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Lobbying in Company: Mechanisms of political decision-making and economic interests in the history of Dutch Brazil, 1621-1656

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MAKING THE COMPANY WORK

'Ever since, the Remonstrants have walked to The Hague, solicited, remonstrated, maintained, prayed, and begged with tears in their eyes'.⁹⁴⁹

Intersectional networks of aggregate interests did not stand idly by as the world changed around them but instead actively lobbied for their own interests. Important decisions were made in the European center, and these decisions were partially negotiated around geopolitical, military, and economic circumstances. However, these decisions were also based on the information that was supplied by the individuals from the (colonial) periphery. In addition, colonial individuals actively engaged in the political decision-making process by physically crossing the Atlantic from Brazil to the Dutch Republic to deliver their opinion. They submitted petitions to colonial or metropolitan governments, or even both, thus steering decision-making process. As a result, policy-making was not exclusive to The Hague, but stretched to include other provinces and even the Atlantic Ocean. In this regard, the political system was polycentric. Moreover, lobbying individuals wrote and/or printed pamphlets defending their interests, thus contributing to a public debate in an attempt to influence decision-making. This thesis argues that the Dutch colony in Brazil was the outcome of a permanent process of structuration by lobby groups formed through free agent organization based in cooperative practice and intersecting interests. This means that aggregates of people made a difference. Concomitantly, this underscores the role of human agency for institutions.

People made a difference for the implementation, shape, and maintenance of Dutch Brazil through lobbying. Lobbying allowed these people to influence decision-making and their influence is most apparent when it comes to formal institutions such as regulations. Institutions are *'humanly devised constraints'* that structure human interaction.⁹⁵⁰ This implies that people, whether as individuals or as members of a network, were part and parcel of the Dutch colonial experience. Moreover, this thesis demonstrates that the colony in Brazil, and

⁹⁴⁹ 'Sedert welken tijt, de Remonstranten wederomme geduyrich henen hebben gelopen, gesolliciteert, geremonstreert, aengehouden, gesmeect ende met de tranen in de ooghen ghebeden (...)', Kn. 7872: Corte en bondige deductie van redenen, 28.

⁹⁵⁰ North, "Institutions," 97.

to some extent the wider Atlantic, was not exclusively a project of great designers, political elites, or enlightened thinkers. Instead, it was the product of individuals who wanted to become *Grietman* in Friesland, of individuals that could mold colonial institutions in accordance to their interest, and of individuals trapped in historical grudges or party lines. In other words, these individuals should not be seen separately from the Company as they were an integral part of its success and failure.

The effect of lobbying for the realization and implementation of institutions can for example be seen in the erection of the WIC. Although it is easy to discredit Usselinx' vision of a colonizing company for the Atlantic as utopian and unrealistic, the result of the WIC was largely influenced by his vision for the Company's structure. That his vision was not realized in all its elements was less caused by an unrealistic vision, than it was the outcome of a failure to forge political alliances. In other words, it was the result of structural limitations which Usselinx was insufficiently able to navigate. Within the colony, the WIC adopted a colonial structure that relied heavily on pre-existing Portuguese bodies such as the *câmara*. This was primarily because the Company had very little room to negotiate and relied on cooperation from existing organizational forms to make the colony a success. In practice, its Portuguese inhabitants succeeded in allocating specific time slots for the High Government to deal with current Portuguese affairs. At the same time, the Portuguese inhabitants were reliant on of the Company's realization of the importance to facilitate lobbying. Despite all the potential of lobbying there were always structural limitations to the bandwidth of maneuverability which has become especially apparent in less successful lobbying campaigns.

The shape of institutions was structured in both the colony and the metropole. A clear example in the colonial sphere is the change of regulations for the enslavement of Amerindians in 1642. Even though the Board of Directors of the WIC and the regents in the States General repeatedly demonstrated their conviction that only enslaved Africans should be part of the enslaved labor force, the *senhores* of Dutch Brazil succeeded in changing this regulation. Within the colony, lobbyists provided the argumentation for, and wording of, an ordinance forbidding enslaved Africans access to certain areas to collect grass, water, or firewood. This clearly demonstrates the relation between petitions and formal institutions. Moreover, when it comes to trading regulations, the population in Dutch Brazil succeeded in

