges, as the military costs incurred to preserve monopoly came to be viewed as a drain on the economy of the major provinces in the Republic. Pieter de la Court, an entrepreneur himself and a prominent friend of Johan de Witt, suggested that commerce should have been the ideal goal of the Dutch state.[82] His suggestion was to cut down the extra expenses through the establishment of independent colonies settled abroad. While remaining linked to the metropolis, these colonies would generate sufficient resources to sustain themselves, backed by naval power. At the same time, the removal of a monopoly would encourage 'free trade' and thereby relieve the state of the financial pressure, opening up chances of greater commercial success in the global forum.

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[80] Pieter Baas, "De VOC in Flora's Lusthoven," in *Kennis en Compagnie: De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de moderne wetenschap,* eds. Leonard Blussé and Ilonka Ooms (Leiden: Uitgeverij Balans, 2002), 124-37; Marion Peters, *De wijze koopman: Het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), burgemeester en VOC-bewindhebber* (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1983); Alfons van der Kraan, "The Dutch East India Company, Christiaan Huygens and the Marine Clock, 1682-95)," *Promotheus* 19, no. 4 (2001): 279-98.

[81] Arasaratnam, "Monopoly and Free Trade", 1–15.

[82] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 221–24.

As Weststeijn put it, – 'By the early 1660s, the claim that "a happy continuation of commerce requires freedom" had become all but commonplace among the propagators of Dutch commerce.'[83] Notwithstanding the fact that Pieter de la Court himself came from an entrepreneurial background which shaped his arguments, there were lots of individual merchants in the Republic like him, who wanted to explore the provisions for trading in Asia beyond the Company's limitations. Even among some of the Company's governors and other high officials, there were open disputations about whether or not monopoly was supposed to be preserved over certain commodities in some areas. Rijkloff van Goens, who went on to become the governor-general of Batavia in 1678, wrote earlier to the *Heeren XVII* about his plans for establishing settlements in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) through plantation colonies.[84] In the memoir that he left for his successors, he made it clear that if his plans were executed, there could still be room for the monopoly of the Company on some commodities such as Indian cotton products in Ceylon.[85] He thus proposed a deal that wedded the colonial proposals of De la Court with the *Heeren XVII*'s monopolistic ambitions. Joan Maetsuyker, on the other hand, pressed more openly during his governor-generalship in the 1650s, for granting greater trading privileges to the *vrijburgers* in Ceylon, beyond the limits of the Company's then permitted monopoly.[86] He reasoned that it would give the Company access to local markets and products through their own men, instead of local Muslim brokers.

Despite all of these promises of commercial greatness guaranteed through the freedom of trade, the Company introduced several reforms from time to time but never really removed its monopoly claims on Asian waters. The charter of 1602 had forbidden everyone to travel between the Cape and the Republic or sail through the Strait of Magellan beyond the Company's

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[83] Weststeijn, 228.

[84] E. Reimers, ed., *Memoirs of Ryckloff van Goens, Governor of Ceylon Delivered to His Successors Jacob Hustaart on December 26, 1663 and Ryckloff van Goens the Younger on April 12, 1675*, trans. E. Reimers (Colombo: Ceylon Government Press, 1932), 8.

[85] Reimers, 27.

[86] E. Reimers, ed., *Memoir of Joan Maetsuyker, President and Commander-in-Chief Delivered to His Successor Jacob van Kittensteyn on the 27th of February, 1650*, trans. E. Reimers (Colombo: Cottle, 1927), 18.

ambit.[87] These instructions were renewed by the charter of 1622, 1647-48 and 1665, laying emphasis on the VOC's exclusive rights to trade in specific commodities in the profitable regions.[88] Though limited trading permits were given to the free traders within the intra-Asian trade network, the monopoly was retained in greater parts and reinforced from time to time.[89] It was this factor of monopoly that became the basis for all the formal rules which were entered into the Company's ordinance books, and used as the standard reference point for defining (im)proper official behaviour. It leads us to wonder why there had been such strict monopoly laws despite all the conflicting opinions, especially when its removal was argued to have guaranteed better commercial success for the profit-driven Republic. In order to find the answer to this, it is necessary to study the VOC's monopoly regulations and use of corruption allegations, in connection with the political implications in the Dutch Republic.

Political Connections Behind Allegations of Corruption

The Company's increasing mention of corruption in its records, coincided with the growing concerns about administrative corruption, in general in the Republic. But there has been, as of yet, no exhaustive research done to establish this connection between the VOC corruption and the political developments in the Dutch Republic. Ample studies exist in the conventional literature about families in the Republic who were tied to the Company, both as administrators or part of the *Heeren XVII* as well as in the VOC overseas.[90] While these studies invite further investigation into the role of the VOC beyond its commercial cadre, they illustrate the importance of establishing a link between the Republic and the Company overseas, on the basis

87 Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:1–2.

88 Chijs, 1:108; Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 2: 112, 389.

89 Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:46.

90 A few examples can be seen in studies on the family Trip by Klein. See, P.W. Klein, *De Trippen in de 17de eeuw: Een studie over het ondernemersgedrag op de hollandse stapelmarkt* (Routledge: London and New York, 1965), 163–83. Kooijmans examines the connections of the family Huydecoper in the Republic and overseas. See, Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*. Apart from these, there are extracts from biographical works. For some such examples see, J. Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1636-1691) and Hortus Malabaricus* (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1986); Wim Buijze, *Leven en werk van Georg Everhard Rumphuis (1672-1702). Een natuurhistoricus in dienst van de VOC* (Den Haag: W. Buijze, 2006).

of known factional and personal alliances. Such an endeavour, as has been attempted in this dissertation, can reveal the politics behind the functioning of the VOC administration. This attempt to explore the political connections in historiography may lead to further revelations about the way in which corruption allegations and incidents were viewed within the Company.

In the previous chapter, it has been shown how corruption became a political agenda in the Dutch political forum. The numerous ideologies and political theories that were current at the time, elevated commerce to become a crucial factor in sustaining the Republic. But this process also raised anxieties of moral and civic decadence. Weststeijn reasoned that the overwhelming anxiety to control corruption in the Republic and in the Company, was influenced by images from the classical past, especially that of the *Sallustian* moment that led to the decline of the Roman Empire. The possibility of a similar fate, he argued, constantly haunted the Dutch Republic. In such a growing and prosperous economy, the key political figures therefore wanted to prevent anything similar befalling them, thereby triggering calls for the reform of administrative morale.[91] By the end of the century, these discussions coincided with the moment that corruption in the VOC had started attracting greater political attention.[92] This was triggered by the flow of exotic commodities which enhanced conspicuous consumption and in turn stirred up controversial images of power, wealth and luxury in the Dutch society.[93] With the 'public' dimension of the government mounting, the financial accountability of the *Heeren XVII* to those citizens with investments in the Company also increased. It brought more attention on the subject of VOC corruption in the political front of the Republic.

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[91] Weststeijn, "Republican Empire," 491–509.

[92] A relevant example of an account written around this time though published later is that of Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*.

[93] For a brief historiographical overview on the state and consumption and its relation to morality see, Sven Dupré and Christoph Lüthy, "Introduction: Silent Messengers. The World of Goods and the Circulation of Knowledge in the Early Modern Netherlands," in *Silent Messengers: The Circulation of Material Objects of Knowledge in the Early Modern Low Countries,* eds. Sven Dupré and Christoph Lüthy (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011), 2–7; Weststeijn, "Republican Empire," 491–509; Mary Lindemann, *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 80–87; Adams, *The Familial State*, 69. Harold Cook introduces another perspective that showed that consumption of luxury goods came to be associated with refined taste and an indication of 'human betterment'. See, Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 14–15.

The VOC in the Republic had not always been financially stable because of its difficulties in being able to return dividends on time.[94] This aroused tension between the shareholders and the directors from time to time, especially during those years when the charter needed to be extended by the States-General. Petitions and pamphlets directed against the *Heeren XVII*, for instance, flooded the Republic in 1622 when the VOC applied for the renewal of its charter. Corruption and mismanagement of money by the directors was one of the chief allegations voiced by the shareholders in these pamphlets. In a complaint to the States-General, those citizens with investments in the Company noted –

> It seems that the dissident shareholders of the Dutch East-India Company have been brought to such a situation by some of the directors through their self-centered administration, as they are the ones who driven by their insatiable greed have let themselves go so far, as to act as usurpers of all rights and reason to make themselves masters of other people's goods (who are much wiser than them) which they then administer against the will of others, without ever accounting for it (that is silently appropriating goods that belong to other people). Everywhere their blinding greed have misled them so far away from reason that they are not ashamed to ask the honourable States-General to formalize their practice in a charter and privileges.[95]

Thus, the political changes combined with the ideological motivations and financial tensions shook the Company's base repeatedly in the Dutch public space with corruption allegations. However, the *Heeren XVII* retained its monopoly but made earnest efforts to address these issues and adapt. One of the strategic responses in the beginning of the seventeenth century was to shift the attention to overseas Company servants, who came to be blamed for their illegal riches earned abroad. This was given a legal voice when in 1626, the office of a commissioner

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[94] Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 27–28.

[95] '*In sulcken staat schijnen nu de dolerende participanten van de oost-indische compagnie vervallen te wesen/ deur eenige der bewinthebbers eygen-baat-soeckende regieringe/ die met eene onversadelijcke gierichheyt haar so verre verlopen/ dat sy tegen alle recht en reden als geweldenaars haar hebben willen meesters maken over ander lieden goederen (die wijser sijn als zy) om die te regieren tegen haren danck/ sonder immermeer rekeninghe te doen ('t welck stil swijgende ander luyden goet eygenen is). Alwaar haar de verblinde gierichheyt oock soo verre van alle redelijckheyt verleyt heeft/ dat sy haar niet geschaamt hebben/ hier van octroy en privilegie/ als een groot werck uytgewerckt Hebbende/ aan de Ho. Mog. Heeren Staten-Generaal te versoecken.*'
Simon van Middelgeest, *Nootwendich discours oft vertooch aan de hoogh-mogende heeren Staten-Generaal van de participanten der Oost-Indische Compagnie tegens bewinthebbers*, 1622 (Dutch Pamphlets Online, pamphlet nr. 3348)

came to be introduced in the VOC whose duty was to investigate the Company's factories abroad.[96] As Pieter van Dam, the *advocaat* of the VOC recorded, this measure was meant to resolve the rising concerns about –

> …the negligence, wastages, faults, excesses and even the disloyalty of the Company servants in the Indies, especially with regard to the private (illegal) trade, which is contrary to the contract and the oaths that they are bound to, (and which) has caused great damage and hindrance to the Company's trade and a stark reduction of its resources and capital, and notwithstanding the continuous attempts and exhortations directed against it, it has been opined that necessary measures should be taken in order to preserve the Company from its forthcoming ruin.[97]

But there was another significant reason for this shifting of the attention to overseas corruption. In the previous chapter, it has been contended that corruption allegations had been used as a political tool in the process of factional infighting with political rivals attacking each other. Since most of the political figures rose to the top ranks of the VOC administration, it is not illogical to think that they attempted to introduce their factional intrigues into the Company's forum. Several of the initial directors of the *Heeren XVII* were men who had been part of the earlier small companies (the *Voorcompagnieën)* trying to explore the trading prospects in Asia. These directors (primarily from the chamber of Amsterdam) included people such as Reinier Adriaensz. Pauw, Hendrick Arentsz. Hudde, Gerrit Pietersz Bicker (all of whom had been directors of the *Compagnie van Verre*), Geurt Dircksz. van Beuningen (who was the director of another Company that merged with the *Oude Compagnie*) and others, who had taken the first step in forming an alliance with Van Oldenbarnevelt to have a chartered United Company established in the

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[96] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:188. Also see, NL-HaNA, Familiearchief Van Goens, inv. nr. 27, Instructions for the commissioners attached with the letter for Rijkloff van Goens Jr. on his appointment as commissioner of the Cape in 1680, 23 April, 1686: folios not numbered.

[97] '*…de onaghtsaamheden, verquistingen, fauten, excessen, selfs ontrouw van de bedienden in Indiën, en specialijck mede over den particulieren handel, tegens de verbintenis en den eedt, by deselve gedaan, tot grote schade en verhinderingh in Compagnies handel, en merckelycke verminderingh in haere middelen en capitalen, en dat onaengesien de geduyrige aanschrijvingen en vermaningen daartegens gedaan, en waarin dienvolgende gemeynt wiert, dat om de Compagnie voor haar aanstaende ruïne te preserveren, nootsaeckelijck diende voorsien te worden.*'
Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book III, 128. It is to be noted that Van Dam's work was meant only for the directors of the VOC as a secret report on the Company's affairs.

Republic.[98] They were at the same time important political figures and the men with the required capital to invest in the Company in order to make it a possible venture. Consequently, their factional bickering which had pervaded the political space, spilled over inevitably into the Company administration. Owing to these strong bonds between the Company and the political administration, factionalism and elite political relations crept into the administration of the chambers. It is then quite likely that the aligning of factions in the political space corresponded to the factional shuffling in the VOC administration. But there was the extra dimension of the factional interplay in overseas settlements that required the VOC in the Republic to be connected to the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia. Was the rule of monopoly then retained so rigidly in order to make political use of corruption allegations and synchronise factions abroad with the purpose of influencing the composition of the Company? This could be, as I contend in detail in the later chapters, another reason for diverting attention towards overseas corruption.

But before investigating the factional connections between the Company in the Republic and overseas, it is necessary to explore the VOC's political connections in the Republic. It was through the factional changes in the *vroedschap* where corruption allegations played a subtle role, that subsequent changes were brought about in the factions of the *Heeren XVII* and the Amsterdam chamber of the VOC in the Republic. In the years after 1618-19, for instance, following the execution of Van Oldenbarnevelt, such factional forces became highly conspicuous. Certain cliques began gaining dominance over the others in both the political and the Company administration. Reinier Pauw, as an active member of the States of Holland, had not been on good terms with Van Oldenbarnevelt. He, therefore, found solidarity with Van Oldenbarnevelt's political opponent, the *stadhouder* of Holland and West-Friesland, Prince Maurits van Nassau. Pauw eventually went on to join the jury that tried Van Oldenbarnevelt and assented to the order of his execution. In the course of these political upheavals, Pauw along

[98] Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 30.

with his family and friends founded a strong Counter-Remonstrant faction in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam.[99] This factional alignment was reflected in both the Republic's political institutions as well as the VOC administration.

Within the political institutions, most offices soon came to be filled with members of Pauw's faction who had clashed with the opponent faction of Van Oldenbarnevelt's friends and political partners.[100] Many of the officials with Remonstrant links like IJsbrand Ben Albertsz., Herman Gijsbertsz. van de Poll and Dierick de Vlaming van Oudtshoorn, who were allies of Van Oldenbarnevelt, had already been removed from power and replaced with men from the pro-Maurits and Pauw factions.[101] In 1619, the *burgemeesters* Sebastian Egbertsz. and Jacob de Graeff Dircksz., who had also been aligned with Van Oldenbarnevelt were forced to leave their positions. They were replaced by men from Pauw's group who took over the leading positions.[102] Among the newly appointed officials in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam; were two members who happened to be cousins/great-nephews (*achterneven*) of Pauw – Albert Coenratsz. Burgh and Arent Pietersz. van der Burgh while the others, Simon van der Does and Gillis Jansz. Beth also joined in as friends attached to the Pauw family circle.[103] Their patron was one of the *burgemeesters* of Amsterdam, Frederick de Vrij, who was known to be close to the Pauws.[104]

This was followed by visible attempts of factional realignments in the VOC administration (and also the WIC which is beyond our scope here), as can be traced through the changes in the composition of the Amsterdam chamber of the Company. A study of the shuffling of office-holders within the chamber of Amsterdam revealed links to the changes of political factions in the *vroedschap*. The Pauws as a powerful family saw to it that their friends and cousins were seated in the Company's chief directorial positions. While Adriaen Pauw joined the

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[99] See Chapter 1 for this reference on the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants.
[100] Geert H. Janssen, *Het stokje van Oldenbarnevelt* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 52.
[101] All three were related to the Hooft family that had Remonstrant connections and were quite anti-Pauw. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578-1795*, 217, 221, 280, 495.
[102] Elias, 258, 266.
[103] Elias, LXX.
[104] Elias, LXX.

board of directors in 1618, Hillebrand Schellinger, another relative of the Pauws, continued in office as a director of the Amsterdam chamber.[105] At the same time, the Witsen family saw Gerrit Jacob Witsen continuing in the directorial office that he had occupied since 1614, while Gerrit Hudde, the brother of Hendrick Hudde was recruited in 1632 as family of the Witsens and a relative of the Pauws.[106] There was thus clear factional linkages between the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam and the VOC chamber of Amsterdam in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic

As mentioned earlier, removals and new appointments did not always go so smoothly or were as unanimous as may have first seemed. Not everyone could be ousted at the same time. There were different mechanisms through which officials could be added or removed by the political factions. There was the system of *contracten van correspondentie* (contracts of correspondence) which allowed existing members of the *vroedschap* to make appointments among themselves, preventing the *stadhouder*'s intervention (that is allowing room for a period of stadholdership).[107] This allowed for the winning faction to install men of their choice into city governments. In other cases, with vacancies arising because of death or other reasons, the dominant faction could press for putting in their candidate in the vacant position.[108] But nothing guaranteed a neat factional sweep all the time. Political opponents had to frequently work together, despite their differences under the same roof of political institutions. For instance, the faction led by Reynier Pauw and his cousins Gerrit Jacob Witsen, Jonas and Jan Cornelisz. Witsen operated alongside their rival faction of the brothers-in-laws, Frans Hendricksz. Oetgens and Barthold Cromhout.[109] Thus, while retaining their offices simultaneously, these two opposing factions also coexisted in the *vroedschap*, triggering greater competition for offices and

[105] Elias, 192, 300.

[106] Hendrick Hudde was already affiliated to the political group of the Orangists as he was appointed by the stadhouder Maurits in the *vroedschap* in 1618. See, Elias, 168, 162.

[107] Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 25–26.

[108] Price, 46.

[109] Laurens Jansz. Spiegel was removed by the *stadhouder* from his position in 1618 but his daughter was married to Michiel Pauw while his sister to Anthony Oetgens van Waveren. Considering both Pauw and Oetgens belonged to the Orangist territory at that time, there could have been competition. See, Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578-1795*, LXVIII.

personal favours. Friction was also caused by certain families harbouring mixed political affiliations and switching sides to join opposing factions. The Witsen family, for example, changed sides many times and different family members supported different factions. While at some point the Witsens were related to the Pauws and to the Huddes, at another point there were Witsens connected to the Bickers and the family of Huydecoper-Coymans.[110] Gerrit Jacob Witsen in 1621 did not care about breaking the obligation of his friendship with Pauw when he switched over to the opposing faction. Witsen's nephew, Jonas Cornelisz. Witsen also followed his uncle in this switchover. Disruptions in the factional alliances was thus possible, even though it was not the general rule or frequently done. But this risk ensured that there was everything done to secure cohesion among the members, making the familial and friendly factions a complicated yet vulnerable mark of solidarity in the political sphere.

To return to the factional linkages between the VOC and the political administration, one must point out that towards the end of the 1640s the Pauws began to fade out because of intense competition from the Bickers. The Bicker family and friends emerged as another powerful faction in Holland's political forum and even managed to win the confidence of the then *stadhouder*, Frederik Hendrik. The family De Graeff had been earlier displaced by the Pauws in 1618, but they received a new chance when Jacob de Graeff in 1630 returned to the *vroedschap* under the patronage of the *stadhouder*, Frederik Hendrik.[111] The Bickers and the De Graeffs formed an alliance against the Pauws whose power had already been dwindling in the States of Holland. This rivalry was laid bare when both the groups put forward or proposed for or nominated their candidates for a vacancy in the *vroedschap* and continued fighting tooth and nail

[110] Gerrit Hudde, whose brother Hendrick Hudde was appointed in 1618 by Maurits to the *vroedschap*, married Maria Witsen. Jonas Cornelisz. Witsen was related to the Pauws. This was already a different faction from the Bickers who were also related from the in-law's side to the Witsens. Cornelis Bicker was married to Aertge Witsen and later in-laws of the Witsens were married to Huydecoper and Coymans daughters. Clearly, there were shifting loyalties in the family according to the turn of vacancies and factional conflicts in the political institution. See, Elias, 327.

[111] Elias, 266.

to install their own candidates in that position.[112] By 1650, the Bicker-De Graeff league had emerged as the stronger faction in the Republic. In the subsequent years when the *stadhouder* of Holland was missing from the political scenario, the De Witt family came to the fore. They enhanced their power by uniting with the Bicker-De Graeff league through marriage alliances, leading to the creation of such a strong bureaucratic wall that it was almost impossible for an outsider to penetrate into this regent oligarchy.

The VOC in these years also turned into a tightly knit network of factions filled with these regent families and their friends who formed a clique as strong as the ones in the political administration. Andries Bicker, who had already held the position of a Company director in Amsterdam since 1641, continued in office as did Cornelis de Graeff, who had been there from 1636.[113] Andries Bicker went on to become both a *burgemeester* and a Company director simultaneously in 1641, and so did De Graeff for the years after 1643 when he became a *burgemeester* while holding on to his office as one of the Company directors.[114] Among others were Roelof Bicker who had joined as a director in the VOC in 1647 and continued thereafter, and Gerard van Papenbroeck who was also related to the Bickers and caught up with the administration of the VOC in 1658.[115] Add to this, later in 1667 Lambert Reynst who had been an in-law of the Bickers, as well as Nicolaes Pancras who came on board the VOC in 1668.[116]

The States of Holland, however, was never entirely won over by the De Witts, for the simple reason that competition always ensured the rise of opponent factions. Gillis Valckenier emerged as the fountainhead of this counter-De Wittian faction, campaigning for the restoration of the office of the *stadhouder* and publicly proclaiming his support for Willem III. In the aftermath of the events of 1672, the De Witts' execution paved the way for the rise of Valckenier and his faction who now stood strong in the States of Holland and the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam.

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[112] Elias, XCIV.
[113] Elias, 346, 422.
[114] Elias, 346.
[115] Elias, 267, 348, 435.
[116] Elias, 452, 467.

Valckenier's turn against the De Witt-De Graeff-Bicker link is to be seen in light of the fact that Valckenier's great-grandfather was Reynier Pauw whose family later had their differences with the Bickers.[117] It was at this time that Johannes Hudde also emerged as a prominent figure in the politics of the Republic and allied with Valckenier to form the Hudde-Valckenier league. Fresh opposition stemmed from Henrick Hooft and his faction against Valckenier and his faction, which led to another tense situation within the *vroedschap*. But by the end of the 1670s, the power of the *stadhouder,* Willem III had compelled Hooft to make peace with Hudde and Valckenier, to maintain a more stable situation in the States of Holland. After the death of Valckenier in 1680, Hudde and Huydecoper with their factions turned out to be the major power-holders and held a relatively powerful stronghold in the political domain in the subsequent decade.[118]

The displacement of officials from opponent factions played a key role in these major power swaps after 1672. The *wetsverzettingen* could be used in times of politicial emergencies by the *stadhouder* to choose members of the *vroedschap* of a limited number of cities.[119] This happened formally after 1672 when the *stadhouder*, Willem III returned to his position. By virtue of his power, many of the older men from the De Witt faction were replaced by men who pledged their allegiance to the House of Orange. Both Cornelis de Graeff and Andries de Graeff were the first among many to lose their positions in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam, followed by Lambert Reynst (who was married to a Bicker), Jan van de Poll (who was related to the Hoofts who were in turn related to the Bicker-de Graeffs), Roetert Ernst (who was married to the family de Vrij that was close to the Bicker-de Graeff faction) and several more.[120] In their places, offices were distributed to Jean Appelman who was related to both Gillis Valckenier and the family Huydecoper; Joan Commelin who belonged to the Bouwer family that was related to Valckenier;

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[117] The father of Gillis Valckenier was Wouter Valckenier (1637-50) who was the son of Gillis Jansz. Valckenier and Claertgen Pauw. Elias, 52.

[118] While Tulp's daughter Anna Catharina Tulp was married to Nicolaes Witsen, Hudde's mother was Maria Witsen belonging to the Witsen family.

[119] Wout Troost, *Stadhouder-Koning Willem III: Een politieke biografie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 97–98; Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 39–43.

[120] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 422, 520, 452, 445, 488.

Nicolaes Opmeer who was related to the Witsens and the Huddes; and Coenraad van Beuningen who was again related to Valckenier and Huydecoper van Maarsseveen among many others.[121]

These changes in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam were reflected in the administration of the Company as well. Within the chamber of Amsterdam, no less than sixteen replacements were made during these years.[122] Johannes Hudde came in and established his stronghold as a VOC director from 1679 that added further weight to his earlier position as a *burgemeester* of Amsterdam (which he held from 1672).[123] Valckenier had obtained the office of a director of the VOC representing Amsterdam in 1657 but he also became one of the prominent *burgemeesters* of Amsterdam in his later years and continued in that position till 1679.[124] Among others, appointed as friends of the Valckenier league were Louis Trip, who joined the VOC's directorial board in 1678 and Cornelis de Vlaming van Oudtshoorn, who had come in the year before Trip's appointment.[125] Valckenier's political opponent in the *vroedschap*, Henrick Hooft had died in 1678. But his son Gerrit Hooft obtained a directorial post in the Company in the same year and continued to work there until he reconciled later with the Hudde-Huydecoper faction. As a dominant personality after Gillis Valckenier's death, Huydecoper continued with his directorship in the Amsterdam chamber – an office that he had occupied since 1666. He was also distantly related to Gillis Valckenier through the family Bartolotti in the Republic.[126] Both Valckenier and Hudde were thereby also related to Coenraad van Beuningen who had married Guillielmo Bartolotti's daughter, Jacoba Bartolotti.[127] Gerrit Hooft, Jan Rodenburgh, Gerard Bors van

[121] Elias, 558, 569, 571, 512.
[122] Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 133.
[123] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 39; Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 528.
[124] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 478.
[125] Gaastra, 547, 506.
[126] Joan Huydecoper's sister, Jacoba Sophia Huydecoper was married to Guillielmo Bartolotti. Valckenier's great grandfather from his mother's side was Adriaen Pauw whose great grandson married a Bartolotti daughter. In some way, therefore, both Valckenier and Huydecoper were connected as family and as friends.
[127] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578-1795*, 513.

Waveren and Salomon de Blocquerie all now allied themselves to this Hudde-Huydecoper faction as some of them gained important positions in the VOC during the 1680s.[128]

It is evident from these examples that factionalism made up the basis of the Republic's political administration and influenced the Company administration as well. When it came to the use of corruption allegations as a political tool, however (as was common in the political institutions), it was seldom used for the VOC in the Republic. The shuffling in the political administration of Amsterdam's city council ensured that there were corresponding changes in the composition of the VOC's Amsterdam chamber and that of the *Heeren XVII*. Since most of the times, the rules for appointment in the Company required political figures to step in, it was not much of a problem for these men to install their favourites from their own factions. Some *burgemeesters* from Amsterdam even went on to appoint themselves to the board of the *Heeren XVII* or become directors for the Amsterdam chamber by using their privilege of being able to choose the right candidate for the Company. Furthermore, even though theoretically the tenure of the VOC directors was mostly for life, it was not impossible to remove existing directors from their offices citing other political reasons like incompetency or disagreement with the *stadhouder*. This meant that the winning faction was sometimes able to directly remove directors belonging to opposing factions from their positions, without having to resort to any strategy. A list of the directors from the chamber of Amsterdam as provided by F. Wieringa in her book shows the diversity in the length of their tenures in serving on the board of the *Heeren XVII*. It could sometimes be as long as twenty-nine years and at other times as short as one, two or three years.[129] It is also important to note that most of these officials were holding multiple offices at the same time such as being members of the the *vroedschap,* the *schepenraad*, a *burgemeester* and a Company director. In this way, the system allowed these officials to exploit their multiple connections, thereby, seizing the privilege to change or shuffle individuals within the Company's

[128] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 121.
[129] Wieringa, *De VOC in Amsterdam*, 180–84.

administration. It ensured furthermore that they did not necessarily need to use corruption allegations here, unlike in the political forum. Changes in the political institutions automatically ensured influence in the Company's core administration, owing to this connected factional interplay.

But the real problem emerged when it came to administering the extended wing of the Company in Asia. Direct shuffling of all the factions in all the places was not always possible, and the most that could be done was to change the governor-general in Batavia. When Johan Maetsuyker was called back from his position as the governor-general in 1676, Gillis Valckenier was one of the most politically powerful men in the States of Holland. He could, thus, influence the decisions of the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam as well as that of the *Heeren XVII* in the VOC. The choice to replace Joan Maetsuyker with Rijkloff van Goens as the new governor-general had much to do with Gillis Valckenier's patronage and alliance with the latter.[130] Similarly, when Johannes Camphuys obtained the position of the governor-general in 1684, he acquired the open support of Joan Huydecoper, one of the foremost men of his times in the Republic and the *Heeren XVII*.[131] Earlier, Cornelis Speelman, who served for a brief period as the governor-general of the VOC in Batavia (1681-1684), was also known for his factional connections with Huydecoper.[132] But beyond this position of governor-general, shuffling or removing the rest of the officials in overseas factories without a valid reason was not always feasible within a short span of time. The reasons were distance, slow communication and everything else that could possibly hinder contact between two continents connected only by ships in the seventeenth century.

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130 Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 125.

131 UA, Familie Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60. Letter written from Amsterdam by Joan Huydecoper, lord of Maarsseveen and Neerdijk (1625-1704) to his cousin, Joan Bax, dated 10 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

132 UA, Familie Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60. Letter written from Amsterdam by Joan Huydecoper, lord of Maarsseveen and Neerdijk (1625-1704) to his cousin, Joan Bax, dated 29 November, 1683: folios not numbered.

Monopoly and its violation as a political tool could, under such circumstances, prove to be a useful strategy, as allegations of illegal trade against certain officials who had been working abroad could displace them from their positions. The vexations of the *Heeren XVII* in controlling corruption among their officials abroad, was therefore enmeshed with, besides pragmatic goals, the opportunity to control the Company's factional politics abroad. These overseas factional politics, reflecting the factionalism of the Company in the Republic, have been elaborated on and substantiated in Chapters 5 and 6 through the case study of the Van Reede Committee in Bengal (in Mughal India). It suffices to say here that this factionalism, combined with the other political, financial and ideological developments discussed earlier, led the VOC in the Republic to stretch its perception of corruption to accommodate new overseas connotations. But despite this corruption and 'pride and single-minddedness' among the directors, the Company was to be sustained as Arnoldus Buchelius, a VOC director in the chamber of Amsterdam put it – for it was 'proper and necessary for our Republic'.[133]

However, when studying the Company's administration abroad, one should take note that the Company did not operate in an isolated bubble with its own employees and rules abroad. The VOC in seventeenth-century India, for example, had to deal with various external political and socio-cultural forces in the midst of diverse administrative rules. Considering the vastness of the territory served and the variety of the non-Dutch actors there, the way the anti-corruption drives and factional politics worked deserves closer examination. In our case of Mughal India, detecting the extent to which the local factors played a role in the VOC administration requires studying the administrative system of the Mughals. As the VOC remained particularly concerned about Bengal being a den of corruption, the following chapter focusses on this region in order to explain the Mughal administrative ethos there, where the Dutch administrative ideals also had to function.

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[133] Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565-1641)* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 180.

Conclusion

The VOC administrators in the Dutch Republic were exposed to the same public sphere as the political institutions in cities. They, too, therefore were confronted with the rising concerns about corruption. This was more intense because of the intimate ties between the Republic's and the Company's administrative domains. Factional allies and often certain personnel served on multiple occasions simultaneously in both these institutions. This connected the VOC and the political space of the Republic through common links. As political figures, the Company officials in the Republic felt the need to be accountable to their investors. The financial situation of the VOC depended on the investments of the citizens for whom the directors had to maintain their credible image. This constant pressure combined with the ideological discussions on the essence of commerce and its power to corrupt added to the rise of debates within and outside the VOC on its policies and actions. Corruption in the VOC consequently began becoming a major part of the *Heeren XVII's* discussions. The *Heeren XVII* defined corruption in the VOC as the violation of its monopoly rules that was further intertwined with the ideals of the prohibition of bribery, undue favouritism and loyalty to the 'fatherland' and its reformed religion. But in the course of the seventeenth century, owing to financial, ideological, political and factional developments, the focus on VOC corruption came to be diverted towards the overseas factories and the administrators there. It opened up the possibility for the VOC to connect their political factions in the Republic with the administration of the Company abroad by using corruption allegations (as was done in the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam), while also responding to the call for reforms and redress of the Company in the Republic.

Chapter 3

Where Desires Remain Untamed: Mughal Bengal and Its Administrative World in the Seventeenth-Century

The VOC set up its trading bases, among other places in Mughal India, including Bengal in the seventeenth century. The presence of the Company there has been recorded in the existent historiography as one that was purely commercial, driven by motives of profit.[1] While that might provide a different perspective when seen in terms of the personal ambitions of the officials as detailed in the next chapter, what is true is that the VOC officials did interact frequently with the Mughal administrators in this province. Consequently, both the VOC and the Mughal officials were confronted with each other's administrative practices and ethics, which supposedly determined their actions, decisions and observations in this setting. This was especially complex in Bengal as it was a region that formed the crucial geo-political frontier of the empire to its east. Mughal rule had begun there from the end of the 1500s and was still evolving in the seventeenth century. The Mughal nobles governing in this province were not only far from the direct control of the court but also enjoyed open access to the commerce of the connecting seas. More importantly, they were the ones who were responsible for granting permission and supervising the activities of European companies and other foreign trading communities living and working in this territory. It is, therefore, necessary to study their administrative world in Bengal with respect to the region's specificities, before we dicuss their encounter with the VOC officials in the seventeenth century. What did the local administrative setting of Bengal look like within the larger administrative set-up of the Mughal Empire? How did the Mughal administrative culture flourish there and what was the perception of this region in Mughal narratives? In order to answer these questions, an attempt has been made in this chapter to study seventeenth-century Bengal and its administrative world by focusing on the Mughal perception of corruption.

[1] Knaap, "De 'Core Business' van de VOC," 18.

The Appropriation of Bengal

The province of Bengal came to be annexed to the Mughal Empire by Emperor Akbar in 1576. After its annexation to the Mughal dominions, it was categorised in Akbar's administrative list as *subah* Bengal, consisting of twenty-four *sarkars* (territorial divisions within a *subah*) and 787 *mahals* (units within a *sarkar*). These included the *sarkars* of Tanda, Lakhanauti, Purniyah, Tejpur, Ghoraghat, Sonargaon, Sylhet, Satgaon and so on, including some *sarkars* from Orissa as it was part of *subah* Bengal. But Abul Fazl, one of the highest-ranking officials of Akbar's court and the author of his chronicle, *Akbarnama* wrote the following lines about the province –

> The country of Bengal is a land where, owing to the climate's favouring the base, the dust of dissension is always rising. From the wickedness of men families have decayed, and dominions been ruined.[2]

Abul Fazl, further went on to describe Bengal as being known to be a '*bulghakkhana*' (house of turbulence) from ancient times.[3] This tendency of the Mughal emperors to characterise Bengal as a rebellious place continued even to the time of Jahangir. The *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* revealed the paranoia of Emperor Jahangir in appointing Ali Quli Istajlu, an official who had served Akbar and was known for his 'habit of making misschief', to a region as Bengal.[4] After granting Ali Quli a *jagir* in Bengal, Jahangir wrote – 'Thence came news that it was not right to leave such mischievous persons there, and an order went to Qutubuddin Khan to send him to Court, and if he showed any futile, seditious ideas, to punish him'. Similar anxieties of 'dissent' or 'rebellion' with Bengal also appeared in Aurangzeb's discourse towards the latter half of the seventeenth century. As an emperor, he wrote the following lines in his *firman* to Mir Jumla, when appointing him as the *subahdar* of Bengal –

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[2] H. Beveridge, ed., *The Akbarnāma of Abu'l-Fazl: History of the Reign of Akbar Including an Account of His Predecessors*, trans. H. Beveridge, vol. III (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1939), 427.
[3] Beveridge, III:427.
[4] Alexander Rogers and H. Beveridge, eds., *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or, Memoirs of Jahangir* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 113.

> On the whole the laxity in administration, slackness, disobedience and rebellion, which have become rampant there (in Bengal) for several years, are not unknown to you…In every district the din of rebellion is rife and ringleaders have raised their heads in tumult.[5]

These three different Mughal narratives emanating from the royal chronicles of Akbar and Jahangir and the official order of Aurangzeb to Mir Jumla belonged to different periods of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But they consistently described Bengal in a negative tone as an outlawed seditious area which threatened their empire. It makes one wonder why Bengal came to be characterised in such a way repeatedly by the Mughal emperors. To address this question, one needs to begin first with the story of how the Mughals conquered Bengal and asserted their control there.

The conquest of Bengal in the sixteenth century was not an easy process, and as the above quotes show, retaining it under control throughout the subsequent century also remained an difficult task for the Mughals. This had partly to do with the geo-political set up of this region and partly with the active local forces present there. As a deltaic piece of land bordering on the north-eastern side of peninsular India, Bengal witnessed repeated changes of political boundaries and regimes. After its annexation to the Mughal Empire, the *Ain-i Akbari* (part of the official Mughal chronicle about Akbar written by Abul Fazl) described it as a region that stretched from Chittagong in the south-east (which was then in the possession of the Arakan ruler) to Teliagarhi in the west, close to the *subah* of Bihar.[6] There were mountains to its north and south, while it remained open to the sea in the east. The interior of this land was crossed by a network of rivers and rivulets that flowed into the high waters of the seas. The northern rivers especially were so well-connected that they provided cheap water transport facilities, which in turn made it possible to travel from Bengal to Agra, close to the Mughal capital.[7] These riverine connections made it a

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[5] Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb* (New Delhi etc.: Rajesh Publications, 1979), 269.
[6] Abu'l Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari*, ed. H.S. Jarrett, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891), 115-21.
[7] Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 25–26.

Fig 1: *Subah* Bengal portrayed under Hindustan/ The Empire of the Great Mughals made by Johannes Vingboons, 1665-1670. Reproduced from *Blaeu De Grote Atlas van de wereld in de 17de eeuw*, 89.[8]

[8] For more information on this see, Gommans, Bos, and Kruijtzer, *Grote Atlas*, 6:89.

crucial zone for Mughal control as an 'eastern frontier'.[9] In Gommans' words – 'Between Agra and Bengal was the richest and most settled agrarian area of Hindustan. Of course, to control this area was of crucial importance to the Mughals. Although, through its rivers, naturally tied to the Delhi-Agra region, at times of political weakness in the latter area, the former tended to become autonomous…'.[10] This tendency of the region to become autonomous by cutting off from the Mughal rule was facilitated by its riverine terrain that was less accessible to the Mughal cavalry. It, therefore, meant that in order to maintain its connection with the political centre, the Mughal emperors had to be extra vigilant in this area.

Prior to the coming of the Mughals, the region of Bengal had a rich history of being ruled autonomously by various dynasties. In the eleventh century, there were the Sena rulers who patronised Brahmanism. Their rule was followed by a brief period of the Devas before being overrun by the Islamic newcomers at the beginning of the thirteenth century. During this time, Bengal remained under the control of different governors appointed from Delhi. It also witnessed a rise of independent sultanates like that of the Ilyas Shahi (Turkic origin) and Husain Shahi dynasties and a brief interlude of Habshi rule (Muslim rulers of African descent) in between.[11] But by the time the Husain Shahi dynasty had attained power, the Mughals were already present in the subcontinent. Babur, however, left Bengal undisturbed on account of the well-entrenched Afghan positions there (which later were co-ordinated under Sher Shah Suri), which neither the Hussain Shahi Sultans nor Babur wanted to encourage through their mutual conflicts. Yet the Afghans could not be suppressed for long. Sher Shah Suri's rise in 1537 posed a new challenge to the Mughal Emperor Humayun (Babur's son) and before long he was overthrown and Sher Shah went on to establish the Sur dynasty. From his stronghold in Bengal, he pressed onwards to reach as far as Agra.

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[9] Gommans, 170.

[10] Gommans, 26.

[11] Stan Goron, "The Habshi Sultans of Bengal," in *African Elites in India: Habshi Amarat*, eds. Kenneth X. Robbins and John McLeod (India: Mapin Publishing, 2006), 131–37.

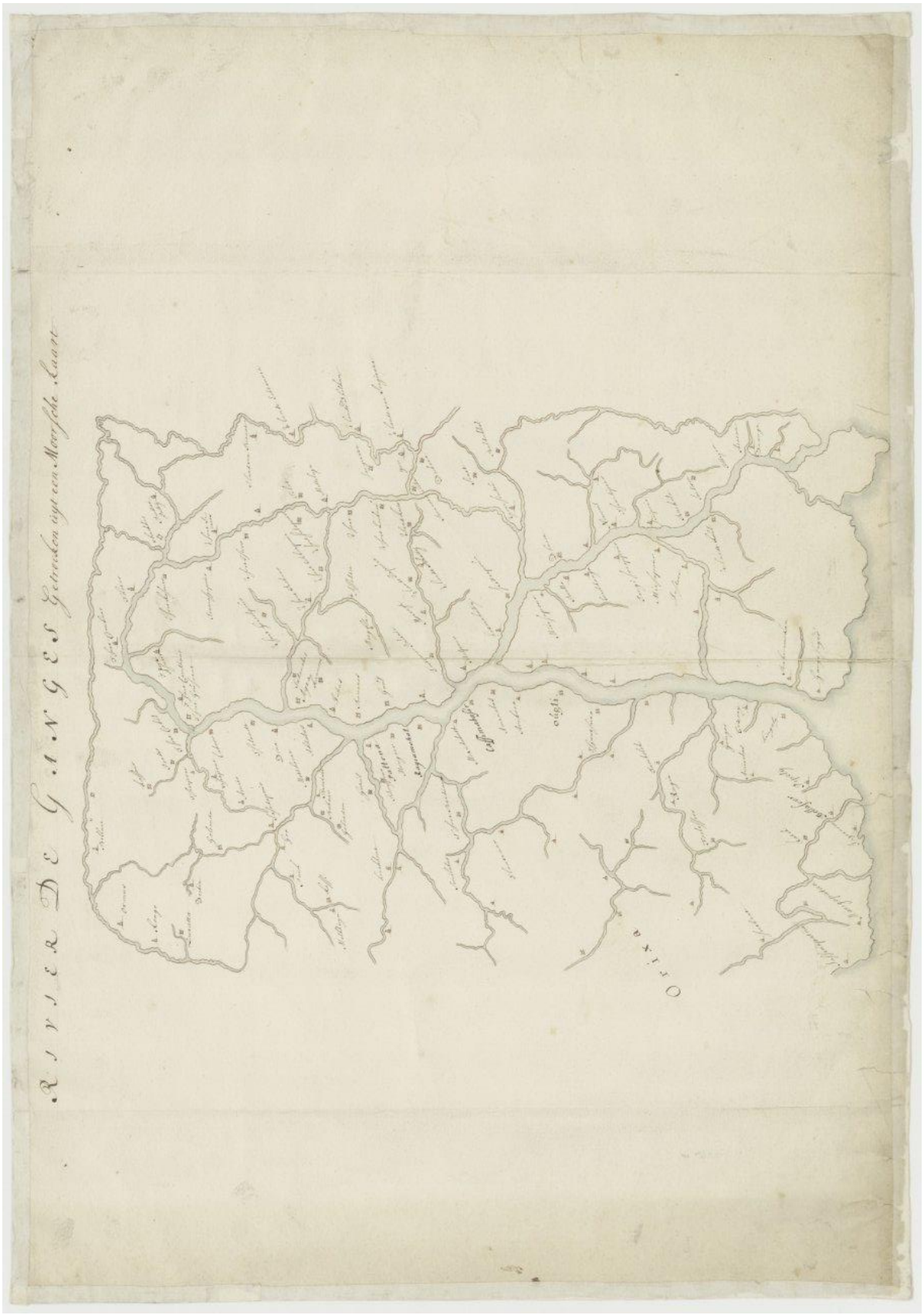

Fig 2: Map of the River Ganges in Bengal with its numerous tributaries, as copied from an Islamic map. NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 259.

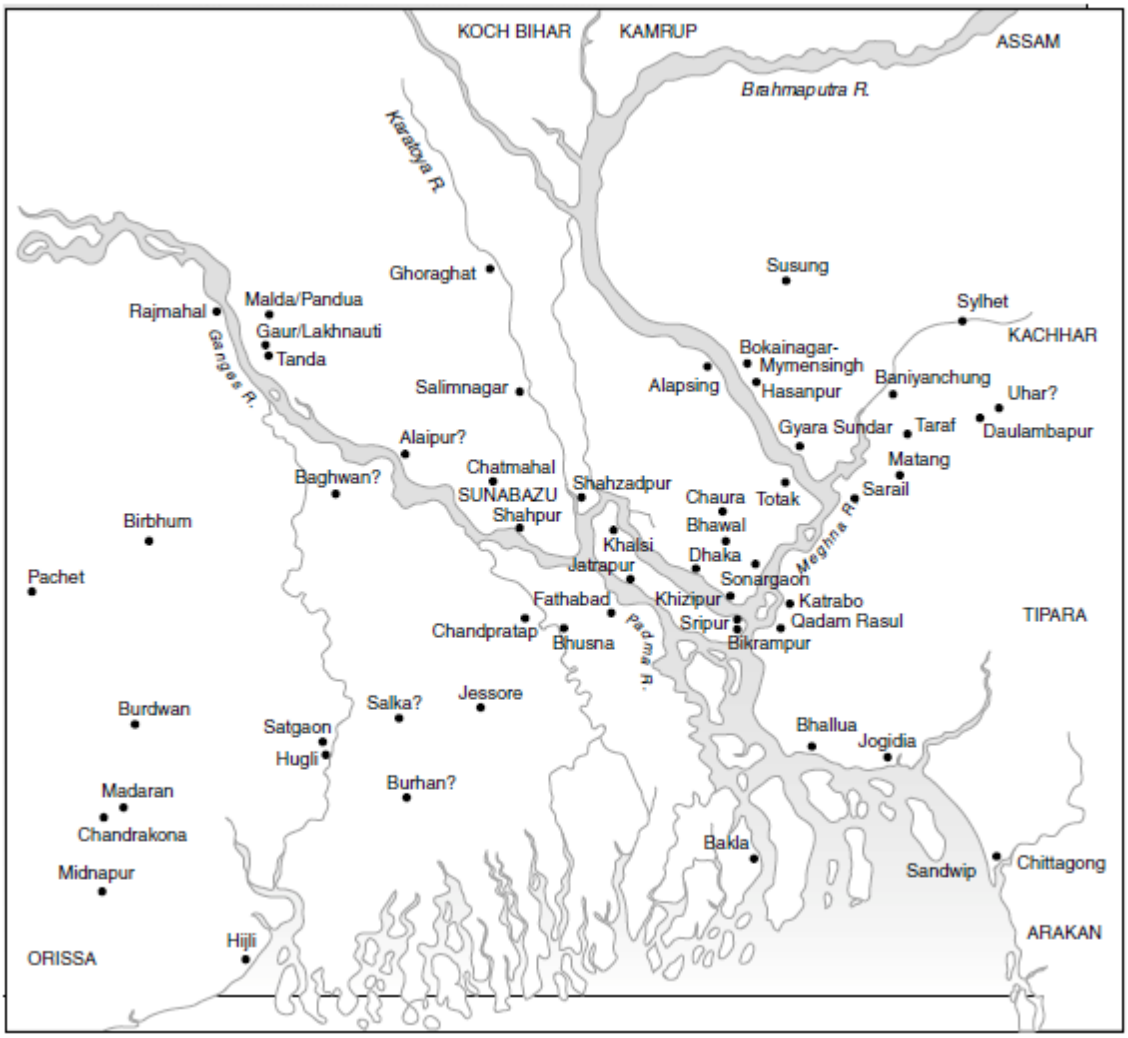

Fig 3: The *subah* of Bengal as the 'Eastern Frontier' of the Mughal Empire. Reproduced from Gommans, *Mughal Warfare,* 170.

After Sher Shah's death in 1545, the Mughal throne was restored to Humayun but the Sur dynasty continued to rule briefly in Bengal before being taken over by the dynasties of Muhammad Shah and the Karranis. The last ruler, Daud Khan Karrani (also Afghan) faced Akbar's armies and was defeated in 1576, allowing Bengal's political annexation by the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century. It finally led to the carving out of *subah* Bengal on the Mughal map while retaining its reputation as an 'extremity of Hindustan' that was therefore difficult to control from the Mughal heartlands (in the Delhi-Agra region).[12] The city of Gaur-Lakhnauti had been the political capital of Bengal for a long time, before the Mughals came in, while Tandah

[12] Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain i Akbari*, ed. H.S. Jarrett, vol. 2, 115.

served as the capital of the Karranis. But Man Singh, the Mughal *subahdar* moved the capital to Rajmahal in 1595, established a fort and a mosque there and renamed it as Akbarnagar.[13] This conquest was further consolidated little by little, owing to the challenges posed by the riverine terrain of Bengal where the unaccustomed Mughal fleet had to manoeuvre carefully to capture the capital at the head of the delta. Politically, thus, this province was known for displaying its independent character by having successful regional kingdoms in power for centuries, even before it was added to the Mughal dominions.

Added to these geo-political specificities and the independent streak of Bengal, there was also the presence of a large number of local political forces. Described as *zamindars*, which was the common term used for such regional potentates in the Mughal documents, they had ownership rights over villages called *zamindari* and jurisdiction over the rural inhabitants living there (see p. 136 for more information on *zamindars* in Bengal).[14] As such, bringing the province of Bengal under control meant having to contend with these regional *zamindars* and their administrative world. But the *zamindars* of Bengal were a group of well-entrenched overlords who could in no way be be uprooted or ignored by the Mughals. Some of them clashed with the Mughal administrators from time to time during their existence in the seventeenth century. The local *zamindars* called the *Bara Bhuyians* (12 landlords), for examples, resisted shortly after the conquest of Bengal under Akbar. Their 'rebellion' was eventually crushed around 1608 under Emperor Jahangir. This entire Mughal expedition in the trenches and waterways of Bengal has been recorded in detail by Mirza Nathan, the son of the then *subahdar* of Bengal, Islam Khan Chishti, in his *Baharisthan-i-Ghaybi.*[15] After this victory in 1612, Islam Khan was appointed as the

[13] For Tandah, see *Banglapedia.org*.

[14] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 173–74.

[15] Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during the Reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan*, ed. Rai Bahadur S.K. Bhuyan, trans. M.I. Borah, vol. 1 and 2 (Gauhati: Government of Assam in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, 1936); Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700*, 170–78.

subahdar of the region and he established his capital in Dhaka.[16] But Mughal Bengal could never entirely be a stable area and fresh expeditions again had to be launched here against the Arakan raids in the eastern part of the region (Bhati) at the time of the *subahdars*, Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan. Towards the closing years of the seventeenth century, further resistance was offered around 1696 at the time of Ibrahim Khan's tenure as the Mughal *subahdar* by Shobha Singh (debatedly either the *ijaradar* of the villages under Krishnaram Ray's Burdwan-*zamindari* or a petty *zamindar* from Chandrakona in Midnapore) who was allied with the Afghan chief, Rahim Khan.[17] This, too, was eventually curbed. But by the eighteenth century, Bengal had inevitably cut itself loose from the Mughal centre leading to the emergence of its independent *nizamat* with several powerful *zamindars*.

In addition to these active local forces, Mughal control was also challenged by an fluid and vast commercial setting. Bengal already enjoyed an enviable economic position in the Indian Ocean trading world prior to the seventeenth century.[18] Thanks to its numerous rivers and water channels, the maritime space of Bengal kept being 'frequented by a large number of East African, West Asian, South Asian, South-East Asian and Chinese merchants, shippers, sailors and pilgrims.'[19] It was reason enough to attract many foreign merchants who had to work alongside the Mughal merchant-administrators with their commercial enterprises there in the seventeenth century. More information on this will be provided in the next section. But besides these Mughal

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[16] For Dhaka, see *Banglapedia.org*.

[17] See under Shobha Singh in *Banglapedia.org*.

[18] Ranabir Chakravarti, "Early Medieval Bengal and the Trade in Horses: A Note," *Journal of Social and Economic History of the Orient* 42, no. 2 (1999): 194–211; B.N. Mukherjee, "Coastal and Overseas Trade in Pre-Gupta Vanga and Kalinga," in *Trade in Early India*, ed. Ranabir Chakravarti (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 199–227; Ian Glover, *Early Trade between India and South-East Asia: A Link in the Development of a World Trading System* (Hull: The University of Hull, Centre for South-East Asian Studies, 1989); Kenneth R. Hall, "Ports-of-Trade, Maritime Diasporas, and Networks of Trade and Cultural Integration in the Bay of Bengal Region of the Indian Ocean, c. 1300-1500," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1 (2010): 109–45; Rila Mukherjee, "Ambivalent Engagements: The Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean World," *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 1 (Feb. 2017): 96–110; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imârat and Tijârat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400-1750," *Comparative Studies in Social History* 37, no. 4 (Oct. 1995): 757.

[19] Ranabir Chakravarti, "An Enchanting Seascape: Through Epigraphic Lens," *Studies in History* 20, no. 2 (Aug. 2004): 306.

merchant-administrators, the local mercantile domain of Bengal was also populated with merchants of different ranks and types – right from the petty peddlers to intermediate brokers to powerful merchants with political allies.[20] There were not just Bengali-speaking but also Gujarati- and 'Hindusthani'-speaking merchants who had lived for generations in this region.[21] Many non-Muslim Bengali merchants also operated here as is evident from their presence as protagonists in the *Mangalkavya* literature.[22] The *Mangal* poems might deal with fictional content, but they reflect the commercial ambience and the socio-economic background of their times. These poems contain many ample examples of independent merchants like Dhanapati or Chand Sadagar with vivid descriptions of their boats and merchandise. Dhanapati, as a merchant in the *Chandimangal,*

[20] Om Prakash, "The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500-1800," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47 (2004): 435–57; Ashin Das Gupta, "Changing Faces of the Maritime Merchant," in *Emporia, Commodities and Enterpreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400-1750*, eds. Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), 353–62; Jos Gommans, "Trade and Civilization Around the Bay of Bengal, c. 1650-1800," *Itinerario* 19, no. 3 (Nov. 1995): 82–108.

[21] NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1422, Translation of the extract from the account book of the merchant Gangedas Kissendas, written in the Gujarati language and his own testimony with a signature, done during his service for the Company's factory at Kassimbazaar, June, 1686: f. 1139r; Translation of the extracts by the merchant Konsiouw Respoet from his account book written in the Gujarati language in Kasimbazaar, dated 20 June, 1686: f. 1140r; Translation of the extracts from the account book of the Company's broker, Caljandas Herriwollop written in the Gujarati language in the factory of Kasimbazaar, dated 21 June, 1686: f. 1144r; Translation of the extracts from the account book of the Company's broker, Dernider written in the Gujarati language in the factory of Kasimbazaar: f. 1145v. Furber points out that the Bengali merchant, Hari Shah helped the Frenchman, Jean de St. Jacquy in financing a voyage from Balasore to Achin. See, Furber, "Asia and the West," 715.

