

The Imperial Archipelago

Governors, Organisational Identity, and the
Dutch East India Company, c. 1700-1750.

Lennart Visser

S1179225

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Supervisor: dr. A. F. Schrikker

Maps designed by Lennart Visser

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Introduction

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) has been ascribed many faces and many colours during its existence, and these still echo throughout the public debate and national discourse. The public debate varies from glorification of the Dutch past, a “VOC-mentality” as an appeal to Dutch ingenuity and entrepreneurship, to a problematic history regarding slavery and colonial exploitation, or, as some have put it, the biggest criminals who ever existed.¹ In the historiography of early modern Dutch colonialism, the Company has also not been presented in an unequivocal way. Instead, three separate discourses have predominated: an emphasis on the Company’s commercial character², or its role as the precursor to the Dutch colonial state³, or the Dutch East India Company as a state-like entity that attributed sovereignty and privileges to itself.⁴ Significantly, around the turn of the century, the Dutch historian Colonial historian Jur van Goor postulated the idea of working towards a synthesis of the Dutch Empire’s various aspects and underlined the need for a broader and long-term perspective on the Dutch Republic, the company-system and the later Dutch-Indies.⁵ Despite astute observations, his idea remained under the radar of mainstream historical research for years. Over a decade later, this lack of a more holistic approach to the history of the Dutch Empire was also noted by Dutch historians Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans in their work *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld* (2012), but they limited themselves to the early modern Dutch expansion and empire in both Asia and the Atlantic.⁶ Around the same time Emmer and Gommans’s work was published, more Dutch colonial historians argued to integrate the Dutch case into the larger debate of overseas empires and

¹ Glorification of the VOC is most often found on the right side of the political spectrum, criticism most often on the left side. Regarding the “VOC-Mentality” quote of former Prime Minister Balkenende, see: *Handelingen der Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Algemene Beschouwingen Miljoenennota 2007*, 28 september 2006, digitally available: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20062007-272-294.html>, page 280.; Critical stances, for example: <https://overdemuur.org/zwelgen-in-eeen-mythisch-verleden-de-voc-en-haar-mentaliteit/>, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2212417-wat-moeten-we-nu-met-de-helden-van-toen.html>, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/het-hoge-woord-de-voc-is-meer-dan-eeen-juichgeschiedenis/>; Biggest criminals narrative: E. Vanvugt, *Roofstaat. Wat iedere Nederlander moet weten* (Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 2016).

² F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen, 1989); J. J. P. De Jong, *De waaier van het fortuin. De Nederlanders in Azië en de Indonesische Archipel 1595 – 1950* (The Hague, 1998); E. M. Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië. De Handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18^e eeuw* (Zutphen, 2000); J.J.B. Kuipers, *De VOC. Een multinational onder zeil 1602-1799* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2014).

³ L. Blussé, *Tussen geveinsde vrienden en verklaarde vijanden* (Amsterdam, 1999); J. A. Somers, *De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor* (Gouda, 2001).

⁴ P. J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); A. Weststeijn, “The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion,” *Itinerario* 39.1 (2014) 13-34.

⁵ J. Van Goor, ‘A hybrid state: the Dutch economic and political network’, in C. Guillot, D. Lombard and R. Ptak (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to China Sea; Miscellaneous notes* (Wiesbaden, 1998) 348-369; J. van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism: The Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004).

⁶ P. Emmer and J. Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: de geschiedenis van Nederland overzee, 1600-1800* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012), 13.

imperialism, by providing it with a ‘New Dutch Imperial History’.⁷ The idea of ‘New Imperial History’ emerge during the 1990s and was first used in research on the English, French, and American empires, and focuses on the imperial networks that linked the colonies with the metropolis, and how these influenced each other culturally, socially, and economically.⁸ This was a step away from the more ‘old-fashioned’ top-down, diplomatic and political approach to imperial history. Since 2013, there have been a growing number of publications that approach the Dutch Empire through this New Imperial History lens.⁹ This thesis will contribute to these new directions in Dutch Empire historiography by focusing on the governors and their narratives, how these changed over time and through different regions, and what the implications are for the organisational identity of the Dutch East India Company.

Looking at the early modern period, the main exponents of the ‘Dutch Empire’ overseas were the VOC and the West India Company (WIC), rather than the Dutch state directly. Historians have often compared the early modern European empires to each other to contextualize and differentiate them. This has resulted in different suggestions as to what the relationship between the Dutch Republic and the companies entailed, and what the status of the companies within the system was. The Danish historian Niels Steensgaard notes in his work *The Asian Trade Revolution* (1974) that the different European trade companies were a peculiar hybrid form between commercial company and state-like enterprise. Steensgaard’s central thesis is that the English (EIC) and Dutch East India Companies eventually surpassed the Portuguese *Estado da India* (State of India) as a result of the superior economic and bureaucratic organisation of the English and Dutch trading companies. He argues that “from its very foundation the [English] East India Company was organised as a Sovereign Power in Asia on a par with *Estado da India* and the VOC.”¹⁰ But Steensgaard regarded the EIC to be different from the other two, unique actually, since “it operated independently of existing political institutions, took its place in the international system under the management of its Court of Merchants

⁷ The first concrete plan was formulated in 2013: R. Raben, “A New Dutch Imperial History? Perambulations in a Prospective Field,” *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128.1 (2013) 5-30; Later, in 2017, the *longue durée* aspect became more flesh out: R. Koekkoek, A. Richard, A. Weststeijn, ‘Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective,’ *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 132.2 (2017) 79-96

⁸ For an overview, see: Stephen Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁹ Since 2013, this ‘New Dutch Imperial History’ has produced a lot of interesting works and results: C. Antunes and J. Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2015); C. Antunes & S. Miranda, "Going Bust: Some Reflections on Colonial Bankruptcies", *Itinerario* 43.1 (2019) 47-62; E. Odegard, "Agentschap Overzee: Het principal-agent probleem in de Nederlandse handelscompagnieën in de zeventiende eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131.3 (2018) 453-473; C. Antunes, S. Miranda, and J. Salvado, "The Resources of Others: Dutch Exploitation of European Expansion and Empires, 1570-1800", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131.3 (2018) 501-521; Cátia Antunes, "From Binary Narratives to Diversified Tales: Changing the Paradigm in the Study of Dutch Colonial Participation", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131.3 (2018) 393 – 407; R. Koekkoek, A. Richard, A. Weststeijn (eds.), *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

¹⁰ N. Steensgaard, *The Asian trade revolution of the seventeenth century: the East India companies and the decline of the caravan trade* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 120.

and preserved restricted economic goals.”¹¹ The VOC was not a ‘pure’ type of commercial company in Steensgaard’s eyes, since it was neither a state-run redistribution enterprise, nor a business, but rather a complex mix of the two.¹²

In his seminal study *Dutch primacy in world trade, 1585 - 1740*, Jonathan Israel, one of the main authorities on early modern Dutch history and history of the Enlightenment, agrees with Steensgaard regarding the hybrid character of the VOC. However, Israel chooses to “classify the VOC as a ‘pure’ type in the sense that it exactly typified the high degree of interaction of the ruling oligarchy with private enterprise” that was so characteristic of the Dutch overseas commerce.¹³ Nevertheless, Israel refrains from looking deeper into this hybridity, despite regarding the VOC as a ‘unique politico-commercial institution’ that was used by the Dutch elite to generate profit, but at the same time could be called upon by the States General to assist in the fight against the Portuguese and Spanish in Asia.¹⁴

It would take some time, but in 2011 American historian Philip Stern investigated the hybrid nature of the early modern European trading companies. In his work *The Company State*, in which Stern deals with the case of the English/British East India Company, he argues that the EIC, founded as a chartered company in 1600, acted as a state within a state throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by subjugating territories, upholding and creating jurisdiction, making treaties with political entities, minting coins, and other activities. In doing so, it managed the British interests in Asia.¹⁵ Furthermore, Stern justly asks the question of how we should understand a phenomenon like the EIC as both a chartered company under the British Crown, as well as being a *diwan*, a government official that collects revenue, under the Mughal Emperor.¹⁶ For Stern, this means that we should take “the early Company as a body politic on its own terms”, and by focussing on the EIC as a form of government he proposes to “move it (...) from the margins to the centre of its own political and intellectual history”.¹⁷

The Dutch historian Arthur Weststeijn, specialised in the intellectual history of empire, follows Stern’s analysis of the EIC, and wrote an article in which he applies it to the realm of the Dutch East India Company. Weststeijn assesses VOC rule by looking at how three prominent Dutch VOC affiliates (Pieter van Dam (1621-1706), Pieter de la Court (1618-1685), and Pieter van Hoorn (1619-1682)) thought about the VOC and its policies. These actors were critical of the VOC: Van Dam described the VOC as an overseas extension of the state, De la Court criticised the VOC for being a competitor of the Dutch Republic, and Van Hoorn argued that the VOC was essentially a

¹¹ Steensgaard, *Asian trade revolution*, 120.

¹² *Ibidem*, 141.

¹³ J. I. Israel, *Dutch primacy in world trade, 1585 – 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 16.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 70-71.

¹⁵ Stern, *The Company-State*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 208.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 6.

state.¹⁸ Weststeijn concludes, therefore, that the VOC should be considered “a particular political institution in its own terms”, in short: a company-state.¹⁹

The most recent historiographical development is to take the Dutch East India Company and embed it in the larger context of Empire. Historians Jane Burbank and Frederik Cooper, experts on the study of empires, argued that the European states in the fifteenth and sixteenth century were not out to found colonies and settlements as a *raison d'être*. Instead, European states were interested in resources and wealth that they could not obtain domestically.²⁰ This meant that the different Companies were an instrument of the European states. Catia Antunes elaborates on this argument, and states that both the VOC and WIC were the means through which the governing body of the Dutch Republic, the *Staten Generaal*, acquired power and resources. Within the Republic, the *Staten Generaal* had to share its sovereignty with the nobility, clergy, and cities. Therefore, the ‘Company-system’ was a way out of this shared-sovereignty problem. As a consequence, the VOC and WIC should be regarded as integral parts of the Dutch process of empire building.²¹

So far, the majority of these works have been describing and analysing the Dutch Empire from a ‘distance’, approaching it from an outside perspective. However, to quote Frederick Cooper: “Any discussion of an imperial polity must be set against colonisation on the ground.”²² To better understand empire, we need to look at the people who shaped it, the traders who made it wealthy, the bureaucrats who wrote the documents to hold the entire organisation together, and the soldiers who engaged in colonial warfare. We need to look at the perspective of the Company itself, how the individuals that constituted it understood, and reflected on, what they were doing. The interaction between the Europeans, or in this case the Dutch, and the local population is also important to understanding the Dutch Empire.²³ In order to gain such a perspective, I took inspiration from the work of anthropologist Charlotte Linde and her idea of ‘organisational identity’. Written in the context of the anthropology of work, Linde argued that s create narratives that give their employees a sense of purpose and identity. This organisational identity is encapsulated and shaped by ‘institutional memory’, which is created by the people’s oral and written interaction with each other, how they talk about, and refer to, the institution, the institution’s recurring events, formal and informal meetings, speeches by personnel, its code of conduct, where it is located, how the filing cabinets are organized, and its relationships to other people and institutions. All these things combined allow the people that

¹⁸ Weststeijn, “The VOC as a Company-State”, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 27.

²⁰ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 149.

²¹ C. Antunes, “From Binary Narratives to Diversified Tales: Changing the Paradigm in the Study of Dutch Colonial Participation”, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131.3 (2018) 393 - 407: 396-397.

²² Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 173.

²³ R. Raben, “Epilogue. Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquests in the Colonial and Postcolonial Age”, in: R. Koekkoek, A. Richard, A. Weststeijn (eds.), *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 205-232: 225.

are part of the institution to create an identity for the institution and themselves.²⁴

For this thesis I have chosen to centre my research on VOC governors. These governors were an exponent of the Company, official representatives, but at the same time a governor was an individual in a foreign society. This is what Eddy Kent has called ‘the company man’, in the case of the EIC, and Elisabeth Heijmans has described as a ‘multi-lateral go-between’ in her research on the early modern French Empire.²⁵ The governor was in the centre between the different layers of empire, but to what extent was he a shaper, and to what extent shaped? By taking these governors as the research subject, this thesis will analyse to what extent there was a VOC organisational identity and how it influenced these officials, and to what extent the local experience of these officials influenced the organisational identity of the VOC. The central questions therefore are: Which narratives did the governors communicate, how did these change over time and through different regions? And finally, what do the answers to the first question imply for a VOC organisational identity?

Before explaining the framework, the sources that form the foundation for this thesis need to be addressed. There are several types of sources available that can be used to gain insight as to how these governors perceived and thought. More specifically, there is a particular type of source that is rich in information, but has so far only sparsely been used by historians, and that is the so-called *Memorie van Overgave* (MvO). This thesis provides the first systematic analysis of a large sample of these sources. It was customary for departing VOC governors and directors to write a report about the current state of affairs, and advise their successors on trade, diplomacy, and the ways of the land. Such a report was called a *Memorie van Overgave*. Simultaneously, the document served as the governors’ business card to showcase his achievements and capabilities to his superiors.²⁶ The vast majority of the *Memories van Overgave* is currently located in the VOC archives of the *Nationaal Archief* (NA) in The Hague, the Netherlands. The VOC was a highly bureaucratic that thrived on procuring information, and using that information to develop policies and approaches. This meant that reports were sent from all sections of the VOC’s network to central nodes, such as Colombo, Malacca, Cochin, and Batavia. These reports were then read and summarized by the local governors and political councils, who would forward the information to the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC in Asia.²⁷ The *Hoge Regering* would annually send a *Generale Missive*, an overview of the state of affairs, to the chief-council of the VOC in the Dutch Republic, the *Heeren*

²⁴ C. Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁵ See: E. Kent, *Corporate Character: Representing Imperial Power in British India, 1786-1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); E. Heijmans, *The Agency of Empire: Personal Connections and Individual Strategies in the Shaping of the French Early Modern Expansion (1685-1746)* (Leiden: Dissertation, 2018), 265.

²⁶ J. Gommans, L. Bes, G. Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600 – 1825* (Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 102-103; A. Schrikker, “Institutional Memory in the making of Dutch Colonial Culture in Asia (1700-1870)”, in: R. Koekkoek, A. Richard, A. Weststeijn (eds.), *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) , 111-134: 122.

²⁷ A. Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, c. 1780 – 1815: Expansion and Reform* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 43.

XVII. The latter would then send a memorandum (*Generale Instructie*) in return through Batavia to all the other settlements with instructions, directions, and wishes for the following period.²⁸ In dealing with this type of source, we have to be aware of their multi-faceted nature.²⁹ Ann Stoler, an American anthropologist who researches colonial governance, explains that the colonial sources are not purely collections of facts, but rather “documents with itineraries of their own”.³⁰ Although her work mostly deals with the imperialism and the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this notion can easily be extended for the Company era. The *Memories van Overgave* provide their own narrative containing facts, fictions, interpretations, suggestions, and reflections. In addition, as stated before, although their official function was to inform a new governor about his new workplace, in reality the document was also a testimony of the work of the author. The MvO, therefore, also served as a justification of the departing governor’s actions, and a quasi-resume for promotion or transfer within the VOC itself. These different characters of the *Memories* are what make them so valuable in discerning the relations that the VOC governors had with ‘the other’, as well as the institute itself.

If we look at the format of the *Memories*, we can see that while the structure remained consistent, their size increased over time. The increase in size could indicate there was more to actually write about, but it could also be a side-effect of *Memorie*-writing becoming more customary over time.³¹ The former can be attributed to the historiographical consensus that the Company experienced more challenges on all fronts during the eighteenth century. The structure of the *Memories* typically starts with a short statement of topic, author, recipient, and location, similar to our contemporary way of letter writing. Then follows a short introduction where the author states his reasons for passing on the office of governor to his successors, for example illness, promotion, or retirement. In addition, the author could give an outline of the message he intended to convey or the topics he wanted to address. Keep in mind, however, that the reasons for the transfer of office and the outline could be entirely absent or only partially present as well, and that the extent of the description varied from *Memorie* to *Memorie*. After the introduction, the rest of the contents followed and the order in which the different topics were presented also depended on the preferences of the author. He

²⁸ Emmer and Gommans, *Rijk aan de Rand*, 51.

²⁹ For the debate surrounding sources and colonial archives, see: R. Guha, “The Prose of Counter-insurgency,” in N. Dirks, G. Eley, and S. Ortner (eds.), *Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 336–71; G. Denning, *The Death of William Gooch: A History’s Anthropology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995); N. Dirks, “Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History,” in B. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002) 47–65; A. L. Stoler, “‘In Cold Blood’: Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives,” in R. Roque, K. A. Wagner (eds.), *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2012) 35–66.

³⁰ A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

³¹ For an overview, look at the VOC archival reconstructions in the TANAP-database: <http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/>.

could start with what he considered to be the most important issue to address and work his way down from there, or he would use the different areas and offices under VOC control to form the backbone of the narrative, or choose any other lay-out that suited him. The *Memorie* ended with a short closing statement, wherein the author blessed his successor, the *Hoge Regering*, and the Company, and also asked God to bless them in their endeavours. Finally, the author wrote the location and date on which he finished the *Memorie*, and signed the document, or, when dealing with a copy, the copyist added his name or autograph at the end. These copies were made for the local archive, if the *Memorie* was sent to Batavia another copy was made there, and even a third copy could be made if the *Memorie*, or a copy, was sent back to the Republic. In short, although the details may vary, in general the *Memories* follow the same format of opening statement, introduction, contents, and closing statement.

