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Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient

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Chapter Four

**SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE: ONNO ZWIER VAN HAREN'S
AGON, SULTHAN VAN BANTAM (1769)¹**

Introduction

In the plays of Vondel and Van Steenwyk, the Orient had manifested in different incarnations. While in Vondel's *Zungchin*, the Orient was forsaken in favour of God, Van Steenwyk centred *Thamas Koelikan* on an Oriental king who his Dutch audiences may have yearned to call their own. Although the VOC was the principal agent in conveying the Orient onto the Dutch stage, it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the time seemed ripe to allocate the enterprise itself a role in Dutch drama. When it made a rather belated debut on the stage in 1769, the VOC was curiously cast in a role whose characterization was to be berated by audiences. The Company was counter-intuitively cast as a villain that fed on sovereign Asian kingdoms to quell its hunger for domination while the protagonist of the drama was an "Oriental" who was courageous, virtuous, and wise. The playwright responsible for this act of daring was Onno Zwier van Haren, and his play, a work regarded as one of the first Dutch anti-colonial texts was *Agon, Sultan van Bantam*.

The play is wary of the colonialism and strident expansionism of the Dutch East India Company. These views are not hidden away in the literary crevices of the 1,500 odd verses of the drama. Rather, Van Haren's work wears its anti-colonial and anti-Company credentials on its sleeve and the entire play is awash with this, at the time, unorthodox rhetoric. *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam* describes the travails of the last bastion of indigenous rule in the Indies as it battles the giant wave of Dutch imperialism before succumbing. The nemesis of the kingdom of Banten, which has long withstood the covetous gaze of the Dutch East India Company in Batavia, comes in the form of a succession feud. When Sultan Agon decides to abdicate, he resolves to partition his kingdom between his two sons, Abdul and Hassan, so that neither is left discontented with his inheritance. Just as Agon proceeds to put the

¹The complete title of the play reads Onno Zwier van Haren, *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam, Treurspel in vijf bedrijven* (Leeuwarden: Abraham Ferwerda, 1769). All references to the content of the play are in keeping with the G.C. de Waard, ed. *Onno Zwier van Haren: Agon, Sulthan van Bantam, Treurspel in vijf bedrijven*, 2nd ed. (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979). When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verse number alone. After the 1769 publication of the play, Van Haren brought out a revised edition in 1773. Pieter van Schelle and Van 's Gravenweert published reworked versions of the play in 1786 and 1825 respectively. It was twice translated into French, first in 1770 and then in 1812.

proposed plan of succession into force, his elder son, Abdul, reckons he has lost the most from his father's unfair decision and seeks the aid of the VOC. The Dutch East India Company readily support Abdul's cause and dispatch a fleet commanded by Saint Martin to force Agon into submission. The old King stands his ground and together with his younger son, Hassan, refuses to give in without a fight. War commences and it takes its toll on the kingdom. Bantam is lost and the curtains fall with a dying Agon – a victim to Abdul's patricide – reprehending the consolidation of Dutch rule in the Indies.

Van Haren's *Agon* is a full-throated denunciation of the subjugation of what it perceives is the last gasp of resistance against a fast expanding Dutch imperialism. Not only is the subject audacious, but Van Haren imbues many of its characters with an aversion for the Dutch East India Company. A measured version of this animosity is worn by Sultan Agon who when despising the "cold Europeans," still admires their propensity for victory and the might of their arms.² A more virulent strain of critique is harboured by the Makassar princess, Fathema who is betrothed to Prince Hassan. With the Dutch responsible for her fall from princess to asylum-seeker in Bantam after they wrested the kingdom of Makassar from her father, her losses included her kingdom, her title, and her family. To Fathema, abhorrence of the Dutch is not a state of mind but an article of faith. Upon Abdul's proposal of marriage, she agrees to consider the offer provided he swears an oath to destroy the Company. She envisions the demise of the VOC in raptures of cold delight:

Swear that you shall fight to avenge me on this coast,
Until you burn Batavia within her walls,
Until she falls before me with her Castle destroyed!
That I may trample on the smoking rubble of the most exquisite building
That I may tread on the heart of the foremost woman,
And that I might see the dogs feed on the blood of the gentlemen of the Council of the
Indies,
And thus Fathema's vengeance might be unparalleled in the East!³

²It is this latter argument which helps explain Agon's recruitment of the renegade Jan Lucas van Steenwyk's services in the kingdom of Bantam. See verses 71 (citation), 842.

³"Tot gy Batavia verbrand in haare wallen,/ Met haar Casteel verwoest voor my zult nêr doen vallen;/ Dat 'k op de rookend' as van 't pragtigste Gebouw/ Kan trappen op het hart van de voornaamste Vrouw,/ Dat ik de honden 't bloed van Indiëns Raën zie drinken,/ En dus Fathema's wraak in 't Oosten mag uitblinken!" verses 469-474.

More forceful than the arresting imagery with which Van Haren infuses his narrative is the degree to which the stock phrases conventionally deployed in literary works by Westerners to comprehend and describe the east are put at the disposal of the Bantenese. The Dutch are described as “tyrants,” Agon refers to the Council of Batavia as a bunch of “dishonourable foreigners,” and to the unforgiving Fathema, they are “the scum of Europe.”⁴ Although the play is cynical about Dutch participation in the East and comes in such unapologetic packaging, Van Haren tempers his denunciation of the VOC by choosing as his principal instigators Abdul, the imperious son itching to assume the throne of Bantam, and Jan Lucas van Steenwyk, a renegade Dutchman who goads the errant Abdul into vicious action. When both Abdul and Van Steenwyk commit heinous and inhuman crimes (patricide by the former and violence against a woman by the latter), Van Haren leaves his audience at a loss to decide which of the two is more depraved implying that malevolence was no less a feature of the liberty-loving Bantenese than it was of their Dutch oppressors. To further dampen his anti-Company position, Van Haren introduced the person of Saint Martin. The Dutch commander is a gentleman and successful military commander, respected by friends and foes alike. As the benign face of the Company, he articulates an eloquent defence of the enterprise he works for. Reacting to Fathema’s and Agon’s cynicism about the Company, Saint Martin draws their attention to Dutch triumphs in wars against Eastern potentates that won for the Company glory, spices, and submission:

From where the morning her first rays shows,
 Until where the sun disappears from sight in the west!
 Malacca, Coromandel, Ceylon and Malabar,
 Theatre of Dutch bravery in the gravest peril!⁵

Here, the play perplexes. Was Van Haren torn between pursuing an anti-VOC position and casting the Company in a favourable light? Perhaps not. The pro-Company rhetoric seems half-hearted and the reception of Saint Martin’s vindication of the Company is a case in point. Unconvinced by the commander’s reasoning, Agon reminds him of the VOC’s past military failures – the loss of Formosa (1662) and their futile siege on Macao (1622) – which the

⁴ “Maar ‘k min in Hassan ook syn haat voor die Tirannen./Het is de raad van die eerlose Vreemdeling:/’t Schuym van Europa zal Fathema wetten geeven!” See verses 285, 784 and 937 respectively.

⁵ “Van daar de Morgenstond vertoond haar eerste stralen,/ Tot daar de Son in ‘t West voor ‘t oog schynd neêr te daalen!/ Malacca, Cormandel, Ceylon en Malabaar,/ Toneel van Neêrlands moed in ‘t bloedigste gevaar!” verses 1109-1112.

Dutch would rather have the Sultan forget. Saint Martin's gallant efforts to convince his adversary of the Company's worthiness are thus in vain. The most convincing evidence that renders such an interpretation of the play incontestable is the manner in which Van Haren chooses to conclude his piece. The last words on Agon's lips are

“Virtue and courage have been expelled from the East,
And I surrender the craven East as prey to her tyrants.”⁶

Despite his temporary departure from his critical stance, Van Haren stays loyal to his original intention – to expose the Company's notoriety.

Agon, Sulthan van Bantam also offers a glimpse of Van Haren's perspective on the origins of Dutch imperial might. Saint Martin believes that Dutch power in the Indies was built on the daring exploits of its commanders, Cornelis Houtman and Jan Pieterszoon Coen, whereas Agon deemed their success a natural consequence of native discord. If these factors together facilitated the imperial bloom for Van Haren, the playwright also deliberated on what gave the Dutch an edge over the Easterner.⁷ The Company is a formidable adversary thanks to its weapons, which Eastern potentates could combat only with their numbers, their valour, and on a more cynical note, gold. “And money is indeed the God of the Europeans,” reasons Agon alluding at once to the fact that it was the Dutch appetite for profits that sent their ships plying the Eastern waters and that proved to be their undoing.⁸ Deliberations such as these about the beginnings, strengths and weakness of Dutch presence in the East are instructive but are not as remarkable as Van Haren's evaluation of the character of European domination in the East. The Dutch presence in the Orient as seen through the eyes of Agon is an excursion at best – they invade, they conquer, they perish. The strengths that kept them in good stead and guaranteed their initial successes dissipate with their continued exposure to the tropics. “Effeminized by the sweltering heat, and drunken in opulence” like the Portuguese before them, the Dutchman in their stupor subsequently pass the baton of power to other European colonizers astute enough to wrest it from their weakened hands.⁹ Agon's prophecy foreseeing

⁶ “De Deugd en Dapperheid zyn uit het Oost gebannen./ En ‘k laat het laffe Oost ten prooy aan syn Tyrannen!” verses 1509-1510.

⁷ Andre Lefevere, “Composing the Other,” in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 2002), 90-91.

⁸ “En ‘t geld is inderdaad de Europeërs God.” Verse 764. When Hassan sends a native spy to Batavia to investigate the details of Abdul's treaty with the Dutch, he declares “...gold bares all secrets/ And everything can be bought from those people [the Dutch] with money.” Verses 399-400.

⁹ “ Verwyfd door ‘t heet Climaat; en drunken in de Weeld./ Zo ras weer uit het West een nieuw gebroedzel kooft.” verses 204, 231 (the quotes). Also see verses 195-208 and 215-232.

the rout of the Dutch in the Indies is noteworthy for two reasons. It conceptualizes what Lefevere describes as the organic character of colonialism.¹⁰ Comprising of the sequence of “rise, greatness, and fall;” the conclusion of the imperial chapter of one power can only mean the beginning of the colonial career of another.¹¹ The second and more remarkable aspect that devolves from the Sultan’s understanding is Van Haren’s quiet endorsement of the corrosive character of the Eastern climate. The observation, in its affinity to Orientalist thought should be no cause for bewilderment. After all, philosophers of the eighteenth century such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Alexander Dow had explained with competence in their works of literature that the chief cause for European exceptionalism and their dominance over the Orient was the varying character of their “climate and soil.”¹² So, when Van Haren sees the heat, dust, and humidity in Java weakening Dutch ardour, and sapping their virility, he too had caught the perspectival flu called “geographical determinism,” which in the words of Ranajit Guha, “had cut into eighteenth-century thought.”¹³ Quite prudently, we are not told whether Agon is a fellow sufferer of this Eastern malady. This is a minor respite to Van Haren’s support to the theory of “geographical determinism,” which is the lone strain of Orientalist thought in an otherwise stoutly argued indictment of colonial ambition.

Bad Blood over Banten: The English and Dutch Hostilities in Print

When civil war broke out in Banten in the 1680s, there were also others wrestling with similar feelings of aversion towards the VOC– the English. Anti-Dutch sentiments among His Majesty’s subjects peaked in this period. Servants of the English East India Company had been unceremoniously shunted out of their factory in Banten by the VOC amidst an internal succession struggle in the kingdom. To add insult to injury, the Sultan (who the English argued was a minion of the Dutch) brusquely ordered them to never come trading in the kingdom again. Outraged as they were at the uncivil behaviour of their fellow Europeans, the English vowed not to take this effrontery lying down and they went instead to the press. In the next years, *The Civil Wars of Bantam* (1683), *A Short Account of the Siege of Bantam* (1683) and *A True Account of the Burning and Sad Condition of Bantam in the East Indies* (1682) painted for the English public a picture of the imperious and roguish Dutchman who schemed to annihilate the legitimate trade of the English in Asia by intervening in the native conflicts

¹⁰Lefevere, “Composing the Other,” 85.

¹¹According to Lefevere, “he [Agon] predicts the fall of the Dutch in a never-ending cycle, but one that will not bring any advantage to the peoples of Asia themselves.” Ibid.

¹²Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris: Mouton and Co, 1963), 25-28.

¹³Ibid., 28.

of bickering Asian rulers to their advantage. As early as 1684, newspapers such as the *London Gazette* had begun using the short hand of the “business of Bantam” to refer to the Banten episode assuming – and rightly so – that the public was by then fairly well-informed about the facts of the case.¹⁴ The public outburst that the affair caused was reminiscent of the uproar over the Ambon Massacre of 1623 because the villains were the same and the villainy alarmingly similar – the Dutch had rudely evicted the English from yet another trading post in the East Indies.¹⁵ The wound in this instance was deeper. Just before the war broke out, when the Ambassador of Banten disembarked in England to pay his respects to the King of England, the episode drew generous public attention. Local craftsmen in London saw business prospects in the diplomatic visit and sold “true effigies of his excellency the Ambassador from the King of Bantam.”¹⁶ “An Heroic Poem to the King” commemorating this trans-continental interaction concluded by gleefully envisioning the prospect of the English overtaking the Dutch in trade in the Indies: “In vain they Fret, in vain the Nations Rail, / To see the Indies down our River Sail.”¹⁷ Now of course, the English had to grudgingly accept that if any river was to witness an increased traffic in commodities from that part of the world, it was going to be a Dutch one.

But just what had happened in the 1680s that made the Englishmen complain to the public back home about the countenance of the Dutch bully in the East Indies?¹⁸ For the tale to be told, one must look back to the birth of Batavia, that settlement on the River Chilliwong on the western coast of Java founded by the VOC, which in the early seventeenth century was still a political upstart in the region. In the establishment of this Dutch town, a competitor was born to the state of Banten, a port kingdom situated at close proximity to this new European settlement. By asserting its independence from the suzerainty of the kingdom of Mataram,

¹⁴The complete titles of these works are “The Civil Wars of Bantam: or, An Impartial Relation of all the Battels, Sieges and other Remarkable transactions, Revolutions and Accidents that happened in the late Civil Wars between that king and his eldest son,” (London: H.C., 1683); *A Short Account of the Siege of Bantam and its Surrender to the Rebels, who were assisted by the Dutch and their Fleet, in the East Indies. In a letter from an English Factor to a Merchant in London*, (London: John Smith, 1683); “A True Account of the Burning and Sad Condition of Bantam in the East-Indies in the War begun by the Young King against the Father, and of the Great and Imminent Danger of the English Factory there; in a Letter from a Member of the Said Factory, to a Friend in London, by the last Ship; which arrived on Saturday the 23th of this instant September 1682,” (London: S.T. , undated); “Untitled,” *London Gazette*, December 11-December 15 1684.

¹⁵Interestingly Shankar Raman notes that the massacre on Ambon which elicited a similar outcry in England was in the period referred to as “the business of Ambon.” Shankar Raman, *Framing “India”: The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 197.

¹⁶“Untitled,” *Loyal Protestant and True Domestick Intelligence*, June 3 1682, 2.

¹⁷“An Heroick Poem to the King upon the Arrival of the Morocco and Bantam Embassadors, to His Majesty of Great Britain in the Year 1682,” (London: Francis Hicks, 1682), 8.

¹⁸The brief history of the Banten-Dutch relation contained in this section is based on Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia*, revised ed. (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd, 1959), 176-82; M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300*, 2nd ed. (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1993).

Banten in the mid sixteenth century, had emerged in the words of Kathirithamby-Wells, as an “international entrepôt.”¹⁹ For commodities, Banten beckoned to her bazaars sugar, spices, and a significant quantity of the pepper produced in the Indies, and for traders it drew to her shores, rivals to the Dutch East India Company – not only English, Danes, and French, but merchants from other parts of Asia such as Arabs, Gujaratis and Turks. As Batavia vied for and sought to usurp Banten’s lucrative spice trade, the two entities grew increasingly wary of one another, and both parties enthusiastically took to undermining the other commercially. Their lifelines as trading centres depended on it. Banten levied periodic prohibitions on the export of pepper to the VOC’s capital in the Indies and Dutch blockaded the Sultanate from time to time in an effort to impair Banten’s trade. Animosities came to a head with the accession to the throne of Sultan Abdulfath Abdul Fattah Agung in 1651. Although diplomatic relations were sometimes resorted to when it suited the commercial interests of both parties, in his three-decade reign, Agung ensured that the Company’s weapons never rusted from disuse. He attacked Batavia in 1656 and upset the political configuration shaped up by the Dutch in Java in the 1670s when he aggravated the discord prevailing between the kingdom of Mataram and her client principality, Cheribon. He embittered the Company yet again when in 1678 he supported the rebellion of Trunajaya against Amungkurat II, the ruler of Mataram and a vassal of the VOC. These confrontations proved indecisive until the end of the century. A simmering factionalism erupted in the court of Banten in the 1670s from the irreproachable differences between Agung and his elder son Prince Haji and both parties soon came to realize that a clash of arms was inevitable. War broke out in 1682 when Agung, who had relinquished power in 1680, attempted to reclaim the throne. Presumably with the aid of English arms, Agung attacked the city of Banten, causing the beleaguered Prince Haji to flee into the embrace of the Dutch. With the intervention of the Company, the tables turned – the VOC broke the siege, rescued Sultan Haji, ordered other European merchants in Banten to vacate the city, and forced Agung and his loyalists into flight. Close on the heels of the fugitive Sultan, the VOC pursued Agung first to Tirtayasa and then into the forests that flanked the kingdom of Banten. In 1683, Agung, weary of war, sued for peace and was kept hostage by the VOC until his death a decade later. Sultan Haji in the following year became the signatory of a treaty by which he acknowledged his vassalage to the VOC, consented to

¹⁹J. Kathirithamby-Wells, “Banten: A West Indonesian Port and Polity during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The South-East Asian Port and Polity. Rise and Demise*, eds. J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), 108.

the payment of a colossal amount in reparations and allowed the Company a monopoly on the purchase of pepper in the kingdom. The Company flag was planted on Banten's soil.