[22] There were many non-Islamic merchants in Bengal who had strong religious associations with Vaishnavism and Shaivism. This is evident from the distinct Shaiva and Vaishnava names that they bore. A close examination of the names of the brokers working for the VOC in Bengal in the late seventeenth century, show clear influences of Vaishnavism among these classes. For example, there are a group of names like Krishan Ram Harihar (Kirsten Ramherriher), Gourikanto (Gaurikant), Hariram Harikrishan Radhakrishan (Heeriram Herrikirsten Radakirsten), Harikrishan Kattayan (Herriekisten Kaitneijn) which provide typical manifestations of the following of Gaudiya Vaishanavism of Chaitanya. Names of merchants like Shivram Shankar (Siveram Sancker) were inspired by Shaivite influences. See, NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422: f. 1135r, f. 1143r, f. 1148r. For more on Vaishnavism and its mercantile connections in Bengal see, Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir (* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), 119–91; Jadunath Sarkar, *Gaudiya Vaishnavism: Chaitanya's Life and Teachings (From His Contemporary Bengali Biography the Chaitanya-Charit-Amrita)* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1988); Eugenia Vanina, "The *Ardhakathanaka* by Banarasi Das: A Socio-Cultural Study," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 5, no. 2 (July 1995): 218–19; Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals*, vol. I (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1997), 247.

is described as sailing to Singhal (Ceylon) with his seven boats.[23] Such connections have been corroborated by historical evidence showing vibrant trading connections between Bengal and Ceylon in these years.[24] Chand Sadagar's mercantile journey in the *Manasamangal*, is traced along the banks of the important trading centres like Tribeni, Saptagram, Akna Mahesh (Srirampur), Betore, Farashdanga (Chandannagore) and so on.[25] The presence of traders from Bengal in other areas, was noted by travellers in several ports like that of Mocha, Masulipatnam, the Coromandel Coast, Malacca and other places.[26] As such, commerce in Bengal was a space where Muslim as well as non-Muslim and Bengali as well as non-Bengali speaking merchants participated at different levels of intra-Indian, inter-Asian and Afro-Indian trade within the Indian Ocean.

Notwithstanding the Mughal annexation of Bengal in 1576, this commercial vibrancy was allowed to exist and grow by incorporating it within the Mughal governing structure. Both Eaton and Rila Mukherjee pointed out the changes in the commercial setting of the region in connection with the shift of rivers from the western to the eastern part of the delta.[27] As agricultural settlements grew in the east, Mukherjee argued that the former trading connections of eastern Bengal with areas like Ava, China and the Arakan started becoming less. New water channels appeared, connecting the eastern rivers to the western ports that resulted in the intensification of trade in western Bengal. It added to the presence of a large number of merchants of different types in the western ports, a number of whom were also political actors. The Portuguese in Bengal, for instance, were known for their commercial and political

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[23] Mukundaram Chakraborty, *Kabikankan Chandi*, ed. Nilmoni Chakraborty (Kolkata: Bengali Printing Press, 1868), 119.

[24] J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1659-61* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1889), 76, 118; Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal* 29, 238; Prakash, 'The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500-1800', 451.

[25] Narayan Deb, ed., *Padmapuran: Manasha-Mangal* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1947), 156–68.

[26] Tõme Pirés, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and The Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, vol. 3 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944), 92–93; Wouter Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie van Wouter Schouten*, eds. Michael Breet and Marijke Barend-van Haeften (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2003), 366, 369.

[27] Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley etc.: California University Press, 1993), 226-27; Mukherjee, *Strange Riches*, 59–60.

engagements with the local forces as well as the Mughal officials.[28] This 'amphibious' nature of Bengal – the active force of *zamindars* on land and the vast number of commercial actors on water – supported by its elusive geo-political landscape made it an increasingly volatile and problematic region for the Mughal Empire to control.[29] If this uncontrollability was the reason that led to this region being known for nurturing 'dissension' in the Mughal chronicles, it might be worth examining how 'dissension' came to be perceived in the Mughal administration. For this, it is essential to know the larger mechanism of Mughal administrative functioning and how Bengal fitted into the set-up.

The Mughal Administration

The Mughal Empire was founded in the sixteenth century and spanned a major part of the Indian subcontinent.[30] It started from the north west of the subcontinent and expanded eastwards towards Bengal and Assam. By the end of the seventeenth century, the empire had extended to the Deccan in the south and the Punjab in the west. The question of how such a large empire retained its control over all the provinces has given rise to a debate that originated in the late colonial times in British-India and continues to be a bone of contention in academia right to the present day.[31] There is a spectrum of different perspectives that revolve around the centrality of the Mughal state. Nationalist historians in the 1940s and 50s disagreed among themselves on the beneficial or ruinous impact of the Mughal rule in India but agreed with the Aligarh school of historians on the central power of the Mughal state. Pioneered by Irfan Habib in the 1960s, this school of historians enforced the image of a strong and centralised state

[28] Faruqui, *The Princes*, 216; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: World, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge etc.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 286-90.

[29] For the relevance of the term 'amphibious' for littoral societies living in the liminal area between land and water see, Rila Mukherjee, *Strange Riches*, 39.

[30] I. H. Qureshi, "India Under the Mughals," in *The Cambridge History of Islam: The Indian Sub-Continent, South-East Asia, Africa and the Muslim West*, vol. II A (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 35–66.

[31] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, eds. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Oxford University Publishers, 1998), 3; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York etc.: Columbia University Press, 2012), 27–32.

extracting revenues ruthlessly from impoverished peasants.[32] However, this argument of a strong and organised Mughal state apparatus was countered by Stephen Blake at the end of the 1970s through his idea of a 'patrimonial' or 'household' bureaucracy. Taking Weber's theory of the ideal patrimonial-bureaucratic empire as a standard for describing the nature of many large empires, Blake argued that the Mughals too easily fitted into this model. Based on the information obtained from Abul Fazl's *Ain-i Akbari,* he concluded that – 'In its depiction of the emperor as a divinely-aided patriarch, the household as the central administration of a loosely structured group of men controlled by the Imperial household, and travel as a significant part of the emperor's activities', the Mughals deserved to be labelled as the quintessential 'patrimonial-bureaucratic' empire.[33]

The centralised state approach came to be questioned by more revisionist scholars, who revealed the weakness of the argument of a rock-solid central empire of the seventeenth century suddenly disintegrating into regional pieces in the eighteenth. Instead, alternative approaches were suggested for studying the Mughal Empire.[34]Alam and Subrahmanyam in 1998 penned down a summary of these approaches (comparative, systemic, spatial diversity from the south and the east, regional centralisation in the eighteenth century) and suggested that – (a) it would be useful to see the Mughal administration as a constantly evolving machinery rather than a static one, as much as (b) understanding that the empire expanded and adjusted itself to the dynamics of the regions annexed and appropriated to its dominions.[35] As revisionists focused their

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[32] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India.*

[33] Stephen P. Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (Nov. 1979): 94.

[34] Chetan Singh, "Centre and Periphery in the Mughal State: The Case of Seventeenth Century Punjab," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 2 (May 1988): 299-318; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers,Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); André Wink, "Land and Sovereignty in India under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya" (Phd diss. Leiden University, 1984).

[35] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction"; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context," *Common Knowledge* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 66–92,

attention on the regional perspectives, Farhat Hasan extended it to Surat in his work published in 2004. In it, he argued that the strength of regional forces, exerted at the bottom, worked its way up to impact the Mughal administrative policies. Through his analysis of Surat, he showed how resources could be cut off and mobilised against the Mughals by the joint network of local merchants and kings, at a time that the region was put under a Mughal siege.[36] Harbans Mukhia in the same year introduced another dimension to this historiography by analysing the Mughals from a 'bottom-up', 'post-colonial' perspective.[37] He showed the different ways the Mughal Empire sought legitimacy at the court and its reflections in the popular cultures of the diverse regions of the empire. At the same time, he showed how the ideals of loyalty and patronage of the administrators were fluid enough to form a stable Mughal reign. It was this intersection between order and chaos (fluidity yet stability), Mukhia argued, that captured the totality of Mughal history. Munis Faruqui, in 2012, went back to the top-down approach, emphasising the factional aspect of the Mughal rule as one of the prominent factors for sustaining the empire.[38] By arguing that the personal networks of the princely households kept the notion of an indivisible Mughal state intact, he showed how a central authority worked in combination with factional politics. He in fact revisited André Wink's work where Wink argued that the sustenance of the Mughal state depended on the *mansabdari* system (more on this appears later in this chapter), which unleashed the mechanism of '*fitna'* meaning 'sedition' or 'rebellion' as the dominant form of control.[39] Although the royal chronicles condemned '*fitna*' in theory, Wink explained that *fitna* in practice was institutionalised by the Mughal Empire. It implied 'forging of alliances' and extraction of allegiance to the state through 'a mixture of coercion and conciliation'

Project MUSE; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal State – Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 29, no. 3 (Sep. 1992): 291–321.

[36] Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[37] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 13.

[38] Munis Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[39] André Wink, *Akbar* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2009), 71-76; Other words used for the meaning of '*fitna*' is 'insurrection caused by factionalism', 'chaos', 'dissension' or 'civil war'. See, Wink, "Land and Sovereignty," 19.

by intervening into 'existing local conflicts'.[40] The politics of *fitna* allowed the Mughal rulers to control their Empire by using conflicts that existed among their *mansabdars* (including Mughal princes) and regional power groups.

The framework of personal networks and factional politics definitely opened up a nuanced and new way of looking into the Mughal administration beyond blunt communal, class and nationalist analyses. However, it also at times entailed the risk of confining the understanding of Mughal Indian governance solely to terms of negotiations and personal alliances for administrative survival, albeit in conjunction with regional loyalties.[41] The factional approach needs to be analysed in the light of Alam and Subrahmanyam's contention of a growing formalisation of the Mughal administrative culture, with the *munshis* and their flourishing set of administrative ethos. Such developments, as Alam and Subrahmanyam argued, could already be discerned from the time of Shah Jahan's rule and became more conspicuous under Aurangzeb through his administrative policies.[42] Moreover, they also stressed the need to understand the nature of the Mughal administration as a constantly evolving and experimenting apparatus that adjusted to its diverse regional dynamics.[43] What seems to be evident from the existent historiography, therefore, is that the Mughal administration needs to be studied in the context of its theory and practice. There existed a precarious equilibrium between the way the Mughal emperors fashioned and refashioned themselves in theory, and their practice of delegating political power to their administrators in the provinces. It is in this context of the formal administrative theory and informal practices, therefore, that the Mughal *mansabdars* in Bengal has been studied.

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[40] Wink, "Land and Sovereignty," 21-2.

[41] J.C. Heesterman, "The Social Dynamics of the Mughal Empire: A Brief Introduction," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 296; Dirk Kolff, "Retrospection," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 459–60.

[42] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," 31.

[43] Muzaffar Alam, "State Building Under the Mughals: Religion, Culture and Politics," *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* 3, no. 4 (1997): 105–28.

Administrative Practices in Mughal Bengal

The governing machinery of the Mughals in practice, revolved around the informal mechanism of political factions and regional alliances in the seventeenth century. This mechanism was, however, made possible through the formal edifice of the *mansabdari* system. Initiated and implemented from the time of Akbar, the *mansabdari* system was developed further by the successive Mughal emperors.[44] Every noble or high official was granted a *mansab* determining his rank in the administrative hierarchy and was called a *mansabdar.*[45] *Mansabdars* were required to offer military support (contingents of mostly cavalry) to the emperor in times of need, in return for emoluments that were either received in cash from the imperial treasury or through the system of granting territorial assignments called *jagirs* throughout the empire. The revenue from these *jagirs* worked as the financial compensation for the *mansabdar,* and those entitled to such *jagirdaris* (land holdings) came to be known as *jagirdars.* It was also a common practice to sublet one's *jagir* to subordinate officials, who could also become *jagirdars*. For instance, *mansabdars* holding several *jagirs* in different places were not always residing in provinces where they had their *jagirs* and, therefore, sublet these land holdings to other intermediate *jagirdars*.[46] Apart from revenue collection, *jagirdars* were not bound to any other administrative or judicial functions in their *jagirs* and were also not obliged to reside there. *Jagirs* were temporary assignments and were subject to the emperor's final approval. In fact, the entire *mansabdari* system with appointment, allotment and assignment of *mansabs* was regulated by the emperor. A dual division of the *mansabdari* rank started off in Akbar's time with the intention of controlling and keeping the *sawar* (military contingent rank) under surveillance, that in turn, determined the *zat* rank (personal rank) of a *mansabdar.*[47] As Wink in fact summarised it, the *mansabdari* system allowed for the

[44] Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 248–49.
[45] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 310–11.
[46] Habib, 310–11; Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," 43–44.
[47] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 85–86.

conversion of 'the rank, payment, and the military and other obligations of their holders (*mansabdars*) into exact numbers', ranging from 10 to 10,000, indicating the number of men that the *mansabdars* were to bring in.[48] This helped in keeping the persons with the largest military network under the ruler's control by entering them into high *mansabs*. With time, under the Emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, a third incentive called the *do-aspa-o-sih-aspa* was introduced to provide extra pay for larger contingents. These incentives, formalised through the *mansabdari* system, continued successfully and became more and more standardised, until by the time of Aurangzeb its very success became the cause of its crisis.

The *mansabdari* system connected all *mansabdars* to the emperor and kept them tied to his sovereign authority. With a large number of political actors stretched over the entire empire and a hierarchy of administrators created by this *mansabdari* system, the seeds of factionalism were inevitably sown in the Mughal administration. With cut-throat competition among the officials for promotion and better administrative positions, intrigues and court politics intensified. This politics in turn led to factional groups being formed among the administrators through patron-client ties (more about factionalism in the Mughal administration has been dealt with on p. 130). Although not officially sanctioned, political factions existed and operated under the formal façade of the Mughal *mansabdari* system. From the royal court to the provincial *subahs,* factionalism was present wherever the *mansabdari* system entrenched itself. But when it came to the regions or *subahs*, there was another difficulty that encountered the *mansabdari* system. Every province had their own local power magnates or *zamindars* (known by different names in different regions) who despite not being *mansabdars*, continued to coexist simultaneously with the Mughal administrators. In fact, as Habib shows, some of them could informally penetrate the *mansabdari* system and participate in it.[49] With the help of recommendations from Mughal nobles, certain *zamindars* in fact managed to climb the bureaucratic ladder and turn into *mansabdars*

[48] Wink, *Akbar,* 71.

[49] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 209–11.

(mostly Rajputs) holding *mansabs* in the seventeenth century.[50] Apart from this there were *ijaradars* or revenue-farmers who were also informally assigned villages by *mansabdars* in provinces to be farmed for revenue.[51] *Ijaradars* however had no jurisdiction over the villages leased out to them unlike the *zamindars* with their hereditary rights over their *zamindaris*. Neither the *zamindars* nor the *ijaradars* were officially part of the Mughal *mansabdari* system but they did exist and find ways of surviving in the formal Mughal administrative machinery.[52] The entire *mansabdari* system, in this way, theoretically connected the emperor, through formal or informal bonds, to all administrators in his empire from the top to the regional level. On one hand, it held the Mughal administrative factions together under one edifice and on the other hand, it created an informal Mughal-*zamindari* nexus at the regional level.

This makes us wonder what the world of these *mansabdars* looked like and on what basis were they selected to be appointed as Mughal administrators. A large number of the *mansabdars* constituted the group of professional administrators called *munshis* who were responsible for lending the Mughal administrative framework its unique character. The *munshis* were men trained rigorously from a young age in the Persian language and in other administrative and fiscal skills that were required for entering the administrative service of the Mughals. The *munshis* could vary from being very powerful administrators at the court, enjoying the highest level of *mansabs* like Abul Fazl under Emperor Akbar, to intermediate levels of provincial *munshi* families, trained in administrative skills and serving individual Mughal officials. A *munshi* could either hold a prominent *mansab* in the Mughal governing structure in the position of the *wazir,* the *diwan*, the *amin*, the *bakshi* and other such offices or intermediate positions in the provinces as revenue-farmers, military generals and court poets. These *munshis* were expected to be proficient in providing not just excellent services of the pen for their employers but were also to be skilful with their swords. Rajeev Kinra has focussed his study of such positions on the *munshis* in the

[50] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 68–69.
[51] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 275-76.
[52] Habib*,* 274-75.

Mughal realm. Using the example of Chandar Bhan Brahmin, one of the most successful *munshis* of his time who served the Emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Kinra has shown how these administrators were required to have basic military and bookkeeping skills along with a poetic flair and scholarly sophistication. It made some of them, to borrow Gommans' words, 'administrator-warriors' or 'officials-cum-soldiers' in the Mughal Empire.[53]

The middle-level *munshis* came from all backgrounds and despite being well-versed in Persian were still able to preserve their own religion or local language, on acquiring their positions.[54] Alam and Subrahmanyam have written about these *munshis* and their rigorous dedication in maintaining themselves as professional administrators, through several generations.[55] There were similar professional scribal families in western, northern and southern parts of India for which there have been meticulous researches done by Rosalind O'Hanlon and Sumit Guha.[56] On account of their combined functions, Kumkum Chatterjee also called them 'military-cum-revenue entrepreneurs'.[57] All of these scholarly works demonstrate that there was clearly a distinguished class of administrative elites with a characteristic education and training that flourished in the Mughal society. They served as the vanguards of the governing machinery in the seventeenth century. In the Mughal style of fragmented administration, they operated by combining their formal skills with their personal allegiances to become the ruling force of the empire. For the non-Muslims who wanted to make it to high offices, the position of the *munshi* was a coveted one as it opened up important political connections at the court and in the

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[53] Gommans, 42.

[54] Kumkum Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites in Sultanate and Mughal Bengal," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010): 464.

[55] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 64–70.

[56] Rosalind O' Hanlon and David Washbrook, "Introduction," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010): 441–43; Rosalind O' Hanlon, "The Social Worth of Scribes: Brahmins, Kayasthas and the Social Order in Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010): 563–95; Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites," 445–72; Sumit Guha, "Serving the Barbarian to Preserve the Dharma: The Ideology and Training of a Clerical Elite in Peninsular India, c. 1300-1800," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010): 497–525.

[57] Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites," 455.

provincial administration. It was also not uncommon for certain *munshis* to appropriate the surnames of their patrons as their own family names.[58] All *mansabdars* formally operating within the Mughal governing machinery were subject to the administrative ethos and etiquette prescribed by these *munshis,* which will be dealt with in the subsequent section. *Munshis*, thus, formed a vital part of the Mughal administration and the *mansabdari* system in the seventeenth century.

The *mansabdars* were not just political administrators but also integrally connected to trade and commerce. Ashin Das Gupta argued that the Mughal nobles 'flirted with commerce', while Chris Bayly and Subrahmanyam went on to propose the concept of 'portfolio-capitalism' for these merchant-officials.[59] They argued that the political administrators and the merchant magnates in India did not always exist in two estranged domains but were in fact often united in the same person of the 'portfolio-capitalist' who ran large enterprises, in addition to discharging their political duties. Satish Chandra focused further on the royal family to show how Mughal princes, queens and the emperors possessed several trading vessels and large ships and had extensive stakes in commerce.[60] Biographical case studies on individual Mughal nobles like Mir Jumla have also helped to explain this aspect further.[61] The *munshis* were known for their connections to the mercantile world. While Chandrabhan Brahmin wrote about the eminent merchants who belonged to his friendly circle; Banarasi Das as an ordinary merchant, talked about his deep friendship with the *subahdar* of Jaunpur, Chin Qilich Khan.[62] The Mughal

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[58] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (Aug. 2004): 65.

[59] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," in *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–20; Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 401–24.

[60] Satish Chandra, *Essays on Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 227–34.

[61] Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb*.

[62] Rajeev Kumar Kinra, 'Secretary-Poets in Mughal India and the Ethos of Persian: The Case of Chandar Bhān Brahman' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 18, 340; Banarasidas, *Ardhakathanak: A Half Story*, eds. Rohini Chowdhury and Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009), 191. One also encounters in the Mangal poems, the character of the merchant, Dhanapati who too takes an interest in reciting poetry and the

mansabdars as *munshis*, thus, simultaneously occupied the dual worlds of politics and commerce in the seventeenth century. To sum up the *mansabdari* system in Mughal India once more, it can be argued that this system linked all levels of administrators, formally or informally, to the emperor and his sovereign authority. The formal system was woven with the informal arrangement, which allowed it to retain factionalism and networks of regional forces in the provinces. Moreover, it also made the *mansabdars* a part of both the political and the commercial administrative worlds.

Given that this was the general structure of the Mughal administration, it is imperative to see how this functioned in the fluid and challenging space of Bengal. The Mughal regional politics in Bengal remained connected to the court politics at the centre to a certain extent through factions. Factionalism revolved around royal princes or prominent *mansabdars* who often held the position of *subahdar* and formed powerful links between the court and the province. But how did this factionalism work in the first place? Faruqui in his work, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire* has shown how the royal princes, as sons sharing the blood ties of the reigning emperor had to compete with each other as potential successors from a very young age. They were expected to develop their own princely households with their political allies. Every noble, every woman in the harem, every servant and soldier had to choose to join one of these princely households and prove their allegiance to their patron, besides serving the emperor simultaneously. During a succession dispute, these men and women in the princely factions had to provide their support with military and financial aid (directly or indirectly) for their chosen princes, so that the princes as possible successors could return the benefits received as soon as they became the next emperor. This was such an intricate process, that to borrow Faruqui's words – 'the best "networked" prince inevitably emerged as the next Mughal emperor'.[63] He argued that the balance in an efficient administration was therefore maintained through these

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mention of the land of Dhanapati's king as being well known for its study of poetry. See, Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakravarti, *Chandimangal*, trans. Edward M. Yazijian (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2015), 145.

[63] Faruqui, *The Princes,* 10.

patronage and friendship relations which ensured the interdependency of the officials on each other, including the ruler himself.

Beyond the emperor and the princes, the high ranking *mansabdars* too had their own political factions. They built strategic alliances by offering patronages to aspiring sons of nobles and others willing to enter the Mughal service. It required them to put forward recommendations for these men to the emperor. While talking about the types of letters and the epistolary modes of Mughal administration, Chandar Bhan wrote about his delight as a *munshi* in writing recommendation letters to help his acquaintances to get a job.[64] That this was common practice is also evidenced by the formal rules for appointment in certain posts that required recommendations, before being confirmed by the imperial order. Abdullah Khan Firuz-Jang wrote to the Emperor Jahangir with a list of recommendations for his servants who accompanied him to suppress the rebellion of the Rana.[65] Likewise, Iftikar Khan was promoted after the *subahdar* of Bengal sent in his recommendation to the emperor.[66] Patronage relations were, therefore, indispensable to acquiring a position in the Mughal administration.

But within this administrative setting, family also conveyed a sense of political solidarity. There are hundreds of such examples where fathers, sons, grandsons, uncles, nephews, cousins and sons-in-laws worked as colleagues in the imperial service, though they often occupied different hierarchical positions. Raja Man Singh's nephew, Madho Singh was granted an office by Jahangir.[67] Baz Bahadur was employed on account of his father, Nizam's reputation as being an efficient librarian during Humayun's rule.[68] Mirza Aziz Koka's son-in-law was Prince Khusrau and all of them were tied to the royal administration.[69] It would be an exhausting task to name all, but it suffices to say that nobody could have made a career at court without familial political

[64] Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India", 104.
[65] Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 177.
[66] Rogers and Beveridge, 177.
[67] Rogers and Beveridge, 17.
[68] Rogers and Beveridge, 21.
[69] Rogers and Beveridge, 80–81.

connections.[70] What is interesting though, is that the concept of the *family* as a political unit remained a relatively looser and more flexible entity in Mughal India than its Dutch counterpart. Being part of the royal family, in itself, did not always imply connections established through blood ties with the emperor, supported by the obligation of unquestioning loyalty. Political opponents could be members of the same family fighting each other for power and positions. For instance, fathers, brothers and sons, although related by blood, could nevertheless belong to rival factions in the administration. Mirza Nathan not only received Islam Khan's recommendation for an administrative position but also offered his help in annexing Bengal despite his father, Ihtimam Khan's temporary clash with the latter (Islam Khan).[71] Mirza Shah Nawaz Khan, who was Aurangzeb's father-in-law did not support Aurangzeb in his war against his brother, Dara Shukhoh. Later, he fought for Dara Shukhoh at Ajmer, despite having no blood ties with the latter.[72] When princes within the royal family set the example of murdering their own brothers and the emperors imprisoned their 'rebellious' sons, one could imagine that families represented political units but were not the epitome of trust within the Mughal Empire.

At the same time, there were instances when the bond of ink proved thicker than that of blood. A Mughal *munshi* could sometimes gain greater proximity to his patron than those belonging to the patron's direct bloodlines. The emperor, for example, could verbally extend his royal family to such an extent that he could embrace as many people as possible within its fold. This ensured that his favourites remained close to him and also were marked out with a high honour for their loyalty. Akbar called his *wazir*, Bairam Khan, *baba* (father) since his childhood days and continued to do so even after being made emperor.[73] Jahangir trusted Islam Khan, his foster cousin with the *subah* of Bengal and called him his *farzand* (son), even though he was

[70] It should be made clear here that anybody with the required skills from any ethnic or religious background could enter the political system. But they had to do it through the recommendations of their patrons by subscribing to the patronage system.

[71] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, 1:38, 51.

[72] Jadu Nath Sarkar, ed., *Ahkam-i Alamgiri (Anecdotes of Aurangzib): Persian Text, with an English Translation, Notes and a Life of Aurangzib* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1912), 48–49.

[73] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 54.

actually the son of Jahangir's foster-brother.[74] Aurangzeb, too, addressed Mir Jumla, his *wazir* as *baba* while Akbar had equal regards for his foster-mother, Jiji Anaga as for his own mother, Hamida Banu.[75] Shah Jahan after attaining the throne with the help of one of his loyal nobles, Yamin al-Daula Asaf Khan addressed him affectionately as his *ammu* (uncle).[76] Redefining relations that were distant by blood but closer in terms of loyalty with personal titles like that of *farzand* (son), *ammu* (uncle) or *koka* (foster-brother) was an indication that one was gaining entry into the royal administration and household.

This labyrinth of factional relations, emanating from the higher courtly level, percolated down to the provincial level of Bengal. The Mughal emperors always sent their trusted high-ranking *mansabdars* to govern the province as *subahdars*. Man Singh was the *subahdar* under Akbar, Islam Khan Chishti. Ibrahim Khan and Mahabat Khan were prominent *mansabdars* under Jahangir. Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan were powerful *mansabdars* during the reign of Aurangzeb. On their recommendation, other *mansabdars* were also given important positions in the Mughal administration of Bengal. At Islam Khan's request, for example, Jahangir increased the *mansab* rank of Iftikar Khan in Bengal.[77] It was also at his request that the rank of Ghiyas Khan, a *mansabdar* in Bengal was increased to 1500/800 with the conferring of the title of Inayat Khan in 1609.[78] Mirza Nathan was requested by another *mansabdar*, Shah Quli Khan in Orissa to appoint someone for maintaining a cavalry of 5000. Nathan then appointed his official, Bhimsen as the *bakshi* of this *mansab*, which was further sanctioned by the emperor.[79] Besides, connecting Mughal officials in the province, it also acted as the link between the local political forces and the Mughal administrators in the region. *Zamindars* and other administrative elites in Bengal, for

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[74] Islam Khan had no direct blood ties to Jahangir, as he was family to Jahangir's foster mother. See, Beveridge, *The Akbarnāma of Abu'l-Fazl*, III:142–43.
[75] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 54–55.
[76] Mukhia, 54.
[77] Wheeler M. Thackston, ed., *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113.
[78] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi,* 2: 796.
[79] Nathan, 2: 744.

example, could align themselves with certain Mughal factions and enter the Mughal administrative world as *munshis* by paying their allegiance to powerful *mansabdars*.[80] Bhabeshwar Simha, a *munshi* working for the *subahdar* of Bengal also became the *zamindari* of Chanchra in the seventeenth century for helping the Mughals.[81] Raja Narayan Mal Ujjainiya, a *zamindar* from Bihar (which was then part of *subah* Bengal) became a Mughal *mansabdar* for having helped Shah Jahan with his rebellion in his princely days as Khurram.[82] On the recommendation of Islam Khan under Jahangir, Raja Kalyan became incorporated into the Mughal administration by acquiring a position in the *sarkar* of Orissa for a *mansab* rank of 200/200.[83] These factional ties that created *zamindar*-cum-*munshis* at the provincial level also helped strengthen the Mughal-*zamindari* nexus in Bengal, and helped sustain the region within the Mughal Empire. The administrative world of Bengal thus consisted of powerful *mansabdars*, high-ranking *munshis* as well as middle-level *munshi* families, several *zamindars* and other active local forces. The Mughal emperor had to be vigilant therefore to keep a control over this mosaic of administrators in this region. A vast number of Mughal *mansabdars* in fact worked in Bengal and their offices changed, evolved or were often combined in the same person.[84] The basic offices for general administration consisted of the provincial *subahdar* (governor of a *subah*), *faujdar* (superintendent of troops or police), *karori* (the chief revenue collector), *kotwal* (police and prosecutor), *diwan* (chief financial officer), *qazi* (Mughal judge), who had to work under a similar set of chief administrators at the Mughal court. Bengal, also, had special positions like that of the *gomashtas* (appointed by higher nobles for collecting market dues) in the Mughal political set-up. It was this group of *mansabdars* who had to coordinate their administration in Bengal with the regional political forces and the local networks. This *mansabdar-zamindar* alliance in the provinces were

[80] Kumkum, "Scribal Elites," 460.
[81] Kumkum, 455.
[82] Faruqui, *The Princes*, 211.
[83] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, 2: 797.
[84] M. P. Singh, *Town, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire, 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 1985), 41, 51, 96.

kept in check by a bevy of superior officials like the royal *wazir*, the chief *diwan*, *qazi*, *karori* and other administrators at the centre who kept an eye on and co-ordinated the activities of their subordinates in the provinces. Besides this, a host of other administrators like the *waqai-nawis* (news-writers), *harkaras* (spies), *sawanih-nigars* (reporters) and *daks* (runners) were sent frequently to the provinces to report about the governance of the *subah* to the central administration of the Mughal emperor.[85] In the midst of multiple factional links, these check and balances were aimed to preserve an appropriate share of power between the centre and the Mughal administrators in Bengal.

But the most widespread group within the *mansabdari* system were the *munshis* who worked for the Mughal administration in Bengal. They were often synonymous with the term *Kayasthas* as a group who stuck to this profession and were already present from the pre-Mughal generations, before embracing with alacrity the new form of Mughal political training to enter its service.[86] Their prompt response to the Mughal administrative demands by learning Persian and adapting to the changing situation, gave them the image of a clever and quickly adaptable group of professionals. In the local *Mangalkavya* literature of Bengal, one can get plenty of examples of this group and their relations with the Mughals. The *Chandimangal* captures the quintessential image of a *munshi* in Bengal in a humorous manner. While in one place, a *Kayastha* (the group that were in this profession for so long that they almost became synonymous with a *munshi*) is described as someone with 'a pen tucked behind his ear and inkpot in hand' recording accounts on paper, at another place (in a metaphorical discussion) the panegyrist of the lion king in the jungle is said to be the clever jackal with his diplomatic and witty countenance as a *munshi*.[87]Such

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[85] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 93.

[86] Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites," 454. A good example is furnished by the case of Devidas Khan, of the Barendra Kayastha community who served Daud Khan Karrani, the last Afghan sultan of Bengal, and was also associated with the subsequent Mughal administration. Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 80.

[87] The *Chandimangal* is a text belonging to the genre of the *Mangalkavya* poems, where the protagonist is a devotee of the goddess Chandi (the snake god). See, Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakravarti, *Chandimangal*, trans. Edward M. Yazijian (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2015), 113.

characterisations emanated from their acquiescent nature to learn and adapt quickly to new rulers and new administrative needs which further led them to attain an elevated status in society. For when Kalketu (the fictional ruler of Bengal) chided his dishonest minister Bhangru Dutta in the *Chandimangal*, his words were – 'You make everyone call you a *Kayastha*…but (you) are actually a Rajput. You are a person of low class with a desire for high status and are not worthy to be my servant.'[88] Most of these families that worked as administrators for the Mughals were, however, not spared from military duties. The aforementioned Bhabeshwar Simha, who secured a revenue-military post under the Mughal *subahdar* of Bengal, distinguished himself in the Mughal military action against Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore. In return, he got to keep four *parganas* and the title of '*chowdhury*' which later formed the basis for his *zamindari* in Chanchra. Bhabeshwar's descendants also continued to serve the Mughals in various capacities in subsequent years.[89] It is again from Mukundaram (the author of *Chandimangal*) that one gets an insight into the surnames of certain families of *Kayasthas* who served as accountant-administrators in Bengal like the Ghosh, Basu, Mitra, Pal, Nandi, Sinha, Sen, Datta, Das, and other such clans.[90] These *munshi* families in Bengal brought the Mughal *mansabdars* and their political factions closer to the local administrative elites .

As mentioned earlier, it was not uncommon for these *munshis* (middle-level scribal elites) to acquire *zamindari* rights in Bengal, thus forming an overlapping regional bond. The '*zamindars*' in Bengal encompassed a group of local overlords from various origins. They could either be autonomous chiefs at the 'frontiers', or simply those with exclusive *zamindaris* ranging from big to petty landlords in the province. *Zamindari* rights were mostly hereditary and were also open to sale and purchase. The *zamindars* as the regional power magnates were indispensable to the Mughal administrators for several reasons. At the same time, they thrived on Mughal recognition and were simultaneously obliged to pay their allegiance to the Mughal emperor. In this relation,

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[88] Chakravarti, 163.

[89] Kumkum Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites," 455.

[90] Cited in Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 94.

both tried to administer Bengal together at different levels while retaining their respective character and power. The *zamindars* alone could either facilitate or make it difficult for the Mughal administrators to access the depths of the Bengali countryside. The local rulers, *zamindars* or chieftains controlled their own region and people and levied *bankar* (forest tax) and *jalkar* (water tax) as actual taxes in the areas of their *zamindari.*[91] They were also the ones who contributed to the performing of civic duties voluntarily, resulting in a number of tanks and *bandhs* (embankments) being built for facilitating agriculture in drought prone areas.[92] While the Mughal *subahdars* tried to control the major trade routes and urban centres, they still remained dependent on these *zamindars* for the local administration of Bengal and for revenue collection.[93] Unlike other Mughal provinces, in Bengal (much like Bihar and Gujarat), instead of revenue assessments, fixed annual claims were made by the local *zamindars* based on the information of the *qanungos* (intermediate *pargana* level revenue administrators) working there.[94] In the Mughal revenue set-up, the *jagirs* were assigned by *jagirdars* to officials called *amils* who in turn were not allowed to forge local ties with the *zamindars*. To mediate between these *amils* and the *zamindars*, a

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[91] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 181. To get an idea about the presence of dense forests and the river system in Bengal see Habib's economic map of Bengal (Plate 11B). Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire: Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes, Bibliography and Index*.

[92] Rachel Fell McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17–20; Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538 A.D.: A Socio-Political Study* (Dacca: Asiatic Press, 1965), 125. For an overview of the *zamindari* duties in the localities of Bengal see, Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 233–34.

[93] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," in *The Mughal State*, 39–46.

[94] The creation of the *subah*, *sarkar* and *pargana* as administrative units was integrally connected with the system of revenue assessment and appropriation. The revenue of all areas under the Mughal administration were normally assigned as payment for its governing class. Territorial units called *jagirs* (or less commonly used *iqta* or *tuyul*) were divided among the nobles for revenue appropriation, who would then become temporary holders of these *jagirs*, known as *jagirdars*. There could be numerous *jagirs* within a particular *subah* of the Mughal empire. Besides these units, there were lands that waited to be assigned as *jagirs* called *paibaqi* and lands called *in'-am* that were granted to nobles without any obligation for payment (reward). The other important areas were the *khalisa-i sharifa* lands which were territories or sources of revenue reserved directly for the royal treasury. All of these lands were mostly assessed during harvest at their crop rates (*rai*) to determine their *jama* (standing revenue assessed). The actual amount collected was called *hasil* and this entire process of revenue administration was known as the *zabti* system. For this enormous task of revenue assessment and appropriation across all areas of the Mughal empire, a huge number of administrators like the *amil*, the *fotadar*, the *karkun* etc. were employed at *pargana* levels. They all worked under the supervision of the *karori* (the chief revenue collector) of a *subah* who in turn worked with the *faujdar*, the *kotwal*, the *diwan* and others under the control of the *subahdar*. See, Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 300.

second layer of local revenue administrators called the *qanungos* was created.[95] Most of the times these *qanungos* had hereditary status and came from the accountant class of *Kayastha*s or *Khatris* who served as *munshis* for the Mughal administration. The *qanungos* were a part of the Mughal revenue machinery and therefore their appointment and removal were officially subjected to the emperor's ratification. In Bengal, they were the ones who were responsible for providing information about the assessed revenue (*jama*) and thereby had the opportunity to form alliances with either the local *zamindars* against the *amils* and their agents, or with the provincial *faujdar* to hinder the process of revenue exaction.[96] There were significant other exceptions that applied to Mughal Bengal, when it came to the administration of revenue collection.[97] What is important though is the informal alliances that were developed through this dependency of the Mughal administrators on the local *zamindars.* Since the *zamindars* paid tribute themselves and helped in collecting the revenue for the Mughal administrators, their help was crucial to the political sustenance of the Mughals in Bengal.[98]

The *zamindars*, on the other hand, also sought approval and acceptance of their authority from their Mughal overlords. The *rajas* of Nadia, the *zamindars* of Burdwan were among the few *zamindaris* that began emerging from the late seventeenth century onwards in Mughal Bengal and became more prominent later under Murshid Quli Khan, as the *nawab* of the eighteenth-century Bengali *nizamat.*[99] There were also new *zamindars* who emerged in the seventeenth century like the *rajas* Srihari and Janakiballabh in Jessore, on the southern part of Bengal.[100] The Mughal-*zamindari* regional accord was crucial for garnering military labour from this area in times of

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[95] Habib, 331–37.
[96] Habib, 336.
[97] Habib, 309, 215–17.
[98] Habib, 217.
[99] Rachel Fell McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011), 17. John R. McLane points out about the thinness of information about *zamindars* in Bengal in the Persian sources of seventeenth century Mughal India. See, John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159.
[100] Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 30.

need.[101] To be able to garner this support, the Mughal administration incorporated the *zamindars* informally in their *mansabdari* arrangement through certain incentives. According to a passage in the *Fathiya-i Ibriyya,* claimants to the throne of Arakan who sided with the Mughals during Shaista Khan's Chittagong expedition, were said to have hoped for something, at least: 'If they could not become *rajas,* they might become *zamindars*; if not *zamindars,* then *ta'alluqdars.*'[102] Instances of *zamindars* working for the Mughal administration by helping the *qanungo* or functioning as the *wakil* are recorded frequently in the genealogical charts called *kulagranthas* of high-status Bengali Brahmins (as *zamindars*) and Kayasthas (*munshis*).[103] One comes across at times even rare examples of *zamindars* taking pride in wedding alliances with lineages of Muslim noblewomen or the Barendra Brahmins as powerful *zamindars* trying to copy the elite Muslim customs, manners and lifestyle.[104]

Despite resting on a precarious balance of power, the fact that this Mughal-*zamindari* nexus in Bengal was successful to some extent is evident from the positive characterisation of the Mughals in contemporary Bengali literature. The Mughal *subahdar* of Bengal, Raja Man Singh and a few other *mansabdars* were hailed as *nawabs* in Bengal and have often found a favourable place in the local literature and folk tales, owing to their patronage of Vaishnava temples and small mosques in this region.[105] The regular vocabulary of the Bengali literary productions in the seventeenth century also included several Mughal words. Owing to the training of several *munshis* and *zamindars* in Persian, many Arabic and Persian words such as the Mughal administrative terms of '*sarkar*', '*pargana*' and so on snuggled comfortably into the Bengali vocabulary.[106] On their part, the Mughal administrators too did their best to accommodate the specificities of the *zamindars* and their political culture. Most of them participated visibly in the local festivities like

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[101] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 170–78.
[102] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 212. For the history of the book see under *Fathiya-i-Ibriyya* or the *Tarikh-i Assam* in Bangalpedia.org.
[103] Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 80.
[104] Chatterjee, 81–82.
[105] Atish Dasgupta, "Islam in Bengal: Formative Period," *Social Scientist* 32, no. 3/4 (2004): 30–41.
[106] Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 133–39.

that of the raft ceremony called *Bera Bhashan*.[107] They provided room for the continuation of vernacular literature in Bengali. The Bengali poet, Alaol who hailed from Gaur and moved to Arakan, was known for receiving generous patronage from the king for composing poems in a mixture of languages producing the '*Musalmani Bangala*' form.[108] Daily conversations, too, were carried out in vernaculars and an ambience developed where Bengali authors composing Brahmanic texts were also fluent in Persian.[109] The Mughal administrators also allowed the customary laws and other parallel forms of local judicial dispensations in Bengal to be adhered to, although as Nandini Chatterjee pointed out, most of all the major civil and criminal cases were registered at the Mughal *qazi's* court.[110] It showed that the state of plural jurisdiction where the *zamindars* held on to the jurisdiction over their own *zamindaris* while also being subject to the jurisdiction of the Mughal *qazi* in the province. The *zamindars* in Bengal, on their part, accepted the Mughal authority but retained their local world within it. The fluidity and complexity of this administrative situation of Bengal – that was Mughal and yet local – is best evident from a reference in the *Mangalchandir Geet* composed by Madhabacharya in the 1640s. The author here

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[107] Rila Mukherjee, "Putting the Rafts out to Sea: Talking of "Bera Bhashan" in Bengal," *Transforming Cultures* 3, no. 2 (2008): 125.

[108] David L. Curley, "A Historian's Introduction to Reading *Mangal-kabya*," in *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal,* ed. David L. Curley (Washington: Western Washington University), 15; Thibaut d'Hubert, 'Pirates, Poets, and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U,' in *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, eds. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 47–74.

[109] Bharatchandra Ray, the composer of the Annadamangal was thoroughly versed in Persian see, Sribrajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Srisajanikanto Das, "Introduction," in *Bharatchandra Granthabali: Annadamangal* (Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1943), 17; Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites," 464.

[110] Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 181–83; Chatterjee, "Reflections on Religious Difference," 396–415. Most of Chatterjee's references however come from the latter half of the seventeenth century, while it should be noted that *The Ain-i-Akbari* recorded that Akbar ordered all cases between Hindus to remain under the jurisdiction of the Brahmins and not be judged by the Muslim *qazis*. This could possibly indicate a gradual change in the Mughal administrative stretch from Akbar to Aurangzeb's time, though lack of proper compilation of court cases make this a problematic aspect. For more on the availability of judicial sources in Mughal India see, Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," 32. It is also important here to include Mukhia's contention that in terms of jurisdiction and application of the *Sharia* law, the Mughals imposed it on criminal offences but when it came to civil cases like weddings, inheritance rights and so on, the different religious codes of different communities were respected. But that still meant that they were registered at the *qazi*'s court. See, Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 40.

referred to Akbar as '*Ekbar badshah, Arjuna avatara*'.[111] Similar was the reference to Emperor Aurangzeb by the poet, Krishnaram Das who called him '*Ram Raja*', indicating the king Rama from the epic, Ramayana.[112]

Beyond political incentives, the interest of the Mughal administrators to forge ties with regional potentates also lay in their need for earning commercial profits. Om Prakash pointed out the presence of Mughal merchant-officials in Bengal, whose active presence was further highlighted by Alam and Subrahmanyam.[113] Trade in Bengal, in their words, became a major preoccupation of 'a series of powerful *subahdars* and court-based grandees' from the 1630s onwards.[114] Mughal administrators like Prince Azam-ush-Shah, Shaista Khan, Mir Jumla attempted to monopolise trade in Bengal, as the *subahdars* of that region.[115] The Dutch records talk about Prince Shah Shuja, as the *subahdar* having three to four ships in the year 1661 for sailing to trade in Persia, Achin and Tenassery.[116] Malik Kasim as the *faujdar* of Hooghly had ships being sent to the Maldives and other regions for his trade.[117] Nurullah Khan, the *faujdar* of Jessore, Hugli, Burdwan and Mednipore was mentioned by Ghulam Hussain Salim and *munshi* Salimullah as being a rich man and a merchant by profession (*mutamawwil-o-tijarat pasha*).[118] All these commercial activities of the Mughal *mansabdars* required them to have control and

111 Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 34.
112 Chatterjee, 34.
113 Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 32–34.
114 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, eds. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Oxford University Publishers, 1998), 28.
115 Chandra, *Essays on Medieval Indian History*, 233–34.
116 Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden, anno 1659-61*, 391.
117 F. De Haan, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1681* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1919), 125–27.
118 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," 54.

Fig 4: Mirza Abu Talib, Amir-ul-Umara, Shaista Khan, c. 1765-73 by Mehr Chand. Courtesy Berlin State Museums or Staatliche Musueen zu Berlin (artstor.org), accession nr. I. 4594 fol. 21r.

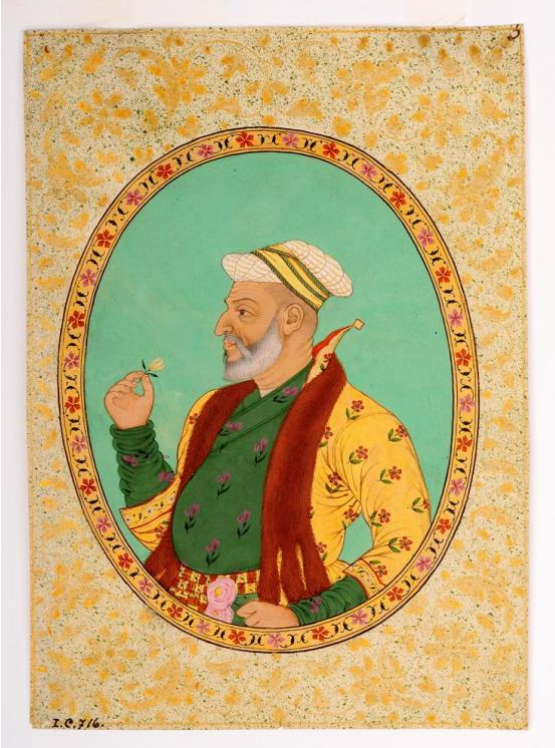

Fig 5: Mir Jumla, end of the 17th century. Courtesy Berlin State Museums or Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (artstor.org), accession nr. 83.967.

Fig 6: Prince Shah Shuja, c. 1686. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-T-00-3186-9.

knowledge of local merchants, brokers and ordinary villagers along with the *zamindars*. It is particularly interesting to think about the VOC in this case, which also held jurisdiction over certain villages in Bengal and engaged in several commercial dealings with the *diwan* of Hooghly, Rai Balchand, the *diwan* of Udayganj, Rai Kesudas, and other significant Mughal administrators.[119] Was the VOC than holding a semi-*zamindari* status (excluding ownership rights or *milkiyat*) in Bengal and interacting in that capacity with the Mughal *mansabdars*? Of course, the VOC reports on the Mughals did not eulogise the Mughals unlike the local *zamindars* of Bengal, but the Company remained subservient to the Mughal authorities and offered on several occasions naval and mercantile assistance to Mughal *mansabdars*. This aspect of the VOC-Mughal

[119] F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1680* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1912), 724; Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 390.

relation in Bengal has been dealt in detail in the next chapter. In any case what is clear here is that these compulsions and beneficial exchanges of profit and power ensured that the Mughal administrators adjusted to regional dynamics of Bengal as long as the local *zamindars* there accommodated the former.

The Mughal Administrative Theory in Ruling Bengal

While informal personal relations developed under the canopy of the *mansabdari* system, the theoretical model of Mughal governance never approved factionalism and favouritism on paper. Discord among the royal family members were rarely recorded (only inevitable personal frictions) in the imperial chronicles, suggesting that factionalism was formally not acknowledged in the Mughal administration. What guided the Mughal administrators instead in their daily functioning was the theoretical ethos of the *munshi* code of conduct. Mukhia argued that this represented the embedded Mughal idea of eternity, so that 'the Person of the King and the Princes changes, but their conduct, mores, even disposition, are in a large measure standardized and follow the impersonal, normative eternal format of kingship, princehood and so on.'[120] It is not to suggest that the Mughal emperor did not or could not change administrative rules, which in fact they very much did throughout their reign. But it is rather to suggest that, the rituals, norms and etiquette of the sovereign ruler which helped to establish his authority in the Empire had to be upheld all the time by all administrators as well as the Mughal emperors.[121] This impersonal code of Mughal conduct was encapsulated in the ethos of a *munshi*, in which devotion to the governing figure of the emperor constituted a central part. Investiture of sovereignty in the emperor and the proclamation of his divine rule, along with his administrative apparatus became the base for the Mughal administrative ethos. But along with it there were also other rules of administrative skill and etiquette that added to the code of conduct of a Mughal *mansabdar*.

[120] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 57.
[121] Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, 19.

This code of conduct was set out in the *dastur al-amals* which was a collection of royal manuals listing administrative codes of conduct. According to these rules, the primary norm of conduct for all Mughal administrators was to demonstrate their love for the emperor and their loyalty towards him. Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani, an eminent noble who served in both the courts of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, emphasised the exemplary role of the king whom the subjects were expected to love and obey, as divine.[122] He wrote –

> Therefore, it is necessarily incumbent upon the Almighty's chosen creation, whom they call an emperor (*padshah*), to inculcate in himself the morals of the custodian of the *Shari'ah* (Prophet Muhammad)…Know that the empire and kingship constitute exalted rank and high station…One may attain the position [of sovereignty] only with divine assistance, perpetual felicity, Almighty God, Praise be unto Him, bestows favour upon one of His servants by putting a crown of authority on his head, he in turn must hold the empire dear and venerable.[123]

Akbar on becoming the emperor, was known for his efforts to enforce the language of religious politics surrounding his divine kingly figure. This had its roots in Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* written in 1235, copies and reproductions of which were already circulating in Mughal India from the time of Babur.[124] Though it caused much discontent in his court politics, with Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni and others voicing their unwillingness to accept Akbar's tenet, Abul Fazl (the opponent of Badauni and one of Akbar's most powerful *munshis*) provided the document of the *ulemas* (led by Shaikh Mubárik and others, some of whom signed it against their will) in his *Ain-i Akbari* that sanctioned this aspect.[125] The administrative etiquette revolved, theoretically, therefore around the emperor as the central figure, giving the impression that the Mughal state remained entirely under his influence.

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[122] Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance: Mau'izah-i Jahāngīrī of Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i-Sānī: An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, ed. Sajida Sultana Alvi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 12.

[123] Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sani, 42–45.

[124] Muzaffar Alam, *The Langugaes of Political Islam: India 1200-1800* (London: Hurst, 2004), 50–51.

[125] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 7.

This condition of love and loyalty to the sovereign institution of the emperor became the primary element of the *munshi* code. In the words of Muhammad Baqir, a *munshi* in Jahangir's court –

> Every prudent ruler…will find his country (*mamlakat*) prosperous and his subjects contended and happy. The hearts of the people will come together in the bond of his loyalty and obedience [if the ruler is prudent], and the garden of his empire (*saltanat*) will flourish.[126]

This sentiment was also echoed in the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* which claimed that 'Behind the duty that lies on all people is the duty to the/ Sovereign and benefactor.'[127] Mirza Nathan, an administrator under Akbar wrote that there 'was no heavier burden on the neck of a Muslim than the burden of being true to the salt (of the emperor).'[128] Loyalty, in fact, was the incentive for the very sustenance of the Mughal administration. It was so much so that even after hard-fought wars, those who pledged their loyalty to the throne were immediately incorporated into the empire, regardless of their regional, ethnic and sectarian backgrounds.[129] Thus, even though Abul Fazl was murdered on Jahangir's instigation (during Jahangir's princely days when Akbar was the ruler), the latter patronised Abul Fazl's family and children after he became the emperor on the condition that they pledged their allegiance to him.[130] Consequently, it became an absolute condition for a *munshi* par excellence to be able to demonstrate this loyalty in his literary, scholarly and military duties to the sovereign emperor.

The royal texts, in this respect, often penned by the *munshis* of the highest order, expressed fervently the love of the Mughal nobles for their patrons and for their emperor. In an anecdote where Jahangir's cup broke when Qasim Khan (his close friend as mentioned in the *Ain-i Akbari*) handed it to him, Jahangir retorted with a poem, 'The cup was lovely and the water

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[126] Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance*, 42.
[127] Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 138–39.
[128] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, 1:197; Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 162.
[129] Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (California: University of California Press, 2015), 91.
[130] Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 17.

lost its rest'. To this, Qasim Khan promptly replied – 'It saw my love's grief and could not suppress its tears.'[131] On the other hand, the emperors too were shown to reciprocate and admire this love and devotion of their trusted nobles. The epitaph on the grave of Shaikh Abul Fazl, one of the *munshis* closest to Emperor Akbar, holding massive political power at his court, read as follows – 'may God Almighty preserve him! – in the shadow of the majesty of the just king, whom power, auspiciousness, and generosity follow'.[132] Mir Shihabuddin, a nobleman in Aurangzeb's service collected information for his emperor about the rebellious prince, Muhammad Akbar. Aurangzeb was pleased with his service and wrote – 'Whosoever drinks, like the ruby, the blood of the liver and grows patient, / Becomes the ornament of the top of the crown of Fortune.'[133] This idea of adoration and 'honour' in serving the emperor meant more than the political power and status that came with it.[134] It was embraced not only by all the Mughal *mansabdars* but also sometimes in the provinces by regional powerlords as did the Bengali *rajas* and *zamindars* through reverence to portraits of emperors and their turbans portraying the Timurid genealogical tree.[135]

But the Mughal rhetoric did not stop at displaying allegiances to the emperor only. Functioning in a world of informal political networks with the responsibility of revenue collection having been placed on merchant-minded administrators, the Mughal administration also needed a pervading administrative ethos that had to be upheld by everyone, including the emperor himself. For this purpose, standard moral codes of conduct came to be written down by the *munshis*, and all the administrators with the emperor himself complied with these codes. They became increasingly more rigid and crystallised, as the Mughal Empire began growing,

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131 H. Blochmann, ed., *The Ain i Akbari by Abu'l Fazl 'Allami*, trans. H. Blochmann, vol. I (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 498–99. There is evidence in the chronicles of Jahangir that Qasim Khan was very close to the emperor because of which he enjoyed a high mansab position. Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 176.

132 Allami, *The Ain i Akbari*, 1873, 1: xxxv.

133 Sarkar, *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*, 90.

134 Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 61.

135 Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India*, 35.

along with its professional class of *munshis* who regulated the laws, accounts and all other tasks required for governance. It is baffling but true that despite the informal set-up of factional connections, one of the vital aspects that these codes recommended was the ideal of appointing men on the basis of merit rather than random favourites. Although factionalism remained the informal mechanism of the Mughal administrative functioning, there is some truth in the fact that official positions were not allowed to be distributed on the basis of religious or ethnic bias. Abul Fazl once observed, 'May merit have an open market' and this meritocracy in appointing one's favourites was reasonably honoured.[136] The Emperor Jahangir also recorded his conversation with his favourite noble, Sharif Khan on this subject of merit in a person deserving honest attention –

> One day the *Amiru-l-umara* (Sharif Khan) greatly pleased me by an incidental remark. It was this: "Honesty and dishonesty are not confined to matters of cash and goods; to represent qualities as existing in acquaintances which do not exist, and to conceal the meritorious qualities of strangers, is dishonesty."[137]

In this way, political power did not remain concentrated in the hands of a particular religious or ethnic group in the Mughal administration.[138] What determined this merit depended on the administrative capabilities of the interested groups in accordance with the skills prescribed in the *munshi* manuals.[139]

These *munshi* manuals or the *dastur al-amals* provided a guide to such skills that were required for Mughal administrative service. Chandar Bhan Brahman, one of the leading *munshis* of his times, laid down the following points for his son, Khwaja Tej Bhan (with a wider readership in mind) that were to be mastered before entering the service of the Mughals – (i) being acquainted with the Mughal system of norms (*akhlaq),* (ii) listening to the advice of elders

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[136] Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, 59.