In order to answer the research questions, these sources need to be systematically analysed. This requires some form of demarcation and categorization, but the problem arises that categories often overlap, and do not lend themselves well for static comparison. For example, if a governor writes that the local population is lazy, would that fall into the category of labor perceptions, race, modernity? Or, if a local ruler is described as greedy and a heathen would that be considered colonial diplomacy, identity, or simply looking down on other cultures and religions? In a thought-provoking work, historian Frederik Cooper argues in favour of de-essentializing colonial terms and categories, and that these should be regarded as historical processes instead.³² Terms such as ‘modernity’, ‘race’, ‘identity’, ‘globalization’, and ‘empire’ are used simultaneously in a normative and analytical way, or in a hard and a soft way, throughout various academic disciplines. According to Cooper, employing these categories in such an interchangeable fashion creates an ahistorical approach to history, thereby making it difficult for scholars to gain a better understanding of both the past as well as the present.³³

Based on this argument, this thesis utilizes a framework that is aimed towards historicizing empire research and is based on ‘relations’ that consist of ‘aspects’. Before explaining the underlying choices that formed the framework, it is necessary to explain it first. As a result of my reading and analysis, I distinguish the information presented in literature and the *Memories* into several dominant and recurring themes: the Company’s policies, the role of the governor, reflections on the *Memories* of predecessors or other writings, descriptions and reflections of social-cultural characteristics of the local societies the governor was operating in, reflections and recommendations on how to generate revenue and profit, and, finally, reflections on the state of the Reformed Church and local religions. These themes and topics have been reorganized into six ‘aspects’ that will serve as the main components of the framework that this thesis will utilise. Thus, in its finalized form, the framework has the governor at the centre of two relationships that consist of three aspects each, as illustrated in the image below.

³² See: F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 8-9, 18-19.

³³ *Ibidem*, 8-9, 62-63.

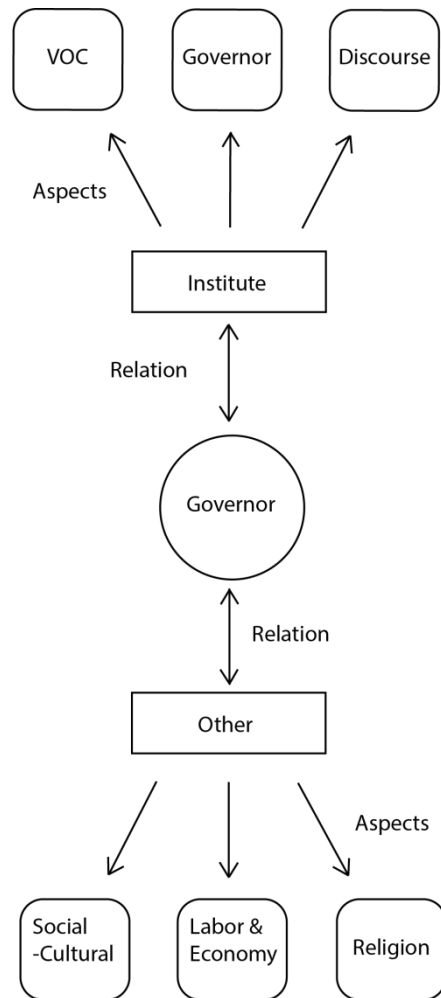


Image 1: The Framework

The first relationship that is discerned is with ‘the Institute’, which is subdivided into three aspects. The first aspect is ‘VOC’, wherein I want to know to what degree local policy was ordained by the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia, or to what extent the governor could shape this himself, and subsequently, what the governor’s interpretations of these policies were. The second aspect is ‘Governor’, in which it will be investigated which characteristics and attributes the governors considered important to being a good governor. In other words: what was the proper skill-set a governor should possess? The third aspect is ‘Internal Discourse’. Here I want to know how the governors reflected on the writings of their predecessors and other company-related documents. The other relationship that will be analysed is ‘the Other’, and in this relationship is also built on three aspects. The first is ‘Socio-Cultural’, wherein the central question is as to how other peoples and cultures were described, and what characteristics were emphasised. The second aspect is ‘Labor &

Economy’: what kind of ideas regarding labor and laborers did the governors express? Which system did they regard as most suitable to generating revenue for the Company: free-trade, monopoly trade, autarky, something else? The third aspect is ‘Religion’. Here the thesis analyses which role the Reformed religion played, and how other religions were described. These different aspects enable this thesis to make a spatial and temporal comparison, in order to create a larger picture of how global and local developments mutually influenced a VOC organisational identity.

Now we must return to the underlying question: why this framework? The argument of colonial historians Eddy Kent and Elisabeth Heijmans that the colonial governors were linchpins in a web of internal and external relations is the reason why the governor is at the centre of the proposed framework. The VOC governor was an agent that had both a relation to the larger Dutch East India Company he was a part of, and a relation to the outside world, the proverbial ‘other’, he encountered. Humans interact with an inner and an outer world so to say. This is why the framework utilises two ‘relations’. As mentioned above, the work of Charlotte Linde provided valuable insights into how organisations/institutions and the people that are a part of it reflect on themselves and communicate their own history and identity. This thesis took inspiration from Linde’s idea of organisational identity, and the self-reflection, transfer of ideas and knowledge, and canonisation of individuals and documents that underlie this concept in order to create the first half of the framework that centres on ‘the Institute’. The aforementioned ideas were then reworked as three ‘aspects’ to operationalize the ‘relationship’. The dynamic between the individual and the institute form the basis for the ‘VOC’ aspect, the self-reflection of the individual governor on his ‘profession’ and his colleagues form the basis of the ‘Governor’ aspect, and finally, the transfer of ideas, knowledge, and canonisation form were operationalized as ‘Internal Discourse’.

The other half of the framework is the result of a similar process, and centres on the governor’s encounter with the world around him, the proverbial ‘Other’. For this ‘relation’, the thesis took inspiration from the work of German historian Damien Tricoire and his study of ‘Enlightened Colonialism’. Writing on French colonialism, Tricoire shows that from the mid-eighteenth century onward imperial agents appropriated the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment to develop new claims, practices, and strategies for their colonial endeavours.³⁴ Tricoire calls this ‘Enlightened Colonialism’, the core of which revolved around the idea of the French (and the rest of Europe) having a mission to bring ‘civilisation’ to the rest of the world. This civilizing mission rested on three pillars: the first being republican ideals of a society based on the principles of natural right. The second pillar was the physiocratic philosophy that materialism and moral progress can be linked, therefore commerce and luxury would contribute to the progress of civilization. And finally, the third pillar, Christian universalistic claims and its teleological view on the progress of history where all of history is in

³⁴ D. Tricoire, “Introduction”, in: D. Tricoire (ed.), *Enlightened Colonialism: Civilization Narratives and Imperial Politics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017) 1-23: 12.

service of the realization of the kingdom of God.³⁵ These three pillars form the inspiration for the three ‘aspects’ that operationalize the ‘relationship’ the governor had with ‘the other’. The ‘Socio-Cultural’ aspect is based on the pillar of the governor interacting with other cultures and societies, and his own preconceptions of what society could and should be. The ‘Labor & Economy’ aspect is inspired by the second pillar and how the governor reflects on economic systems. And finally, the ‘Religion’ aspect is the result of the third pillar and how the governor reflected on his own religion and that of others.

For the analysis, I have chosen *Memories* from three different regions, across two different time periods. The chosen regions are Ambon, Bengal, and Ceylon, and the time periods are circa 1700 and circa 1750. The three regions were selected based on the amount of power and influence the VOC had in the region, to see if and how different contexts affected the outlook of the governors. On Ambon, the Company became the dominant power in the Moluccas archipelago after the Great Ambon War (1651-1658), and thus had no direct competitors for power as it did face in Bengal and on Ceylon. In Bengal, the Company was one of many actors, they were allowed to trade and ‘exist’ by the grace of the Mughal Empire and the local elites. On Ceylon the situation was different, the Company held a powerful position on the island and had a potent rival in the Kingdom of Kandy, with which the Company was engaged in a power struggle for control over the island. The interval of 50 years between both periods is chosen because this creates enough distance between the two periods to notice changes if there were any, while at the same time being close enough to remain contextually relevant. If this thesis were to compare, for example, 1650 and 1750, the context would have changed too much between both periods to provide a nuanced comparison.

The second argument for this temporal delineation is the declining role of the Dutch Republic on the world stage. Despite having been shaken by the wars with France and the infamous *Rampjaar* of 1672, the Republic was still one of the major powers in the world around 1700: the VOC continued to increase its labor force, shipping tonnages, and expanding its overall trade.³⁶ Stadtholder William III of Orange (1650-1702) had succeeded in obtaining the English crown in 1688, thereby creating a de facto personal union between the Republic and England. The result was a powerful London-Amsterdam economic axis, supplemented by the diplomatic and military leverage to continue the fight against the France of Louis XIV (1638-1715). This leading role in Europe came at a price, however. The financial pressure mounted as a result of the enormous military spending during this period, and a lot of Dutch capital followed William III out of the Republic and the Companies, and into England and the EIC. After William III died in 1702, and the Spanish Succession War (1701-1714) ended, the financial and military capacities of the Republic, and by proxy the VOC, had been

³⁵ D. Tricoire, “The Enlightenment and the Politics of Civilization: Self-Colonisation, Catholicism, and Assimilationism in Eighteenth-Century France”, in: D. Tricoire (ed.), *Enlightened Colonialism: Civilization Narratives and Imperial Politics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017) 25-46: 36-37.

³⁶ For details, see chapter 10 of J. de Vries & A. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Persistence of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

stretched thin. This set the stage for the following stagnation and decline during the eighteenth century.³⁷ Therefore, the second chosen point of comparison is 1750: the Company had to deal with this decline in resources and means, and the increasing competition of England and France.³⁸ In this thesis I put forth the argument that this changing geopolitical reality had serious repercussion for the VOC in Asia and its identity.

The third and final reason is the rise of the Enlightenment. Although the exact starting date of the Enlightenment is debatable, and comes down to arguing whether Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, or Newton is deserving of the title of ‘catalyst’, it is clear that by the end of the seventeenth century the intellectual movement was widespread throughout Europe.³⁹ The debates among French intellectuals between 1680 and 1720 in particular would set the stage for the so-called ‘moderate Enlightenment’, or ‘High Enlightenment’ that would eventually culminate in the French Revolution. The most important contribution made by the French intellectuals was developing the Enlightenment as a self-reflexive understanding of the historical importance and specificity of the present.⁴⁰ The Enlightenment as an intellectual and social current argued the sovereignty of reason and fought for equality for all. Important in the development of the Enlightenment was the European encounter with ‘the other’ in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This encounter led to great curiosity, accumulation of knowledge, and self-reflection. At first, the equilibrium between Europe, Africa and – especially – Asia fuelled intellectual life and cosmopolitan attitudes.⁴¹ Over time, however, as this balance shifted in favour of the Europeans, and their influence in Africa and Asia increased, the idea of an ‘exclusive Eurocentrism’ also took root in European societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eventually Europeans deemed that the superiority of European culture was axiomatic, and found Africa and Asia wanting.⁴² The Enlightenment was therefore a two-sided coin. The development of the Enlightenment in Europe also had its repercussions overseas. Tricoire argues that Enlightened Colonialism was characterised by the following points: Imperial agents often used the Enlightenment

³⁷ M. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6; J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 841-853, 998-1005; K. N. Chaudhuri and J. I. Israel, “The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9”, in: J. I. Israel (ed.), *The Anglo-Dutch Moment. Essays on the Glorious Revolution and its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 407-438; D. Degroot, *The Frigid Golden Age: Climate Change, the Little Ice Age, and the Dutch Republic, 1560-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 244-245; L. Jardine, *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland’s Glory* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 344-345; L. Panhuysen, *Oranje tegen de Zonnekoning: De strijd tussen Willem III en Lodewijk XIV om Europa* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2016).

³⁸ For a broader research of the VOC during its decline period, see: C. Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the Period of its Decline (1740-1796)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

³⁹ J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7, 14.

⁴⁰ See: D. Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 2-3.

⁴¹ J. Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment’s Encounter with Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 27-28, 484.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 489.

narrative for theoretical discussions without intending to change the colonial practice; native elites actively negotiated with the Europeans and thereby created their own versions of the Enlightenment narrative; the civilizing and assimilation policies often had the opposite result: segregation; being ‘enlightened’ had different implications depending on the composition of the colonial population. I argue therefore that this lens of Enlightened Colonialism provides an interesting context through which to analyse the *Memories* in the search of how the governors viewed the people and the world around them. Since Tricoire’s work mostly focusses on the French empire, this thesis provides an opportunity to juxtapose Tricoire’s ideas on Enlightened Colonialism with the Dutch Empire in Asia.

Before transitioning into the main part of this thesis, a final clarification of the structure is necessary. In order to understand the world a VOC governor was operating in, we need context, and that is what the first chapter will provide. The structure of the VOC will be investigated, and the three different regions that this thesis concerns itself with will be painted. Regarding the latter, it is important to know the basic social, political, and cultural aspects of the different regions, when and why the VOC came to that region, and how the dynamic between the local actors and the Company developed up to 1700. Chapter two and three are chronologically delineated, where chapter two looks at the 1700 period, and chapter three the 1750 period. These two chapters are where the analysis takes place based on the abovementioned framework.

Regarding terminology and translations, I have opted to mention a ruler’s reign and a governor’s governorship where necessary. The reign of a ruler is indicated as (r. x – x), and the governorship of a VOC governor is indicated as (g. y – y). All translations are by my own hand, I have chosen to keep the translation as close to the original Dutch as possible, and I have purposely made the English ‘clunky’, to convey that even to the modern Dutch speaker, the early modern Dutch comes across as somewhat strange and foreign. Finally, a remark concerning brackets in quotes from the archival sources: (x) means I have added the text myself, (x) with extra spacing means it was bracketed in the original text.

Chapter I – Contextualizing the Company

In order to establish (the character of) the organisational identity of the VOC, this thesis will use the comparison of memories from governors from the regions of Bengal, Ceylon and Ambon between the 1700 and 1750 periods. However, before turning to the analysis of the memories, some background information must be provided. Since this thesis will use the perspective of the governors to answer its research questions, it is important to understand the context in which they operated and wrote their memories. Therefore, this chapter will first look into the organisational structure of the Company and the responsibilities a governor had. Secondly, to be able to make an effective comparison between the memories from the governors from the different regions, these sources must be understood in relation to the specific situation in which they were written. Thus, this chapter will subsequently provide a brief introduction to the regions of Ambon, Ceylon, and Bengal.

The VOC was founded in 1602, with an initial charter for 21 years. The States General had decided that it would be beneficial to merge the different merchant companies that existed up to this point into a single entity. Not only would such a merger prevent these merchant companies from going bankrupt due to their mutual competition, but the States General also recognized the possibilities this new united company could provide in their military struggle against the Portuguese and the Spanish by supplying the Republic with additional warships and by taking the fight overseas to the colonies.⁴³

The institutional framework of the VOC mirrored the decentralized nature of the Dutch Republic. The charter of the VOC specified that it was to be a single company, consisting of six chambers that represented the six cities where each of the merging companies was founded and seated. The VOC's activities and funding were divided amongst these six chambers as well, whereby Amsterdam accounted for one-half, Zeeland for one-quarter, and Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen for one-sixteenth each. In practice, this meant that the power of Amsterdam could only be controlled by the other five chambers acting together. To accommodate the smaller chambers, Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarneveldt (1547-1619) put the central administration of the VOC in the hands of the *Heeren XVII*, seventeen directors who represented the investors: eight from Amsterdam, eight from the smaller chambers, and one extra position that rotated among the smaller chambers. In 1609, the *Heeren XVII* decided to reorganize the Company's operation in Asia under a new central authority: the *Gouverneur-Generaal* (Governor-General) and the *Raad van Indië* (Council of the Indies). Together they would be known as the *Hoge Regering* (High Government) with Batavia as its residence, the rebranded port city of Jakatra (modern-day Jakarta) that the fourth Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen (g-g. 1618-1623, 1627-1629) had conquered in 1619. The distance between the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia was about 25.000 kilometers, which

⁴³ J. de Vries & A. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Persistence of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 384.

translated to 10 months by ship. Therefore, the *Heeren XVII* had to wait 20 months before they would receive a reply to their correspondence. In practice, this meant that the Governor-General and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia could organize expeditions or allocate the Company's resources as they saw fit, because they were difficult to hold accountable.⁴⁴

The different branches and factories of the Company in Asia varied in size, political status, and economic importance. In March 1620, resigned Governor-General Laurens Reael (1583-1637) gave testimony of his experiences in the East Indies in front of the *Staten Generaal*, and there he distinguished three categories into which the branch offices could be divided. This division reflected the difference in political power of each branch:

- 1) Conquest: Certain trade had been brought under the Company's control by use of force, by their own conquest. For example, Formosa (Taiwan) and the Banda Islands.
- 2) Exclusivity Contracts: Trade that was conducted under the auspices of exclusive contracts, such as the contract with the rulers of Maluku (Moluccas) archipelago.
- 3) Regular Contracts: Trade that was conducted through treaties that were concluded with nations or Asian rulers, under these treaties there was more or less equal standing between the Company and the Asian partner, for example Bengal.⁴⁵

In practice, most of the exclusivity contracts had also been obtained through the use of force, therefore the local Company offices that had been technically obtained through contracts could also be regarded as conquest. The *Heeren XVII* seemed to have liked this structure, for in their *Generale Instructie* of 1650 the directors of the VOC used Reael's division, which made it official.