The Dutch conquest of Banten should have entitled them to a certain amount of self-praise. Christopher Frick, a surgeon in the service of the Company who accompanied the Dutch fleet to Banten at the time of the siege thought so when he confessed in his travel account, "I have not but many times been amazed at how this glorious kingdom whose trading port is one of the most exceptional in the world and which existed from 1582 to 1685 should so easily fall into the hands of the Company."²⁰ But the Dutch did not seem ecstatic about the victory, and even if they had been, their celebration was effectively drowned out by the English lamentations over the episode. Far from celebrating their accomplishments, Dutch pamphlets like the *Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene*, which carried the official response of the Dutch to the English accusations and was presumably drafted by the Company's advocate Pieter van Dam, and the *Verhaal van de gepasseerde tusschen de Engelsche en Hollanders in en ontrent Bantem*, were more concerned about rebutting off English accusations.²¹ They were concerned about justifying their intervention in the Banten War than with displaying satisfaction over the victory.²² While the pamphlet wars raged and the written communication between the English and Dutch became a regular feature in the periodical, the *Hollandsche Mercurius* between the years 1682 and 1686, the episode also invaded the travel account.²³ The earliest was the polemically-tinted though unpublished narrative of Reynier Adriaensen, presumably written in 1690, which seized every opportunity to parade the English complicity in instigating the civil war and allying themselves with

²⁰"k heb my dickmael niet weynigh verwonderd dat dit seer heerlijk koninghrijck waer van in de gantsche weereld des koophandelshalven soo veel te seggen is geweest soo light van tsederdt jaer 1582 tot 1685 aen de Hollandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie is overgegaen." Christophorus Frikius, Elias Hesse, and Christophorus Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen nae en door veelerley gewesten in Oost-Indien*, trans. S. de Vries (Utrecht: Willem van de Water, 1694), 71.

²¹"Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene, representerende de generale Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost Indische Compagnie aen de hoogh mogende heeren Staten Generael, Der Vereenigde Nederlanden," (Paulus Matthijsz door ordre van d'edele heeren Bewinthebberen der Oost-Indische Compagnie, Ongedateerd); "Verhael van het geene gepasseert is wegens 't innemen van Bantem, tussen de Engelse en Hollanders in en omtrent Bantem," (S.n.S.I., 1683).

²²See "Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene, representerende de generale Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost Indische Compagnie aen de hoogh mogende heeren Staten Generael, Der Vereenigde Nederlanden," 10.

²³See *Hollandse Mercurius, het drie en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1682), 250-52; *Hollandse Mercurius, het vier en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1683), 44-58; *Hollandse Mercurius, het vijf en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1684), 266-69; *Hollandse Mercurius, het ses en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1685), 153-54; *Hollandse Mercurius, het seven en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1686), 1-41; *Hollandse Mercurius, het acht en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1687), 123-47.

Sultan Agung.²⁴ This suggests that the Dutch were still smarting under the English accusations of high-handedness even a decade after the event. *De drie aenmerckelijcke reizen* of 1694 written by the aforementioned Frick, also carried an eye-witness account of the siege of Banten written by Elias Hesse, another German and keeper of the Company's mine records. Adriaensen's account aside, this work constitutes the most elaborate narrative of the Banten affair. Those works that G.C. de Waard and Bert Paasman have identified as sources for Van Haren's *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam*, were all published in the course of the seventeenth century - Abraham Bogaert's *Historische reizen* (1711) and volume four of François Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1726), which dwell on the event in some detail, and *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff* (1701) which briefly recounts certain events in post war Banten.²⁵ Van Haren, who as M.A.P. Meilink Roelofsz notes, holds the rare distinction of having employed the archives of the VOC when penning many of his works, made an exception in the case of *Agon*.²⁶ Instead of plunging into the archives to retrieve information about the Banten war, he relied on these travelogues for details about the episode.

Because the Banten affair was an episode involving two antagonistic nations, England and the Dutch Republic, there were predictably two conflicting versions of the story. The English version held that the civil war was an outcome of years of careful calculation on the part of the Dutch. In their descriptions of Agung's offensive on Banten and the VOC, the Dutch version accorded a generous role to English mercenaries and ammunition. Both powers also spent their energies trying to argue the legitimacy of their respective "protégés'" claims to the throne. The English emphasized the ludicrousness of privileging the son's claims to the

²⁴The manuscript of *De overtreffelijcke reijse gedaen door Reynier Adriaensen* is housed in the Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam. I have consulted the transcribed version of the work which features in Bram Cocquyt, "De overtreffelijcke reijse gedaen door Reynier Adriaensen: Leven als soldaat in de Oost, (1681-1689)" (Licentiaat in de Geschiedenis, Universiteit Gent, 1999).

²⁵De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 18-19; Bert Paasman, "De Indisch-Nederland literatuur uit de VOC-tijd," *Europa buitengaats: Koloniale en postkoloniale literatuuren in Europese talen* ed. Theo D' Haen (Bert Bakker: Amsterdam, 2002), 88. The fact that Van Haren relied on François Valentyn's work to no small degree when writing *Agon* is addressed by Van der Vliet. Pieter van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren (1713-1779) : Staatsman en dichter* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1996), 311. The complete titles of the works that have been identified as sources are François Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a: Beschryving van Groot Djava, ofte Java Major* (Dordrecht: Joannes van Braam, 1725; repr., 2003); Abraham Bogaert, *Historische reizen door d'oostersche deelen van Asia* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas ten Hoorn, 1711); *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 2nd ed. (Hoorn: Feyken Rijp, 1704). The principal grounds on which these scholars assert that Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff constitute the sources to *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam* is that these works feature in the list of sources which Van Haren claims to have employed to author a biography of the Governor General Joannes Camphuis which also recalls the Banten Civil War. Onno Zwier van Haren, *Proeve, op de levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen: behelzende het leeven van Joannes Camphuis, Haarlemmer* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1772).

²⁶M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, *Van geheim tot openbaar: een historiografische verkenning. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar in de geschiedenis van de West-Europese Expansie overzee ...aan de Universiteit Leiden op 6 November 1970* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1970), 7.

throne over his father's and the Dutch in turn reminded the English of the injustice implicit in Sultan Agung's act of reversing his decision to abdicate and recognize his son as king in 1680. While the English and Dutch accounts contradicted one another for obvious reasons, among the different Dutch accounts, there are an intriguing number of inconsistencies. Some are minor, such as the claim put forth in Frick's and Hesse's accounts that Haji was not in fact the elder son of Agung, but the younger; but others were perceptively capital. Bogaert's travelogue, which keenly followed the "official version" of the story as prepared by the Dutch attorney Pieter van Dam, strongly emphasized the inadvertent character of the Dutch involvement in the war, which came about as a then-undesirable consequence of an unanticipated chain of events in the kingdom.²⁷ Adriaensen's account on the other hand omitted this crucial detail and suggested that the war with Banten had been the only intention of the Dutch, which might be one reason that the account remained unpublished. Whatever the variations these accounts came with, they were all victors' tales that told of how the Dutch had tamed an obstinate foe. This almost seemed a natural position for Dutchmen to take until the publication of *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam*.

Antecedents to Agon's Anti-Colonial Indictment

Had any of these authors who recorded the events of Banten in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries lived to read Van Haren's play, they might have been singularly appalled. Plainly put, Van Haren vandalized the story, and as G.C. de Waard's and W.M.F. Mansvelt's studies amply reveal, facets of the episode were reshaped until the tale was turned on its head.²⁸ If the authors of the sources that Van Haren presumably used to write his drama, Bogaert, Valentyn, and De Graaff could have drawn the playwright into conversation, they would have liked to remind Van Haren that Sultan Agung displayed none of the relentless bravura that Agon exhibited in the pages of the drama. Agung had instead surrendered after fighting a two-year-long war with the VOC. They also might have liked to inform Van Haren that his portrayal of Van Steenwyk did not accord with their characterization of the renegade. Their accounts may have made mention of his having "turned Turk" in his circumcision and his having embraced Islam, but in contrast to the revolting villainy that Van Haren attributes to the man, the sources do not denounce the renegade, although apostasy was always regarded

²⁷Compare the account of the Banten War authored by Pieter van Dam which features in the 1686 issue of the *Hollandse Mercurius* with the version of the event contained in Bogaert's work. *Hollandse Mercurius, het seven en dertigste deel*, 1-39; Bogaert, A. *Bogaert's historische reizen*.

²⁸De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25-27; W.M.F. Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," *De Gids* 84, 4 (1920), 313.

a highly despicable act. Valentyn, for example, sought to erase the shame of Van Steenwyk's desertion of his faith and country and to convince the reader of the renegade's contrition for his actions. He concluded his description of the man by noting, "he later returned to us [the Dutch East India Company], re-embraced Christianity, and died in Batavia on 16 October 1711."²⁹

The third aspect in Van Haren's account that might have positively intrigued his sources is the character, Fathema. They might have been sure to point out that their accounts only referred to women in the collective, as ladies of the harem. And here, they might have sheepishly confessed to having paid inordinate attention to the women of the harem almost as if they had felt obliged to say a word or two about the King of Banten's women. Bogaert noted with ill-concealed scorn that when under siege, "the young king [Sultan Haji], irrespective of the fact that he had no more than three hundred men by his side, was in the company of a larger number of women which," he noted "symbolized the splendour of the Eastern court" and Valentyn informed his audience that when Sultan Agung laid down his arms, thus bringing the Banten war to a close, the vanquished ruler did not endure imprisonment alone.³⁰ "All his women" supposedly partook in his piteous state of captivity.³¹ The wives and concubines of Banten's royals also drew the attention of other contemporaries. Elias Hesse confirmed that Sultan Haji took delight in a similar transport of women. He recalled the fact that the King's women were amply represented in a royal procession he had witnessed in Banten in 1683.³² If tales of the king's queens, concubines, and other women in his service thronged the Dutch accounts affirming stereotypical notions of Oriental rulers and their well-populated harems, they also offered enticing glimpses into the erotic spectacles that took place behind the latticed screens of the secluded spaces. Hesse engrossed his readers with the tale of a Dutch woman whose sensibilities were deeply aggrieved when one of the King's concubines salaciously "bared her breasts and asked whether she desired to see more."³³ The red-faced lady, we are told, was positively scandalised. The obscenity implicit in the act of the concubine, the accounts suggest was only to be outdone by the king himself. The Dutch Resident Joan van Hoorn, Valentyn tells us, returned from a visit to the Banten court in 1685 with the impression that Sultan Haji, contrary to his station and upbringing, was

²⁹Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 215.

³⁰Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 148. Bogaert was clearly relying on Christoph Frick's account to make this evaluation. See Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 39.

³¹Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226.

³²Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 287.

³³"Eene onder haer in de tegenwoordigheyd van des gedaghten Admirael's Gemaelin ontblootende haere Borsten; en vraeghde hoe offe noch niets meer begeerden te sien. Doch 't wierd niet aengenomen." Ibid.

no stranger to “the use of inordinately foul brothel-language in High Javanese.”³⁴ Among the others who displayed a fixation with Bantem’s harem was the painter-traveller Cornelis de Bruyn who visited Banten in the first decade of the eighteenth century. He opened up the space of the harem and its concubines to the voyeuristic gaze of European readers in illustration. His sketch recording his presence in the Banten court is populated by a surfeit of women, some of whom reveal their breasts in much the same way that Hesse’s cheeky concubine startled the poor Dutch woman.³⁵ In an apparent contrast to Van Haren’s sources, and other contemporary accounts and illustrations of Banten, in which women only serve as consorts to the King but whose identities were otherwise erased, Van Haren’s female protagonist, Fathema, was made of greater grit and mettle than any of the male characters that populated his cast.

If we wager that there was an element of consensus between the sources and *Agon*, it lay in their characterization of Agung’s elder son, Sultan Haji, who features in the drama as the detestable Abdul. Despite being an ally of the Company and having afforded the VOC an opportunity to intervene in Banten, none of the Dutch sources take kindly to this rebellious ruler. They may not have charged him with fratricide but they certainly thought him capable of this abominable act. They testified that the VOC had to take steps to ensure that once defeated and taken captive, Agung did not become a victim of his son’s “bitterness.”³⁶ They attributed to Sultan Haji traits commonly associated with Oriental despotism – an insatiable imperiousness and cruelty verging on sadism in the assortment of punishments he meted out to dissidents.³⁷ While the caricature of Sultan Haji as the remorseless and sadistic son persisted in all the sources as it did in *Agon*, Christoff Frick offers a slightly variegated portrayal of the ruler. Together with his understanding that Sultan Haji could never claim to have been a compassionate ruler, Frick also depicted him positively as the itinerant prince eager to experiment with unconventional forms of government.³⁸

Van Haren’s imagining of the East as divesting the Dutchman of his superior qualities and rendering him a slave to luxury and opulence constitutes a second borrowing. This was seemingly predicated on De Graaff’s commentary on the Dutch East India Company’s east and its various facets in *De Oost-Indische Spieghel* which was published as an appendix to his travel account. In a biting critique of Batavian society, De Graaff painted a dismal image of

³⁴Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27.

³⁵See illustration in *Cornelis de Bruin’s reizen over Moskovie door Persie en India*, (Amsterdam: Willem en David Goeree, 1711), centrefold between pages 382 and 83.

³⁶*Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226.

³⁷Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 65,69.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 39.

the populace's gradual descent into Eastern depravity. It was the lifestyle of its mestizo women that De Graaff projected as capturing the wantonness that was breeding in the Dutch Indies. The indigenous culture he darkly recalled had infected the Batavian households to the extent that even the child-rearing practices that the city's women adopted were no longer even faintly Dutch. In drawing attention to the orientalization of the Dutch in the Indies, De Graaff seemed to allude to the twilight of Dutch rule that Van Haren prophesized in the pages of *Agon*.³⁹

Apart from the drama's consensus with its sources on two counts, it was for all intents and purposes a counter-construction of the tale of Banten. The origins of the civil war where the dissensions between the father and son had simmered for a while before boiling over was snipped, the aftermath of the battle in Agung's surrender to the Company was cropped, and the complex relationship between both parties and their respective European allies was jettisoned altogether.⁴⁰ The Bantanese, who in Frick's account, were the masters of deceit were valorised; the Dutch, who the sources were at pains to project as the righteous victors, were denounced; and the episode originally comprehended as an ode to Dutch bravery in the Indies was inverted to be read as an epitaph to Dutch morality in which Van Haren held that his countrymen sacrificed themselves before the high alter of imperiousness in the Indies.⁴¹

Admittedly, the provenance of Van Haren's fiery anti-colonial or even anti-Company rhetoric in *Agon* cannot be found in these Dutch sources to the play. The English, we might remember, had in the thick of the Banten conflict composed a scathing critique of the Company. The precedents to the radical thought processes contained in the play might then be found in the aspersions cast by the English East India Company on the involvement of their European rivals in the civil war. The English and Van Haren seem to share the same perspective on the VOC on many counts. The English pamphlet titled *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company* took the same stance as the playwright on the causes for the civil war and the character of the Dutch engagement in the confrontation. The work alleged that "it was the encroaching, restless, covetous humour of the Dutch Company" that stoked their expansionist zeal in the Indies.⁴² This, it argued, was sufficiently quenched

³⁹Marijke Barend-van Haeften and Hetty Plekenpol, eds., *Nicolaas de Graaff: Oost-Indise Spiegel* (Leiden: KITLV, 2010), 73-75.

⁴⁰De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25-28.

⁴¹See Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijcke reysen*, 50. This reading of Van Haren's drama is similar to what Meijer posits when he says: "In *Agon*, the Dutch are unqualified villains, the Javanese are the heroes." Reinder P. Meijer, *Literature of the Low Countries: A Short History of Dutch Literature in the Netherlands and Belgium* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 169.

⁴²English East India Company, *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company from the Unjust and Slandrous Imputations cast upon them in a Treatise intituled A Justification of the Directors of the Netherlands*

by their intervention in the disputes of the local rulers which it sourly noted “[was] an old practice of the Dutch.”⁴³ The work also parroted the play’s perspectives on the consequences of the conflict by noting that the Dutch were trampling on Banten’s sovereignty in the same manner that they “[had] enslaved and held in slavery above fifty such kings within eighty years past in those eastern parts of the world.”⁴⁴

But notwithstanding the apparent similarities, the English sources do not anticipate the drama’s morally driven anti-colonial indictment. Incredulously at odds with the general anguish that the *Impartial Vindication* reveals at Dutch covetousness, the work asked “whether it was not more prudent, (since they had the noble places of trade in India already) to sit down quietly and let their Neighbours peaceably imploy their industry to gain a penny by their leavings.”⁴⁵ That the English in their critique of the VOC did not reproach the logic of expansionism, but merely lamented the fact that they had been beaten to the task by the Dutch becomes more apparent when the *Impartial Vindication* alleged that Sultan Agung, already wary of the happenings in Banten, had notified Charles II of England of a Dutch conspiracy brewing in his kingdom: “he [Sultan Agung] wrote to his late Majesty long before the surprize of Banten, that the Dutch were contriving to enslave him and his country, as they had done all his Neighbour Princes; but that he would be a slave to none but to his late Majesty of Glorious Memory.”⁴⁶ Clearly then, *Agon*’s pungent critique of the Dutch East India Company had no antecedents either amongst his sources, or in the English post-Banten polemic. It was the drama’s own.

Accounts of Travel and Travelling Company Correspondence

In a touch of amusing irony, Van Haren’s *Agon* despite its fiery anti-colonial rhetoric was based on sources that were associated with the enterprise the playwright wants his audience to detest in his drama. François Valentyn was for a great part of his career, a clergyman in the services of the VOC stationed on the island of Ambon. Bogaert served the Company in various capacities in their settlements across Asia and visited Banten between 1702 and 1703. On leaving Company service he began a writing career in the Republic and by his death in

East India Company; As it was delivered over unto the High and Mighty Lords of the States General of the United Provinces (London: J. Richardson for Samuel Tidmarsh, 1688), 136.

⁴³Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁴Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵Ibid., 137.

⁴⁶Ibid., 92-93.

1727, he had authored over twenty works of history, poetry, and drama.⁴⁷ De Graaff earned his bread and butter as a surgeon aboard Company ships. Always on the move owing to the nature of his profession, he had visited virtually every VOC settlement. Other telling signs of association with the VOC also characterize his work. The dedicatory epistle of his account marks out the directors of the Hoorn Chamber of the enterprise as having earned the “gratitude” of the publisher of the work, Feyken Ryp.⁴⁸ Both aspects indicate that De Graaff’s publication enjoyed the patronage of and was sanctioned by the Company.