[137] Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 26.

[138] Gommans points out that despite certain ethnic labels being present, they were not 'rigid, ascriptive categories indicating inbred loyalty or cohesion'. Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 69.

[139] Those social groups whose development had been stunted in the pre-Islamic Indian society as well as the Brahmins were allowed to enter the Mughal administration. Kinra, *Writing Self*, 25, 38, 64–65, 162–63.

and acting accordingly, (iii) being able to compose and write in a coherent manner with good calligraphy, (iv) being deft at accountancy (*siyaq)* and scribal skills (*navinsindagi*) simultaneously (v) being discreet and virtuous and (v) above all, having a solid grasp of Persian.[140] In a similar vein, the *dastur al-amal-i-Alamgiri* (manual of bureaucratic conduct) highlighted the essential qualifications of an aspiring official that included – (a) mastering the art of writing (*insha*), that is composing letters and drafting documents conforming to the seventeenth-century imperial standards, (b) knowledge of special techniques of accountancy (*siyak*) and arithmetic (*hisab*), (c) fluency in spoken Persian and, (d) full knowledge of all types of record kept in the various departments (tax, mint, market etc.) and all thirty-six workshops (*karkhana).*[141] Such formal eligibility criteria were combined with a generous dose of moral advice on governance, as found in the contemporary 'Mirror for Princes' literature. In this a great deal of focus was placed on the personal character and individual qualities of a *munshi.*[142] According to Chandar Bhan Brahmin, an efficient *munshi* was supposed to be authoritative [*zabit*], well-mannered [*khwush-suluk*], unenvious [*ser-chashm*], open-minded [*wasi-mashrab*], courageous [*sahib-i hausala*], tolerant [*mutahammil*], sincere [*durust-i khlas*], experienced [*azmudakar*], and of pleasant demeanour [*shigufta-peshani*].

But with it, he also had to have the desired qualities of aloofness from material wealth and detachment from greed, like a Sufi saint or a yogi. Abstinence from material wealth was, therefore, the other vital aspect of administrative behaviour recommended for Mughal nobles. Kinra called it the idea of 'mystical civility' that was combined with the knowledge of *akhlaq* (political ethics), to reflect the phenomenon of, what in the existent historiography has been

[140] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," 62–63.
[141] Najaf Haider, "Norms of Professional Excellence and Good Conduct in Accountancy Manuals of the Mughal Empire," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 19 (Nov. 2011): 270–71.
[142] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," 71.

identified as, 'political Islam'.[143] It was the practice whereby critical components of the wider Mughal perspective on literature and larger societal matters like civility, religious tolerance, and the role of the state came to be highlighted through Indo-Persian Sufi idioms.[144] Literary flair, administrative integrity, political discretion and scholarly sophistication was to be combined with a saintly detachment (*bitaluqi*) from worldly affairs. Chandar Bhan wrote that to be a *munshi* in Mughal parlance, one had to have among other things the humility of the 'great men' (*buzurgan*).[145] Not only would that have helped in staying away from decay through attachments (*aluda-yi taluq*), but also prevented corruptibility in administration. The emperor was, first and foremost, expected to adhere to these ideas himself which is evident from the various acts of respect paid to Sufi saints on different occasions by almost all the Mughal emperors.[146] And in so doing he also obliged all the other administrators to follow this rule of mystic aloofness from material attachments.

Afzal Khan, the *wazir* of the Mughal Empire under Emperor Shah Jahan, once wrote a missive to one of his close friends, Aqa Rashid, in which he hoped that God would sever them of their 'worldly attachments (*alaiq-i dunyawi*)' and guide them on the path of the divine. He expressed his wish of having an aversion to all 'worldly affairs (*dil-sardi az umur-i dunyawi ba ham rasida*)' at his old age in order to attend to the calling of God. This idea was also reflected on another occasion when Afzal Khan recieved an *ainak* (eyeglass, possibly a kaleidoscope or spectacles) as a gift from Mu'izz al-Mulk, the *mutasaddi* at the port of Surat. This gift was not related to any official business, for which despite having accepted it out of courtesy, Afzal Khan wrote back a witty reply saying –

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143 On the idea of 'Political Islam' see, Shahram Akbarzadeh, "The Paradox of Political Islam," in *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam* (London etc.: Routledge, 2012), 1–8; Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 4. For the idea of 'mystical civility' see, Kinra, 65.

144 Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 3–4.

145 Kinra, 62.

146 Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 44; Kinra, *Writing Self*, 8; Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 141–47.

> The viewing glass (*ainak*) that you sent (as a gift) – which shows one thing as a multiplicity – has arrived. [But] this inmate of the prison of multiplicity is looking, rather, for a viewing glass that will turn such panoply into a unity. If you come across anyone who has such a glass, do give me some indication so that I can enlighten my eye by meeting him, and, having gotten hold of such a glass, can look through it and deliver myself from the prison of all this multiplicity.[147]

Afzal Khan's reference to the 'unity' could be his reference to the cosmic unity of God that he deemed was superior than the 'multiplicity' of all worldly objects, such as the *ainak* that was gifted to him. Kinra argued that this anecdote was proof of the reluctance of Afzal Khan to accept a gift that could be perceived as a bribe, as it was not necessarily needed for any specific administrative purpose.[148] It was the customary duty of the Mughal *diwan* to pass on a set of administrative advice to a newly appointed *qazi*, one of which read as follows – 'Do not accept presents from the people of the place where you serve, nor attend entertainments given by anybody and everybody…Know poverty (*faqr)* to be your glory (*fakhr).*'[149] The *Mirzanama,* a manual on aristocratic etiquettes, described a refined *mirza* to be the one who was 'not… greedy for more', 'not…beguiled by the attraction of the greater *mansabs*' and 'love of money' and was into 'the study of ethics' rather than 'in quest of digging more' wealth 'out of the earth'.[150] According to the *Mau'izah-i Jahangiri,* it was the duty of the emperor to ensure that his men 'do not neglect their affairs, are not overpowered by their whims and desires, and do not get involved in wanton pastimes, prohibited things, and corruption.'[151] Thus, the Mughal Empire endorsed an overarching administrative ethos, that demanded a combination of advanced skills in Persian language, accounts, aloofness from material wealth and a scholarly flair with a dash of individual panache. This suited the requirements of *munshigiri* (the art of being a *munshi*), which was also accompanied by military skills (*imarat*) and participation in wars.

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147 Cited in Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire,* 72–73.

148 Kinra, 73.

149 Jadunath Sarkar, *The Mughal Administration* (Patna: Patna University, 1920), 18.

150 Aziz Ahmad, "The British Museum *Mirzanama* and the Seventeenth Century *Mirza* in India," *Iran* 13 (1975): 100.

151 Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance*, 42.

To combine the views laid out so far, it can thus be concluded that factionalism and regional alliances were informal practices of the Mughal administrative system that thrived under the formal framework of the *mansabdari* system. In theory, the *mansabdars* were expected to adhere to an impersonal code of *munshi* ethics (such as recommendations on the basis of merit instead of personal friendships, refraining from bribery in making recommendations etc.) while remaining loyal to the sovereign institution of the emperor. This meant that the personal loyalty of an administrator to his patron prince or noble, could not override or go against the general loyalty that he was to exhibit to the sovereign head on the Mughal throne (no matter whoever occupied the throne and became the emperor) as per the *munshi* code. All administrators were bound to this impersonal ethos of *munshigiri,* including the emperors themselves and no occupant of the royal throne could scrap or disregard these codes.

Perceptions of Corruption in Mughal Bengal

What did this mean for perceptions of corruption in the Mughal administration when factionalism formed the empire in practice but was not formally acknowledged in the chronicles? As seen before, the impersonal ethic of *munshigiri* which required loyalty to the emperor and his laws condemned attachment to material wealth and undue favouritism in the Mughal administrative world. At the same time, the elaborate gift-giving ceremonies had to be maintained as part of the court rituals that marked the act of paying allegiance to the emperor.[152] This was justified and balanced by the fact that gifts and money were meant for the royal treasury to run the governance of the empire and not to be unduly appropriated by the nobles in the provinces. In a didactic passage, Chandar Bhan wrote –

[152] Jos Gommans, "For the Home and the Body: Dutch and Indian Ways of Early Modern Consumption," in *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia*, eds. Maxine Berg et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 342; Balkrishnan Shivram, "Islamic Court Dress and Robing Ceremony in Mughal India," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 66, no. 1 (2005-2006): 404–22; Neha Varmani, "Mughals on the Menu: A Probe into the Culinary World of the Mughal Elite" (presentation, Symposia Iranica, Cambridge, June 1, 2017). In this connection, Lambton's work on the Persian gift-giving rituals with certain meanings and status of the giver and the receiver ascribed to it is particularly relevant. See, Ann Lambton, "Pīshkash: Present or Tribute?," *Bulletin School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (Feb. 1994): 145–58.

> More than anything, a powerful monarch requires an abundant treasury. If he does not have wealth, he cannot mobilize an army. If he does not have an army, there can be no law and order [*zabt*] in the realm. If there is no law and order, wealth cannot accumulate, and the state's treasury can grow only if the country itself is prosperous. The realm can therefore flourish only if it has a capable administrator [*sahib-i mu'amala*] who is attentive to imperial business and derives a sense of personal satisfaction from it.[153]

It was meant to urge the administrators in the provinces not to tamper with the revenue supply, the responsibility for collecting which lay largely with them at all times. Refusing to forward the due revenues amounted to outright denial of the emperor's suzerainty and was thereby perceived as 'rebellion'.

And in this declaration of 'rebellion' lay one of the most crucial elements that constituted perceptions of corruption in the Mughal administration. 'Rebellion' against the emperor or disloyalty to the sovereign authority of the emperor was perceived as corrupt thought and behaviour. As for the way it came to be described in the Mughal political vocabulary, it is not possible to find a neat equivalent for the word 'corruption'. The reason for this can be partly attributed to the fact that several local languages were used, along with the elite administrative language of Indo-Persian. But even within the administrative language of the Mughal Indo-Persian, there is no single word but many words conveying meanings close to 'corruption'. One of the most prominent among them is the word *fasad* (mischief/corruption) which conveyed the meaning of cultivating corrupt thoughts in a political context. In the administrative sources, it was mostly used in the sense of a state of mind and thought rather than any actual act of corruption. Actions that challenged the sovereign authority of the emperor and his laws such as *irtisha* or *rushwa-khwari* (bribery), *haram-khwari* (malversation), *bad-diyanati* (dishonesty), *al fitnatul* (fraud, deceit), *hilat* or *hila* (deception or fraud), *makr* (plotting, fraud or deceit), *aubashi* (depravity, profligacy), *sharr* (being wicked or wickedness) and so on counted as 'rebellion' or

[153] Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 75.

fasad.[154] The act of forcible usurpation or seizure, mostly in terms of embezzlement like *tasarruf* (misappropriation or embezzlement) or *taghallub* (embezzlement) also indicated corruption.[155] These, and more of such actions were used to refer to administrative corruption, and the corrupt were described as having succumbed to *adbar* (fall from grace and allegiance). There was, thus, in the Mughal administrative vocabulary, a way of condemning certain actions as (im)proper for official attitude and conduct.

Much of the impropriety was directly connected and used in the context of disloyalty or rebellion against the emperor. It appeared almost as a supplement to the word *fitna* (civil strife). In the *Akbarnama* written by Abul Fazl, for instance, there is repeated use of the word '*fasad*' hinting at bad or corrupt thoughts as in the phrase – '*bekhayali fasad*'.[156] Such thoughts in this context implied intentions of dissent and disloyalty. During his audience with Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir), Saiyid 'Abd-ul-Khalil, a resident of Qannauj warned the prince about the 'unrest (*shorish)* [that] was sweeping Qannauj on account of the corruption *(fasad)* of local officials.'[157] Another time, when Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) had taken harsh measures against his rebellious half-brother, cousins and nephews, the *Amal-i Salih* justified it by suggesting 'that Khurram's actions were necessary to avoid future *fasad*' (contagion or corruption).[158] From these examples, it can at least be discerned that 'rebellion' in all forms came to be portrayed as a corrupt thought or action, against the administrative ideal of loyalty to the emperor and his laws. Acts of bribery, embezzlement or sedition through non-payment of revenue were all forms of violation of the general *munshi* code of conduct. Any disruption thus of this code of conduct

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[154] Sarkar, *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*, 129, 96, 109, 105.
[155] Sarkar, 104.
[156] Abu'l-Fazl, *Abu'l-Fazl: The History*, 1:38–39, 244–45. For the phrase '*bekhayali–fasad*' or 'corrupt notions' specifically see, 446–447. I am grateful to Reza Hussaini for his help with and insight into these Persian phrases and words.
[157] Faruqui, *The Princes*, 161.
[158] Faruqui, 252.

which thrived on, as Abul Fazl put it – 'a share of skill and loyalty', amounted to allegations of corruption.[159]

This brings us back to the situation in Mughal Bengal that was frequently associated with such perceptions of administrative corruption. As has been explained earlier in this chapter, *subah* Bengal offered several challenges to the Mughal empire. Its elusive geo-political composition facilitated the region's tendency to be autonomous, encouraged by the presence of a vast number of local *zamindars* and other political and commercial actors. It is true that with time, the *mansabdari* system fostered factional connections which led to a precarious balance of the Mughal-*zamindari* nexus. But at the same time, such informal connections also came to be increasingly brought under Mughal scrutiny following the consolidation of the *munshi* ethos and the rise of a 'paper-empire'. It strengthened the check on the Mughal *subahdars* as well as the local *zamindars* manifold by the time of Aurangzeb, at least on paper. As long as the informal mechanism of maintaining factional relations and forming a stable Mughal-*zamindari* alliance in the province worked in harmony with the formal *munshi* code, the governing machinery in the region operated relatively well. This meant that even though such factionalism and informal administrative arrangements were officially disapproved, they still continued in practice without the intervention of the emperor. However, allegations of rebellion or corruption arose the moment such informal norms were broken and the system was disrupted. Bengal was particularly prone to such disruptions because of its fluid and elusive nature, as mentioned earlier, which made it difficult to control. Failed factional alignments and unstable Mughal-*zamindari* alliances could at times lead to rude disruptions in the administrative system of the region that triggered alarming allegations of rebellion or corruption.

A classic example of this was the case of Prince Shah Shuja as the *subahdar* of Bengal who tried to assert his power in the region against his brother, Aurangzeb in the struggle of succession. Shuja's alliance with the local *zamindars* was not formidable, as the Rajas of

[159] Beveridge, *The Akbarnāma of Abu'l-Fazl*, III:428.

Coochbehar and Assam started making inroads into Eastern Bengal due to a depletion of military resources in their own area, that Shuja was using for his pursuit to the throne.[160] On a factional level too, Shah Shuja was in a disadvantageous position as he opposed Aurangzeb in whose faction were high-level *mansabdars* like Mir Jumla who were close to their father, Emperor Shah Jahan. Consequently, Mir Jumla was sent to Bengal to pursue Shah Shuja as well as launch Mughal expeditions in 1658 for conquering Cooch Behar and Assam. This is the moment that Aurangzeb's *firman* to Mir Jumla characterised Bengal as a place infested with 'slackness, disobedience and rebellion.' Such dissension also occurred earlier in the Mughal Empire due to the failure of being able to forge a successful Mughal alliance with the local political forces of Bengal. One of the *zamindars*, Isa Khan, for instance, united with the Afghans and other local *zamindars* to resist the Mughal *subahdar* Khan Jahan in 1578. Later Musa Khan, the son of Isa Khan, resisted the *subahdar*, Islam Khan along with other local *zamindari* forces. This was when Akbar was trying to conquer Bengal and add it to the Mughal dominions. Abul Fazl, one of Akbar's powerful *mansabdars*, at this moment described the region as a '*bulghak-khana*' (house of turbulence). There were also occasions of strong Mughal-*zamindari* nexus formed in Bengal that threatened the Mughal emperor at the centre. While the *subahdar* of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan failed to maintain his local connections with the *zamindars*, Shah Jahan as Prince Khurram, on the contrary, took the help of certain *zamindars* and other active local forces in this region to stir dissension against his father, Jahangir as the emperor.[161] They provided him with military support and financial resources in return for administrative sanctions, profits and better positions. It resulted in an interruption in revenue payment as Khurram like Shah Shuja drenched Bengal of its resources for his military support.[162] Consequently, his act was declared as an outright rebellion and a demonstration of corrupt behaviour by Jahangir which led him to send his army to Bengal.

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[160] Faruqui, *The Princes,* 248.
[161] Faruqui, 208, 210.
[162] Faruqui, 205.

All the three instances of 'rebellion' discussed above were marked by the acts of non-payment of revenue (also some form of embezzlement in terms of misappropriation of revenue for individual needs) and disloyalty to the emperor, that showed clear violation of the *munshi* code of conduct. The equilibrium between the Mughal administrative theory and practice in Bengal rested on the ideal of the Mughal administrators remaining loyal to their emperor and paying their revenues by forging informal ties with the local *zamindars*. Whenever this equilibrium was disturbed, the region tended to cut loose from the Mughal control which made it a seditious or corrupted zone in the Mughal chronicles. In the *Jahangirnama*, Jahangir repeatedly expressed his concerns about the region of Bengal. On one occasion, he wrote that having heard nothing good of Bengal and the *subahdar*, Qasim Khan there, he summoned Qasim Khan to the court and sent in his place another trusted *mansabdar*, Ibrahim Khan Fath-Jang to govern the province.[163] In another instance, he mentioned about the 'indiscretions' of the *diwan* and *bakshi* of Bengal, Mukhlis Khan whom Jahangir demoted from his *mansab* by 1000/200.[164] It almost gave the impression that the emperor was constantly aware of the situation in Bengal and took care to prevent the existence of too autonomous Mughal *mansabdars* in the province. When prince Khusrau rebelled against Jahangir, it is reported in the *Jahangirnama* that the emperor and his officials suspected Khusrau to have first headed towards Bengal where his uncle, Man Singh was stationed.[165] Also, while talking about the rebellion of Mirza Hindal in Agra against his father, Humayun, Jahangir located the origin of such corrupt ideas in Bengal. He wrote that after Humayun conquered Bengal, some of his more 'avaricious servants who were naturally disposed to sedition and rebellion proved disloyal and left Bengal' to go to Mirza Hindal and provoke an insurrection in Agra.[166] This frequent association of Bengal with corrupting notions was linked to its riverine terrain that was difficult to control, and therefore highlighted as perilous and

[163] Thackston, ed., *The Jahangirnama*, 218-19.
[164] Thackston, 222.
[165] Thackston, 49.
[166] Thackston, 290.

responsible for nurturing rebellions. This idea was echoed in Mughal accounts like that of Mirza Nathan's *Baharisthan-i-Ghaybi.* Nathan fought in the Mughal expedition under Islam Khan in Bengal (at the time of Akbar) and gave vivid accounts of the dangerous rivers and swamps that he had to cross throughout the day and sometimes in the middle of the night in Bengal.[167] Eaton remarked that such descriptions of Bengal and its dangerous rivers were strangely echoed later in the colonial stereotypes of the British accounts.[168] What suffices to say here, nevertheless, is that *subah* Bengal remained a fluid region with a complex administrative matrix under the Mughals. Consequently, this fluidity led to its inclination of being autonomous or 'rebellious' which fitted the Mughal perception of administrative corruption and earned the region the notoriety of being corruptible in the Mughal narratives.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the fluidity of the Mughal administrative world in Bengal and how and why this region featured as corrupt in the Mughal narratives. Bengal as a Mughal *subah* formed a crucial geo-political frontier of the Mughal Empire. Added to this, were a large number of regional *zamindars* and other commercial actors in the province who made the area politically active and challenging for administration. Consequently, Bengal remained difficult to control and contain within the Mughal Empire. Through the *mansabdari* system, which was the core of Mughal administration, the *mansabdars* began penetrating into the regional politics and *zamindari* networks. Factional alliances between Mughal *mansabdars* and local potentates led to the incorporation of local *munshi* families into the Mughal administrative fabric. Moreover, the regional potentates, such as the wide range of *zamindars* also increasingly had more interactions with the Mughal *mansabdars*. Both political and commercial incentives, induced the Mughal *mansabdars* and the *zamindars* in Bengal to assist each other. It led to factionalism and the Mughal-*zamindari* nexus as becoming the primary mechanism of sustaining this region within the Empire.

[167] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, 1:44, 46.
[168] Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, 168–69.

However, none of these were formally acknowledged in the Mughal administrative chronicles. In theory, there was the *munshi* code of conduct which provided an outlay of how a *munshi* or a Mughal administrator should behave and administer his *jagirs*. It advocated loyalty to the sovereign authority of the emperor and his rules, detachment from material wealth, prohibition of undue favouritism and the development of bureaucratic skills such as accounting, poetic flair, scholarly panache and military deftness. Accordingly, corruption came to be perceived as those thoughts and actions which violated this code of conduct. It included acts of rebellion as disloyalty to the emperor, non-payment of revenue or embezzlement, bribery and such other thoughts and actions that demonstrated a transgression of the *munshi* code of conduct.

The Mughal administrative world, thus, functioned on a precarious balance struck between the administrative theory of the formal *munshi* code of conduct and the practice of informal factional ties and regional alliances. As long as this balance was maintained, the informal practice despite being condemned as corrupt, persisted and was not intervened by the emperor. But the moment there appeared disruptions in this balance, allegations of corruption arose. In Bengal, owing to the region's specificities, such chances of disruption were higher and there were frequent occasions when the province threatened to cut loose from the empire. Consequently, ideas of corruption came to be associated more with this *subah*. Caused either by a strong *zamindar-mansabdar* nexus against the Mughal throne or a failure in fostering successful regional alliances, Bengal came to be seen as an area of disobedience and rebellion, non-payment of revenue and embezzlement. It soon earned the province a notoriety of being corrupt in the Mughal royal discourse. The Mughal authorities blamed the marshy landscape of this region with its numerous rivers as a perilous setting which led to the nurturing of rebellions. The riverine terrain of Bengal and its fluid administrative space with several local political actors and networks, therefore, became the reason for its uncontrollability and association with corruption in the Mughal administrative world. The next chapter shows what happened under these

circumstances when the VOC arrived in Bengal and started interacting with the Mughal *mansabdars* there in their capacity as a Company with administrative status.

Chapter 4

The 'Corrupt' and the 'Incorrupt': Written and Unwritten Dynamics of an Administrative Encounter

> There is nothing here in Hooghly, however, that dazzles more than the Dutch lodge. It is situated on a remarkable square at a musket-shot's range from the large river, the Ganges, in order to not be washed away. The lodge resembles more of a robust castle: its walls and bastions are carved out elegantly of fine stones…There are also stone warehouses, where both foreign as well as local commodities are stored daily… We strolled through the nice pavements and reached the beautiful and densely populated villages. The English were building their new lodge here, as the older one with its houses, walls and everything else was eroding by bits and pieces, due to the strong currents of the Ganges, every day.[1]

This is how Wouter Schouten described the VOC factory at Chinsurah during his visit there as the Company's *chirurgijn* (physician) in 1663. The progress of the Dutch East India Company's administrative role in Bengal was unique in that the Company started off rather late here (in comparison to the other regions like Coromandel, Malabar and Surat), and hastened to gain greater control in the final decades of the seventeenth century. Greater energy was invested from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards as the English East India Company (EIC) had also entered the scene. The VOC seemed to have been doing well in the second half of the seventeenth century, as the above extract of Schouten shows.[2] The Company's lodge resembling 'more or less a big castle' reflected a stable Dutch presence vis-à-vis the EIC in Bengal. But significant changes crept in in the eighteenth century as the EIC caught up in the race for

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[1] '*Niets schittert echter meer in Hougly dan de Nederlandse loge. Deze staat op een aanzienlijk plein en, om niet te worden weggespoeld, op een musketschot afstand van de grote rivier de Ganges. De loge heeft meer weg van een flink kasteel: Muren en hoekpunten zijn heel netjes en sierlijk van louter steen opgebouwd…Ook zijn er steen pakhuizen, waar dagelijks buiten- en binnenlandse handelswaar wordt opgeslagen…Langs plezierige wandelwegen kwamen wij in mooie, dichtbevolkte dorpen. De Engelsen waren hier bezig om een nieuwe loge te bouwen omdat de oude door de sterke stroom van de Ganges, met woningen, muren en alles wat er bij hoorde, iedere dag wat meer wegspoelde.*'
See, Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie*, eds. Michael Breet and Marijke Barend-van Haeften, 374.

[2] There are similar references of the VOC factory's stately presence in English and French accounts of the seventeenth century. See, Lequin, *Het personneel*, 118.

colonial pursuits and the Dutch East India Company kept slipping from its former position. In 1784, Isaac Titsingh was appointed as the VOC director of Bengal (1785-92) with the purpose of reviving the Dutch trade there against the English.[3] During his stay, he wrote about his experiences in the following manner –

> Since my arrival here I have found little enjoyment; the landscape, which many appreciate, I do not like; I have little taste in company, every day one meets the same people, among whom hate and envy ensuing from former troubles are kept alive for ages; it is like purgatory in which it is my task to open the doors to Paradise so that trade can pick up again…[4]

Titsingh's writings, as seen in the above extract, reflected his awareness of everything that had been said and written by his predecessors in praise of Bengal. And yet his bitterness with the unrealistic hopes of success of the *Heeren XVII* against the strong English presence there, revealed his despair in trying to recover a lost position.[5] There was not much space left there for the VOC to claim anymore. By the end of the eighteenth century, this territory had slipped out of Mughal hands and fallen under British control. The Dutch had to evacuate all other workplaces in the Indian subcontinent, except Bengal where they were allowed to retain their factory and trade, albeit under strict vigilance till 1825.[6] In 1824, the then Dutch resident of Bengal, D.A. Overbeek, lamented the situation while writing his *verslag* (report) to Batavia –

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[3] C.R. Boxer, *"The Mandarin at Chinsura"; Isaac Titsingh in Bengal, 1785-1792: A Paper Read to the Royal Asiatic Society and the Royal India and Pakistan Society, London, 10 February* (Amsterdam: Indisch Instituut, 1949), 4.

[4] Cited in Harm Stevens and Sam A. Herman, *Dutch Enterprise and the VOC, 1602-1799* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1998), 89. This was reportedly resolved after the official, C.L. Eilbracht was transferred to the Coromandel Coast from Bengal with whom Titsingh did not get along very well. See, Boxer, *"The Mandarin at Chinsura"; Isaac Titsingh*, 11.

[5] For an overview of the reforms and its implications as suggested by Titsingh for the VOC see, Boxer, 11–12.

[6] The Dutch possessions in Bengal were eventually surrendered to the British in 1795, before it was returned to the Netherlands in 1814, to be given back again to the British in 1825. See *archiefbeschrijving* (description of the archives) from NL-HaNA, Nederlandse bezittingen Vóór-Indië (Dutch Settlements in India), Residentie Bengalen. The summary of the entire process as recorded in these archives has been penned by Kemp in the wake of the 20th century through the use of primary sources. P.H. van der Kemp, "De Nederlandsche factorijen in Vóór-Indië in den aanvang der 19de eeuw," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 53, no. 1 (1901): 285–357; P.H. van der Kemp, De jaren 1817-1825 der Nederlandsche factorijen van Hindostans Oostkust," *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde* 74, no. 1 (1918): 1–72.

> It speaks for itself that the welfare of a country, or of a … (illegible/destroyed part of folio) or of a special place would diminish if the resources meant for it are blocked. It is well-known that the reason for the decline of this colony (indicating Chinsurah-Hooghly) is the building of the British port at the chief town of Calcutta nearby, which has attracted all trade. What Calcutta has become nowadays, is what suited Hooghly and Chinsurah earlier. But from the time this change has come about, we have kept declining gradually, step by step, to be reduced to this current level of usefulness.[7]

Overbeek, thus, regretted the lost glory of Chinsurah owing to the damages brought upon them by the British in Calcutta.

It is interesting to note that both Chinsurah and Calcutta were among the few villages that were leased out to the Dutch and the English East India Companies respectively by the Mughal authorities in the seventeenth century. The EIC held a lease over the three villages of Sutanuti, Gobindpur and Kalikata (later these were renamed as Calcutta but then the region was known as Dihi-Kulkatta) until they bought their *zamindari* rights in 1698 from the *zamindars* of that area, the Majumdars, with the approval of the Mughal authorities (the EIC also purchased land from a *zamindar* in Malda in 1681).[8] The VOC, too, had acquired the three villages of Chinsurah, Bazaar Mirjapur and Baranagore in lease from the Mughal *subahdar*, Shah Shuja in 1656 but there was no mention of having purchased them later at any point as *zamindaris*.[9] The

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[7] '*Het spreekt van zelve dat de welvaart van een land, een* … [illegible part of the text] *of van een bijzondere plaats moet afnemen, als de bronnen daartoe worden opgestopt, de bekende oorzaak van't verval deser colonie is de nabij* … [illegible part of the text] *der Britsche Haven in Hooftplaats Calcutta, welke alles wat maar naar handel zweemt na zig trekt. Wat Calcutta nu is, was wel ter Hougly en Chinsura, dog sints de ommekeer voorgevallen, zijn wij van trap tot trap gedaald, tot de tegenwoordige staat van nuttigheid.*'
NL-HaNA, Hoge Regering van Batavia (HR), inv. nr. 298, General report about Chinsurah for the governor-general and Council of the Indies in Batavia from the resident at Chinsurah, D.A. Overbeek, 22 August, 1824: folios not numbered.

[8] Stern, *Company-State*, 129–30; Habib, *The Agrarian System*, 195–96, 217. Later in 1717, the EIC acquired more *zamindari* rights over other villages from the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar. See, Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 33.

[9] This is recorded in the missive written by Van Reede, while describing his arrival in 1684 in Bengal in the villages which were once leased out to the Dutch East India Company. NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive written by Hendrik Adriaan van Reede to the *Heeren XVII* from Hooghly, Bengal, 9 December, 1686: f. 75v. Also see, Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 40; NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1212, Memoir for the honourable Peter Sterthemius, *extraordinaris raad van Indië,* and the director appointed to control the important commerce of Bengal and Orissa, left by the then commissioner Joan Verpoorten when he departed from this place for Batavia, Hooghly, 31 January, 1656: f. 216v.

Dutch, thus, started on a relatively equal footing with the English when it came to having villages on lease in Mughal Bengal. But while the EIC was able to successfully penetrate the Mughal administrative framework and begin their colonial career by acquiring *zamindari* rights over Dihi-Kulkatta and then moving on to holding the *diwani* of Bengal in the eighteenth century, the VOC declined 'gradually, step by step', to borrow Overbeek's words, into a 'state of (minimal) usefulness'. While this issue of eighteenth-century Dutch – English – Mughal dynamics is beyond the scope of our current dissertation, the purpose of mentioning this point here is to draw the reader's attention to the administrative presence of these Companies (the VOC and the EIC) within the Mughal administrative structure of seventeenth-century Bengal. More on this will be highlighted later.

This naturally leads the researcher on to raise certain questions about the turn of events concerning the VOC in seventeenth-century Mughal Bengal. How did the Mughal administrators view the Dutch East India Company officials within their administrative structure and conversely, what did it entail for the Company in Bengal? In other words, what did the 'Dutch' – 'Mughal' administrative encounter look like in Bengal with respect to the region's specificities, as explored in the previous chapter? The answers to all these questions will be examined here in order to highlight the role of corruption in this administrative encounter. It is worth considering that this encounter in Bengal fanned the region's notoriety for breeding corrupt Company servants in the seventeenth century. As Van Dam reported to the directors in the Republic, the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* wrote in 1661, 'that the enormous dirt in Bengal that has come to light eventually, has made them shriek, and fear that the same would be in vogue in other places as well.'[10] Van Dam then continued writing, 'And on that note, it has since then been only growing.' Corruption in Bengal was highlighted as a menace in the VOC reports, which called for the *Heeren XVII's* fast intervention. It is, therefore, through this window of 'corruption' and

[10] 'I*ntegendeel schryven de Generael en de Raden in 't jaar 1661, dat de grote vuyligheden, in Bengale aen den dagh gekomen, haar deden verschricken, en verse hebben, dat deselve op andere plaetsen mede in swangh mogten gaan. En op die voet is dat alsoo voort blyven continueren*.' See, Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book II, Part II, 16.

its use in raising allegations that the Mughal-VOC administrative encounter is examined here. However, a vital distinction that has been made in this chapter is between the formal side of this encounter and its informal side. This is relevant for understanding how informal practices shaped the formal VOC discourses and the role that corruption played in them. It also makes a compelling case for investigating the presence of the VOC in Bengal beyond the obvious commercial stance that historians have so far emphasised.[11]

The Company in Bengal

The VOC had to start yet in Bengal when it had already set up trading posts successfully in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, like the ones on the Coromandel Coast, in Malabar, Surat, and in the interior of the subcontinent, near Agra. All of these areas, together, with Persia and Ceylon were designated as the *Westerkwartieren* (the Western Quarters) in the Company's records and Bengal consequently came to be a part of these western quarters. The administration of the VOC in Bengal revolved around the director and the council in Hooghly, which served as the main factory in that region. Being the chief governing body, the director and the council were answerable to the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia and the *Heeren XVII* for everything that happened in the *binnen-comptoiren* (subordinate factories inland) of Bengal. The factories that were in the *binnen-comptoiren* included the ones located at Kasimbazaar, Malda, Falta, Dhaka, Rajmahal and those built in Patna, Balasore, Sjopra, Singia and Pipli in the provinces of Bihar and Orissa. Besides the director and the council, there were also a handful of other VOC personnel working at these factories in Bengal in the rank of the *opperkoopman* (the senior merchant or factor). They occupied different positions like that of the *negotieboekhouder* (trade-bookkeeper), the *fiscaal* (for maintaining the rules at the ports and other jurisdictional policing functions) and so on. A special position as that of the *opperhoofd* (the chief) existed in the factory at Kasimbazaar which served as

[11] Gerrit Knaap categorised it as a zone of 'extraterritoriality' where the VOC was granted certain privileges by the local political authorities for trading. The Company's base in Bengal, along with Japan, China, Persia and Surat fell into this category. Knaap, "De 'Core Business'," 18.

the second most important factory for the VOC in Bengal. Apart from this rank, there were several other Company servants performing different duties in the rank of the *onderkoopman* (junior merchant) like the *pakhuismeester* (warehouse manager), the *cassier* (cashier), the *soldijboekhouder* (wages clerk) etc., one of whom also acted as the secretary to the director's council in Bengal.

The historiography of the VOC in Bengal focuses strongly on its commercial aspect. Om Prakash's seminal work on this theme provides an excellent study of the Company's involvement in the trade of Bengal with links to South East Asia (Arakan, Pegu, Tenasserim, Aceh, Kedah, Malacca etc.), the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts, Ceylon, the islands of the Maldives, Surat and Cambay, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea as well as directly to the Republic.[12] The major commodities that Bengal supplied to the VOC were textiles, sugar, saltpetre, opium, rice and clarified butter, all of which were either utilised for its intra-Asiatic trade or for its direct trade with the Republic.[13] Om Prakash pointed out that the share of exports from Bengal in the Company's trade with Europe was between 7 and 10 percent in the 1660s and 1670s.[14] It was only in 1665-66 that the goods from Bengal counted for half of the total value sent to the Republic. However, at this time, the intra-Asian silk trade between Bengal and Japan provided the *Heeren XVII* with 'the largest amount of capital'.[15] With the changes in fashion in Amsterdam in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, the demand for textiles and raw silk from Bengal increased more than before. Between 1675-76, textiles from Bengal accounted for 22 percent of the total exports from India and by 1701-03, the figure went up to an impressive 54 percent.[16] Bengal silk constituted 83 percent of the total Asian raw silk sold in Amsterdam

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[12] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 28.

[13] Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, vol. II, The New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 338; Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 78–79.

[14] Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, 2: 202.

[15] Prakash, 199.

[16] Prakash, 212.

between 1697 and 1718.[17] Bengal became the principal supplier of goods for Europe during the 1690s accounting for almost 40 percent of the total imports there.[18] In fact, the profits from Bengal seemed to constitute, if the Dutch poet Antonides van der Goes is to be believed, an extremely vital part of the Company's trade. Van der Goes wrote in 1671 – 'The rich settlement of Bengal in the lands of the future/ Gives the Batavians, a sea of treasures at best.'[19] Not just the trade in material goods, but also the VOC's slave trade at this time was boosted by Bengal.[20] This region (along with Arakan, Malabar and Coromandel) formed one of the most important circuits for the Company's forced labour till the 1660s in the Indian Ocean, while also being known to contribute commodities that could be exchanged for buying slaves in the trans-Atlantic trade of the *West Indische Compagnie* (WIC).[21] At the same time, it was also located at a strategic zone between the two regions of Ceylon and Batavia where the VOC had, at different points of time, expressed their political plans and colonial ambitions.[22] It meant that plans to bring it under control as a cushion or buffer zone between Ceylon and Batavia could facilitate the colonial projects of the rival factions within the VOC that were keen on either of these two regions as their base.[23] Bengal thus was of more use to the Company than just for its commercial profits in the seventeenth century.

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[17] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 73.

[18] Prakash, 218.

[19] '*Bengale, 't ryk kantoor der Morgenlandegewesten/ Geeft aen den Batavier een zee van schat ten besten.*' See, J. Antonides Van der Goes, *De Ystroom begreepen in vier boeken* (Amsterdam: Peiter Arentsz., 1671), 46.

[20] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 35.

[21] After the 1660s, the focus shifted to Southeast Asia but that did not mean that Bengal was put out of the picture. Markus Vink, ""The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 140–42; Edward A. Alpers, "Africa and Africans in the Making of Early Modern India," in *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, ed. Pius Malekandathil (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2016), 67.

[22] Bengal was advantageous because of its food supplies and other resources sent from there to Batavia and Ceylon. See, J.A. van der Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1665* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1894), 225.

[23] Vink argues that in the years following 1650 there were two groups – the Ceylon-centric faction in the Company, followed by the Batavia-centric administration that emphasized the cutting down of costs and expenditure. See, Vink, *Encounters*, 118-35; H.T. Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië* ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1919), 781.

Attempts to explore the possibilities in Bengal began from 1612. VOC ships filled with *facteurs* on board were sent now and then from the Coromandel Coast to the regions of Balasore and Pipli (in current-day Orissa but which were then part of *subah* Bengal), not only for procuring raw materials like silk, but also for reporting back on the risks and opportunities for setting up a VOC base in this province.[24] Considering that Hooghly (Bandel) had till then been a Portuguese port, it made sense that the Dutch first tried to access its neighbouring ports. But the conflict between the Mughals and the Portuguese escalated when the latter extended their support to the local *zamindars* who were resisting the Mughal suzerainty.[25] It finally culminated in the official ousting of the *Estado* from Hooghly around 1632. The Dutch were quick to seize this opportunity and the first VOC factory was established at Hooghly in 1634. Formal permission to establish a factory there was granted by Azam Shah as the then *subahdar* of Bengal on condition that the Company promised to pay custom duties like all other merchants for using the port. The Company also received a formal recognition from the Emperor Shah Jahan in 1635 through a royal *firman* acknowledging their rights to trade in Bengal. There were simultaneous attempts in these years to set up factories in other places such as Hariharpur, Patna, Dhaka and Kasimbazaar though not all of them were successful.[26]

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[24] For more on the Dutch early settlements in Bengal see, Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 34–52; Gommans, Bos, and Kruijtzer, *Grote Atlas*, 6:387–416.

[25] It is crucial to mention here that there were vague Portuguese visions of conquering Bengal from the Mughals, that were not endorsed by the *Estado* at Goa. See, footnote number 56 in Jorge Flores, "The Mogor as Venomous Hydra: Forging the Mughal-Portuguese Frontier," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no. 6 (2015): 555.

[26] Om Prakash, "The Dutch East India Company in Bengal: Trade Privileges and Problems, 1633-1712," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 9, no. 3 (July 1972): 258–87.

Fig 7: Map of the river of Bengal, from its point of origin to the Dutch lodge in Hooghly, 17th century, Reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 258.

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Fig 8: Map of the Bay of Bengal with Pegu and Arakan, 17th century, reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 257.

The Company first started out to set up its base in Bengal but the process was speeded up through the recommendations of Joan Verpoorten. Verpoorten as a commissioner was sent with a committee, by the *Hoge Regering*, to report on the situation of the VOC in Bengal and it was his suggestion that an independent directorate be established there. From 1655, this directorate began operating on its own, freed from the control of the Governor and his Council in the Coromandel. Hooghly started functioning as the chief factory with the director residing there along with his council. When the flood of 1656 washed away this factory at Hooghly, the only alternative left was to use the factory at Kasimbazaar that came to serve as the functional headquarters then. In that same year, however, the Company managed to secure a lease (possibly semi-*zamindari/ijaradari* rights and some more privileges) on the three villages of Chinsurah, Bazaar Mirzapur and Baranagore from the *subahdar*, Shah Shuja. This ignited fresh investments in replacing the damaged factory at Hooghly with a new one being constructed in its place. Only this time the foundation lay in a different area, in one of these newly acquired villages called Chinsurah (close to Hooghly, which henceforth in VOC archives continued to be referred to as Hooghly). By the end of the century, the VOC had, however, managed to come up with formalised plans for an armed fort to be built there that came to be eventually completed in the following century as Fort Gustavus (Fig 9).[27] The Dutch East India Company was not the only one with fortification plans in Bengal around this time. With this region's importance growing in the Europe-Asia trading circuit from the late seventeenth century, fortification talks were also rife among the English, Danish and French East India Company there.[28] It is in the context of

[27] For the plan of the fort Gustavus in 1743 see, NL-HaNA, Kaarten Leupe, access nummer 4. VEL, inv. nr. 1104. It was destroyed by the British in 1827. Also see, G.C. Klerk de Reus, "De vermeestering van Chinsura in 1781 en 1795," *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap der Kunsten en Wetenschappen* 38, no. 1 (1875): 3.

[28] Plans for the building of Fort William by the EIC and Fort d'Orleans in Chandannagore by the French were sanctioned by the Mughal in Bengal along with the Dutch plans for building Fort Gustavus around the 1690s. The Danes were more active around Serampore or Fredericksnagore in the eighteenth century where a Danish fort also came to be built. The Dutch, French and Danish forts were later destroyed by the British in colonial Bengal. It might be important to remind the reader here that military fortifications of the EIC made in Bengal in 1696 and the plan to erect Fort William was actually done in the name of Willem III, the King of England and the *stadhouder* of the Dutch Republic.

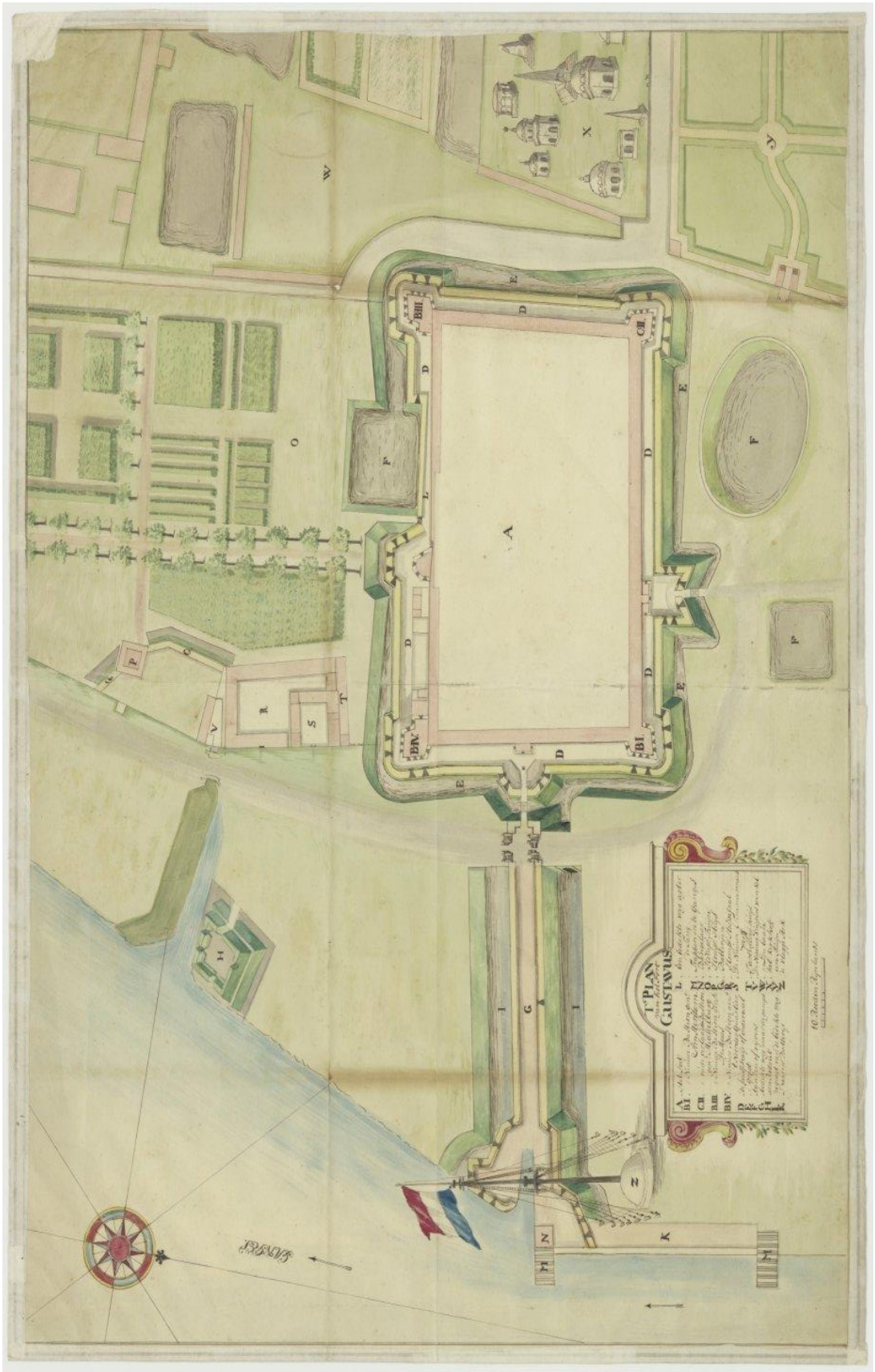

Fig 9: Plan of Fort Gustavus to be built in Chinsurah in 1743, reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 1103.

this dynamic setting where not just the position of the VOC was changing but also the political and economic situation of Mughal Bengal, that our analysis of this seventeenth-century administrative encounter is done.

The Formal Face-Off

On paper, the Mughal administrators from the very beginning dealt carefully with the Dutch, owing to their previous experience with the Portuguese who built their 'shadow' empire in Bengal.[29] All fortification moves and building projects as such, were initially forbidden by the Mughal governors for the VOC in Bengal. The *firman* issued in 1636 by the Mughal *subahdar* in Dhaka, Islam Khan contained the following injunctions – (i) the Company should comply with the orders of the *karori* and the *faujdar*, and not try to subjugate and conquer the local population, (ii) the Company officials were required not to make requests for transforming their mud warehouse into a stone building or demand excessive freight charges from the Portuguese ships that arrived at the ports of Hooghly and Bally (close to Hooghly, in present-day Howrah district of West Bengal), (iii) they were not allowed to trade in saltpetre and slaves, which apparently comprised two of the most lucrative commodities for the European traders against the interest of the Mughal *mansabdars* in Bengal.[30] These regulations made it evident that the Mughal administrators were clear about not giving any political or commercial edge, at least on paper, to the Dutch East India Company officials. However, as political personages with vested commercial interests, the Mughal administrators also could not help but encourage the presence

[29] On the nature of Luso-Mughal relations in Bengal see, Flores, "The Mogor as Venomous Hydra," 554–55, 557, 560–62.

[30] Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book II, Part II, 1–2. It is to be noted that the Mughal authorities in Bengal repeatedly forbade the capture of their subjects as slaves by the Portuguese and later the Dutch and the English East India Companies. But a large part of this populace was also used by the local traders for supplying eunuchs to the Mughal court and the royal *harem*. A Mughal prohibition was however placed against this trade. For this see, Richard M. Eaton, "Introduction," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington etc: Indiana University Press, 2006), 11; Gavin Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1974): 128-29. Added to this was the fact that several Mughal *mansabdars* themselves traded in saltpeter from Bengal as Bengal was the principal supplier of this commodity in the Asian trade. See, Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 33.

of the VOC in Bengal's mercantile space. This would have enhanced their chances of maximum appropriation of custom duties, subsidiary profits and the influx of silver bullion.[31] They, thus, allowed the Company officials to operate on promise of paying customs duties and honouring the rules enumerated in the *firmans*. The commercial sustenance of the VOC in Bengal was, thus, dependent on these formal orders of the Mughal administrators and the emperor.

There was, however, one element that remained undefined in the fluid tangle of the Mughal administration in Bengal. This was the arrangement about the three villages the resources of which the VOC could utilise, in return for a timely payment of customs to the Mughal administration. The Company's documents described this reception of the villages as having them 'in lease' (*in paght genomen*), which is the same way in which the Dutch sources also referred to the Mughal administrators as *jagirdars* acquiring their *jagirs* (*oversulks sijn dese landen in veel provintien verdeelt, door gouverneurs en superintendenten der selver financien geregeert, en om die te bestieren als in paght gegeven*).[32] Probably, this convinced Lequin to conclude that the VOC in Bengal had *jagirdari* rights over the three villages of Chinsurah, Bazaar Mirjapur and Baranagore in the seventeenth century.[33] While it is true that this process of leasing out territories made room for the VOC in Bengal within the Mughal administrative machinery, it still cannot be asserted with certainty that a lease always implied *jagirdari* rights in the Mughal political world. Habib in his analysis of the revenue system of Mughal India mentioned that *zamindaris* could also be transferred on 'lease' (*ijara*) without gaining *milkiyat* (ownership) over them.[34] This meant that the VOC could have also had semi-*zamindari*/*ijaradari* rights there, that is jurisdiction without ownership. When compared to the EIC that was able to buy the *zamindari* of the three villages of

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[31] Om Prakash, "Bullion for Goods: International Trade and the Economy of Early Eighteenth Century Bengal," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13, no. 2 (April 1976): 159–86.

[32] '*…den koningh Orangtsjah of Orangsab, aan dien vorst sijn dese landen uijtgegeven, om daar een uijt derselver inkomsten te fronturen te versterken, de lasten der militie te betalen, sijn eigen hof te onderhouden, midsgaders bovendien tot de schatkist van't rijk, nogh enige somma op te brengen oversulkx sijn dese landen in veel provintien verdeelt, door gouverneurs en superintendenten der selver financien geregeert, en om die te bestieren als in paght gegeven…*'.
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*, 9 December, 1686: f. 73v- 74r.

[33] Lequin, *Het personeel*, 117.

[34] Habib, *The Agrarian System*, 196.

Dihi-Kulkatta later, such possibilities make all the more sense. In the memoir left by Louis Taillefert, the director of the VOC in Chinsurah (1755, 1760-63) to his succeeding director, A. Bisdom written in 1755, he mentioned the following –

> The *zamindari* or the inheritance right over Baranagore belonged previously to the Company's translator, Rammisser, who seeing no chances of being able to protect himself and the inhabitants of his village against the violence of the Moors, had given it away to the Company in 1681 under the ratification of the Moorish government, along with the condition of paying the rent for the ground to the Moors. But, whether we acquired Tjoentjoera (Chuchura) and Mirzapur also from him is not known to me. All I know is that the Nawab Shaista Khan recognized the Company's legal rights over these two villages and the *bazaar* and had issued a *perwanna* in that regard, for which Chinsura was to pay *f* 1652, 1, 12; Baranagore was to pay *f* 903, 8 and bazaar Mirzapur paid *f* 440, 4 annually to the Moors.[35]

While it is possible that these three villages or at least the village of Baranagore had been former *zamindaris* that were transferred to the Company, two vital points in the existing historiography on the VOC in Bengal can be established. Firstly, from the Mughal viewpoint, the VOC did come to enjoy a certain administrative status in Bengal that was more than the usual designation of simple foreign merchants. Secondly, it meant that the Mughal officials in Bengal infomally recognised the right of the VOC to collect revenue from the villages under their control and exert their civil jurisdiction over its people, as long as the Company paid their customs duty to the Mughal *subahdar*. In fact, it conferred three very important rights to the VOC that were part

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[35] '*De Djiemiedary of het erfschoutscap van Baranegger heeft eerst toegehoort aan 's Comps tolk Rammisser, die geen kans ziende zig selfs en dies inwoonders voor de vexation en geweldenarijen der Mooren te decken, Ao. 1681 hetselve met uijtdruckelijke ratificatie van de Moorse regeering aan de Comp. heeft afgestaan, mits de grondpagt ook aan de Mooren te betalen, maar of wij Tjoentjoera en Mirzapoer ook van hem of van een ander bekomen hebben is mij niet gebleeken. Alleen weet ik dat de Nawab Cha-Estachan de Comp voor de wettige besitter van die twee dorpen en bazaar erkent en daaraan eene perwanna g'expedieert heeft, werdende voor Tjoentjoera f. 1652, 1, 12; voor Bernagoer f 903, 8, en voor de bazaar Mizapoer f 440, 4 jaarlijks aan de Mooren betaald, ook heb ik nergens kunnen vinden, hoe en wanneer de Comp.*' See, Reus, "De vermeestering van Chinsura," 3–4. The word '*grondpagt/ grondpacht*' occured later in the eighteenth-century Dutch sources as '*grondrente*' or *Raiyati Khazanah*. See, Reus, 59. For another article on the VOC in Bengal that extensively uses Taillefert's memoir for Bisdom see, A.K.A. Gijsberti Hodenpijl, "De handhaving der neutraliteit van de Nederlandsche loge te Houghly, bij de overrompeling van de Engelsche kolonie Calcutta, in Juni 1756," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 76, no. 3/4 (1920): 258–83.

of the general *zamindari* rights in Bengal – the right to provide protection, jurisdiction (not criminal though) and the right to extract revenue from these three villages. Unlike actual *zamindars*, the VOC of course exercised these rights without gaining any concrete ownership over these villages.

This semi-z*amindar* or *ijaradari* equation takes on a whole new dimension when one thinks about how it could have been translated for the *Heeren XVII* to comprehend in the Republic. The existing historiography on the interactions between the Mughal state and the VOC have shown the different angles of diplomatic relations that were carried out between the two worlds.[36] The VOC had to approach the Mughal state for securing trading privileges with caution as the knowledge that the Dutch East India Company had gathered from former accounts of the Portuguese showed them how the *Estado* struggled to keep its servants under control in this region. The last thing that the Company in the Republic wanted to happen was for their officials to cut loose from their obligations to the *Heeren XVII* and infiltrate the local political world. The *Heeren XVII*, therefore, insisted that the Company officials should deal diplomatically with the Mughal authorities to earn profit for the VOC but also follow the rules that restricted such interactions to important limits. This approach became especially relevant after the 1650s, when naval expenditure abroad began to be reduced and the VOC in Bengal were compelled to adopt a more compliant attitude towards the Mughals for their trading privileges.[37] In order to prevent this compulsion of the Company officials from turning into a formal assent of the *Heeren XVII* to permeate the Mughal administrative world, regular *plakkaaten* (ordinances) containing codes of exemplary conduct were issued for the officials from time to time. These placards forbade the Company officials to accept gifts or have any private

[36] See relevant footnote on p. 10 of this chapter.