The status of the VOC office was reflected in the salaries and stature of the officials. Large establishments, where the Company also held territorial authority were directed by a *gouverneur* (governor). At the end of the seventeenth century, these included Ambon, Banda, the Moluccas, Coromandel, Ceylon, and Malacca. During the eighteenth century the Cape Colony, the north coast of Java, and Makassar were added to this. Branches that were economically important, but did not include territorial authority, were Bengal, Surat, and Persia, these were headed by a *directeur* (director). A tier below that were Malabar, and Padang on the west coast of Sumatra, there a *commandeur* (commander) was in charge. The lowest tiers were controlled by a resident, found in places as Ciribon, Banjarmasin, and Palembang, whereas Japan and Timor had an *opperhoofd* (head of establishment). Regardless of the ranking, all office directors wrote *Memories*. It could therefore be

⁴⁴ De Vries & van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy*, 386.

⁴⁵ F. S. Gaastra, "The Organization of the VOC", in: G.L. Balk, F. van Dijk, D.J. Kortlang (eds.), *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 13-60: 24.

interesting to compare different tiers of Company offices with each other in future research.

The heads of these Company branches were in charge of civil government, military affairs, trade and commerce, and were the highest judicial authority in the local courts. They did not operate alone but were assisted by a political council, and important decisions regarding the local communities had to be made *in rade* (in council). Once matters had been decided, the council and the head would communicate their decision by issuing official decrees. These councils consisted of several members: the *secunde* was the second-in-command, and mostly this position was filled by an *opperkoopman* (head merchant) who was in charge of commercial matters. Additionally, the council could contain a military commander, head accountant, and a *fiscaal* who was in charge of detection fraud and criminal activity. Though in practice, the composition of the council could vary.⁴⁶ The majority of the Company's employees, however, were appointed as clerks to support the administrators and executives. These clerks were a mixed group of Dutch, other Europeans, and the offspring of mixed marriages between Europeans and locals. Occasionally these desk jobs were also performed by military personnel who aspired to a different career. VOC employees were not specialized in a particular field, and during their career they could occupy positions in different branches of local Company administration. Officially, all employees were bound to the wage the Company paid them. In practice, however, most employees found ways to make money on the side, mostly through moneylending or local trade.⁴⁷ To summarize: although the governor/head of a VOC branch office was officially bound by rules, in practice he was a powerful and autonomous individual.

Now that the organisational structure of the VOC and the responsibilities of the governor have been laid out, we should turn our attention to the three regions that this thesis revolves around: Bengal, Ambon, and Ceylon.

Bengal

The name 'Bengal' is likely to have its origins in the ancient kingdom of Vanga, the earliest mention of which can be found in the *Mahabharat* epic that was written in Sanskrit during the first millennium BCE. Although the precise etymology of Bengal is up for debate, the name 'Vangaladesa' is already used to describe the region in Indian records from the eleventh century.⁴⁸ Jesuit priests, working for the Portuguese in India, referred to the region as 'Bengala', a westernized version of 'Vangaladesa', in their writings during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.⁴⁹ Henceforth, this Westernized version would be, and still is, utilized by all Europeans. Besides the Bengal tiger, one of the defining features

⁴⁶ Gaastra, "The Organization", 24-25.

⁴⁷ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 42-43.

⁴⁸ J. Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000), 220.

⁴⁹ D. Lach, E. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe. Volume III: A Century of Advance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 1124.

of the Bengal region is the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta. Throughout history, this delta has bestowed Bengal with large areas of fertile soil and a vast network of waterways to facilitate and support commercial activity. Merchants and travellers from East Africa, the Middle East and all over Asia were attracted to Bengal's commercial activity and viability, and eventually this prospect also lured the Europeans.⁵⁰

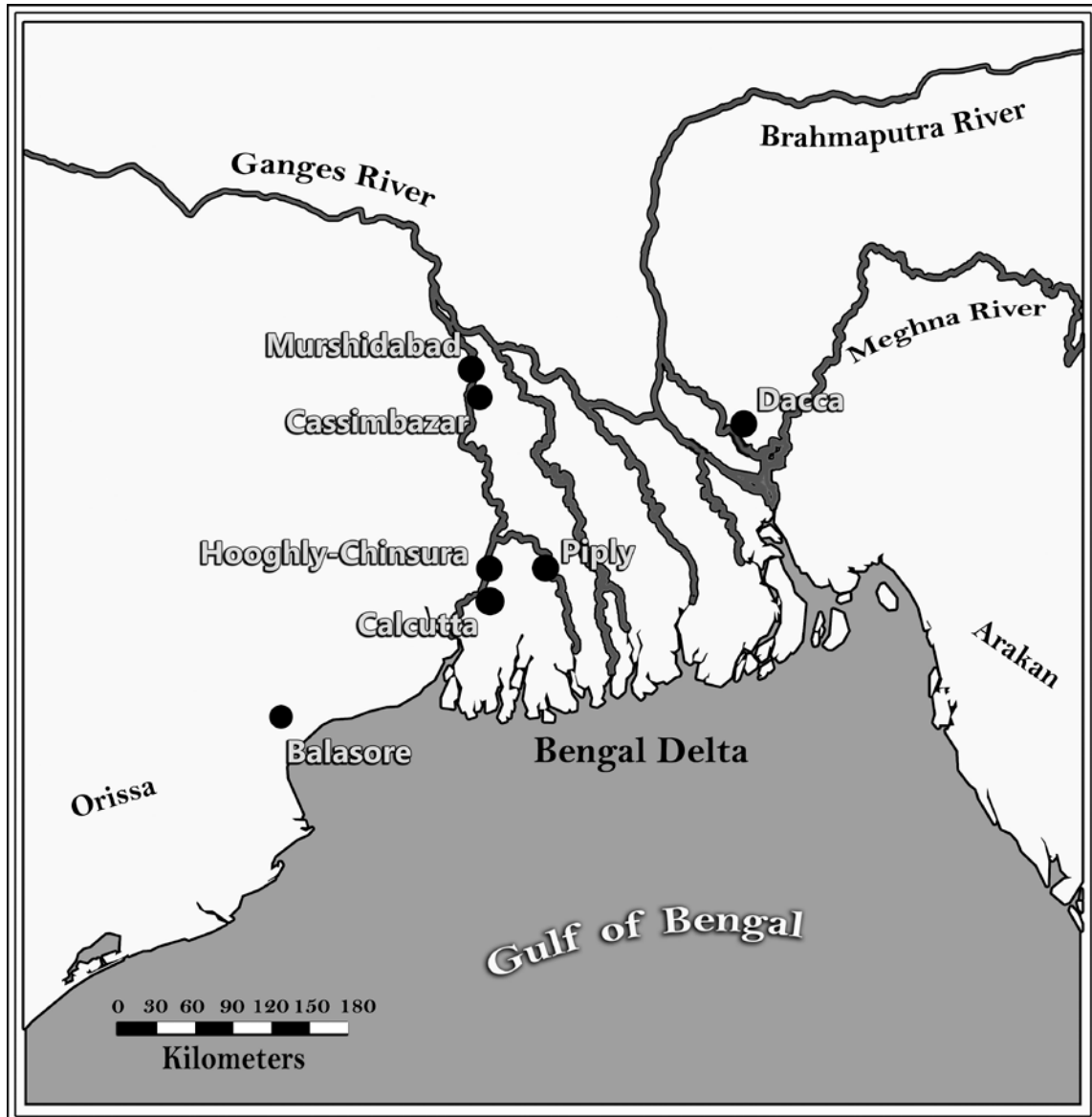


Image 2: Bengal, and main VOC and EIC factories.

⁵⁰ B. Sur, 'Beyond the Company and its Commerce: Reviewing the Presence of the VOC in Mughal Bengal, 1600-1700', in: R. Aquil, T. Mukherjee (eds.), *An Earthly Paradise: Trade, Politics and Culture in Early Modern Bengal* (London: Routledge, 2020) 123-156: 127.

The first VOC ships arrived in Bengal in 1615, its trade network initially resided under the Government of Coromandel that was located in Paliacatta, or 'Pulicat' in the sources. The Portuguese and British were already active in the region. The Portuguese had arrived a century prior and established a trading post in 1528, and the English had established themselves in 1611. Unfortunately for the Portuguese, they were ousted from their trading post in Hooghly by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1658) in 1632. The Shah had quenched a local rebellion, and since the Portuguese had been supporting the dissidents, the Portuguese lost their privileges and had to leave. Afterwards, he gave the VOC its first *firman* (royal mandate) to trade in Bengal in 1634. The Dutch gladly accepted this opportunity, and the VOC relocated its Bengalese trading post from Piply to Hooghly in 1635. After Hooghly was destroyed by a flood in 1656, the VOC designated Chinsura as its new regional headquarter, which it would remain until the dissolution of the Company in 1795.⁵¹ In the sources, however, the Company officials would often still use Hooghly to refer to their local headquarters. The Company benefitted from the expansion of the Mughal Empire, at the same time the Mughals could benefit from their relations with the VOC. The Dutch provided the Mughals with maritime security in the Bengal region, and the Mughals provided the Dutch with increasing commercial opportunities as the Bengal region became more and more integrated into the larger Mughal system.⁵²

The Company's main interests in Bengal were textiles, opium, and saltpetre, but to obtain these goods the VOC needed a lot of cash as this was the preferred method of doing business in the region.⁵³ Until 1672, 86% of the silver and gold the Dutch imported into Bengal came from Japan, which was essential to the Dutch inter-Asian trade system. However, after the Tokugawa government banned the export of silver from Japan in 1668, followed by a devaluation of the gold *koban* (oval shaped gold coin) in 1696, the Dutch had to find other means of securing sufficient precious metals to satisfy their needs in Bengal.⁵⁴ Between 1630 and 1720, on average 87.5% of the total Dutch import value into Bengal consisted of precious metals.⁵⁵ Bullion was costly, however, and in order to limit the import of bullion the Company turned to selling as much non-precious metals and spices as possible, targeting items that were in large demand with the local population.⁵⁶ A second characteristic the Company had to keep in mind was the broker based trading system: as elsewhere in India, the VOC in Bengal had to rely on brokers and intermediaries who would provide the goods via commission. As long as the economy was doing well, the brokers could make a profit and the system worked. Once the economy of Bengal declined due to local infighting during the eighteenth century,

⁵¹ Lequin, *Het Personeel*, 108-109.

⁵² P. Emmer, J. Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 343-345.

⁵³ Prakash, *Economy of Bengal*, 55-60.

⁵⁴ For an overview of Dutch bullion trade with Japan, see: G. C. Gunn, *World trade system of the East and West: Nagasaki and the Asian bullion trade networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), chapter 9 in particular.

⁵⁵ O. Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 67.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 93-94.

however, the brokers went bankrupt and the Company had to try to find a different road to the desired goods.⁵⁷ Bengal played a key role in both the VOC and EICs trade networks, albeit for different reasons. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company held the largest trade volume in the region, but the English East India Company held a larger value within Europe.⁵⁸ The economy of Bengal grew as a result of the VOC's trade, and the Indian merchants who supplied the goods to the VOC were the foremost beneficiaries of this expanding trade, and by proxy the Mughal state itself.⁵⁹ Om Prakash argued that the VOC's presence in India did not become political, as opposed to the English and French, hence he has a more positive outlook on the VOC's historical influence on the Bengal region.⁶⁰ As the *Memories* will show below, however, this was more the result of a lack of political and military resources, and opportunities, as the VOC did become very political on Ceylon and Ambon where it had the means to do so.

Turning to the historiography, it stands out that the Company presence in Bengal, or India in general, has been considered almost entirely from an economic perspective.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the works of Prakash, Chaudhuri, Dasa Gupta, and Reid have made important contributions to the economic history of Southeast Asia, and India in particular, and their work has shown that the early modern world was a more connected and integrated whole than thought up to that point. *Memories van Overgave* were not used in these works regarding Bengal, which is not surprising given the fact that there are other VOC sources that are better suited to economic analysis. An interesting exception is Frank Lequin's dissertation from 1982. In it, he stepped away from the statistical models and wrote a study of the life and times of the VOC staff in Bengal.⁶² Recent historical research has recognized the one-sided perspective of the economic historians. Byapti Sur, for example, argues that the different labels that have been used thus far to describe the relationship between the VOC, the local merchants and the Mughal state revolve around 'conflict', 'partnership', 'collaboration', and 'competition'. These terms create the idea of strict segregation between the Dutch and the Indians. Sur proposes therefore to approach this relationship as a fluid process, rather than a binary one to better reflect the historical reality.⁶³

⁵⁷ Emmer, Gommans, *Dutch Overseas Empire*, 346.

⁵⁸ Prakash, *Economy of Bengal*, 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 258; Prakash also estimates that the VOC employed between 33.000 – 44.000 people in their local Bengal textile industry, see: Om Prakash, "Employment Implications", 344.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, *Economy of Bengal*, 256-257.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*; K. N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); O. Prakash, "On Estimating the Employment Implications of European Trade for the Eighteenth Century Bengal Textile Industry – A Reply", *Modern Asian Studies* 27.2 (1993) 341-356; A. Dasa Gupta, *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500-1800* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994); A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680. Volume I: The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680. Volume II: Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁶² See: Lequin, *Het Personeel*.

⁶³ B. Sur, "Individual Interests Behind the Institutional Façade: The Dutch East India Company's Legal Presence in Seventeenth-Century Mughal Bengal", *Itinerario* 42.2 (2018) 279-294: 280.

Ambon

The Company first arrived on the shores of the Moluccas Archipelago by the end of 1604. The local people themselves called their home 'Maluku'. It is a recurring theme but 'Moluccas' is derived from the Portuguese 'Maluco', which is how the Portuguese referred to this region in their sixteenth-century sources. The Dutch, led by Steven van der Hagen who was the first admiral of the VOC, found the Ambonese people dissatisfied with the Portuguese and Spanish that were present, and therefore eager to form an alliance with the Dutch. The Dutch ousted the Portuguese from their fort on Ambon and settled themselves there in February 1605. Now that the competition had been driven out of the region, the VOC sought to enforce a monopoly on the production of, and trade in, cloves.⁶⁴ It was not until 1657, however, that the monopoly was realized. In that year, the first contract was signed between the VOC and the Kingdom of Tidore after the Great Ambon War (1651-1658). The cause for this war was a local revolt against the Sultan of Ternate, who was backed by the Company. The military power of the Dutch proved too much, however: the revolt was crushed and the entire region was brought into the VOC's sphere of influence. The Dutch would refer to this as 'the Pax Neerlandica'.⁶⁵

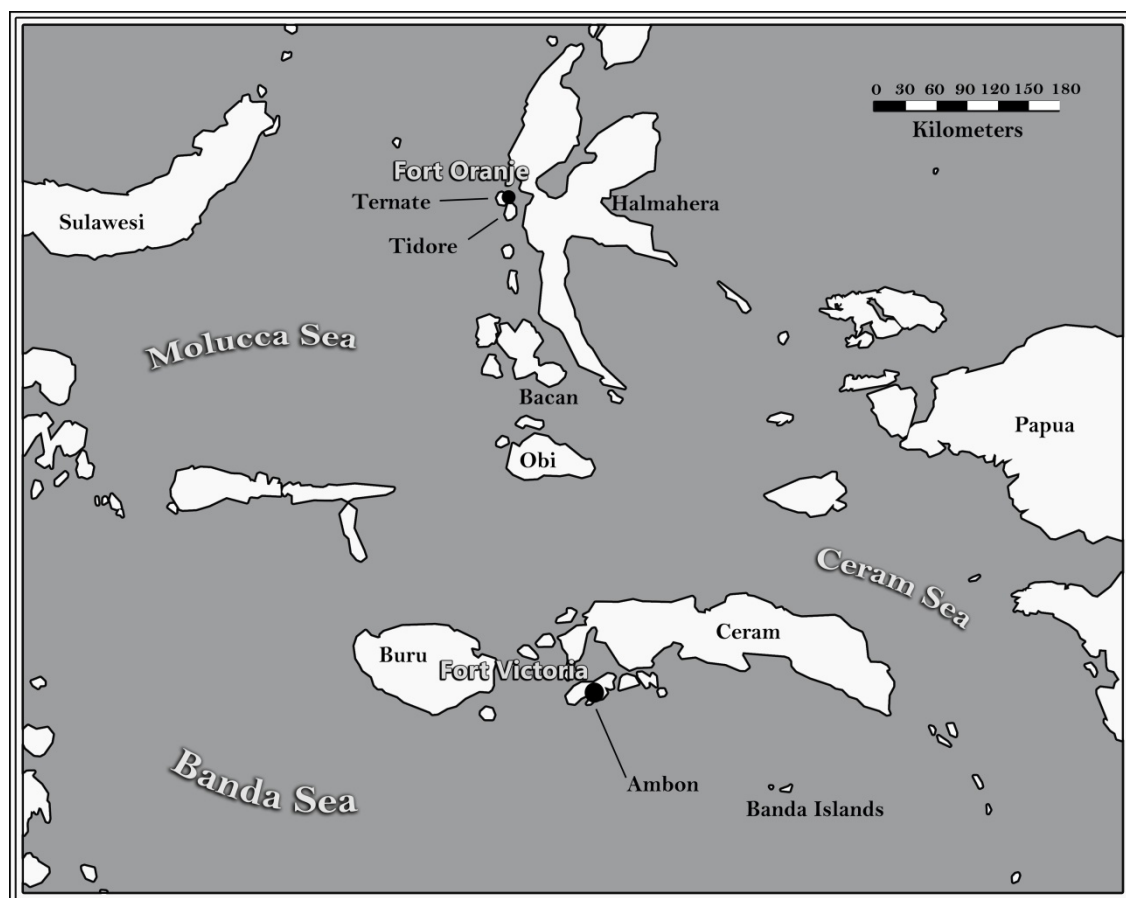


Image 3: Ambon and main VOC factories.