lobbying the High Government to introduce regulations that sought to improve the quality and global competitiveness of Brazilian sugar. Interestingly enough, these trading regulations were adopted by the Portuguese only after the colonial façade changed back from Dutch to Portuguese. Within the metropolitan sphere, the implementation and shaping of institutions of political economy were also the result of lobbying. When diverging interests went head-to-head in the Republic with some preferring a Company monopoly and others preferring free trade with recognition fees, the political arena formed a battleground for lobbying interest groups. Both parties used economic, legal, and moral arguments and provided extremely detailed calculations to prove their policy was economically more rewarding. Even though colonial subjects were invited to demonstrate their preference on this matter, and as such the “peripheral” colony became the center of the political interest, the States General established itself as the center of political decision-making within the Republic. As a result, the shape of institutions in both the Republic and the colony in Brazil was the result of structuration through lobbying.

Furthermore, lobbying was often the tool of choice for the maintenance of institutions. The lobbying campaigns for military assistance demonstrate this clearly. The drawn-out process that culminated in the loss of Brazil was characterized by repeated lobbying campaigns for military support from the metropole. The decisions following these campaigns were structurally limited by other circumstances such as the availability of resources and other political events. Nevertheless, the fact that military support was eventually organized demonstrates that lobbying was a successful tool to achieve the maintenance of institutions. Even though lobbying for the rescue of Brazil united people in both the colony and the metropole, it is striking that individuals in the colony preferred to use their resources to lobby for a continuation of a Dutch façade. The lobby campaign of 1652-1653 demonstrates the commitment and the faith entrusted to the lobbyists by the inhabitants of Brazil for the maintenance of institutions. This was evidenced by the fact that the campaign was in fact financed by donations from the inhabitants of Brazil.

These lobbying campaigns for implementing, shaping, and maintaining institutions were inclusive in principal. That is to say, lobbying campaigns were open to free people, for there is no evidence that the enslaved population had access to political bodies at all. The Catholic Portuguese, Brazilian Amerindian, and Jewish population on the other hand had

comparable access to the political arenas as Protestant Dutch inhabitants in Brazil. One Amerindian delegation even had an audience with the States General. Moreover, as argued above, the Portuguese inhabitants had a crucial role for the shaping of institutions relating to the preservation of sugar, and, for example, a regulation aimed at preventing fraudulent practices. Limitations for lobbyists were more structural in nature. Access to the political arena could be prohibited. Moreover, limited funds or other political circumstances, such as the peace treaty in Munster, could limit the bandwidth of maneuverability for lobbyists. However, these limitations applied equally to lobbyists and political mandataries.

From the perspective of the Company or the States General it made sense to facilitate lobbying even when, for example, there was no legal obligation to accept petitions. Policies and regulations that resulted from popular participation were more likely to boast a larger foundation of support than decisions introduced by the political mandataries. This does not necessarily mean that decisions that were the result of lobbying were always met with universal approval, as is well demonstrated by the intense lobbying campaign in the Republic over trade regulations in the late 1630s. However, the anger in Brazil in response to the Company's decision to reduce expenditure in the colony, is a clear indication of the possible pitfalls of more "top-down" decision-making. Policy changes involving the employees of the university that were not the result of a lobbying process evidently ran the risk of strikes and resignations from the employees and subjects. An additional benefit of allowing lobbying is that it facilitated the integration and implementation of Portuguese know-how and institutions in the newly conquered Dutch colony.

It often occurred that lobbying took place on an individual level, but individuals could just as easily form a lobbying alliance. These alliances of aggregate interests are of particular relevance as they demonstrate the intersecting interests that could transcend sectional boundaries of gender, kinship, class, religion, 'nationality', and geography. As such, these alliances shaped the institutions of Dutch Brazil in an attempt to further their shared interests. However, alliances were not exclusively forged between heterogeneous individuals. An intimate network such as the Varlet-Hack family, which obtained seats in important bodies such as the *câmara* and the Board of Directors, succeeded in advancing its own interests for trading regulations in the late 1630s. These lobbying alliances, whether

based on traditional boundaries or otherwise, were essential to the success and failure of Dutch Brazil and were an integral part of the colonial experience.