[37] The Company was not always constant in terms of its decision-making process throughout the seventeenth century. Military expeditions were sometimes encouraged and at other times not. By the time, Bengal became important towards the end of the seventeenth century, the *Heeren XVII* came to be controlled by directors who were interested in reviving the Company financially with minimal expenditure. See, Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 42; Winus and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior*, 4.

dealings with the locals beyond the *Heeren XVII's* knowledge.[38] They prohibited the copying of local elite clothing styles and the appropriation of status-symbols like the holding of parasols by slaves as a sun-guard in imitation of the local kings and emperors (excepting the officials in the *Raad van Indië*) and the transportation of personal servants from the Indies to the Republic.[39] Though most of these rules specifically came to be drafted in the context of Batavia and its surrounding islands, they were also meant to be implemented everywhere in Asia where the VOC operated amidst kings and emperors.[40] This is evident from the fact that these articles were used at the court of the *Raad van Justitie* whenever officials working in Bengal came up for trial, as will be seen in Chapter 6 and here in the subsequent section. At least on paper, thus, there was an administrative culture that the VOC created and wanted to preserve as being distinctly different from that of the Mughals in India. All interactions were consequently to be limited to a diplomatic nature, but the two administrative worlds were to remain separated from each other.

The *Hoge Regering* in Batavia, accordingly, projected itself as the delegated wing of the Dutch state in Asia to communicate with the Mughal world. The Mughal administrators responded the same way in return – that is, addressing the *Hoge Regering* as more than just a commercial concern. This is evident from the way the Mughals used their formal epistolary style (*insha*) while writing letters to the Company's higher officials and adopting their gift-giving rituals. On a certain occasion for instance, the Mughal *subahdar*, Shaista Khan at Dhaka asked the Company for help with naval forces in trying to conquer Chittagong from the ruler of Arakan. He wrote to the Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker equating him to the political superior of the VOC officials in Hooghly. The formal letter was adorned with all epistolary greetings according

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[38] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:160, 328, 480; J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek, 1602-1811, tweede deel 1642-1677*, vol. 2 (Batavia: 's Hage, 1886), 201.

[39] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 2:88, 111, 250, 406, 473, 512, 306; J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek, 1602-1811, derde deel 1678-1709*, vol. 3 (Batavia, 's Hage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1886), 47–48.

[40] The rule on reducing pompous lifestyle was part of the 36 regulations of the *Heeren XVII* passed in 1676, to which the Governor-Generals Speelman and Camphuys also added another 20 points. See, Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 129-30.

to the Mughal etiquette for addressing other nobles, which read as follows – 'The noblest and the most powerful among his esteemed peers and dignitaries, the champion and protector of the merchants of this age, a lion in the show of courage, a crocodile in the sea of manhood, Joan Maetsuyker, General of the Hollanders.'[41] This was accompanied by gifts of tribute not only for the VOC in general but also personally for Maetsuyker that comprised two red *saloes* with golden heads, a white piece of cloth with golden stripes, a cloth with embroidered borders, a *lancol* with painted borders, a stitched *dekentie* along with a special Bengali variety of *cassa*.[42] Such language and ways of writing were not meant for addressing ordinary merchants but were reserved for conversing with men of administrative status. On a formal level thus, this fitted neatly into the description of a restrained, diplomatic encounter. But it also meant that the VOC officials in Bengal tried to share this special status, especially in connection with their *semi-zamindari/ijaradri* rights in the Mughal administrative world. The peculiarity of their administrative arrangement in the context of Bengal's fluid geo-political setting failed to be translated and conveyed clearly in the Company's official papers. Consequently, it turned out to be the most important hinge in the door that opened up to the world of the Mughal-VOC informal interactions, beyond the direct comprehension and control of the Mughal emperor and the *Heeren XVII* and Batavia.

The Informal Dynamics

The process of accommodating the VOC in the Mughal administration of Bengal initiated deeper informal interactions which did not always follow the same trajectory as the prescribed goals of the *Heeren XVII* and Batavia. Sometimes these interactions managed to make their way into the formal reports in cases of serious conflicts breaking out between individual Mughal and

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[41] '*Den edelsten ende groot mogesten onder de aghtbare synes gelycken ende syner grooten, het puycq ende de beschermer van de coopluyden deser eeuw, een leeuw in de wercken der dapperheyt, een crocoodil in de zee der manhaftigheyt, Joan Maetsuyker, Generael der Hollanderen.*' J.A. van der Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1666-67* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1895), 40.

[42] *Saloes* refer either to boats or to the Salempuri variety of textile. *Lancol*, *dekenties* and *cassa* are all different varieties of textiles. See, Marc Kooijmans and Judith Schooneveld-Oosterling, *VOC-Glossarium: Verklaringen van termen, verzameld uit de Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën die betrekking hebben op de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2000), 100, 67, 37, 27.

VOC administrators. But for the rest, such informal interactions continued unperturbed and kept adjusting to the changing circumstances of seventeenth-century Bengal. The incentive of the Mughal administrators to let these informal interactions proliferate was to retain their control over the commercial arena of Bengal. *Subah* Bengal was filled with mighty Mughal merchant-officials whose private trading interests were connected to the Company's trade. Trade in general around this time was conducted in the Indian subcontinent not only through the coastal ports but also through long-distance inland routes by caravans of merchants (*qafilas*), mostly *banjaras* who moved with their herds of bullocks.[43] But this form of inland trade was not the most profitable option as it was dependent on the availability of pasture along the way for the bullocks and therefore remained seasonal. Consequently, the riverine and overseas trading ventures remained the most attractive options for the merchants in seventeenth-century India. The Mughal merchant-officials too tapped into this coastal trading network for their private commercial venture.

While it is evident from the previous chapter that trading activities in Bengal remained very intense under the Mughals, the question remains as to what extent they formed a part of the Mughal revenue system. Habib points out that despite the Emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Aurangzeb repeatedly issuing orders prohibiting the imposition of dues like *baj*, *tamgha* and *zakat* on trade, there was evidence that such orders were not enforced and taxes on trade continued to be imposed and collected by the Mughal *jagirdars* and other officials.[44] For instance, the transit duties at large ports had a fixed rate (that Aurangzeb changed under his rule) but there were other cesses and tolls called *rahdari* that were levied as protection costs for using certain routes, ports and water channels. The Mughal emperor in theory provided protection for all trade in his empire but this task was to be executed by the officials in different areas and provinces with

[43] Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 69; Irfan Habib and James D. Tracy, "Merchant Communities in Precolonial India," in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 371–99.
[44] Habib, *The Agrarian System*, 73–74.

specifically assigned jurisdictions. Such a mechanism provided an informal leverage to the Mughal administrators who were also merchants themselves to use this opportunity to advance their own trading interests. Thus, vital ports in provinces like Bengal could be controlled by clusters of Mughal officials who could then exert considerable autonomy in the name of executing their duty of protecting the sea-borne trade and the traders. For the European Companies who paid customs to these Mughal administrators, it was seen as the payment due to the Mughal authorities for securing their own protection as traders at the ports of Bengal. The duty was charged on the basis of *talikas* supplied by the Company which were statements containing details of the physical quantities and the value of the goods imported and exported.[45] In case of the VOC officials in Bengal, their obvious status as merchants combined with an informal administrative presence meant that the annual customs and trading dues doubled up as payment for protection of the Company's trade and acceptance of the symbolic authority of their Mughal overlords.

These informal trading enterprises of the Mughal officials culminated in their monopolising tendencies in Bengal which were often not under the direct control of the Mughal emperor.[46] There were plenty of such examples like that of Prince Azim-ush-Shan as the *subahdar* of Bengal and Bihar who declared the entire import trade of these regions to be under his control, styling it as *sauda-i-Khas-o-aam* (the private and public trade).[47] Mir Jumla, the *subahdar* of Bengal (1660-63) was known to have been involved in a contract of monopoly over indigo purchase in the whole of the kingdom on condition of payment to the Emperor Shah Jahan at the end of three years. Even though the contract was signed in the name of a certain Munnodas Dunda (Munnoardas/ Manohar Das Danda), the real mover and shaker behind this project was

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[45] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 46.

[46] Prakash, 29–33. On an early work on the Mughal state's involvement in trade see, Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India* (Delhi etc.: Oriental Publishers and Distributors, 1975), 177–85. On a recent debate on the intermingling of politics and trade see, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imârat and Tijârat," 750–80.

[47] Chandra, *Essays on Medieval Indian History*, 234.

reportedly Mir Jumla.[48] The names of the *diwan* of Orissa, Malik Beg; the *faujdar* of Hooghly, Ahmed Beg and the *faujdar* of Rajmahal, Nawazish Khan were also found to be featuring in the lists compiled by the VOC for tracing the owners of the vessels that engaged in trade with Kedah (in present-day Malayasia), Tenasserim (around present-day Burma), Aceh (Banda Aceh in present-day Indonesia), Malacca (officially known as Melaka, situated now in Malayasia) and such other places from Bengal.[49] Om Prakash points out that individual Mughal officials made frequent attempts to control the trade of certain commodities in certain areas. For example, the saltpetre trade in Bengal was attempted to be controlled by the *subahdar* of Bengal in 1636, by the *subahdar* of Bihar in 1653, by the imperial *diwan* at Patna in 1660, by the provincial *diwan* at Patna in 1675 and by the *subahdar* of Bengal again in 1699.[50]

These huge financial stakes also became the cause of vulnerability for the Mughal merchant-administrators who were themselves responsible for securing their profits in the given circumstances. External naval assistance and financial capital were sometimes required by these nobles to keep their private ventures rolling. On the other hand, as custodians of law and protection at these ports, they also had authority over the VOC officials. This relation of symbiotic understanding often led to personal coalitions at individual levels between the Company and the Mughal officials. There have been sufficient examples of such coalitions under the *subahdars*, Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan with individual VOC officials.[51] These alliances were most of the time made informally, but the lid blew off now and then when a conflict broke out

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[48] Sarkar, *Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India*, 179.

[49] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 229–30.

[50] Prakash, 33. What however Om Prakash does not mention is that saltpetre as a highly profitable commodity was also a target for the VOC servants which explains their attempts to gain greater control and concessions in saltpetre trade in Bengal that led to the consequent conflicts with the Mughal nobles having their financial stakes in it.

[51] There are instances of naval assistance provided by the VOC to the Mughal authorities in Bengal. See, Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 77, 391; J.A. van der Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1663* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1891), 665; Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden, anno 1665*, 75, 155; Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1666-67*, 38; F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1679* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1909), 569.

or something went wrong. For example, Malik Kasim, the *faujdar* of Hooghly, had his ship returning from trade when it met with an accident in the Gulf of Mannar. Loaded with cargo, the ship broke down and a number of Dutch sailors who were on board then reportedly plundered the cargo and left the ship to sink there. Malik Kasim was quick to demand a financial compensation from the VOC, that turned into a long negotiation with the Company officials in Bengal before he threatened to make it formal by taking strict action. Malik Kasim while asking for the money that the Company officials owed him in Bengal, wrote –

> …and since after the arrival of the *nachodas* and from the declarations of other men in my ship, it appears that the Hollanders in Mannar did all of this (that is, plundered the cargo of my ship and had sold them all out)…I have had earlier brought this matter to the attention of (Willem) Volger, the then director of the lodge in Hooghly, to which he had answered that the magnitude of the case required it to be forwarded to the governor-general…When he, the aforementioned director passed away and the director, (Jacob) Verburg succeeded him, he promised to have the affair about the ship resolved and advise the governor-general and have all my money to the last penny returned to me…after he died, captain (Herman) Fentzel… assured me that he would write to the governor-general…Assuming that your highness have by now received the letter with all the details and the testimonies, I would like to remind you about the good bond of friendship and devotion between Your honourable (Company) and my late father, Murtabad Khan. It was during his (Murtabad Khan's) rule as the *subahdar* of Orissa, that the Company was allowed to erect its lodge in Balasore and Pipli…at the time of Prince Shah Shuja's rule, when the full disposition of the *subahdari* of Orissa and the *faujdari* of Balasore and Pipli, lay with me, I too have had extended all the possible help and hospitality for the directors and captains of Hooghly and Balasore. I have written a recommendation for them to acquire a *firman* from the *subahdar*, Shah Shuja…It is because of this good relation that had been cultivated by my father and me throughout these years, that I have been patient until now…I hope that your honour would do justice and no longer make delays in taking the right action.[52]

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[52] '*…en vermits naer de komste van den nachoda en uyt de verklaringh van de lieden die op het schip geweest zyn gebleken is, dat de Hollanders op Manaer dit zoodanigh geklaart hebben, zoo is daervan een attestatie onder het zegel ende getuygenisse van ettelycke persoonen in forma beleid, makende daarop de gantse toedraegentheyt en gelegentheyt van dese zaek aan Volger, den directeur van de logie tot Ougly, bekend, die daerop tot antwoord gaff dat dese gantse zaek aan de Heer Generael overschryven en*

These were such moments when informal deals threatened to spill over into the formal domain due to conflict between the two groups. Such incidents also revealed the weaknesses or dependency of the Mughal merchant-officials which created a porous space for the Company officials to penetrate deeper into Bengal's administrative scenario. The VOC officials were aware of the vulnerabilities of the Mughal governors who were trying to juggle their offices and businesses simultaneously as is apparent from the Company's director, Mattheus van den Broecke's description of the *subahdar* of Bengal, Mir Jumla. Van den Broecke wrote – 'The *nawab* manages to control his wars on the one hand, while simultaneously not forgetting to keep up with his commerce on the other.'[53] The letter of Malik Kasim, on the other hand, was written to the Company's director in a highly formal tone (that was eventually translated and forwarded to the *Hoge Regering*), as was done while addressing not just ordinary foreign merchants but men holding respectable positions. This entire tussle between the formal and informal, between vulnerability and assertion of power, showed the precarious balance struck in the dual domains of this administrative encounter.

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het daertoe brengen soude dat al het geroofde weder aan ons toekomen soude,…Wanneer hy voorsz. directeur nu overleden en den directeur Verburgh in zyn plaats trad, zoo heeft Verburgh insgelyx belooft dat de gantsche geschapentheyt omtrent dit schip sonder yts het minste af te doen aan den Heer Generael soude adviseren en maken dat alle de goederen tot den laesten minsten penning aan my gewierden, en alsoo dees oock door de beschickinge Godes overleden zy, zoo is den capteyn Fenzel, die nu de directie waerneemt, de geheele gestalte van die saek met alle haer omstandigheden uyt de voorsz. attestatie vertoont, die mede aengenomen heeft dat de geheele constitutie daervan in het largo en particulier aan de Heer Generael by een missive bekent soude maken en het daertoe brengen dat alle de goederen die doen gerooft zyn weder aan my gerestitueert wierden, sullende dan zyn Ed. uyt het schryven van hem voornoemt en uyt de voorsz. attestatie een volcomen beright van alles krygen; een aangesien tusschen zyn Ed. en myn vader zaliger een volmaekte vruntschap en verknogtingh geweest en ten tyde van de regeringh van Mootabad Chaan, Zoebadaer van Oedesag off Brixa, de logien van zijn Ed. door het toedoen van myn vader en de zeecoopplaatse van Bellesoor en Pipely staende en in esse gebleven zyn, als oock dat den tyde der regeeringh van den Prince Sias Doiedzja, wanneer de volle dispositie er vermogen over het soebaschap van Oedesah en den fausidarye van de zeecoopplaats Bellesoor en Piply aan myn patroon specteerde, en ick oock van den beginne myner gouverno aff aen de directeuren en capitains van de zeecoopplaats Oegely en van de zeecoopplaatse Bellesoor alle hulpe en accommodatie toegebracht en myn patroon altyt de bevelschriften van Siaach en Sjoedsiaa en de schriftelycke ordonnantie van de Soebedaren in der tyt tot vorderingh van den dienst der E. Compagnie geprocureert,…soo heb ick ten reguarde van de vyfftighjarige kennis en vruntschap, zoo door myn vader als my met U Ed. gecultiveert, eenige jaeren langh tot nu geduld genomen,…Aldus dan zoo neme Zyn Ed reguard op God en zyn eyge religie, in zoodaniger voegen dat op het schryven van den jegenwoordigen directeur het voorsz. volgens de constitutie van dese zaek ordonnere en geen langer dilay en make, alsoo ick niet wel langer gedult soude kunnen hebben; en meer en hoeff ick niet te schryven…'.
See, F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1681* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1919), 125–27.
[53] Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 392.

The VOC, in itself, was not a static body as is known from its factional segregations in the administration. The case of the Mughal administrators in India was similar. Striking informal deals with each other opened up for the Mughal officials the world of factionalism among the Company administrators and vice-versa. Factionalism proved to be one of the robust factors that helped the VOC officials to bargain for more than they were allowed to have in the shadow of this undefined informal juncture. For instance, Jacob Verburg, during his days as the *gezaghebber* of Kasimbazar seemed to have had a special understanding with the *diwan* of Bengal, Raynandalal, whom he used against his factional opponent, Constantijn Ranst. Ranst, as the director of Bengal in 1672, came to be involved in a case pertaining to the death of the Company weaver, Bholeram Chaudhuri's (Boleram Sjauduri) widow.[54] The *faujdar* of Bengal, Malik Qasim had lent money to Bholeram which Bholeram failed to return before his death. Malik Qasim then asked Ranst, as Bholeram's employer, for the money but the latter refused to pay. When Malik Kasim pressed with his soldiers, Ranst brought Bholeram's widow to the Company's lodge for interrogating about the money. The next day, the widow was found dead and this blew everything out of proportion. Malik Qasim blamed Ranst for the death and passed on the matter to Shaista Khan, as the then *subahdar* of Bengal. Shaista Khan put a stop to the Company's trading privileges there and forbade the locals to provide supplies, until the due amount was paid back. This inevitably meant that the VOC director and the council in Bengal had to write to the *Hoge Regering*, and the *Heeren XVII* also got pulled into the affair.[55] In his explanation to the *Heeren XVII*, Ranst defended himself by saying that the widow had committed suicide by poisoning and he was not to be blamed for this death. While Ranst, defended himself saying that the widow had committed suicide, Verburg put the blame on Ranst. Verburg framed his case against Ranst for

[54] Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 126–36.

[55] NL-HaNA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 36, A small note regarding the 1960 rupees the honourable Company has been charged with paying to the Moors in Bengal addressed to the *Heeren XVII* from Constantin Ranst, 12 May, 1682: folios not numbered; Advice given by the *Haags besogne* to the *Heeren XVII* on the case of the 1960 rupees that Ranst was charged to pay to the Mughal authorities in Bengal, 18 February, 1682: folios not numbered.

which he garnered the support of the *diwan*, Raynandalal. The *diwan* claimed that Verburg was more familiar with the local populace and therefore knew his duties far better than Ranst.[56]

Such strategic support showed how the VOC officials in their position within Bengal's Mughal administrative hierarchy were already swift in building alliances with individual Mughal officials. It also gave them the proximity to learn how to decode Mughal etiquette, mannerisms and political intrigues better than the heavily adorned courtly rituals. It was, therefore, not always comfortable when changes or transfer of positions occurred. Nicolaas Schagen, who was the director of the VOC in Bengal between 1685 and 1688, remarked that it was not in the best interests of the Company to frequently change their officials posted in a certain place employed in its service, as it disrupted the balance of trust in these relations and hampered the Company's operations in Bengal.[57] Ranst left a memoir for Verburg as the succeeding director of the VOC in Bengal, wherein he complained of the provincial *diwan*, Rai Balchand from whom the VOC officials were to maintain safe distance.[58] But Verburg as the Company's director in Bengal between 1678 and 1680, insisted on maintaining good relations with the very same *diwan* for the benefit of the Company in Bengal. He reasoned in a letter to the *Hoge Regering* that his closeness to the *diwan*, Rai Balchand was because of the latter's great power in Bengal which could have been useful for the Company in the long term.[59] Such examples confirmed the fact that informal relations were extremely important for the Company officials in Bengal who were trying to fulfil their individual aspirations there.

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[56] Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 130.

[57] NL-HaNA, HR, inv. nr. 241A, Consideration of the *Raad-extraordinaris* Nicolaas Schagen on the instructions of the commissioner, Hendrik Adriaan van Reede for the directors and council in Bengal, 1691: folios not numbered. Also see its copy available in NL-HaNA, Collectie Heeres, invf. nr. 13, Consideration of the *Raad-extraordinaris* Nicolaas Schagen on the instructions of the commissioner, Hendrik Adriaan van Reede for the directors in Bengal, 1691: folios not numbered.

[58] NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1283, Memoir left by Constantijn Ranst for Jacob Verburg, *opperkoopman* and in his absence, for the *koopman* Harman Fentzel, *opperhoofd* and second in rank in the factory of Kasimbazaar, written from Kasimbazaar, 20 August, 1671: f. 1893r.

[59] F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1680* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1912), 724.

While factionalism was one of the ways to achieve this, there were other ways, as the following evidence shows, by which many officials tried to informally penetrate deeper into the administrative domain of the Mughals. One of the most dominant ways of manifesting this individual aspiration of the officials was by their attempts to imitate the behaviour of local administrative elites (of different ranks and religious backgrounds), like their clothing and pompous lifestyles. The director of Bengal residing in Hooghly was instructed to visit, twice every year, the factory at Kasimbazaar to investigate the state of affairs there.[60] This journey from Hooghly to Kasimbazaar was made by land and was a ceremonial and conspicuously grand procession. Pieter van Dam wrote – 'Earlier, it was customary for the director to travel annually in person to Kasimbazaar, with a grand parade, incurring huge expenses owing to the numerous tents, the horses and several newly appointed and hired mercenaries that had to be sent forth in advance.'[61] It clearly showed the appropriation of elite symbolic authority by the Company officials to mark their administrative status and power in Bengal. As they passed through the villages which lay on their way, the director seized the opportunity to impress upon the general inhabitants the significance of his social position and might in Bengal. Van Dam argued that the explicit intention of these VOC officials, was to be recognised by the Mughal authorities as men of high status for which they adopted visible traits of princely attitude and manners.[62]

The painting of the Company's factory at Chinsurah-Hooghly (Fig 10), by Hendrik Schuylenburg, in 1665 possibly depicted one such procession manifesting the pomp and show of the VOC director. Martine Gosselink concluded that this could have been Schuylenburg's patron, Pieter Sterthemius's journey back from Kasimbazaar to Hooghly during his tenure as the

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[60] Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden, anno 1663*, 142.

[61] '*Het gebruyck in vorige tyden is geweest, dat de directeur jaarlijcx een opreyse in person nae boven en Cassimibasaer quam te doen, met een groote parade, omslagh en kosten, sendende tot dien eynde vooruyt tenten, paerden en veel nieuw aengenome en gehuurde soldaten*, …'.
Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book II, Part II, 27.

[62] Dam, Book II, Part II, 27.

director of Bengal.[63] In fact, all the directors till the late seventeenth century, conducted this ceremonial journey of travelling back and forth from Hooghly to Kasimbazaar. One can see in this painting, a palanquin carrying two Dutch officials and some other Europeans on horseback following them (Fig 11). A retinue of foot soldiers accompany these officials, with a man in front blowing the trumpet to herald the advance of this stately procession. The villagers are shown to witness this display of power and pomp, along with possibly the Mughal *subahdar* or a high-ranking noble, whose tent is pitched next to the Company's factory. Such scenes clearly revealed the outright appropriation of elite administrative behaviour by the Company officials to emphasise their status in Bengal. By the eighteenth century, such lifestyles were unapologetically appropriated and reflected in the residences of the Dutch *nabobs* like Jan Albert Sichterman.[64] Sichterman, the VOC director in Bengal in 1744 was even convinced that the Company officials required more knowledge about 'the nature of the moors' (*de aard van de moren*) and as proven by another official, C.L. Eilbracht's efforts in mastering the Persian language, linguistic training was by the mid-eighteenth century, a common practice.[65] With the political changes in Bengal that saw the establishment of the independent *nizamat* in 1717, these desires came to be unabashedly materialised and exposed in the English and Dutch *nabob* cultures. The problem appeared when the *Heeren XVII's* focus on corruption increased and these activities came under their scrutiny from the end of the seventeenth century. As will be seen later, these gradual developments in Bengal came to be portrayed as corruption and were followed by a

[63] Martine Gosselink, "Schilderijen van Bengaalse VOC-loges," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 46 (1998): 400.
[64] J.A. Feith, *Bengaalse Sichterman* (Groningen: B.v.d. Kamp, 1914); Gommans, Bos, and Kruijtzer, *Grote Atlas*, 6: 29.
[65] Lequin, *Het personneel*, 199–200.

Fig 10: The Painting of the VOC lodge at Hooghly, Bengal by Hendrik van Schuylenburg, 1665, courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. SK-A-4282.

Fig 11: Detailed view of the above painting showing the procession of possibly the director of the Company returning to the factory in Hooghly. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

vigorous momentum of reforms, meant to boost the Company's corporate image in the Republic. Nevertheless, the VOC officials in seventeenth-century Bengal played along to the regional dynamics in the informal sphere for strengthening their position in the Mughal world, beyond the confines of the *Heeren XVII*.

As factional alliances and the appropriation of elite lifestyles provided the Company officials greater access to the Mughal administrative world, the problem of jurisdiction became another issue. This had to do with the plural jurisdiction over local brokers as well as the inhabitants of those villages that were leased out to the VOC in these years. In the midst of the

formal and informal presence of the Company in Bengal, it turned out to be a sore point between the Company and the Mughal officials. At the very outset, the VOC in Bengal had its own jurisdiction (both civil and criminal) over its own employees which meant that the court of the Mughal *qazi* were not to meddle in the Company's affairs. But, as discussed earlier, the Company was subjected to the fiscal jurisdiction of the *subahdars* and other administrators in Bengal who had the discretion to act in cases of non-payment of demanded dues. In this way, the Company in Bengal was subjected to a certain extent to the Mughal jurisdiction. However, endowed with semi-*zamindari*/ *ijaradari* rights in the Mughal system over the previously mentioned three villages, the VOC enjoyed a certain amount of jurisdiction over the inhabitants of these villages (excepting the power to exercise death penalties).[66] Some of these villagers, moreover, were regularly hired by the Company in Bengal as workers, servants and menial service providers. One can get a glimpse of the kind of services that were provided by these villagers to the Company from a list of persons that were working at the factory in Hooghly. They included functions such as that of the overseer, the *peons* (guards), coolies, porters, water-carriers, barbers, washer-men, gardeners, market-goers (for getting groceries), sweepers, cooks, smiths, carpenters, rowers and so on.[67] This list also confirmed the fact that these workers came mostly from the villages in the area surrounding the factory.[68] These villagers were not just subjected to the Mughal administration, but also to the VOC jurisdiction. They were also dependent on the Company as their immediate protector, and the Company in turn paid tribute to the Mughal authorities as a symbolic acceptance of the Mughal protection. Benton and Clulow argued that the idea of gaining legitimate authority in the political domain emanated from the ability to provide protection and the symbolic payment of tribute further sealed this process.[69]

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[66] Hodenpijl, "De handhaving," 261.

[67] NL-HaNA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations made by Van Reede, 1687: folios not numbered.

[68] NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations made by Van Reede: folios not numbered.

[69] Lauren Benton and Adam Clulow, "Legal Encounters and the Origins of Global Law," in *The Cambridge World History*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 80–100.

The VOC officials were doing exactly the same in Bengal which helped them acquire an administrative status and the chance to assert their presence in the Mughal world. For the villagers who were bound to the plural jurisdictions of both the Company and the Mughal administrators in Bengal, they could seek protection and thereby, participate in both these worlds as and when it suited them. On the other hand, it initiated a jostling of jurisdiction between the Company and the Mughal officials on both sides. Retaining control over these locals was important for the Mughal officials to establish their administrative status and credibility in this region with strong local loyalties. The Company officials too wanted to control the villagers in the villages under their jurisdiction to maintain their mercantile-administrative status. The villagers thus had to shuttle between both these jurisdictions and the VOC and Mughal authorities had to keep that in account and operate accordingly.

Besides these villagers, there was also another category of locals over whom there arose a similar problem of plural jurisdiction. These were the brokers who provided a multitude of services in Bengal and came from different backgrounds. They were divided into subcategories of agents (*dalals*) who conducted trade for the bigger merchants in return for commissions. Some of them were called the *nakhudas* and were commissioned by both powerful Indian merchants and officials of the European Companies to trade on their behalf. While the *nakhudas* could function as brokers for the larger merchant-magnates in exchange for commissions, they could also conduct their own trade at the same time. Then there were the *gomashtas* (factors) who acted as agents of the chartered European Companies to procure goods for them in return for commission.[70] Apart from this, there was also another type of broker who provided accounting and translation services. Mentioned in the VOC sources as Persian scribes, their function was comparable to that of Mughal *munshis*. They were proficient in reading, writing, speaking, translating and keeping accounts in Persian. However, we get very little information about them except occasionally their names and scribal designation. When Van Reede was in Bengal, he

[70] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 33–34.

mentioned for instance, the name Achon who was the Company's Persian scribe.[71] All these brokers entered the Company's service after signing temporary contracts and were even bound to formal oaths, like other Company personnel.[72] They were the ones who sometimes worked as intermediaries for both the Mughal merchant-magnates and the Company officials. It was also common for a broker to have served as a Mughal noble first before going on to work for the VOC later, or even for the EIC after that.[73]

The brokers were prized agents, thanks to their ability to deliver supplies for the commercial sustenance of both the VOC officials and the powerful Mughal merchant-administrators. They also acted as important sources of information in terms of revealing business tricks of former employers, secret trade networks and so on. This made them the target group of individual Company officials who desired to forge an alliance for enhancing their (the officials') own positions. Control over the brokers could aid the VOC officials with their appropriation of commercial resources which could keep up their semi-*zamindari* elite lifestyles in the administrative space of Bengal. But control over the brokers was equally desired by the Mughal merchant-administrators who also needed to secure their position and power in this *subah*. The brokers themselves, on the other hand, were left with the option to move between these two administrative worlds of the VOC and the Mughals. As long as the balance on all sides could be maintained, the system ran through a prolonged process of negotiations and tact. But it stirred up friction at times, ensuing from a contesting of authority, that could spill over from the informal to the formal administrative arena. One of the VOC reports, for instance, contained complaints about Mir Jumla trying to exploit the smaller brokers of Bengal for supplies.[74] On the other hand, Shaista Khan wrote to Van Reede complaining about the Company's men using his

[71] NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.
[72] For the oath of the brokers who have had entered into the service of the VOC see, Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 305-08.
[73] Charles Fawcett, *The English Factories in India: Eastern Coast and Bay of Bengal*, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 158.
[74] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 32.

brokers in the villages with VOC factories for cheating on the customs that the officials were due to pay to the Mughal administrators.[75] Personal conflicts between the VOC and Mughal officials became intertwined with formal administrative demands that exposed their informal relations. Such incidents have been discussed earlier in the case of Ranst when Shaista Khan stopped the Company's trade in Bengal and in the case of Malik Kasim's strict warning to the Company after incurring losses with his cargo in Mannar that made the intervention of the *Heeren XVII* inevitable. The brokers involved in such instances, were in a state of plural jurisdiction and were compelled to choose sides and participate in the legal process of both the VOC and the Mughal officials. This aroused further confusion. The VOC and the Mughal jurisdictions at such times competed with each other, revealing the Company officials' ambiguous administrative presence in Bengal. It was during these times that the Company officials felt the need to justify their informal actions to the *Heeren XVII*.

To sum up the situation of this formal and informal administrative encounter once again, it needs to be emphasised that the rights of the VOC in Bengal were formally sanctioned by the Mughal *subahdars* through *firmans*. These rights could be likened to a semi-*zamindari*/ *ijaradari* in the terminology of the Mughal administrative world. The VOC in general was further treated and addressed as more than a group of mere merchants in Mughal India. Consequently, individual VOC officials acting as merchant-administrators in Bengal compared themselves to the local political potentates, and tried to informally strengthen their position there. They did this by building factional alliances with certain Mughal *mansabdars*, through conspicuous appropriation of elite lifestyles and a jurisdictional tussle with the Mughal authorities over brokers and villagers (from the villages that the Company held on lease) in Bengal. Only on occasions of such informal actions being spilled in the open, did the *Heeren XVII* become aware of the transgression of the Company's formal limits by its officials. Under such circumstances,

[75] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Translation of missive written in Persian by Nawab Shaista Khan to Van Reede on 6 June, 1686, 16 December, 1686: f. 1255rv.

the VOC officials felt the pressure to provide justifications, which in turn led to the production of certain narratives about Mughal Bengal that were sent to the *Heeren XVII*.

The Role of Corruption in Writing about Encounters

The non-transparent nature of their informal dealings with the Mughal administrators had to be concealed in the formal narratives of the Company officials to justify their actions in foreign territories. This need was even more important because of the extended patronage networks of the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic and in Batavia which determined the position of all officials within the formal VOC structure. At the same time, as seen in Chapter 3 and here, the Mughal administration in Bengal was based on fluid and informal mechanisms of control due to the strong, local forces in the region. In their bid to preserve their position between the home authorities in the Republic and the Mughal administration in the *subah*, the VOC officials in Bengal also participated in this informal regional political atmosphere. But to justify their activities that from time to time were exposed and were not entirely in accordance with the *Heeren XVII*'s prescribed rules, they composed a discourse on paper that targeted the powerful, experienced and well-networked Mughal *subahdars* and administrators in Bengal, and not so much the Mughal emperor. Before proceeding further with the examination of these discourses, we must note that the VOC documents written for and by the Company personnel were not meant to be circulated among the wider public. The first concise compilation by the VOC in Asia and the Cape by Van Dam, was believed to have been locked away in a chest which required three different directors to have their own keys each to open it.[76] However, the ideas expressed in these papers was not always limited to the Company's inner circle and they often spilled out, as Manjusha Kuruppath pointed out, unabashed and uncontrolled in all forms – to be read and heard by the wider audience in the Republic.[77]

[76] Schutte, "Introduction," 4.
[77] Manjusha Kuruppath, "Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient: A Study of Representation and Its Information Circuits, c. 1650-1780" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014), 44.

The dominant idea consistently expressed in the Company's papers about the Mughal administrators was that they were greedy, unscrupulous and cunning figures with unjust ways of working. Van Dam made the following remarks in his report about the Mughal government in Bengal –

> The Mohammedans, who, as it is said, rule and govern these lands, are by the nature of their sect hugely arrogant, mighty and greedy. The regents, have a very small piece of land, in comparison to their king, who happens to be a great and powerful monarch…and there emerge arrogant regents and slavish subjects, who are further false, malicious, also eloquent, and exhibit such moral virtues as are meant to sustain themselves and encourage their parties, rather than righteously implementing them in practice…This being the inherent nature of the regents, one should try as hard as possible to please them, due to the fact that they are capable of causing much damage and harm to us, if we provoke and disrespect them… The common populace (in Bengal) is poor and slavish, and repressed harshly by the Moorish government.[78]

The Mughal *subahdars* in Bengal were equally regularly described as being immoral and ruthless to their people. Mir Jumla, one of the *subahdars* of Bengal, was described as someone who did not present himself to the Emperor Aurangzeb as his powerful vassal but as someone in the capacity of almost a 'sovereign prince'.[79] He was busy devising new means for draining all the money from this land, so that he could enrich himself and strengthen his own position vis-à-vis the emperor. The VOC commissioner sent to Bengal, Joan Verpoorten wrote – 'It is known that the Company in this land has found it difficult to trade from the beginning without vexation,

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[78] '*De Mahometanen, dewelcke, volgens het geseyde, die landen beheeren en regieren, sijn na de wyse van die secte uytnemende groots, hooghmoedigh en wellustigh, hebbende de regenten een seer kleyn gebieth in vergelyckingh van dat van haeren koninck, een groot en maghtigh monarch sijnde, … en hieruyt komt dan voort hooghmoedige regenten en slaefachtige onderdanen, sijnde voort valsch, arghlistigh, oock welspreeckende, vertoenende een morale deught, meer om haar selven te doen bestaan en haere parthyen te verkloecken, dan dat sulcx in opreghtigheyt soude geschieden…Dit dan sijnde het inwendigh humeur der regenten, moet men haer tragten sooveel mogelijck te complaceren, uyt orrsaecke sy ons veel beleth en schade kunnen aendoen en toebrengen, soo wy haar tergen en veragten…Het gemene volck is arm en slaefs, door de Moorsche regieringh seer verdruckt wordende.*'
Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book II, Part II, 17–18.

[79] Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 391.

extortion and violence because of the natural violence and selfishness of the Moors'.[80] This report was Verpoorten's justification of the inappropriate behaviour of the Company officials, who, in their defence, had to work in a naturally dishonest setting dominated by the corrupt administration of the Mughals.

The most common complaint of the VOC officials was about the gifts demanded by the Mughal governors, which was noted down as evidence of their insatiable lust for money and desires. On one occasion, some elephants and horses presented to the *nawab* of Dhaka by the Company were reportedly rejected. The director of Bengal then described the *nawab* in the following manner – 'He, however, knows his credit in accumulating money by extracting it from both the great and the small, as the Mughal against everyone else, who hate him, in order to maintain himself and keep growing more everyday'.[81] The *diwan,* Ray Balchand was received at the Company's lodge in Hooghly and given a certain amount of money for obtaining a *parwana* (imperial order) after which he was described as a 'shrewd money-grabber, who sought to empty the area under his jurisdiction.'[82] It has been shown in the previous chapter that gift-giving was part of the Mughal etiquette but extortion or bribery was forbidden in their administration. It was similar to the Dutch etiquette of receiving and sending foreign delegates and high officials with a symbolic exchange of gifts.[83] It is true that the Emperor Shah Jahan expressed his interest in possessing good elephants and the Emperor Jahangir had the royal artist make sketches for him of rare plants and animals.[84] But in the same way, it was also true that the *stadhouder*, Willem

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[80] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1212, Memorie for Pieter Sterthemius, *extraordinaris raad van Indië*, and director of the important commerce of Bengal and Orissa proposed by the commissioner Joan Verpoorten in Bengal, 21 Jan 1656: f. 211r.

[81] '*Hij weet evenwel zyn credit door het opbrengen van de schatten die hy van groot en kleen afperst, by den Mogol tegen alle, die hem haten, noch al staende te houden en meer en meer te doen aengroeyen.*'
Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 240.

[82] Haan, *Dagh-Register, anno 1680*, 725.

[83] Irma Theon, *Strategic Affection? Gift Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

[84] For Mughal gifts see, Wayne Edison Begley and Ziyaud-din A. Desai, eds., *The Shah Jahan Nama of 'Inayat Khan': An Abridged History of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Compiled by His Royal Librarian* (Delhi: Oxford

III wished for an elephant to be shipped over to him from India, while many of the elite regents of Amsterdam like Nicolaes Witsen and Johan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen amused themselves with their exotic collections, received as gifts from their friends in the Company.[85] It surely must not have been too difficult for the VOC servants to have understood this very familiar and universal practice of political gift-giving.[86] But every time the Company was supposed to pay a tribute for seeking trading privileges from the Mughal government, it was recorded in the papers as personal gifts (*geschenk*, *present*) that had to be given in order to get work done by the greedy, money-loving (*geldgierig*) Mughal officials.[87] The grievance expressed by the Company officials surrounding the practice of gift-giving almost implied accusations of bribery against the Mughal *mansabdars*. Such repeated stereotyping created the picture of Bengal being ruled by tyrannical and corrupt governors.

These ideas also came to be reflected in the books that were published on Asia in the Dutch Republic. Olfert Dapper in his book *Asia of Naukeurige Beschrywingen van het rijk des grooten Mogols,* for instance, described Bengal as a land where –

> The kings (of India, Cambay and Bengal) maintain all those of the Moorish or Mahommedan faith; as a result of which the *Moors*, that had been brought to India as

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University Press, 1990), 33, 48, 80, 84–87, 211, 221, 282, 327, 469; Rogers and Beveridge, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 105, 143.

[85] For gifts for Willem III see, Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 44. The cargo list of one of the ships departing from Bengal in 1677 also mentioned carrying rounded horns of an ibex and a peacock for the Prince of Orange. J.A. van der Chijs, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1677* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1904), 394. For the collections of regents see, Peters, *De wijze koopman*; Kees Zandvliet and Leonard Blussé, *The Dutch Encounter with Asia, 1600-1950* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 2002), 22; Marion Peters, "Nicolaes Witsen and Gijsbert Cuper: Two Seventeenth-Century Dutch Burgomasters and Their Gordian Knot," *LIAS: Sources and Documents Relating to the Early History of Ideas* 16, no. 1 (1989): 113. Some of these commodities were even privately smuggled as Herbert de Jager tried to do when sending objects to Witsen. See, Peters, 111–50; Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 137.

[86] Kim Siebenhüner, "Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift-Giving in Europe and Mughal India: Shared Practices and Cultural Diversity," *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (Oct. 2013): 525–46.

[87] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 74r-77v.

> slaves, have now been made masters of it, and the pagans in many places, are now kept under their whip and they have implemented their own doctrine everywhere.[88]

Both Wouter Schouten and Nicolaus de Graaff worked for the VOC and wrote books on their observations that were published later in the Republic. They both talked about the local administrative elites and merchant-officials in Bengal whose corrupt lifestyles, they claimed, influenced the behaviour of the Company servants. De Graaff was employed in the service of the VOC as a physician (*chirurgijn*) and sailed from Batavia to Bengal around 1668. On reaching the shores of Bengal, he claimed to have seen numerous incidents of corruption that he later published in a book in order to hold a mirror, in his own words, to the *Heeren XVII's* face for reflecting the Company's state of affairs there. De Graaff complained that after reaching Hooghly, all the men in his ship went inland and mixed freely there with the local elites, having dinners at their houses or visiting courtesans at night while conducting illegal trade during the day, together.[89] Schouten, the other VOC physician had visited Hooghly earlier and expressed his concerns in his book about the Company servants drinking and rolling in the streets, which was an unlikely sight in the Republic. He reported them as being stripped of all honour, availing themselves of the services of prostitutes which was openly allowed by the Mughal authorities and the local elites of Bengal.[90] To add to these stories, extracts from travelogues like De Graaff's *Oost-Indise spiegel* were circulated as pamphlets among the citizens in the Republic which

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[88] '*De Koningen van Indiën, Kambaye en Bengale onderhoudern alle den Moorschen of Mahometaenschen Godsdienst: uit oorzake de Moren, die voorslaven in Indien gebragt wierden, zich al eens meester daer van gemaekt, d'afgodsdienaers op veele plaetsen onder zweep gehouden en overal hunne leere ingevoert hebben.*'
Olfert Dapper, *Asia of Naukeurige Beschryvingen van het rijk des grooten Mogols en een groot gedeelte van Indiën: Behelsende de landschappen van Kandahar, Kabul, Multan, Ha"ikan, Bukkar, Send of Diu, Jesselmeer, Attak, Peniab, Kaximir, Jangapore, Dely, Mando, Malva, Chitor, Utrad, Zuratte of Kambaye, Chandisch, Narvar, Gwaliar, Indosten, Sanbar, Bakar, Nagrakat, Dekan en Visiapour, beneffens een volkome beschryvinge van geheel Persie, Georgie, Mengrelie en andere gebuur-gewesten vertoont in de benamingen, grens-palen, steden, gewassen, dieren, zeden der inwoonders, drachten, bestiering en Gods-dienst* (Amsterdam: Jakob van Meurs, 1672), 142.

[89] Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, 93.

[90] Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie*, 372.

aggravated the existing notions about the VOC officials in Bengal, being corrupted by the foreign people and their ways of life.[91]

Although not related to Bengal, a particular instance concerning a dispute over the ownership of the VOC lodge in Ahmedabad deserves mention here. While describing the case, Hendrick Zwaardecroon (director of Surat from 1699-1703 who also worked as a *secretaris* in the Van Reede committee) openly reasoned in his memoir (written for his successor in 1702) that 'we should use corruption' if it ever looked as if the *qazi* was not going to decide in the Company's favour.[92] On paper, the officials reasoned that they needed to deal with these foreign men through bribery, treachery and other practices that were otherwise morally condemned in the Republic but were needed to survive in this land.[93] Yet there is another side to it as revealed by Van Reede's comment about the *karori* of Hooghly*,* Abdul Ghani Beg (Abdul Gennibek). Van Reede described him as having such a high esteem of himself that he could not be persuaded or bought with any amount of gold to withdraw his complaints against the VOC officials.[94] Such remarks gave an insight into the fragility and farce of the VOC discourse about corruption, by revealing the inherent tendency to overlook the Company officials' corruption as

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[91] Hullu, "Het Oost-Indische sacspiegeltje," 173.

[92] Tracy, "Asian Despotism?," 277.

[93] On the reference to Machiavellianism as a usual logic of resort to forbidden administrative rules for conquest overseas in foreign empires see, Guido van Meersbergen, "Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Trade in Mughal India and the Problem of Trust, 1600-1630," in *Beyond Empire: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*, eds. Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 71. J.H. Maat too confirms that 'in the past bribery among one's own administrators and politicians was forbidden, but bribing foreign officials and political figures was allowed.' See, J.H. Maat, "Buitenlandse corruptie en de aanpak door de rijsrecherche," *Justitiele Verkenningen* 5 (2005): 65. For a comprehensive discussion on the ideas of Machiavelli being introduced to the Mughal court through the Jesuits and later by the Dutch, during the production of the 'Mirror for Princes' literature, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Lecture 2: Travelling Mirrors for Princes" (presentation, The Ehsan Yarshater Lectures Yale, Iran India, and Europe: Early Modern Connected Histories, Iran, April 26, 2017). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv4dMqEk65I&feature=youtu.be). What is also relevant in this connection is Subrahmanyam's discussion of Aurangzeb's interest in the politics of Europe by the end of the seventeenth century. See, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On the Hat-Wearers, Their Toilet Practices, and Other Curious Usages," in *Europe Observed: Multiple Gazes in Early Modern Encounters*, eds. Kumkum Chatterjee and Clement Hawes (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 67. In this connection, one can find an explicit emphasis on the use of deception (*hilat*) and stratagem in Aurangzeb's political wisdom, which is applied cautiously with reference to the Quran. See, Sarkar, ed., *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*, 96–97.

[94] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*, 9 December, 1686: f. 77r-77v.

a result of the natural rule of Mughal governance. As has been explained in Chapter 3, the Mughal administration did not endorse bribery and the ethos of the *munshi* could not have been unfamiliar to most of the VOC administrators. By the second half of the seventeenth century, there were Dutch envoys like Johannes Bacherus at the Mughal court who were well-versed in the Indo-Persian language and etiquette, while in the provinces the Company's men interacted daily with the Mughal officials. And yet the fact that the VOC accounts chose to interpret and narrate the story of immoral Mughal administrators revealed the role that administrative corruption played in covering up the informal side of the administrative encounter between the Company and the Mughal officials in Bengal.

Ultimately, this mechanism of perceiving VOC corruption was beneficial for three reasons – (a) it accommodated the factional infighting of the Company officials and allowed them to accuse their opponents of illegal trade and other forbidden actions and try to remove them from their profitable positions, (b) it still left room for the officials to keep pursuing their individual interests and ambitions and (c) it generated a response of producing an 'incorrupt' self-image of a VOC servant by 'corrupting' the other. Subrahmanyam has argued that the Portuguese were the ones who first circulated in Europe this image of an 'oriental despot' for describing the Indian Sultans.[95] While this might be true, the VOC remained essentially the first to have introduced this policy of 'corrupting' the Mughal administrators to portray an 'incorrupt' image of their own officials in Bengal on a prolific scale, facilitated by the printing machinery of the Republic.[96] It led to the fast dissemination of the idea that James Tracy called 'Asian despotism' in the language of the VOC administration.[97] Robert Travers later used this label

[95] Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History*, 14.

[96] If true, I would agree with the agrument of Benjamin Schmidt that the print machinery of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic led to the production of innumerable images and pamphlets, that in fact speeded up the dissemination of these ideas to profuse levels and proportions, perpetrating the invented 'exotic' and the 'orient'. Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[97] Tracy, "Asian Despotism?."

under the name of 'Asiatic despotism' to study the English expansion and their imperial ideology in eighteenth-century Bengal.[98]

But there was yet another layer to it that made it specifically about Bengal in this narrative on corruption. In the Republic, books published in connection with the VOC in Asia assigned a negative moral connotation to the geography of Bengal. It is interesting to remember that not just Dutch books but the Mughal chronicles themselves engaged in similar denigrations of Bengal as a seditious and uncouth area in the empire as seen in Chapter 3. Such tales about Bengal, moreover, were appropriated by the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century and adapted to suit the political and religious context of Portugal. Jorges Flores pointed out their frequent occurrence in the Portuguese texts from the sixteenth century which were replete with mysterious and monstrous depictions of the region.[99] It is noteworthy that in contrast to these literary publications, the memoirs left by the VOC directors in Bengal in the seventeenth century remained silent on this aspect of the region.[100] In the kilometres of missives sent to the *Hoge Regering* or the *Heeren XVII* by the director and his council in Bengal in the seventeenth century (all of which are not humanly possible to read in detail in any given number of PhD years), what appears most frequently are regular commercial details and certain specific reports on encounters or conflicts with the Mughal authorities. But there, too, one rarely notices anything being mentioned explicitly about the moral geography of Bengal. The first time such ideas about Bengal are reflected in the Company's official accounts is at the time Van Reede as the

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[98] Robert Travers, "Ideology and British Expansion in Bengal, 1757-72," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 7–27.

[99] Jorge Flores, "Distant Wonders: The Strange and the Marvelous between Mughal India and Habsburg Iberia in the Early Seventeenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 3 (July 2007): 553–81.

[100] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1212, Memoir from Joan Verpoorten for Pieter Sterthemius, 28 October, 1655: f. 211r-225v; NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1246, Memoir of Matheus van den Broeck for Rogier van Heijningen, 14 February, 1664: f. 437r-463v; NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr, 1277, Memoir for *opperkoopman* Jacobus Salderus in Patna, 20 December, 1669: f. 1421-27; NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1284, Memoir for *koopman* Cornelis Portier from the commissioner Willem Volger during his departure from Pipli, 23 September, 1671: f. 1903-1905.

commissioner introduced them in his reports for Bengal's succeeding directors and the *Heeren XVII* in 1686.[101]

But the books published by geographers in the Dutch Republic or those written on Asia by Dutch botanists and scientists incorporated this peculiarity of portraying Bengal in a negative light in their texts from a much earlier period. In the seventeenth century, there was already a booming Dutch market for books with stories (*verhalen*) about voyages to Asia that ranged from adventures of shipwrecks to claims of accurate scientific descriptions (*nauwkeurige beschrijvingen*) of the flora and fauna, customs and inhabitants of territories across the oceans. Bengal, too featured, repeatedly in these varied literary productions, albeit in a particular fashion. The rivers of Bengal and its adjacent terrain were portrayed consistently as a 'lawless', wild and unruly zone where riches were to be found in abundance. But it was also this environment that was shown as evoking vile desires. The first such detailed description of Bengal, appeared in Dutch in Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario.* Published in Amsterdam around 1596, the geographer Linschoten prepared the ground for the stereotypical description of a flourishing and prosperous Bengal that was to be repeated systematically by most of the later travel accounts on Asia. He wrote –

> The country is wondrously abundant and fertile of all life forms, primarily of rice…numerous ships from all places come here to load themselves (with this rice)… and it is so cheap that if told (to someone) it would sound incredible…there is ample sugar and all other commodities which makes one realise the abundance of everything here…Besides rice, a lot of cotton textiles are produced that are very fine and are held in high esteem all over India; they are not only distributed and shipped within India and the entire Orient but also to Portugal and elsewhere (in the world).[102]

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[101] See chapter 6 for more details on this.

[102] '*Het landt is wonder abondant en vruchtbaer van alle lijftochten/ ende principalijck rijs/…want laden jaerlijcks veel schepe die daer van alle weghen comen/…ende so goedencoop/ datter alhier te vertelle soude ongelooflick wesen:…Suyker en ander waren naer advenant/ waerby men mach consideren die overvloedigheyt van alle dinghen…Behalve het rijs wort er gemaekt veel Cattoene lywaet dat seer fijn is/ en wert in Indien seer gheestimeert/ en niet alleenlijck verspreyt ende vervoert naer Indien en gheheel Orienten: maer oock naer Portugael en ander weghen.*'

In this account of Bengal's abundance, Linschoten also added the elements of wilderness and unruliness that were part of its riverine tracts and the people living in the nearby region. He wrote –

> …the water (of the Ganges)…is so pristine and clear, that it seems to be like paradise…it has crocodiles, like the Nile in Egypt…for all Indians this water is considered holy and blessed and they believe for certain that washing and bathing in its waters would rid them of all sins and make them pure and clean again…The Portuguese have some of their trade and traffic there and their settlements in some of the places…but they have no permanence, nor any police or government as in (the rest of) India. They live by themselves like wild men and untamed horses, to do whatever they wish, being masters of themselves and do not pay much attention to the legal system and if they do, they are often to laws of Indian origin, and in this way some of the Portuguese there sustain themselves.[103]

This set the trend in describing Bengal and was picked up voraciously by all VOC officials writing later about Bengal. The rivers and the adjacent terrain filled with chaos became a standard stereotype which was reiterated in almost every subsequent account.

Geographers like Dapper reproduced this image of Bengal in their own works. Dapper, published his book *Asia, of naukeurige beschryving van het rijk des Grooten Mogols* in 1672 where he put forward similar ideas on Bengal. Dapper wrote –

Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert van Jan Huygen van Linschoten oost ofte portugaels indien inhoudende een corte beschryvinghe der selver landen ende zee-custen/ met aenwysinge van alle de voornaemde principale havens/rivieren/hoecken ende plaetsen/ tot noch toe van de Portugesen ontdeckt ende bekent; waer by ghecoecht zijn/ niet alleen die conterseytsels van de habuten drachten ende wesen so van de Portugesen aldaer residerende als vande ingebooren Indianen/ ende haere tempels/ afgoden/huysinge met die voornaemste boomen vruchten kruyden speceryen en de diergelijcke materialen, als ooc die manieren deselfden volckes so in hunnen Godts-diensten als in politie en huis-houdinghe; maer ooc een corte verhalinge van de coophandelingen hoe en waer die ghedreven en ghevonden worden/ met die ghedencksweerdichste geschidenissen/ voorghevallen den tijt zijnder residentie aldaer* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz., 1596), 21.

[103] '*…die revier opwaerts gesonden/ die sommighe maenden inden wegh versette/ tot dates quamen daerse een seer lieffelicken rueck ontfinghen/ ende eenen seer claren ende ghetemperde hemel/ stil ende seer liefflick water/ so dat het haer scheen te wesen/ gelijck een paradijs…Dese revier heeft ook crocodilen/ ghelijck die Nilus in Ægypten…welcke wert van alle die Indianen voor een heyligh ende gebenedijt water ghehoude/ ende ghelooven voor seker/ dat alle de ghene die hem daer eens in wast ende baeyt (al is hy noch so groote sondaer) dat hem dan alle zijn sonden vergheven zijn/ ende dat hy so reijn e suyver is/ als nieu herboren…De Portugesen hebben daer haer traffijcken ende handelinghe/ ende sommighe plecken bewoont…maer en hebbender geen vastigheden/ noch sonderlinghe gheen policye noch regieringhe/ als in Indien: maer leven by naer ghelijck wilde meschen ende onghetoomde peerden: want eenjeghelijck doet wat hy wil/ ende zijn haer eygen heere/ en passen niet veel op Justitite/ so daer eenighe is ofte comt uyt Indien/ ende op dees manier onthouden haer daer sommighe Portugesen.*'
Linschoten, 21.