In view of the ties of association that these authors share with the Dutch East India Company, the pertinent question that follows is how influential the VOC was in determining what went into the pages of these three works? Virtually any scholar who has reflected on Valentyn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* has commented on its lack of originality and his dependence on Company documents to write his monumental work is an ill-kept secret. Labelled by E.M. Beekman as “an intellectual magpie,” Valentyn was a far better collator of information than he was an author, and as Habiboe tells us, his debt to the Dutch East India Company for the information that featured in his account was enormous.⁴⁹ Apart from the multiple ways in which he put official VOC documentation and the private papers of its personnel to use in his work, Valentyn realized how the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* would benefit from his contemporaries who in the course of Company service in the Indies amassed vast reservoirs of knowledge about Asia and the workings of the enterprise.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, C.R. Boxer calls for a re-evaluation of our understanding of Company secrecy regarding their activities in the East – the imprints left behind by the VOC in the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* were such.⁵¹ De Graaff’s *Reizen*, in contrast, presents a picture of a straight-forward first-person narrative based on experience which was not overly dependent on outside borrowings. A few precious references in the account however suggest that, as

⁴⁷A.J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden. Deel 2. Eerste en tweede stuk* (Haarlem: J.J. van Brederode, 1854), 768; P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek. Deel III* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1914), 131-33.

⁴⁸See dedicatory epistle in *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*. The work was first published in 1701.

⁴⁹ Cf. E.M. Beekman, ed. *Fugitive Dreams: An Anthology of Dutch Colonial Literature* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 59; R.R.F. Habiboe, *Tot verheffing van mijne natie: Het leven en werk van François Valentyn, 1666-1727* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2004), 97-99.

⁵⁰To fathom the extent to which François Valentyn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* was dependent on Company documentation; one need only look to the official correspondence of the Dutch East India Company which has been incorporated in Volume 4a of the work which also features Valentyn’s narrative on Banten. The volume contains the particulars of the treaty signed by the Company with the kingdom of Mataram in 1646 and correspondence between the King of Abyssinia and the Governor General of the VOC in 1675. Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 98-99, 321; Habiboe, *Tot verheffing van mijne natie: Het leven en werk van François Valentyn, 1666-1727*, 97-99.

⁵¹C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 164.

with Valentyn, oral communication played a role in the making of his travel account. One of his fellow conversationalists, he notes, was Hendrik Laurenszoon van Steenwyk, who featured in Van Haren's cast with a slight change of name as Jan Lucas van Steenwyk.⁵²

Agon's third source, Abraham Bogaert's *Historische Reizen* has a lot in common with Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*. Both works demonstrate uncanny similarities to the official Dutch narrative of the 1682 siege of Banten which was published in the Republic as part of the pamphleteering that emerged in the wake of the English outcry over their expulsion from the port polity. Both accounts tell of an episode that occurred in Banten when the Dutch sought Sultan Agung's response to their proposal for mediation between father and son. As the battle-ready Dutch awaited the answer that was to determine the character of Dutch intervention in Banten's civil war, they encountered an Englishman who presumably spoke on behalf of the Old Sultan and behaved most reprehensibly. A part of the conversation that ensued between the unnamed Englishman and the Dutch features in a 1688 English tract titled *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company*, which was a translation of a Dutch pamphlet. It reads, "But after having advanced a little, they [the Dutch] met with some Europeans, who asked them by the mouth of an Englishman, why they [the Dutch] intermeddled with the differences between the two kings."⁵³ When Bogaert and Valentyn recast the episode in their accounts, the choice of words they employed was similar.⁵⁴ One can assume that the Dutch pamphlets of the 1680s, which were drafted in the Republic, were informed by the reports of the VOC that had been dispatched to the United Provinces from Asia. The attempt to recreate the chain of information transfer by embarking on the mission to find reference to this obnoxious Englishman at the lower level of information gathering is successful. According to the 1682 Batavia Dagh-register, a letter from Saint Martin, commander of the Company forces in Banten to Batavia dated 27 March refers to a

⁵²*Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 184. When Bogaert like De Graaff names the renegade, Hendrik Laurensz. van Steenwyk; Valentyn refers to him as Henrik Lucaszoon Caardeel, van Steenwyk. Van Haren's choice of Jan for the renegade's first name appears rather arbitrary. To avoid confusion owing to the handful of names that we are presented with, the chapter shall henceforth refer to renegade, both the historical figure and dramatic persona as Van Steenwyk.

⁵³This description features in a report titled "The Commissioners Instructors their first paper presented to the Lords Commissioners Decisors" and was submitted on 13th October 1685 by the Dutch representatives, G. Hooft, Jacob van Hoorne, S.V. Bloquery and A. Paets in Company, *An Impartial Vindication*, 73. I have been unable to find the original Dutch pamphlet on which this English version is based.

⁵⁴"Deze, een weinig voor gestapt, gemoetteden eenige Europeanen, en weird hen door den mond van eenen Engelsman afgevraagd: waarom zy hen kwamen te bemoeien met de verschillen van die twee koningen? Zy antwoorden, dat ze als vrienden kwamen, om den vrede tusschen vader en zoon te bevorderen." Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 151. Compare the above description with Valentyn's sketch of the same episode: "Deze, daar op afgegaan zynde, quamen eenige Europeers te gemoet, die hen door een Engelsman afvraagden, wat zy met de geschillen van dese twee koningen te doen hadden, en waarom zy zich daar mede bemoeiden? Zy gaven tot antwoord, dat zy quamen als vrienden, om die beide vorsten, waar 't mogelyk, te verzoenen." Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 223.

conversation that took place on the 24th of the same month between Company personnel and, as the letter put it, “the three Europeans from Carangatoe who were representatives of Pangeran Pourbija [Sultan Agung’s younger son].”⁵⁵ The commander’s correspondence like the subsequent print versions of the Banten war thus affirmed that such an exchange did indeed happen before war broke out the following day, 25 March 1682.

As Saint Martin’s telling of the episode corresponds closely with the accounts of Valentyn and Bogaert, we might entertain the notion that these accounts were based on Saint Martin’s letter, which constituted lower level Company documentation. Although this is a plausible scenario, it is more likely that Bogaert and Valentyn learnt of the tense exchanges that took place between the Dutch and the English from the Dutch version of the pamphlet, *An Impartial Vindication*. I substantiate this assertion on the grounds that we can hardly tell the Bogaert, Valentyn and pamphlet versions of the episode apart – the accounts rehearse the pamphlet version of the story verbatim. The pamphlet was arguably based on – though a polemical rendition of – the Saint Martin letter. The episode of the Englishman had thus travelled from the Saint Martin letter (1682) to the pamphlet *An Impartial Vindication* (1688) in which it manifested in a palpably different form. It subsequently went on to feature in the accounts of Bogaert (1711) and Valentyn (1726) with no further transformations in the characterization of the confrontation. When in possession of four near similar versions of a small but significant episode in the Banten war written at completely different times, we are presented with a classic example of the migration of what one might call “hard fact” from Company documentation to the travelogues. We must note, however, that not all events that appear in the published accounts can be corroborated in the Company archives. The reasons for this range from the greater propensity of writers of travel accounts to fabricate information to the varying levels of importance that authors accorded to different episodes.⁵⁶

⁵⁵See “Short summary of the missive from Major Isaack St. Martin and Council dated 27 Maart 1682 to His Honours [the Governor General and Council of Batavia]” in W. Fruin-Mees, *Dagh-register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer te plaetse als over geheel Nederlands India anno 1682* (Batavia: G. Kolff, 1928), 378-79. The minor details on which Saint Martin’s letter differs from the English pamphlet and the accounts of Bogaert and Valentyn relate to the conversation that ensued between the two parties and does not confirm whether any of the “Europeans” that the Dutch met were in fact Englishmen.

⁵⁶Valentyn’s aforementioned tale about the foul mouthed Sultan is one such example. Although Valentyn mentions that the event took place in 1685 and affirms that Johan van Hoorn, the then Councilor of the Indies was a witness to the episode, one fails to find a parallel reference to the event in the Company archives. The Company records which address the affairs of the kingdom of Banten for the year 1685 make reference to only a single instance where the Dutch were granted audience by the Sultan. The Dutch were here represented by their Commander St. Martin in a meeting which took place on the 21 November, 1685. An account detailing what transpired in the meeting was relayed to Batavia in a dispatch which reached the following day. Joan van Hoorn finds no mention in this report. See NA, VOC 1417, “Report from St. Martin to the Governor General and Council dated 21 November, 1685,” fols. 2015v-2018 r; Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27.

When our quest for palpable connections, that is, the transfer of “concrete” information from Company documentation to published accounts that served as sources for the play, is rewarded, we might explore the possibility of looking for connections and associations at the level of perspective. In the context of our analysis of perspectival linkages, I choose to focus on three subjects: the character of Sultan Haji, Bantanese women and apostasy. Just as these were issues to which the published sources and Van Haren’s *Agon* attached varying degrees of importance, the same themes received considerable attention in the Company archives. But when the perspectival connections between the travel accounts and Company documentation are examined, the information acquisition practices of the Company with respect to Banten need to be addressed. This is because the perspectives the Company came to hold of Banten were after all generated from a network of information gathering in which both natives and Dutchmen participated as information brokers.

Making the Other’s Business One’s Own: Information Gathering and Intelligence Acquisition

Although the history of the VOC’s mercantile activities in Banten date back to 1603, it was only in the mid seventeenth century that Dutch commercial interests in the kingdom were secure.⁵⁷ The vagaries of the political relationship between the two entities had in the intervening decades disrupted the Company’s operations in the kingdom. Banten was virtually at Batavia’s doorstep and this, as Johan Talens has noted, ensured that the correspondence between the Dutch chief in the factory in Banten and the Governor General and Council in Batavia was brisk and regular.⁵⁸ In the decade before the war, Willem Caeff, the Dutch merchant stationed in the kingdom sent out no less than a letter a week to Batavia. These dispatches were formulaic in their composition. They recorded the trading practices and profit margins of the Sultan, their European trading competitors such as the English, French and Danes and local and other foreign merchants. Other subjects that merited attention were of a more confidential kind. Information about changing political alliances and news of crucial happenings in the palace that could in some way determine Banten’s political posture were brought to Batavia’s notice. In 1678, the Governor General was notified that Sultan Agung had granted audience to the emissary of Amangkurat II of Mataram. Indicative of the effective

⁵⁷Ibid., 219-21.

⁵⁸Johan Talens, *Een feodale samenleving in koloniaal vaarwater: Staatsvorming, koloniale expansie en economische onderontwikkeling in Banten, West-Java 1600-1750* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 36.

lines of espionage that the Company was able to lay, Batavia was informed of all that transpired in the course of the envoy's visit to the Banten court.⁵⁹

The Banten dispatches reveal a great deal about the character of Dutch surveillance. The letters were mostly written in the first person by the Dutch factor, who told of episodes and events he had witnessed or had been a part of. In instances he relied on informants, native or otherwise, he remained discreet about them. These information brokers who relayed information to the Dutch factor in the kingdom that subsequently made up the content of the letters sent to Batavia are thus inconspicuous in the correspondence in times of peace. If they surfaced, it was in times of war. The year 1677 marked one such moment. When the kingdom of Mataram already rankled by weak governance fell prey to a powerful rebellion staged by Trunajaya, a prince from the island of Madura who had set his eyes on the throne of Mataram, the kingdom began emitting the odours of a dying state.⁶⁰ As Banten and Batavia, both full-blooded expansionists in the period closed in to claim their share of the beleaguered kingdom, they threw their support behind opposing sides in the battle. Tensions hit a new high and war clouds gathered. Under this situation of increased political duress, the factor in Banten spoke of his information brokers with greater openness and references to informants suddenly infiltrated the Banten dispatches. Many still had their identities shrouded in anonymity and the correspondence in the period continued to attribute much of the information they received to informants who they plainly referred to "a certain spy" or "our secret court correspondent."⁶¹ When political alignments underwent a shift in the late 1670s, the channels of information procurement metamorphosed accordingly. Abdul (later Sultan Haji) whose dissensions with his father had been evident since 1674, was gravitating towards the Company and his attempts to display his commitment to establishing a friendship with the VOC included sharing information with the enterprise.⁶² When the Company found a native

⁵⁹ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 28, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1779r.

⁶⁰ While the Dutch supported the cause of the crown prince of Mataram, Amangkurat II who later was successful in stamping out the rebellion, Trunajaya was aided by Banten. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 73-79; Barbara Watson Andaya, "Political Developments between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 441.

⁶¹ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 18, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1773r; NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 3, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1830r; Also see entry dated July 24 in F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India anno 1679* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1909), 335; See entry dated September 28 in F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India anno 1678* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1907), 528.

⁶² In 1674, Batavia in their correspondence to the Gentlemen Seventeen reported what appears in retrospect to have been the first signs of a breach in the relationship between father and son. Implying that the familial quarrel was hardly petty, Batavia wrote: "[the differences between father and son] has caused such a riot that [Sulthan

informant in the King, confidential conversations between father and son came to be broadcast in Batavia's boardroom. It became Company knowledge in 1678 that "[Sultan Haji's] father had warned him that when the Dutch have brought everything in the East to their liking, they would war with Bantam and whether [under such circumstances] it was not best that they first began [the hostilities]." ⁶³ When the Company satisfactorily drew Sultan Haji into their ring of espionage, the Company "steward and interpreter" named Huigh Booy performed the role of emissary between Abdul and the Dutch representative in Banten. ⁶⁴ Huigh Booy was also an informant in his own right and shared information that Abdul was unwilling to divulge. Shortly before the disagreements between father and son flared in the 1680s, an alternative centre of power emerged – in Tirtayasa. When Agung and his loyalists flocked to Tirtayasa, it assumed the face of a rival settlement to Banten. Consequently, the Company's tentacles of espionage had to penetrate yet another royal establishment. This was accomplished by recruiting a Muslim cleric called Abdulha who at the behest of the Company frequently commuted between the two courts procuring mostly military intelligence for the VOC. He focussed on subjects such as the strength of Agung's fleet, and the manner in which his faction was mobilizing its troops. In recognition of Abdulha's contribution, one Banten dispatch referred to him as "our trusted priest." ⁶⁵ The case of Abdulha is instructive in another context as it demonstrates the fact that engagement in espionage could also cause the loyalties of those involved in the exercise to be questioned. In April 1678, Batavia aired its misgivings about the Company's growing dependence on Abdulha to cull intelligence from Tirtayasa and went so far as to suggest that the cleric was a double agent. ⁶⁶ The Dutch merchant in Banten promptly replied that Batavia's suspicions were misplaced. This response supposedly quelled Batavia's apprehensions, as the services of the "old court spy" were once again recruited

Haji] was determined to play Amok and take out his anger on the Christians there." Dispatch dated November 17, 1674 sent from the Governor General and Council in Batavia to the Gentleman Seventeen. See J.K.J. de Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag over Java, derde deel* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1872), 124.

⁶³"Nadat de jonge Sultan verleden weer op Turtiassa bij zijn heer vader geweest is en weder geretourneert, is ons angedient dat de oude Sultan gewaerschout zijn, wanneer de Hollanders alles na haer sin om de oost sullen gebracht hebben, dat zij dan Bantam ook den oorlog sal aendoen en off het niet best soude zijn dat zij nu eerst begonden." NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 29, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1835r.

⁶⁴The Company records refer to Huigh Booy as "bottelier en tolck." I thank Dr Wagenaar for having clarified what the term "bottelier" meant. NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 20, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1833v. Biographical information available on Huigh Booy is scant. Talens records that he did not survive the war. Talens, *Een feodale samenleving*, 93(fn).

⁶⁵ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 18, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1773v.

⁶⁶NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated April 7, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fols. 1783v-1784r.

during the Banten war.⁶⁷ When the espionage networks of the Company seem to have relied on both native and Dutch informants, Sultan Agung was not far behind. In April 1678, the Dutch factor informed the Governor General and Council that the interpreter Huigh Booy when on a regular trip to gather intelligence in Banten had stumbled on information that led him to believe that Agung had his own well-established moles in Batavia. The Dutch feared that the proceedings of high-level meetings in the Company headquarters had as a consequence become enemy knowledge.⁶⁸

With the commencement of war in 1681, the Dutch capture of Banten, and the retreat of Sultan Agung and his faction to Tirtayasa, the landscape of surveillance and espionage underwent a change. The Company continued to heed to the news shared by traditional sources of information such as people of power in the royal house, a role filled during the war by Keij Agus Ronus Raja, *Mantri Anum* (subordinate minister) to Sultan Agung, and other regular sources of information such as the spy Abdulha.⁶⁹ What dramatically changed was the manner in which fugitives and defectors suddenly appear in the Company annals as informants palming off copious amounts of information to the Dutch. These sources carried news of immense strategic value such as the layout of Tirtayasa, the strength of Agung's garrison, and the Sultan's military plans. The slave Anthonij Gomes, who after serving masters in Batavia and Banten, was forced to flee to Tirtayasa during the war informed the Company that although there was a likelihood of an increase in the numbers of Agung loyalists, the Sultan was seriously wanting in military strength.⁷⁰ Massaboe, one of the few women who turned informant attributed her calling to her unfortunate decision to "venture out to pluck vegetables."⁷¹ This had led to her imprisonment in Tirtayasa and she returned to apprise the Dutch of the manpower Agung had at his disposal and to tell of Banten's own inquisitiveness about the military strength of the Dutch. The character of Dutch correspondence during the war therefore exhibits a marked change from that prior to the war. Unlike the pre-war phase, when the Dutch factor and other recruits fulfilled the intelligence

⁶⁷NA, VOC 7528, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 24, 1684 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," Batavia 2, section 3, p. 64.

⁶⁸NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated May 13, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1793r.

⁶⁹NA, VOC 7659, "Report concerning the situation of and happenings concerning the enemy put down in writing as it was reported to Capitein Joncker from a certain Keij Agus Ronus Raja who arrived here on the evening of 24 October 1682," p. 700.

⁷⁰NA, VOC 7659, "Report regarding the situation and circumstances in Pontangh Turtiassa as was orally pronounced by a certain slave who arrived here from Turtiassa on 13 August, 1682," p. 499-501.

⁷¹NA, VOC 7659, "Translation of a Javanese story drawn up by Pangerang Souda Ningrat for the Major on August 7, 1682 told by a woman named Massaboe who had been kidnapped nearly two months ago when she had gone to pluck vegetables and who now returned," p. 514.

needs of the Company, owing to its natural tendency to displace populations, the war made every fugitive man, woman, and child a potential informant. Correspondence from both periods are informative not merely about the character of information that coursed through these channels, but the motivations that turned persons into information brokers, and the systems of surveillance and information gathering both permanent and ad hoc that the Dutch had instituted to procure information about Banten and later Tirtayasa. It was against this backdrop of information acquisition that the Company's perspectives on Banten came to be formed. Among the myriad themes that the official VOC records deliberated upon in their relations with Banten, the character of Sultan Haji, the role of women in the royal household, and the issue of apostasy enjoy a certain prominence.