⁶⁴ Fraassen, "Maluku en de Ambonse eilanden", 49.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 53.

The two foremost characteristics of the Dutch presence on the Ambon islands were cloves and Christianity, according to Gerrit Knaap. The cloves were the desired object, Christianity proved a useful tool to bind the subjugated population to the Dutch overlords, while at the same time acting as a buffer against Islam.⁶⁶ The Company relied on its military power and political influence to restrict the production of cloves to Company territories. These cloves were cultivated and produced at a fixed price. The task of oversight and fulfilling the quotas was left to the village leaders who in turn relied on the local farmers.⁶⁷ In the wake of Dutch influence in the region, Islam became the symbol of dissent and resistance against the VOC. The Company tried to curb the spread of Islam, leading to further encroachment and expansion of the VOC's authority in the region, which in turn led to an increased appeal of Islam. Several revolts against Dutch rule occurred between 1670 and 1690: Ahmad Shah Ibn Iskandar in Sumatra, Sultan Ageng in Banten, Trunajaya and Surapati on eastern Java, and Kaicili Sibori on Ternate. These should be seen as culminations of Islamic fuelled anti-VOC resistance.⁶⁸

A big problem in the historiography of the Moluccas, is the fact that the majority of the source material is European. The Maluku people had an oral tradition, which makes it difficult to determine their own views. What then do we know about Maluku culture and society? For the Malukans, their worldview revolved around the idea of a centre and a periphery, and the number four held cosmic relevance in Maluku society: four polities, four rulers, four associated animals, four types of associated soil, and four ranks among these rulers.⁶⁹ These hierarchies of four were crucial for maintaining the unity of their world and society. Just as the cosmos needed to be balanced, society did too, and it therefore was relatively egalitarian, according to Maluku historian Leonard Andaya.⁷⁰ Of course, Malukan society was not immune to external influences, and the introduction of Islam in the late fifteenth century and the interaction with the Europeans from the sixteenth century onward exemplify this. Islamic and European ideas of power and authority strengthened the position of the Malukan rulers.⁷¹ These new influences allowed the Malukan rulers to create their own hierarchies and legitimacies, and they gladly accepted the possibility to appeal to an external spiritual force that was independent of the norms of the Malukan world itself.⁷²

In general, the historiography of the Moluccas emphasizes how the Maluku people reacted to, and interacted with, the Europeans, and that the Malukans, despite their traditionally regarded

⁶⁶ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 1.

⁶⁷ Emmer, Gommans, *The Dutch Empire*, 278.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 273.

⁶⁹ Ch. F. van Fraassen, "Maluku en de Ambonse eilanden tot het midden van de 17de eeuw. Socio-kosmische ordening en politieke verhoudingen", in: G. Knaap, W. Manuhutu en H. Smeets (eds.), *Sedjarah Maluku: Molukse geschiedenis in Nederlandse bronnen* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren, 1992) 33-53: 34-35.

⁷⁰ L. Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 240.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 242.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 241.

‘weakness’, found ways to make their own agendas. The works that deal with institutional-economic aspects are mostly written by Dutch historians, due to the legacy of Dutch colonialism and the vast Dutch archives.⁷³ Dutch historian Gerrit Knaap argues that the common image of the history of the Moluccas is that of an aggressive VOC that ravages and depopulates the region in its desire to establish the spice monopoly. He shows that the historiography of this image can be traced back to the Dutch anti-colonial protesters of the nineteenth century. Is this representation myth or reality? Knaap concludes that this image needs to be more nuanced. Both culturally and socially, Knaap argues, the Ambonese situation was characterised by continuity despite the colonial ventures of the Dutch. The biggest discontinuities, however, were the destruction of the clove-culture due to the VOC monopoly; the loss of political autonomy of the Ambonese people; a decline in population as a result of the wars against the Portuguese and Dutch; and finally, the process of Christianization and anti-Islamisation policies.⁷⁴ Besides global historiographical trends, an additional influence on the discourse that should be kept in mind is the Moluccan diaspora that originated during the 1950s. After the independence of the Indonesian Republic from the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1945, this diaspora, along with the on-going conflicts between the Moluccans and the Indonesian government, is likely to have influenced the need for, and emphasis on, the Moluccan people’s ‘own history’.⁷⁵ All things combined, the historiographical trend has moved away from the old fashioned colonial narrative of ‘the noble savages were subjugated and civilized by the Europeans’, and moves towards a more balanced view, wherein the local inhabitants and Europeans both acted in their own interest and on their own incentives.⁷⁶

⁷³ G. Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen: De VOC and de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2004); Ch. F. van Fraassen, "Maluku en de Ambonse eilanden tot het midden van de 17de eeuw. Socio-kosmische ordening en politieke verhoudingen", in: G. Knaap, W. Manuhutu en H. Smeets (eds.), *Sedjarah Maluku: Molukse geschiedenis in Nederlandse bronnen* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren, 1992) 33-53;

⁷⁴ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 343-344.

⁷⁵ Diaspora peoples tend to have stronger memory cultures than non-diaspora peoples, some well-known examples are the Jewish peoples, West African peoples as a result of the Atlantic slave trade, and Iranians who fled after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. For Example, see: S. Schama, *The Story of the Jews. Volume One, Finding the Words: 1000 BC-1492 AD* (New York: Ecco, 2017); J. E. Harris, A. Jalloh, S. E. Maizlish, *The African Diaspora* (Texas: Texas University Press, 1996); R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Revised Second Edition) (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷⁶ Andaya, *The World of Maluku*; M. S. Widjojo, *The Revolt of Prince Nuku: Cross-Cultural Alliance-Making in Maluku, c. 1780-1810* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Ceylon

The name 'Ceylon' is derived from the Portuguese *Ceilão*, which has its etymological origins in the Arabic *Saylan*, the Arabs in turn derived it from the Chinese *Hsi-lan*.⁷⁷ Despite the name being characterized by an etymological richness and seeming unity, the reality is that Ceylon, or Sri Lanka as it is called today, was a divided region for most of its history. The history of Ceylon was connected with, and influenced by, that of mainland Southeast Asia, and South India in particular.⁷⁸ Geographically, Ceylon occupied a central position in the Indian Ocean, and as a result of this it occupied a central position in the Indian Ocean trade as well. This brought wealth, settlers, and traders to the island, whereby South India provided the highest number of immigration between 1300 and 1600.⁷⁹ The predominant natural influence on the island was the monsoon, which dictated shipping lanes and trade flows before the invention of motorized shipping. From April to September, the monsoon comes from the southwest, and from October to March it comes from the northeast. Although the Europeans who arrived at the beginning of the sixteenth century were mainly interested in the abundance of cinnamon that the island had to offer, Ceylon was also known for its elephants, its pearl fisheries on the northwest coast, and areca nuts.⁸⁰

The Portuguese first arrived at Ceylon in 1505, they quickly managed to take over the larger part of the island's commerce in their search for cinnamon. The turn of the sixteenth century was also a time of political instability on the island: the King of Kotte was fighting his brother, the King of Sitavaka, in a succession dispute.⁸¹ The Portuguese ended up being mixed into the local Ceylonese power politics and ideologies, and ended up possessing a vast area of the island after Dharmapala (r. 1551-1597), the king of Kotte, drafted a testament in which he stated that Kotte would be donated to the Portuguese crown, were he to die without an heir.⁸² Growing dissatisfaction with the Portuguese influence caused some nobles of the Kingdom of Kotte to flee into the mountainous interior of Ceylon and establish the Kingdom of Kandy as a successor state to Kotte.⁸³ The first decades of the seventeenth century were therefore characterized by negotiation and warfare between the Portuguese and the Kandyan kingdom. Meanwhile, the Dutch had also entered the region in their quest for spices and to undermine the Habsburg Empire.

In 1638, the Dutch signed a treaty with the Kingdom of Kandy that gave the Dutch the treasured cinnamon in exchange for helping the king, Rajasinha II (r. 1635-1687), to expel the

⁷⁷ Zoltán Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires: Imperial Portugal, Sri Lankan Diplomacy and the Making of a Habsburg Conquest in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2018), 39.

⁷⁸ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 17.

⁸⁰ M. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003), 54-55; Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 16.

⁸¹ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 19; Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 48-50.

⁸² Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 157.

⁸³ Schrikker, *Colonial intervention*, 19.

Portuguese. The Dutch seemed to accept the king of Kandy as sole legitimate ruler of Ceylon, by describing him as ‘King of Ceylon’, but the lines became blurred when the king of Kandy accepted the Dutch as his sole protectors against the Portuguese in the same agreement.⁸⁴ In addition, Rajasinha II would also pay for the Dutch war expenses, and permit the Dutch to take over the Portuguese coastal fortresses.⁸⁵ These contradicting ideas would form the basis for the problematic diplomatic relations between the kingdom of Kandy and the VOC for the rest of the Dutch presence on Ceylon.

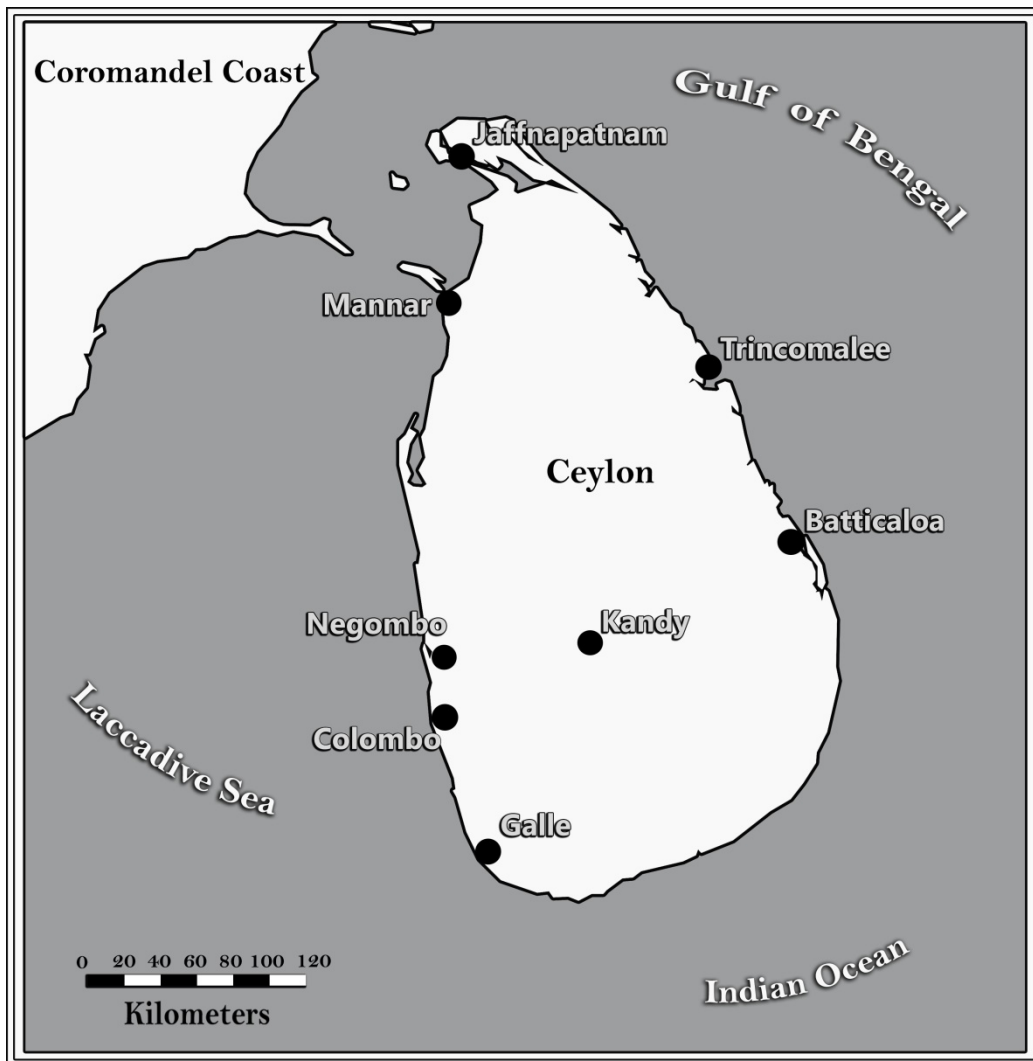


Image 4: Ceylon, Kandy and main VOC factories.

⁸⁴ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 21; S. Arasaratnam, “Dutch Sovereignty in Ceylon: a historical survey of its problems”, in S. Arasaratnam (ed.), *Ceylon and the Dutch: External Influences and Internal Change in Early Modern Sri Lanka* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996) 105 – 121: 106.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 21.

Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch held the notion that the possession of land was the key to both social-economic position and authority.⁸⁶ Hence the Dutch had a large interest in local land registers (the so-called *Thombo*) and the registration of land in general, through which they sought to reduce their dependence on local officials and local structures.⁸⁷ The Dutch focused on acquiring land in the south-western regions of Ceylon, around Colombo and Galle, because these were the main cinnamon producing regions. Cinnamon requires proper technique to grow, to peel, and to dry the material into a usable spice, and therefore, by extension, proper organization and oversight of the process. As a result, VOC had to become more directly involved in the areas under their jurisdiction to make sure the entire process was executed in good order. They were, however, dependent on the cinnamon-peeling caste, the *Chalias*, who did their mandatory labor for their new Dutch overlords.⁸⁸ The Dutch recruitment of these cinnamon-peelers and the emphasis on production of cinnamon led to social changes over time. As we shall see later in the *Memories van Overgave*, the governors actively pursued enlarging this caste to be able to bend the caste system to its own needs.

The early historical research into Sri Lanka came from the colonial angle. After the British took Ceylon over from the Dutch, the British started looking back on what came before them, and the British used Dutch sources and reflected on Dutch rule on Ceylon. While the British saw themselves as enlightened and competent statesmen, the Dutch were seen as old-fashioned, which made a fine narrative as to why the British had surpassed the Dutch and now found themselves ruling on Ceylon.⁸⁹ After the Second World War, the decolonisation era meant the end of the traditional colonial historiography and was replaced by a nationalist historiography in the former colonial regions. Sri Lanka was no exception: after it gained its independence in 1948 British rule was relegated to the same static and negative perception as the British had done with the Dutch.⁹⁰ In the Netherlands, the interest in Asian history was revived during the 1960s, with a broader focus on political economy. More recent historiography has argued that the years under Portuguese and Dutch rule had been significant episodes in Sri Lankan history, and have contributed to the shaping of Sri Lanka itself.⁹¹ Therefore, the early modern era in Sri Lanka has been re-valued in historical research, and has moved towards the larger connective scope, similar to the historiographical trends for Ambon and Bengal.

⁸⁶ S. Arasaratnam, "Elements of social and economic change in Dutch maritime Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1658 – 1796", in S. Arasaratnam (ed.), *Ceylon and the Dutch: External Influences and Internal Change in Early Modern Sri Lanka* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996) 35 – 54: 41.

⁸⁷ N. Rupesinghe, "Defining Land Rights in Dutch Sri Lanka", *Portuguese Journal of Social Science* 16.2 (2017) 143 – 161: 146.

⁸⁸ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 33-34.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 2.

⁹¹ S. Arasaratnam, "Ceylon and the Dutch, 1630 - 1800: an essay in historiography," in S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch 1600 - 1800: external influences and internal change in early modern Sri Lanka* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996) 1 – 18: 3; N. Dewasiri, *Peasant in Transition: Agrarian Society in Western Sri Lanka under Dutch Rule, 1740-1800* (Leiden: Dissertation, 2007), 171.

Chapter II – It is Good to be the Company, c. 1700

In this chapter, six *Memories* will be analysed for the 1700-period, these will be summed up first along with a brief situation sketch to set up the analysis.