> Those from Bengal, as Linschoten shows, claim that the Ganges originated in the earthly paradise which is why they also consider its water sacred. It even attracts thousands of *Banias* and other Indian heathens who bathe in its waters…In the middle of the Ganges there lie innumerable small and big islands, which are very fertile, and bear wild fruit trees, pineapples and all other sorts of vegetables, while being criss-crossed with several canals or water-channels (distributaries).[104]

But this image of prosperity was coupled with the usual portrayal of danger and lawlessness in this region. Dapper wrote that most of the islands towards the east of Bengal were not under proper control and were left to be 'wild and desolate', infested by Frankish pirates (by which he possibly meant pirates of Portuguese origin) from Arakan.[105] They were also teeming with 'tigers, that swam from one island to another, making it very dangerous to move in there.'[106] Dapper's narrative reinforced the stereotypical picture of a rich province filled with chaos and disorder. He emphasised the tiger as a dangerous, exotic creature that was to be found –

> In several places in the interiors of India… especially in Bengal…He has…glistening eyes, sharp teeth, giant paws with bent claws, and long hairs on the lips: that are so poisonous that if one of these hairs get into a man or even an animal, they succumb to the poison…nobody should, as forbidden by the *Great Mogols*, keep such hairs of a dead tiger for themselves, but on penalty of death (if violated), should send them to the court of the *Great Mogol,* where the King's physicians then made deadly poisonous pills from these hairs, that would be given secretly to anyone, the King wished to kill.[107]

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[104] '*Die van Bengala, zoo Linschooten getuigt, stellen den oorsprong van den Ganges in het aerdsch paradijs: waerom ook zijne wateren by hen voor heilig worden gehouden: ja trekken de Benjanen en andere Indiche Heidenen by duizenden na denzelven ter beevaert, om hetzelve te hebben of zich daer in te baden…In het midden van den Ganges leggen ontelbare groote en kleine eilanden, die zeer vruchtbaer zijn, en alle bewassen met wilde en vrucht-boomen, ananas en allerlei slag van groente, en worden doorsneden met duizenden van kanalen of watergangen.*'
Dapper, *Asia of naukeurige beschryvingen*, 11.

[105] Dapper, 11.

[106] Dapper, 11.

[107] '*Op veele plaetsen van Indien te landewaerts hout de tiger, inzonderheid in Bengala,…Hy heeft…glinsterende oogen, veele scherpe tanden, veelklovige voeten, met kromme nagels: aen de lippen langachtige hairen: die zoo vergiftig zijn, dat zoo iemant, 't zy mensch, of ook het beest zelf, slechts een eenig van deze hairen in kreeg, door zijn eigen zelfs vergif zou omkomen…niemand, by verbot des Grooten Mogols, zoodanige hairen van een gedooden tyger by zich mag behouden, maer moeten alle, op penne van den lijve, na het hof van den Grooten Mogol gezonden worden: alwaer door's Konings artzen doodelijke vergiftige pillen van deze hairen gemaekt worden, welke den gene, die de Koning heimelijk wil doen sterven, ingegeven worden.*'
Dapper, 14.

Without having ever visited Bengal himself, Dapper produced such detailed images that inevitably played up to the dualism of prosperity and peril in this region. Schouten, the VOC physician, who on the other hand actually had visited the Company's factories there, published his book from Amsterdam in 1676. His accounts, as well as the illustrations in his book, also reflected similar ideas. He commented on the availability of abundant rice in Bengal which formed the primary constitutent of the diet of the local inhabitants. He wrote about the numerous magicians, soothsayers, tarot card readers etc. that inhabited its terrain.[108] Furthermore, he too brought back the geographical imagery of a riverine Bengal like Linschoten and Dapper. Schouten reported about the affluence abounding the land and its people, while emphasising on the dangers of the region. He observed –

> Bengalen or Bengala is a great and mighty land…Bengal is one of the most beautiful and productive countries of India. With the produce of this region, the people can feed not only themselves, but also the inhabitants of other areas of India…We saw that Hooghly lay, great and beautiful, along the banks of the famous river, the Ganges. There were wide but unpaved streets, beautiful footpaths (*wandelwegen*) and occasionally, here and there some respectable buildings, wealthy warehouses, and houses built in the Bengali style. There were also shops filled with all kinds of commodities, especially beautiful silk cloth and other oriental textiles.[109]

On the contrary, he wrote –

> With daybreak, we reached the village of Baranagore where a large number of *jentives*, both men and women, disregarding the sharp chill, went shamelessly naked…to plunge themselves in the river. This was without consideration of the fact that crocodiles and

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[108] Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie*, 413.

[109] '*Bengalen of Bengala is een groot en machtig land…Bengalen is één van de mooiste en vruchtbaarste landen van India. Met de opbrengst van het land kan de bevolking niet alleen zichzelf voeden, maar ook bewoners van andere landen van India…Wij zagen dat Hougly groot en prachtig langs de befaamde rivier de Ganges ligt. Er zijn brede, maar ongeplaveide straten, fraaie wandelwegen en ook hier en daar aazienlijke gebouwen, rijke pakhuizen en woningen op Bengaalse manier gebouwd. Ook zijn er winkels die vol liggen met allerhande goederen, in't bijzonder mooie zijden kleedjes en andere oriëntaalse stoffen.*'
Schouten, 373.

> alligators were found daily in these waters and were known to have preyed on many people.[110]

A print illustration depicting the landscape of Bengal along with the text in his book, reiterated this impression. As can be seen in Fig 12, scenes of cremation, a tiger attacking a woodcutter and crocodiles in the water – all the elements of the wild and perilous are put together in a single frame. This is set against the background of ships and commerce portraying the image of fortune and wealth in the region. It presumably depicted the peculiarities in Bengal that the author wished to show. It is *not* to say that these descriptions were untrue or fabricated in the seventeenth century. Rather, what is interesting to notice is the way these accounts represented Bengal and chose to provide information about the region repeatedly in a particular fashion– in this case, its richness coupled with its mysterious and dangerous rivers.

How such ideas about Bengal steadily made their way into the Dutch books on flora and fauna can possibly be explained in the light of their transmission from elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, the Islamic sources were an inspiration for the Portuguese accounts and Linschoten drew most of his descriptions from Portuguese accounts.[111] But other works produced by university trained authors had more probable sources than Linschoten's. Abul Fazl while talking about Bengal's 'base' air and soil as being responsible for its dissident nature, referred to the origin of such knowledge in 'old writings'.[112] It is possible that certain ideas associated with Bengal were contained in ancient writings that had made their way into the Mughal and other Islamic chronicles in India. Francis Zimmermann pointed out how classical Sanskrit medical treatises

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[110] '*Bij het aanbreken van de dag bevonden wij ons b't dorp Barnagor waar een groot aantal jentieven, zowel mannen als vrouwen, ondanks de hevige koude zich zonder enige schaamte naakt had uitgekleed...en in de rivier begeven. Dit zonder acht te slaan op de vele krokodillen en kaaimannen die hier dagelijks in de Ganges worden aangetroffen en die veel mensen levend verslinden*.' Schouten, 369.

[111] Linschoten worked for the Archbishop of Goa in the last decades of the sixteenth century, when it was under the control of the *Estado da India*. See, Arun Saldanha, "Linschoten's Itinerario and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594-1602," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 1 (Jan. 2011): 153.

[112] Beveridge, *The Akbarnāma of Abu'l-Fazl*, III:427.

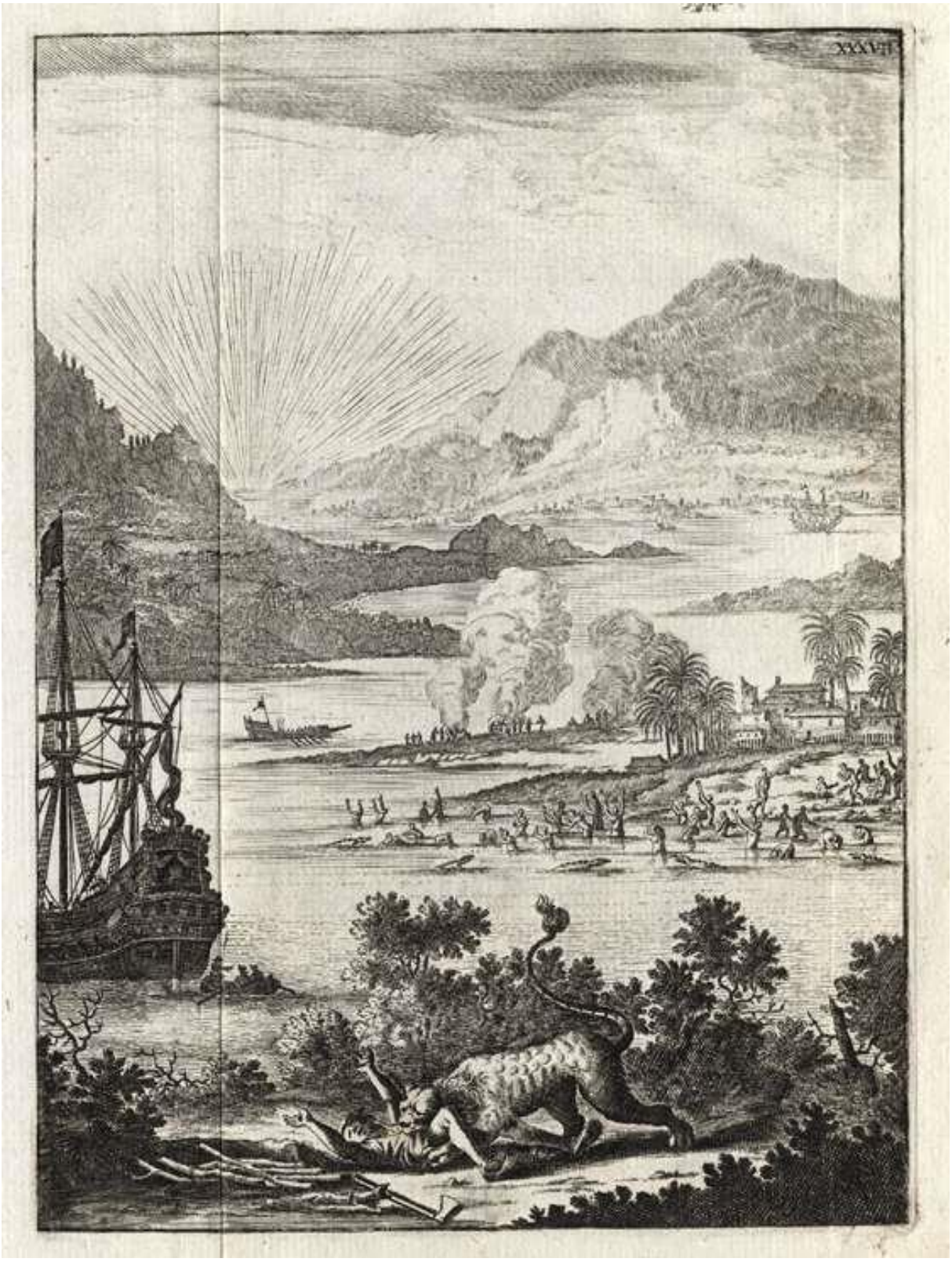

Fig 12: The Ganges in Bengal, reproduced from Wouter Schouten, *Wouter Schoutens Oost-indische voyagie,* Book III, 62.[113]

[113] Wouter Schouten, *Wouter Schoutens Oost-Indische voyagie, vervattende veel voorname voorvallen en ongemeene vreemde geschiedenissen*… (Amsterdam: Jacob Meurs, 1667): 62.

had created a hierarchy of areas based on humor (wind, bile and phlegm) according to which the savour (sweet, acid, salty etc.) and qualities of life (smooth/rough, cold/hot, sluggish/lively, tender/crude etc.) differed. In this category, areas such as Bengal with its wet, marshy texture of land (*anupa*) was placed on a contrasting polarity to the arid, dry lands in the west (*jangala*). In Zimmerman's words, 'This polarity was expressed in the food (wheat to the west, rice to the east), the pharmacy and the bodily techniques of human communities, giving rise to people of thin, dry and bilious temperament at one extreme, and at the other to rotund people who were susceptible to the disorders of phlegm. Consumption was a characteristic malady of the *jangala,* and elephantiasis of the *anupa.*'[114] There were also Persian medical treatises (*tibb*) which reflected similar ideas of humour and the nature of men.[115] With nature being a point of interest for the Dutch scholars and geographers, the Indian medical treatises containing knowledge about plants and herbs could have made their way into European texts and sensibilities. Hortus *Malabaricus,* which was one such VOC production made under the initiative of Van Reede was drafted with the help of Brahmanic and local physicians from Malabar who had access to the ancient Sanskrit texts and *Ayurvedic* knowledge.[116] More information on this point is given in connection with Van Reede and his factional allies who were known for their ideological connections, in chapters 5 and 6. In this light, it is possible to claim that the source of Van Reede's information about Bengal and that of other Dutch geographers and botanists could have been such medical treatises which were either available in written or recirculated orally and preserved through Islamic renditions and other European translations in the seventeenth century. He adapted such information but obviously lent it a new context that would suit his purpose.

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[114] Francis Zimmermann, "The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine," *Social Science Medical* 27, no. 3 (1988): 198.

[115] Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India*, 20; Fabrizio Speziale, "The Encounter of Medical Traditions in Nūr al-Dīn Šīrāzī's '*Ilājāt-i Dārā Šikōhī*," *eJournal of Indian Medicine* 30, no. 2 (2010): 53-67, file://vuw/Personal$/Homes/S/surb1/Desktop/24731-28860-1-PB.pdf.

[116] Saraswat Brahmins like Ranga Bhat, Vinayaka Pandit (with knowledge of Sanskrit), Appu Bhatt as well as an *Ayurvedic* expert from Karapurram in Malabar like Itti Achudem were involved in this project. Apart from this there were other local collaborators from the Chogan caste who had first-hand experience of working with plants, flower and fruits of all types.

The relevance of this was also established in the book by the VOC physician, Schouten which contains detailed accounts of Bengal in the seventeenth century. At the very beginning of his book, he revealed his interest in exploring the limits and miracles of nature around the world, albeit described in a religious connotation as the wonders of God.[117] Furthermore, he went on to write at length about the different flora and fauna he encountered during his journeys. When it came to Bengal, he commented explicitly on the local physicians, their methods of healing and their books recommending medical practices like massages and the drinking of herbal sap as remedies for diseases.[118] This could be any medical treatise in Indo-Persian or Sanskrit, including the *Ayurveda* itself. One can only speculate about these probable connections which merit deeper research in future. These old texts and the Mughal chronicles together, however, created a chain of certain ideas that came to be associated with the riverine landscape of Bengal which were further adapted in the Portuguese, Dutch, and later French and English writings to suit the European East India Companies' context. As mentioned earlier, such ideas were not found in the reports of the Company officials in the beginning. But in the Republic, Dutch literary publications repeatedly chose to portray Bengal in this manner. Consequently, when Van Reede was visiting Bengal, such ideas about this region were already rife and commonplace in the minds of average VOC officials.

The fact that the source of menace was found in Bengal and in its Mughal governance can be better understood by looking back at the developments in the Republic and in Bengal. As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, corruption was becoming a rising concern both in the political administration of the Republic and within the VOC concerning its overseas affairs. Among other things, acceptance of gifts or bribes by officials for performing their duties was perceived as administrative corruption. On this ground, the Company officials dismissed their Mughal counterparts as being greedy for gifts and therefore prone to extortion and corruption. By the

[117] Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie*, 25.
[118] Schouten, 412.

second half of the seventeenth century, the political atmosphere in the Republic was against a monarchical form of government and this disapproval was reflected in the writings of the VOC officials while describing the Mughal administration. Added to this was the situation of the Company in Bengal as has been exemplified in Chapter 3. The fluidity and complexity of this region, its increasing importance in Europe-Asiatic trade, and the non-transparency of the Company's participation there in the Mughal administrative world made the VOC try to get a better grip on Bengal. The inability to do so led to concerns about uncontrolled and unchecked corruption among the Company officials there. By such corruption was meant violation of the Company's monopoly by indulging in illegal trade, or disregarding prohibitions on informal contact with locals and appropriation of elite lifestyles abroad.[119] Within the Company, therefore, the official reports described the region from the 1660s as a den of corruption. It blended with the moment of Dutch publications on Asia incorporating ideas about Bengal's wealth and wilderness, prosperity and monstrosity from the existing non-Dutch sources. For the citizens in the Republic at least as also for the *Heeren XVII* and Van Reede, which will be seen in Chapter 6, the image of corrupt Mughal ways of administering a corruptible area as Bengal was already formed. It provided a justification for the Company officials to explain their informal practices in Bengal. Conversely, it also led to the addition of new connotations to the VOC perception of 'corruption' in the form of an inefficient Mughal governance in Bengal.

At least on paper, a gradual moral hierarchy of the Dutch administration began being established over the Mughal governance in Bengal. Intimate interactions with Mughal officials and behaving like the administrative elites was, therefore only, seen as conforming to corrupt behaviour. This was not how an exemplary VOC official ought to have conducted himself abroad. It served the purpose of not only reinstating the moral credibility of the Company

[119] Note that recent research has shed light on the Portuguese discourse on decadence and contamination in connection with Christianity and the contact with the local Hindus in Goa. See, Nandini Chaturvedala, "Preserving Purity: Cultural Exchange and Contamination in Late Seventeenth Century Portuguese India," *Ler História* 58 (2010): 99–112.

servants at the cost of the Mughal administrators, but it also conferred on them the power to claim administrative superiority in having to survive and work in this corrupt atmosphere. In a way, thus, the formal administrative encounter became a process of perpetrating the 'politics of difference' between the Mughal and the VOC administration by 'corrupting' the former to project an 'incorrupt' image of the latter.[120] At the same time on the informal side, the fluidity in Bengal's political arena allowed more room for personal negotiations and unsolicited penetration of the Company officials into the Mughal administrative structure. But this 'lived' experience came to be concealed in the VOC narratives where the image of the Mughal administrators was systematically tarnished as corrupt. This explains why in pocketbooks like that of Daniël Havart's *Persiaanse Secretaris* meant to inform the Company servants about Mughal epistolary style and other ethnographic information (to understand the Mughal style of administration), there was no mention of the Mughal *munshigiri* ideas of 'public welfare' and 'good governance'.[121] This aspect of 'corrupting' the image of Mughal Bengal to implement the reforms of the Van Reeede committee was a VOC phenomenon; but the process continued in the subsequent century when Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of British-India (1772-74) managed to remove the Mughal *munshi* in Bengal, Muhammad Reza Khan from his office with corruption allegations for implementing his own legal reforms.[122] Nierstrasz was, therefore, right in claiming that corruption per se had never been a special problem of the VOC in the eighteenth century or of

[120] On the politics of difference see, Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17,147.

[121] Neither Francis Gladwin nor Daniël Havart has acknowledged Chandar Bhan who wrote on the skills and requirements of a Mughal *munshi*. Kinra argues that sections from his *Chahar Chaman* were freely copied by Gladwin, without acknowledging the source and the author. It was meant to educate the British civil servants in pre-colonial Indian administration. Designed as a small pocket-book, Havart's *Persiaanse Secretaris* was designed to serve the same purpose of training Company's personnel in Persian administration. See, Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 29; Rajeev Kinra, "Master and Munshi: A Brahman Secretary's Guide to Mughal Governance," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010): 553; Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 147; Francis Gladwin, *The Persian Moonshee* (Calcutta, reprint London: Oriental Press, 1801); Daniël Havart, *Persiaanse Secretaris, of een nette beschrijving van de stijl die de Persiannen gebruiken in hare brieven en notariale stukken* (Amsterdam: Jan van Hoorn, 1680). For more on Havart and his book see, Jos Gommans, *De verborgen wereld: Nederland en India vanaf 1550* (Rijksmuseum: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2018), 45-53.

[122] Chatterjee, "Reflections on Religious Difference," 411.

any century, for that matter.[123] It's mention in the Company's administrative reports increased simply because of its increased importance as a political agenda in the Republic that was echoed in its overseas settlements and factories. With an increased accountability of the Dutch regents *cum* VOC directors to their 'citizens' in the Republic, the Company's overseas project of expansion gradually began to gain a 'public' audience. The ongoing debates on administrative behaviour and corruption in the political domain of the Republic, therefore, came to be used by the VOC and the *Heeren XVII* for intervening in Bengal from particularly this time period (1660s onwards).

Conclusion

In this chapter, it is shown what happened when the partially incommensurable yet largely commensurable worlds of the Mughal and the VOC administrators came together. This encounter is studied against the backdrop of Bengal, whose importance had risen from the latter half of the seventeenth century as a commercially advantageous region for the Company and a politically permeable space for its individual officials. It has been shown here that the pressures from the VOC in the Republic to account for the forbidden actions of its officials in Bengal led to the region's incorporation in the VOC perception of corruption. As has been alleged in Chapter 2, the *Heeren XVII* had been focusing on the corruption of Company officials overseas, to subdue the pressure back home from its shareholding citizens. Consequently, they wanted to have greater control exerted abroad. It was also demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2 that the changing political context of the seventeenth century led to the factional shuffling of the *Heeren XVII*, which in turn increased the pressure on every new group of directors. They had to prove their administrative efficiency to the citizens through corruption allegations and anti-corruption reforms. The force of a newly pervading political energy triggered by the contemporary philosophers also added to this drive of the VOC in implementing experimental measures. All

[123] Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*, 6.

these developments combined together to place more accountability on the shoulders of the Company officials overseas to report to the *Heeren XVII*, which compelled them to draw up lengthy justifications for all their actions. Often their actions were not in compliance with the prescribed rules of the *Heeren XVII* which accounted even more for a formal justification to cover up the informal side of the encounter.

In this process of writing about such justifications, corruption accusations against the Mughal *mansabdars* operating in an atmosphere as Bengal became a tool for portraying an incorrupt image of the Dutch officials there. Their discourse was fixated on churning out ideas about Mughal immorality and corruption. Although such justifications were intended only for the eyes and ears of the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic, they spilled over inevitably into the 'public' domain. To kindle the pleasure of Dutch readers, literary works of varying genres about Asia that were published in the Republic, incorporated such ideas and made them more widespread. It was also through such books that a steady influx of information about the geographic peculiarities of Bengal came to be disseminated. Either borrowed from earlier Portuguese texts or Islamic sources, these ideas pervaded the Dutch literary market. Bengal in this discourse consequently came to acquire a negative connotation, that was coupled with the story of Mughal mismanagement there. Through this process of writing about corruption, the VOC administrators ended up assigning a higher moral authority to the Dutch administrative ethos in their encounter with the Mughals.

While this represented the formal side of the encounter, the informal side to it thrived at the same time. In the relatively fluid setting of Bengal, the 'lived' reality, as has been shown in this chapter, was more porous than the tight categories of the written reports. Neither was the VOC a fully developed coherent administration, nor were the Mughals. The presence of different networks, political factions, and actors with multiple loyalties and legal identities on both sides made it difficult to reconcile formal categories with the lived situation. The informal dynamics between these two administrative groups, therefore, continued to exist, driven by

personal ambitions and factional interests. But the writing of the encounter from the Dutch perspective, tilted the symmetry in favour of the 'western' administrative superiority while nullifying the other.[124] 'Corruption' thus became the perfect façade under which formal discourses took a specific shape in Mughal Bengal to camouflage the informal politics and negotiations of the Company officials there. The following chapters dealing with Van Reede as the commissioner with his investigation committee, both in the Republic and in Bengal would explicate these points further.

[124] It is not to say that this thwarted the administrative development on the Mughal side in any way, whose momentum has been discussed earlier in Chapter 3. But in the written accounts of the VOC (and probably later in the EIC), this bureaucratic growth of the Mughal entity came to be systematically erased.

Chapter 5

Behind the Scenes: The Making of the Van Reede Committee in the Dutch Republic

> We have bound ourselves to the Company by an oath, by which we call upon the God Almighty to not only be a witness to our sincere intentions but also we are, as it were, taunting and provoking God's punishing powers to be provoked if we do anything other than what we have promised; as we are God-fearing Christians, we should remain faithful, do well and induce ourselves to love our lords and masters because they have received not only the power of the state from our fatherland to punish miscreants but have also themselves given us ample opportunities to prosper, to flourish, and to add to our honour and respect by which we have had come to obtain a kind of temporal happiness, that we could not find in our fatherland.[1]

This was what Hendrik Adriaan van Reede wrote from Hooghly in his position as the commissioner-general in 1687 for the future VOC directors and the council working in Bengal. He was doing what he had been sent to do in India – namely to remind the Company servants in the factories there about their duty to remain 'faithful' to their 'lords and masters' in the Republic. If they failed in this duty, they could be punished as miscreants by virtue of the 'power of the state' sanctioned by the *Heeren XVII* and by the 'fatherland'. This entire process, as has been alleged in the previous chapters, was necessitated against the background of intense discussions on overseas corruption. In their effort to prove to the Dutch citizens and the VOC investors that remedies were being adopted, the *Heeren XVII* strengthened the Company's monopoly and persistently drafted new rules and regulations. In chapter 2, we mentioned that this opened up

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[1] '*…dewijle wij onsezelven door een eed daar aan hebben verbonden; in zig vervattende wij God almagtigh niet alleen tot getuijge aan roepen van onse sincere intentie, maar dat wij boven dien Gods straffende magt als versoeken en over ons uijtlocken zoo wij anders komen te doen als het geen wij beloven; zulx zoo wij Christenen zijn en God vreesen moeten wij getrouw wesen, wel doen en onse heeren en meesters bewegen ons te beminnen want deselve hebben niet alleen van den staat onser vaderlands verkregen de magt van quaad doenders te straffen maar sij hebben ook bij haar zelven zoo veel gelegentheijd ons te begunstigen, groot te maken, en in haar dienst toe te voegen eere en aanzien waar door wij een tijdelijk geluk bekomen, diergelijk wij in ons vaderland niet en zoude konnen vinden.*'
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and Regulations made by Van Reede as commissioner, c. 1687: folios not numbered.

the possibility of factional alignment between the political institutions in the Dutch Republic – the VOC in the Republic – and the VOC in Asia (as the governor-general in Batavia had direct ties with the dominant faction in the *Heeren XVII*). In order to see if this was true or not, it is necessary to examine a case study involving one such investigation committee. This committee was different from the usual committees because it was sent to India in 1684 with a commissioner appointed by the *Heeren XVII*, unlike other commissioners that were sent by the *Hoge Regering*.

This was the committee constituted in December 1684, and Van Reede was put in charge as the commissioner-general with instructions to inspect all the Company's factories in the western quarters – those along the coasts of Coromandel and Malabar, and in Ceylon, Surat, Agra and especially in Bengal (fig 13).[2] Van Reede was to be on board the ship, *Bantam* that would sail from the Republic along the Cape where he was to change over to the yacht, *De Purmer* that would be accompanied by another fluyt (*fluijt*), *Adrichem* sailing together towards Ceylon.[3] After the loading and unloading of commodities, *De Purmer* full with *arrecq* (areca nuts), *chiancoes* (big horns) and other goods from Ceylon was to carry Van Reede to Bengal while the fluyt, *Adrichem* was to leave for Coromandel.[4] On reaching the factory of Chinsurah-Hooghly in Bengal, he was supposed to read out the letter from the *Heeren XVII* so that the officials serving there were made aware of his authority and obeyed him.[5] Van Reede was allowed to enter the lodges of the Company and was to be allocated his own desk for working, the cost of which had

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[2] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede appointed as the commissioner of the committee to be sent to Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon etc. in Amsterdam, 1684: f. 1v-2v.

[3] NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, Copy-*Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 27 February, 1681- 8 October, 1685, 23 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

[4] Anonymous, *VOC Glossarium* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2000): 13, 30; NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede, December, 1684: f. 1v.

[5] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede, December, 1684: f. 2v.

Fig 13: The Western Quarters that were granted to the VOC by the charter of the States-General were included in the stretch between the Cape of Good Hope and Japan in the Indian Ocean. NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 312.

to be covered from the Company's accounts.[6] His position and power was designated as being above those of all the governors and directors of the places he was supposed to visit. He even had permission to preside over any meeting that was convened during his stay on behalf of the *Heeren XVII*.[7]

The explicit orders however were to report all cases of malpractice, fraud and abuse against anyone to the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia so that it was the *Raad van Justitie* that had the final say in the trial and punishment of the accused.[8] From Bengal he was to later move on to Coromandel, Ceylon and thereafter to Malabar. From there, the orders were to let him go further to Surat before returning back to Ceylon again. In Ceylon, he could embark on any of the returning ships and return back to the Republic. Van Reede was to be assisted in this mission by two other men, the second and next in rank being Isaac Soolmans who had earlier written to the directors complaining about the chaotic state of affairs of the Company in Bengal.[9] Soolmans was instructed to take over the position of Van Reede in case of his sudden death or under any other unpredictable circumstances.[10] The third person, Johannes Bacherus who had been the former *opperkoopman* in Surat was appointed as the final member of this committee for assisting both Van Reede and Soolmans in their investigation duties.[11] It thus seemed to be a fully-equipped and a sound attempt by the *Heeren XVII* to try to combat corruption among the Company's servants in India. But why was there the need to send this committee at this hour in the first place? How did the plan to send this committee reflect the anxiety about corruption and especially that of corruption in Mughal Bengal, towards the end of the seventeenth century, among the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic? It is in order to find the answers to these questions that

[6] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 2v.
[7] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 19 October, 1684: folios not numbered.
[8] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 3r.
[9] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 28 November, 1684: folios not numbered.
[10] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 26 October, 1684 and 28 November, 1684: folios not numbered.
[11] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 25 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

this chapter focuses on the above-mentioned committee and the story behind its formation in the VOC.

Why this committee?

This committee led by Van Reede was neither the first, nor the last in the series of reforms adopted by the factions in the VOC administration to create checks and balances in its overseas wing. And yet it was significant on account of the fact that the Van Reede Committee came at a crucial point of the Republic's expansionist ventures *vis-à-vis* its other European competitors and was designed to target particular VOC bases. Furthermore, it was one of its kind, equipped with extraordinarily special powers. Besides that, the extreme care and year-long deliberations that went behind planning and organising it and the tremendous expectations from this committee made it look like a seriously high-profile investigation.

To begin with the time of this committee's inception and dispatch, one needs to situate the VOC in its contemporary political and social background. As early as 1626, complaints of corruption against the Company in the Republic could be heard through the popular pamphlet culture. Two pamphlets published in 1635 and 1638 blamed the VOC for its barbarous and villainous conduct in the East Indies in order to maximise the Company's profits in the Republic.[12] By 1663, a pamphlet called *Het Oost-Indisch-Praetjen* gave an explicit insight into the lives of the Company servants as perceived by the people in the Republic. In a conversational style (*praetje*) typical of such pamphlets, the author showed a *stuyrman* (a helmsman), a *koopman* (a merchant), a *krijghs-officier* (an officer of the militia) and a *krancke-bezoeker* (a religious visitor for comforting sick patients) engaged in dialogues with each other about their lives in Asia. The *koopman* was shown to begin with remarks on their drinking habits that reflected the common image of a Company servant living abroad –

[12] Cited in Virginia West Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209.

> *Koopman*: Well, friends, you have all gathered here together, and yet it is so dry? There is only tobacco, and no drinks such as wine, German beer, arrack, gin or at least some nice ale (*smul-biertjen*) that could have been of use now. We have certainly been doing quite badly.

Half-way through the conversation, more on this conspicuous lifestyle was revealed when the *krijghsofficier* made his remarks on the illegal means of earning by the Company officials –

> *Krijghsofficier*: …Well, I still maintain what I have said; that the merchants (indicating Company servants) play with the pennies and show them to us. Although we know very well that such (pennies) comes with their position and service for which they enjoy a pay and salary; yet we see, that they already make so much for their own that they not only live in an extravagant state and indulge in prodigal consumption when they come here from other places, but also do the same in our fatherland…

To this, the *stuyrman* had replied –

> *Stuyrman*: 'Yes, yes mate; having is having but acquiring is an art. You don't have to explain to a farmer how a nobleman earns his money…'.

As the conversation continued, the names of many high officials were mentioned casually in relation to illegal trading in Asia. Finally, the *stuyrman* confessed that –

> *Stuyrman:* 'It appears to be that the whole of the Dutch-Indies is infested with theft and private trade, and is entirely dependent on these, with nobody as an exception, and why should then the men who arrive here new, not maintain the lifestyle of their masters, or even follow them, because the belief here in India is that it does not go all too well even among the directors themselves. On the contrary, it is they who try to plague the Company servants with new rules and laws, so that the Company servants are compelled to steal as much as they can before they return to the homeland, and free themselves of their slavery (to the Company), and what more is that one learns here that those who return home with the largest amount of goods are the most respected, even getting married to the daughters of the directors…'.[13]

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[13] '*Koopman: Wel vrienden bent ghy hier t'samen soo vergadert, en dat soo drooghjes, alleen met een Tabackjen, sonder een dronckjen Wijn, Mom, Arackjen, Towackjen, of ten minsten een smul-biertjen te nuttigen, dat loopt seecker al vry slecht af… Krijghs-officier: Wel ick houdt noch staende, 't geen ick geseyt hebbe, dat de koop-luyden vast met de penningen speelen, en laten't ons ansien: En hoewel wy wel weten, dat sulcx haer ampt en bedieningh mede brenght, daer voor sy haer gagie en tractement*

Such pamphlets reflected a part of the corruption discussions that were going on in the Republic about the Company, especially at a time before 1665 when the VOC charter had to be renewed by the States-General.

After the turmoil of 1672, such discussions still haunted the Republic and the call for reformation or redress were heard even more loudly than ever. Deliberations began by the board of directors on launching reforms by installing a committee to send abroad. From 1676 onwards, such discussions began to materialise but the directors remained inconclusive about finding the right person to be appointed as the commissioner-general. By August of the same year, concern grew that details about trading practices in India should be examined; in other parts of Asia too commerce had grown considerably and with it the need to find ways of improving profits.[14] It did not take long before the resolution of 24th September allowed for the appointment of a committee of three members comprising Nicolaas Verburg, Cornelis van der Lijn and Mattheus van der Broecke.[15] They were to produce a detailed report on the ways of cutting down costs and making the Company's trade more profitable in Mughal India. Accordingly in October, a set of regulations were passed against illegal trade by the 'ministers of the Company' and the punishments detailed that were to be meted out as per the *placcaten,* with instructions to the Company's men to control expenses overseas by living less extravagantly there.[16] These points were well developed by the next year when the directors met again and further decisions were

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genieten, soo sien wy echter, dat sy voor haer eygen, soo veel mede brengen, datse niet alleen wanneerse van andere plaetsen hier komen, groote Staet voeren, en prodigale consumptie doen, maer selfs in ons Vaderlandt … Stuyrman: Jae, jae maet, hebben is hebben, maer krijgen is konst, 't is een boer niet wijs te maecken, hoe een edelman aen gelt komt …Stuyrman: 't schijnt dat India van dievery en particulieren handel te plegen, geheel aen malkander hangt, sonder dat men by na yemandt mach uytsonderen, en waerom souden de aenkomelingen de stijl van haer meesters niet mogen onderhouden, ofte achter-volgen, want het gheloof is in India toch dat het selfs niet al te pluys onder de bewindhebberen toe-gaet, van onnakomelijcke wetten, so te plagen, dat de selve wel genoodsaeckt zijn, haer handen te moeten reppen, om weder nae't patria te keeren, en haer uyt de slaverny te ontslaen, te meer men hier hoort, dat die maer met 't meeste goedt t'huys komen, 't beste gesien zijn, jae noch wel bewindhebbers dochters ten huwelijk toe bedingen..'.

Anonymus, *Oost-Indisch-praetje*, A1r.-C4v.

[14] NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, Copy-*Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 27 August, 1676: folios not numbered.

[15] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 26 September, 1676: folios not numbered.

[16] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.

taken on checking the treasuries in all the factories in Asia.[17] The following year of 1678 produced the plan to send someone to inspect these factories again. Rijkloff van Goens Junior happened to be the *Heeren XVII's* choice.[18] But owing to his refusal, the post remained unfilled.[19] That the search of the *Heeren XVII* was still on was evident increasingly in the next two years as the *besoignes* came to be repeatedly entrusted with the duty of looking into the accounts, documents and records of every chamber.[20]

By June 1681, there were detailed discussions carried out about appointing a person of experience and knowledge who could occupy the position of the commissioner as was reflected from the resolutions of the *Heeren XVII*.[21] He was to undertake the task of inspecting the factories and finding solutions for doing away with the problems of the desertion of workers and fraud in the prices of commodities. The idea of 'redress' became one of the prominent ideals of the *Heeren XVII* in 1683, and a *besoigne* was formed to draw up ideas for economising with regard to salaries, the excess in the number of Company officials and fraud in the Company's inland trade.[22] As a follow-up ten days later, a list of points of redress was drawn up that would bring about the desired changes in the 'faults, abuses and disorders' of the VOC factories overseas.[23] On 19th October, 1684, the plan to dispatch a committee under one suitable official in order to investigate the factories in Bengal and Coromandel for 'fraud, misuse, tampering, [and] malpractices' was ultimately finalised. The initial idea was to invest this official with so much power and authority that he would be able to remove anyone found guilty or even suspected of it by communicating directly with the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic.[24] But in the final instructions,

[17] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 4, 8 and 17 September, 1677: folios not numbered.
[18] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 25 October, 1678: folios not numbered.
[19] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 126.
[20] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 22 November, 1679/ 17 June, 1680: folios not numbered.
[21] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 3 and 4 June, 1681: folios not numbered.
[22] NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, Minuut- and net-*resoluties* of the *ordinaris* and *extraordinaris* meetings of the chamber of Amsterdam, 5 April, 1683: folios not numbered.
[23] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, *Resoluties* of the chamber of Amsterdam, 15 April, 1683: folios not numbered.
[24] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 19 October, 1684: folios not numbered.

the *Hoge Regeering* was given the last say with the person accused having the chance to undergo a trial in the *Raad van Justitie*.

In the afternoon session of the next day the directors had already agreed on their choice of the official to be put in charge of this committee and it was none other than Hendrik Adriaan van Reede. He was to visit the Company's bases in Bengal, the Coromandel Coast, Malabar, Ceylon and other places as the *Heeren XVII* had instructed. The days after this in October and November were spent in drawing up the privileges that were to be given to him, the details of changes that needed to be addressed and included in the instructions that were to be handed down to him and in finding the second and third members of this committee who were supposed to assist him.[25] On 30th November, 1684, Van Reede took his last oath in the service of the Company.[26] He had to swear his allegiance to the 'States-General of the United Provinces and the sovereign authority of his Highness, Willem Hendrik (referring to the *stadhouder*, Willem III of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht), and by the grace of God the Prince of Orange and Nassau, as Governor Captain and Admiral-General', while fulfilling his duties as the 'commissioner-general in India on behalf of the *Heeren XVII*.'[27]

The fact that almost eight years in the Company's board meetings were spent in creating this committee and finding the right person as the commissioner makes it no ordinary initiative. The post of the commissioner-general that Van Reede occupied had been conceived long since the Company's initial years in 1626.[28] The idea was to have two persons appointed as commissioners by the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia with the approval of the *Heeren XVII* to investigate the factories in Asia. The commissioners were supposed to execute their duties according to the instructions of the *Hoge Regering* and the *Heeren XVII* and report

[25] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 20, 24, 25, 26 October, 1684 and 11, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30 November, 1684: folios not numbered.
[26] Van Reede died in 1691 on his way to Surat, without being able to complete his mission as a commissioner-general.
[27] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 30 November, 1684: folios not numbered.
[28] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:188.

back with their findings, recommendations and conclusions. Considering that the territorial possessions of the VOC in Asia were vast, it was suggested that the two commissioners should split their task between the eastern and the western quarters. Thus, while in the first year, one of the commissioners was to investigate the factories and the VOC officials working in Amboina, Banda, Moluccas, Taiwan, Japan, Siam, Patani and so on; the other went looking into the factories located on the coast of Coromandel, Surat, Malabar, Mocha, Persia and Sumatra. It was then decided that these commissioners would alternate with each other for the two quarters of the following year.

Since Bengal was not yet a part of the VOC bases in Asia, it was left unmentioned in the documents of 1626. Later in the century, however, it was added to the domain of the Western Quarters. These commissioners were endowed with the power to check almost all the rules that were drafted as contents of the statutes of Batavia. This covered the area of arms and ammunitions, the condition of the factories, forts and other relevant buildings, the bookkeeping accounts, the warehouses, the shipping logs, the orders issued by local directors or governors, and the networks of illegal private trade, if any, conducted by the Company officials. It was precisely these powers that Van Reede too had in 1684 as the commissioner-general of his committee. But instead of being appointed by the governor-general and *Raad van Indië* in Batavia as was the case with Nicolaas Bauckes, Willem Volger or Isaac Solomans who were sent to Bengal for inspection, Van Reede was directly installed by the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic. This definitely made this committee special and worth looking into.

Copies of the extracts from other relevant letters written by Company officials such as the memoirs sent by the governor-general and the members of the *Raad van Indië* to Commissioner Nicolaas Bauckes in 1681, the report of the *schipper* (captain) Willem Hagendooren and so on were attached to the instructions for Van Reede as the *Heeren XVII*

thought that their contents might be useful for his investigations.[29] The instructions also mentioned about the Company's experiences with Bauckes and Jacob Jorisz. Pits who had been sent earlier to inspect the factory offices in Bengal and along the coast of Coromandel in 1681 and 1682 respectively.[30] There were also the reports of Abraham Lense and Isaac Soolmans who too had written back to the VOC directors in 1683 protesting against the fraud and misdeeds of the local authorities in Bengal.[31] It was quite clear that the Company had not just passed on random instructions in haste but had lodged a well thought-out, long discussed and carefully put together plan that reflected their resolution of implementing reforms.

Apart from that, there was another interesting aspect that distinguished this committee from the rest. In the list of instructions that were sent to Van Reede enumerating his duties and responsibilities, he was asked to investigate the factories in all the places in the western quarter, but with special emphasis on Bengal in Mughal India. The *Heeren XVII* was clear about the fact that 'for several years it had been noticed and found that everywhere in the Indies' and 'especially in Bengal (with a bold underline in the sources), there were ample faults and misuses of different types that had crept into' the Company's offices 'from time to time'.[32] Therefore, while Van Reede was instructed to announce the purpose of his visit on his arrival at the different factories that he was to investigate, the *Heeren XVII* mentioned that it was necessary 'especially, in Bengal (where) after his arrival, he had to restore order through communications and the advice of the director and his council (also underlined in the sources for extra emphasis).'[33] Considering that this was a ripe time for Bengal's prominence in the European

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[29] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4rv.
[30] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4v.
[31] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4r.
[32] '*Alsoo wij van veele jaren aff hebben gesien en ondervonden, dat allomme in Indien en voornamentelijck oock in de gewesten in't hooft deser genomineert en wel bijsonderlijk in Bengale veel en verscheijde foute en mesuses van tijt tot tijt sijn ingekropen*…'
NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f.1v.
[33] '*Soo haeft syn Ed. op Ceylon en in Bengale, mitsgaders de vordere gewesten hier nae uijtgedruckt sal wesen g'arriveert sal sijn Ed sijn commissie den volcke en bedrevende aldaer doen voorlesen, ons te weten, hoedanigh en waervoor deselve syn Ed sullen hebben aen te sien, te erkennen, en te gehoorsaemen, mitsgaders voort daerop te treden tot het verrighten van't geene syn Ed by*

overseas network, and that a similar investigation committee led by Streynham Master had been sent by the EIC in Bengal around 1676, the Van Reede committee seems to have been all the more relevant.[34] Bengal had witnessed the arrival of such commissioners from the time of Joan Verpoorten in 1653 under the initiative of the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. In 1670, another commissioner called Willem Volger was sent to Bengal and to the other Indian factories for investigation.[35] This was followed by the despatch of Nicolaas Baukes in 1681 who was to act in the dual capacity of the commissioner and the director at the factory of Hooghly, under the instructions of the Company's government in Batavia.[36] In 1683, Abraham Lense was deputed on a fact-finding mission in Bengal where he drew up lengthy reports of his observations.[37] The *Heeren XVII* at this point again wrote to Batavia to appoint Isaac Soolmans as the special commissioner for Bengal, Surat and Persia and any other factory that required attention in the western quarters.[38] Soolmans ended up being included in the Van Reede committee as a second member and the information in his reports was used largely by Van Reede in writing his missives to the *Heeren XVII*. The extensive care taken in forming this committee and selecting a suitable person as the commissioner-general leads one to wonder why there was so much time and attention devoted to this endeavour. To answer this question, the motives in sending this committee need to be uncovered.

To start with the motives, the obvious question would be – 'Why was this committee formed in the first place?' And the most obvious answer would be – 'It was so because of the 1626 regulations that provided for the appointment of commissioners for checking into the VOC factories in Asia from time to time'. But new dimensions are added to the story when the

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desen wort aanbevolen, en voor al, in Bengale aengekomen synde, met communicatie en advijs van den directeur en den raedt ordre te stellen…'

NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f.1v.

[34] Fawcett, *The English Factories in India*, IV:188; 211–14.

[35] Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 83.

[36] Prakash, 86.

[37] Prakash, 87.

[38] Prakash, 87.

sense of urgency in creating it, the tremendous effort invested in finding the right person and the high expectations and propaganda of reform surrounding it are taken into consideration. There was definitely more than one obvious reason for this. As I would argue here, a combination of different factors that had already been present in the Republic for a long time, became functional in creating this committee. Although differing from each other, they were not independent of each other's effects. The call for frantic reforms had to do partly with the financial situation of the Company arising out of the political mess of the time. This was accelerated further by the factional politics of the people behind the committee and their ideological strife.

The Financial Angle

It is important to start with the financial crisis, which was the most widely used, explicit reason provided for the citizens of the Republic, about initiating reforms within the VOC administration. When the political disaster of 1672 hit the United Provinces, the economy was devastated to an extent that was considerably larger than conventional war-time damages. Even though the Company managed to bring in decent profits in these years from the cargo of its returning fleets, many debts were still waiting to be repaid. The debt trap which had already crippled the Republic earlier was intensified by the urgent need for cash, which led to increased amounts of forced loans.[39] Immediately after the political crisis of 1672 in the Republic, considerable panic among the VOC investors had led to a heightened demand for a quick return of their dividends. Failure to be able to do this would have had led to the Company's loss of face and trust in the Republic, as Gaastra argued, risking its dissolution.[40] The directors in the Company's administration (in the Republic) at that time were eager to regulate their own finances and see to it that the dividends of the shareholders were returned, since they were accountable to all the Company's investors. Consequently, all the attention came to be directed towards the overseas possessions which did have the ability to pump in extra resources for

[39] Gelderblom and Jonker, "Public Finance and Economic Growth."
[40] Gaastra, "Succesvol ondernemerschap, falend bestuur?," 59.

saving the situation in the Republic. To maximise profits from overseas trade therefore, the *Heeren XVII* regarded it as important to show that corruption was being curtailed there, and that the economy was not being deprived of its potential prosperity. The call for redress in reorganising the Company's administration in India and Ceylon thus was perfectly timed to blend in with these concerns.[41]

From 1676 onwards, the *Heeren XVII* had recovered partially and it was to make important decisions on the dividends. The chamber of Amsterdam wanted to hold on to the payment of dividends till 1678 until the pressure became higher, but this proposal was not supported by the other chambers of the Company. Factional rivalries and chamber politics led to a flood of allegations of fraud in the bookkeeping records of the chamber of Zeeland in the same year, which in turn highlighted the agenda of corruption and reforms.[42] The involvement of some officials from the Amsterdam chamber in this alleged fraud was also exposed. It led to a few older officials being removed from their positions within these chambers, while new men were appointed in their places. Eventually, in 1679, 1680, 1681 and 1682, dividend returns were made to the shareholders at a 3.5% reduction on the normal rates.[43] But even though the Company managed to pull itself out temporarily from the immediate damage, there was the need to save the VOC's image and credibility in order to prevent it from collapsing. The leading directors in the *Heeren XVII* like Johannes Hudde and Coenraad van Beuningen (both from the prominent chamber of Amsterdam) began, therefore, planning frantically in 1683 ways of embarking on projects of redress, especially at a time that Van Beuningen had made larger investments.

The plans for redress included consequently many economic measures for the Dutch East India Company. This was manifested in the instructions handed over by the *Heeren XVII* to Van Reede, which contained strong assertions of the Company's need for financial reforms. At

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[41] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 70.
[42] Gaastra, 65–66.
[43] Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 27.

the beginning of the instructions, the *Heeren XVII* stressed the fact that in all places in India where there were VOC factories, and especially in Bengal, several 'faults and abuses had crept in over the years, which had resulted in a lot of corruption, defrauding and other malpractices'.[44] The *Heeren XVII* lamented the fact that despite the best efforts of the Company up till then, illegal private trade and other unnecessary expenditure had made the economic losses deeper and the situation worse overall. The points of redress therefore were highly focused on bringing about financial changes, which conveyed the idea of the directors trying to build a stricter corporate image of the officials abroad. From 1676 onwards, the growing unpopularity of the policies of the Governor-General Van Goens owing to his expenditure and plans in Asia, put the directors in the Republic under pressure to produce a different approach.[45] From 1683, the redress committee led by Van Beuningen, Hudde and the others was focused on prioritising the Company's role in overseas trade as opposed to its military engagements, in order to boost the image of the Company servant as a merchant official.[46]

While the administrative functions of the VOC official had not changed in any way, the rhetoric that came to be crafted was that of a 'frugal' merchant, who sought to live within his means and obey the orders of his employers in the best interests of the 'fatherland'.[47] All the thirteen points laid out by the *Heeren XVII*, that were set as the goals for the Van Reede committee, were directed towards this mercantile image-building. Among other things, it included reforms through cutting down expenses by reducing the number of Company personnel, by avoiding unnecessary gift-giving and payments, by maintaining sober households suitable for the lifestyle of merchants and by keeping a check on the arms and ammunitions that were stocked in all of the Company warehouses in India.[48] Regulations on currency value, proper weighing and investigation of the cargo in the ships and such other measures were also part of

[44] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 1v.
[45] Vink, *Encounters*, 126.
[46] Knaap, "De 'Core Business' van de VOC," 15.
[47] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 5r.
[48] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4v-5v.

these reforms.[49] All of this makes it clear then that, among other factors, financial concerns were one of the incentives for creating a corporate outlook for the Company, which was the message that the committee sought to impress upon its overseas officials.

The Political Backdrop

However, although the economic reasons were serious enough to push the Company administrators to act, there were deeper political and factional reasons that stirred up the measures against corruption even further. By 1672, Willem III had gained the office of the *stadhouder* by garnering support from Valckenier and his faction in the States of Holland against the De Witt-ian regents. He seemed to have managed to convince the citizens of his capability and legitimacy as a descendant of the House of Orange. The virulent pamphlet fever that was stirred up in these years by the anti-Orangist and the pro-Orangist camps, showed the strength of the 'public' presence in the political forum.[50] The political murder of the De Witt brothers in 1672 made it even more visible and important than in previous years. It forced the leading figures in the Dutch administration, to try hard to stick together despite their differences, in order to preserve stability and unity in the seven provinces. Administrative corruption had loomed large on the agenda in the Republican campaign of the De Witt brothers, as referred to in Chapter 1. It was at this time that strict rules were made to install reforms against corrupt actions because of citizens who started identifying corruption as a major nuisance within the political administration.

Even after the fall of the Republicans and the De Witt faction, the basis for judging the administrators remained the same – that is the capability to govern in a fair way without indulging in bribery and corruption. As has been alleged in the earlier chapters, corruption among the officeholders was an important political agenda. Naturally the political power-holders after 1672 had to show the Dutch citizens that they were better administrators capable of

[49] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 5r-5v.
[50] Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists," 315–46; Bruijn, "Political Pamphleteering," 63–96.

steering the Republic and its populace in the right direction. The need to show a greater drive and urgency for correcting all faults and defects, was reflected in the Company's administration as well. *Burgemeesters* and other regents in Amsterdam (and other cities in Holland) who were also Company directors in the chamber of Amsterdam and sometimes part of the *Heeren XVII*, realised that the overseas administration of the VOC was as much their responsibility as the need to protect the image of the Company in the Republic. In the aftermath of the political scars inflicted by England and France on the Republic, the VOC had also to prove itself against the English and the French East India Companies.[51] The new administrators in the States of Holland and in the Amsterdam chamber of the Company, therefore, were eager to experiment and implement new measures in a spirit of reform. This zeal was manifested in the formation of a committee of redress in the VOC and the appointing of a suitable person in the position of the commissioner. A group of directors were allied and dedicated to this purpose of implementing changes, which they claimed could improve the Company's commercial performance. In 1676 and 77, this group consisted of men as Valckenier, Joan Munter, Nicolaas Rochusz. van Capelle, Bernard Hulft and so on in the Amsterdam chamber and partly in the *Heeren XVII*. But by 1680 and 1681, new members came in after the demise of Valckenier and his faction. They consisted of the likes of Salomon de Blocquerie, Gerrit Hooft, Hudde and Coenrad van Beuningen. They began revising the areas that needed reform and amending the codes in the Statutes of Batavia, for curbing corruption among its officials abroad. A committee of redress was especially drafted in 1683 for this purpose with men as Munter, Van Beuningen, Van Capelle, Hudde, Adriaan Temminck, De Blocquerie and others as Huydecoper, Pieter de Graef, Hendrick Becker, Jan de Vries and Hendrik Decker along with Pieter van Dam and Gerbrand Elias.[52] But these measures bring us to the crucial question of whether this zeal to implement reforms was more than just

[51] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 99.
[52] Gaastra, 148.

the need to conform to the factional politics of corruption allegations and the implementation of reforms.

Ideology or Political Factionalism?

The seventeenth century in the history of the Dutch Republic was known for its constant tension among the officeholders due to their political differences and factionalism.[53] All the administrative factions consequently shared not just material possessions and honour as their common bond of friendship, but they also harboured similar ideological beliefs. And these ideologies were often vocally expressed during discussions among groups of friends and families. With the advent of new philosophies at that time, it was the political families with university training who were exposed to these ideas.[54] It was they who were acquainted with these debates and their implications in politics and society. This was because most of the students who could afford university education in the seventeenth century hailed often from these political families, who had the necessary money and resources for giving their children such a training, essential in building an administrative career. It was quite logical therefore that they brought along with them these ideas into the political arena, as they filled the different administrative positions within the Company and the political institutions. Most of them did have various ideological stances and those who allied together in a faction were assumed to be more or less in a consensual state over these affairs. Factions in the seventeenth century, therefore, represented a conglomeration of somewhat similar political, economic and ideological affiliations.

It was in this atmosphere that the ideas of reforms and redress were put forward by the leading administrators in the Republic, who formed part of the *Heeren XVII*. They incorporated these ideas into the policy-making decisions of the Company. These men were tied together by a shared ideology, as can be discerned from a sentence extracted from the *apologia* of Nicolaas

[53] Judith Pollmann, "Met grootvaders bloed bezegeld: Over religie en herinneringscultuur in de zeventiende eeuwse Nederlanden," *De Zeventiende Eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief* 9, no. 2 (Dec. 2013): 154–75; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 748–66; Prak, "The Politics of Intolerance."
[54] For examples see, Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 37.