Salacious and Sordid Spectacles: Representation of Banten's Women and Sultan Abdul

The entry of the journal recording the progress of the war dated 29 August 1682 reads, "In the afternoon the Sultan [Haji] had announced to the Major that he was of the intention to visit the mouth of the river with his wives in order to call upon Captain Joncker and his spouse." The description of the king's procession that follows suggested that the entire palace had gathered on the streets of Banten to accompany their sovereign in this social exercise:

he together with his 4 principal wives sat in a palanquin which was suffered by 16 fugitive natives with yellow skirts, red trousers and similarly coloured hats that they were accustomed to wearing. Two more palanquins followed with his children and a company of soldiers from Bali marched ahead with their spears pointing upwards followed by a company of European musketeers under Lieutenant Miville with flying standards and drum beats, and shortly after the King's bodyguards and the *Soura nagaras* [Javanese soldiers] followed, and then came a long retinue of royal maid servants, who carried one thing or another...⁷²

⁷²"...in der agtermiddagh lieten er zulthan de heer maijoor aendien dat van meninge was, nevens zijn vrouwen, een keer nade boom te doen, omme den capit. Joncker en zijn Ega te gaen besoecken, daer op alles ter geleijde van zijn ho: wiert vervaerdigt, werdende ontrent ter 4 uren door den heer maijoor en eenige der gequalificeert ministers tot buijten de casteels poort geconduijseert, alwaer sigh nevens 4 zijner voornaemste vrouwen in een palanquijn begaf die van 16 weggelopen swarten met geele rochies rode broecen en sodanige mutsen gehabitudeert getorst wiert, daer aen nogh 2 palanquijs met zijn kinderen daar volgden, marcherende voor uijt een comp. balijers met hun spietsen opwaerts gevolgt van een comp. Europese musquetiers onder Luijten. Miville met vliegende vendels en slaende trommels, er korts daer agter 's conincx lijff guarden en soura nagaras, daer een lange rije van conincklijk dienstmeijden agter na quamen, die den een agter der ander ijetwes droegen..." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated 29 August, 1682 in "Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria which arrived in Tessel on June 27, 1685 detailing the occurrences before, during and after the conquest of the

As an episode recorded by the VOC scribe to emphasize the pomposity involved in the spectacle or perhaps to underline the court's ability to mobilize such manpower for the purpose, the act to chronicling the Sultan's "visit" was perhaps also driven by the same need that had led Elias Hesse and Christoph Frick to describe similar processions in their travel accounts – to draw attention to the numerous women who featured as participants in the event.⁷³ As in the works of Valentyn, Frick, and Hesse, references to women frequently punctuate the seventeenth-century Company records on the kingdom of Banten. They register the plentitude of women who populated the royal Bantanese space in their roles as wives, concubines, and maid-servants to the sovereign. According to official VOC reports, the female presence in the company of the Sultan was considerable when visits were paid to his majesty by Dutch representatives. Royal women also seem to have accompanied the sovereign when these diplomatic gestures were returned – in the King's visits to the lodgings of the Dutch captain. Certain royal events by implication suggested the attendance of the palace women such as the pleasure trips organized by the King to the River Pontang. As Company records note, they also partook in the less agreeable undertakings of the Sultan. On the 6 April 1683, the royal women were expected to join their sovereign in witnessing the execution of Dutch deserters. When the royal entourage failed to arrive on time, the Company went ahead and carried out the executions in their absence.⁷⁴

The purported likeness between the official accounts and the travelogues in that they both refer to the numerous women who featured in Banten's royal household, it appears, is the only commonality they share in their representations of Banten's women. In alluding to the female company of the Sultans of Banten, and excitedly peddling the erotic tales that supposedly took place in the inner chambers of the palace, the accounts of Valentyn, Frick, and Hesse reiterated what Mary Roberts calls "orientalist myth-making."⁷⁵ The tale of Johan van Hoorn's experience in the royal harem as chronicled in Valentyn's account might be doubted, and the truth in Hesse's story about the royal woman's indecent exposure can also be

city of Bantam as have happened in the aforementioned settlement and in the region since March 6, 1682 until May 20, 1684," p. 371-372.

⁷³Frikus, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 119, 286-87.

⁷⁴"Omtrent tien uren, zijn de vooren verhaelde deserteurengeexecuteert en met de coorde aen een galge gestrafft, datter de doot an gevolgt is, waer na de coninck omtrent een groot half uur, met sijn wijven en verдре geheel stoet verschijnt meijnende met de executie tot sijn comste gewaght sou werden." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated April 6, 1683 in "Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p. 674.

⁷⁵Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27; Frikus, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 39, 286-87; Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

questioned because there is no corroboration of it in the Company records. This leads us to believe that these travel accounts merely reinforced the “image...of the Sultan’s palace as a proverbial site for sexual excesses, sadistic entertainment, and private, pornographic spectacle.”⁷⁶

In contrast to the travelogues which in their depiction of women seem to have been playing to the expectations of a European readership back home, the Company records adopted a certain matter-of-factness in their descriptions of women. The reason that these entries on the palace’s female populace feature in the Company documentation in the first place was because certain matters such as the marital affairs of the royal family were of crucial importance to the Company. The marriage alliances of the Bantanese royals were of consequence for the VOC at one level because the Company had to tend to certain practical matters such as acquiring suitable presents. At another level, these marital alliances had implications for the forging, strengthening, or disrupting of political associations and could thereby have an impact on the political equilibrium in the region. A clear example of the tilting and turning of political alliances on the basis of marital ties surfaces in the manner in which the generally amiable relations between Sultan and the Makassarans who had sought asylum in his kingdom turned sour when he took one of their women as a bride.⁷⁷ On other occasions when references to women tended to infiltrate the VOC narratives, they plainly registered the presence of women in the Sultan’s company without venturing to deliberate on the spectacle at length.

While it might be accepted that the Company descriptions of the royal women were generally prosaic, they did at times veer towards the standpoint similar to that found in the travelogues. In March 1675, the Dutch factor Caeff was determined to frustrate the Sultan’s attempts to secure the temporary services of Monsieur Blauwet, the diamond cutter in Batavia. He justified efforts to prevent Blauwet from setting foot in the kingdom when he wrote to Batavia, “this king and the nobles allow such professionals many liberties with their women because of whom they may defect and adopt the foul Muslim faith.”⁷⁸ The VOC

⁷⁶Cf. Daniel J. Vitkus, ed. *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk, The Renegado* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 13. Vitkus makes this remark in the context of a discussion on the Ottoman harem but one reckons that this applies to Oriental harems at large.

⁷⁷NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated March 20, 1675,” fol. 658v; J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India anno 1675* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1902), 93. After the fall of Makassar to Dutch authority, Banten experienced a heavy influx of Makassaran asylum seekers. See Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 78.

⁷⁸NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated March 20, 1675,” fols. 658v-659r.

records also carry examples of its servants displaying their indignation at the manner in which the King's interaction with the royal womenfolk impeded the day-to-day agenda of the Company. In his letter dated 27 September 1678, Willem Caeff intimated to the Governor General that the King's attention to his consorts had frustrated the interpreter Huigh Booy's attempts to secure an audience with the ruler.⁷⁹ But for these occasional exceptions, the official narrative generally lacks the sensational lustre of the travelogues' tales. In this regard, the VOC records at times offer a suitable counterpoise to the tendency of the travel accounts to distort their observations of Banten. Bogaert claimed that Sultan Haji valued his female company more than he did his male company, thereby generating for the European reader, the image of a ruler who immersed himself in his harem when his kingdom was plunged in war.⁸⁰ The official documentation in contrast espoused a more complex view of the women associated with the palace. When the King prepared to hand over local deserters to the Company during the war, the official documentation noted, "his majesty immediately commissioned some women thither to fetch their swords and [take] them to [the Company lodge]."⁸¹ The narrative thus implied that women in the royal household were known to take up various kinds of employment including military duties. In so doing, the records of the Company suggest that Banten exudes similarities to seventeenth-century Mataram where, as Barbara Watson Andaya notes, "courts used women as sentinels."⁸²

Just as Company documents appeared prosaic in their representations of Banten's royal women, in distinction to the tendency of the travel accounts to drape their women subjects in stereotypical harem imagery, both the Company records and the travelogues stayed loyal to their respective representative strategies in the depiction of the Company protégé Sultan Haji. Caricatured as an Oriental despot and the epitome of cruelty, the travelogues of Frick and Valentyn appealed to character of the Sultan's dispensation of punishment to exemplify their stance. The punitive measures implemented by the Sultan against those who had fled his rule, they agree, were as capricious and unmerciful as they were uncalled for.

⁷⁹NA, VOC 1340, "Letter from Resident Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated September 27, 1678," fol. 1823v.

⁸⁰Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 148.

⁸¹"...heeft zijn majesteijt opstonts eenige vrouwen derwaerts gecommiteerd om hare crissen aftehalen en hier te brengen." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated May 31, 1682 in "Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p.195.

⁸²Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 176. Although travel accounts were predisposed to sensationalize their observations of the Bantense harem and its women, these narratives did at times seem aware of and also drew attention to the fact that women in the courts dispensed several functions. Yet when such evaluations cohabited with others in the same textual space, these appraisals were muted and overrun by others which tended to depict the court and its women in stereotypical terms.

Johan Talens who in his work *Een feodale samenleving in koloniale vaarwater* also deliberates on the characterization of Sultan Haji rightly points out that Company documents, unlike the accounts of travel, could evaluate the Sultan's bloodletting from a different vantage point.⁸³ According to Talens, Company servants sought recourse to Machiavellian reasoning in comprehending the King's actions as an end that justified the means.⁸⁴ Although acknowledging the validity of Talens inference, one argues that official documentation offer far more clues in terms of their estimation of the King's brand of justice as well as the benefits that the Company accrued from the actions of the King than is enumerated in Talen's study. When in May 1683, the persons responsible for the murder of six Dutch soldiers who had gone missing were apprehended, the King was convinced that the assailants could only pay for the act with their lives and ordered their execution. Under these circumstances, "the honourable [Dutch] commander tendered a request to the Sultan through Pangeran Ningrat that if the execution was still to take place, that the village be kindly informed [about the event] in the evening with the beating of a gong and be told to appear at the *alon alon* [the following] morning to watch the criminals be punished as was promised."⁸⁵ In this instance, apart from positioning themselves as collaborators in a brand of justice that Valentyn and Frick so vehemently decried in their travelogues, the VOC also prescribed the nature of punishment that they wanted to see dispensed. Interestingly, Company documentation also cites an instance that corroborates this viewpoint. In 1685, the King was faced with the prospect of passing judgement on a native of Banten who had taken the life of a Dutchman, and shortly afterwards the Company had to preside over a case in which a Dutch soldier was the assailant and a King's subject the aggrieved party. In response to the King's decision that his erring subject had to pay for the murder he committed with his life, the Dutch factor in Banten also faced with the prospect of punishing their soldier candidly confessed: "we find ourselves rather embarrassed as on what grounds we can pass judgment or give sentence in comparison to the immediate justice executed by the Sultan regarding the fatal injury of our aforementioned soldier."⁸⁶ Thus, as an ally to the Sultan of Banten and a lawmaker in its own

⁸³Talens, *Een feodale samenleving*, 177-78.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵"waerom den E: Commandeur zijn hoogheit door pangeran ningrat deed versoecken, in gevalle de executie nogh te geschieden stont het nogh desen avont met het slaen van de gom door de negorie liefde te laten bekent maecken, op datse daer van verwittight, morgen op den alon alon moeten verschijnen, ende misdagen sien straffen dat belooft is aen te dienen.." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated May 7, 1683 in "Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p. 693; Pangeran Dipaningrat was Sabandar of Banten. See *Ibid.*, 58(fn). The *alon alon* is the palace courtyard.

⁸⁶"wij vinden ons al vrij wat verlegen op wat voedt wij haar te regt stellen en zullen konnen sententieren in eenige vergelijckinge van de parate justitie die den sulthan over 't dodelijck quetsen van voorsz: onsen soldaat

right, the VOC appears to have been complicit in the Sultan's methods of punishment, and even recognized an element of injustice in the nature of punishment they meted out to their own subjects and the character of justice that they desired the Sultan to dispense to those who harmed the servants of the Company. Here too, the Company records revealed that they were not marked with the same perspectival stripes as the travelogues, which in their representation of Haji merely strengthened the already prevalent image of the Oriental Despot as one who was keen on spilling blood as he was in populating his harem. If there was another subject on which the perspectives contained in Company documentation hardly aligned with those in published accounts, it was the issue of apostasy.

Anxieties over Apostasy: The Company and Its Renegades

Valentyn chose to close his lamentably short account of Banten with a tale of two renegades: one a Bantanese woman who paid for her apostasy with her life, and the other, the familiar Henrik Lucaszoon Caardeel (Van Haren's Jan Lucas van Steenwyk), who remoulded his religious identity a second time and "returned to ... [Batavia] on his own."⁸⁷ In invoking this juxtaposition of two similar acts of apostasy with strikingly different outcomes in his account, Valentyn's intention was perhaps to show the merciless manner in which Banten dealt with her renegades where the Sultan had deemed death suitable punishment for a woman who had forsaken Islam. In evoking the case of Cardeel, his point was to highlight the power Christianity possessed to beckon former believers back into her fold. What is less apparent in the tale yet crucial to our study is the fact that Cardeel's apostasy was the object of neither denunciation nor ridicule in the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*. Valentyn may have fallen short of condoning Van Steenwyk's conversion, but he certainly does not appear to have despised it. It was with this same impartial air that Bogaert and De Graaff dealt with the most illustrious Dutch renegade in the East Indies.⁸⁸ We might surmise that Van Steenwyk was accorded the treatment he was because he was a success story.⁸⁹ He had successfully metamorphosed from being a Batavian mason to a Bantanese noble. While these authors were evidently impressed

heeft geexcuteert..." NA, VOC 1417, "Letter from Van der Schuur to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 19 August, 1685," fols.1991r-1991v.

⁸⁷ Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, Deel 4a, 228.

⁸⁸ The stance that Valentyn, De Graaff and Bogaert take on Van Steenwyk is reminiscent of the evaluation that Sanjay Subrahmanyam offers in his reading of the manner in which sixteenth century Portugal dealt with her renegades in print. Subrahmanyam notes that if fame and fortune had smiled on these apostates once they had relinquished their past identities; their tales were told rather amiably. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 249-50.

⁸⁹ Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 134-35; *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 184.

by Van Steenwyk's achievements and apparently unperturbed by his act of apostasy, the Company accounts had a different tale to tell.

In the annals of the VOC, Banten is appraised with a mixture of hostility and malevolence. Although the trade that entered Banten's port and the staggering sums of investment and profit margins of the Sultan's own mercantile ventures in different parts of the world established the kingdom as Batavia's greatest competitor and her dealings with the Company's European rivals such as the English marked her out to be an unrelenting foe, her identity as an adversary was intensified by another element.⁹⁰ This lay in her generating a phenomenon exemplified in the career of Van Steenwyk.⁹¹ This renegade's life, commendably pieced together by F. de Haan from the Company archives over a period of twenty-five years, is intriguing.⁹² He is shown to have almost impulsively forsaken his religion and his identity as a Batavian "free citizen" to start a new life as the Muslim Wiragoena in Banten in 1675. In contrast to Van Steenwyk's modest standing in Batavia, Wiragoena in the Sultanate was soon identified by the kingdom's aristocrats as being one of them.⁹³ Underlining his commitment to his new life and religion, a 1678 letter from the Dutch factor in Banten noted that Wiragoena had become a religious mentor to more Dutchmen who were in the process of adopting the Islamic faith in Banten.⁹⁴ Although Wiragoena refashioned himself as a Christian and resident of Batavia in 1688 – some thirteen years after his conversion to Islam – the earlier phase exposed a fundamental problem that the VOC had to wrestle with: the desertion and apostasy of "its subjects."⁹⁵ The people who disappeared from the VOC settlement and surfaced in the Sultanate included Company employees, slaves and free citizens. Where these runaways did not flee Batavia voluntarily, the VOC alleged that

⁹⁰Describing how the fortunes of both entities affected one another, F. Colombijn notes, "Banten and Batavia behaved like a pair of scales: if one rose, the other had to sink and vice versa..." F. Colombijn, "Foreign Influence on the state of Banten, 1596-1682," *Indonesia Circle* 50 (1989), 25. The *Generale Missiven* in the years 1675 to 1678 persistently referred to Banten's flourishing commerce or expressed remorse at the manner in which this rival prevented Batavia from attaining her actual trading potential. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 4: 1675-1685 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 37,168,189,205,303.

⁹¹Van Steenwyk is referred to by the name of Hendrick Lucassen van Steenwyk in the records of the Dutch East India Company. NA, VOC 1313, "Letter from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 20, 1675 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 658v.

⁹²F. de Haan, *Priangan: De Preanger-Regentschappen onder het Nederlandsch Bestuur tot 1811*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalia* (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1910), 192-96. Although De Haan has gleaned much of what is available on Van Steenwyk in Company documentation to write a biographical note on Van Steenwyk in his work, there still is information about the renegade in the VOC archives and this has been incorporated in this section.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 192. NA, VOC 1313, "Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 20 March, 1675," fol. 658v.

⁹⁴For details see entry dated November 30. De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 696-97; De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalia*, 192.

⁹⁵De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalia*, 193.

they were “forcibly taken away” and official documentation often blamed the Bantanese for these “abductions.”⁹⁶ While transgressors of all kinds were a cause for concern for the administration, renegades invited the greatest attention. Persons who defected to Banten, sought refuge at its court, and demanded to be circumcised were accorded greater visibility in the VOC archives than any other category of fugitives.

Apostates were deserters and the act of apostasy usually followed desertion. It was those who first fled Batavia that later converted to Islam. Unlike desertion however, apostasy did not imply the mere rejection of former loyalties. It was a transgression of a more serious kind where former religious affiliations were also discarded. Turning renegade in the annals of the VOC was a thus highly despicable act and the deep disdain that renegades seemed to elicit in their records is illustrative of the apprehensions that early modern Europe had about Islam. In the words of Ania Loomba, “Islam was the spectre haunting Europe ... [which] provide[d] Christianity with a frightening image of alterity.”⁹⁷ The crime implicit in the act of apostasy was the gross violation of the boundaries between the self and the detested Other and according to Jonathan Burton, “conversion to Islam amounted to an act of betrayal and subversion.”⁹⁸ As Maria Augusta Lima Cruz’s article on the Portuguese in early modern Asia and G.V. Scammell’s study of Europeans in the Indian Ocean have in general demonstrated, apostasy in the early modern period was a rampant phenomenon.⁹⁹ It blighted all European trading entities that had dealings with non-European polities and the Dutch were well acquainted with the issue of Company reprobates “crossing over.” The VOC also confronted apostasy at their settlements in Ballasore (present day Orissa in India), Surat, and Gambron (Bandar Abbas), where Company servants turned renegades with such a frequency that their relationship with the local administrations were often strained.¹⁰⁰ What caused Company subjects to transgress their religious boundaries as apostates and forsake former loyalties as

⁹⁶Cf. Letter dated October 10, 1679 from the Governor General Ryklof van Goens and the Council of the Indies to the Directors of the Dutch East India Company (Gentleman Seventeen) in J. K. J. de Jonge, *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag over Java, vierde deel* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1873), 21.