For Bengal, the analysed *Memories van Overgave* were written by Arnold Muijkens (g. 1688-1696) and Willem de Roo (g. 1705-1710). *Memorie*-writing for Bengal was sporadic during the seventeenth century, and it became customary during the eighteenth century, implying there was a growing need for information and standardization of the bureaucratic process. The shorter *Memories* of the seventeenth century do translate into less detailed information. With the benefit of hindsight, we can ascertain that the Mughal Empire peaked around 1700. The stability and economic growth of the Mughal Empire was predominantly experienced in the peripheral regions, such as Bengal.⁹² Over time, the regional rulers could employ this wealth to decouple themselves from the Mughal centre and strengthen their own position. For the time being, however, the Company still enjoyed its good relations with the Mughals. Bengal was the most important commercial region for the Company, as it provided about 40% of the total Company export volume from Asia to the Dutch Republic.⁹³

Dirk de Haas (g. 1687-1691) and Willem van Wijngaerden (g. 1697-1701) provide the *Memories* from Ambon. The archipelago had calmed down by the end of the seventeenth century, after the Kaicili Sibori revolt (1679-1681) it appeared that all regional parties accepted the Company as their overlord.⁹⁴ The VOC could thus refocus its efforts on the so-called ‘extirpation policy’: in order to gain more control over supply and demand, the excess and illegal clove trees had to be extirpated. Additionally, the Company’s local subordinates were pressured to keep a strict eye on their borders to prevent outsiders from potentially undermining the Company’s clove monopoly.⁹⁵

Finally, for Ceylon, the *Memories* that were written by Laurens Pijl (g. 1679-1693) and Cornelis Joan Simons (g. 1703-1707). Dutch Ceylon was in search of a sure footing at the end of the seventeenth century. The influential Rijcklof van Goens sr. (g. 1660-1663, 1665-1675) and Rijckloff van Goens jr. (g. 1675-1679), who governed Dutch Ceylon between 1662 and 1679, had attempted to turn Ceylon and its VOC capital Colombo into the central node of the entire VOC operation, but after a power struggle between Colombo and Batavia the *Hoge Regering* managed to oust Van Goens the younger from Ceylon by promoting him to Batavia as commissioner for the Company. Van Goens jr. refused, however, and eventually ended up returning home to the Republic. Unfortunately for him, he died on board of the ship *Oosterlant* en route back in 1687. With the Van Goens family removed from Ceylon, the conflict was resolved in favour of Batavia, which became the sole centre of the VOC

⁹² Emmer, Gommans, *Dutch Overseas Empire*, 393.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 346.

⁹⁴ Andaya, *World of Maluku*, 182-185.

⁹⁵ Emmers, Gommans, *Dutch Overseas Empire*, 279.

Empire.⁹⁶ With the internal stability restored, the Company now set out to rebuild its relation with the Kingdom of Kandy through annual gift-giving and recognizing the Kandyan monarch as the supreme ruler of Ceylon, in theory. Normalised relations with Kandy were important for the continued procurement of cinnamon and ivory, after all, that is why the Company had come to Ceylon in the first place.

What we see in this short period-overview is the Company enjoying the fruits of its labor in all three regions, be it through diplomacy or the use of force. However, what can the comparison of *Memories* from different regions tell us about the VOC's organisational identity during this period?

Institute

VOC

The question here is to what extent the *Hoge Regering* or the governors themselves created policy for their respective regions, and how the governors reflected on these policies. Analysing the *Memories*, the general trend during this period was that the *Hoge Regering* was the party that created and ordained policy, who steered the governors. Subsequently, the governors were the ones to find a way to make it work. There were local differences however, every region had its own goals and challenges. These regional differences become apparent in the governors' reflection on the ordained policy, as they tried to convey to their successors what they themselves had attempted to do to achieve these goals, or what they considered the best approach.

Bengal Director Muijkens explained to his successor Van Dishoek that he would inform him what the director of Bengal should strive for during his tenure, "according to her Honourables contentment".⁹⁷ When the new orders arrived, Muijkens argued that it should be done according to the instructions provided by the *Hoge Regering*.⁹⁸ Batavia demanded trade goods, and Muijkens argued it was the Bengal director's job to see to this that it happened. The shortness of Muijkens's *Memorie* also reinforces the idea that he relied more on the guidance of Batavia, rather than provide his successor with elaborate information to create his own approach. Director De Roo stated at the end of his *Memorie* that "For the rest I behave myself [according to] the letters and other papers both received from Batavia as sent from here to there", and he requested his successor to read these for

⁹⁶ For an overview of the conflict between Colombo and Batavia, see: E. Odegard, *Colonial careers: Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and career-making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire* (Leiden: Doctoral Thesis, 2018), 121-146, 173-198; S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1958), 77-100.

⁹⁷ Arnoldus Muijkens, "Memorie van Overgave voor Pieter van Dishoek", 1695, NA, 1.04.02, 1569 Bengalen, 44-54: 45.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 46.

information purposes.⁹⁹

On Ambon, this pattern was also present. De Haas informed his successor Schagen that the annual “description of the Souls” and counting the clove trees should happen in the month of June, and the results sent to Batavia to contribute to the general overview.¹⁰⁰ Batavia wanted to know how many people and what resources it had available in the territorial areas the Company controlled, the more the Company was in control of an area, the more it sought to ‘manage’ all kinds of aspects. Van Wijngaerden also communicated this to his successor: Batavia had explained in several writings that “competitors or strange European ships” should be monitored and were also not allowed to stay in the region.¹⁰¹ This also extended to foreign traders, as the *Hoge Regering* ordained that the placard that prohibited the foreign traders to stay should be renewed annually to make sure that foreign communities did not grow, the Chinese in particular.¹⁰² Batavia played a more directing role on Ambon and the *Memories* show that the governors complied with this, or at least did not question this system.

After the abovementioned internal conflict, the *Hoge Regering* had drafted and ordained a set of instructions that would act as the new framework for Company policy on Ceylon. These instructions are commonly referred to in the Ceylonese *Memories* as ‘Instructions of 1689’. Governor Pijl gave an elaborate description of the matters pertaining to Ceylon, from which it becomes clear that Batavia was in charge. The *Hoge Regering* issued orders and guidelines concerning commerce, cinnamon peeling, slave labor, to what extent the local population was allowed to inherit land, and employee salaries.¹⁰³ Pijl occasionally also remarked that if Batavia had made a decision or gave an assignment he would behave accordingly and make it happen.¹⁰⁴ Eighteen years later, in 1707, Governor Simons advised his successor Becker to use all the directions and regulations that the *Hoge Regering* had ordained to try to execute “this weighty office to the true intentions of our high masters”.¹⁰⁵ Simons showed more initiative than Pijl, and argued that the Company had certain interests on the island, but it remained to be “researched, what thereof the true goal, and use has

⁹⁹ “Voor ‘tverdere gedraag ik mij aan de brieven en v(er)dere papieren zo van Batavia ontfangen als van hier derwaarts affgegaan” - Willem de Roo, “Memorie van Overgave voor Anthonie Huijsman”, 8 november 1710, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, 8741 Bengalen II, 100-122: 122.

¹⁰⁰ “In’t begin vande maend Junij, moet de beschrijvinge der Sielen alomme in dit gehele territoir, en die der nagelbomen, bijderhand werden genomen” – De Haas, “Memorie van Overgave”, 55V.

¹⁰¹ “voors(chreven) competeurs off vremde Europeaansche schepen” – Willem van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave voor Balthasar Coijet”, 11 juni 1701, NA, 1.04.02, 1647 Ambom, 111-144: 121.

¹⁰² Ibidem, 130.

¹⁰³ Laurens Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave voor Thomas van Rhee”, 28 January 1692, NA, 1.04.02, 8912 Ceylon, 181-405: 195, 321, 329, 370, 371, 374, 385.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 187, 195, 253, 379, 384.

¹⁰⁵ “om dit swaarwigtig bestier nade waare Intentie van onse hooge gebieders tebehandelen” – Cornelis Joan Simons, “Memorie van Overgave voor Hendrick Becker”, 16 December 1707, NA, 1.04.02, 8923 Ceylon, 47-124, 55.

been.”¹⁰⁶ The search for clarity ties in with the next step of the thought process, because now that it is clear that Batavia was the policy-making party during the 1700-period, how did the governors reflect on the instructions that were given to them?

In practice, the reflection was the answer to the following two questions: How do I turn the task the *Hoge Regering* has bestowed upon me into the desired result, and how do I explain this to my successor?

Working backwards from Ceylon, Laurens Pijl kept it short and explained that the principal means of achieving Company success on Ceylon was “a thrifty and manageable household”.¹⁰⁷ This thrift was “each time very seriously by the High Noble Lords masters (i.e. *Hoge Regering*) most recommended”, and as mentioned above, Pijl was a loyal servant who argued that a governor had to adhere to the wishes of the *Hoge Regering*, and so he did.¹⁰⁸ In reality, however, Ceylonese cinnamon made more than a million guilders per year on the markets in Europe, and Ceylon also provided Indian cloth to Batavia. Ceylon was thus much more profitable than it got credit for, but Ceylon was booked as a loss-making establishment in Asia due to the VOC keeping the ledgers for Europe and Asia separated.¹⁰⁹ The austerity was most felt in military resources, and Pijl reluctantly remarked that “the entire *gouvernement* [has] fallen below the required manpower”.¹¹⁰ Batavia assured Pijl that soldiers would still be dispatched in case of an emergency, just as soon as these arrived from the Republic.¹¹¹ This emphasis on austerity left Pijl little options other than the diplomatic approach and careful manoeuvring. His contemporary Simons took matters more into his own hands. Despite the instructions of 1689, Simons stated that it had remained unclear how to fill in the details and put this 1689-framework into practice. The governors before him were “of none and the same mind, or sentiment”, he argued, while each employed his own ideas in an attempt to benefit the Company’s position on Ceylon.¹¹² Simons thereupon presented his successor with his own vision on these instructions: the first and foremost task was obtaining the cinnamon. But to achieve this, it was also important to remain good relations with the court or king of Kandy, preventing other European nations from gaining a foothold on Ceylon, and closely monitor the shipping around Ceylon.¹¹³ Simons implored his successor, that whatever the different governors and directors may have argued, he should remember “as an immutable Axiom” that peace was “not only very useful and salutary[,]

¹⁰⁶ “zoo diend thans nagevorscht, wat daar van het ware oogmerk, en but zij geweest” - Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 50.

¹⁰⁷ “Het principaalste waar van Seijlon bestaan moet is een suijnige en menagieuse huijshouding” – Laurens Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave voor Thomas van Rhee”, 28 January 1692, NA, 1.04.02, 8912 Ceylon, 181-405: 183.

¹⁰⁸ “die ons tot seer ernstig telkens vande Ho(ge) Ed(ele) Heeren meestens gerecommandeert wort” – Ibidem, 183.

¹⁰⁹ Odegard, *Colonial Careers*, 177-178.

¹¹⁰ “het geheel gouvernement verre onder 't getal der manschapwaard gecomen” – Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 243.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 243.

¹¹² “van geen een, en het selve (ver)stant, of sentiment zijn geweest” – Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 50.

¹¹³ Ibidem, 62.

but the war also as a very harmful consequence should be regarded”.¹¹⁴ War had become too costly, thus it should only be fought if there were no other options left. The austerity ideal seemed to have been the direct result of the rejection of the Van Goens family and their more aggressive, expansionistic policies for Ceylon. Regardless, Simons still thought the Company should try to expand its local influence: “since those [rulers] of Kandy and Madure, still being underage, and the old *Theuver* lord (a local ruler in the southeast of India who was a rival of the Company) wholly in dire straits, so the times are showing favourable in all aspects to re-appropriate the Company’s old prerogatives”.¹¹⁵ For Simons, fulfilling the directives of the *Hoge Regering* had to be done through a symbiosis between trade and diplomacy.

The Ambonese governors took a different approach, and communicated to their successors that it was important to control the hierarchical structure down to the local level. De Haas explains: “in the case of some Radjas, patih, orangkayas (all three terms refer to village chiefs, but differ in rank), or other such ambonese being in public service[,] dying” the *Politieke Raad* appointed their successors.¹¹⁶ The rules stated that the new appointees could be family of the deceased ones, but not their direct descendants, as this was the law of the land, according to De Haas.¹¹⁷ On the one hand, upholding local laws and traditions was deemed important to generate trust and complacency, on the other this example shows the extent of the Company influence: the *Politieke Raad* was the one who appointed the local officials, not the locals themselves. By banning direct descendants from holding public offices, the Company also aimed to prevent local dynastic structures from taking shape and thus keeping the local population disorganised. Van Wijngaerden also built on this foundation. He argued it was “much needed that one (the Company) in every district keeps dependable people at hand”, and that there should be regular investigations into the plantations and cloves-forests to keep an eye on possible illegal plantings.¹¹⁸ While Batavia asked of the Ambonese governors to uphold the monopoly, maintain social order, and keep out foreign merchants, De Haas and Van Wijngaerden tried to get the desired result by co-opting the local elites.

In Bengal, there is an interesting contrast between both governors and how they went about their task. Muijkens argued that things were going rather well. The Bengal branch was “with neither outstanding issues burdened, nor through difficulties with the [Mughal] government Etcetera

¹¹⁴ “soo mag men wel voor een onwrikbaar, Axioma alhier noteren dat de vrede voor d'EComp(agnie) niet alleen seer nut en salutair maar den oorlog ook van een seer schadelijk gevolg g'agt moet werden, en nimmer daar toe getreden als door hooge nootsakelijh(eijt)” – Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 96.

¹¹⁵ “want die van candij en madure, nogh minderjarigh Zijnde, ende ouden theuver heer gants verdeboucheerd zoo toond sig den tijd aan alle kanten favorabel om comp(agnies) oude prerogativen weder in tepalmen” – Ibidem, 93.

¹¹⁶ “Bij afsterven van eenige Radjas, pattijs, orankaijen, of diergelijken andere in publike dienst zijnde amboinesen” - Dirk de Haas, “Memorie van Overgave voor Nicolaas Schagen”, 14 mei 1691, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, 1497 Ambon, 33v-63v: 35V.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, 35V.

¹¹⁸ “het is egter hoognodig dat men op ijder district vertrouwen lieden aandehant hout” – Van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave”, 120.

hindered”.¹¹⁹ His successor Van Dijshoek was thus recommended to keep doing what Muijkens had been doing, which was maintaining good relations with the Mughal court to protect the Company from the local elites.¹²⁰ His other contemporary De Roo also subscribed to maintaining good relations with the local “Moorish regents” as that would be beneficial to the Company’s trade.¹²¹ De Roo also presented an additional vision to his successor, where he advocated the Company being a Company. The VOC should take a stance whereby it limited itself to being a trader, and that “the authority is not expanded further than Company’s district extends nor exercise jurisdiction over strangers nor [the Mughal] King’s subjects”.¹²² This explicit opposition to expansion of authority and jurisdiction formed an interesting contrast to the reality of VOC policy on Ambon and Ceylon. There the expansion of authority and jurisdiction was much more an integral part of VOC operations. Furthermore, it would be best if the Company’s employees “to their duty and everyone to the job would stay, to which he is called or employed”.¹²³ De Roo argued there was a lack of professionalism amongst the VOC’s employees, and that this should be addressed to secure the Company’s future prospects. Where Muijkens argued that everything would be alright as long as the Company and the Mughals were on good terms, De Roo constructed a vision that the VOC in Bengal would be best served if it focused on being traders, and being professional in doing so.

Governor

The governorship was also an institute in and of itself. In the *Memories*, the governors communicated to their readers/successors which characteristics and attributes they considered important to being a good governor. There are differences between the three regions regarding the ‘role’ the governors had to play: in Bengal the director should be more of a ‘merchant-by-example’, on Ambon he was more of a local prince amongst princes, and on Ceylon he was ‘the negotiator’. Where the *Memories* of these governors overlapped is that they all considered, to a larger or lesser degree, knowledge on local matters to be an essential part of the governor’s skill-set.

When it comes to ideas about how a Bengal director should act, the two *Memories* for Bengal in this period are opposites in terms of outspokenness. Muijkens only gave an implicit vision, De Roo on the other hand, was one of the most explicit *Memories* in the analysed set. Director Muijkens advised his successor that the Mughal Emperor’s *duan* (diwan) – head of local finance and merchant-

¹¹⁹ “met gene quade uijtstaande zaken belast, nogh door moeilijckheeden met de regeringe Etc(etera) belemmert” - Muijkens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 53.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 52-53.

¹²¹ De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 114.

¹²² “tgesag niet verder uijtbreiden als 'sComp(agnies) district streckt nog sgh eenige jurisdictie aanmatigen over vreemdelingen veel min 'sConinx onderdangen”- Ibidem, 115.

¹²³ “De dienaren van d' E(dele) Comp(agnie) behoren zoo veel doenlijk bij hun pligt en een ijder tot het werk gehouden tewerden, waertoe hij beroepen ofte aangesteld is” – Ibidem, 111.

affairs – in the Deccan region was the one who held authority over all the lesser elites in Bengal. Fortunately, he was a “special friend of the Honorable Company”, and protected them against those who harboured ill-will against the VOC.¹²⁴ But the divan also delegated a lot of tasks to the Hooghly *faujdar* Mir Ali Akbar – a local magistrate tasked with overseeing the police and justice -, whom it was “necessary to keep friendly” as well.¹²⁵ For Muijkens, the role of the director of Bengal was that of a diplomat, keeping the people who mattered close, and trying to use their authority to protect the Company’s interests in the region from those who sought to undermine it.