Schagen. Schagen was the former director of Bengal, who (along with his wife) was accused of illegal private trade by Van Reede. On the basis of the evidence produced, he had to undergo a trial in the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia. After Van Reede's death, Schagen produced his *apologia* in 1691 where he complained about the unsuitability of Van Reede as a commissioner-general. According to him, the Company's men who decided to bring trade and commerce under the forte of the 'Cartesian philosophy' (*Carthesiaansche Philosophie*) and whose principal was 'to doubt and question' everything chose Van Reede to examine the Company's acitvities in India.[55] But in Schagen's opinion, the *Heeren XVII* did not realise that Van Reede's measures destroyed the entire system as they were implemented without him understanding the way the Company operated in areas such as Bengal and Coromandel. These directors of the VOC were political allies of Van Reede, which Schagen pointed out as belonging to a certain ideological clique, and were responsible for appointing Van Reede to the position of the commissioner-general. An examination of the personal letters written and received by Huydecoper, one of the most prominent director-*burgemeesters* on the board of the *Heeren XVII*, revealed his cordial relationship with Van Reede and his support for him.[56] Huydecoper had no qualms about proclaiming the political favours he had granted to Van Reede, stating openly in a letter to Commander Simon van der Stel in October 1685, 'I had contributed a lot to the advancement of the lord of Mijdrecht.'[57] If Schagen was to be believed, Huydecoper was then one of those men supporting Van Reede who belonged to the group of Dutch administrators experimenting with new political theories in the VOC that was current at their time.

Interest in natural science, including human anatomy and medicine, that formed an essential part of the new political theories was appreciated and shared by these group of

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[55] NA, HR, inv. nr. 241A, Consideration of Nicolas Schagen on the instructions of Van Reede: folios not numbered.

[56] It is to be noted that Huydecoper studied in the University of Utrecht where Van Reede came from. Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 117.

[57] '*Dewyl ick veel heb gecontributeert tot het advancement van den heer van Mijdrecht*.'
UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to Van der Stel in the Cape by Huydecoper van Maarsseveen from Amsterdam, 7 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

administrators. It boosted the habit of collecting 'exotic' plant specimens and other naturalia by these men in the Republic.[58] In the numerous letters despatched by Huydecoper to his nephews, Joan Bax and Simon van der Stel (both of whom were stationed at the Cape in succession), there was repeated mention of exchanges of natural curiosities as gifts.[59] These included horns of rhinoceros, several seeds, bulbs, dried flowers and even water-colour illustrations of African plants sent by them to Huydecoper in the Republic.[60] Huydecoper explicitly provided his support for research on the flora and fauna of the Cape, thus demonstrating his interest in natural sciences. Whether such interest was connected to the idea of 'Cartesian philosophy' is, as mentioned earlier, a matter of inspection best left for further research in another project. What is nevertheless important to note here is that, Hudde had close contact with Descartes, and was allied with Huydecoper to form the dominant political faction in these years which indicated their common political and ideological connections.[61] Known for his concealed contacts and correspondences with the likes of Descartes, Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, Hudde managed to remain a stable link to the circle of new philosophers of his time.[62] He became immensely active in the VOC and in the political space of the Republic, in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Simultaneously, his reputation for his knowledge of medicine as well as for being an excellent mathematician also roused his interests in the Company's 'exotic' collections.[63] Van Beuningen was also one of those men who had appointed Van Reede along with Huydecoper and Hudde. He, too, was known for his lofty career on the political stage of the Republic, especially throughout the high years of the De Witt regime. He continued working in political positions even after 1672, before moving on to join the VOC administration. Born of parents

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[58] Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 304.
[59] Cook, 307.
[60] Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 71.
[61] P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1911), 1171.
[62] Kraan, "The Dutch East India Company, Christiaan Huygens and the Marine Clock, 1682-95," 281; Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 224, 1099, 1172–76, 1482.
[63] Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1171.

harbouring Remonstrant sympathies, Van Beuningen went on to study law and held numerous administrative positions at different points in time in the Republic (ranging from that of a *burgemeester*, to a foreign diplomat, to being the *pensionaris* of Amsterdam and eventually a VOC director).[64] It led him to invest heavily in the Company's overseas affairs (possibly in order to stimulate the study of Asian flora and fauna) until he lost a lot of money and ended up being under legal restraint in his last years for reasons of eccentricity.[65] The spirit of Van Beuningen was subsequently shared by his friends and family in his faction, who too were under the spell of his energy and ideas. The personal journal of Huydecoper gives ample information about the informal social gatherings of this group who met regularly at Huydecoper's residence. There were evening-drinks (*borrel)* where discussions about new philosophies and natural science were conducted with full vigour.[66] Jan Commelin, one of the cousins of Huydecoper and a *burgemeester* of Amsterdam was known for his passion for having private collections of different botanical specimens for the purpose of study.[67] His presence in these discussions at Huydecoper's residence brought him into contact with Van Reede who had also been a regular visitor to these gatherings, before commencing his second term as the commissioner-general in Mughal India.

Van Reede himself was born in a noble family in Utrecht. His father, brother and uncle were all known for holding important military and political positions, and Van Reede's father even occupied a position on the board of directors of the chartered Companies, though this was the West India Company (WIC) and not the VOC.[68] However, as Van Reede himself claimed in his botanical work *Hortus Malabaricus*, he ran away from his home to join the Company as a

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[64] Molhuysen and Blok, 118. For a biography on Van Beuningen's life see, M.A.M. Franken, *Coenraad van Beuningen's politieke en diplomatieke aktiviteiten in de jaren 1667-1684* (Groningen: Wolters, 1966); Cornelia W. Roldanus, *Coenraad van Beuningen: staatsman en libertijn* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931).

[65] Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 119–20.

[66] See the entries at the end of Huydecoper's journal for the years 1683-85. UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, 1684 and 1685: folios not numbered.

[67] Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 320.

[68] Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 4–5.

Fig 14: Portrait of Coenraad van Beuningen, Jacob Houbraken, attributed to Jacob van Loo and Hendrik Pothoven, 1749-59. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-48.829.

Fig 15: Portrait of Johannes Hudde, 1749-80, attributed to Jacob Houbraken, Hendrik Pothoven, 1796. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-48.654.

Fig 16: Portrait of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein by Pieter van Gunst, 1659-1731. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-1895-A-18865.

Fig 17: Portrait of Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen, Pieter Holsteyn, 1651. Courtesy, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-55.274.

fourteen-year-old boy. This claim of his, as Heniger pointed out, could not be verified from the Company's records and it was not until 1656, that his name appeared in the VOC records as a *cadet* (an official in probation) recruited by the Company.[69] Gradually, through patronage from higher officials (with mainly Van Geons as his patron), he managed to climb up the bureaucratic ladder and made his mark in the Company's overseas administration. It was during his tenure as the commander of Malabar in India between 1670 and 1677 that he produced his famous volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*.[70] These volumes, elaborating on the multiple specimens of Indian herbs and plants and their medicinal benefit, exposed his passion for the study of nature and brought him closer to the men in Huydecoper's and Van Beuningen's circle. Moreover, Van Reede had started his career by sailing on the same ship to the Cape as two important men – Joan Bax van Herentals and Isaac de l'Ostal de Saint Martin, both of whom remained part of his circle of close friends through his lifetime. They were important because Bax was one of Huydecoper's nephews and therefore a vital link between Van Reede and Huydecoper. In this connection, Saint Martin also formed part of this group and remained in Huydecoper's and the *Heeren XVII's* proximity after his return to the Republic in 1683.

All these men who had undergone administrative training and shared common interests, naturally tended to form a tight faction in the Company and the Republic around the 1680s. It could be true that their new-found philosophy imbued them with an unmatched vigour, that genuinely moved them to bring about reforms and changes. But it can also be contended that their ideological drive compelled these men to try to secure dominant positions within the VOC administration in order to be able to exercise their ideas. They were, as such, not free from the ongoing power struggles but their ideological motivations were connected to some extent to their factional politics which formed the very core of the Company's administrative structure. In

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[69] Heniger, 7.

[70] See for an English version, K.S. Manilal, *Van Rheede's Hortus Malabaricus (Malabar Garden): With Annotations and Modern Botanical Nomenclature* (Kerela: University of Kerela, 2003). For a general introduction see, Marian Fournier, "*Hortus Malabaricus* of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein," in *Botany and History of Hortus Malabaricus*, ed. K.S. Manilal (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1980), 6–23.

the second half of the seventeenth century, much of the intellectual domain had more or less passed under the influence of 'Cartesian philosophy' in the Republic, irrespective of all factional rivalries.[71] For no matter how fiery Huydecoper had been with his new world views, he would not let his curious son join the VOC and sail to India. In fact, he expressed his outright anger when he heard of his son's desires to join Van Reede by saying how he had spent much money on his son's education, and his son, was now willing to give up his promising career in the Republic for the sake of travelling to India.[72] Hudde extended his support to the pro-*stadhouder* faction in the States of Holland against the De Witt governments' Republican ideals, despite being a friend of Descartes' and sharing the common sentiment of his friendly faction of regent-administrators (to whom De Witt and the other Republicans also belonged). This case of Hudde showed how political theories and ideologies were not unanimous with or restricted to any specific faction. The case of Valckenier was similar; he started out in the States of Holland under the De Witt regime, but changed over to provide support to the *stadhouder* challenging the Republican ideology of the De Witt brothers. Ideological motivations, thus, did not always override political factionalism. Factional allegiances were supple and fluid, and it was not uncommon for family members or friends to change their political affiliations, if circumstances necessitated it.

Despite the fact that members were in the same political faction, personal differences of opinion could snap ties of common ideology and factional alliance. Van Beuningen, for example, continued to work in Amsterdam for some time after 1672, though relations between him and the *stadhouder*, Willem III soon soured over political differences.[73] On the other hand, despite differences in ideology, it was possible for all administrators to work together. Van Beuningen was known for his differences with Johan de Witt on the Republic's manoeuvres against France,

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[71] Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 82–83.

[72] UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen in Amsterdam to his son, Jan Elias on 6 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

[73] Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 119–20.

but the two continued to be on cordial terms.[74] Similar ideological beliefs did not always mean open endorsement of friendships and factions. Johan de Witt, despite having allegedly amicable relations with Spinoza, did not dare entertain his ideas publicly in the political space.[75] He also withdrew his support for Pieter de la Court when De la Court's ideas sparked controversy and came to be censored in the Republic. Ideological motivations were sometimes suppressed by the force of political factionalism to form a stable entity in the public political space. In this regard, it is essential to look into the factional interplay behind the formation of the committee to see how ideologies and reforms blended in with the political power struggles.

Factionalism in the Making of the Committee

Around 1676, Gillis Valckenier (1623-80) and his allies comprising Johannes Hudde, Joan Munter, Nicolas Pancras, Cornelis Backer, Pieter van Loon and others happened to be the strongest factional front controlling both the States of Holland and the Company (from the Amsterdam chamber) in the Republic. They also comprised a significant part of the *Heeren XVII* and attempted to align their factions with the composition of the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. Since this was the time that the plans for the redress committee was being brought up, it is crucial to explore the factional links between Batavia and the Republic. The new governor-general of the VOC in Batavia at this time, was Rijkloff van Goens, who came to be appointed after the previous Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker was called back to the Republic.[76] Van Goens tried to take control of the Company's administration overseas, in alliance with Valckenier in the Republic, until they met with resistance from some of the Company personnel (as explained later Van Reede and Ranst were some of them). In 1680 however, Valckenier died and with his demise, Van Goens' power too began declining. His tenure as the governor-general ended in 1681 when he came back to the Republic and lived there until his death in 1682. The factional

[74] Mirte Postma, *Johan de Witt en Coenraad van Beuningen: Correspondentie tijdens de Noordse Oorlog (1655-1660)* (Deventer: Scriptio, 2007).
[75] Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1482–83.
[76] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.

link between Van Goens and Valckenier was not explicitly mentioned anywhere, but their family relations and the secret letters dispatched betrayed their alliance.

One of Van Goens' letters despatched to the *Heeren XVII* contained details of the names of certain Company servants that he suspected of corruption. It was however addressed to an anonymous person mentioned as 'my lord' who Van Goens later again described as 'my patron'.[77] Further, it was accompanied with the request at the end of the letter to keep the information revealed in it secret, stating that – 'My duty and love for serving the Company, and my conscience for its welfare… has compelled me to send this (letter) to you secretly…I would not dare disclose this information to anyone else, therefore my request is to ensure that this letter gets burnt'.[78] According to Gaastra, this highly regarded person of Van Goens, who was entitled to receive such high-level confidential information about the Company's activities in Asia could not possibly have been anyone else other than Valckenier at that time.[79] Consequently, Valckenier who was close to Hudde passed it on to him and with or without the knowledge of Van Goens the copy of his letter written to his patron survived through Hudde's collection. This letter with names of certain Company officials shows that there were attempts of factional coordination between Van Goens as the governor-general and Valckenier as one of the leading men in the VOC and the political space of the Republic. It also showed that Van Goens had the power to try to remove men who were his opponents by bringing them to the notice of the *Heeren XVII* through corruption accusations. The anonymity showed how this was craftily done under the formal façade of the Company.

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[77] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens to an anonymous patron, 8 February, 1676: folios not numbered.

[78] '*Mijn pligt en liefde tot 's Comps dienst, ende mijn conscientie tot betragtingh van hare welvaren, …hebben mij gedwongen desen secretelijck U ed toe te senden, …ende buijten wien ick niemand anders soo open kennisse soude durven doen, versoeckende deselve…magh verbrant werden…*'.
NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens to an anonymous patron, 8 February, 1676: folios not numbered.

[79] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 12.

It was also Van Goens who happened to be the patron of a young Van Reede when the latter had set sail from the waters of Texel in 1657 to reach the Cape and sail further into the Indian Ocean. In 1662, when Van Goens had launched his conquests over the spice-producing areas of Cochin in order to establish the Company's monopoly there, Van Reede accompanied his patron in the military feats. Van Reede's timely intervention with the local king saved the situation which impressed Van Goens very much. He wrote to the *Heeren XVII* reporting that, 'he (Van Reede) is a constantly sober and seasoned soldier, and what he may still lack in style of trading, will no doubt be made good within a short time by his ability.'[80] However, this amicability snapped when the two argued over their differences on Ceylon, which was a possible choice for the establishment of a VOC base with colonial plantations, as suggested by Van Goens.[81] This rivalry made such a deep chasm in the relationship between these two men, that it became one of the most bitter examples of factional strife in the history of the Company. An agitated Van Goens wrote to the *Hoge Regering* complaining openly about the personal character of Van Reede, breaking many of the rules of the policy of neutrality for colleagues in the official reports of the Company.[82]

In 1676, Van Goens managed to remove Van Reede from his post of commander of Malabar through the influence of his power and position in the Company. In October of the

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[80] Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 22.

[81] Van Reede wrote a report on the prospects of the Company in Ceylon at the request of the *Raad van Indië* in 1677. This was at a time, Van Goens was already chosen as the next governor-general (1678-1681) in Batavia, though Joan Maetsuyker was still officially carrying out his duties in this position. In his report, Van Reede opposed Van Goens' idea of establishing a colony in Ceylon and this was forwarded to the *Heeren XVII*. This infuriated Van Goens, as he later came to know of it, and wrote back an angry letter to the *Heeren XVII* condemning Van Reede's actions as 'hypocrisy'. For the letter of Van Reede see, NL-HaNA, Aanwinsten 1e afdeling, inv. nr. 1001, Aanmerking en verklaring over verscheyde zaken, betreffende der staet en ommeslag van de I'Comp op het eijland Ceijlon, en het gene daer aen hoort te samen gestelt uijt last en bevel van den Ed heer gouverneur-generael, en d' Ed heeren raden van India, door Hendrick Adriaan van Rheede, voor zijn advijs, in d'vergadering der Hoge Regeringe van India gedaen [Observations and declarations concerning different affairs, regarding the state and consequences of the Company in Ceylon, and those who belong there put together by Hendrick Adriaan van Reede, under the order of the governor-general and the Council of the Indies in Batavia, as his advice for the High Government], dated 23 November, 1677: f. 1-98. For the letter of Van Goens sent to the *Heeren XVII* see, Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 52.

[82] NL-HaNA, Familie Van Goens, inv. nr. 18, Letter from Rijkloff van Goens to the *Raad van Indië* about Ceylon*,* 1675: folios not numbered.

same year, Van Reede came to be appointed as an *extraordinaire Raad van Indië* (extraordinary councillor of the Indies) in Batavia where his colleagues were among others, Cornelis Speelman and Willem Volger.[83] But relations between him and Van Goens had already reached an impasse and his open letter to the *Heeren XVII* questioning the ideas of Van Goens brought matters to a deadlock.[84] Thereafter, a resignation was filed in his name and Van Reede went back to the Republic. On board with him, was also Constantijn Ranst who too had resigned from his position in the *Raad van Indië*.[85] Ranst was a brother-in-law of Valckenier (as the latter was married to Jacoba Ranst, the sister of Constantijn) and therefore both Ranst and Van Goens should have had been on good terms with each other.[86] But the two clashed with each other as a result of their differences in opinion and soon Ranst too resigned and accompanied Van Reede to the Republic.[87]

In the meantime, ideas for 'redress' of the VOC regulations were being drawn up in the directorial board of the Company and Nicolaas Verburg was invited to be one of the committee members in 1676.[88] Verburg's active involvement with the Company's affairs was understandable on the grounds of his belonging to the faction of Hooft (another faction besides Valckenier's in the States and the VOC at that time), who was connected to Verburg by family relations.[89] At the same time, Van Goens' writing highly of Nicolaas Verburg can be understood with reference to the past incidents, involving Ranst and Verburg. The two had a disagreement over Nicolaas Verburg's brother, Jacob Verburg who was charged with corruption by Volger during the

[83] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.
[84] Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 54.
[85] Heniger, 55.
[86] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 542–43, 479.
[87] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 124; Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 55; Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1677*, 395, 399.
[88] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 26 September, 1676: folios not numbered.
[89] The Hoofts were related to the Verburgs in two ways – first through Anna van Hoorn who had previously been married to Cornelis van Vlooswijck before being married to Arnhout Hellemans Hooft and the Van Vlooswijck family was related to the Verburgs through Neeltgen Jansdr. Verburg. And secondly, Willem Hooft married as his second wife, Adriana Verburg. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 142, 483; W. Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De gezaghebbers der Oost-Indische Compagnie: Op hare buiten-comptoiren in Azië* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Liebaert, 1944), 130.

directorship of Ranst in Bengal.[90] Van Goens' conflict with Ranst might have then incited him to show his approval for Nicolaas Verburg (who was the opponent of Ranst). Moreover, Nicolaas Verburgh also showed his disapproval against Maetsuyker's wife and brother-in-law, Andries Bogaart during the revelation of their illegal trade in Surat.[91] Nicolaas Verburg was thus not opposed to Van Goens and his faction, both in the *Hoge Regering* and in the Republic. On the basis of this committee's reports, and the letter received from Van Goens himself, further *besoignes* were formed in the Amsterdam chamber. In 1677, a committee of redress was constituted in Amsterdam led by Valckenier that was also copied at the level of the *Heeren XVII*. By 1678, Van Goens used his influence and the attention of the directors came to be focussed on none other than Van Goens' son, Rijkloff van Goens Jr. in considering him for the commissioner's position. But Van Goens Jr. then refused and the fall of Van Goens himself begun soon after, as his decisions and actions came to be increasingly questioned by the *Heeren XVII*. In 1680, he was instructed to repatriate back to the Republic and his power base immediately collapsed. Following both Hooft's and Valckenier's deaths, the political grip on the States of Holland and the Company was transferred to the new leaders such as Huydecoper van Maarsseveen and other allies from Hudde's faction.

Huydecoper had always expressed his dislike for Van Goens in his letters.[92] Naturally, Van Reede in the Republic, sought his alliance in Huydecoper and found patronage under him and his faction. Van Reede consequently stepped back into active politics of the VOC again and came to be involved in the plans for the 'redress committee'. In 1683, when the idea of checking for corruption and implementing reforms had begun slowly materialising, Huydecoper and Hudde turned out to be the most prominent director-politicians within the VOC administration. They were also related through family with the other directors and the members of the *besoignes*

[90] Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 126–36; Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 119, 124.
[91] Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 120.
[92] UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 58, Letter written by Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen to Joan Bax, 19 November, 1678: folios not numbered. Also see, Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 125.

who supported the plan of redress consisting of Munter, Van Beuningen, Van Capelle, De Blocquerij, Temminck and others.[93] While Munter was related to the Valckeniers and the Trips, and was thereby related to Hudde as well, the others like Temminck and Van Beuningen were related to the Huydecoper-Coymans and the Tulp families.[94] Van Capelle had been related through the Hochepieds to Valckenier.[95] The De Blocquerij family was connected to the family De Haze through marital alliances who were in turn connected to the families of Hudde and the Coymans.[96]

The *Heeren XVII's* sessions in October 1684 which decided on the final instructions and oath for Van Reede was also presided over more or less by these same men – De Blocquerij, Cornelis van Vlooswijck, Munter, Huydecoper, Van Beuningen, Decker, Temminck and others belonging to an allied group.[97] In the years before he left for India, Van Reede's frequent visits to the Huydecoper residence along with his friend Saint Martin were known from Huydecoper's *journaal*.[98] They often had long conversations and drinks with Commelin, Gerard Bors van Waveren, De Blocquerie, Munter, Hudde and Huydecoper, with the wife of Huydecoper, Constantia sometimes joining in.[99] It seemed quite clear then that this was a dominant factional group in the Republic at that time to which Van Reede was attached. His appointment as the commissioner was therefore a consequence of his direct links to this faction that controlled the administration of the VOC. On the other hand, the old friends and sympathisers of Van Goens

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[93] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, *Resoluties,* 5 April, 1683: folios not numbered.

[94] Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 626. A relation of Valckenier was married to one of the daughters of Joan Munter, Agatha Munter. One of the sons of Huydecoper van Maarsseveen was married to Maria Temminck from the Temminck. In the Huydecoper-Coymans family, there were marriages with the Bartolotti family which was in turn connected to the Van Beuningen family. Jacoba Victoria Bartolotti van den Heuvel was married to Coenraad van Beuningen who was the daughter of Guiliellmo Bartolotti who married Jacoba Sophia Huydecoper from the Huydecoper-Coymans family.

[95] Elias, 620.

[96] Elias, 721.

[97] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 31 October, 1684: folios not numbered.

[98] UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, entry of 21 May, 26 June, 7 and 8 July, 9 and 30 August, 21 and 25 October, 13 and 14 November, 11 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

[99] UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, entries made on 27 January, 19 February, 10 April, 25 October, 12 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

remained Van Reede's political opponents and this could be clearly discerned from their bitterness towards him in their writings. While Van Dam who was in the pro-Van Reede faction praised him for his fervour in rooting out corruption from the Company, Nicolaus de Graaff who had been close to Van Goens regretted Van Goens' death and questioned Van Reede's intentions as a commissioner-general in charge of the committee.[100]

On the other side, the political atmosphere in the Republic had to correspond with the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia, in terms of aligning factional networks. After Van Goens' death, Cornelis Speelman took over the office of the governor-general of the *Hoge Regering*. The fact that the alignment of the factions was gradually taking place in Batavia in accordance with the shuffling of power positions in the *Heeren XVII* was evident from the appointment of Speelman who was on good terms with Huydecoper. In one of his letters to his nephew, Joan Bax, written in 1683, Huydecoper mentioned that he was obliged to Speelman for the favour done to his cousin Van Heusen and Joan Bax's brother Jacobus.[101] In 1684 when Speelman died in Batavia, Johannes Camphuys was chosen as his successor.[102] Huydecoper described him as 'one of the most capable officials of the esteemed Company' which left little doubt about Camphuys being in favour of Huydecoper's faction in the Republic.[103]

Finally, when Van Reede was on board the ship *Bantam*, Huydecoper wrote to his cousin, Bax who as mentioned before was also close to Van Reede, wishing that 'God may give his (Van Reede's) committee the desired success'.[104] His letters show that he was in constant touch with

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[100] Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, 100–101. The fact that Pieter van Dam was in the pro-Van Reede faction can be asserted from Van Reede's dedication to Van Dam, along with others in his faction, in one of the volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. See Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 101.

[101] NA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Joan Huydecoper to Joan Bax from Amsterdam, 29 November, 1683: folios not numbered.

[102] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 1 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

[103] UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to Bax by Huydecoper van Maarsseveen from Amsterdam, 10 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

[104] UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to cousin Joan Bax, 5 April, 1685: folios not numbered. The fact that Van Reede and Bax were good friends can be deduced from the fact that they sailed together when they started off for the first time to the Cape and Van Reede spoke dearly of him. Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 9.

Van Reede himself, and knew exactly when Van Reede had reached the Cape on 1st May, 1685. Thereafter he recommended his cousin Hinlopen and some other of his acquaintances in Asia, to Van Reede.[105] From his letters, it is also evident that Huydecoper had an alliance with Bacherus (the second member of the committee), whom he had recommended to his cousin Faucommer.[106] Factionalism thus seemed to have been in full force in the making of this committee and the choosing of its commissioner throughout these years. The factional link between the political institutions in the Republic – the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic – and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia became thereby evident from the way corruption allegations and the promise of reforms were used by their officials.

The *Heeren XVII* eventually took the recommendations of Van Reede and his committee seriously and implemented most of them as administrative reforms in the Company.[107] But what was further unfortunate, was the abrupt culmination of this committee's investigations when Van Reede succumbed to sudden illness and died, during the course of his journey from Malabar to Surat. Even though there are sources that refer to his illness plaguing him for months already, certain conspiracy theories alleging his being poisoned by his political opponents also could not be ignored.[108] It makes one curious about the manoeuvrings of the committee since the time of its landing in Bengal in 1685. It also compels the researcher to look beyond the official reports in order to uncover Van Reede's personal intentions in his pursuit against corruption. It

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[105] UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to the Lord of Zuilen, 8 August, 1685: folios not numbered; UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter to Jacobus Hinlopen, 11 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

[106] UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter to cousin Faucommer, 10 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

[107] The office of an independent fiscaal, for instance, was created to specially regulate the illegal trading practices on the basis of the Van Reede Committee's reports. See, Gaastra, "The Independent Fiscaals."

[108] Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1012. It is important in this connection to note that the factional politics in the Company were quite serious and could at times have had serious consequences for the VOC officials. There were also often rumours about the bookkeeper, Paulus de Roo being poisoned while on duty, that were known to have been circulated within the Company's administrative circle. References for Roo in the editor's note by Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschrywinge*, Book II, Part II, 386. Also see, R.J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (M.E. Sharp Inc., 2002), 409; Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 117.

simultaneously opens up a glaring lack of control on the part of the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic, to comprehend the dynamics of the Company's Asiatic world. The next chapter deals with the Committee in Bengal and tries to explore all these perspectives, in light of Bengal's notoriety for corruption.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it is shown why the committee under Hendrik Adriaan van Reede as its commissioner was different from its predecessors. The time, attention and long deliberations invested in its formation, was the outcome of the ongoing developments in the Republic in the seventeenth century. There was already a focus on corruption and its reforms as a political agenda in seventeenth-century Dutch society. The years after 1672 saw a more pressing need to use corruption allegations and reforms in politics, following the instability of the times. Reforms and changes to combat corruption became the necessary political tools for the new administrators (both in the political space and in the Company) to establish their credibility for the Dutch citizens and the VOC investors. Financial tensions regarding timely return of dividends also made the situation more serious. At this time, the dominant faction representing Amsterdam in the Company belonged to a group of men who were known for their specific world views and new ideas. As botanists, anatomists, mathematician and scientists, men like Hudde, Huydecoper and Van Beuningen provided an intellectual stimulus to the Company's activities abroad. This was represented by the choice of Van Reede as the commissioner who was also known for his interest in botany that led to the compilation of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. But to be able to implement policies along the lines of these new ideas, there was a need to establish their administrative stronghold within the VOC, both in the Republic and in the overseas posts. Factional politics appeared to be the way this could be done, and as has been shown in this chapter, it was in substantial use. The instructions for Van Reede from the *Heeren XVII* also left open the chance to remove men that Van Reede deemed guilty of corruption by

sending them for trial to Batavia. This possibly opened up chances of realigning factions between the Company in the Republic and the Company in Asia and the Cape. Lastly, the committee's focus on Bengal as a problem region also marked the growing importance of the region for the VOC in the final decades of the seventeenth century. The following chapter will emphasise this aspect further, along with the factional interplay, in order to shed light on Mughal Bengal through the lived encounter on the one hand and the discourse of the committee on the other.

Chapter 6

The Find: Politics of Corruption and the Committee in Action in Mughal Bengal

> Therefore, it is to be understood that all the information and evidence should be provided in such a manner that they can help the judge in making a judgment, by basing his decree or sentence on these available information (as evidence). But if the aforementioned information comprises only of the evidence given by the moors and the heathens, along with extracts from their account books, without these being corroborated by the sworn testimonies of trustworthy Christians or others who suffice (this criterion), and the charges would be proven by law, our intention is to allow the accused to make a reconvention against his charges and he would then be only discharged from his office and (deprived of) entitlement to his salary.[1]

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[1] '*…verstaende bij aldien de informatie en bescheyden soodanigh syn dat nae syn Ed oordeel by den righter daerop sentientie gewesen en strafe gedecrereert sal kunnen worden, maer wanneer de voorsz. informatien alleen soude bestaen ingetuijgenissen van mooren en heijdenen, mitsgaders extracten uijt derselver boecken, sonder dat die souden mogen syn gecorrobeert door beedigde verclaringen van geloofwaerdige Christenen off andere suffisante, en in regten aennemelijk bewijsen soude onse intentie daer heen gaen, dat de sulcke met soodanige bescheijden als 't haeren lasten sullen wesen gereconvereert alleen herwaerts sullen werden opgesonden buijten qualiteijt en gagie.*'
NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38. Instructions from the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, heer van Mijdrecht, appointed as the commissioner of Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon and other areas in the western quarters, Amsterdam, December, 1684: f. 3r.
On the point of the phrase - 'those who suffice this criterion', it is unclear to me what was exactly meant. One can only think of the possibility of mixed European Christian groups that were present in Bengal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The following comment by Robert Chambers, the President of the *Raad van Justitie* in Chinsurah in 1781 can shed some light - 'All children with European fathers and conceived from native women, were to belong to the group of Europeans. The illicit children conceived from such alliances belonged to the group of black Portuguese or native Christians. These black Christians were to be tried only in the *Raad van Justitie* for their crimes that were physically punishable, because the governor-general and the Council of the Indies in Batavia, owing to the religious beliefs of these persons, would not allow the magistrates in Chinsurah to have them deliver their testimonies as witnesses to the Muhammedan administration, even if they happened to be accused by the *jamadar*. Therefore, criminals of that race are treated as if they are Europeans. But in civil cases, these criminals might be tried before the director as the chief *jamadar*, or before the assistant of the *fiscaal*, just as it is done with the rest of the natives. Also, they must be brought before the director, in case of transgressions, that were meant for punishment there in Chinsurah. If needed to be flogged, they should recieve it from the hands of Christian soldiers and not Muhammedan servants, because they are themselves Christians and the punishment should be less strictly executed, than it is done for the natives. They should also not be tied to a pole, as was the case in such instances, during the execution of the punishment.' [*De wettige kinderen van Europeesche vaders, al waren het kinderen bij inlandsche vrouwen verwerkt, werden gerekend tot de Europeanen. De onwettige kinderen van dergelijke ouders, behoorden tot de klasse van de zwaarte Portuguezen of inlandsche Christenen. Deze zwaarte Christenen werden wegens misdrijven, welke aan den lijve strafbaar waren, alleen vervolgd voor den Raad van Justitie, aangezien de Gouverneur-Generaal en de Raad te Batavia, wegens de*

The instructions handed down by the *Heeren XVII* to Van Reede and his committee in 1684, contained the above condition, which required the collection of sufficient evidence with Dutch (or European, Christian) testimonies for convicting an accused Company official. Accordingly, Van Reede reached the factory at Hooghly in February 1686, and began his investigations among the VOC personnel there. However, despite the *Heeren XVII*'s instructions which demanded Christian testimonies at court, Van Reede inevitably had to seek the help of local brokers. While carrying out his interrogations for forming his legal cases, he therefore used the testimonies of such 'heathen' and 'Moors' from Bengal whom he was not to trust. These testimonies in combination with those of other VOC officials were used by the committee to bring charges of illegal trade against the very director of the Company in Bengal, Nicolaas Schagen. But Schagen was not the only one who displeased Van Reede and his committee. Before starting with his investigation in Bengal, Van Reede had stopped over at the Cape in 1685 where Rijkloff van Goens Junior, the son of the late Rijkloff van Goens (the former governor-general of the Company and Van Reede's ex-patron) was the VOC commissioner.[2] Van Reede clashed with him there and reported the matter in detail by writing back to the *Heeren XVII*.[3] Their friction ensued as a result of Van Reede's attempt to protect Simon van der Stel, the Company's Governor at the Cape, from Van Goens Jrs.'s intervention as the commissioner. Van der Stel was a friend of Van Reede as Van der Stel happened to be one of the nephews of Huydecoper van Maarsseveen and thereby, the relative of another of Huydecoper's nephews, Joan Bax. Bax

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goddienstige belijdenis dezer lieden, den magistraten te Chinsura niet wilde veroorloven hen ter vonnissing over te leveren aan het Mohamedaansche Bestuur, gelijk had moeten geschieden, indien zij aangeklaagd waren door den Jammatdar. Misdadigers van genoemd ras werden daarom behandeld alsof zij Europeanen waren. Maar in burgerlijke zaken mogten deze lieden gedagvaard worden voor den Directuer als Hoofd Jammatdar, of voor diens assistant den Fiscaal, evenals zulks met de inboorlingen het geval was. Ook moesten zij voor den Directeur gebragt worden, wegens die overtredingen, welke te Chinsura gestraft warden. Tot geesseling veroordeld ontvingen zij, omdat zij Christenen waren, deze straf uit de handen van een Christen soldaat, en niet uit die van een Mohamedaansch voetknecht en werd de straf met minder gestrengheid voltrokken, dan waarmede die aan inboorlingen werd ten uitvoer gelegd. Ook werden lieden van bovengenaamd ras bij zulk eene strafuitoefening niet aan de paal gebonden.] See, Reus, "De vermeestering van Chinsura," 55–56.

[2] NL-HaNA, Familie Van Goens, inv. nr. 27, Act on the appointment of Rijkloff van Goens Jr. as the commissioner-investigator of the Cape of Good Hope, 22 November, 1680: folios not numbered.

[3] A. Hulshof, ed., "H.A. van Reede tot Drakenstein, journaal van zijn verblijf aan de Kaap," *Bijdragen en medeedelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 62, (1941): 5.

was a close friend of Van Reede while Huydecoper became Van Reede's strong ally after the latter's return to the Republic in 1678. Through both these connections, Van der Stel, too, thus belonged to the factional group of Van Reede.[4]

By the time Van Reede had left the Cape to sail further east, he had ensured that Van Goens Jr. was removed from his position and sent to Batavia. Appointed as an *extraordinaris* member of the *Raad van Indië* there, the idea was to keep him under the watchful eye of the Governor-General Johannes Camphuys, a political ally of the Huydecoper – Van Reede faction.[5] Not unexpectedly, this situation did not have a harmonious end and open conflict broke out between the members of the *Raad,* led by Van Goens Jr. and the other members allied with Camphuys.[6] The matter became so serious that it had to be presented to the *Raad van Justitie* to be resolved*,* shortly after which Van Goens Jr. returned back to the Republic in 1685. Meanwhile, Van Reede arrived at Ceylon in 1685 and brought charges against certain officials there as well.[7] He then proceeded to Bengal in 1686 and continued with his investigations there till the next year. In 1687, he left for Coromandel and on arriving there, worked together with Bacherus. While Bacherus investigated the factories in the interior of the Coast, Van Reede himself resided at Nagapattinam. Here, too, some high officials of the Company were accused and sent to trial at Batavia by Van Reede and Bacherus.[8] Although the headquarters of the VOC for the Coromandel Coast was Pulicat, it was moved to Nagapattinam in 1689 after Van Reede's departure. With an interlude of two years from 1689-91 in Jaffnapatnam and Tuticorin, Van Reede sailed further upwards to Malabar. It was an eventful year as Van Reede had to deal with

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[4] For the relation between Simon van der Stel and Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen see, UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Huydecoper to Van der Stel, 7 October, 1685: folios not numbered.
[5] Huydecoper clearly extended his support for Camphuys by calling him 'one of the most capable ministers of the honourable Company'. See, UA, Huydecoper family archives, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to cousin Joan Bax from Amsterdam, 10 October, 1685: folios not numbered.
[6] A.M. Lubberhuizen van Gelder, "Rijkloff van Goens, de Jonge, en zijn bezittingen," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 101, no. 2/3 (1942): 301.
[7] For both Van Reede's first visit to Ceylon and second visit to Jaffnapatnam see Jos Gommans, "Malo Mori Quam Foedari: Een onderzoek naar het ontstaan van de commissie Van Reede tot Drakestein en haar verrichtingen op het eiland Ceylon (1684-1691)" (bachelor's thesis, Nijmegen University, 1984), 35–51.
[8] Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 41–43.

the political unrest in Malabar at a time when his health was deteriorating. He suddenly left Malabar in 1691, as the commander of Surat, Van Dielen later reported and sailed for Surat. On his way to Surat, Van Reede died on board his ship on 15th December in 1691.

Throughout his journey, he drew up fortification plans and concentrated his energy to produce his later volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. But at the same time, he did not lose sight of his duties as a commissioner-general and brought certain officials to the *Hoge Regering's* notice. As decided, he was to report the names of all Company servants suspected or found guilty of corruption. These people were then to be tried in the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia on the basis of the evidence gathered by Van Reede and his committee members. This meant that in Bengal, like other places, he had the power to enquire into and interrogate all men employed in the Company's factories there. Those who were beyond the Company's jurisdiction and were still suspected or found guilty of corruption within the Company, were left to Van Reede's discretion.[9] This possibly implied the Indian brokers and other locals whose services were used by the Company but over whom the Company's administration had restricted jurisdiction.[10] However, it is important to mention here that the Company could bring charges against such men to the Mughal authorities, on the basis of which they could be tried at the *qazi's* court.[11] Given that this was the setting of the Company's limits of formal existence in Bengal, it is worth examining what Van Reede's findings eventually led to. What did the committee's operations in Bengal finally discover about corruption in the VOC? How did it contribute, shape or form the on-going discussions about the Company's corruption in Bengal?

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[9] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, 1684: f. 2v.
[10] For a brief overview of the judicial system of the VOC in Asia see, Hendrik E. Niemeijer, "The Central Administration of the VOC Government and the Local Institutions of Batavia (1619-1811) – An Introduction," in *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*, eds. G.L. Balk, F. van Dijk, and D.J. Kortlang (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 65-67.
[11] The VOC records mention the incident of a silversmith and washer-man being tried at the 'Moorish court' for allegations of fraud that was raised by the Company and according to which the accused were punished. See F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India, anno 1681* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1919), 369.

The Findings

For the investigations carried out in the factories in Bengal, Van Reede left detailed reports containing information about financial, social and other aspects of the Company and its employees in the western quarters. On behalf of the committee, he was originally supposed to produce three copies – one for the *Heeren XVII*, one for the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia and another for himself representing the committee. The compilation in the National Archives at Hague now contains all of these copies collected together in almost a dozen bundles (from the Amsterdam chamber only, apart from their copies in the Zeeland chamber), of which three volumes contain information over Bengal.[12] In his reports on Bengal, Van Reede wrote not only about the illegal trade and bookkeeping frauds, but also of the state of the factories there, about the area surrounding these factories and the locals who worked at the Company's bases. These accounts contained moreover lengthy descriptions of the different commodities that the Company traded in, in Bengal – namely, the various types of silk and other textiles and the corresponding prices at which they were bought and sold in the market. In the midst of this huge mass of information, the focus remained nevertheless on the many instances of corruption that Van Reede pointed out among certain Company officials.

He began writing about his experience by mentioning how his arrival in Bengal was detested by the Company's people there, who did not want him to investigate them. In fact, he complained that Van Goens Jr. managed to secretly dispatch a letter with the help of English ships to these factories, alerting the men there about Van Reede's arrival and the *Heeren XVII's* orders for inspection.[13] Van Reede wrote that when he started his investigations he felt that both the local inhabitants as well as the Dutch Company servants were withholding everything and

[12] These are now in the National Archives at Hague. For the missives on Bengal in the Amsterdam chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 1408, 1421, 1422. For the rest of the missives on other places that were produced by the committee in the Amsterdam chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 1429, 1435, 1449, 1450, 1477, 1478, 1479, 1494. For the copies in the Zeeland chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 9709, 9710, 9711, 9712, 9714.

[13] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 19v-20r.

acting secretively – everything that could cause damage or leave a negative impression was done away with, so that all seemed suitable and clean. Nobody knew anything, if asked about someone who knew something then one would hear being said that such men had either left or had been sent somewhere else.[14] But keen to prove himself an efficient commissioner, Van Reede reported that he stuck to his duties and drew up a list of the names of those officials whom he suspected of corruption within the Company. In addition, he also gathered enough evidence to send some of them to the court at Batavia for trial and punishment.

One of the primary accused officials in the Van Reede committee reports was Jan Pit, the then provisional *gezaghebber* (chief) of the factory at Kasimbazaar and second in command in Bengal. Van Reede accused him of intentionally hiding information and not maintaining proper accounts of the Company's transactions in order to facilitate illegal activities.[15] Pit was also accused of being one of the group of officials who carried out their own illegal private business in the name of the '*Kleine Compagnie*' (Small Company) under the protectorate of the VOC in Bengal.[16] Since the year 1679 when Jan Pit had begun his tenure in Bengal, Van Reede reported that this '*Kleine Compagnie*' had been formed by a select group of directors, *pakhuismeesters* (warehouse-overseers), *guastoshouders* (assistant cashiers) and *fiscaals* (official appointed for controlling cargo of all VOC ships and maintaining Company rules) who retained their dominance on this illegal trade and did not allow anyone else to enter the club. According to Van Reede's reports, the former director Marten Huijsman and his wife, the *fiscaal* Pieter Mesdagh, the *pakhuismeester* and *onderkoopman* Isaac van Helsdingen, and the *guastushouder* and *onderkoopman* Quirijn van Rijn were also members of this racket.[17] As for the other accusations, there were

[14] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 19v.
[15] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 29rv.
[16] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 38r.
[17] Prior to the Van Reede committee, Isaac Soolmans was appointed as the commissioner-general in Bengal, by Johannes Camphuys and his Council of the Indies in Batavia. In Soolmans' reports, he made a series of allegations against Marten Huijsman as the director of Bengal and his Council members including Jan Pit, Isaac van Helsdingen, Pieter Mesdagh, Quirin van Rijn and others. Later of course, Soolmans joined the committee as the second in-charge after Van Reede. See, NL-HaNA, Aanwinsten 1de afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Missive to

complaints of embezzlement, buying commodities for household and personal use with the Company's money, and withholding customs duties from the Mughal governors.[18] Most of these complaints in Van Reede's reports were, therefore, clearly connected to allegations stemming from the violation of the Company's monopoly regulations.

Besides this, Van Reede also brought serious allegations against the then director of Bengal at Hooghly (Chinsurah), Nicolaas Schagen and his wife. The committee managed to collect sufficient evidence against Schagen and his illegal trade with the English East India Company officials in Japanese copper (*staafkoper*) on his way from Malacca to Bengal. They also found his wife guilty of participating in this trading network. Under these circumstances, the Company's court at Batavia scanned through all the evidence and pronounced Schagen guilty of violating certain codes in the VOC *artikelbrieven*. He was charged with violating article 10 in the Statues of Batavia prescribing punishment for all illegal trade carried out by wives and domestic workers for which the Company servants were to be responsible.[19] Besides that, he was also tried under the violation of article 1 forbidding illegal trade.[20] The punishment was decided by the terms of the law of the *Hoge Regering* passed in 1678, whereby all the smuggled goods were to be confiscated.[21] It was also pointed out, that since Schagen had not reported to the *opperhoofd* of Balasore about the cargo of his ship (as he was supposed to do, with regard to the rules of article 30), he had erred there too and was therefore subjected to deportation.[22] In view of the combined allegations, he was pronounced guilty and sent to Ambon. It was only after Van Reede

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the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam from Isaac Soolmans in Hooghly, 16 December, 1684: ff. 1- 275; Answer to the protest made by Soolmans, as provided by the director, Marten Huijsman and his council in Bengal, 27 September, 1684: f. 435-448.

[18] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: ff. 25r-33v; 39r-40v.

[19] NL-HaNA, VOC, Ingekomen stukken bij de Raad van Justitite in Batavia bij de Heeren XVII and the kamer Zeeland, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered by Gerard de Bevere, *Extraordinaris Raad* and *advocaat-fiscaal* of the Indies against Nicolaas Schagen, *Extraordinaris Raad* van Indies and ex-director of the Company in Bengal, 6 October, 1688: folios not numbered.

[20] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

[21] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek,* 3: 12.

[22] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

died, that Schagen produced in 1691, an *apologia* pleading 'not guilty' in self-defence.[23] In addition to such serious charges, Van Reede also mentioned other instances that had caused severe damage to the Company's profits, for example, the desertion of the contractual labourers who entered the Company's service in the Republic but had broken their contracts and now worked for other European Companies in India or for the big Indian merchant-nobles.[24] He also provided examples of the personal collaboration between certain Dutch and English officials to facilitate their mutual smuggling ventures.[25] The other noteworthy aspect of his observations was his remarks about the local brokers and *gomashtas* (agents helping to maintain revenue accounts of landholdings) who, he claimed, regularly helped the VOC officials in their illegal businesses. Almost half of an entire volume that was compiled meticulously by him contained copies of all the account books belonging to the local brokers who had signed a contract with the VOC to show which of them had defrauded the Company with the connivance of some of the corrupt officials.[26] A large part of his report also contained explanations of the policies and attitudes of certain Mughal officials who made it difficult for the Company to work in Bengal. These documents give a rich insight into the process of the VOC officials being integrally connected to the local populace of Bengal for acquiring knowledge about the market.

The reports of the Committee seemed therefore to have exposed an important body of information to the directors in the Republic and the *Hoge Regering* about the Company's affairs in

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[23] NA, HR, inv. nr. 241A, Consideration of Nicolaas Schagen on the instructions of Van Reede: folios not numbered.

[24] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII,* 1686: f. 92rv.

[25] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII* from Hooghly, 9 December, 1686: f. 61r. Robert Parthesius writes that 'In contrast with the English and the Portuguese, the VOC did not lose ships due to the replacement of ballast with the products of illegal trade.' In the relevant footnote, he adds that 'No record has been found to indicate otherwise'. The case of Nicolas Schagen and the mishap his ship encountered at Balasore because of the mistakes in the loading and unloading of cargo and ballast prove that such incidents related to illegal trade were very much present in the VOC, as it had been in the EIC. See, Parthesius, *Dutch Ships*, 95-96, 175.

[26] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Brief summary compiled by Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, the lord of Mijdrecht with the account books of the three merchants who conducted trade with the Company servants in Bengal, 4 April, 1686: f. 1212r-1215v.; Translated version in Bengali from the account book of the *banya* Rammu Dutt, who was used by Jan Pit for his private illegal trade, 5 May, 1686: f. 1216r-1217v.

Bengal. However, all of this information was not entirely new to the *Heeren XVII* at that time. Van Reede was not producing reports containing any new information or shocking revelation. De Graaff who had been in Asia during Van Reede's inspection, made the following remark (which however was not free of his own factional prejudices) about him in his account –

> And that one should opine that the lord N.N. (intending to keep the name anonymous though he was clearly referring to Van Reede as is proven by the rest of his text) went to India among all other reasons, to do a special service to the Company, by uprooting and intervening into the illegal trading swindle of Bengal and other places, without trying to promote his own interests, nobody is going to persuade me of it as I believe that men are naturally inclined to riches by virtue of their being, many of whom would never in their lifetime abandon their ambition and greed for money.[27]

De Graaff's narrative was not unjustified, given the socio-political context of the time. But what De Graaff importantly pointed out was the fact that Van Reede decided to take up his position of the commissioner and return to India when he had no pressing reason to do so. He was already holding a noble title in the Republic in 1684, a manor house in Utrecht and a high position in the States of Utrecht.[28] Was there another reason then, as De Graaff wrote, for Van

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[27] '*En dat men ook soude menen dat de heer N.N. ook anders om naar Indie gaat als om de Compagnie een besondere dienst te doen, in 't uitroyen ende verstoren van den particulieren handel so in Bengale als anders, sonder sijn eigen interest te bevorderen, dat sal mijn ook niemand konnen wijs maken, vermits ik geloof dat meest alle mensche uit der nature tot rijkdom en staat genegen zijn, en veele onder deselve zijn die noyt so lange sy leven van de staat sugt en gelt gierigheid versadigt zijn*.'
Note though that the book – *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff* was published in Hoorn in 1701 as a posthumous version of what De Graaff had written during his lifetime (1619-1688), and it cannot be ascertained with certainty whether there were discrepancies between the original manuscript and its print version. But the *Heeren XVII* at least had access to the information provided by De Graaff in his writings, long before it was published as a book in the Republic. Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, 100. For the original version see Nicolaus de Graaff, *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff, na de vier gedeeltens des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa: Behelsende een beschryving van sijn 48-jarige reise en aanmerkelykste voorvallen, die hy heeft gesien en die hem zyn ontmoet. van de levenswyse der volkeren, godsdienst, regeringe, landschappen en steden als ook een nette, dog korte beschryving van China, desselfs over groote landschappen, menigvuldige steden, gebouwen, gegraven kanalen, scheepvaard, oudheid der Chinesen; mitsgaders derselver oorlogen tegen de Tartaren; en op wat wyse de tartar moester van China heeft gemaakt. hier agter is by gevoegd d'Oost-Indise spiegel, zynde een beschryving van deselve schryver van geheel Oost-Indiën, de levenswyse so der Hollanders in Indiën, als op de schepen, en een net verhaaal van de uit en t'huis reise* (Hoorn/ Amsterdam, Utrecht: Feykenryp/ Hendrik en de Wed: Dirk Boom, Antoni Schouten, 1701).

[28] Van Reede served in the VOC till 1677 after which he returned to the Republic in 1678. On an official estimate, he had earned 11,500 guilders for his service to the Company in India. Thereafter, he bought the manor house of Mijdrecht in 1679 and was admitted into the Equestrian Order of Utrecht. He took over the title of the Lord of Mijdrecht. In 1680, he obtained a seat in the Audit Office and in 1684, he exchanged that

Reede to have chosen to return to India? Was it about gaining more money, or having more power or the need to get back to unfinished business, left behind in 1676? On a first glance, though, there was nothing about the committee or its findings that could raise suspicion. The names of officials that Van Reede mentioned as being guilty of illegal trade and other corrupt activities could not have had apparently raised questions. The other official papers also gave no reason to doubt the zeal of the committee and its intentions. Yet, the play of factional forces in the committee's findings could not have been so easily set aside or put out of consideration. Who was Jan Pit and who was Nicolaas Schagen? What were their political connections within the Company's administration?

The answers to these questions unlocked the vital link that pitched these men against Van Reede in 1686. They were both allied to the Van Goens family (Van Goens Sr. and his son, Van Goens Jr.) and thereby belonged to the opponent faction of Van Reede. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Van Reede and Van Goens clashed with each other within the VOC and Huydecoper van Maarsseveen, who too was not fond of Van Goens and his policies, gave his open support to Van Goens' opponent – Van Reede. Pit and Schagen, on the other hand, had the open support of Van Goens Jr. In a letter written by Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII* in 1683, the brother of Jan Pit, Martin Pit was recommended by him to be appointed to the *Raad van Indië* (for keeping a check on the bookkeeping accounts concerning the Company's trade in Asia).[29] The Pits were also connected to the Van Goens family through wedding relations and another brother, Jacob Jorisz. Pit who served as the Governor of the Coromandel Coast from 1681 to 1686 also left for Batavia before the Van Reede committee's inspection could begin

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for a seat as a deputy of the States of Utrecht. In October of the same year, he attained the position of the *watergraaf* of the Nieuwe Vaart in Utrecht. It was not until the end of 1684 that he involved himself actively into the Company's affairs again. See Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 57.

[29] This letter, signed by Van Goens Jr. is now preserved in Hudde's collection of papers. It bears no direct name but Van Goens Jr. addressed his letter to someone, whom he described as '*Mijn edele achtbare heere*'/ 'My honourable lord.' One can assume that it was either written to Hudde or to any of the members of the *Heeren XVII* at that time. NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII*/Hudde in Amsterdam, 14 September, 1683: folios not numbered.

there.[30] The case with Schagen was similar, as he, too, was mentioned in Van Goens Jr.'s letter for being considered in the position of vice-president in the *Raad van Justitie*.[31] The name of Marten Huijsman, the then commander of Malabar and the former director of Bengal, also featured in the list of men recommended by Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII* in his letter of 1683.[32] It is quite clear then that Pit, Schagen and Huijsman were allied to the Van Goens faction. This explains why Van Reede had targeted these names, among all the other Company servants that were working in Bengal at this time. As for the other members in the investigation committee, there was Isaaq Soolmans, who was the second in rank and had earlier functioned as a commissioner in Bengal, when appointed by Batavia in 1684. This was at a time that Marten Huijsman was the director of the Company in Bengal. Soolmans then had his differences with Huijsman on several issues regarding illegal trade and other allegations, that according to him the director had not acknowledged and attempted to overlook.[33] Soolmans had also written to the *Heeren XVII* complaining about Jacob Verburg, the former director of Bengal, who allegedly used a certain group of local brokers to facilitate his own illegal trade.[34] Besides Van Reede, Soolmans too therefore had his scores to settle and all complaints from his earlier experiences were taken over and incorporated into the reports of the Van Reede committee in 1686.

These connections showed how corruption allegations were being used for factional motivations by the VOC. The *Heeren XVII* wished to align factions in the overseas

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[30] Willem Hartsinck was married to Maria Pitt in 1675. Willem was the son of Carel and served with Van Goens in the campaign against St. Thome and on Ceylon. Carel Hartsinck was married to the sister of Van Goens's second wife, Esther the Solemne. It is, thus, through the Hartsinck's there is a familial link to Van Goens post-1675 at least. See, Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 588, 699; Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 41–42.

[31] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens Jr. in Amsterdam, 14 September, 1683: folios not numbered.

[32] NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter of Van Goens Jr., 1683: folios not numbered.

[33] NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling ARA, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from Isaac Soolmans to the director, Marten Huijsman, the *oppercoopluijden* Jan Pit, Johannes van Keulen, *ondercoopluijden*, Pieter Mesdagh, Jacob Hinlopen and Isaak van Helsdingen, 12 September, 1684: f. 337-354; Letter from Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman, 23 September, 1684: f. 432-434; Answer to the protest of Soolmans by Huijsman and his council, 27 September, 1684: f. 435-448.

[34] NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman, 1 September, 1684: f. 405-407.

administration of the Company under the pretext of sending commissioners and committees for investigation. In this case, Van Reede and his political friends tried to align their factions in the Republic with the factions in Bengal and subsequently with the rest of the other areas. The former clique of Van Goens had still been retained through his son, Van Goens Jr. and his older allies in several places which became the cause of grievance for Van Reede. During the period that Soolmans served as the commissioner, he had reported about how he felt it to be a heavy duty, given the numerous open and hidden enemies in the closed circle of Bengal, with the director, Huijsman and his council of men sharing factional alliances.[35] This closed clique became the evident concern of Van Reede and Soolmans in 1686 as they, both, targeted those men still operating in Bengal who happened to be in the pro-Van Goens faction. With allegations of corruption brought against them, the Van Reede committee wanted to have these men removed from their power base. For formulating their cases, they had to dig up legal evidence. In the process, many extra-VOC actors also came to be used and absorbed in the Company's administrative space. Considering the fluid setting of the region of Bengal, as seen in Chapter 4, this was not surprising. The ambivalent jurisdiction of the local villagers and brokers, and the informal power of the Mughal nobles – all of these had to be dealt with by the committee with regard to the problem of corruption. It revealed thus two sides to the story – (a) the factional infighting of the Company officials among themselves one one side (b) and, the locals being embroiled in the Company's administrative politics on the other side. These aspects can be discerned from the way legal cases against Pit and Schagen came to be formed by the committee, supported by an analysis of Van Reede's final report sent to the *Heeren XVII*. It is important to remember in this context that local testimonies were only accepted at the *Raad van Justitie*, if they were supported by Christian or Dutch witness accounts, as has been shown at the beginning of

[35] NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from the former commissioner Isaac Soolmans in Hooghly to the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 16 December, 1684: f. 1-2.

this chapter. Considering this, it is extra challenging to see how these two worlds were encountered by the committee and Van Reede in their combat against corruption.