⁹⁷Ania Loomba, “Delicious Traffick: Alterity and Exchange on Early Modern Stages,” in *Shakespeare Survey 52: Shakespeare and the Globe*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 203.

⁹⁸Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Delaware: Rosemont, 2005), 16.

⁹⁹Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, “Exiles and Renegades in Early Sixteenth Century Portuguese India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 23, 3 (1986), 249-62; G.V.Scammell, “European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c. 1500-1750,” *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 4 (1992), 641-61.

¹⁰⁰Van der Lijn, Caron, Reiniers en Caen IV, 21 december 1646. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. 2: 1639-1655* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 291; Camphuys, Hurdt, Van Outhoorn, Pit, Van Hoorn, enz.XI, 13 december 1686. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, vol. 5:1686-1697* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 55; Van Hoorn, Van Riebeeck, Van Swoll, De Wilde, Douglas, enz.IX, 30 november 1705. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, vol. 6:1698-1713* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 379.

deserters was the promise of better employment. Jean Gelman Taylor observes, “the VOC was but one possible employer for Europeans. All around the archipelago kings were adding to their staff coachmen, grooms and men skilled in languages, commerce, crafts, music, warfare and the management of markets.”¹⁰¹ Although acquiring political influence in a native kingdom in the manner in which Van Steenwyk did was an accomplishment few other renegades and deserters could boast of, as Linda Colley reveals in her study of British deserters, most were prompted to abandon their inherited identities by the promise of enhancing their wealth and station.¹⁰² Matthijs Timmerman who defected to Sultan Agung shortly after the outbreak of war in 1682, dispatched a letter to the Dutch troops urging them to follow in his footsteps. What prompted his flight were better living conditions or so he claimed when he wrote to his former compatriots: “I have arrived in a good harbour, thanks be to god, and I am treated extremely well by the King. He has given me all that I have wished for.”¹⁰³

Scholars seeking to discount Said’s theory of Orientalism have invoked the phenomenon of apostasy in the early modern period. They argue that the freewheeling renegade who abandoned one faith and culture for another demonstrates the artificiality of the boundaries conceptualized by Saidian dualism. Daniel Vitkus who theorizes on these lines suggests that in “embody(ing) cultural flexibility, mobility and adaptability,” the renegade blatantly undercuts the bipolar conception of the relationship between the East and the West which is implicit in Orientalism.¹⁰⁴ We might in this context share Vitkus’ misgivings about Orientalism and its inability to explain apostasy, as it is the fickleness of identities that is powerfully emphasized in the lives of the renegades in Banten. Upon the renunciation of his identity as a Dutchman, Van Steenwyk aka Wieragoena, is said to “have become a complete Javanese.”¹⁰⁵ Company servants recorded sightings of him “with a Koran under his arm” and the ease with which he fit into his new identity is vividly illustrated in the fact that he was

¹⁰¹Jean Gelman Taylor, *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 171.

¹⁰²Linda Colley, “Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire,” *Past and Present* 168 (2000), 184-85.

¹⁰³“...dese is om uw te doen weeten, dat ick op een geode haven aengeland ben, god zij danck, en werd ick vanden Coningh seer wel getracteerd, hij heeft mij alle het geen gegeven, dat ick wenschte...” NA, VOC 7659, “Translation of the letter which arrived from Tirtayasa on July 10, 1682 which was sealed by one Arija Soera de Marta in red lacquer, runs as follows,” p. 526-527.

¹⁰⁴Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 22.

¹⁰⁵De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalialia*, 193.

comfortable enough to engage in fraudulent schemes in the royal court of Banten.¹⁰⁶ On 8 March 1683, he earned royal displeasure when it was found that he was lining his pockets by “smuggling” dairy products under the very nose of the Sultan.¹⁰⁷ The manner in which Van Steenwyk reinvented himself places him in the category of early modern individuals, “who,” in the words of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “made a smooth and rapid transformation from being merely rooted inhabitants ...to being cosmopolitans and therefore citizens of the world.”¹⁰⁸ That identities in the period could be worn so lightly as to be shed at one instance and put on again at another is also evident in the life of “a Batavian citizen” Hans Adams. On absconding from the VOC settlement, “Adams [who] had hidden himself with the French in Banten...could not flee with the Danes to Coromandel had now let himself be circumcised by Pangaran Pourbaja [the younger son of Sultan Agung].”¹⁰⁹

However evident the flux of identities in apostasy might be at the ground level, the binaries conceptualized by Orientalism do not lose their applicability completely. The VOC officialdom still seemed to swear by a black and white conception of the world and sought to counter any process or person who deviated from the norm. This, we might theorize was manifest in their policies and in the perspectival realm. Determined to stem the tide of outward traffic of Company subjects to the neighbouring kingdom, the Company devised measures to punish offenders and dissuade others from following suit. Deserters and apostates who during the war were unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Dutch were mostly sentenced to death by hanging. One of very rare instances where the Company deviated from this policy came during the war. When the Sultan Abdul faction of the Banten royalty turned friends from foes, the Dutch issued blanket pardon to those deserters and renegades who had joined the forces of their newfound ally. This seems to have been the context in which Van Steenwyk “was granted pardon.”¹¹⁰ The effect that this had on the characterization of the renegade is reflected in the manner in which he went from being referred to as “the mason who has forsaken the religion” (*de affgevalen metselaar*) in the pre-pardon records to the

¹⁰⁶“...vertreckende den Sulthan doen weder in ordre na zijn apartement gaende den gerenegerde pangiran wiera goena voor uijt met Mahomet’s gesz: alcoran onder den arm...” NA, VOC 1399, “Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria, p. 459.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 645-646.

¹⁰⁸Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 173.

¹⁰⁹“seker Batavia’s borger, Hans Adams, hem omtrent 2 maenden by de Francen op Bantam schuyt gehouden hebbende en met de Deenen na Cormandel niet konnende wegh geraken, had sich nu by de pangeran Pourbaya laten besnyden...” J. A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India anno 1677* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1904), 142.

¹¹⁰This decision of the Company which was favourable to Van Steenwyk is dated to March 29, 1682 but the renegade returned to Batavia much later. De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalia*, 192.

more forgiving “the Dutch aristocrat” (*de Hollandse Pangiran*) in the post-pardon annals of the Company.¹¹¹ It is perhaps this transformation in the VOC’s perception of Van Steenwyk that the travel accounts went on to reiterate when they recalled his tale without a show of ill feeling.

Van Steenwyk’s pardon was forced by the exigencies of war and constituted an exception to the Company’s general policy of responding with punitive action. The usual punishment was death, but the Company sought to discourage the flight of its subjects by negotiating their return with the King of Banten. While desertion was no doubt a touchy issue, apostasy was a more significant cause of contention between the two states. The Batavian administration vigorously pursued the handover of her renegades and Banten showed just as much obstinacy in turning down her requests. A deadlock over the matter was responsible for derailing the peace negotiations between the two polities that followed the Dutch blockade of Banten in 1657.¹¹² Similar tales of failure also haunted the Dutch in their frequent visits to the Banten court to request the return of their apostates and the Sultan remained firm in his refusal to turn them over. The inability of the Company to come to an understanding with Banten regarding the fate of its renegades and the manner in which the issue impinged upon its relationship with Banten lends literal meaning to Jonathan Burton’s understanding of “the renegade [as] the fundamental symbol of Christianity’s struggle with Islam” because Banten and Batavia were unable to defuse political tensions due to their disagreements on the issue of apostasy.¹¹³

Company documents concerning apostasy drip with contempt and it is here that the perspectival stance of the Company regarding apostasy comes to light. Far more than the erring renegade, it was the polity that granted the miscreant asylum or in many instances beckoned him into their fold (as was the case or as the Dutch liked to believe) that was the

¹¹¹De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 718; NA, VOC 7659, “Translaat berigt uijt het maleitsch door den schrijver van Capiteijn Joncker te samen gesteld soodanig als het selve door voorm. Capiteijn Jochim Michielsz. en den Hollandsen Pangiran opgenomen is bij drij persoonen op den 12 Augustij [1682] van Turtiassa overgeomen,” p. 494.

¹¹²The decade of peace between the VOC and Banten between 1645 and 1655 was rudely brought to an end when Sultan Agung launched an attack on Batavia the following year. The Dutch reprisal came in the form of the blockade of Banten in 1657. Following this spate of violence, repeated attempts of the Company to bring Banten to the negotiating table failed and a principal element which put a spoke in the wheel was the issue of the restitution of renegades. It was only in 1659 that both parties consented to a peace treaty whose terms were acceptable to both parties. Still, Banten refused to concede to the return of Dutch apostates which the Company seemed to have grudgingly accepted. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lv-lxiv.

¹¹³Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 220. When speaking of apostasy, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the phenomenon is to be seen in relation to the value that Southeast Asia attached to manpower. As Anthony Reid remarks “the key to Southeast Asian social systems was the control of men.” Anthony Reid, “Introduction: Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asian History,” in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 8.

object of intense VOC resentment. As Company records suggest, the Dutch believed that apostasy among their fellow Dutchmen was not merely sanctioned but actively pursued by the king. The Dutch factor for instance wrote “by keeping and protecting our fugitives, they stop at nothing to ensure that our own inlanders want to convert to her religion on their own will.”¹¹⁴ When reflecting on Banten’s passion in seizing its personnel, Company documentation also commented on the vulnerability to and consequence of its countrymen becoming renegades. As explained before, the Dutch were convinced that Bantanese women had a significant part to play in making apostates of Dutchmen.¹¹⁵ Likewise, when Caëff in 1678 organized the escape of a Dutchman from Banten who alleged that he was fleeing a “forced conversion,” the factor wrote to his superiors that he had “claw[ed] this blood from the Mahommedan and rescue[d] him from depravity.”¹¹⁶ The binaries were here apparent. The Company records envisaged the Muslim Bantanese to lying in wait to lure the vulnerable Dutchman into his depraved embrace, a position that displays the traditional apprehensions that Western Christendom had about Islam – and one that persisted as the flight of renegades and flux of identities it implied continued.

The visions of apostasy adopted in the accounts of Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff was therefore starkly at odds with the VOC’s perception of the issue. The only similarity between their otherwise conflicting perceptions of apostasy lay in the fact that the travel accounts seemed to have adopted the tenor of forgiveness in their characterization of Van Steenwyk. This feeling of clemency only crept into the Company accounts following their decision to redeem Van Steenwyk of his past act of apostasy; until that time it was a cause of nagging embarrassment and anger for the VOC. In the equanimity with which the travelogues addressed the issue, they ignored the Company’s apprehension about the phenomenon so manifest in both its policies and its perspectives.

The Other Side of the Story: Banten’s View of Batavia

If we agree that the Company attitude towards apostasy displayed all the suspicion and hostility of the early modern European view of Islam, we might wonder how Banten perceived the Dutch. Religion, it is generally accepted, was an inextricable element in the

¹¹⁴“...maer het aanhouden en protegeren van onse fugitiven, laaten sy daerom egter niet na, selfs met onse eygen inlanders als se haer maer willen tot haer geloof begeven, ende laten besnyden...” Letter from the Governor General Joan Maetsuyker and the Council of the Indies to the Directors of the Dutch East India Company dated November 28, 1676. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, 156.

¹¹⁵NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caëff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 20 March, 1675,” fols. 658v-659r.

¹¹⁶De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 718.

comportment of certain Southeast Asian polities in their relationship with the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For instance, Anthony Reid and David Morgan note, the alliance of Aceh with the Ottomans in the mid sixteenth century to stave off a Portuguese incursion appealed to, “the idea of a unified counter crusade in the name of Islam.”¹¹⁷ When the Dutch in the seventeenth century trailed the Portuguese as expansionists in Southeast Asia, political hostilities once again came to be articulated by states such as Makassar using the language of religion and the term “kafir” or infidel came to be applied to the Dutch as well.¹¹⁸ The question whether Banten like Aceh and Makassar was antagonistic towards the Dutch based on religious difference in the seventeenth century is in part answered if we consider the dynamics of religious definition which took root in the kingdom. Although Islam had long been established in Banten when its leadership fell into the hands of an Islamic dynasty in 1527 and when it was declared a Sultanate in 1638, the subscription to religious motifs to underline the identity of the state was accentuated during the reign of Sultan Agung.¹¹⁹ As Claude Guillot notes, “symbolically Sultan Agung sent his first ocean going vessel to Mecca; whilst his son, is credited as having been the first of the Archipelago’s sovereigns to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca.”¹²⁰ “The establishment of...formal indicators of Islamic identity” and the “state sponsorship of Islam,” Michael Fenner argues, were significant features of Sultan Agung’s regime while Ota Atsushi points out that it was in this period that Banten situated itself within “an Islamic network in a Muslim world.”¹²¹ Just as Banten and her royals seem to have undertaken a conscious project of self-fashioning employing elements drawn predominantly from the realm of religion to sculpt their own and their kingdom’s identities, VOC records affirm that Islam played a significant role in determining the kingdom’s disposition towards the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

Company records suggest that Dutch saw much of their hostility emanating from or being compounded by religious difference and they also believed that Banten’s antagonism

¹¹⁷David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid, “Introduction: Islam in a Plural Asia,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, vol. 3, The Eastern Islamic world : Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

¹¹⁸Anthony Reid, “Early Southeast Asian categorization of Europeans,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounter between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 284; C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London Hutchinson, 1977 reprint), 153-54.

¹¹⁹See Claude Guillot, *The Sultanate of Banten* (Jakarta: Gramedia Book Publishing Division, 1990), 11-35.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

¹²¹R. Michael Feener, “South-East Asian Localisations of Islam and Participation Within a Global Umma, c. 1500-1800,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, vol. 3*, eds. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 485; Ota Atsushi, “Imagined Link, Domesticated Religion: The State and the Outside Islamic Network in Banten, West Java c. 1520-1813,” in *Large and Broad: The Dutch Impact on Early Modern Asia*, ed. Yoko Nagazumi (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2010), 14.

towards Batavia sprang from the same source. The Bantenese, too, supposedly envisioned the “self” against the Dutch Other on religious lines. Apostasy, as previously discussed, was a touchy issue between the two states. This owed, the Company documentation tells us, to the widely held view in Banten that renegades “were under the protection of the Koran and [hence] they were never to be handed over to non-believers.”¹²² We are sufficiently apprised of just how sensitive the issue of proselytization actually was from the story the goldsmith Mattheus Rick brought back to Batavia in 1665 about his conversion to Islam in Banten. Apart from repenting his decision to have crossed religious lines, he told Company officials of the degree to which Banten’s royals abetted his apostasy. According to Rick, “the Sultan had promised him great things and had tonsured and washed his head with his own hands.”¹²³ By suggesting that the Sultan was an active participant in the ceremony of Rick’s conversion, he alluded to the manner in which apostasy kindled the religious fervour of Banten’s royals.¹²⁴ It was also said that Sultan Ageng relied on Islam for decisions on matters of statecraft, and the Company often felt that Banten’s displays of belligerence towards Batavia were religiously grounded and based on the Koran.¹²⁵

When Koranic injunctions and religious differences were considered to have determined Banten’s disposition towards Batavia, the Company also held the Bantenese guilty of whipping up the anti-Dutch sentiments of the neighbouring kingdoms by projecting the Dutch as infidels.¹²⁶ This was the political stratagem that Banten attempted to use in 1655, when she sought external support in her war against the Dutch. The VOC alleged that they witnessed a second deployment of this tactic during the Mataram crisis in the 1670s when they came into possession of correspondence between Agung and an ally of the VOC, Amangkurat II, and sultan of Mataram. In evident approbation of Amangkurat II’s alliance with the Dutch, Agung wrote to the former: “God wills that you, my younger brother will raise the standard (that is the faith of the Prophet Mohammed) so that the faith may grow, will become and remain strong.”¹²⁷ Like these early confrontations, the Banten civil war was

¹²²Cf. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lx. The Dutch were confronted in 1678 with a similar reply when they demanded the restitution of fugitive slaves. NA, VOC 1340, “Letter dated 9 July, 1678 from the Resident Caeff in Bantam to Governor General and Council of Batavia,” fols. 1802v-1803r.

¹²³J. A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia van’t passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India anno 1665* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1894), 2.

¹²⁴The VOC accounts suggest that conversion to Islam in Banten involved both tonsure and circumcision.

¹²⁵De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lv.

¹²⁶Guillot, *The Sultanate of Banten*, 42.

¹²⁷ “zoo wil Godt u gebeden en u versogt hebben, dat gy, myn jonger broeder oprigt den standaart (dat is het geloof van den prophet Mahomet) opdat dat geloove magh toeneemen ende krachtig syn en blyven.” This features in “Translation of a letter written by the Banthamse Sultan Agon to the Sousouhounangh Amancourat Sinnepatty Ingalaga, and received in Japara on the 22nd of April 1678 per de Sourouans which the Sousouhounan

projected to have been borne its share of religious inspiration. Batavia in December 1683 informed the Gentlemen XVII that “a certain letter written by or on behalf of the old and former King of Bantam ...had been sent to all the Eastern Kings and greats requesting that they arm themselves to champion the interests of the Islamic faith and to [rise up in] general revolt against the Company.”¹²⁸ Moreover, Agung was shown to have strummed on religious strings to both justify his cause and discredit the political pursuits of his son, Abdul. He assaulted his son with the very same reasoning which had allowed European renegades to be traditionally chastised. Agung alleged that in his alliance with the Dutch, Abdul had crossed over into the ranks of the non-believers and had thereby ceased to be a believer himself. In the midst of the war, when Agung seemed to have appropriated for his faction the ideological weapon of fighting a righteous war and when garnering greater support for his cause was crucial, he attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the pro-Dutch army in Banten using similar reasoning.¹²⁹ Agung appealed to their religious affiliation to invoke their sympathy for his cause and urged them to “stand steady in [their] religion and not forget the faith of the prophet of God.” If the top brass of Abdul’s command could be eliminated, Agung promised that this would be the ultimate proof of their religious commitment.

The above section makes the case that Banten in their understanding of their Other were no different from the Dutch. But having “to read cross-cultural contact solely from the evidence of European texts” when presenting a sketch of Banten’s notions of the self and the Other is an ironical exercise.¹³⁰ There is however an escape from this morass and a solution to this dilemma. Two works of Bantenese origin allow us to widen our vision and thereby permit the indigenous voice into our reading of how the Bantenese perceived the Dutch – the *Sadjarah Banten* for which Hussain Djajadiningrat provides a useful summary and commentary and the *Sajarah Banten Kecil* which is considered an alternative version of the former and for which Titik Pudjiastuti has provided a recent translation in Bahasa

Amancourat had sent to Bantam a few months previously,” De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, vierde deel*, 210.