Director De Roo held a much more outspoken view. He argued against an increase of rules, standards, and laws that were common practice in the fight against corruption or upholding the VOC trade agreements. He deemed that approach “fruitless”, whereas “on the contrary the good example of a director (*hoof*) leads many to imitate [him]”.¹²⁶ De Roo was an advocate of leading by example, as this would inspire others to follow. He combined this with a normative idea of what a director of Bengal should be: a merchant. The director should not pretend to be anything other than that, “neither pompousness nor stadhoudery leads necessarily to upholding the Company’s respect, because exuberance holds no esteem other than with the lowest of people”.¹²⁷ Showing off wouldn’t give the VOC the sought after respect and standing with the local authorities, according to De Roo. He argued that it would create a precedent where the local elites would use the VOC governor’s own pompous presentation as pretence to demand increasingly bigger gifts. After all, those who “belong to such a great state” should have the means to spend lavishly.¹²⁸

Diplomatic skill was important, as the VOC was not a big entity in the Bengal region, the director of Bengal would do well to keep that in mind. His role should be based around sticking close to the – predominantly Mughal – authorities that protected the VOC, and have an understanding of the rights and privileges the Company possessed. The governor had to be a ‘merchant by example’. A contrast to the more ‘local prince’-role the governor assumed on Ambon, as we shall read below.

What stands out in the governorship of Ambon is the hosting and participating in the annual *hong*i tour. Both De Haas and Van Wijngaerden explained that this was important. The *hong*i was a fleet consisting of a specific type of ship known as *kora-kora*, a small two-decker ship that was supposed to be equipped and manned by men from one village. In other words: every village outfitted its own *kora-kora*.¹²⁹ The *hong*i was a type of amphibic weapon, and the Dutch used it a lot throughout the seventeenth century, but over time, as the Dutch rule become more consolidated and enshrined,

¹²⁴ Muijkens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 52.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 52.

¹²⁶ “maar ook genoegzaam vrugteloos wesen daar in tegendeel het goed exempel van een hoof veele tot navolg(ing) maakt.” – De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 110.

¹²⁷ “geen meer pompe nog staadhouderije voerd ons 'en noodzakelijk tot ophoudinghe van 's Comp(agnies) respect requiereert, want overdaat en baart geen agtingh dan bij 't gerinste slag van lieden” – *Ibidem*, 110.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, 111.

¹²⁹ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 188-190

the *hongi* developed into a more ritualistic show of force.¹³⁰ The last couple of years, De Haas had not been able to organise the *hongi* due to other obligations, and the outbreak of the Nine Years' War (1689-1697) where the Dutch Republic was fighting the France of Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715).¹³¹ Nevertheless, De Haas argued that his successor should resume this custom once hostilities were over. After the *hongi* tour was completed, De Haas explained, it was an important custom to host a banquet for the local rulers.¹³² The importance of the *hongi* lay in the fact that it was a means to inspect the different islands, and serve as an unofficial leadership council for the Company and the local princes.¹³³

The *hongi* was also important for Van Wijngaerden, but whereas De Haas emphasised the more diplomatic aspect of the phenomenon, for Van Wijngaerden it served as a tool in the Company's extirpation policy, thus more economically oriented.¹³⁴ The connection between *hongi* and active governorship was also reiterated in the Van Wijngaerden *Memorie*: "when such trips mister governor himself cannot attend, [these] must be suspended", as had also been communicated with, and ordained by, the *Hoge Regering* in 1697.¹³⁵ In practice, the *hongi* thus served as ritual to assert the Company's rule in the region, while at the same time making the local princes stakeholders in Dutch rule over the archipelago by involving them in exerting this control through the *hongi*. Since the governor acted as the placeholder of the Company's sovereignty, it was important that he was present and knowledgeable about this custom.

Professionalism was another topic both *Memories* from this period concerned themselves with. De Haas pointed out that a lot of his predecessors had engaged in what could be called 'private justice'. A lot of the complaints and requests that the Ambonese had would be dealt with outside of the VOC's institutional framework. In practice this meant that every new governor would be confronted with the same requests and complaints, this caused many mistakes and cost the VOC "endless work". Therefore De Haas argued that he had restored things to the way they should be, and that all requests and complaints ought to be dealt with via the *Politieke Raad* and the *Landraad*.¹³⁶ Both De Haas and Van Wijngaerden gave a description of the clerks and personnel that were employed on Ambon. It was both useful to, and expected of, the governor to be in the know regarding the employees' personalities and competences.¹³⁷ The professionalism had a more organisational context, rather than a personal one, as for example observed in the Bengal *Memories*.

Additionally, providing order and security was an important pursuit. Both governors

¹³⁰ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 196.

¹³¹ De Haas, "Memorie van Overgave", 45V.

¹³² *Ibidem*, 46V.

¹³³ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 204.

¹³⁴ Van Wijngaerden, "Memorie van Overgave", 119, 124.

¹³⁵ "wanneer diergelijcke togten den heer gouverneur deselve niet kan bijwoonen, moeten werden gestaakt" – *Ibidem*, 126.

¹³⁶ De Haas, "Memorie van Overgave", 37R – 37V.

¹³⁷ For the entire summary of the employees, see: Van Wijngaerden, "Memorie van Overgave", 137-144.

mentioned the problem of runaway slaves, according to De Haas their number had grown so large that they “eventually became so bold[,] that the travellers to the outer *negorijen* (village-level unit) or villages could not safely pass by”.¹³⁸ To counteract this, De Haas had reinstated the “placard on runaways” in 1688, and increased the bounty for capturing runaways to incentivize the local population to do the job for the Company. Reading Van Wijngaerden’s *Memorie*, the situation did not seem to have changed, the runaways had entrenched themselves in the mountains and “up to several times violence, robberies, in addition committed other insolences”.¹³⁹ This forced Van Wijngaerden to organise several expeditions to deal with “those thugs”, which were successful according to him. He advised his successor to immediately prosecute these gangs upon their first offense, as this would yield a better chance to capture them rather than waiting and giving them time to prepare.¹⁴⁰ However, Van Wijngaerden had not always been successful in that regard. On Ceram, for example, he had not been able to make progress, as the island was “large and wide, on top of that filled with inaccessible places” and the people he sent on the extirpation missions kept being attacked and decapitated by the Papua’s.¹⁴¹ There remained work to be done by his successor Coijet. The Ambonese *Memories* from this period paint a picture of the governor as a local prince and ‘foreman’. Visibility, participating in local rituals, maintaining order, and a professional bureaucracy were important so that the governor, and by proxy the Company, could focus on the economic imperatives that were dominant in the Company’s outlook in the Ambon region.

Pijl’s diplomacy was based on empathy for the local population, or at least the parts of local society that relied on the Dutch, and cordial relations with Kandy. However, as we shall read later, this was a mixed bag from our modern perspective. Certain indigenous people, who had to fulfil a cinnamon quota, had grown poor over time, and “that people owed so much [cinnamon], that I am of the opinion to remit her this debt on the whole or for the most part”. Pijl proposed to investigate how it came to this and that they should have better leadership in the future.¹⁴² When Pijl wanted to retire from Ceylon in 1689, Batavia “very seriously requested” him to continue his governorship for a while longer.¹⁴³ On top of that, the King of Kandy also asked him “with particular praise” to stay. Pijl, not one to let a compliment go to waste, decided to stay, because he felt he owned the *Hoge Regering* so

¹³⁸ “en eijndelijk soo stout wierden dat de reijsgigers na de buijten negorijen off dorpen niet veijlig konde passeren, belemmerende bij nagt en ontijde selfs de passagie rondsom dese stad” – De Haas, “Memorie van Overgave”, 57R.

¹³⁹ “tesamen gerottene slaven tot (ver)scheijde keeren geweld en roverijen, mitsgaders anders insolentien gepleegt” – Van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave”, 133.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 133.

¹⁴¹ “dat het lant wijt en breed, mitsgaders vol ontoegankelijkke plaatsen, sijnde” – *Ibidem*, 124-125.

¹⁴² “dat volk is soo veel schuldig, ik meen dat men haar deese schult in 't geheel of voor 't meerder gedeelte behoorden quijt te schelden” – Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 320.

¹⁴³ “mijn seer ernstig versogten voor eerst en nog eenigen tijt in haar Hoog Ed. Dienst en op dit eijlant te willen continueeren, waar bij dan meede nog quam het versoeck vanden Vorst deses lants met besondere expressien, om mijn almeede hier te doen verblijven” – *Ibidem*, 335.

much, and did not want to seem ungrateful.¹⁴⁴ Later, when Pijl finally finished his tenure as governor, an interesting diplomatic spectacle occurred. Kandy sent down three lords to Colombo to inquire if it was true that Pijl was leaving, and why this was the case. They presented him with a handwritten letter from the King of Kandy, which according to Pijl was a rarity, wherein the king tried to persuade him to stay. The king even went as far to promise that if Pijl stayed “he (the king) would then soon make peace with the Honourable Company”.¹⁴⁵ After consultation, Pijl and the Company agreed to the king’s proposition, but when he failed to live up to his promise, Batavia finally withdrew Pijl from Ceylon.¹⁴⁶

In terms of diplomacy, Simons did not have such a good rapport with Kandy as Pijl, this was represented in his *Memorie* by expressing diplomatic rivalry regarding Kandian affairs. The “Singalese courtesies (...) should be tread with caution”, Simons explained, and the *Hoge Regering* agreed with him as they were actually the ones to recommend this stance in a missive from October 1704.¹⁴⁷ Correspondence with the king should refrain from “disgusting, and for the Honourable Company so damaging Expressions” because these could come back to haunt the Company in due time. These ‘expressions’ had nothing to do with insults, however. Simons explained that in these letters it should never be uttered that “cities[,] areas, and land, that we possess, are his, that the governor were to be his governor, etcetera”. Instead it was recommended to keep addressing the king with as much honour as had been the case as thus far.¹⁴⁸ Diplomacy based on cordial relations, had turned into diplomacy based on distrust, but it was diplomacy nevertheless. Despite the provocative language, Simons kept repeating that maintaining the peace was preferable to war.¹⁴⁹

Expert knowledge was another important theme in the *Memories* of Pijl and Simons. An interesting detail of Pijl’s *Memorie* was that he incorporated a couple of integral memoranda that contained more detailed information on military affairs, fortifications, financial reviews, construction projects, and overviews of slaves and clergy.¹⁵⁰ Pijl informed his successor on how to best breed Persian horses on Ceylon, how elephants should be caught and treated, and he had ordered the drawing of 14 maps to get a better understanding of the geography and topography.¹⁵¹ Pijl wanted to

¹⁴⁴ Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 335.

¹⁴⁵ “en daar bij tebeloven quam, dat soo sijn beminde Gouv(erneur) alhier genegen was te continueren hij als dan de vrede in korte met de E. Comp soude sluijten” – Ibidem, 388.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 392.

¹⁴⁷ “waar om de cingaleese courtosien (navolgens de recommandatie bij missive vande hooge indische regeringe gedateert 2e october 1704) ook voorsigtelijk dienen tegemoet gegaan” – Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 74.

¹⁴⁸ “dat men zig voortaan inde brieven aanden coning soude hebben te onthouden, vande walgelijcke, en voor d'E. Comp(agnie) zoo nadeelige Expressien, die ons inder tijd en wijlen voor de scheenen zoude kunnen springen, namentlijk dat de steeden plaats, en landen, die wij besittende, zijne zijn, dat den gou(ver)n(eur) sijn gou(ver)n(eur) soude wesen, en diergelijcke met recommandatie, den Coning Egter niet te min soo veel Eere te geven, als bedagt kan werden zoo als tot nu toe, door ons is gepractiseerd” – Ibidem, 77.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem, 72.

¹⁵⁰ See: Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 209, 254.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, 200-201, 230, 310.

know everything there was to know, and advised his successor to strive for the same. His 14 years in office bear testament to his interest in Ceylon and the experience that he built up over time.

Knowledge for Pijl meant knowledge of everything on Ceylon, for governor Simons, knowledge was required to maintain the Company's position and gain an advantage over Kandy. To achieve this, Simons advocated a more efficient bureaucracy. He drafted new instructions for the secretary's office since its effectiveness had deteriorated after the Van Goens years, and everybody was working "at their own whim" when he arrived on Ceylon.¹⁵² It was also important for Simons to build an archive to retain knowledge, therefore the secretaries should be instructed that "no qualified secretary based on some verbal order can burn such charters and papers" as had happened in the past.¹⁵³ Furthermore, to straighten out the problem of corruption and breaking monopoly laws, Simons advised his successor to keep a close eye on the "several rash attendants" who tried to conceal their "reckless trade against all semblance of truth" under the pretence of verbal orders from his predecessor.¹⁵⁴ Simons argued that the new king, the son of Rajasinha II, was only seventeen years old and was more aggressive than his father had been, so it remained to be seen what attitude he would take towards the Company in the future and what the influence of his advisors was.¹⁵⁵ The Kandian army was in a bad state, according to Simons. It had less than 1000 soldiers capable of using firearms, and although the army had cannons, it did not know how to properly operate those. Apparently Kandy managed to obtain sulphur from abroad in their attempts to create their own black powder, but where this sulphur came from was unknown.¹⁵⁶ Simons showed that he had an extensive knowledge collection on Kandy's political and military affairs, and by conveying the knowledge to his successor he also made it clear that this was what he deemed important to being a governor on Ceylon.

The general ideal of the Ceylonese governor during this period was someone who was competent, loyal to Batavia, and a sort of translator for the ideas of the *Hoge Regering* to the realities of Ceylon. While Pijl and Simons were not very explicit in their views on governorship, it becomes clear that they both regarded diplomatic skills and expert knowledge to be essential for a governor of Dutch Ceylon.

¹⁵² Simons, "Memorie van Overgave", 55.

¹⁵³ "en geen secretaris gequalificeerd op d'een of ander mondelinge ordre te doen (ver)branden soodanigen chartres of papieren" – Ibidem, 99.

¹⁵⁴ "Vermits (ver)scheijde temeraire suppoosten haar roukelosen handel tegens alle schein van waarh(eijt) sogten bedekt testellen, onder de mondelinge ordres van wijlen welged(eelde) mijn predecesseur" – Ibidem, 59.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem, 65.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, 67.

Internal Discourse

The internal discourse of the *Memories* is the final aspect to understanding the relation the governor had with the institute. The following section will analyse how the governors reflected on the writings of their predecessors and other company-related documents. What we shall see is that some documents were more important than others, and all three studied regions had their own specific documents that were reiterated, and whose importance was passed down from governor to governor. These documents can be regarded as so-called ‘retold narratives’. These are narratives that are told by someone who was not a participant or witness to the actual events narrated, but also heard them from someone else.¹⁵⁷ In the context of the VOC, these retold narratives provide the three analysed regions with their own origin stories and explain important turning points in the Company’s presence in the region. These documents thus serve to remind the governor, or allow him to reflect on, how the Company got here, why it is here, and why it does what it does.

The Bengal Directors were aware that despite having good connections with the Mughal court, their position was precarious. Arnoldus Muijkens complained that even though the firman was supposed to give the VOC rights and legal protection, “circa 20 to 25 years ago we have here due to a harmful implementation, against the right of the Honourable Company been forced, to pay the toll in Suratian rupies”. While the firman stated the VOC was supposed to pay in “piet”.¹⁵⁸ This so-called “piet” was a Dutchism that VOC personnel used to refer to ‘ropia pitna’, which meant the older standard mint of rupies, that held 4% less value than the newer Suratian rupies.¹⁵⁹ In other words, Muijkens was irritated that the Company had to pay in coins that were more valuable, costing the VOC more money. Nevertheless, Muijkens followed legal procedures and filed a complaint which eventually set things straight, whereby he also implied in his *Memorie* that it was important for a Director of Bengal to adhere to the firman to manoeuvre within the legal reality of Bengal.¹⁶⁰

Despite the existence of the firman, vessels were still being “apprehended and money extorted”, as can be read in De Roo’s *Memorie*.¹⁶¹ Complaining to the local authorities had brought little result “besides beautiful promises”, and De Roo argued that the most promising option would be the direct appeal of Ambassador Cornelis Besuijen at the Mughal Court in Delhi.¹⁶² Both *Memories*

¹⁵⁷ Linde, *Working the Past*, 72-74.

¹⁵⁸ “Ongeveer 20 a 25 Jaren herwaarts zijn wij alhier door een schadelijke invoeringe, tegens het recht vand' E(dele) Comp(agnie) gedwongen geweest, den thol te betaalen in Zouratse ropias, schoon volgens het firman van den Koningh, enel(ijk) (ver)plight zijn, zulx in Piet Patsmeel te doen” –Muijkens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 50.

¹⁵⁹ See: F.W. Stapel, *Pieter van Dam's Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie 1639-1701*, 4 volumes (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1927-54) volume 1.2: 69.

¹⁶⁰ Muijkens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 51.

¹⁶¹ De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 103.

¹⁶² “sonder dat het klagen daar over bij de regenten (buijten schone beloften) tot nog toe weijning heeft kunnen helpen, en mijns geringen eragtens ook geen volkomen redres daar omtrent tev(er)wagten is, dan alleen van het Hoff door bewerkinghe van deheer directeur en ambassadeur Cornelis Besuijen” – Ibidem, 103.

show that the internal discourse of the period revolved around the firman, the legal status the VOC derived from that document, and how to defend the VOC's interest against the local Bengal powers that did not seem to care that much for the VOC's legal status in the region. The Directors of Bengal informed their successors of this problem, and also repeated the notion that the Mughal Court would, and should, protect the VOC's rights. The difference with Ambon and Ceylon, however, is that in Bengal this legal basis was used as a defensive tool, rather than an offensive one.