Jan Pit and his Partners in Crime

Jan Pit, the *gezaghebber* of the VOC factory at Kasimbazaar, was accused by Van Reede of violating several Company rules including embezzlement, the conducting of illegal, private trade on commodities that the Company had a monopoly on and of making friends with the English who were, as he described, the dinner-guests (*tafel-gasten*) of Jan Pit.[36] None of these habits were peculiar to Jan Pit as a VOC official serving in Bengal. In fact, there is ample evidence of English and Dutch officials intermixing freely, and this even went on sometimes to encompass the French and the Danes.[37] During the tenure of Jacob Verburg (1678-80) as the director at Hooghly, the EIC officer Matthias Vincent mentioned the regular 'entertainment' at the Dutch factory lodges where garden parties with drinks seemed to be a usual affair.[38] When Verburg died, Vincent wrote highly of him saying that, 'he was a quiet man, and of better principles of moral honesty than Dutchmen in great employments generally observed.'[39] Undoubtedly, Pit was not the only one then to engage in such actions that were in contradiction to the formal prohibitions on the Company's illegal trade. Added to these personal alliances that were fostered among the different European Company servants, Van Reede also accused Pit of harbouring strategic bonds with local brokers and VOC factors.

Van Reede cited the names of three Indian merchants who had indulged in illegal, private trade by collaborating with Jan Pit and others from the *Kleine Compagnie*. They were Deepchand (Diepsient), Kalyan Das (Caljandas) and Jai Biswas (Siaijwiswas) *alias* Ramsen (Ramceen).

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[36] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 61r.

[37] Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 316–17; Kathryn Wellen, "The Danish East India Company's War against the Mughal Empire, 1642-1698," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no. 5 (2015), 445–48; Richard Carnac Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streynham Master, 1675-1680 and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto*, vol. I (London: The Government of India, 1911), 329; Richard Carnac Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streynham Master, 1675-1680 and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto*, vol. II (London: The Government of India, 1911), 240.

[38] Fawcett, *The English Factories in India*, IV: 222.

[39] Fawcett, IV: 248.

However, the most that the Company could do with their limited jurisdiction over these merchants was to dismiss them from further service. Van Reede also added that the locals in general were so afraid of Pit that they did not always want to give away information properly.[40] What is important to note is that despite all these frequent complaints about the missing papers and lack of witness accounts, Van Reede eventually managed to garner enough evidence against Pit. This was mainly collected from the account books of the three accused brokers, who had allied themselves with Pit. Besides Pit, Jacob Verburg (the director of Bengal in 1679), Herman Fentzel (the *gezaghebber* in 1681), Nicolaas Baukes (director of Bengal in 1682), and Marten Huijsman (director of Bengal in 1684) were also alleged to have conducted illegal trade and deprived the Company of its due profits. These Dutch officials were accused of evading tolls with the help of the *factoors* and *gomashtas* and of trading illegally in their name or through the Company's brokers by paying them commission in return. On the official records, however, they entered the money given to the Indian brokers as a loan advanced for buying new merchandise for the Company's trade in textiles.[41]

While all the brokers were forced to disclose their account books to Van Reede and his committee, the fact that they were written in the Hindustani (local Hindi), Gujarati and Bengali languages remained a problem for the commissioner and the committee. It was not possible to translate them without local help which form the other side of our story involving the local merchants and villagers. For reading these accounts, Van Reede resorted to the aid of another broker named Jadu (*Satou*). Jadu clearly testified against the misdeeds of his colleagues and their allied officers by adding his signature at the end of all the committee reports. In the sources, his testimony against one of the brokers, Kalyan Das was translated from Bengali to Dutch and read as follows –

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[40] NA, VOC 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 20r.

[41] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extracts from the account books of the three brokers showing contracts with the directors in Bengal signed, 1679-1685: f. 1075r-1094r. Also see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1313, Memoir from Francois der Haze for direction to the chief of Kasimbazar, Jacob Verburg, in the position of the *oppercoopman,* and to the assistant-director and then provisional merchant, Jan Pit, 22 June, 1675: f. 156rv.

> I, Jadu, having worked in the quality of 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 to those officials who had been committed for this 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 servants of the Honourable Company from 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 testify to agree as the truth; and I sign it with my own hands. Hooghly, 15th April, 1686.
>
> (written below)
>
> This is the signature of Jadu, the broker of the Dutch Company.[42]

The fact that Jadu openly dared to provide a written declaration meant that he was not in league with either Jan Pit or his local colleagues in Bengal. In the same way, the name of Ramu Dutt (written as *Rammoedet*), a *baniya* merchant and a *factoor* (local agent or broker) of the Company also surfaced in the reports.[43] Ramu Dutt confessed to being part of the illegal trade dealings in 1683 when Jan Pit used him to sell his private goods to Jai Biswas in Hooghly.[44] Van Reede not only praised Dutt for his service but also consolidated his position as a broker of the VOC in Bengal. Jadu too was highly recommended by Van Reede and assigned the task of assisting with the supervision of textile quality control.[45] The reason for Jadu's willingness to provide a

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[42] '*Ick Satou, als makelaar in die qualiteijt gebruikt wordende in den dienst van d'I Comp hebbe ten ordre van sijn Hoog Ed Heer Hendrick Adriaan van Reede tot Drakesteijn heere van Mijdrecht vertolckt aan d' expres daer toe gecommitteerden uijt den mont van Caljandas d'hier voorenstaande extracten uijt de boeken van hem aangaande den handel tussen hem ende bediende van d'I Comp gedreven sedert den jare 1679 tot het laatste van den jare 1685/6 ende deselve geconfronteert met de gelijke notitie daarvan bij mij aangetekent verklare die daar 't eenemaal mede te accorderen en tot teken den waarheijt die met mijn hant ondertekent Ouglij desen 15 April 1686 (onderstont)*
Hier staat getekent Satou makelaar der Hollantsche Comp.'
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extract from the account book of Kalyan Das in the Gujarati language, 15 April, 1686: f. 1081r-1086v.

[43] On the relevance of the term '*baniya*' and its implications in pre-colonial India see, Subrahmanyam, "Of Imârat and Tijârat," 764.

[44] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extract from the account book of Jai Biswas in the name of Ramsen and Nandakishor trading with the Company's servants as written in Bengali language with the testimony of Satou, dated 15 April, 1686: f. 1092v-1093r. Also see, NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Confession of Ramu Dutt being used by Jan Pit for his private and illegal trade in Hooghly, 15 December, 1686: f. 1168.

[45] NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations, 1687: folios unnumbered.

testimony can be ascertained from Soolmans' reports written earlier, that were not mentioned in Van Reede's writings. Soolmans had written earlier about how Jan Pit had made Jai Biswas and his accomplices too powerful as brokers for Pit's own illegal profit.[46] Jai Biswas had problems with Jadu, who was also working for the VOC at that time. Biswas eventually managed to get Jadu out of service through accusations of fraud. Later, thus when Van Reede and his committee arrived and wanted to expose Jan Pit's actions, Jadu siezed the opportunity to get back at Jai Biswas and his friends who had been working with Pit. Jai Biswas and Jadu's personal conflict instigated the latter to help Van Reede and Soolmans against Jan Pit and his local allies. This incident does indicate that the local mercantile space in Bengal was also riddled with infighting and the strategic building of alliances against common rivals. It cannot be concluded here with certainty that these brokers were aligned in neat factions. But it is evident that they did enter into competition and were inclined to operate in groups for profit motives. It also showed how such animosities among local brokers became embroiled with the factional politics of the Company in Bengal.

In this process of constructing charges against Jan Pit, there are thus a few things that became evident. Firstly, it was clear that corruption allegations were used politically to blend in with factional interests. As is evident here, Soolmans and Van Reede were in a faction against Verburg, Huijsman and Pit and such rivalries motivated the former to allege the latter of illegal trade and other corrupt actions. Secondly, it also showed how the VOC administrators could merge their factions with that of the brokers and mercantile groups in Bengal. In this case, Pit was allied with the brokers Deepchand, Kalyan Das and Jai Biswas who were challenged by the faction of Van Reede and Soolmans tied with brokers such as Jadu and Ramu Dutt. While the act of Pit in initiating unsolicited contact with the locals was shunned as corrupt and damaging for the Company's monopoly, it also revealed that such practices were common among the VOC

[46] NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter written by Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman in Hooghly, 10 November, 1684: f. 517.

officials in Bengal. Thirdly, it also showed the urge of the Company officials to have control over these brokers as they were the chief sources of knowledge for gaining commercial success and a firm footing in this region. It is for this reason that Shaista Khan, wrote to Van Reede about the brokers being claimed by the Company servants unjustly.[47] This issue continued to be a constant bone of contention between the Mughal administrators and the VOC officials in their formal/informal encounters. As regards the allegations against Pit, his brother, Marten Pit as a member of the *Raad van Indië* managed to prevent the case from proceeding to the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia.[48]

The Case of the Director and his Wife

A second case that was started by the committee revolved around Nicolaas Schagen who was the director at the factory in Hooghly when Van Reede reached the waters of Bengal in 1685.[49] A long legal duel ensued thereafter between Van Reede and Schagen that culminated in the latter being deported to Ambon. Not only Schagen, but also his wife was entangled in this factional battle with the committee targeting her and accusing her of having smuggled fine silk (*armozijn*) for illegal profit. This silk was supposedly bought from the English in Kasimbazaar by the Company's *soldijboekhouder*, Barend Kaaskoper who then sold some of it to Gerrit Coper, the *schipper* of the VOC yacht, *De Bombaij* and some of it to Jan Frins, the *schipper* of the ship, *Strijen* and some more to the *boekhouder*, Anthony Mina.[50] It was in this network of exchanges that Schagen's wife was alleged to have participated, by buying a part of the silk from Kaaskoper. Even though it was the fault of Schagen's wife, the committee made full use of it in forming

[47] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Translated missive from Persian written by Nawab Shaista Khan to Van Reede on 6 June, 1686, 16 December, 1686: f. 1255rv.
[48] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 50v-52r.
[49] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 19 October, 1684 and 23 November, 1684: folios not numbered; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 242, *Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 31 August, 1684 and 17 October, 1684: folios not numbered. Also see, NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Copy of the instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik van Reede, December, 1684: f. 1r-8v.
[50] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Index of all the testimonies, confessions, examinations, reports, and interpretations about the private trade in Hooghly, December, 1686: f. 1313r- 1313v.

their charges against Schagen who by virtue of the *plakkaat* of 1642 on illegal trade (*verboden handel*) was to be held accountable for the offences of his wife.[51]

These occasions showed that though the Dutch women were not tried openly in the courts for civil offences in Batavia, there was no problem in either charging them with offences or using their testimonies (in combination with the higher official witnesses) for the Company's legal administration. The wife of Barend Kaaskoper, Clara Catherina Stumphuis, for instance, provided a written declaration stating that a servant of Schagen had brought in a picnic basket covered with cloth that was full of money to her house, giving it to her husband. She described this servant as being 'tall and brown, and full of life' but could not recall his name specifically.[52] Her testimony was seriously included and cited as one of the primary pieces of evidence to build this case against Schagen and his wife in the *Raad van Justitie's* legal proceedings in Batavia. It is important however to mention here that this representation was limited to European women only, unlike the voices of local women that remained directly unheard of in all instances (or was at best present through colonial translations).

While there was no testimony from the aforementioned servant that could be used for this case, there were a striking number of other testimonies used as legal evidence, given by the local menial workers of the Company. The gardener (*mali*) of Kaaskoper was interrogated and testified, in Portuguese, to the events that were described by Catharina Stumphuis.[53] He told the Van Reede committee about going to Schagen's residence with his master, Kaaskoper and having seen in the afternoon a heavy basket being brought, that was covered with cloth, to Schagen's lodge (*logie*). He presumed it to have contained money. He also confirmed seeing Schagen's wife pacing up and down earlier in the gallery waiting for the basket to arrive. The basket was eventually brought with the help of one of Kaaskoper's coolies from Schagen's lodge

[51] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 585.
[52] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Testimony of the wife of the bookkeeper Barent Kaaskoper called Catharina Stumphuis, 5 December, 1686: folios not numbered.
[53] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Examination of the *mali* or gardener along with a certain coolie from the bookkeeper, Kaaskoper, 16 December, 1686: folios not numbered.

to his own house and put upstairs where after the cloth was removed, the *mali* caught sight of some money inside. The *mali* also admitted to bringing in the same basket to the house of the Company's cashier, Marten van Heemskerk. There were further declarations about the illegal *armozijn* trade between his master, Kaaskoper and the *schippers*, Coper and Frins with the money. Besides this, even the words of the *cooli* mentioned before were recorded in the testimonies (in a mix of Portuguese and Moorish language). He testified to having helped in moving the boxes earlier from Schagen's lodge to Kaaskoper's house and later to the house of Maarten van Heemskerk.[54] All these links were used as evidence, naturally in combination with the major testimonies provided by Company servants like Kaaskoper, who himself confessed to having received money from Schagen's wife for the commodities she bought.[55] Another official, Arnout Deldijn (*boekhouder*) confessed to Zeeman, the *advocaat fiscael* of the Company about Gerard Coutier (*onderkoopman*) who had helped Schagen's wife by sending Alexander Hendrik (*ondercoopman*) to buy illegal *armosijn* from the English in Kasimbazaar.[56]

As Schagen was charged with the offences of his wife, he was also held responsible for his own involvement in an illegal trading deal of Japanese copper (*staafkoper*). Several men on board the *fluijt* Strijen which was on its way to Bengal from Malacca, and where Schagen and his wife were present testified to the events of boxes of copper being picked up at Malacca and unloaded at Balasore on an English chaloupe. The witnesses who testified included the names of men like Andries Smit (*soldaat* and *oppasser* of Schagen), Wijnand Barsvelt (corporal of the *oppassers* of Schagen), Jan Abramse van Oldenhoven (*opperstuurman*), Jan Praijer (*opperchurugijn*), Pruge van Heel (*onderchirurgijn*), Harmanus Naekemus (*bottelier*), Jan Frins (*schipper*) and others who either saw or helped with the loading and unloading of the boxes of copper. Even though it

[54] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.
[55] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.
[56] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Index of all the testimonies, confessions, examinations, reports, and interpretations about the private trade in Hooghly, December, 1686: f. 1314v- 1315r.

is not possible to deduce from the sources conclusively what led these men to change sides and agree to provide witnesses for Van Reede, the answer may be sought in the modifications brought about in the Statues of Batavia.[57] According to the *plakkaat* of 12th-14th August, 1678, all *schippers* (captains), *boekhouders* (bookkeepers), *onderkooplieden* (rank of junior merchants), *opperstuurlieden* (rank of senior merchants), *hoogbootsman* (rank of senior boatswains), *schieman* (assistant boatswains), *botteliers* (officials in charge of provisions) and *kuipers* (officials in charge of the utensils) at all levels were to be held responsible for any illegal trade on a ship that they had been on.[58] The code also mentioned deportment without having the right to a fair trial as a punishment.[59] The offices involved were amplified in 1679 to include the *adsisten* (assistants), *stuurlieden* (sailing crew), *konstabels* (constables) and *zeilmaker* (sailing-cloth maker) as being subjected to the same punishment for conducting illegal trade in Asia.[60] These codes might have been the reason why lower Company servants involved in this case were no longer interested in lending Schagen their support. Van Reede, in turn, requested the *Hoge Regering* to grant amnesty to these men by virtue of their willingness to provide confessions. But it is not difficult to see that such virtues were not supposedly freed from personal and political motivations. It is difficult to fathom all of these personal intricacies in detail from official accounts. But it is possible to conclude that the incentive of getting a one-third share of the confiscated goods if someone reported illegal activities might have also been a motivating factor.[61]

This case, like the previous one, showed how factional motives were intermingled with the operations of the committee in charging officials and their families with corruption. Schagen and his wife were targeted by Van Reede as they belonged to the pro-Van Goens group that eventually brought Schagen to the Court at Batavia. This case also stands out for its involvement

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[57] The Statues of Batavia were the code of laws designed for the VOC in Asia. See for details, http://databases.tanap.net/ead/html/Colombo_Jurriaanse/index.html?N1AE3C, accessed 30 December, 2017.

[58] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 3:12.

[59] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:12.

[60] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 3:37–38.

[61] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:12–13.

of locals such as menial servants in the legal processes of the Company that were initiated against prominent officials. The purpose of using these testimonies of the servants was connected to the fact that all officials were answerable for the actions of their domestic servants or slaves in the Company's administration.[62] It showed how, like the brokers in the previous case, ordinary villagers and workers in this case were also seen as being part of the VOC's illegal trading racket in Bengal. At the same time, the presence of these men was proof of the fluid and informal relations that existed between the Company officials and the locals in this region. This case also showed that control over not only the brokers but also the local inhabitants of the villages under the Company's supervision remained a matter of concern for the VOC officials.

Both these two cases above can be contextualised in the situation of the VOC in Bengal as explained earlier in Chapters 3 and 4. The fluid geo-political space of Bengal ensured that the Company officials there operated as semi-*zamindars* within the Mughal administrative world. It has been argued before that this led the officials to informally attempt penetrating the Mughal administrative domain through factionalism, appropriation of elite lifestyles and acquiring jurisdiction over the local inhabitants of the villages leased out to the Company. The two cases discussed here demonstrate that such practices which boosted the personal ambitions of the officials were common. Factional alignments of individual officials with groups of local brokers existed beyond the formal limitations of the Company. This allowed them to gain more information about the mercantile scenario of Bengal and acquire private profits. It, in turn, enabled the Company officials to live a more luxurious life suited to their administrative elite status in Bengal that Van Dam or De Graaff complained about. Moreover, these cases also show the urge of the Company officials to gain control over the villagers and assert their jurisdiction vis-à-vis the Mughals in the region. This last condition led to a situation of frequent tussle as is evident from the incident of collision with the provincial *karori*, Abdul Ghani Beg during Van Reede's stay in Bengal. As Van Reede reported, Abdul Ghani Beg demanded tolls from the

[62] Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 96; Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 2:473.

Company which he accused the officials of having evaded by illegally using the local brokers and *gomastas* for their private trade.[63] To exert further pressure, he visited the village of Baranagore (which was under the Company's lease) with his men and scribes calculating and writing everything down, that frightened the villagers there and caused them to flee their village. Van Reede wrote that the VOC director in Bengal was not doing anything at this time so that he had to initiate contact with the Mughal *subahdar*, Shaista Khan. When that too did not work, the Company reportedly approached the *amin*, Matta Monidas who promised to look into the matter. But Abdul Ghani Beg, being more powerful, retained an upper hand in Bengal threatening to strip the Company off of its trading privileges. This example showed how the Company could be affected in the Mughal administrative world because of the officials' vulnerable semi-*zamindari* status in the village of Baranagore where a Mughal *mansabdar* could intrude and challenge the Company's base of resources, jurisdiction and right to provide protection to the villagers. Secondly, it also showed the awareness of the Company officials of the factions existing within the Mughal administration, so that they could align their interests with the *amin*, Matta Monidas against the *karori*, Abdul Ghani Beg in Bengal.

The findings of the committee can be better understood in the context of the complex situation of the VOC, as explained in Chapters 3 and 4, in Mughal Bengal. The VOC existed in the Mughal administrative world as semi-*zamindars*/ *ijaradars* in Bengal. By virtue of this existence, they maintained personal contact with provincial *mansabdars*, merchants, brokers and inhabitants of those villages that were leased out to them. But this status was not entirely comprehensible to the *Heeren XVII*. Within the Company's administrative world, it was translated or conveyed as the VOC having limited jurisdiction over the villages under lease and having necessary interactions with the Mughal officials and locals for trading purposes. Shuttling between these two worlds, the Company officials realised that their semi-*zamindari*/ *ijaradari* status lent them greater control over locals which allowed them to make illegal profits and pursue individual

[63] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 75v-82r.

interests. Factionalism on all sides further facilitated this process. But it also ensued a tussle with the Mughal officials at times which brought the informal practices of the Company officials to the fore. Van Reede and Soolmans in the course of their investigation exposed these practices as illegal and corrupt, but the semi-*zamindari* world of the Company officials in Bengal remained beyond the committee's grasp. When Schagen thus wrote about Van Reede not understanding the ways of the Company in regions such as Bengal, he was possibly hinting at this informal administrative world of the officials. Under such circumstances, one wonders how did Van Reede explain the cause of corruption among the Company officials that he exposed in Mughal Bengal in the reports sent to the *Heeren XVII*.

Writing on Corruption

Throughout his reports, Van Reede chose to associate the corruption of the Company officials with the local situation – namely, rampant corruption among the Mughal governors and the locals in a landscape as Bengal. Thus, while he acknowledged the fact that the VOC in Bengal lived 'as friends obliged by favours granted by the King of Hindusthan, the then great Mughal' who had allowed them to have 'several privileges, more than his own subjects, to not only live with all the freedom in this land and empire but also to conduct trade', he also did not hesitate to remark how the region was infested with 'the tyranny of the sovereign government of heathens and Moors (*de tiranique souvereijne regering van heijdenen en mooren*).'[64] In his missives to the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering*, his description of Bengal reflected this idea. He wrote –

> Bengal…can be administered and made useful for the profit of the Company, if it is governed with prudence and expertise, and executed with loyalty and zeal… the government (in Bengal) is entirely Islamic and functions under the king of Hindustan, the

[64] '*De I. Comp woond in Bengalen als vrunden en gunstelingen van den coning van Hindostan, den groten mogul genaamd, van de welke wij hebben veel privilegen en voorregten boven alle zijn eijgen onderdanen, niet alleen om met alle vrijheijd in deszelve landen en rijken te leeven, maar om daarin met alle gemak de negotie te drijven in soodanige coopmanschappen als d'I. Comp goed vind aan te brengen en weder uijt te voeren.*'
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

> lord of the lands from Persia till the region of Arakan. Bengal is administered by Shaista Khan, an uncle from the mother's side of the king Aurangzeb, who has given him this land as a source of his income for strengthening his frontiers and paying the military expenses and for maintaining his own court along with the treasury of the empire. In order to collect all the money, this land is (therefore) divided into provinces among governors and superintendents who administer the finances (of these divisions) and hold them in lease. The predominant nature of the prince enjoying the highest authority called *Naboob (Nawab*), is said to be extremely greedy; as a consequence of which he is neither the happiest nor righteous in his administration…the entire course of the political administration is monarchical and asserts itself fully over all regions, over all men and all resources. The regents (indicating Mughal administrators) are extravagantly grand, selfish, and conspicuously pompous with their lifestyles, (the standards of) which are often more than their power and income. They are drawn to tyranny and extortion, not only from their unregulated squandering behind women, servants, horses, tents, camels, and elephants but also for having more resources to maintain their households and their (political) favourites in their courts, occupying more important offices.[65]

In this extract, the stereotypical notion of a rich land where the profits were plundered by corrupt administrators was reflected. While he admitted that there were unaccounted for riches in Bengal, he also talked about the large-scale misappropriation of these riches by the Mughal *mansabdars* like Shaista Khan. Such *mansabdars*, according to him, resorted to frequent extortion and tyranny making corruption the rule of their land. Van Reede described the *karori* of Bengal, Abdul Ghani Beg, as one of those many 'Moors, who were greedy for money, knowing their

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[65] '*Bengale…tot voordeel van de generale Comp konnen beheert en te nutte gemaekt worden, soo deselve met verstandt en kennisse beleijdt, met trouw en ijver uijtgevoert U Ed Ho. agtb. maar werden toegebraght…de regeringh (in Bengale) is geheel mahometaans staende onder den groten mogol ofte den koningh van hindostan, als algemeen heer der lande van persia af tot tegen het gebied van Arrakan werde Bengala bestiert door den vorst Chahestachan, een oom van 'smoeders wegen met den koningh Orantsjah of Orangsab, aandien vorst sijn dese landen uijtgegeven, om daar en uijt derselver inkomsten de frontieren te versterken, de lasten der militie te betalen, sijn eijgen hof te onderhouden, midsgaders boven dien tot de schatkist van't rijk, nogh enige somma op te brengen oversulks sijn dese landen in veel provintien verdeelt, door gouverneurs en superintendenten der selver financien geregeert, en om die te bestieren als in paght gegeven, het predominerend nature van den vorst in dese opperste regeringh Nabbob genaemt werd geseght seer geldgierigh te sijn, en bij gevolgh niet van de gelukkigsten, nogh sijn regeringh reghtvaardigh… de geheele cours van de politique bestieringh is monarchael, een vol gebied voerende, over de menschen en derselver middelen, de regenten sijn uijtnemende groots staatsughtigh, met veel uijtwendige praght, en huijshoudingh, 't welk boven haar vermoogen en inkomen sijnde, haar vervoert tot dwingelanderij en extorsien, daartoe sij niet alleen gedwongen worden door haar ongeregult verquisten, aen vrouwen, dienaren, paerden, tenten, camelen, en oliphanten maar om ook middelen te hebben haar, aen het hof en bij de favoriten te maintineeren, also wel (om) een grotere bedieningen te verkrijgen, maar daar ook ingelaeten te worden…'*.
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 73rv.

own selfish interests alone'.[66] He added that the lower administrators of the Mughal government, sensing the deficit in their share of money due to the Company's presence in Bengal, were bent on driving the Company away from this land. It is for this reason that the Company officials were hindered in their peaceful trading operations. Van Reede further regretted writing that since it was not in the Company's hands to change the law of this land – which was violent behaviour and extortion by the Mughal authorities – attempts to please Abdul Ghani Beg through gifts were made.[67] He also wrote that it was a wise decision to work with gifts, rather than lodge complaints and seek justice since it would have actually 'cost (the Company) more and helped little'.[68] This justification laid bare the idea that practices which were otherwise not approved by the Dutch administrative ethos, had to be adopted by the Company officials in Bengal in order to comply with the Mughal ways of administering there.

Moreover, the corrupt practices of the Company officials were heightened in Bengal, as Van Reede explained, by the climate and squalor of the region. In his words –

> …the headquarters and the Company's lodge are situated in a land where the moors and the mohammedans are so filthy, and the climate so hot that there one had very little freedom to turn away from the influence of (their) eyes filled with vice...[69]

His contempt for the atmosphere of Bengal could have been shaped by the ideas that were already doing the rounds in the Republic through published literature. But it justified the Company servants' illegal indulgences, in the natural backdrop of Bengal's immoral and base air, which induced the corruption of all Company officials. As a result of which Van Reede's reports portrayed the Company's factory being in utter disorder, a description that was surprisingly in striking contrast to its comparison with a 'castle' made by Schouten earlier. Van Reede wrote –

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[66] "…*dat de moren geld gierigh sijnde, haar eijgen interest kennend*…".
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 77v.
[67] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 77rv.
[68] NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 75r.
[69] '…*al het welk het hoofdcomtoir en 's Comps logie, gelegen in een land alwaar de mooren en mahometanen zoo vies, het climaat zoo heet men weijnig vrijheid gehad hoefd zigh te wenden of keeren als onder haar ontugtige oogen*…'
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

> Till now the Company's valuable merchandise has been put in Hooghly at warehouses, built of straw huts and in places which are not just prone to theft and fire, but also lie beyond the sight and supervision of the director…The outer walls of the Company's lodge, garden and orchard looks so miserable and dirty, that even the poorest inhabitant seems to be better enclosed and cared for …For the accommodation of the married families of the Company servants, there is a small plan as has been shown to you, which elucidates the possibility of these families living close to the main factory and the Company's lodge at minimum cost.[70]

Accordingly, he proposed reforms including the building of stone walls around the factory and the appointment of a *fiscaal* to regulate illegal trade, among other changes at Hooghly (Figs 18, 19A and 19B).[71] The image of a filthy land with abundant riches that were exploited by the Mughal administrators was seen as a reason to provoke the Dutch Company officials to take to corruption. This corruption, according to Van Reede, damaged the Company since 1678 (from the year of Van Goens' governor-generalship) to an 'almost uncountable amount…that went far above the rough estimate of 38 hundred thousand gold.'[72]

But nowhere did Van Reede mention about the jurisdiction of the Company officials over the three villages in Bengal (although he mentioned about them being on lease), nor did he seem to understand the informal semi-*zamindari* status of the Company officials in the Mughal world. Yet throughout his reports, his desperate attempt to impress upon the Company officials their role as merchants and their goal of making commercial profits did convey the sense that the

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[70] '*Tot nog toe heeft men alhier Houglij 's Comps kostelijke coopmanschap en effecten vertrouwd in pakhuijsen, stroo hutten, en plaatsen met alleen in gevaar van dieven en brand, ook geheel buijten het ooge en opsigt van den directeur…De buijten muuren van s'Comps logie, thuijn, en boomgaart heeft zoo miserable en vuijl gelegen, den alderarmsten inwoonder veel beter bewaard en beslooten is geweest…Tot accomodement van de getrouwde en hare familien is U l. aangewesen, en bij den caartie/cartier afgemeten hoedanig men deselve met de minste kosten zal konnen logieren en binnen de logie doen te samenwonen…*'.
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

[71] For a detailed explanation of the illustrated plans in the factory at Hooghly see, G.G. Schilder, Rosemary Robson-McKillop, and J.R. van Diessen, *Atlas Isaak de Graaf/ Atlas Amsterdam* (Voorburg etc.: Asia Maior/Utrecht: KNAG, 2006), 206–9.

[72] '*Wat schade de generale Comp in Bengale, zedert den jare 1678 geleden heeft is bij na niet na te rekenen door het drijven van particulieren handel, als quade en ontrouwe directie, passerende bij ruijge calculatie verre op de agtendertig tonnen goud…*'.
NA, HR, inv., nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

Fig 18: Plan of the Company's lodge, garden and its surroundings in Hooghly, 17th century, reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1102.

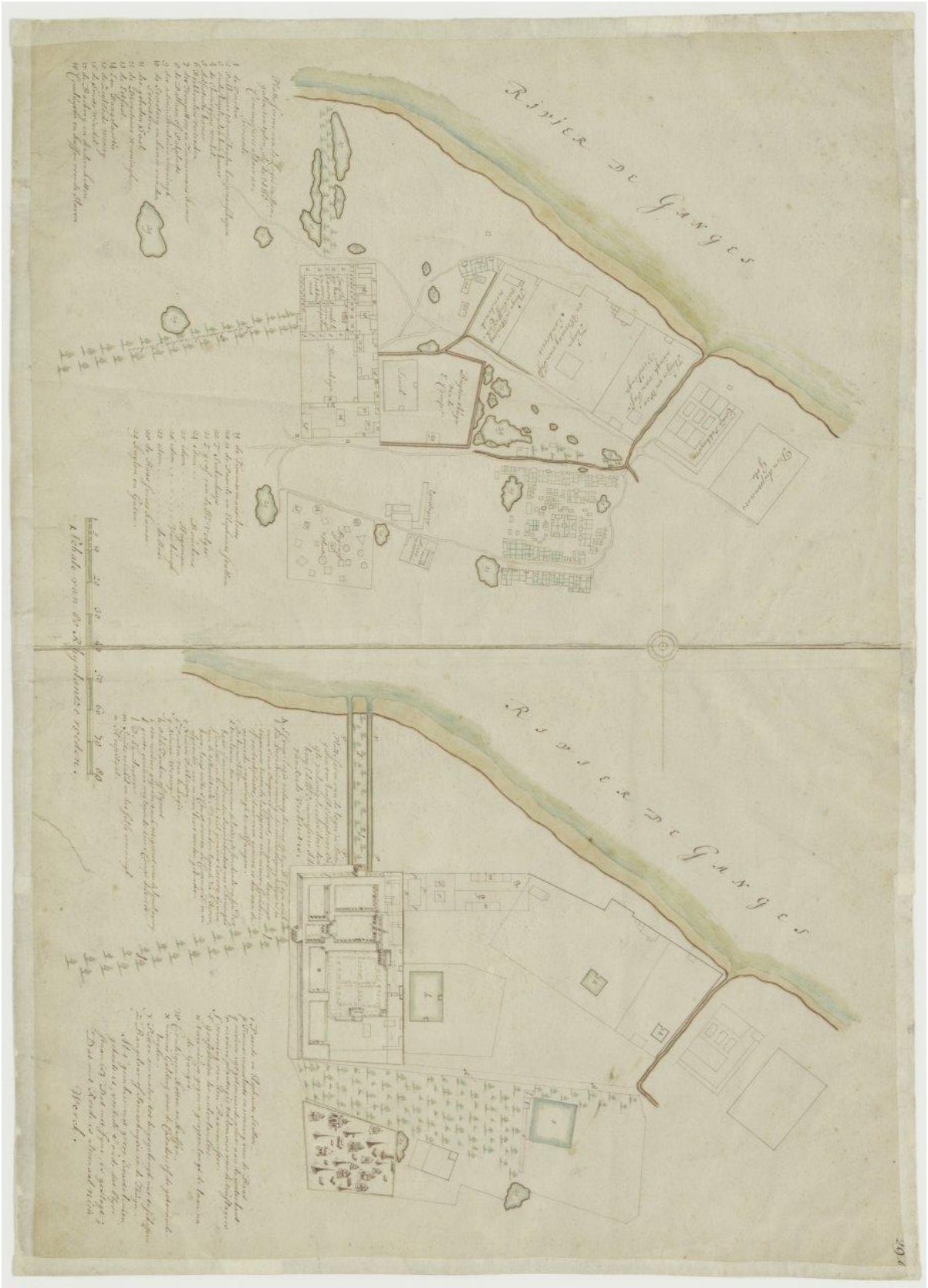

Fig 19(A): Layout of the plans made for improving the lodge in Bengal (Hooghly) by Van Reede during his tenure as the commissioner-general, 17th century. Reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access no. 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1101.

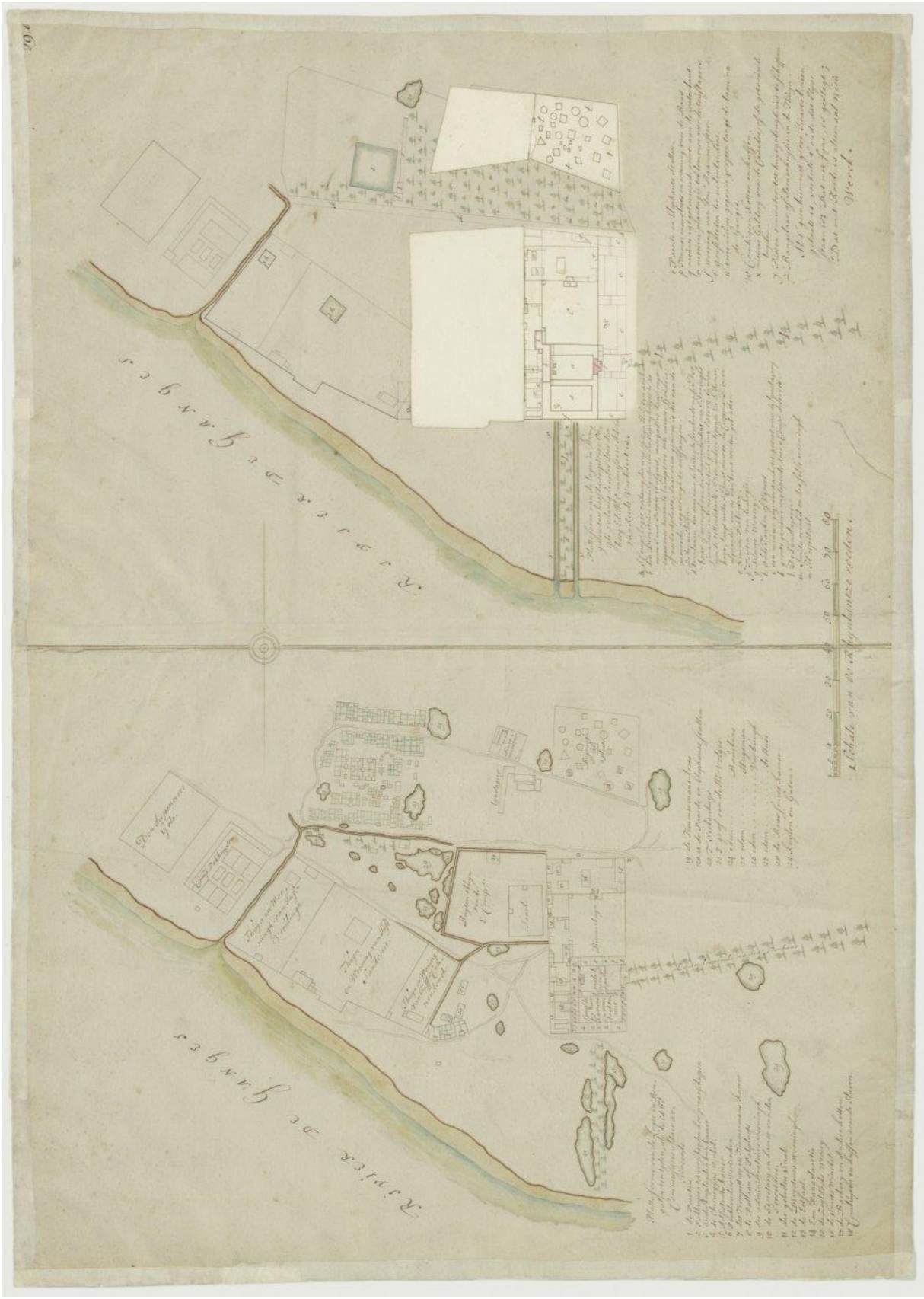

Fig 19(B): Layout of the plans made for improving the lodge in Bengal (Hooghly) by Van Reede during his tenure as the commissioner-general, 17th century. NA, Kaarten Leupe, access nr. 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1101.

Company officials lived a life that was anything but that of a modest merchant. Van Reede repeatedly made this clear by reminding the officials of their function as VOC merchants –

> …therefore, we should always bear in mind that we are nothing more in these lands than the servants of the Company and have no other quality apart from being merchants. Although our lords and masters are owners of their own kingdoms, and it is in this capacity that the governor general and the Council exercise their kingly authority and power here, it is not relevant to us in Bengal, for though the power and majesty of our lords and masters that brings upon us, the servants of the honourable Company, an ornament of honour and dignity to decorate ourselves, it should not become an instrument with which qualities/positions that are not suited to us can be gained. Considering this, we should not conduct our affairs here like that of princes and kings.[73]

The warning to not behave like 'princes and kings' in Bengal showed how this was actually the lifestyle that the Company officials led there. Moreover, while stating that commerce was necessary and so was contact with the brokers, but Van Reede warned against informal contacts that were made for the illegal trade of the Company officials. He wrote –

> …my zeal in discovering and investigating into the fraud and forbidden private trade (of the VOC in Bengal) has revealed three practices by which the wicked and the disloyal (Company servants) secure themselves, from not being convincingly punished by law…the first practice revolves around their use of the help of none other than the very moors and heathens, with whom the Company has to trade in this land, and through whom all the trade, both good as well as bad, is conducted. The words spoken and written by such men against Christians are as per the laws of our land not trustworthy...[74]

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[73] '*…derhalven moeten wij altijd in gedagten houden wij in dese landen niet anders zijn dan dienaren van de generale Comp; geen andere qualiteijt hebbende in deese landen dan coopluijden, want schoon onse heeren en meesters eijgenaren en heeren zijn over coningrijken, en in den persoon van den gouverneur generaal en raaden van India een koninglijke magt ende authoriteijt oeffenen, zoo en is zulx niet relative tot ons alhier in Bengale, want schoon de maght en hoogheijt van onse heeren en meesters aan ons haar Ed hoog agtd. dienaren toebrengt een ornament van eere en agtingh om ons te vercieren zo en is zulx egter geen instrument voor ons daar mede te werken, als tot ons in die qualiteijt niet behorende: 't welk zoo wij wel considereren wij ons zaken alhier niet als coningen en princen zullen willen hebben aangemerkt…*'
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

[74] '*Mijn sijn in het ontdekken en naervorsschen van frauden en particulieren verboden handel voorgekomen drie paractijquen, waarmede de quade en ontrouwe haar selven secureren, om niet te konnen overtuijgt en naereghten gestrafdt worden…het eerste is; sij tot hulpe gebruijken geen andere dan moren en heijdenen, met wie de Comp in dese landen handelen moet, en door welke de*

In another place, he commented about the Company being cheated by the local merchants often owing to the availability of an enormous variety of textiles and their different prices which the Company administrators could not have had possibly known in its entirety.[75] He tried to encourage the *Heeren XVII* to gain greater control over them, and thereby drag them within the purview of the VOC administration. Such intentions are clearly revealed in these lines –

> …the entire charter has been rendered entirely fruitless in these parts … because all the orders and placards of the state have no force, as one cannot punish the guilty and the transgressors who cannot be punished, the ones with whom and by whom, they (the Company officials) conduct not only illegal trade but also commit fraud and theft, against the Company.[76]

This need to control the brokers and other locals was accompanied by a message about how the general corruption of the land and its inhabitants was not to be an example for the Company officials who were to resist the foulness by performing their duties of serving their 'lords and masters'. Van Reede wrote –

> …but if we (the VOC servants) still follow the bad manners and customs of the local inhabitants, we would then burden conscience, and make ourselves incapable of many things, and that would be the cause not only of contempt but also that of failing to execute our duties properly of serving our lords and masters.[77]

The Company official in Bengal was therefore instructed to work as a merchant whose duty was to earn profits for the *Heeren XVII* and not behave like the locals and the Mughal administrators. However, despite this strong commercial rhetoric of the committee, its proposals and measures,

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goede en quade negotie gedreven wordt, sodaniger luijden woorden en schriften sijn tegen Christenen nae de wetten onser landen niet geloofbaar,…'.
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede: f. 58rv.

75 NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and Regulations: folios not numbered.

76 '*…het geheele octroij in dien delen, …want alle de ordres en placcaten van den staat sijn van geen kragt, soo men de schuldige en overtreders derselve niet en kan straffen, welke niet konnen gestraft worden, soo de genen met wie, en door wie sij niet alleen den verboden handel, maer ook frauden en diverijen uijtvoeren, tegen haar, …*'.
NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 60rv.

77 '*…dog soo wij d'inlanders, gelijk der zelver quade zeden en gebreeken, navolgen wij beladen ons gemoed, maken ons tot veele dingen onbequaam, en zijn oorsaak niet alleen van veragting maar dat wij den dienst voor onse heeren en meesters niet nabehoren konnen uijtvoeren.*'
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

in fact, led to the indirect strengthening of the Company officials' administrative status in Bengal. The proposal of building strong walls for the factory at Hooghly to improve trade encouraged the attempts of the Company officials to maintain their informal elite status while simultaneously being agreeable to the *Heeren XVII*. The instruction to have more control over brokers worked in favour of the Company officials who were trying to assert their jurisdiction in a greater measure over the locals. Thus, in practice, the measures of the Van Reede committee in Bengal did not drastically curtail or disturb the Company's informal administrative status there. But it did enhance a standard stereotype of Mughal Bengal and its inhabitants which apparently had a corrupt influence on the Company officials and hampered their intention of trading in peace. It also tried to portray the VOC administration as ideally being interested in nothing more than commerce abroad, which was to be preserved through the Company's monopoly.

This rhetoric of commerce was strongly present in the *Heeren XVII's* redress committee and was reiterated by Van Reede in his regulations for the VOC director and council in Bengal. Van Reede was influenced by the prominent administrators and VOC directors of his time such as Hudde, Huydecoper, Van Beuningen and others who formed a group of men with specific ideological inclinations and were imbued with the idea of reform. Van Reede had begun his career quite early as a military cadet and was interested in building up his military skills under the patronage of Rijkloff van Goens in the VOC. However, after his conflict with Van Goens and his return to the Republic, he got back in touch with his old friend, Saint Martin who was already acquainted with the Huydecoper and his circle of friends (since Van Reede's and Saint Martin's common friend, Joan Bax was one of Huydecoper's nephews). By then, Van Reede was known for his botanical work, the *Hortus Malabaricus*, of which the first volume was dedicated to one of his patrons and allies, Joan Maetsuyker (an opponent of Van Goens).[78] The fact that Van Reede was getting closer to the group of Huydecoper can be deduced from the journal records of

[78] Van Reede dedicated Vol. I of his *Hortus Malabaricus* to Johannes Maetsuyker, the governor-general of the VOC in Batavia. See, Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein*, 100.

Huydecoper which showed that Van Reede visited the Huydekoper residence frequently with Saint Martin in the years before his appointment as the commissioner. It was during these times that Van Reede's interest in Huydecoper's group of (probably Cartesian) friends was rekindled. Another coincidence emphasised this point further. Descartes had a daughter by his female servant and he adopted the daughter as his niece, naming her Francine.[79] Van Reede, too, had adopted a daughter by the name of Francina, who was possibly born of a Portuguese/Hispanic mother and was recognized as his sole heir during the last years of his stay in Malabar.[80] However to return to the subject of reforming commerce, the rhetoric of the 'wise merchant' which was upheld during the Republican government of the De Witts (also a group of Cartesians) lingered on in the Dutch political space even after the restoration of the office of the *stadhouder*. These ideas were carried forward by Hudde and his allies and were implemented in the resolutions of the *Heeren XVII* that aimed towards creating a more corporate character of the Company abroad. What Van Reede was doing in sketching a commercial guideline can be comprehended in this context, especially as a response to the banter about immorality and corruption of the Company officials in Bengal.

Van Reede and his committee's reports tarnished the image of a *corrupting* Mughal Bengal to portray an *incorrupt* image of the Company officials. Moreover, it revealed the way corruption became the major tool of the *Heeren XVII* for achieving their political and administrative goals. As shown in the previous chapters, the *Heeren XVII's* plans of reform and redress in the Company was sparked by the rising socio-political tensions concerning corruption in Dutch society at that time. Van Reede, at a crucial juncture of these political developments, helped his allies in the Republic to blur the stigma of overseas corruption, by providing a reason for the same.[81] He built an ideal of a dutiful corporate official, and tried to portray the image of an

[79] Ariew et al., *Historical Dictionary of Descartes*, 8.
[80] Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 87–92.
[81] The concern about corrupted Company servants returning to the Republic and living a lavish life is expressed in the reports written by Van Reede.

undaunted Company official adhering to his administrative ethics, in the face of numerous challenges encountered abroad. In reality, this did little to diminish the acts of violation of the Company rules (namely, illegal trade etc.) among the officials. In fact, by the eighteenth century, the VOC in Bengal came under the control of a few director-families such as Van Dishoeck, Huysman, Pelgrom, Sadelijn and Sichterman who built their network of illegal riches and led pompous lifestyles as *nabobs*.[82]

The Van Reede committee was not a success when it came to fulfilling its proclaimed goals. It ended up being a personal tool for political rivalries, with Van Reede using corruption allegations to align factions between the *Heeren XVII* in Republic (Amsterdam) and in Asia (Bengal as shown here and elsewhere in India). There is no doubting the presence of serious ideological motivations in launching the redress project of the 1680s that led to the formation of this committee. But such ideologies were not freed from personal and political motivations driven by factional bickering among the Company administrators. The reforms of the committee also did not amount to any revolutionary change within the VOC. It simply kept the practices in the overseas factories intact and resulted only in minor personnel modifications in the areas Van Reede visited. But notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the committee was important for having made substantial contributions to the ongoing changes in the VOC. It laid the ground for several major debates and policies of the Company in the eighteenth century. Some of these debates concerned the question of monopoly of the VOC and the limits of its permissible private trade in the Indian Ocean. Besides, the committee's emphasis on the commercial rhetoric proved how the VOC as 'a Janus-faced hybrid institution straddling the divide between merchant and sovereign' remained divided on the issue of 'whether to use mercantile or military means' throughout the greater part of the seventeenth century and beyond.[83]

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 37r.

[82] Piet Emmer en Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2012), 387-90.

[83] Vink, *Encounters*, 119.

Van Reede and his committee also contributed towards creating a moral higher ground for themselves and their allies in the VOC administration. The committee, moreover, brought the focus of the Company in the Republic on the behaviour of its administrators in the overseas territories and the corruption there. In practice, corruption allegations and its reforms eventually came to play a substantial role in – (a) establishing a connected factional link between the political space in the Republic – the Company in the Republic – the Company in Bengal – and the Mughal administrative world and (b) creating degrading moral impressions of the landscape of Bengal, its people and its governance by the Mughal *mansabdars* there, in order to justify corruption among the Company servants abroad. On a factional level, it showed how administrators functioned through personal and informal networks under an official façade. On the level of creating a narrative on corruption about Bengal, it brought this region to the focus of overseas corruption of the VOC. Even though Van Reede's written reports remained confined to the official circles, similar ideas were echoed in the popular books and images circulated in these and later years. A steady discourse on the vices of Bengal helped in stretching the existing perception of VOC corruption to new levels, explaining the emergence of wealthy Company officials in Bengal. It also culminated in the introduction of the oath of corruption as suggested by Van Reede in his reports to the *Hoge Regering*, which has been mentioned at the beginning of the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter connects the developments that were discussed in the earlier chapters to show how Mughal Bengal became a part of the core perception of the VOC's overseas corruption in the late seventeenth century. This eventually led to the creation of an oath for all the Company servants that they would not take part in corrupt practices. Against the changes in the Republic revolving around the political situation, the financial tensions and the need to preserve a credible image of the VOC for its investors, the Van Reede committee was appointed by the *Heeren XVII*

in 1684. Its members arrived in Mughal Bengal (and other places in India) with special instructions from the *Heeren XVII* to investigate more thoroughly all the Company's factories in this region, besides Ceylon, Malabar, Coromandel and Surat. Van Reede and his committee's findings showed how Bengal as a place with fluid contacts and several personal dynamics was hard for the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering* to comprehend and control. The committee's attempts to construct charges against Pit and Schagen uncovered these uncontrollable dynamics even further. But there were other important factors as well, namely factional politics in the overseas administration of the Company that were exposed through the committee's reports and investigation. Both the cases of the committee in Bengal that are discussed here show how – (a) corruption allegations came to be used to align factions between the VOC in the Republic and in Asia, (b) and factional infighting within both the Company and Mughal administrators as well as the personal deals with local brokers in Bengal which added to the complexity of the problem of corruption. Van Reede's reports also showed instances of informal arrangements and relations with Mughal administrators as well as incidents of conflict with them. These fluid VOC-Mughal administrative interactions as well as informal contact with the locals were represented on paper by Van Reede and the other members in his committee in a more flattened and stereotypical manner. The Mughal administrators in Bengal, according to the reports of the committee, were corrupt and were affected by the many depravities offered by the region and its climate. On the informal side, this probably changed little. Moreover, it showed that the Company administrators in Bengal were engaged in activities that were geared towards fulfilling their personal ambitions, beyond the restrictions of the *Heeren XVII*. But on the formal side, it led to the emergence of a strong rhetoric of mercantile integrity within the Company that went on to shape the standard of the Company officials' administrative behaviour. Bengal, in this sense, broadened the perception of VOC corruption to indicate overseas immoralities, that accounted for the corrupt ways of the Company officials who lived and served there. The echoes of this were heard in the

condemnable, extravagant *nabob* lifestyles of VOC officials living lavishly in this region in the subsequent century.

Conclusion: Studying the VOC through its Corruption

The subject of corruption has never ceased from appearing in the headlines of newspapers. What is striking, however, is its growing use in the recent years as a political agenda in almost every part of the world.[1] It is possible today to discuss high-level corruption in the open (albeit with its limits), thanks to social media and the political presence of the citizens. But it leads us to wonder what the situation had been in the past, in the seventeenth century for example when 'modernity' had not yet been manufactured. With vague boundaries between politics and commerce and the absence of an all-pervading social media, how did corruption accusations work? When did corruption began being used as a political agenda in the public domain to sustain or destroy administrators? It is imperative to raise these questions and go back a few centuries to see how corruption allegations started becoming more frequently used to reach our current stage. In this dissertation, I have tried to look into these issues in order to understand the importance of corruption allegations in the 'early-modern' times. The VOC, as a global organisation, encompassed both politics and commerce and operated in the Dutch Republic as well as Asia.

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[1] Associated Press in Riyadh, "Saudi Arabia: 201 people held in $100bn corruption inquiry," *The Guardian*, 9 November, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/09/saudi-arabia-201-people-held-in-100bn-corruption-inquiry, accessed August 9, 2018; Associated Press and Reuters, "Tens of thousands protest against corruption in Romania," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/21/tens-of-thousands-protest-against-corruption-in-romania,; Dom Philips, "Brazil braces for corruption appeal that could make or break ex-president Lula," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/23/brazil-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-corruption-appeal-verdict-election, accessed 12 June, 2018; Lily Kuo, "China sentences former political rising star to life in prison for corruption," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/china-sentences-former-political-rising-star-to-life-in-prison-for-corruption, accessed 12 June, 2018; Jason Burke, "Kenyan authorities detain 50 in anti-corruption drive," *The Guardian*, May 28, 2018. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/28/kenya-authorities-detain-50-anti-corruption-drive&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwiFuci8083bAhVSyqYKHaNiCycQFggFMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=007466294097402385199:m2ealvuxh1i&usg=AOvVaw3nIgqDjjoprY2hZD3m3VG8, accessed 12 June, 2018.

Research on its officials, therefore, seemed to be the most suitable option for having a holistic picture of 'early-modern' administrators.

The Company was active in the Dutch Republic at a time that the Republic was one of the leading powers in the world and possessed substantial monetary, military and cultural influence. The VOC administrators dealt with large amounts of wealth and power daily, not only within the Republic but also overseas where the Company had its bases. Problems of administrative mismanagement and reports of corruption under such circumstances were inevitable in the Company, which forms the area of my research interest in this dissertation. The VOC has been studied from various perspectives in the past; Markus Vink has summarised them in his book *Encounters on the Opposite Coast*.[2] He showed how the VOC could be studied as a Company split between following a military and a commercial approach with different factions vying for different places to colonise (Batavia for the mercantile-centric faction versus Ceylon for the imperialist-centric faction). Besides this, the VOC was also an organisation that was represented and understood differently by different groups in the Dutch Republic and overseas. There was, for instance, the Indian perception of the Company which varied according to the varied interactions of the VOC officials with different social groups there (such as the emperor, the local rulers, merchants, religious groups, scholars etc.). On the other hand, the Company also represented itself in different ways in the context of its various operations abroad in the Cape of Good Hope and in Asia. One of the predominant ways was through its theocratic vision (the works of Calvinist preachers) which made the Company officials the true upholders of the Reformed faith vis-à-vis the Indian and Catholic religions. Then there was the 'bottom-up' view of a common soldier and his representation of the Company through popular publications in the Republic. Vink pointed out another perspective – the 'outsider view' which was mostly the external representation of the Company by 'vicarious tourists', 'armchair travellers' and scholars in the Republic and in Europe. It is usually difficult to focus on all these representations and

[2] Vink, *Encounters*, 30-147.

layers of the VOC in a single dissertation but most of them surprisingly come to the surface when the Company's policies and debates on corruption are explored. I have therefore used this subject of administrative corruption in the VOC to study the Company in the Republic and in Bengal in the seventeenth century.