¹²⁸“...te onderscheppen en in handen te krijgen seeckere brieff, door ofte vanwege den ouden en gewesen Koningh van Bantam, ten tijde dat wij de rheede beset en beslooten hadden, ges[chreven] en gesonden aan alle de oosterse Coningen en groten, tenderende om deselve tot voorstand van ‘t Mahomethaans gelove te armeren tot een generalen opstand tegen d’E. Compagnie.” Cornelis Speelman, Balthasar Bort, Anthonio Hurdt, Willem van Outhoorn, Joannes Camphuys, Marten Pit, Nicolaas Schagen en Joan van Hoorn, Batavia, 31 December 1683. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. 4: 1675-1685, 604.

¹²⁹NA, VOC 1399, See entry dated October 27, 1682, “Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria,” p. 489.

¹³⁰Su Fang Ng, “Dutch Wars, Global trade, and the Heroic Poem: Dryden’s *Annus mirabilis* (1666) and Amin’s *Sya’ir Mengkasar* (1670),” *Modern Philology* 109, 3 (2012), 359.

Indonesia.¹³¹ Even so, the employment of these texts is fraught with complications. Supposedly authored in 1662, the *Sadjarah Banten Kecil* was a product of Sultan Agung's reign.¹³² This lends credibility to its evocation in the context but fails us on the grounds that it was written two decades before the turbulent years of 1682-1685 and does not therefore chronicle the war of Banten itself. Although the second work, *Sajarah Banten Kecil* (henceforth *SB Kecil*) makes up for the shortcomings of the first by giving the Banten war admirable coverage, it is dated to the nineteenth century. Despite the apparent complexities that these works bring with them, I believe the two texts are useful because they provide the oft-neglected native perspective on Bantenese-Dutch relations. In addition, these works provide useful reflections on the self and Other in Bantenese literature.

The *Sadjarah Banten* chronicles the port kingdom's Islamic history. As a mid-seventeenth century text that concentrates on events in Banten's recent past, the kingdom's turbulent relation with the Dutch inevitably receives attention. It chronicles the advent of the Dutch in Java and records the Company's wars with the kingdoms of Mataram and Banten.¹³³ The corpus of the text admittedly frustrates our attempts to rake up an elaborate view of their perceptions of the Dutch. Whether this is attributable to the character of the chronicle itself or whether this is to be blamed on Djajadiningrat's summary of the work proffered by Djajadiningrat (which I employ), I cannot tell. Nevertheless, it is clear that in Banten's estimation, a predominant source of the VOC's strength in their conflicts with other Southeast Asian polities lay in its weaponry.¹³⁴ Another significant inference that one draws from the work is that the Bantenese regarded their conflict with the Dutch as having been ignited by the religious differences between the two parties. Very tellingly, holy war and the question of the disposition of believers towards non-believers were subjects that the conclusion of the chronicle wrestles with.¹³⁵

Despite its having been written in the nineteenth century, the second work the *SB Kecil* provides an interesting take on the Banten war. Written in verse, the work conceives of the war as one incited by an imposter, Raja Pandita, who posed as Pangeran Dankar (Sultan Haji) and recruited the aid of the Dutch in the war against Sultan Agung. While the war raged

¹³¹Hoessein Djajadiningrat, "Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten: Bijdrage ter kenschetsing van de Javaansche Geschiedschrijving" (PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 1913); Titik Pudjiastuti, *Sajarah Banten: Suntingan dan Terjemahan Teks KBG 183* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional RI, 2010). I thank Uji Nugroho, Mareta Kartikasari and Maria Ingrid for translating the latter text for me and helping me understand its contents.

¹³²I follow Djajadiningrat's estimation here. Djajadiningrat, "Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten," 7-8.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 39, 47, 68.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 44.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

in Java, the real Pangeran Dankar – who contrary to his father’s wishes had set out on the Haj and was stranded on the island of Poetri – is oblivious of the furore that has erupted in his absence. By the time Sultan Haji returns to Banten, the kingdom has sustained defeat at the hands of the imposter and the righteous son is filled with remorse. The chronicle does not end with the depiction of Sultan Haji’s anguish but continues on to unravel the subsequent history of Banten. The chronicle displays certain core characteristics all through. It subscribes to a non-linear understanding of history, mythical figures in the form of angels and djinns freely roam the narrative and the tale of the Banten war, which is essentially a seventeenth-century occurrence, includes events and people from the kingdom’s eighteenth-century history. Tubagus Buang, one of the leaders of the Banten rebellion of 1750, for instance, rubs shoulders with Sultan Agung and is posited to have been the chief opponent to the Dutch in the work’s interpretation of the Banten war. The work furthermore turns a blind eye to Sultan Haji’s revolt against his father and instead attributes his actions to an imposter. Although *SB Kecil* vindicates Sultan Haji of his complicity in igniting the Banten war, the same cannot be said about the chronicle’s assessment of the role of the Dutch. Reinforcing the fact that Banten’s hostility towards Batavia was fed and fattened by religious antagonism, the work refers to the Dutch as “kafirs.”¹³⁶ Portrayed as mercenaries whose sole motive for war was a desire for profit, and their victory is depicted to have been the outcome of base deceit.¹³⁷ Little admired in the *SB Kecil*’s take on the war, the Dutch are also projected as the antagonists in the chronicle’s depiction of subsequent political events in the kingdom.

Whether we turn to the annals of the VOC or to its own chronicles, Banten can clearly be said to have been on the same page as the Dutch. Both parties accorded certain significance to the role of religion in determining their political posture. It was without doubt the presence of new actors and the growing competition for power in Southeast Asia which forced states to reformulate their political policies so as to protect their polities from new threats in the region. The political vocabulary of the kingdoms of Banten, Makassar and Aceh thus increasingly came to feature the term “jihad” in the period. What made mapping hostilities using the compass of one’s faith irresistible was that religion constituted one of the principal markers of difference between many kingdoms in Southeast Asia and the Dutch. Not only did religion permit the rulers of these states to sway the sentiments of their own subjects, but as the kingdoms of Aceh and Banten successfully demonstrate, it also provided them with a platform to cement coalitions with other local kingdoms to fight the Europeans in the name of

¹³⁶Pudjiastuti, *Sajarah Banten: Suntingan dan Terjemahan Teks KBG 183*, 83, 93.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 94-95.

Islam. The Portuguese also promoted their religion openly and often resorted to faith to justify their military incursions into the region. The Company's condescension for Islam was more covert and was rarely projected as a reason to go to war. Their documentation instead, as we have seen, was the destination for their raging condescension.

Although Banten and the Dutch took a dim view of one another, the tale of the two port cities does not quite end there. It is easy to be distracted by the rhetoric of hostility in Company documentation and in the characterizations of the Dutch in the chronicles of the kingdom of Banten and thereby turn a blind eye to the contradicting realities that characterized their relationship. Pull away this curtain of unmitigated antagonism and we encounter a more complex scenario. Religious rhetoric was deployed by both parties only where there was gain. In other instances it was returned into its original packing and stowed away. Faith was not factored into the equation either when Sultan Agung allied himself with the English, another group of "non-believers," or when the Dutch in turn inducted Haji (another "Mahomedan" into their camp) during the Banten War. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has written in the context of the Portuguese in Southern India, "the religious zeal was always tempered by a pragmatic spirit," and the same can be said about the relationship between Batavia and Banten.¹³⁸ The Company rhetoric of unbridgeable boundaries between themselves and Banten and the formulation of policies which reinforced this belief were flagrantly violated by Company deserters and apostates who made Banten their home. This illustrates the wide gap that existed between the choices that individual subjects of the Company made and the institutional rhetoric of the enterprise as a whole.

Apart from the general promiscuity in the Banten-Batavia relationship that the fugitives make apparent, the governments of Batavia and Banten, that is the VOC and the Bantenese royal family openly explored possibilities of grooming other forms of diplomacy for fostering amicable relations with one another. These constructions of camaraderie came in the form of the constant want on the part of Sultan Agung and his aristocrats for Western curiosity and other favours which the Company mostly satisfied against payment. In the three decades that Agung sat on the Banten throne, he revealed a hearty appetite for pistols and poffertjes (tiny comet-shaped Dutch pancakes).¹³⁹ Other things that greatly amused the Sultan were clocks, "a little clove oil," and "rope twelve thumbs thick for his ship" – all of which

¹³⁸Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 111.

¹³⁹J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India anno 1659* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1889), 191, 97.

were commodities which he relied on the Company to provide.¹⁴⁰ His courtiers had their own demands. The list of commodities that Dutch were expected to supply in 1659 included “three large Persian sheep with big tails.”¹⁴¹ In some cases, the Company did not play the part of the helpful neighbour too convincingly. The VOC’s refusal to entertain such requests or the delays they caused in dispatching the requested goods was received by the Sultanate with consternation. In other instances, the Company willingly obliged Banten’s demands. As further evidence of the Sultan’s reliance on the Dutch, the Sultan’s own trade with other parts of Asia depended on his acquisition of VOC “sea-passes.”¹⁴² Bantanese aristocrats and their family when travelling to foreign destinations sometimes sought passage on Dutch ships.¹⁴³ The Dutch motivation in encouraging this dependence lay in protecting and fostering their interests in Banten. The VOC moreover nursed the hope of recruiting Agung. As a consequence, parallel to the high walls of rhetorical hostility that both parties rigorously built, they also laid down channels for peaceful interaction and engagement. Thus, if the relationship between Banten and Batavia took on any definite form, it was an uncomfortable coexistence between rhetoric and policies of hostility on the one hand and a reality of interdependence, camaraderie and opportunistic alliances on the other.

To conclude the section, the accounts that constituted the sources of Van Haren’s *Agon* show evident associations with the Dutch East India Company in terms of the connections that its authors possessed with the enterprise and in the context of the “factual” linkages in their accounts, which drew heavily on Company documents in Batavia. Yet in comparison to the records of the VOC, the image of Banten in the travel accounts seems to have been based on an almost different reality. While similar subjects seem to have caught the attention of both the official records and the print literature, they were dealt with in entirely different ways. The Company’s anxiety over apostasy turned to equanimity in the travelogues, while their matter-of-fact descriptions of Banten’s women gave way to a heightened sensationalism and stereotypical imagery in the travel accounts – a feature of the genre that undoubtedly drew from their constant need to anchor their narratives on Banten in the familiar tropes of the Orient. What the printed accounts thus took back into Van Haren’s study bore similarities and differences to Company documentation.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 197. NA, VOC 1277, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated July 6, 1670,” fol. 1129r; NA, VOC 1290, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia dated January 25, 1673, fols. 137 r-v.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 255.

¹⁴²NA, VOC 1277, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated May 30, 1670, fol. 1115v.

¹⁴³NA, VOC 1264, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Ocker Ockerse to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated June 15, 1667,” fols. 705r-707v.

Intentions, Influences, and the Inevitable Scholarly Tussles

Blame it on scholars' love for debate but as a rule, arguments ensue every time the issue of authorial intentions is raised. An equally invigorating scholarly discussion has erupted when Van Haren's reasons for penning *Agon* have been put to question. Digging through the mound of explanations that scholars have offered for Van Haren's writing the play, we principally deal with two equally well-argued but contradictory claims. The first is the more apparent. In what is admittedly an attempt to trace a genealogy of anti-colonialism in the Dutch Republic, the literary critic J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren hails Van Haren as the "forerunner of Multatuli," judging *Agon* as comparable to *Max Havelaar*, Douwes Dekker's famous nineteenth-century denunciation of Dutch rule in the Netherlands Indies.¹⁴⁴ Ewald Vanvugt aligns himself to this perspective when he regards the eighteenth century as having produced a number of anti-colonialists, including apart from Van Haren, Jacob Mossel, Governor General of the VOC from 1650 to 1661 and first director of the Opium Society and the Republic's poet-playwright Jan de Marre both of who had displayed differing degrees of disaffection towards the colonial policy of the Dutch East India Company.¹⁴⁵ As one might expect, it is not merely the resonant hatred implicit in the pronouncements of Fathema and *Agon* for the VOC in Van Haren's drama that have allowed these scholars to see reason in the prospect of the playwright's identity as a critic of the Company. Van Haren's daring reimagining of the story of Banten, as past sections readily indicate, corroborates their stance. With its loathing for the imperial urges of the Dutch East India Company on moral grounds, *Agon* is easily distinguished from its sources: it has as its protagonist Agung, the single greatest contender to Dutch domination in Java in the period, it slanders a renegade who the sources had sought to rehabilitate; and it plucks a woman from the obscurity of the harem to make her secondary protagonist. Rewardingly supportive of the anti-colonial thesis is also the fact that the drama was quite in sync with ideological currents prevalent at the time the play was written – the late eighteenth century.

Disaffection with colonialism was a muse for many dramatists of Van Haren's time and before. John Loftis in his study of the English playwright Richard Sheridan's *Pizarro* (1799), a play which reprehends the Spaniard, Francisco Pizarro for the excesses committed in the New World makes mention of other dramas such as Voltaire's "*Alzire ou les*

¹⁴⁴J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," *Taal en letteren* 4 (1894).

¹⁴⁵Ewald Vanvugt, *Nestbevuilers: 400 jaar Nederlandse critici van het koloniale bewind in de Oost en de West* (Amsterdam: Babylon-De Geus, 1996), 47-49, 58-60.

Americains" (1736) which put their anticolonial grievances on stage.¹⁴⁶ The Spanish seem to have received the lion's share of criticism, and for the French and English playwrights of these dramas, a denunciation of the another nation's imperial practices must have been an agreeable and a usually non-bothersome option. But this should in no way suggest that the condemnation of the colonial policies of one's own country was unheard of. One recalls the debate which erupted in the England with the trial of Warren Hastings.¹⁴⁷ An episode of the late eighteenth century and therefore closer to Van Haren's time, the corruption of the employees of the English East India Company was brought to the national radar and these scandals resonated in the realm of fiction. The new breed of "Nabob Literature," which, as Renu Juneja notes, was drenched in satire hit the stands and made protagonists of English East India Company servants who had chanced upon substantial fortunes in the East.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, the rhetorical strategies of Van Haren in *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam* correspond with those contained in this genre of English writing which created new caricatures of the quintessential Britisher in India. Juneja states that in the pages of the Nabob literature, "It is the British who are arrogant, cruel, avaricious. The Indians...when they appear we see them as unindividualized victims of oppression."¹⁴⁹ Juneja further argues that these works held the view that, "the East ha[d] corrupted these men."¹⁵⁰ There were parallel trains of anti-colonial thinking in other parts of Europe at the time, including Van Haren's *Agon*.

If we concede that a vehement critique of Dutch expansionism in the Indies is the predominant thrust in *Agon*, we come face to face with Shankar Muthu's characterization of the Enlightenment as being unique for its variety of public opinion.¹⁵¹ For probably the first time, as Muthu observes, a critic of colonialism was not a lone voice in the public sphere, but suddenly there was an entire chorus of them.¹⁵² The character of the period allows him to consider the era as worthy of the label of a "historical anomaly."¹⁵³ Apart from its anti-colonial clamour, the period showed other signs of being somewhat atypical. Sympathetic

¹⁴⁶John Loftis, "Whig Oratory on Stage Sheridan's Pizarro," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 8, 4 (1975), 457.

¹⁴⁷According to Loftis, Sheridan's play *Pizarro* was modeled to deliberate on the notoriety that the English East India Company had won itself for its conduct in eighteenth century India. Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Renu Juneja, "The Native and the Nabob: Representation of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth Century English Literature," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27, 183 (1992). Also see chapter titled 'Eighteenth Century Orientalism' in Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial Narratives, Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52-78.

¹⁴⁹Juneja, "The Native and the Nabob," 183.

¹⁵⁰Ibid; This theme of "going native" as it features in *Agon* is broached in Lefevre, "Composing the Other," 87-88.

¹⁵¹The work referred to in this context is Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁵²Ibid., 1-10.

¹⁵³Ibid., 3.

approaches towards the Orient emerged and one of the many who especially demonstrated this tendency was Voltaire, in whose *Candide*, *La Princesse de Babylone* and *Essai sur le moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, among other works, the East featured as a respectable entity.¹⁵⁴ In his discussions on tolerance, Voltaire proved himself no more an admirer of the imperial practices of the Dutch than Van Haren. He considered the Dutch massacre of the Chinese in 1740 where over a thousand Batavian Chinese lost their lives comparable to the Roman emperor Nero's infamous Jewish persecutions.¹⁵⁵ Taking notice of Voltaire's membership in the club of anti-colonial faction of the Enlightenment and his criticism of the Dutch brand of colonialism makes it easier to understand Van Haren's own position with respect to the play. The literary critic Gerard Knuvelder states that "Van Haren was a great admirer of Voltaire" and Pieter van der Vliet maintains that the impression of Voltaire's literary works cannot be missed in *Agon, Sulthan van Bantem*.¹⁵⁶ If the ideological inclinations contained in *Agon* reflected Voltaire's own philosophical standing, it also claimed kinship with the work of another exponent of anti-colonialism – Abbé Raynal. Considered to be the perfect embodiment of Enlightenment opinion in its critique of colonialism, Raynal's explosive *Historie philosophique et politique et des établissements et du commerce des Europeens dans les deux Indes* (1770) expressed dismay at the policies of the VOC in the Indies.¹⁵⁷ On the issue of the reparation payments demanded by the Dutch on the conclusion of the Banten War, Raynal wrote:

Though the expedition was brisk, short, and rapid, and consequently could not be expensive, they contrived to make the charges of war amount to a prodigious sum. The situation of things would not admit of a scrutiny into the sum demanded for so great a piece of service and the exhausted state of the finances made it impossible to discharge

¹⁵⁴Edelstein refers to these works as defying the traditional or predominant European perspective of the "derogatory" east. Dan Edelstein, "Hyperborean Atlantis: Jean- Sylvain Bailly, Madame Blavatsky, and the Nazi Myth," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 35 (2006), 268.

¹⁵⁵T. Smollett and M.D.T. Francklin, eds., *The Works of M. de Voltaire. Translated from the French* (London: Printed for J. Newbery etc, 1764), 74-75.

¹⁵⁶G.P.M. Knuvelder, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde, deel 3* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 1973), 277; Van der Vliet, *Onno Zvier van Haren*, 315-16.