The internal discourse of the 1700-period Ambonese *Memories* was rather brief. There was one source of information in particular that became a staple for the Ambonese governors, and that was *De Ambonsche Landbeschrijving* (1675), written by Georgius Everhardus Rumphius (1627-1702), a German-born botanist in service of the VOC that was stationed in the Moluccas. The book was a recommended read in three of the four Ambonese *Memories* that were studied for this research, and thus served as one of the main sources from which governors were supposed to improve their knowledge on the ways of the land.¹⁶³ The VOC was convinced of the value it held for the entire regional enterprise, the *Hoge Raad* in Batavia therefore argued that its contents had to remain a secret so that the VOC would maintain an advantage over its competitors.¹⁶⁴ Van Wijngaerden mentioned early on that he found De Haas's *Memorie* to have been written "with so much accuracy" that he conformed to the ideas presented there, and suggested that Coijet also used it as a *rigtsnoer* (guideline) for his own governorship.¹⁶⁵ I would argue that the brevity and simplicity of the internal discourse of the Ambonese *Memories* point to a lack of incentives that required reflection, which indicates that the extent of Company control in the region meant there was little that changed from governor to governor.

Ceylonese governors Pijl and Simons both referred to two documents that they regarded as the most important ones to read: The *Memorie* from Johan Maatsuijker (1606-1678) to his successor Kittenstijn, and the Batavian Resolution of 1689.¹⁶⁶ Johan Maatsuyker had an impressive track record working for the Company: he had written and compiled the *Statuten of Batavia*, the VOC's legal code, in 1642, was Governor of Ceylon from 1646 to 1650, where he successfully waged war against the Portuguese, managed to obtain the much-desired cinnamon monopoly from the King of Kandy in 1649, and, finally, served as Governor General in Batavia from 1653 until his death in 1678. His stature and success gave his *Memorie* prestige as well. Important was, however, that Maatsuyker had described in his *Memorie* how the VOC came to be on Ceylon, and it included the important treaty that Company admiral Adam Westerwolt had concluded with the King of Kandy in 1638.

¹⁶³ For the specific pages where *De Ambonse Landbeschrijving* is referred, see: Dirk de Haas, "Memorie van Overgave", 33V; Cornelis Rosenboom, "Memorie van Overgave voor Nicolaas Jongsma", 13 mei 1750, Nationaal Archief 1.04.02, 7920 Ambon, 303-344: 305; Gerrardus Cluijsenaar, "Memorie van Overgave voor Meijert Johan van Idsinga", 24 mei 1757, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, 7925 Ambon, 1 – 24: 2.

¹⁶⁴ De Haas, "Memorie van Overgave", 33V.

¹⁶⁵ "met soo veel naeuw keurigheijt" – Van Wijngaerden, "Memorie van Overgave", 112.

¹⁶⁶ Pijl, "Memorie van Overgave", 184; Simons, "Memorie van Overgave", 51.

Pijl was rather brief on which documents were relevant in his view, he argued his successor should read the *Memories* of previous governors, and that the main purpose of these was to gain insight into how the Company had established itself on Ceylon and what its goal had been.¹⁶⁷ As mentioned above, Pijl's inclusion of *Memories* from the head of the army and the *opperkoopman* indicated that he wanted to provide his successor with as complete a picture as possible.¹⁶⁸

Simons on the other hand, was more elaborate. According to Simons, the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia changed its approach to Ceylon many times before realizing "the detriment caused by that". Batavia appeared to "finally with great seriousness have begun to look towards, grounds on which the building of this administration could be founded safely", in a resolution from November 1681. This new foundation would be finalized in the Resolution of 1689.¹⁶⁹ Both the *Memorie* from Maatsuyker, and the resolution from November 1681 still served as the guiding documents for governing Ceylon around the turn of the eighteenth century. Simons stated that it was "a good thing that such a useful writing has once again here been brought to the front".¹⁷⁰ There was only one problem: Simons mentioned that some of the earlier *Memories*, up until the one written by Rijklof van Goens the younger, had been bundled together between 1696 and 1701 together with the relevant resolutions from Batavia and contracts with Kandy. This bundle, however, had been lost by the secretariat and these documents had been "to great inconvenience obscured".¹⁷¹ Therefore, Simons pointed towards the reports of Special Commissioner Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede to Batavia from 1677, and the writings of governor Laurens Pijl from 18 June and 28 December 1688. The writing of the former was important because it contained relevant documents pertaining to the lost originals, and the latter because Pijl "very precisely dissected [the] Company's interest on Ceylon".¹⁷² Laurens Pijl's dissection of interests formed the reference work, together with the *Hoge Regering's* new vision in the resolutions from November 1689. Simons adhered to this new vision and hence found it important that his successors would read it.¹⁷³

The *Memories* from Pijl and Simons paint a picture of a lively internal discourse, particularly with other *Memories* that serve to explain the origins and the administrative history of the Company on Ceylon, such as the Maatsuyker *Memorie*, and the Resolution of 1689 from the *Hoge Regering* that outlined the new course for Ceylon. These documents were still very important and 'alive' to Pijl and Simons during their time in office as the governors used these documents to derive the Company's

¹⁶⁷ Pijl, "Memorie van Overgave", 184.

¹⁶⁸ See: *Ibidem*, 209, 253.

¹⁶⁹ "tot dat haar Edele agtbare de variatien van dien en 't nadeel daar door v(er)oorzaakt, met ongenoegen bemerkte hebbende, als betuijgen bij missive van 9e october 1681 en ook die van 5en november 1689 eijndelijk met veel ernst hebben beginnen uijt tesien, na gronden waarop het gebouw van dit bestier veilig conde worden gestigt dese scheijnen eerst ontworpen bij de mediterende resolutie ult(imo) november 1681" - Simons, "Memorie van Overgave", 50-51.

¹⁷⁰ "een goede saak sijnde dat zoo nutten schriftuur hier weeder in het ligt is gebracht" - *Ibidem*, 52.

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 52.

¹⁷² "comp(agnies) belangen op ceijlon seer nauwkeurig heeft ontleedigt" - *Ibidem*, 53.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, 54.

legitimacy on Ceylon from, while also using these to try to control and influence the Company's relation vis-à-vis the Kingdom of Kandy.

Other

Social-Cultural

After the analysis of 'the institute' for the 1700-period, we now turn to 'the other'. The first aspect to come under scrutiny is the social-cultural, how did the governors describe other peoples and cultures? Which characteristics were emphasised?

In Bengal, the directors were focused on the local office-holding elites and the local brokers. On the one hand, Muijkens argued that current *Subahdar* (provincial governor) of Bengal Ibrahim Khan II (r. 1689-1697) was "gentle", which provided an opportunity for the Mughal Emperor's Diwan to expand his own influence and authority in the region. This was beneficial for the Company, because, as mentioned above, the Company in Bengal had good relations with him.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, the nawabs (vice-roys in the Mughal Empire) of Bengal were "greedy and stiff lords" who managed to "arrogate everything, and even act as the sovereign".¹⁷⁵ The advice for Van Dijshoek was to pay particular attention to this development, because despite everything going according to plan for the Company, it was preferable if things stayed that way.¹⁷⁶ It was important to stay in everybody's good standing, because the Company couldn't function without the blessing of the local elites. The idea was to keep your friends close, and your rivals even closer.

Whereas Muijkens only mentioned the administrative elites of the region, De Roo also informed his successor Huijsman about the merchants he would be dealing with. He advised to keep some of the best swatches of cloth separate from the rest, to be able to reaffirm or demand continuation of quality. Otherwise, the local suppliers would deceive the Company, "which they would do surely" to achieve their goal. Hence, the local suppliers should not be given the chance to make up a story.¹⁷⁷ The suppliers were not the only ones who could not be trusted, however. The *inlandse bedienders* (local servants) – VOC employees that were part of the local population – should also be kept under close auspices, so that they "cannot overindulge themselves in anything", as had

¹⁷⁴ "wanneer deselve zoo zaghtzinnigh zijn, als den nu regerende Ibraim Chan, bij wien des Coninx Duan, als doen, en laten gehouden werdende, ook voornament(ijk) occagie heeft, om zijn gesagh uijt te breijden, en zich bijzonderlijk alomme te doen gehoorsamen" – Muijkens, "Memorie van Overgave", 52-53.

¹⁷⁵ "dat de nababs hebsugtige, en straffe hereen zijn, zoo weten zij zight ter contrarie alles (hoewel ten onreghte) aan te matigen, en selvs den souveraine regeringe te voeren, daar dan voor den dienst van d'E(dele) Comp(agnie) bijzonder op te letten staat" – Ibidem, 53.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, 53.

¹⁷⁷ "maar alleen om te bedriegen, en zo zullen ze zekerlijk doen, indien haar daar omtrent gehoor gegeven werd, waaromme ik ue(dele) raden moet zig daar voorwel tewagten, en dat versoek van dehand teweijzen als oneijgen off ongefondeerd wanneer het gedaan werd." – De Roo, "Memorie van Overgave", 105-106.

often happened “when they had the reins loos and were not accordingly observed and limited”.¹⁷⁸ Only the problem was that these local employees could not easily be affronted or rebuked, because that could incentivize them “to join our competitors, where no doubt they with their great experience and capacities would be most welcome and we then [would be] highly embarrassed”.¹⁷⁹ This, however, did not stop De Roo from advising his successor to never hire the merchant “Ramkirstendeth” again, because he had lied against the Company broker. “Not only because of his treacherousness and known falseness”, but also because this merchant would draw people into a labyrinth of deceitfulness from which it would be difficult to escape.¹⁸⁰ De Roo had notified both Batavia and the *Heeren XVII* of the difficulties with this merchant, but De Roo feared his successor Huijsman would be ordered to rehire Ramkirstendeth, which is why the governor emphasized to exclude this merchant on a personal note.¹⁸¹ Both Muijkens and De Roo emphasized in their *Memories* that it was important to maintain good relations with the people who the Company’s operation in Bengal depended on. But these locals were depicted as being deceitful and greedy when referring to the local brokers, and greedy and despotic when talking about the local elites.

Looking at Ambon, the local population was described through a paternal lens. The *Memorie* of De Haas produced a lot of social-cultural remarks and anecdotes, but as most of them related to Islam and the Company’s local relationship to it, I have relegated these to the ‘religion’ section below. Besides that, De Haas argued that the Ambonese people had become more calm and “adequately managed, like sheep”. In order to keep them calm and sheep-like, however, it was adamant that they were to be treated well, and those who refused to do so, should be punished accordingly.¹⁸² De Haas was intent on maintaining a good standing with the local population. Despite this intent, De Haas still referred to the Ambonese as being “on average lazy” and “not interested in following the path mapped out by us.”¹⁸³ This unwillingness of the local population to participate became a trope in European colonialism, this trope has been dubbed ‘the myth of the lazy native’, and served as an argument to justify later colonial rule.

Van Wijngaerden held a similar view, but was more elaborate in his argumentation: “it is certain that every human, how dumb and little gifted by nature with reason [he may be]” will always

¹⁷⁸ “op dat haar nergens in kunnen tebuijten te gaan, gelijk anders veel maal gebeurd alsze den teugel los hebben en na behoren niet werden g’observeerd nog gelimiteerd” – De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 112.

¹⁷⁹ “veel min in 't een off ander verongelijkt off brutaal omtrent haar aansteld want dat zoude hen kunnen doen resolveren zig bij onse competeuren tebegeven, daarze ongetwijffeld mets haar groote ervarenth(eijt) en capaciteijt zeer welkom zoude zijn en wij als dan ten hoogsten verlegen” – Ibidem, 112.

¹⁸⁰ “niet alleen om zijn vuijlaardigh(eijt) en bekende falçiteit, en dat hij Ue(dele) sekerlijk d' een of ander tijd in een labirint zoudehelpen waaruijt men nietligt te geraken soude zijn, zonder grote moeijten en mogelijk geen minder kosten” – Ibidem, 117.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 117.

¹⁸² De Haas, “Memorie van Overgave”, 33V.

¹⁸³ “En mag daerenboven wel geweten werden dat de Amboinese door den bant seer luije menschen zijn en in het betragten van haar eijge(lijke) intresten en profijt, 'tgeen seer wel in desen toedragt van tijden voor d' E(dele) Comp(agnie) komt, namentlijk dat UEd(ele) het van ons gesteeijde spoor op volgenden haer niet belieft aen tesselten.” – Ibidem, 35 R.

try to obtain what he has deemed of use for him.¹⁸⁴ Because “the Ambonese usually are very poor and needy people” and could barely make ends meet, it would be unwise to demand too much of them now that they had finally had a couple of rich crop yields.¹⁸⁵ “One must therefrom conclude,” van Wijngaerden wrote, “that one by using the ways of softness, and fairness with the same (the local population), her affection [will be maintained]”.¹⁸⁶ His reasoning for treating the local population this way came from a more practical consideration: Van Wijngaerden argued that the Portuguese had roused the anger of the Ambonese as a result of “their hybris as well as hard and brutal actions”, causing the Portuguese demise in the region. It would therefore be wise if the Dutch prevented a similar scenario. The Great Ambon War was also still relatively fresh in the back of his mind.¹⁸⁷ The locals were “of a haughty character”, however, and so the policy of gift-giving was advised by Van Wijngaerden to maintain a good standing.¹⁸⁸ Competitors of the Dutch were eager to profit from bad relations between the Dutch and the local population, according to Van Wijngaerden, adding extra incentive to maintain cordial relations.¹⁸⁹ The local population was deemed to be of a simpler nature, and the governors argued that the locals needed good leadership, the kind that the Company could provide. In the eyes of the governors, this was a symbiotic relation that all parties profited from.

In the Ceylonese *Memories*, both worlds seemed to merge: the paternalism of Ambon combined with the distrust of local elites of Bengal. An important theme in the *Memorie* of governor Pijl was winning over ‘the hearts and souls’ of the local population. For example, he wrote to his successor that the “bush peoples” had to be led with “sensibility and kindness”, especially when they were already more drawn to the Company than to Kandy.¹⁹⁰ Drawing the local population into the Company’s sphere of influence, or at least lure them away from Kandy was a recurring subject in the Ceylonese *Memories*. Pijl argued that the bush peoples had to be led fair as well, “not ill-treated, and especially not with affront words (of which our [people] are very lacking) addressed”.¹⁹¹ The local people should be treated with respect as this would help further the Company’s goal of expanding its influence over Ceylon. At the same time, the stereotype of the local people needing to be ‘led’ was very much present here as well as on Ambon.

¹⁸⁴ “T is seker dat ijder mensch, hoe dom en weijnig vande natuur met reden begaaft door een natuurlijke instinct altoos werd aangeset tot het betrachten en bekomen van dat geen 't welk hij bij sig selven heeft vast gesteld voor hem nuttig en dienstig te sijn” – Van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave”, 115.

¹⁸⁵ als mede dat de Amboinesen deurgaans seer arme enbehoefte menschen sijn, naeuwlijx soo veel bij een komende brengen als onvermijdel(ijk) om aande nootdrufftigheijt vande natuur tevoldoen” – Ibidem, 115.

¹⁸⁶ “moet men daar uijt vast stellen, dat men doorde wegen van sagtheijt, en billickheijt met deselve te gebrueken, hare genegentheijt” – Ibidem, 113.

¹⁸⁷ “voors(chreven) natie dan door haare trotse hoog moed als hard en brutale handelinge, den haet en afkeer deses landaarts op den hals gehaald” – Ibidem, 113.

¹⁸⁸ “van een hoogmoedigen aart” – Ibidem, 113.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, 114.

¹⁹⁰ “deese bos menschen moeten met verstant en goetheijt geleijt worden wanneer meer tot de E. Comp dan den vorst van 't lant sullen geneegen sijn” – Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 188.

¹⁹¹ “door een goede en billikke regering moeten geleijt, niet qualijk bejegent, voor al met geen affronteuse woorden (daar van de onse een groot gebrek hebben) toegesproken worden” – Ibidem, 188-189.

Pijl explained his view on the social situation from both his personal interest, and the on-going power struggle between the Company and Kandy: “the lower groups (*geslagten*), as there are the *Karrias*, *Chiandos*, *Chialias*, and more others, will generally serve the Honourable Company much more loyal” than the higher castes.¹⁹² Similarly, Pijl complained that these lower castes, were increasingly fewer in number, because outside of their VOC services they were also put to work by their local elites. According to Pijl, this caused “the peoples to have almost no rest, to do something for[,] and take care of[,] themselves, causing a lot to expire.”¹⁹³ The lower castes were regarded more favourable by Pijl because of their apparent loyalty, but this was more due to the mutual benefit both the Company and the lower castes gained from each other. The lower castes could grow in status because of the Company’s reliance on them, and the Company could create a group of people more loyal to the Company than the local elites or the King of Kandy.¹⁹⁴ Keeping this in mind makes it hardly surprising that the higher castes were less content with the VOC’s presence, hence their perceived higher degree of ‘disloyalty’. Regarding the Moors, Pijl argued that they were “to the Honourable Company in her trade very damaging, and use all means to thwart her and make [her] Odious with as many rulers as possible”.¹⁹⁵ Remarkably, Pijl also mentioned that “it is [a] people that is more laborious than the Singhalese are, but also more cunning”. They managed to obtain the best land, and spice gardens on Ceylon, which was a thorn in the Company’s eye.¹⁹⁶ On Ceylon, as well as in Bengal, the Moors were seen as cunning, hard-working rivals, as opposed to the local population that was regarded as less-developed, meek, and more in need of Dutch leadership.