The question that I raised at the beginning of this dissertation is why corruption and its redress became an administrative concern in the VOC and why Mughal Bengal became central to this concern. Such a question is relevant in the context of the Van Reede Committee which was formed in 1684 to investigate the factories of India and Ceylon, especially those in Bengal. Hendrik Adriaan van Reede was appointed as the commissioner and was sent to these places along with Isaac Soolmans and Johannes Bacherus as the second and third members of the committee. It was on the basis of this committee's reports that a formal oath of corruption was introduced in the VOC in 1687. It indicated the extent to which corruption had become a pressing concern for the Company in the Republic and explained why Van Reede enjoyed such exclusive powers as the commissioner-general. But the office of the commissioner was conceived way earlier in 1626 meaning that discussions about corruption in the Company had already begun back then. This is enough reason as a historian to go back to the early years of the seventeenth century and start our story of corruption in the VOC from there. I have attempted to tell this story through the six chapters of this dissertation, by bearing the relevant temporal and spatial dimensions in mind – that is, the socio-political developments throughout the years of the seventeenth century and their differences in the settings of Amsterdam and Bengal. The story thus told captures the momentum towards the formation of the Van Reede committee and shows how the focus on corruption in the VOC increased with Bengal becoming central to such concerns. Several developments in both the socio-political space of the Dutch Republic and the administration of the Company (in the Republic and abroad) arguably led to this increased focus on corruption. But more importantly, the regional dynamics of Mughal Bengal also played a crucial role in adding new meaning to the perception of VOC corruption. I have thus concluded

that the interactions between the administration of the VOC, the Dutch Republic and Mughal Bengal were responsible for the growing concerns about Company corruption and the extra dimension of Bengal in it.

These interactions happened at different levels and proceeded simultaneously through multiple negotiations. For this reason, they remained largely overlapping within their given institutional confines. Firstly, there was the primary connection between the VOC directors (including the *Heeren XVII*) and the political administrators in the city councils of the Dutch Republic. This was further extended to a secondary level of administrative connections between the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia through the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië*. Of course, the *Hoge Regering* needed to connect itself with all other subsidiary administrative bodies of the Company, spread across the Indian Ocean. This link between the *Hoge Regering* and other VOC factories formed the third level of interactions which further spiralled back to the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic and the regent-administrators in the Dutch city councils. But the VOC also had to deal with the political administrators of different areas overseas where they had their bases. This meant that in Bengal, the Company officials had to deal with the Mughal *mansabdars* and the local *zamindars* there who were, in turn, connected to the Mughal emperor at the centre in the Delhi-Agra region. This level of connection – the VOC-Mughal regional interactions in Bengal formed the fourth and one of the most elusive links within the Company's administrative setting. At this level of interaction, the Company's men-on-the-spot were formally accountable to their higher authorities in Batavia and the Republic. But there was no compulsion to reveal their informal deals made with the Mughal administrators in Bengal. Such interactions, therefore, remained opaque to the rest of the Company. This explains why the fourth level of interaction between the Mughal and the VOC officials in Bengal was elusive and beyond the frequent scrutiny of the *Hoge Regering* or the *Heeren XVII*. Unlike the other level of interactions, such regional interactions remained partially beyond the formal cadre of the VOC.

Another entirely informal level of interactions which connected the Company administrators on a personal level was rendered possible through factionalism. Factions fostered informal interactions among the Company administrators as allies or opponents while being camouflaged under an institutional façade. Formed by patronages through familial and friendship bonds, such forces constituted the core of Dutch administration in the seventeenth century. All appointments and distribution of offices were made on the basis of factional preferences in the political institutions. Officials who served both in these political institutions and the VOC at the same time or were connected by friends and family, brought in their factional links from the political space of the Republic into the Company administration. The political institutions of the Republic thus became connected to the *Heeren XVII* in this way through factions. Although fully functional in practice, factionalism in the Company was not officially permitted and was condemned in the formal oaths of the administrators. Factional interactions as such remained an informal part of the VOC administration. All of these multiple interactions that the Company administrators had at different levels represented varied interests – personal and institutional. On one hand, there were the formal interactions between the *vroedschap*, the VOC chambers in the Republic, the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia and other subordinate factories overseas. They were tied to institutional goals prescribed by the VOC directors. On the other hand, there were the informal interactions among different Company officials as factions and their elusive links with the political actors of different regions overseas (in our case Mughal Bengal). These were related to personal goals and ambitions of the Company officials. This complex of interactions led to a precarious balance of the formal and the informal in the administration of the VOC. The official reports of the Company did not make this complex explicit. But the situation of personal interests remaining embedded in the institutional order evoked occasional tensions which led to disruptions in the Company administration. Such disruptions exposed incidents of corruption which in turn revealed the informal side of the Company, that thrived under its formal façade. This is especially valid for Bengal where such interactions are otherwise difficult to capture if not

exposed in the context of incidents of corruption charges and legal trials. Studying the VOC through its corruption thus helps in revealing this formal-informal balance by going into the hidden depths of the archives and accessing information that usually lay beyond the controlled discourse of the Company.

But given the ambiguity and vast scope of the term 'corruption', defining it in its early-modern context is a challenging task. The introductory chapter undertakes this task by adopting an anthropological approach which acknowledges the fact that different political systems shape perceptions of corruption in different ways. Based on the two parameters of (a) difference in political structures and (b) the ideas of morality as represented through formal rules, corruption can be percieved as '(dis)loyalty' of the administrators to their authority and its rules with specific uses of its allegations in a given seventeenth-century political structure. Such a definition accommodates the varieties in systems of governance and studies the way they affect the understanding of corruption. The term 'administrative corruption' is used in order to accommodate all seventeenth-century peculiarities, mostly having to do with vague boundaries between political, economic, religious and other sectors of governance. On the basis of this definition and terminology, the rest of the chapters study the perception of corruption in the VOC, in the background of corruption as it was understood in the Dutch Republic and in Mughal Bengal.

By examining corruption in the Dutch political space for understanding its effect in the VOC administration, it is seen how corruption in the Dutch Republic became a growing administrative concern in the seventeenth century. The Republic in these years saw the production of a number of new political theories which received a spur because of the printing machinery there. It made the production and circulation of political ideas easier and faster. Inspired by a group of political theorists, some of whom were also prominent regents, existing administrative practices came to be questioned and experimented upon in the Republic's political forum. Concern about administrative behaviour and corruption rode on this wave of political

experimentation and gradually became the focus from the latter half of the seventeenth century. What was the perception of corruption in the Dutch Republic and what were the uses of corruption allegations? The answer can be sought by assessing the two parameters laid out for defining corruption – the formal laws and the political system. The sovereignty of the Dutch Republic was represented in the States-General that shared its sovereign authority with the constituent provinces (which were further divided into cities). All administrators were consequently expected to display 'loyalty' to their respective provinces and city councils as repositories of this shared sovereignty. Added to this were the formal rules contained in the oaths of the officials which forbade the use of bribery and undue favouritism while executing administrative duties and making appointments. Being institutional laws, these prohibitions were to be adhered to by the Dutch officials. Violation of these rules was perceived as 'disloyalty' towards the political institutions that advocated them (namely the States-General composed of the provinces and city councils) and came to be seen as corruption in the Dutch administrative space.

While there was a focus on corruption as defined above on the lines of favouritism and bribery, the Dutch political system in practice revolved around factionalism. This demanded personal loyalty of the administrators to their political allies and patrons which was as important as loyalty to cities and provinces in the Dutch administrative world. While being condemned on paper as corruption, favouritism in the form of factionalism nevertheless dominated the Dutch political system. Although this was not directly attacked as a corrupt administrative practice every day, Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff argued that it did come to be alleged as corruption on certain occasions when norms of seniority, rotation etc. were transgressed. Using Price's argument, I have demonstrated here that there were other instances when such acts came to be accused under the label of corruption allegations. The paradox of labelling factionalism as 'corrupt' in the formal space while practising it in the informal space left open the opportunity for rival factions to use it against each other. Charges of nepotism thus were often used by administrators to

tarnish the image of their factional opponents. Corruption allegations, as such, were also triggered by factional infighting which made it a major political tool in the Dutch administrative world. Its usefulness was enforced by the presence of the 'public' (citizens with political rights) in the political space. Relevant pamphlets, petitions and books were addressed to this 'public' and to their need to be informed of all the corruption in the government. Of course, such pamphleteering was generously sprinkled with the language of specific political ideas of the day, and was interwoven with discussions of administrative corruption and reforms. Such repeated discussions, along with the political presence of the 'public' increased the focus on corruption and catalysed its political use in the Republic.

It was in this air that the VOC too, lived and breathed, at least in the Republic. The VOC, besides struggling with its own financial problems, was affected by the ongoing socio-political developments in the Republic. Moreover, the administration of the Company in the Republic remained deeply connected to the factional changes in the political institutions. The changing composition of the *vroedschap* of Amsterdam, for instance, was reflected in the composition of the *Heeren XVII* and the Amsterdam chamber of the VOC throughout the seventeenth century. This was further linked to the governor-general in Batavia who it seemed was often favourably inclined to the dominant faction in the *Heeren XVII*. With pertinent examples, I have shown this proximity between the political administrators in the Republic, the Company in the Republic and the Company in Batavia. Of course, when *burgemeesters* of Amsterdam were also members of the *Heeren XVII*, their political accountability was combined with their financial responsibility to the Company's shareholders. This meant that they had an image to save as political power-holders and a credibility to preserve as Company directors in the Republic. With the ongoing discussions on corruption, such social-*cum*-financial accountabilities became even more pronounced for the administrators in the Republic.

Corruption in the VOC, as was perceived by these administrators, came to be described mainly as the violation of the Company's monopoly. This was applied in combination with the

general prohibition against the use of bribery and favouritism in making appointments and executing duties. Corruption in the Company was, thus, perceived as violation of the loyalty to the *Heeren XVII* and the 'fatherland' that formed the underlying principal of the administrative behaviour of the Company officials. In the Republic, direct factional links between the *vroedschap* and the *Heeren XVII* ensured that politically there was an alignment of interests and ideas. Instances of corruption allegations against VOC officials in the Republic were, therefore, far fewer than overseas. In Batavia, excepting the governor-general, it was hard to align all political factions in the factories abroad with the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic. Only corruption allegations provided the opportunity to the *Heeren XVII* to disturb the factions abroad and realign them according to their preferences. It was in the Company's overseas factories that corruption in its strictest sense – that is, violation of monopoly and disloyalty to the 'fatherland' through illegal trade and other malpractices could happen. The *Heeren XVII* struggling with its financial and political responsibility to its investors and citizens in the Republic therefore diverted their attention to this form of overseas corruption among its officials.

The way the *Heeren XVII* did this was to send commissioners for investigating the VOC factories and the officials in Asia. From 1626 onwards, confronted by the heat of growing debates about corruption in the Republic and the struggle of the VOC to maintain its financial credibility, the *Heeren XVII* set up the office of the commissioner to investigate the Company's activities overseas. He was to be assisted by a committee that could accuse officials of corruption and displace them from their positions, if proven guilty. This mechanism made it possible to disturb the overseas network of factional safety and try to align it to the *Heeren XVII's* preference. Throughout the subsequent years therefore, despite attempts to challenge the monopoly of the Company, the *Heeren XVII* sternly held on to it. It showed how the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic that was so closely attached to the Dutch state (along with its inherent factionalism) was reluctant to let go of their most important means of overseas control – namely, the Company's monopoly. In the process, attention came to be focussed on the corruption of the Company

officials overseas. All these factors – the political situation in the Republic, the financial pressures within the Company, the ideological drive of a clique of philosophers and the factional strife together built up the momentum towards the events of 1684. After frequent deliberations and elaborate planning, Van Reede came to be appointed as the commissioner-general for investigating the Company's factories in India, and in Bengal in particular.

It brings us to the other side of our story – why Bengal? What was happening in Bengal around 1684 to make it the primary concern of the Company's corruption abroad? This question is answered through the study of the regional dynamics in Mughal Bengal in order to understand its effect on the presence of the VOC officials there. Bengal as a Mughal *subah* had earned the notoriety of being a corrupt area in the royal chronicles and was as much problematic for the Mughal emperors as it was for the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering*. To understand why Bengal was considered corrupt, one needs to understand what corruption meant in the Mughal administrative world. Although perceived on the similar parameters of formal laws and the sovereignty in its governing system, corruption in the Mughal world was shaped in a different fashion than the Dutch Republic. Sovereign authority here rested in the single unit of the emperor unlike the Republic where it was shared by the provinces. All Mughal administrators were therefore required to display their love and loyalty to the emperor and his laws. The emperor however ruled his vast empire with the help of numerous *mansabdars* connected to him through the *mansabdari* system. This was the formal edifice of the informal factionalism which constituted the core of Mughal administration but was never acknowledged in the royal chronicles. To keep this large number of *mansabdars* and their factions in distant provinces under control, the Mughal emperors needed a pervading administrative ethos. It was more so in regions like Bengal which formed a volatile geo-political frontier of the empire with several active political forces as the local *zamindars*. These *zamindars* though, not formally allowed to participate in the vast Mughal administrative apparatus, were informally incorporated by the *mansabdars* in their daily administration of Bengal. The informal presence of these regional forces

in the formal Mughal machinery meant that the local political scenario remained highly fluid. Central control, therefore, needed to be continuously creative and flexible in order to sustain itself in this area. It was in order to control the Mughal officials in such regions with fluid relations that an administrative ethos was created and imposed. This ethos was shaped by the *munshis* (Mughal administrators) at higher levels in the court and it was expected that all *munshis* at all levels, including the emperor himself, were to adhere to this ethos. It was an impersonal code of conduct that advocated aloofness from wealth and non-favouritism while demanding personal loyalty to the sovereign and his laws. Corruption in this administrative system thus came to be perceived as violation of the *munshi* code of conduct which was disloyalty to the emperor through 'rebellion', acts of non-payment of revenue, bribery and undue favouritism. The fluid political space of Bengal with the informal *mansabdar-zamindar* nexus was always prone to instability and disruptions. As long as an equilibrium existed in this nexus, Bengal remained under the control of the Mughal administration. But on occasions of this alliance not working, the *zamindars* were likely to provide resistance to the Mughal administrators in Bengal. On the other hand, a stable *mansabdar-zamindar* alliance could also become powerful and pose a formidable threat to the Mughal throne. Both these cases created disruptions in the region and triggered allegations of 'rebellion' or corrupt thoughts and actions in the Mughal administrative world. It contributed to Bengal's notoriety of being disloyal to the Mughal emperors and this idea of Bengal as corrupt made its way steadily into the Mughal chronicles.

But the abundant resources of this region in the seventeenth century and its vibrant commercial connections with the rest of the world made it, despite its challenges, a lucrative province. This affluence coupled with its elusiveness were already reasons for anxiety for the *Heeren XVII*; the existing non-Dutch narratives about Bengal aggravated such anxieties even more. It is demonstrated here that it is through this way that these narratives and other VOC-Mughal administrative interactions influenced the perception of VOC corruption. From the 1670s with the increasing importance of this region for textiles in the Company's Europe-Asiatic

trade, accusations of corruption among the Company officials there began to be reported more. This had to do with the nature of the Company's presence in the fluid political space of Bengal which produced an informal encounter in practice that was different from the formal encounter in the Company's papers. In Bengal, the VOC officials held an administrative status as semi-*zamindars/ijaradars* within the Mughal governing machinery. It led to the pursuit of luxuries and personal ambitions by the Company officials there through forging links with local brokers and provincial Mughal *mansabdars*. The VOC officials in Bengal thus, as I have argued here, gained more leverage in the fluid political space of the region than their higher authorities desired. The *Heeren XVII's* efforts to keep a tight control over them was comprehensible in light of the *Estado's* earlier experience in Bengal, where the Portuguese officials detached themselves from the directives issued by the authorities in Goa and built a 'shadow empire' in and around the Sandwip islands. The *Heeren XVII* did not want the same to happen to the Dutch officials. But the regional dynamics of Bengal facilitated informal interactions between the Company and the Mughal officials which the *Heeren XVII* could not control; nor did they understand the nature of the Company officials' administrative presence there as semi-*zamindars/ijaradars*, interacting with the local brokers and villagers. This 'lived' encounter remained beyond the *Heeren XVII's* grasp which added to their anxieties and preoccupation with the region. Consequently, pamphlets in the Republic started complaining about the activities of the Company officials there. The fluidity and lack of transparency about the Company's position in Bengal and the elusiveness of their informal dealings with the Mughal *mansabdars* and the locals began shaping the formal discourse about the Company in Bengal towards a certain direction.

From quite early on in the seventeenth century, a rising market in the Dutch Republic for literary productions on Asia emerged. The pamphlets and books that were circulated in these years had a particular way of depicting the region of Bengal. Publications made both by outsiders as well as VOC employees tended to portray Bengal as a prosperous but perilous region where lawlessness was to be found in abundance. Most of this were narratives incorporated from

Portuguese texts and other existing European and Islamic accounts. Added to this, were the reports of the Company officials themselves about the corrupt Mughal administrators in this region. While being part of the Mughal administration informally, the Company officials also had to defend their position and factional connections to the *Heeren XVII*. They, therefore, chose to justify their opulent lifestyles and dealings with local potentates and Mughal nobles as necessary to survive the naturally corrupt setting in which they were operating. Bengal gradually acquired the stereotypical image of an unruly wealthy province with corrupt Mughal rule in the Company's papers. The encounter of the VOC officials with Mughal Bengal in theory created a formal hierarchy of a superior Dutch administrative ethos vis-à-vis the Mughal administrative world, which was distinctly different from the 'lived' encounter in practice. As much as it increased the focus on overseas corruption, it also resulted in the region of Bengal being connected to the perceptions of corruption in the VOC.

The year of 1684 when the Van Reede committee was sent to India with specific instructions to investigate Bengal was a result of the momentum set by all these ongoing developments. Studying the process behind the committee's formation, composition and the appointment of Van Reede as the commissioner reveals how it went. The political situation after 1672 saw the force of Valckenier and his faction in the States of Holland as well as in the Company's administration in the Republic. There was a need to prove to the citizens that the new administrators were capable of running the governance, both at home and abroad across the oceans and high seas. By then the VOC have become more than just a commercial Company and its expansion was accompanied by increasing profits. Back home in the Republic, the investors wanted their share of dividend at a time that money was deficit owing to bonds issued by the *Heeren XVII* to the state during 1672. Thus, the VOC administrators faced both political and financial pressure in these years in the Republic. Not surprisingly therefore, the dominant rhetoric that the VOC propagated in these years was that of corporate integrity and economic redress. The Company became more inclined towards a commercial image rather than a military

approach overseas. In the backdrop of criticism on how the Company officials were living princely and lavish lifestyles abroad, the VOC administration reacted by re-emphasising on its monopoly and its attempts to prevent corruption overseas. The clique of directors with new political ideas initially revolving around Hudde and joined later by men such as Van Beuningen, Huydecoper and others from the 1680s began focussing more on the concept of redress within the Company. This political, financial and ideological drive increased the urgency of sending a committee and a commissioner overseas. From 1626, commissioners had been appointed by the *Hoge Regering*. But this time, Van Reede and his committee was appointed by the *Heeren XVII*. There were long deliberations about who was to be chosen as the commissioner and the final decision of Van Reede being chosen was a matter of deep factional motives. The group of directors behind the redress committee of the 1680s in the VOC, mainly Huydecoper were allied to Van Reede and supported him. Van Reede had openly criticised his former patron, Van Goens' plans for colonising Ceylon which Huydecoper, among others, was also not particularly impressed with. Sharing commong interests and ideas, Van Reede became close to the dominant Huydecoper faction in the Republic. Thus, besides the political, economic and ideological factors, factionalism too played a massive role in the formation of the committee and the choice of Van Reede as the commissioner. From the 1660s, a number of commissioners were sent to Bengal in response to the growing complaints about corruption in this region. The reports of these commissioners confirmed such complaints provoking the *Heeren XVII* to take matters to notice. Moreover, the existing discourse about this region, written by men from both within and outside the Company increased the urgency of instructing the committee to specially investigate the factories of Bengal, along with other places in India and Ceylon.

The committee's operations and Van Reede's impression about corruption in Bengal showed that he accused certain officials working there of corruption. The way he formed his cases by collecting evidences show the formal-informal balance in the Company administration. His investigations also revealed the contrast between the 'lived' encounter of the Company

officials in Bengal and the formal discourse in the committee's reports. Van Reede eventually accused and targetted officials who belonged to the Van Goens faction. He did this under the formal façade of the Company in the capacity of a commissioner trying to inspect factories in Asia. It showed how corruption was politically used to realign factions in the VOC. Van Reede used many local brokers to assist him with his investigation and wrote about certain Mughal *mansabdars* who were more approachable than other Mughal officials. This showed the 'lived' experience of the VOC officials in Bengal where informal interactions were a regular part of their daily activities. Moreover, the contents of the allegations brought by Van Reede showed how certain Company officials in Bengal were used to appropriating elite lifestyles through illegal trading profits while asserting their influence on the local brokers and villagers. It revealed the personal ambitions of Company officials in Mughal Bengal as semi-*zamindars/ijaradars* which Van Reede failed to comprehend and convey to the *Heeren XVII* or the *Hoge Regering*. In a bid to impress upon its officials the Company's commercial rhetoric, Van Reede noted down instructions for the director and his council in Bengal reminding them to behave like merchants and not as princes or kings. In order to justify the Company officials' transgressions, he wrote a report about how the climate of Bengal and the corrupt ways of the 'Moors' had a bad influence on the Company administrators. Van Reede tapped in the existing discourse about Bengal and connected it to the problem of corruption. His rhetoric provided a corporate camouflage to the Company officials who otherwise held an informal administrative status in the Mughal political world of Bengal. Such an arrangement in fact made room for the *nabob* culture of the subsequent century to flourish in this region. The elusive regional dynamics of this place, thus, led to its notoriety of being a corruptible area in both the Mughal and the VOC discourse. But the Dutch East India Company elevated itself as having a superior administrative ethos by denigrating the Mughal administrators as a part of the local corrupted world of Bengal.

To conclude, this dissertation not only shows the political use of corruption allegations and its power in serving personal interests and in shaping stereotypical discourses, but also helps

the historian study the VOC in its overseas context. The Company, as this dissertation proves, was not a stable structure with a single, well-defined aim. It was filled with factional infighting and differences among its own administrators. The VOC was also unique in the way it had deep connections as a chartered Company with the Dutch state. Many directors in the *Heeren XVII* were simultaneously members of the city councils and the VOC represented the State's political and financial interests. The Company moreover functioned as an organisation that evolved gradually through different policies of expansion depending on the kind of regional authority it encountered in different places. As Arthur Weststeijn argued, expansion always remained a clear aim but as seen through this case study of Bengal, the ways to achieve it varied from one region to another. Most of the time it was a matter of negotiations but the degree of the negotiations too varied depending on the local factors. This roused tension between the *Heeren XVII* and the officials abroad trying to function along similar lines of set objectives. As much as the *Heeren XVII* would have liked to see it running in a unilineal direction, this was often not the case. Officials in different areas had their own informal channels to pursue power and personal profit. At the same time, they had to abide by the instructions and regulations of the *Heeren XVII*. In addition to this, there were occasional cliques of officials who were interested in different areas such as Batavia, Ceylon or Malabar and tried to promote their colonial interests in that region, under the façade of the monopoly of the Company. The VOC officials were not just expected to act according to the prescribed instructions of the *Hoge Regering* and the *Heeren XVII* but also produce a steady flow of information about everything. Such information catered to certain needs and pressure situations both in the Republic and abroad. Sometimes, they served as justifications for the actions of certain officials who otherwise did not comply to the VOC rules. At other times, they were used to form new administrative guidelines according to changed policies and decisions. Often, extracts from such official papers were published as pamphlets and books in the Republic in order to preserve the Company's image and give it a boost. The narratives of the Company found throughout the span of the seventeenth century depended on

who produced it and under what circumstances. They differed constantly and as discussed in this dissertation, took on an increasingly commercial turn in the final decades of the seventeenth century. Studying the VOC as a fixed organisation is thus less useful than seeing it as a prolonged process of experimentation and evolution where different goals came to be articulated by different administrators in different ways. As is reflected in this dissertation, the corporate image became the dominant policy and discourse of the Company in the 1680s. Corruption allegations, too, formed a vital part of both the Company's discourse and practice and revealed all the possible dimensions of studying the VOC. It revealed the administrative instability and factionalism, the formal and informal elements of the VOC-Mughal encounter and its association with Bengal that showed the importance of the regional dimension in studying the VOC in the seventeenth century.

Appendix 1
List of the *stadhouders* of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht
(as also of Overijssel and Gelderland) under the States-General

(Holland and Zeeland)

1. Willem van Oranje, prins van Oranje (1572-1584)
2. Maurits van Nassau, prins van Oranje (1585-1625)
3. Frederik Hendrik van Oranje, prins van Oranje (1625-1647)
4. Willem II van Orange, prins van Oranje (1647-1650)
5. No *stadhouder* (1650-1672)
6. Willem III van Oranje, king of England, Scotland and Ireland (1672-1702)
7. No *stadhouder* (1702-1747)
8. Willem IV van Oranje-Nassau, *erfstadhouder* (hereditary *stadhouder*) of the United Provinces of Netherlands (1747-51)
9. Willem IV van Oranje-Nassau, *erfstadhouder* (1751-1795)

   Regents
   Anna van Hannover (1751-1759)
   Lodewijk Ernst, hertog van Brunswijk-Wolfenbüttel (1759-1766)

(Utrecht)

1. Willem van Oranje, prins van Oranje (1577-1584)
2. Joost de Soete, heer van Villers (1584)
3. Adolf van Nieuwenaar, graaf van Meurs (1584-89)
4. Maurits van Nassau, prins van Oranje (1589-1625)
5. (the same *stadhouders* as that of Holland and Zeeland hereafter till 1795)

(Overijssel)

1. George van Lalaing, graaf van Rennenberg (1576-1580)
2. Willem van Oranje, prins van Oranje (1580-1584)
3. Adolf van Nieuwenaar, graaf van Meurs (1584-89)
4. Maurits van Nassau, prins van Oranje (1590-1625)
5. (the same *stadhouders* as that of Holland and Zeeland hereafter till 1795)

(Gelderland)

1. Adolf van Nieuwenwaar, graaf van Meurs (1583-89)
2. Maurits van Nassau, prins van Oranje (1590-1625)
3. (the same *stadhouders* as that of Holland and Zeeland hereafter till 1795)

Appendix 2

List of Mughal emperors in the Mughal Empire (1526-1540; 1555-1857)

1. Babur (1526-1530)
2. Humayun (1530-1540; 1555-56)
3. Akbar (1556-1605)
4. Jahangir (1605-1627)
5. Shahryar, declared himself as the ruler (1627-28)
6. Shah Jahan (1628-1658)
7. Aurangzeb (1658-1707)
8. Muhammad Azam Shah, as titular ruler (1707)
9. Bahadur Shah I (1707-1712)
10. Jahandar Shah (1712-1713)
11. Farrukhsiyar (1713-1719)
12. Rafi us-Darajat (1719)

    Shah Jahan II (1719)
13. Muhamamd Shah (1719-1748)
14. Ahmad Shah Bahadur (1748-1754)
15. Alamgir II (1754-1759)
16. Shah Jahan II, as titular ruler (1759-1760)
17. Shah Alam II (1760-1806)
18. Jahan Shah IV, as titular ruler (1788)
19. Akbar II (1806-1837)
20. Bahadur Shah II (1837-1857)

Appendix 3

List of Mughal *Subahdars* in the Subah Bengal

1. Munim Khan Khan-i Khanan (1574–75)
2. Hussain Quli Beg Khan Jahan I (1575-78)
3. Muzaffar Khan Turbati (1579-80)
4. Mirza Aziz Koka Khan-i Azam (1582-83)
5. Shahbaz Khan Kamboh (1583-85)
6. Sadiq Khan (1585-86)
7. Wazir Khan Tajik (1586-87)
8. Said Khan (1587-94)
9. Raja Man Singh I (1594-1606)
10. Qutb-ud-din Khan Koka (1606-07)
11. Jahangir Quli Beg (1607-08)
12. Sheikh Alauddin Chishti (1608-13)
13. Qasim Khan Chishti (1613-17)
14. Ibrahim Khan Fateh Jang (1617-22)
15. Mahabat Khan (1622-25)
16. Mirza Amanullah Khan Zaman II (1625)
17. Mukarram Khan (1625-27)
18. Fidai Khan (1627-28)
19. Qasim Khan Juvayni (1628-32)
20. Mir Muhammad Baqir Azam Khan (1632-35)
21. Mir Abdus Salam Islam Khan Mashhadi (1635-39)
22. Sultan Shah Shuja (1639-60)
23. Mir Jumla II (1660-63)

24. Mirza Abu Talib Shaista Khan I (1664-76)
25. Azam Khan Koka, Fidai Khan II (1676-77)
26. Sultan Muhammad Azam Shah Alijah (1678-79)
27. Mirza Abu Talib Shaista Khan I (1679-88)
28. Ibrahim Khan ibn Ali Mardan Khan (1688-97)
29. Sultan Azim al-Shan (1697-1712)

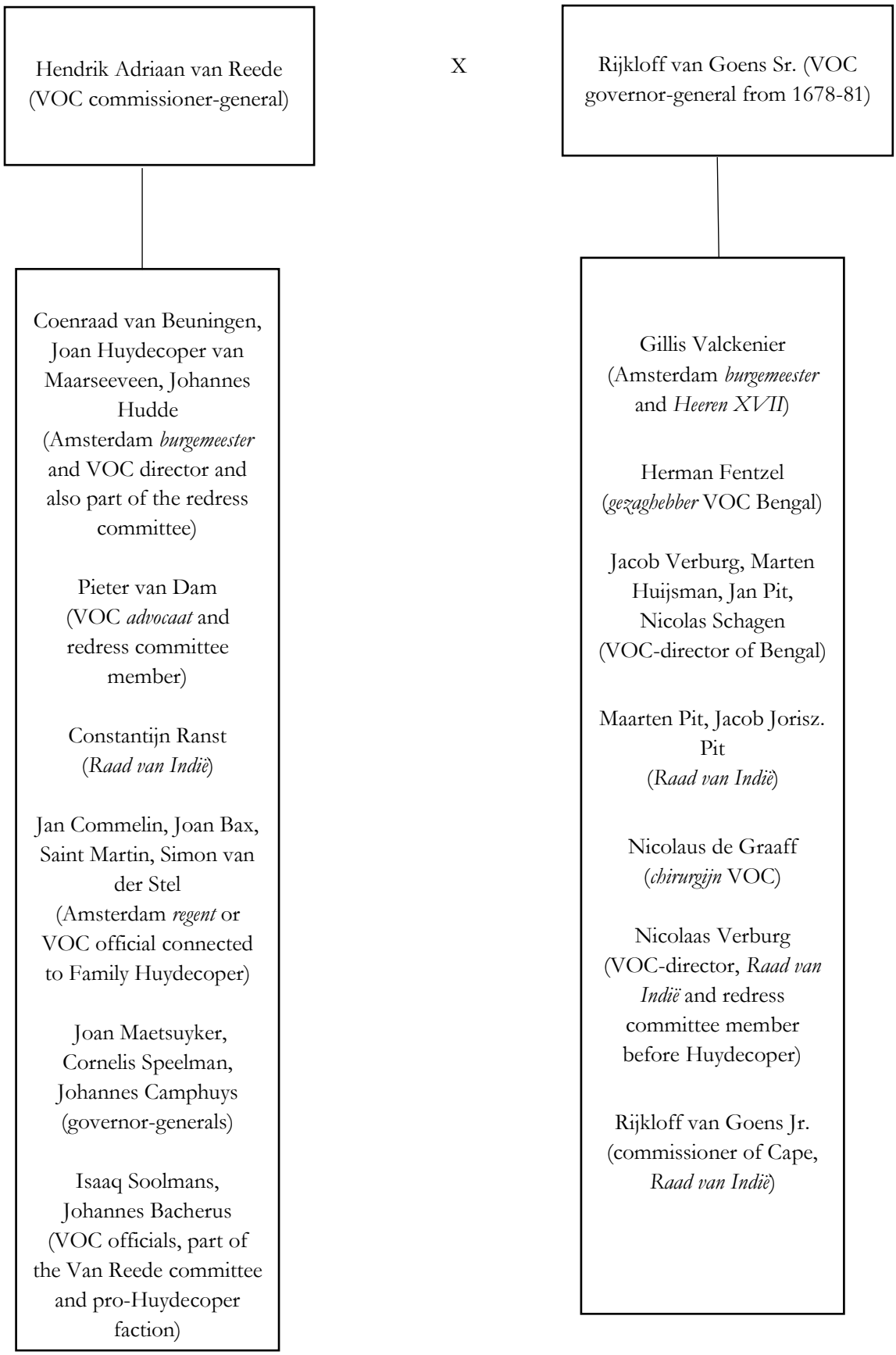
Appendix 4

List of the VOC directors in Bengal

1. Pieter Sterthemius (1655-58)
2. Mattheus van den Broucke (1658-63)
3. Rogier van Heyningen (1663-65)
4. Vacant (1665-69)
5. Constantijn Ranst de jonge (1669-73)
6. Francois de Haze (1673-76)
7. Willem Volger (1677-78)
8. Jacob Verburgh (1678-80)
9. Nicolaas Baukes (1681-83)
10. Marten Huysman (1683-85)
11. Nicolaas Schagen (1685-88)
12. Pieter Willeboorts (1688)
13. Arnoldus Muykens (1688-96)
14. Pieter van Dishoeck (1696-01)
15. Jacob Pelgrom (1701-05)
16. Willem de Roo (1705-10)

17. Anthony Huijsman (1710-16)
18. Ewout van Dishoeck (1717-22)
19. Pieter Vuijst (1722-24)
20. Abraham Patras (1724-27)
21. Jacob Sadelijn (1727-31)
22. Rogier Beernards (1731-33)
23. Jan Albert Sichterman (1734-44)
24. Jan Huygens (1744-50)
25. Jan Kersseboom (1750-55)
26. Louis Taillefert (1755)
27. Adriaan Bisdom (1755-60)
28. Louis Taillefert (1760-63)
29. George Lodewijk Vernet (1763-69)
30. Boudewijn Versewel Faure (1769-70)
31. Johannes Bacheracht (1771-76)
32. Johannes Mattheurs Ross (1776-81)
33. English East India Company administration (1781-84)
34. Gregorius Herklots as provisional director (1784-85)
35. Isaac Titsingh (1785-92)
36. Cornelis van Citters Aarnoutszoon (1792-95)
37. Johan Willem Salomon von Haugwitz as provisional director (1795)

Appendix 5 – Factional Interplay behind the Van Reede Committee



Glossary of Dutch Administrative Terms

Baljuw – the bailiff or the chief law-enforcement officer at local levels in towns.

Burgemeester – the burgomaster or the official responsible for the daily administration of a city. Each such city usually had more than one *burgemeesters* who controlled certain appointments to minor posts within the city council.

Burgher – a citizen with political rights that could be bought or acquired by other means such as marriage, birth and inheritance.

Burgherschap – literally meaning citizenship, that was limited in case of the Dutch Republic.

Essaijeur-generaal – the official who controlled the weight and purity of coins/currency and was part of the *Generaliteits Muntkamer*.

Gecommitteerde Raden – The 'Commissioned Councillors' or a standing committee of the States of Holland that was in permanent session and dealt with legal, military and financial matters. It comprised of ten members including the senior members from the *ridderschap* and the respective city representatives. The *raadspensionaris* was present during the meetings of this committee.

Gemeente – representatives of the citizenry.

Generaliteit – The concept of the United Provinces.

Generaliteitslanden – Areas including States Flanders (now Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), States Brabant (now North-Brabant), and States Limburg (now part of the present-day province of Limburg) which were part of the Republic but had no representation in the *Staten-Generaal*.

Generaliteits Muntkamer – the Mint of the Generality that kept an account of the weight, exchange rates and all other relevant details of the currency in reserve and issued by the government.

Generaliteits Rekenkamer – Exchequer of the Generality that acted as a general accounting organ for supervising receipts and expenditures related to the affairs of the central government.

Gerecht – the magistracy of a city comprising of *schout*, *burgemeesters* and *schepenen* for issuing local ordinances (*keuren* and *ordonnantiën*) and dealing with minor administrative matters.

Griffier – the secretary for the *Staten-Generaal* who attended its meetings and handled its correspondences.

Hof van Holland, Zeeland en West-Vrieslandt – The High Court of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and West-Vrieslandt with both civil and criminal jurisdiction.

Hoge Raad – The Supreme Court or literally The High Council that acted as the court of appeal from the *Hof van Holland* with additional jurisdiction over *waterschappen* (water-control administration) and so on.

Kerkmeester – an official in charge of the churches in a city.

Landsadvocaat/ Advocaat van den Lande – the former office of the *raadspensionaris* in the time of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1585) with greater political power in Holland and in the Republic

Notaris – the official in charge of drafting notarial documents.

Ontvanger-generaal – The office of the receiver-generaal that was part of the *Generaliteits Rekenkamer* and was responsible for the supervision of receipts and handling of money of the central government.

Pensionaris – the official who acted as the legal advisor to the city government and was usually the city's spokesman in the States of Holland.

Raad van Staat – The Council of State was the military and financial administrative council of the *Staten-Generaal* that consisted of the *stadhouders* (including that of Friesland) and twelve representatives from all the provinces.

Raadspensionaris – the Grand Pensionary or the official who was like a city pensionary but at a higher level of the States of Holland. He also acted the legal advisor/spokesman of the *ridderschap* in the States.

Regent – literally meaning the holder of political power in the Dutch governing system. This included all members of the *vroedschap* in city (officials like the *schouten*, *schepenen,* the *pensionarissen* were not part of the regent elite unless they had been members of the *vroedschap*).

Ridderschap – The nobility or colleges of nobles consisting of nobles of Holland who represented the rural districts.

Ruwaard – the officer who administered an area as a representative of the landlord (*landsheer*).

Secretaris – the office of a secretary as part of the *Generaliteits Muntkamer*.

Schepen – the aldermen at the local law courts.

Schepenbank – the legal bench or local court of law in city.

Schout – the office combining the duties of a police chief and a public prosecutor with prosecution of cases before the local *schepenbank* in cities.

Schutterij – the civic militia that was the main body for maintaining order in the city and was drawn from the *burghers* in city.

Stadhouder van Holland – the Stadholder of the States of Holland was the official with a complex of powers like that of the power to make certain important appointemnts, *wetsverzetting*, head of the army and so on.

Staten-Generaal – the States-General which was the supreme administrative body of the Republic and had direct control over matters of foreign relations, armed forces and administration of the *generaliteitslanden*. It consisted of delegations from the seven provinces of the Republic.

Staten van Holland – The administrative body at the provincial level of Holland that was composed of nineteen members, the *ridderschap* and the representatives of the eighteen voting cities of Holland.

Vroedschap – city council in Amsterdam (also called *raad*, *veertigen* etc. in other cities).

Weesmeester – the official as part of the *weeskamer* which administered the property of orphans who were below twenty-five years old.

Wetsverzetting – unusual emergency change in the membership of the *magistraat* and *vroedschappen* which was made by the *stadhouder* on certain occasions.

Thesaurier-generaal – The office of the treasurer-general that was a part of the *Generaliteits Rekenkamer* and was responsible for the expenditure of the central government.

Glossary of Mughal Administrative Terms

Amil – revenue collector

Amīn – same as *munsif*, revenue assessor; also, the chief imperial officer for confirming with regulations adhering to the *khalisa* and *jagirs*.

Bakshi – minister or official who supervised maintenance of military contingents and postings of commanders.

Daroga – intelligence officer.

Diwan – minister or officer in charge of revenue and finance, e.g. of a province.

Diwanian-i uzzam – imperial finance ministry, its officials.

Durbar – the royal court.

Faujdar – commandant in charge of normally a group of *parganas*.

Faujdari – jurisdiction or cess levied by a *faujdar*.

Fotadar – same as *khizānadār*, treasurer.

Gomashta – official appointed by higher nobles for collecting market dues.

Hasil – Revenue, actually collected.

Iqta – territorial revenue assignment, literary synonym of *jagir*.

Iqtadar – literary synonym of *jagirdar*, holder of *iqta*.

Inam – *jagir* assigned as reward in excess of *mansab* pay-claim; revenue-free land granted in reward for service.

Jagir – same as *iqta,* territorial revenue assignment.

Jagirdar – holder of *jagir*.

Jama – Amount of revenue assessed on individual or village or larger area; standard estimate of net revenue for purpose of *jagir* assignment.

Kachehri – office (more in the context of a spatial entity).

Karkun – accountant in revenue administration.

Karori – designation of revenue collector in the *khalisa-i sharifa* and princes' *jagirs*; also, operational in the provinces or *subahs*.

Khalisa – (1) *Khalisa-i sharifa*, territories and sources of revenue assigned to yield revenue for imperial treasury, (2) *Khalisa*, part of *jagir* not sub-assigned by *jagirdar*, and so kept for his own income.

Khan-i saman – high steward.

Kotwal – police and head of the city.

Madad-i maash – grant of revenue from (usually specific area of) land.

Mahal – administrative unit for revenue purposes, mainly territorial as *parganas* or could be sometimes non-territorial as well, e.g. market dues, customs house, mint etc.

Mansab – rank in system instituted in 1574-75 and represented by number(s), determining status, pay and size of military contingent required of holder.

Mansabdar – holder of *mansab*.

Mir Atish/ Daroga-i Topkhanah – Artillery commander.

Mir Bakshi – imperial military paymaster and accounts officer.

Mir Mal – officer for emperor's private accounts.

Mir Manzil – Quarter Master General when the court was on the move.

Mir-tozak – master of ceremonies.

Muhtasib – in charge of censorship and enforcement of public morals.

Mufti – theologian entitled to issue *fatwa* or a formal legal opinion as an advisor to the *qazi*.

Munsif – the same as *amin*, revenue assessor.

Mushrif – accountant who kept a record of the fines collected from civil suits.

Mutasaddi – administrator at the port of Surat.

Nazir-i Buyutat – superintendent of the imperial *karkhanas* or factories.

Paibaqi – area held in reserve for assignment in *jagir*.

Pargana – territory delimited by Mughal administration for revenue and administrative purpose.

Peshkar – official for collecting papers concerning law suits.

Pishdast – personal assistant.

Qanungo – semi-hereditary *pargana* level official concerned with revenue assessment and keeping of revenue records.

Qazi – Islamic judge with jurisdiction generally synchronizing with limits of *pargana*.

Qazi-al-Quzat – chief *qazi* at the *durbar*.

Qiladar – commander of the *qila* or fort.

Rai – yield of crop per *bigha*; revenue rate in kind.

Sadr – minister or officer in charge of revenue grants.

Sadr-i Jahan – chief *Sadr* for supervising religious endowments and charity.

Sakkak – clerk.

Sarkar – subdivision of a *subah*, containing usually a group of *parganas.*

Sawar – numerical rank (part of the *mansab*) indicating the size of the military contingent and payment allowed for it.

Subah – a Mughal unit of administration at the provincial level.

Subahdar – governor of the province or *subah.*

Thana – police station for a group of *parganas*.

Thanadar – the officer in charge of the *thana.*

Tuyul – revenue assignment.

Tuyuldar – same as *jagirdar*, holder of *tuyul.*

Ulema – Islamic clergy with minimum practical involvement in the politics.

Wakil-i shari – administrator for pleading cases on behalf of the state.

Waqai-nawis – official news-writer.

Zabt – measurement of land; revenue assessment by use of measurement and application of tax-rate (crop-wise) per unit of area.

Zamindar – landlord or chief (usually of various categories and hierarchical levels).

Zat – numerical rank (part of the *mansab)* indicating status and personal pay.

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Nederlandse Samenvatting

In 1684 stuurden de *Heeren XVII*, de hoofdbestuurders van de *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), een commissie naar Azië om in India en Ceylon inspecties uit te voeren naar het reilen en zeilen van de verschillende kantoren en onderzoek te doen naar *corruptie* van haar functionarissen. Commissaris-generaal Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakestein vertegenwoordigde de Heeren XVII en in die hoedanigheid had hij tijdens zijn inspectie het hoogste gezag in VOC-Azië en stond hij dus ook boven de *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. De meegegeven instructie bepaalde dat met name het gouvernement Bengalen degelijk moest worden onderzocht omdat juist op dat kantoor corruptie onder de medewerkers schering en inslag zou zijn. De opdracht aan de commissie en de uitvoering van de inspectie roept een aantal vragen op die in deze studie nader worden onderzocht. Wat was er met de corruptie op de kantoren aan de hand dat de directie van de VOC zich met dit onderwerp zo sterk bezig hield. Wat verwachtte de Compagnie eigenlijk van haar medewerkers, in Nederland en overzee, en, gerelateerd aan deze studie, in het bijzonder van haar dienaren in Bengalen? Om deze vragen goed te kunnen beantwoorden wordt het onderwerp corruptie in twee verafgelegen en cultureel zeer verschillende gebieden onderzocht, namelijk in Nederland – toen de *Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden* (1648-1795) geheten – en in Bengalen, dat toen deel uitmaakte van het grote Mogol keizerrijk (1526-1858) – zo wordt de kwestie corruptie in een brede context geplaatst en ruim van achtergronden voorzien.

In de zeventiende eeuw werd in de Republiek in toenemende mate nagedacht en gediscussieerd over het thema corruptie. Dat hield verband met een nieuw denken over politieke verantwoordelijkheden en met het ontstaan van een publiek *discours* over de legitimiteit van de staatsinstellingen van de jonge Republiek. In het onderzoek wordt met name gekeken hoe in Amsterdam – in de zeventiende eeuw het centrum bij uitstek van een zich nieuw ontwikkelend stedelijk bewustzijn –, de machtige Amsterdamse *regenten* die vaak onderling in facties om de macht streden, geconfronteerd werden met politieke schandalen. De regenten, zelf gekozen uit het stedelijk patriciaat, raakten zo betrokken bij een publiek debat dat we terugzien in een grote hoeveelheid gepubliceerde pamfletten. De interactie tussen regenten en hun stadsgenoten werd overigens niet beperkt tot puur politieke kwesties, ook op het gebied van kunsten en wetenschap raakten bestuurders en bestuurden met elkaar in contact. Regenten vormden *facties*, een belangrijk politiek instrument om als groep te overleven in een situatie waarin een voortdurende strijd om de macht bestond, ook al was het voor buitenstaanders niet altijd duidelijk hoe groepen regenten zich tot elkaar verhielden. Bewust van het feit dat ze bij een nieuw publiek in de kijker stonden en geïnspireerd door het ontstaan van nieuwe politieke ideeën, probeerden regenten de discussie

over corruptie in hun eigen voordeel te gebruiken om politici van andere facties te beschuldigen van wangedrag. Het publieke debat over corruptie werd voor openbare ambtsdragers een belangrijk wapen om de doelstellingen van hun instituties te realiseren en tegelijkertijd op non-formele wijze de belangen van hun eigen factie te bevorderen.

Het kon niet uitblijven dat het discours over politieke en ambtelijke corruptie in Nederland ook het bestuur en beleid van de VOC beïnvloedde, want de bestuurders van de Compagnie kwamen uit dezelfde politieke kringen – directieleden hadden altijd wel familieleden of aangetrouwde familieleden in stadsbesturen en in de diverse instellingen van Gewest en Generaliteit, en vaak bekleedden zij zelf ook een dergelijke functies en hoorden zij ook tot één van de verschillende politieke facties. Aantijgingen tegen directieleden van de zes VOC-vestigingen in Nederland (de zogeheten *kamers*) wegens corruptie en wanbeleid waren uitzonderingen, maar overzee was de situatie anders. De handelsmaatschappij fungeerde in het buitenland als een semi-staat, die in politiek, militair en gerechtelijk opzicht optrad namens de Staten-Generaal en in religieus-culturele en vooral economische zin Nederlandse belangen diende. Daarom was het essentieel dat de Heeren XVII haar bestuurders overzee in de hand hield, want het voortbestaan van de Compagnie was in belangrijke mate afhankelijk van het handhaven van haar handelsvoorrechten, vaak maar niet helemaal juist samengevat met het woord *monopolie*. Ondermijning daarvan bestreed de Compagnie door maatregelen te nemen tegen functionarissen die met hun illegale privéhandel in gingen tegen het monopolie van de VOC of anderszins de regels van het bedrijf overschreden. Om die reden werden meermalen functionarissen van de VOC beschuldigd van corruptie, terwijl het bij bestuurders in de Republiek meestal niet zo ver kwam.

De situatie van het *gouvernement* Bengalen baarde de VOC-directie in de zeventiende eeuw ernstige zorgen, wat treffend is omdat de VOC Mogol-bestuurders in Agra/Delhi de provincie Bengalen ook al als een probleemgebied zagen. Dankzij de levendige handelsbetrekkingen was de provincie voor het keizerrijk van groot belang, maar door haar ligging ver van het Mogol machtcentrum was Bengalen politiek niet makkelijk onder controle te krijgen. De door de Groot Mogol aangestelde *mansabdars* (bestuurders met politiek-militaire rang) konden het bestuur uitoefenen dankzij het feit dat ze officieuze banden aanhielden met lokale bestuurders en handelaren. Wanneer deze lokale relaties te sterk werden, nam de greep van het centraal gezag af en ontstond er het gevaar van *rebellie* tegen de Groot Mogol. In Indiase kronieken en andere verslagen over het Mogol imperium zien we dan ook dat Bengalen werd gezien als een opstandig en corrupt gebiedsdeel. De Portugese *Estado da Índia*, de koloniale staat in Azië, maakte zich in de zestiende eeuw eveneens bezorgd over haar Bengaalse bestuursfunctionarissen in het gebied

dat zich leek te gedragen als een onafhankelijke koloniale onderneming. Ook de Compagnie kreeg te maken met eigengereid optreden, met name in de dorpen die haar ten noorden van het huidige Kolkota in pacht waren gegeven. Uit rapporten blijkt dat de plaatselijke VOC-bestuurders zich gedroegen als waren zij zelf zo'n beetje *zamindars* (landheren) en *ijaradars* (belastingpachters), al dan niet in dienst van de Groot Mogol. Ze leefden op grote voet en spendeerden met kwistige hand dankzij hun nauwe betrekkingen met de lokale bestuurselite. Ze hadden een sterke positie omdat ze plaatselijk ook als civiele rechter optraden, maar wat hun privileges en bevoegdheden nu eigenlijk waren, was bij de Heeren XVII in de Republiek en bij de Hoge Regering in Batavia niet precies bekend. Verhalen uit uitgelekte rapporten over hun gedragingen deden in Nederland de ronde en in pamfletten en schampschriften werd hun handelswijze aangeklaagd als corrupt. Dientengevolge maakte de directie van de VOC zich zorgen over de inheemse indogene cultuur van Bengalen die de zeden van haar functionarissen bedierf, en dit beeld werd versterkt door stereotype beschrijvingen van het corrupte Bengalen in oudere Portugese en in Mogolse bronnen.

Tegen deze achtergrond ging de commissie aan de slag om de vermeende corruptie te bestrijden en dat was ook de context waarin geprobeerd werd hervormingen door te voeren. De plannen voor deze commissie ontstonden niet heel lang na het zogeheten *Rampjaar* (1672), toen Engeland, Frankrijk en twee kleine Duitse staatjes de Republiek aanvielen. De economie kreeg toen grote klappen met alle ellende tot gevolg voor de bevolking. Voor de Compagnie was de oorlog een grote schadepost en er moest dus scherp op de financiën worden gelet. Een aantal krachtige persoonlijkheden binnen de directie van de Compagnie ontwikkelden toen heel nieuwe ideeën over de noden van de Compagnie, en daaruit vloeiden nieuwe voorstellen voort om de bedrijfsvoering in Azië te hervormen – dat heette toen *redres*. Het tijdsgewricht had de voorwaarden geschapen om cruciale beslissingen te nemen, en zo werden in 1676 plannen gemaakt om zoals wel eerder was gebeurd een commissie naar Azië te sturen om op de verschillende vestigingen de boeken te onderzoek en corruptie op te sporen. Vertrokken in 1684 ging de commissie onder leiding van Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakestein in 1685 in Azië aan de slag.

De samenstelling van de commissie en haar optreden kunnen niet los worden gezien van de belangen van de toen bestaande facties. In de jaren 1680 deelde de factie Hudde-Huydecoper in Amsterdam en in het bestuur van de VOC de lakens uit. Van Reede hoorde bij deze groep en droeg dezelfde opvattingen uit – dat verklaart zijn benoeming tot commissaris-generaal. Die factie-achtergrond speelde een rol bij de werkzaamheden van Van Reede in Bengalen en men kan zich afvragen of hij een persoonlijke vendetta uitvoerde toen hij daar functionarissen van

corruptie beschuldigde die geliëerd waren aan vader en zoon Rijcklof van Goens. Van Goens senior was na zijn gouverneurschap over de VOC-vestiging Ceylon aangesteld als gouverneur-generaal (1678-1681) in Batavia; zijn zoon was hem opgevolgd in Ceylon (1675-1679). Zij behoorden tot de 'tegenpartij', maar hun sterke positie werd aangetast na het overlijden van de Amsterdamse regenten Valckenier en Hooft.

In Bengalen maakte Van Reede gebruik van lokale getuigen om bewijzen te verzamelen voor zijn aanklachten van corruptie waarmee hij zijn pleidooi onderschraagde om te pleiten voor een voorbeeldig gedrag door de Compagniedienaren. Maar tevens liet hij zien dat de informele betrekkingen tussen VOC-functionarissen en anderzijds de Bengaalse handelaren en bestuurders wel tot corrupt gedrag moesten leiden, en daarmee schurkte hij aan bij het bestaande stereotiepe beeld van Bengalen als de meest corrupte provincie van het Mogolrijk.

Het onderzoek mondt uit in de vaststelling dat corruptie voor de bestuurders van de VOC in de zeventiende eeuw een belangrijk thema werd, omdat controle op en het handhaven van het handelsmonopolie c.q. van de interne bedrijfsregels conditioneel waren voor het voortbestaan van de Compagnie. Dat was de reden dat de Commissie Van Reede naar Azië werd gestuurd: zij moest de corruptie onderzoeken zodat de directie van de VOC weer grip zou krijgen op haar bestuurders overzee. Door rotte appels te verwijderen moest bovendien de politieke factie van de bestuurders overzee gelijkgeschakeld worden met de heersende factie in Nederland. Bengalen was binnen het handelsimperium van de VOC relatief de meest winstgevende vestiging geworden en daarom moest de discussie over Bengalen als een poel van verderf bij uitstek in Mogol India wel leiden tot optreden door de directie. Tegelijkertijd was ook het debat over corruptie in Nederland voor de directie aanleiding de van corruptie verdachte functionarissen in Bengalen aan te pakken. De bestuurders van de VOC verwachtten van haar personeel in Nederland en in Azië dat ze zich hielden aan de zakelijke en morele uitgangspunten die het bedrijf haar dienaren had voorgehouden. Maar tegelijkertijd was het in de jaren 1680 en daarna zo gesteld dat er naast deze formele uitgangspunten een heel andere werkelijkheid bleef bestaan, zij het zorgvuldig toegedekt, namelijk een waarin persoonlijke belangen juist informele en ongewenste betrekkingen in stand hielden, met het gevolg dat hoge VOC-functionarissen konden doorgaan met hun luxeleventje – in het VOC-imperium overzee als ook na repatriëring thuis in Nederland.

Curriculum Vitae

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