¹⁵⁷ I refer to the 1782 English translation of the work: Abbé Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies, vol. 1* (Edinburgh: Printed for W.Gordon etc, 1782). On the estimation of Raynal's work within the context of the Enlightenment, see Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 590-614.

it. In this extremity, this weak prince determined to entail slavery on himself and his descendants, by granting to his deliverers the exclusive trade of his dominions.¹⁵⁸

Thus his rhetoric seems no different from what Van Haren articulated in his drama *Agon* which was translated into French in 1770, the same year that Raynal took to villifying European colonizers in his *Historie de deux indes*.

Just as Van Haren allowed the ideological winds then blowing across Europe to brush across his play, he may also have mimicked stylistic elements of French drama. Critics denounced *Agon* for its “un-Dutchness” in a period that was paradoxically a phase in Dutch literary history when dramatists reeled in a daze of heady Francophilia.¹⁵⁹ For all intents and purposes, Van Haren had modelled the play almost flawlessly. Like Van Haren’s *Thamas Koelikan*, his five act play was written in Alexandrine verse, strictly observed the unities of time and place, and adhered to the other rules of French Classicism, the genre widely practiced by eighteenth-century Dutch dramatists.¹⁶⁰ The only stylistic feature in the drama that could have possibly grated on critics was its ending. *Agon*, the epitome of righteousness, was sent to his grave while Abdul, the loathsome son, was installed on the throne. Van Haren concluded the play in a fashion that Aristotle’s *Poetics* did not regard permissible or fit.¹⁶¹ Whatever the truth in the critics’ charge of the presence of an adulterating Frenchification in the play, *Agon* and Van Haren’s other works revealed an honest debt to French drama.¹⁶² Busken Huet, Jos Smeyers and H.J. Vieu-Kuik have usefully pointed out that Van Haren’s borrowings from the French playwrights, Racine and Corneille in his choice of plot and cast in *Agon* were rife.¹⁶³ Whilst *Agon* merely carried resemblances to French plays, the playwright also adapted the French play *La boîte de Pandore* (1720) for the Dutch stage in his *Pietje en Agnietje of de Doos van Pandora* (1779).¹⁶⁴ If one were to consider the fact that the English poet, Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* also merited the playwright’s attention who considered

¹⁵⁸Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 183-84, also see 380 (index).

¹⁵⁹The *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* was remorselessly exacting in its review of the stylistic aspects of the drama, *Agon*. It read: “hoeveel toegevendheid men ook wille gebruiken, men vindt zich, dat stuk doorbladerende, genoodzaakt te zeggen, het verzenmaken en rijmen is ‘s mans werk niet.” Cited in G. P. M. Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, 5th ed., vol. 2 (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 1971), 569-70; For the influence of French drama on Dutch literature, see F. A. Snellaert, *Schets eener geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* 4th ed. (Utrecht: Beijers, 1866), 181-201.

¹⁶⁰Jan te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde, Deel 5*, 2nd ed. (Haarlem: De erven F.Bohn, 1924), 514; De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25.

¹⁶¹Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde, Deel 5*, 442-43.

¹⁶²See Busken Huet, “De Van Haren’s,” 28.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 39,48-49; Jos Smeyers and H.J. Vieu-Kuik, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden*, vol. 6 (Amsterdam: Standaard Uitgeverij, 1975), 189-90; Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 315; Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde, Deel 5*, 442.

¹⁶⁴Busken Huet, “De Van Haren’s,” 27.

the work worthy of translation, Van Haren may very well be taken for a man who had his finger on the pulse of international literary trends.¹⁶⁵ The idea that *Agon* can be grouped with those late eighteenth century works that slammed their mother countries for their colonial policies would only seem rational.

Van Haren, Fence-sitting, and the Other Side

Notwithstanding the evident validity of the anti-colonial stance, another branch of scholarship represented by Pieter van der Vliet has displayed wariness towards unthinkingly embracing such a position. Others such as W.M.F. Mansvelt assert that the play has not the slightest trace of the anti-colonialism claimed by its proponents.¹⁶⁶ What has allowed this opposition to flourish has been an act of clever mischief on the part of the playwright himself. In contrast to the unflinching anti-colonialism that *Agon* professes, Van Haren's other literary works betray a more ambivalent attitude towards the Dutch East India Company and their colonial enterprise in the East. The story of Banten's civil war, in the playwright's literary oeuvre surprisingly came in two versions. As Mansvelt points out, the same hand that circumvented the story of Banten in *Agon* recorded another version of the event in a later work, his *Proeve, op de levens-beschrijvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen : behelzende het leeven van Joannes Camphuis, Haarlemmer* (1775), the biography of a member of the Council of Indies during the Banten War who later became Governor General of the VOC possessions in Asia.¹⁶⁷ While the playwright might in this work have retained his sympathy for the father Sultan who was the tragic hero of his drama and bemoaned the subsequent turn of events, he displayed full knowledge of the episode as recounted in his sources. *Proeve* thereby implicates Van Haren for the invention of detail but his work *Het Vaderland* in the reading of Mansvelt presents a more serious allegation – that Van Haren held contradictory views about the Company.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to the steadfast anti-colonialist that the Van Haren of *Agon* appears to be, *Het Vaderland* shows a playwright who is a committed propagandist for the enterprise and a sincere admirer of its conquests and victories in the Indies. The very acts of the VOC he denounced in *Agon* he eloquently praised in *Het Vaderland*, when he writes:

¹⁶⁵Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 374; Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 5, 514.

¹⁶⁶Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 307-19. Also see Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316-17.

¹⁶⁷Van Haren, *Proeve, op de levens-beschrijvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen*; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 312-13.

¹⁶⁸Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 312-13.

See how Batavia began!
 Here Van Dam punishes the Makassars,
 And there Van Goens tames the Malabars!
 Here, Hulft dies on the battlefield, but conquers Ceylon!¹⁶⁹

While the playwright might here appear sympathetic to the Company's exploits and even adopts a congratulatory tone when applauding their successes, in *Van Japan, met betrekking tot de Hollandsche natie en de Christelijke godsdienst* he sought to combat the prevailing view in Europe that the Company had worked hand in glove with the Japanese in orchestrating the seventeenth-century massacre of Christians.¹⁷⁰

Also causing us to doubt the strength of Van Haren's anticolonialist stance or even his commitment to such a position is the fact that no other of Van Haren's works save for *Agon* espouses the anti-colonial cause. All his other works (most obviously his other tragedy, *Willem de Eerste* (1773), and the eulogy *Lijkrede op Willem IV* (1766), both of which were written in honour of members of the House of Orange) parade his credentials as an unwavering loyalist.¹⁷¹ Van Haren's literary oeuvre also resists any sort of explanation that hinges on the possibility that the playwright underwent an ideological shift during which his admiration for the Company either spiralled into disdain or vice versa. Although such an explanation might have served to explain the dizzying diversity in opinion that the playwright expresses with respect to the VOC, the prospect of its application is rendered futile. *Agon* was published in 1769, the same year that *Van Japan* and *Het Vaderland* appeared in print with their lavish praise on the Company and its undertakings in Asia.¹⁷²

The inconsistencies in Van Haren's oeuvre apart, what allows those scholars who doubt the drama's anti-colonial leanings to further maintain their position is an episode the impact of which on the author's life makes it pertinent to any question about authorial intention. In 1760, the playwright, a friend of the royalty and one who had held influential

¹⁶⁹ "Zie hoe Batavia begon!/ Hier straft Van Dam de Macassaran./ Daar temd Van Goens de Mallabaran/ Hier sneuveld Hulft, en wint Ceylon!" Onno Zwier van Haren, *Aan het vaderland* (Leeuwarden: Abraham Ferweda, 1769), 90. Also cited in Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 316.

¹⁷⁰ Onno Zwier van Haren, *Van Japan: Met betrekking tot de Hollandse Natie, en de Christelyke gods-dienst* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1775).

¹⁷¹ See Willem Gerard Brill, *Nederlandsche spraakleer*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1866), 101. Snellaerts refers to Onno Zwier van Haren together with his brother Willem van Haren as having been "vurige minnaars van hun vaderland..." Snellaert, *Schets eener gescheidenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, 199-200.

¹⁷² *Van Japan* was first published in French in 1769 as *Reserches sur la conduite de Hollandois au Japan relativement a la Religion Cretienne*. It appeared in translation for the Dutch readership in 1775 as Onno Zwier van Haren, *Van Japan: met betrekking tot de Hollandse natie, en de Christelijke Gods-dienst* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1775). See Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 352.

political offices in his own right, was accused – from within his own family – of an incestuous relationship with his daughters. The chief complainants were his son in law, Johan van Sandick, and Willem van Hogendorp, who was betrothed to his daughter. The episode triggered uproar among the upright eighteenth-century gentry and had the rumour mills grinding for weeks; but the playwright may have been the victim of a political conspiracy hatched by his political rival, the Duke of Brunswijk.¹⁷³ Van Haren's fall from grace and loss of influence was swift. The reason why this charge of incest has been found a worthy tool to help understand the narrative content of the play is because, as Busken Huet argues, "all [Van Haren's] writings have been written to blot out the impression of the events of February 1760 as far as possible."¹⁷⁴ Moreover, this personal tragedy is said to have had no small bearing on the play, *Agon*. When Sultan Agon in the drama was also a victim of familial treachery and unjust expulsion from office, the playwright and his protagonist were fellow-comrades in suffering.

Closing in on Van Haren's Intentions

We might here pause, take a step back, review the rhetorical arena and lament the woeful complexity implicit in determining Van Haren's intentions in authoring the drama. Is Van Haren to be taken for an avowed loyalist or an unrelenting critic of the Company? If the gaping inconsistencies in the playwright's literary oeuvre prevent us from applauding the provocative anti-colonialism that colour the drama, his revisionist history of Banten requires us to reconsider our subscription to any theory that downplays the drama's anti-colonial content. Under these circumstances, I propose a reading of the play which reconciles these two seemingly non-negotiable but equally valid positions.

I argue that Van Haren never intended to write an anti-colonial drama. The crackling criticism of both colonialism and the Company in *Agon* was undoubtedly a response to the anti-colonial tendency in literary circles elsewhere in Europe, a trend to which Van Haren seemed to have been receptive, although that was not strictly his object. It constituted collateral damage. *Agon* hardly reflected Van Haren's views of the Company. *Het Vaderland* which appreciatively recorded the Company's eastern conquests and *Van Japan* which articulated a moving defence of the Company were better representatives of his ideological

¹⁷³Smeyers and Vieu-Kuik, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden, deel 6*, 189; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 310.

¹⁷⁴Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 43; Rob Erenstein, "Onno Zwier van Haren en *Agon*, Sulthan van Bantam," *Scenarium* 2 (1978), 42; G. Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde, vol. 5* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1910), 501-02. Mansvelt subscribes to this point of view when he writes: "Agon is ...in the first place de apology of Van Haren." Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 314.

standing. In the latter work, Van Haren even deliberated on the colonization methods of the Company and argued that they fell short of their potential in Ceylon. The island, he argued would have made for an ideal “settlement-colony.”¹⁷⁵ *Agon* on the other hand was conceived of as an ode to the aging Javanese monarch and a eulogy to his resolve to protect the independence of his domains. The contempt for the aggressive imperialism of the VOC, a rhetoric that *Agon* indisputably carries, was the result of Van Haren’s attempt to bring to life the agony of this potentate, while at the same time (as previous scholars have argued) lending voice to his own personal tragedy. Van Haren may certainly have meant to chastise the Company for its highhandedness in the Banten affair, in which he indisputably saw Sultan Agon as the aggrieved party, which explains the unprecedented step of upholding the ruler as the protagonist at the cost of marginalizing the Company. The belligerent critique of the enterprise that ensued however was an unintended consequence.¹⁷⁶ I argue, in other words that a subtle distinction needs to be made between the ideological bent of the playwright on one hand and the anti-colonial sentiments of the drama on the other. The latter characteristic entered the literary piece owing to the nature of the subject and influences of the period when the play was written.

This reading of the play can be substantiated on two grounds. First, the claim that Van Haren unwittingly overlooked the play’s stern anti-colonialist message relies on the same reasoning that scholars have employed to criticize the view that the play was a literary crusade against colonialism – Saint Martin’s response to counteract Sultan Agon’s criticism of the Company.¹⁷⁷ Van Haren presumed (and in retrospect wrongly so) that Saint Martin’s dialogue would suffice to quell any outrage that Agon’s ignominious estimations of the Dutch may have caused his audiences.¹⁷⁸ Secondly, the playwright seems to have remained remarkably indifferent to the drama’s ideological content and contemporaries although aware of its anti-Company stance were not particularly offended by it. On publication, the drama did not ruffle any feathers and Van Haren’s critics chose instead to train their guns on trivialities such as the drama’s stylistic aspects. The periodical, *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1770) which was remorselessly exacting in its review of the play’s literary content curiously chose

¹⁷⁵Van Haren, *Van Japan*, 104(footnote). Although Van Haren attributes these views to “a foreigner” who he is supposed to have struck a conversation with, it is certain that Van Haren subscribed to these views as well.

¹⁷⁶Van der Vliet usefully notes that “one forgets far too easily that the critique of a policy per se need not have to mean (that it was a) colonial critique.” While this evaluation is close to my own thesis, Van der Vliet essentially considers the drama (both the intended object and the outcome) to not have been anti-colonial. Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316.

¹⁷⁷ Saint Martin had recalled the successes of the Company in Asia to counter Agon’s denunciation of the enterprise.

¹⁷⁸Erenstein, “Onno Zwier van Haren en Agon, Sulthan van Bantam,” 60.

only to describe Van Haren's views about the Dutch East India Company rather than deliver their verdict on his ideological stance.¹⁷⁹ Convinced that his drama was in need of fine-tuning, the playwright sought only to assuage his critics. In the 1773 edition of the work, the drama's rhyme and verse were altered, but its colonial criticism was retained with all the vituperative bite of the original.¹⁸⁰ The first audiences to have been decidedly squeamish about the play's ideological content were its nineteenth-century public who knocked the play off the repertoire in the *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*.¹⁸¹ In 1890, the newspaper *Java Bode* similarly expressed its discomfiture with Van Haren's glorification of "this Sundanese Despot," and four years later, the literary scholar J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren caught the scent of the Multatulianesque anti-colonialism in the drama, thereby igniting the debate that we have in our hands today.¹⁸²

If it was not Van Haren's design to devote his literary energies in *Agon* to critiquing colonialism and the Company, what might his intent have been? The analogies between the drama and Van Haren's own life are far too overpowering to downplay the estimations of scholars such as G.P.M. Knuvelde who argue that "Agon is another Van Haren."¹⁸³ The playwright had indeed, as he suggests, contrived to make the play a literary canvas on which he inscribed his life in an effort to plead his innocence in the incest controversy. The drama's message of vigorously resisting any form of aggressive imperialism on the other hand carries an inherent universalism that, as Mansvelt notes, also made it a lesson for the Dutch Republic.¹⁸⁴ Another relevant object of the playwright was to provide a commentary on an ideological and political tussle that was played out within the boardroom of the Council of the Indies in Batavia just as the war with Banten raged in full steam.¹⁸⁵ This is a point to which G.C. de Waard and Pieter van der Vliet refer fleetingly and which most other scholars seem to have ignored. When Saint Martin features as one of the few Dutchmen worthy of admiration in *Agon*, the drama might easily be seen as an extension of a project that Van Haren embarked upon in his biography of Joannes Camphuis, the governor-general of the VOC from 1684-1691. As De Waard notes, Van Haren sought to express ideological support for the governor-general and his clique which included Isaac de Saint Martin, Joan van Hoorn and others. The

¹⁷⁹See *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letter-Oefeningen, deel. 3, stuk. 1*, (Amsterdam: A. van der Kroe, 1770), 238-39.

¹⁸⁰See Onno Zwier van Haren, *Proeve van Nederduitsche treurspellen, getrokken uit vaderlandsche gebeurtenissen* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1773). This work carries the revised version of the drama.

¹⁸¹Erenstein, "Onno Zwier van Haren en Agon, Sulthan van Bantam," 59; Maria A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Nederlandse literatuur: een geschiedenis* (Groningen: Nijhoff, 1993), 337.

¹⁸²"Een Oud-Indische Treurspel I," *Java Bode: Nieuws, Handels en Advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indie* December 3, 1890; Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli."

¹⁸³Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde, deel 2*, 567.

¹⁸⁴Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 314.

¹⁸⁵Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316-17; De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 36.

policies of Camphuis's predecessor, Cornelis Speelman during whose tenure as governor-general, the war had begun did not appeal to the playwright.¹⁸⁶ When Speelman was governor-general, and Camphuis was a councillor of the Indies in his council, they seldom saw eye to eye on various policy points. Their political feud is mentioned in Company records such as Pieter van Dam's *Beschrijving van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* as well as in Van Haren's sources such as François Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* thereby providing the playwright with the information he desired to cement his literary alliances. Valentyn was exceptionally eloquent in his estimation of Camphuis, who he described as "virtuous, upright, very honourable, god-fearing and obliging," but showed greater thrift in positively evaluating Speelman's tenure.¹⁸⁷ The diplomat J.P.J. du Bois's *Vies des Gouverneurs Generaux* published in 1763 (which Van Haren may have very likely read) reproduced Valentyn's appraisals of the two administrators. He described Camphuis as "obliging, upright, pious and god fearing" while regarding the Speelman era as having been rather lacklustre.¹⁸⁸ According to Mansvelt, with Van Haren's sources providing him with the necessary information to cement his literary alliances, the playwright clearly preferred the intellectual Camphuis and his clique, including individuals like Saint Martin, over Speelman.¹⁸⁹ It is also fitting to read Van Haren's engagement with these personages who were all drawn from the VOC's seventeenth-century history together with fact that all of Van Haren's literary engagements involving the Dutch East India Company, namely *Agon*, *Proeve* and *Van Japan* were situated

¹⁸⁶Cornelis Speelman was Governor General of the VOC from 1681-1684. Evidences of this political feud may easily be gleaned from contemporary Company records such as the *Dagh-Register van Batavia*. See Fruin-Mees, *Dagh-register Batavia anno 1682*, introduction. For an overview of Camphuis' tenure as Governor General which also speaks of his association with Saint Martin and Van Hoorn, see "Camphuys (Joannes)," in *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biographisch Woordenboek*, eds. P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok, and K.H. Kossmann (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1924), 263-64. Although Mansvelt makes mention of the difference of opinion between Camphuis and Speelman regarding the Dutch involvement in Banten, he does not refer to the factionalism and infighting which raged within the Council of Batavia in the period. See Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 317.