Kollman's theory of lobbying suggest that interest groups can use direct lobbying as well as outside lobbying strategies.⁹⁵¹ In the seventeenth century, direct lobbying manifested itself via petitions, presentations and correspondence. Petitions were of paramount importance in facilitating the interaction between (ordinary) people and political mandataries. Outside lobbying occurred in pamphlets and displays of social unrest in the streets, as well as petition drives. Petition drives, and the practice of multiple individuals signing petitions to support a cause, transformed the public sphere and created a new form of lobbying in the Dutch Republic. Political mandataries had predominantly feared public opinion and a petition drive was a way of mobilizing public opinion for lobbying purposes. A petition drive demonstrated the popular support for the issue addressed in the petition. An excellent example of the influence of public opinion for the decision-making process is the city of Amsterdam, where a petition drive led the city to remove its objection to send a rescue fleet to Brazil in 1645.

Moreover, it is imperative to emphasize and include the role of personal relations and the use of societal capital in seventeenth century lobbying. Hendrick Haecxs, for example, needed the societal capital of Johannes de Laet to introduce him to the States General, the States of Holland, and the Stadtholder. Furthermore, the Frisian Stadtholder Willem Frederik employed his personal connections in order to put forward his favorable recommendations regarding the Brazilian affair. Willem Frederik did not have any personal stake in the matter, but acted in his 'official capacity' as Stadtholder, who needed to manage his societal capital. On another occasion, Stadtholder Fredrik Hendrik recommended favorably without 'actual knowledge of this affair'. This further demonstrates the necessity of societal credit in lobbying, since the content of the lobbying campaign was of secondary importance to the lobbyist's personal relations. Thus, Kollman's analytical framework for the twentieth century should include the role of personal relations and societal capital in the early modern period.

At the same time, controlling the flow of information was a tool that could be instrumentalized by all interested parties. The Board of Directors relied on information provided by the colonies. The directors often complained about the slow stream of

⁹⁵¹ Kollman, *Outside Lobbying*.

information coming from Brazil and that the people in the street were faster and more accurately informed than the Board was through official channels. It was also important to control the information that was percolating to the meetings of the States General. The diary of Hendrick Haecxs provides an excellent example of how the committee on West Indian affairs of the States General and a subset of the directors together succeeded in convincing Haecxs to tone down his report in order not to frustrate peace negotiations in Munster. Because reliable information was often scarce, the ability to control the flow of information was a vital tool for influencing the decision-making process. When the delegates of Brazil lobbied for a rescue campaign in 1652 and 1653, a large part of their time was devoted to streamlining information exchange between the different political bodies. Even though they did not produce the information, they attempted to control the flow of information to further their own interests. As a result, the control of information was important for lobbyists and political mandataries alike.

Lobbying offers a perspective of human agency for the development of institutions. Institutions did not solely exist because they were more efficient; they also existed because they were the product of structuration by knowledgeable individuals. Lobbying was a more cooperative form of interaction between people and political mandataries than, for example, going to court. While several people remarked how tense the situation was between the two competing factions during the lobby campaign on trading regulations in the late 1630s, none of the two parties went to court, but lobbied instead. Moreover, lobbying offered a better chance of success than going to court. When Pieter Coets obtained a court ruling reversing the delegates of the quarter of Veluwe to nullify their approval of Guelders' delegates consent for a relief effort for Brazil in February 1647, the States General simply overruled the court's decision. In other words, appealing political decisions in a court could result in an appeal by opponents to a political body that overruled the earlier decision of the court. Political lobbying on the other hand – as is demonstrated in this thesis – had recurrently proven itself capable of facilitating institutional change and was an accessible way of doing so.

While war and revolutions could prompt changes in institutions, not all institutional alterations happened organically or incrementally. Hence, it needs to be emphasized that institutional change was also the result of structuration through lobbying. Even though

people also lobbied for marginal adjustments in regulations, the chapter on trading regulations demonstrates that lobbying had the potential of influencing far-reaching institutions of political economy that transformed the reality of many people with an interest in Brazil or the wider Dutch Atlantic. Lobbying was a form of structuration, and petitions, public opinion, and personal relations were the carriers of the interactions between lobbyists and political mandataries. The lobbying campaigns were often the result of individuals allied through their shared interests. These shared interests shaped the colony in Brazil. The lobbyists ensured that the Company operated, and that it operated to accommodate their interests. In other words, lobbying made the Company work.