¹⁸⁷Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, *Deel 4a*, 317. Of Speelman, Valentyn wrote, "he did not win as much fame in his role as Governor General, than he did as member of the Council of the Indies and Director." *Ibid.*, 311. It may however be noted that Van Haren spoke highly of Cornelis Speelman's early exploits such as his role in the conquest of Macassar in 1669 and of his subsequent intervention in the war with Mataram. A similar estimation of Speelman is born in Pieter van Dam's *Beschrijving van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* which regarded the man's administrative capabilities rather poorly. Van Dam deemed him a better subordinate than leader. Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oost Indische Compagnie*, *deel 3*, ed. FW.Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1943), 22-23.

¹⁸⁸J. P. J. Du Bois, *Historische beschrijving der reizen of nieuwe en volkome verzameling van de allerwaardigste en zeldzaamste zee en land-togten*, vol. 20 (Amsterdam: J. Roman et al, 1765), 265, 83. The work was originally published in French in 1763 as *Vies des Gouverneurs Generaux avec l'abrégé de l'histoire des établissements Hollandois aux Indes Orientales*. I have employed the Dutch translation.

¹⁸⁹De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 36; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 311.

in this very period, which is widely considered to have been the Company's heyday.¹⁹⁰ In authoring these works, Van Haren harked back to a glorious past: *Proeve* reflected genially on the governance of Camphuis, who was an enlightened seventeenth-century administrator, while *Tot Japan* defended the character of the Dutch, which eventually won them their exclusive presence and trading rights in Japan. Unlike *Proeve* and *Tot Japan*, *Agon* filled not one but two roles. As a sub-narrative to the fall of Sultan Agon, the drama traced the rapid expansion of the Company and thereby recalled a brilliant yet bygone era. The play also expressed regret at the decline of the VOC which Van Haren saw unfolding in his lifetime, sentiments which as we have seen before were articulated in three forms: it predicted that the Dutch would replay the Portuguese decline in Asia; it lamented the gradual indigenization of the Dutch which it equated with degeneration; and it claimed that Dutch greed, which was the motive for their expansionism would also lead them to ruin.¹⁹¹ This perspective that Van Haren seemed to express encapsulated the general sense of dejection with which the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic had come to view their Eastern trading corporation.

Although not aggrieved by the VOC's imperial appetite, which is the general picture that Van Haren's work seemed to convey, people within the Company and the Dutch Republic, cast a critical eye on the habits of life that it had engendered in the east. Like Van Haren, they sensed the Company's impending downfall and that this sombre state of affairs was in part caused by the character of its employees. A rhetoric both publicizing and critiquing the staggering levels of corruption and luxury indulged in by Company servants featured in Dutch print across the eighteenth century. This coincided with the Company's own concern to arrest the phenomenon. Their internal correspondence stressed the need to set its house in order and Governors-General Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff and Jacob Mossel in the second half of the eighteenth century attempted to relieve Batavia of its notoriety for lasciviousness.¹⁹² De Graaff's *Oost Indische Spiegel* which was undoubtedly the inspiration for Van Haren's notions about Asia's corrupted Dutchmen, went through numerous editions under various titles through the eighteenth century. Two editions of the *Beschryving van Batavia* which bore incredible likeness to the work were published in the 1640s suggesting

¹⁹⁰ According to Van Heeckeren, Van Haren engaged with this particular period in Dutch history because "he [Van Haren] want[ed] to teach [us] how the history of the institution of [Dutch] might in the Indies was written with blood and tears." Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," 330.

¹⁹¹ On the subject of indigenization, see Lefevre, "Composing the Other," 87-88.

¹⁹² Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 66-93. J.J. Steur, *Herstel of ondergang: de voorstellen tot redres van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, 1740-1795* (Utrecht: Hes, 1984), 36-37; Also see NA 1.10.03, Collection Alting 42, "Memorie ter verhandeling van de staat en het belang der E. Comp op hare respectieve kantoren Julij 1753," p. 1.

that it had become commonplace to speak of the sloth that had taken root among their compatriots overseas.¹⁹³ Jan de Marre's poem *Batavia* (1740) recorded the affluence of its society with a chord of disapproval, and the same Du Bois whose assessments of the Company's administrators are likely to have influenced Van Haren's take on the Banten episode alleged that "the excessive wealth and opulence that [held] sway in these Indische settlements and especially in Batavia ha[d] become like a plague for public well-being."¹⁹⁴ If these works convincingly sounded out the unsavoury extravagances of the Dutchmen abroad to their eighteenth-century audiences, the more articulate and resounding critique of the enterprise emerged within years after the publication of the drama with the rise of the Patriots in the Dutch Republic in the 1770s.¹⁹⁵ Along with their staunchly anti-Orangist ideology and new notions of political participation came a deep-seated scepticism about the workings of the Dutch East India Company. Anti-colonialism was never a part of their agenda, but the Patriots were convinced that the VOC was a malfunctioning enterprise plagued by many evils such as corruption. The call for greater accountability by its employees was as a consequence a predominant feature of the early Patriotic rhetoric of the 1770s, and a pamphlet from this period, the *Redenkundig Berigt* slammed the VOC for speedily rushing towards its own demise by recruiting what it called "fortune-seekers" into its service.¹⁹⁶ Just as the wall of secrecy surrounding the ailments of the Company suddenly seemed to have been razed and all eyes were drawn to the Company's ill-health, people were emboldened to reflect on the causes for the susceptibility of the Dutch in Asia to take on behavioural traits that varied from those they bore at home. In contrast to earlier Company servants-turned-travel writers such as De Graaff, who gingerly hinted at the East's propensity to debauch its European sojourners, Johan Splinter Stavorinus, whose travels in Asia coincided with the scripting of Van Haren's drama, drew a comparison of the conduct of an employee of the English Company and his Dutch counterpart reserving praise for the former and criticism for the latter. He even aired

¹⁹³*Beschryving van Batavia, met des zelfs Kasteel en Publyke Gebouwen als mede van de regeringe der stadt, en van de inwoonders, waar in onder anderen aangetoond wordt de grote hovaardy der Hollandsche en Oost-Indische vrouwen, hare manier van huishouden, opvoeden der kinderen, en bestieren der slaven en slavinnen*, (Amsterdam: Dirk Swart, 1741). A second edition was published the following year.

¹⁹⁴For Jan de Marre's take on Dutch depravity, see Lefevere, "Composing the Other," 87. "De onmatige weelde en overdaad, die in dese Indische bezittingen en vooral te Batavia heerste, was als een pest voor het gemeene welzyn geworden..." Du Bois, *Historische beschrijving*, deel 20, 402.

¹⁹⁵As a political force in the Republic, the Patriot movement acquired importance enough to later constitute a threat to the Orangists and subsequently allied itself with the French upon their occupation of the Republic in 1695. See G.J. Schutte, "De Nederlandse Patriotten en de kolonien: Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden 1770-1800" (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1974).

¹⁹⁶*Redenkundig berigt wegens de ware oorzaak van 't bederf, mitsgaders de middelen van redres der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie door den Indischen Patriot*, (1773), 14-15; Schutte, "De Nederlandse Patriotten," 26-28.

his fears about the virulence of the Asian malady in this context. Europe too, he feared was not insulated to its effects. In his 1793 account he sourly noted:

The spirit of liberty which animates a Briton in his own country, is repressed as little here as there. This is diametrically opposite to the stiff and obnoxious formality, which takes place at Batavia, in the company of the governor general, and the counsellors of India... It would be well, if this conduct remained solely confined to the Asiatic regions, which gave birth to it; but, unfortunately, we see it continued by purse-proud individuals, when they return to a country, where, from the most ancient times, it is known to be in perfect contradiction to the genius and temper of the inhabitants.¹⁹⁷

Stavorinus chose to base his view of the eighteenth-century Dutchman abroad upon an ideal state situated in the distant past, but for most deliberations on the demise of the VOC in print, including those of Van Haren, the ideal state lay in the recent past – the previous century. The debilitating state of the VOC in the eighteenth century may have been a palpable reality, but the sense of dejection and unease with the Company's fortunes felt by Van Haren and his contemporaries in the period is also tied to the feeling of ruination that engulfed the eighteenth century Dutch Republic in general. The sense of disillusionment with contemporary circumstances, aptly termed as "nostalgic idealism" by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt was resonant in the moralist Justus van Effen's call in the 1730s for the return to pristine values of the past.¹⁹⁸ It was also discernible in the philosopher Elie Luzac's complaint that it was not respectable enterprise that dictated the character of eighteenth-century commerce, but the rush to create fortunes.¹⁹⁹ The Patriots too harped on the achievements of the previous century to underline the dismal conditions they beheld in their own time. The pamphlet *Voor en aan de Geïnteresseerden* reflected nostalgically on how their seventeenth-century hot-bloodedness had fuelled their successful forays in the East, and the *Plan of welmeenende voorstelling* lamented the devastating impact that the decline of

¹⁹⁷J.S. Stavorinus, *Reize van Zeeland over de Kaap de Goede Hoop, naar Batavia, Bantam, Bengalen, enz* (Leyden: A. en J. Honkoop, 1793). I cite from its English translation titled *Voyages to the East-Indies; by the late John Splinter Stavorinus*, vol. 1, translated from the original Dutch by Samuel Hull Wilcocke (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 146.

¹⁹⁸Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, "Introduction," in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6; James L. Schorr, *The Life and Works of Justus van Effen* (Wyoming: University of Wyoming, 1982), 30-38.

¹⁹⁹Wyger R.E. Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism in the Dutch Republic: The Political Thought of Elie Luzac* (Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1993), 141.

the Republic had on its naval might.²⁰⁰ This fatalism, which dominated the Dutch mentalite impinged on Van Haren's other works like it did on *Agon*. In his play *Pietje en Agnietje*, which retold the mythical tale of Pandora's folly in opening the box of worldly sorrows, Van Haren mourned the fact that the Republic of his age had "languished in the desire for luxury, faithlessness and violence."²⁰¹ When *Agon* thus recounted the events on Java in a time when the Dutch advance on the island was akin to an invasive weed and when it foresaw for the Company a gloomy future characterized by decline and subsequent eviction, it is clear that the "nostalgic idealism" that weighed so heavily on the eighteenth century Dutch psyche had also taken its toll on the playwright.²⁰² "Nothing to [Van Haren]," Mansvelt opines, "was more painful than the waning glory of the old Republic, and he desired nothing more passionately than the restoration of the old glory."²⁰³ The notion of decline is thus absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the reasons why the play was authored.

In our enthusiasm to unravel Van Haren's intentions within the contours of the "anti-colonial" debate, a significant element in the drama has forfeited our attention, namely, why Van Steenwyk, a character whose tale of apostasy was told with much zest and approbation by Van Haren's sources, should be caricatured in *Agon* as the mind behind Abdul's misdoings. In his study on the reactions that apostasy elicited in English drama, Nabil Matar notes, "In England, the renegade developed into an important dramatic type...unlike other villains, the renegade was heinous because he was the enemy from within."²⁰⁴ His argument that dramatists adopted views that were mostly condemnatory also helps explain the Dutch situation. Van Haren's take on apostasy repeated a presumably general Dutch contempt for renegades captured in a saying popular in the eighteenth century - *Een renegaat is nog steeds erger dan een Turk* (A renegade is still worse than a Turk).²⁰⁵ Nicolaes Wassenauer's annual journal *Historisch verhael aller gedenkwaardige geschiedenissen* published in the 1630s, and

²⁰⁰A. Douglas, "Voor en aan de geïnteresseerden in de Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, wegens gedaane aanbieding tot middelen van redres dier maatschappy," (1785), 41-42; Nicolaas Hoefnagel, *Plan of welmeenende voorstelling ter verbetering van Neerlands zee-weezen* (Amsterdam: Dirk Schuurman, 1779), vi-vii.

²⁰¹Cf. Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 30.

²⁰² Van Heeckeren points to the fact that the tendency of "looking back" at the seventeenth century from eighteenth is rife in Van Haren's drama. Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," 329-30. Busken Huet states that this was a predominant theme in Van Haren's drama *Pietje en Agnietje*. Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 30.

²⁰³Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 310.

²⁰⁴Nabil Matar, "The Renegade in English Seventeenth Century Imagination," *Studies in English Literature* 33, 3 (1993), 490.

²⁰⁵One finds no less than three works from the period which bear this saying: Jan A. Bakker, *De jonge reiziger door Nederland*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Langeveld, 1797), 195; Betje Wolff, *De bekkeriaansche dooling op eene geheel nieuwe wyze dat is proef ondervindelyk wederlegd* (Hoorn: Tjallingius, 1775), 10; Cornelius van Engelen, *De Philosoph*, deel 2 (Amsterdam: P. Meijer, 1766), 378.

thus temporally far removed from the drama similarly condemned renegades when it broke news of the death of the Dutch pirate and apostate, Samsone.²⁰⁶ Speaking of the unchristian burial that the pirate had received at the hands of his crew, Wassenaer sought to convey to his readers that misfortune befell those guilty of acts as ungodly as religious conversion. While Van Haren's and Wassenaer's works neatly align with Nabil Matar's assessment of apostasy as perceived in English works, the Dutch attitude towards renegades was more varied. S. de Vries' *Handelingen en geschiedenissen voorgevallen tusschen den staet der Vereenigde Nederlanden en dien van de Zeerovers in Barbaryen* (1684) which recounted the history of the famed French pirate Soliman Reys readily shows this. Revealing the same forgiving disposition as Valentyn, Bogaert, and De Graaff (whose works had informed *Agon*), De Vries was not severe in his appraisal of the pirate's act of apostasy because he turned Christian and had in his last days become irredeemably hostile to his former kin, the Turks.²⁰⁷ We might then draw the conclusion that the act of "crossing over" elicited multiple reactions in the Republic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as *Agon*, and other works suggest. We might also surmise that the choice of Van Steenwyk for antagonist may have been a more incidental one that said little about Van Haren's opinion about Van Steenwyk's deeds. When the plot demanded an antagonist, Van Steenwyk may have seemed the ideal choice – he was attached to Sultan Haji's household and the notion of renegade carried conventional associations with the element of deception.

Conclusion

In 1769, Van Haren's *Agon* resuscitated the tale of the Banten War of the 1680's. Apart from the agitation that the war caused the ruling class in the Republic who defended their actions against the calumny of the outraged English, the conquest had gone down in Dutch memory as a feat of enterprise, courage and determination. And then came *Agon*, which played havoc with this prevailing image. Enterprise became imperiousness, courage cunning, and determination deception. In eliciting feelings of shame and disapproval for the character of the Dutch East India Company and its servants, the play was unprecedented. It was genuinely critical of the Dutch and not surprisingly, it was a pale shadow of the accounts of Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff, works that supplied the raw material for this explosive tale. While

²⁰⁶Nicolaes Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael aller gedenkwaardige geschiedenissen, vol. VIII: van Octobre des jaers 1624 tot April des jaers 1625 voorgevallen sijn* (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz), 108-09.

²⁰⁷S. de Vries, *Handelingen en geschiedenissen voorgevallen tusschen den staet der Vereenigde Nederlanden en dien van de zeerovers in Barbaryen* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1684), 362-64.

there are no doubt intersections to be found in their perspectives, *Agon* had in comparison to its sources, conceptualized the Banten war in as radical a manner as was possible.

The sources to the drama, which were all authored in the early eighteenth century (decades before the play was written), were laudatory of the Dutch involvement in the war. This was a conceivable standpoint no doubt, because their authors shared strong bonds with the enterprise. The Company was employer to Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff, and in the instance of Bogaert, it was also patron. Connections between the works they wrote on the Banten war and Company documentation are also apparent allowing us the opportunity of plotting a roadmap of information travel from the archives of the VOC to the accounts of the trio. These authors employed pamphlets on the war that were published in the Republic in the 1680s. The pamphlets, for the information they bore, had in turn relied on the archives of the VOC which were created at the ground level in Batavia and Banten in the course of the conflict. At the perspectival level, the records of the VOC, which chronicled the same episodes as the published accounts wrote about, carried well-developed perspectives on subjects which the travelogues had also addressed. The issues of apostasy, Banten's women and Sultan Haji's sadism were also dealt with extensively by Company scribes in their official reports. If the perspectival differences between *Agon* and its sources on various themes were acute, the disparities in characterization between the Company records and the travel accounts are equally glaring. The images that Batavia created of her neighbouring kingdom of Banten were dictated by the nature of her interaction with the Sultanate. Before the war of 1682 landed the port kingdom into the lap of the Dutch, Batavia's relations with Banten was one of uneasy peace interspersed by periods of open confrontation. This feeling of profound hostility which the Company felt for her rival in trade for a frustratingly long period of time sculpted her vision of her troublesome neighbour which was consummately expressed in her standpoint on apostasy. Perceived as a phenomenon that was predicated on the religious differences between Batavia and Banten, and as one that grossly undermined the authority of the Company, apostasy was a practice that they combatted both in policy and rhetoric. Despite the unrelenting religious tensions experienced by Banten and Batavia towards one another, both polities seem to have simultaneously experimented with cooperation and co-existence with one another. The published accounts however fail to allot narrative space to either outlining these complexities and inconsistencies that plagued the Banten-Batavia relationship or to reflect on the anxiety that the Company experienced in battling the phenomenon of apostasy. Divulging another contradiction, Company documentation also chose to view Sultan Haji and the royal women differently. Born out of actual day-to-day interaction with the

kingdom of Banten, portrayals of the King, his concubines, maid-servants and other women attached to the royal household were neither unremittingly critical nor overtly simplistic and on the contrary were marked by a rich variation in representation. Clearly here, it was the element of genre which brought in the difference in rhetoric and the variation in perspective. Company documentation as institutional correspondence conceived Banten differently from published accounts as the genres that they belong to differed and the audiences they catered to varied.

The travelogues in their notions of Banten was an attestation of the prevailing stereotypes in Europe about despotism and the Oriental harem and *Agon* in its contradictions to these works constituted subversive content. The only two contexts in which the sources left a dent on the drama were in the context of informing the playwright of the infectiousness of Eastern depravity. Van Haren dispelled the image of a playwright toiling under the weight of “received wisdom” about the East which he felt compelled to replicate, and *Agon* became the ideal example of a drama which not only weaned itself of its sources but grossly contradicted their evaluations. That said, the anti-colonial daring which the play showcased was an accident. It contested the representative strategies that characterized its sources with startling conviction thereby blending into the climate of discontentment that contemporary literary works in England and France had begun to exemplify. While this evidence bolsters the argument of the “anti-colonialists” that Van Haren’s intention lay in deriding the enterprise, the character of playwright’s literary oeuvre indicates that his commitment to such a stance was shaky or better still, non-existent. The controversy over the playwright’s incestuous deeds had a bearing on the play and with the drama’s fixation with the Company’s seventeenth century past and the pessimism regarding its future, it adhered to the dominant eighteenth century Dutch narrative of past greatness and the progressive deterioration of the present.