Simons was less interested in the local population, and what he did write was always in the context of the rivalry with Kandy. He showed a dislike for the Kandian upper class and the court. Pijl had claimed that Kandy “required nothing, and was not lacking in treasures or wealth”, which is why Simons found it odd that Kandy kept accepting cash as gifts.¹⁹⁷ Additionally, Simons wanted to prevent that “arrogant people” from becoming even more bloated by giving the Kandian ambassadors only a small reception when they came to Colombo. Becker was advised to be courteous toward them, and give them some small presents such as “snuff tobacco[,] tea, and so forth”, but he should keep the spending to a minimum.¹⁹⁸ This sentiment of Simons encapsulated the social-cultural relationship with the local population on Ceylon rather well. If the local population was unable or unwilling to

¹⁹² “De lage geslagten, als daar zijn karrias, Chiandos, Chialias, en andere meer, sullen door den bank de E. Comp veel getrouwen (...) dienen” – Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 296.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, 296.

¹⁹⁴ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 34.

¹⁹⁵ “de E. Comp in haeren handel seer schaedelijk sijn, en ook alle practijk aanwenden haar soo veel mogel(ijk) bij alle vorsten de voet dwers setten en Odieus te maken” – Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 324.

¹⁹⁶ “het is volk dat veel laboreuser dan de Singalesen sijn, maar ook veel arglistiger, en waar door die onder 's Comp gebiet sijn sullen bevonden werden de beste landen en tuijnen tebesitten” – *Ibidem*, 325.

¹⁹⁷ “wijle dog van dat hof betuijgt werd, dat het niets benodigt, en sig aan geene schatten of rijkdommen gelegen laat, bij missive van d'Edele heer raad ordinaris Pijll” – Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 76.

¹⁹⁸ “laetende haar Egter geduurende haar (ver)blijff op wolvendaal minnelijk ontfangen, en met dese of gene cleenigheden, als wat snof taback thee, of diergelijcke” – *Ibidem*, 79-80.

cooperate, they were attributed the universal stereotype of 'being lazy' or 'decadent'. Governor Pijl may have had genuine interests in the well-being of the local people, but this still translated into looking down upon them, whereas Simons had a general disdain for the Kandian elite and was not interested in the local population beyond that.

Depending on the region, the governors came up with different answers to the questions this segment started with. In Bengal, the key-word was 'trust': which brokers could the Company trust? Could the Company trust that the local authorities? The Bengalese directors almost solely concerned themselves with the local elites and local traders. These two groups were generally regarded as greedy in character and depending on whether they were a broker or held authority, supplemented with deceitful or despotic respectively. On Ambon, the governors argued that the local population were meek, and in need of good leadership, which the Dutch should provide. This paternalistic lens applied to basically the entire local population. Finally, on Ceylon, there was a mix between the two aforementioned sentiments. The parts of the local population that the Company ruled over, or those who worked for the Company were regarded as in need of proper Dutch leadership and protection against Kandy, or should be swayed towards the Dutch sphere of influence. The local Ceylonese elites, and especially Kandy, were seen as arrogant, greedy, and basically an obstacle on the road to the Company's goals.

Labor & Economy

Labor and economy form the second aspect through which the Company interacted with the local context. What kind of ideas regarding labor and laborers did the governors express? Which system did they regard as most suitable to generating revenue for the Company, free-trade, monopoly trade, autarky, or something else? As we shall read, the mind set of Company controlled trade/monopoly trade was dominant in all three regions. How to achieve this, however, varied between regions, and depended on whether the Company had to use local intermediaries that required pay, or to what extent the Company had subject populations or slaves available to perform labor.

In both Bengalese *Memories*, free trade was considered the main means of generating revenue, and labor was not explicitly mentioned or reflected on. The VOC had only obtained the right to trade, not the monopoly to any kind of trade good, therefore the governors could strive towards obtaining some kind of monopoly, but the chances of this happening were slim. As the Company utilised local brokers to gain access to the products it wanted, Muijkens complained to his successor that even though he had tried to obtain the desired goods, it was difficult to do so due to the lack of cash.¹⁹⁹ But Muijkens prided himself on handing over the direction of Bengal "with neither bad

¹⁹⁹ Muijkens, "Memorie van Overgave", 47.

outstanding matters, nor by difficulties with the [local] government etcetera hampered”.²⁰⁰ The brevity of Muijkens’s *Memorie* does not offer elaboration on economic and labor matters, but it does become clear that trade and trade goods were the things he cared about most, and that the degree to which these could be successfully obtained depended on the amount of available cash. Willem de Roo also held that trade was the “lynchpin which the entire wheel turns upon” for the Company in Bengal.²⁰¹ This was hardly an overstatement: at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Bengal region provided approximately 40% of the Company’s total export value that was sent back to the Republic.²⁰² In De Roo’s *Memorie*, everything revolved around procuring trade goods and executing the list of requirements from Batavia to the best of the governor’s ability. The goods should be shipped to Batavia on time, and acquired “after the real need of the management”, because sending more than required would cause the products to go to waste and that would cause monetary damage to the Company.²⁰³ Nevertheless, it was important to keep some goods in stock, spices in particular, to be able to keep up with sudden increases in demand.²⁰⁴ All was not perfect, however, because the Company’s operation in Bengal was plagued by corruption and illegal trade. De Roo mentioned to his successor that despite small successes, his governorship of Bengal “to so much quarrels had been subjected, and so much effort and headaches has cost”.²⁰⁵

The Ambonese *Memories* from this period show that the Company was preoccupied with upholding and enacting the cloves monopoly, and utilizing the local population as the Company’s main labor force. De Haas explained that this extirpation was going well in most places, and therefore the fear of illegal or private trade had also diminished.²⁰⁶ In his *Memorie*, Van Wijngaerden explained that during the transaction of the harvested cloves from the local to the Company, the Chinese merchants had been banned. Yet somehow they still had managed to obtain some of the cloves, to Van Wijngaerden’s dismay, hence upholding the monopoly in practice proved more difficult and troublesome than desired.²⁰⁷

Labor control served the purpose of controlling clove-production. The local population had been inventoried in the *jaerlijxe beschrijvinge der zielen* (annual description of souls), and De Haas argued that within the contracts made with the local population it was prescribed that the local

²⁰⁰ “met gene quade uijtstaande zaken belast, nogh door moeilijkheden met de regeringe Etc(etera) belemmert” – Muijkens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 53.

²⁰¹ “Met den handel als het voornaamste point en de spil daar het gantsche rad op draaijd” – De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 102-103.

²⁰² Prakash, *Economy of Bengal*, 8.

²⁰³ “nae hetware behoeft vande directie gedaan werden, want meer tevorderen als men na apparentie uijt den goeden vertieren kan off benodigd, kan niet dan schade veroorsaken” – De Roo, “Memorie van Overgave”, 107.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 107.

²⁰⁵ “dit bestier 't welk soo veel rusie onderhavig geweest, en soo veel moeijten als hooftbreekens gekost heeft en het verval van zaken tendeede gerestaureerd endegebragt heeft” – *Ibidem*, 102.

²⁰⁶ De Haas, “Memorie van Overgave”, 38V-39R.

²⁰⁷ Van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave”, 126.

population could only perform servile labor during one month a year, or accompany the *hongji* tour.²⁰⁸ Returning to the contracts made with the local population, De Haas argued it was important to adhere to these contracts, and not employ the local population other than in utter necessity. The reason was that the Company was obligated to pay them “two heavy nickels and two pounds rice a day”, and given these expenses, De Haas explained that decisions regarding this extraordinary labor should be made *in rade*.²⁰⁹ Van Wijngaerden later recommended De Haas’s instructions, because Van Wijngaerden was of the opinion that De Haas had explained the situation really well.²¹⁰ Another example of the Company’s attempts at labor control was found in the realm of slavery. De Haas mentioned that both during and after the Great Ambonese War, a lot of people were enslaved and a lot of slaves were freed.²¹¹ The act of changing the legal status of people also served the more practical goal of undermining the power of the local Ambonese elites by taking away their slaves and forcing other hostile or subservient people into slavery. This is further backed by the fact that the leaders of the opposing forces were either executed or banished to Batavia.²¹² Van Wijngaerden mentioned in his *Memorie* that Batavia had ordained a ban on importing slaves to Ambon in 1696, but “so as to not cause unrest[,] not a public ban” was issued.²¹³ The public placard explained that certain “suspect nations like Macassarians, *Boutonders*, Bunanesians[,] Etcetera” were forbidden from being imported, and it was also prohibited to “either alienate or sell slaves of Christians to Moors and heathens”.²¹⁴ Adding to that, Van Wijngaerden explained that all the slaves that already had been brought to the markets were sent back with the same ships they arrived in, and that his successor Idsinga should continue this policy as was also approved by Batavia in 1700.²¹⁵

Both De Haas and Van Wijngaerden attempted to increase local production to optimize the supply and demand cycle. To achieve this, labor was important and it had to be acquired as cheaply as possible, which meant mostly relying on servile and forced labor. Slave labor was the alternative, but this also had been strictly regulated to create a scenario in which the Company was the sole slave owner, or at least attempted to be.

The monopoly mind-set was also the main economic motif for the Company on Ceylon, thus both Pijl and Simons provided information on how to obtain the different sought-after trade goods. The governors explained that there was a basic division of labor: the local subjects were tasked with

²⁰⁸ De Haas, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 34R-34V.

²⁰⁹ “voor ieder hooft voor hooft 2 sware stuijvers en 2 ponden rijst daegs, soodat eermen haer off 't een off 't ander werk oplegt te doen, daerover in politijken rade moeten werden gebesoigneert” – *Ibidem*, 34V.

²¹⁰ Van Wijngaerden, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 114.

²¹¹ De Haas, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 39V.

²¹² Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 40.

²¹³ “hoewel mentot nu toe om geene opschuddinge te veroirsaken geen publijcq verbod, daarvan gedaan heeft” – Van Wijngaerden, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 117.

²¹⁴ “t placcaat verbiedene der aanbrengh der suspecte natien als Maccassaren, Boutonders, Bunanesen Etc(etera) nevens dat inhoudende het niet veralieneren nog vercopen der slaven van Christenen aan Mooren en heijdenen” – *Ibidem*, 117.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 118.

producing and procuring trade goods such as cinnamon and ivory, slaves were used to perform construction and maintenance tasks on the Company's property. In an attempt to keep the supply of slaves up, Pijl explained that the Company was the owner of the children of slaves: "the fruit follows the womb", so even when a Company owned slave conceived a child with a non-Company slave "thereof the Honourable Company as lord of the land, the firstborn belongs to her (the Company)". The slaves, furthermore, had to pay *hoofdgeld*.²¹⁶

With regards to his subjects, the cinnamon peelers (*Chialias*) in particular, Pijl showed an ambivalent attitude. He mentioned, on the one hand, that the *Chialias* often added sticks as extra weight to their cinnamon batches in order to reach the demanded quota. A governor should be weary of such deceit and should be paid close attention to by the Company's local supervisors.²¹⁷ On the other hand, the quest for labor forces was often accompanied by a message of exaltation of the peelers and protection against the higher castes who were oppressors, as the Dutch argued. Pijl urged Van Rhee to make sure that "those who are obligated to peel cinnamon none [of them] may be taken to use for other services", there were even laws decreed to ensure this.²¹⁸ According to Pijl, he had always taken care of the cinnamon peelers to the best of his abilities, and also attempted to convince them to give their children, "particularly the qualified ones", a Dutch education "to over time free her (the *Chialias*) from servitude".²¹⁹ Though Pijl's intentions may have been sincere, the reality remained that the Dutch themselves exploited the local population's labor in a similar way as the local elites Pijl criticized.

Regarding labor and economy, Simons was very much preoccupied with enforcing the Company's monopoly: other nations had to be excluded, like the Company had always strived toward on Ceylon.²²⁰ Where Pijl expressed his thoughts on the *Chialias* that had to peel the cinnamon for the Company, or the bush peoples, Simons was only interested in knowing whether or not Kandy could prevent the VOC, legally or by force, from collecting and peeling the cinnamon. He reassured his successor Becker that Kandy could not obstruct the Company, but it was possible that Kandy could hire marauders to ambush the cinnamon peelers on their way to work or back home, as had happened a few times in the past.²²¹

To summarize: the founding principle of seeking or maintaining monopolies on certain trade goods was an integral part of the Company's identity during this period. To what extent this was

²¹⁶ "dog soo een 's Comp(agnies) slaaff bij een andere slavinne kinderen procureert, daar van komt de E. Comp als heer van 't lant, de eerstgeboorne toe" – Pijl, "Memorie van Overgave", 204.

²¹⁷ "De Chialias off kanneel schillers sijn listig en bedriege(lijk) om ijder sijn gewigt televeren" – Ibidem, 317.

²¹⁸ "Voor al moet sorg gedragen, dat van die verpligt sijn kaneel te schillen geene mogen genomen worden, om tot andere diensten te gebruiken, sullende de placcaten daar omtrent g' emaneert genoeg aanwijzen" – Ibidem, 321.

²¹⁹ "tragtende dat volk gedurig hare kinderen bij de Nederlanders, besonderlijk de gequalificeerde te besteeden, om haar daar door metter tijt van haar servituijt te bevrijden" – Ibidem, 321.

²²⁰ Simons, "Memorie van Overgave", 86.

²²¹ Ibidem, 70.

achievable depended on the local situation. In Bengal the problem was rather straightforward: the Company had no monopoly on trade goods, therefore participating in the trade system with permission of the Mughal state was the only option. This system, however, required a lot of cash to utilize and maintain the broker network the VOC depended on. On Ambon, labor control formed the key to the Company's monopoly. The labor had to be either performed by the local population or slaves, and the VOC attempted to be the only party that owned slaves in the region through strict rules and controlling mechanisms. This gave the Company on Ambon a very feudal character. Finally, on Ceylon, labor served to produce the trade goods the VOC desired, but also acted as a political tool. Especially the cinnamon peelers were used to change the structures of the local caste system and subvert the political power of Kandy and the local elites. However, where governor Pijl proposed the idea to give the smartest children of the cinnamon peelers a Dutch education, a certain civilising and exalting ideal, the *Memorie* of governor Simons does not give any notion of such an idea. Simons was only interested in how labor could improve the Company's position, or worsen that of Kandy.

Religion

In the original charter of the Company in 1602, there was no specific mention of matters pertaining to religion. However, since the Company was bestowed with state-like powers and rights, and the Dutch Republic's state religion was the Reformed Faith, it was evident to contemporaries that the VOC would also be responsible for the overseas religious affairs. Further evidence is the fact that the *Hoge Regering* had to report on three core matters in their annual *Generale Missive*: trade, warfare, and the proselytization of the Christian faith.²²² The second charter of 1623 did, in fact, argue that the conservation of the Reformed Faith was one of the reasons to grant the VOC a second charter. In other words, religion was an important third aspect in the Company's relationship to the proverbial 'Other'. In the following section, it will be analysed which role the Reformed religion played in the *Memories*, and, if so, how other religions were described. What we can distil from this after the analysis, is that religion appeared less relevant from a personal or moral perspective, and more aimed towards achieving local political and social goals. Bengal was an interesting outlier, as religion played no role at all in the *Memories*. Therefore, religion also seemed to go hand in hand with territorial control. The more territory the Company controlled in a region, the more religion was a part of its local identity.

As mentioned, religion was the great absentee in the *Memories* of Bengal, apart from the divine blessing the governors wished upon each other and the Company itself. As mentioned in the introduction, however, this was part of the *Memorie* format. Several of the VOC's branches never had

²²² G. J. Schutte, "De kerk onder de Compagnie", in: G. J. Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002) 43-64: 46-47.

a commissioned minister and Bengal was one of these. Even after an official Christian congregation was established in Chinsura in 1767, Bengal remained ministerless. The Dutch managed to fulfil their clerical needs by making use of what was around: for example, the Dutch children were baptized with the help of Catholic or Anglican priests.²²³

In his 'Mallabar letters', seventeenth-century reverend Jacobus Visscher wrote that the possible reason that the Company had not appointed an official reverend was due to the Europeans in Bengal living such a debauched lifestyle.²²⁴ In my opinion, the more likely explanation is that the Company had no initial interest in establishing and expanding a Christian congregation because of the lack of territorial authority the Company had in Bengal. Evangelization was interesting when it could contribute to commerce, and the *Hoge Regering* had no interest in converting people whose convictions they considered to be too deeply ingrained, such as Muslims. In short: since the Company's commerce was not dependent on establishing communities of loyalists, and since there were too few available people to convert, both physically and mentally, a religious mission in Bengal was absent.

Religion was an important topic in the Ambonese *Memories*, or at least it was important for one of the studied governors. The *Memorie* of De Haas shows that there was a concern with the influence that Islam had in the region, anti-Islam policies were therefore often mentioned and discussed. The *Mooren*, as the Dutch referred to Muslims, should not be allowed to "circumcise and convert heathens to their sect, on the pain of severe corporal punishment".²²⁵ The justification for this policy was that the Dutch had once tried to convert the same heathens to the "True Church of Christ", which made them off-limits to other religions.²²⁶ This is an interesting philosophical stance, which only seemed to work when there was actual power to back it up. For example, on Ceylon the Dutch also had a sizable religious presence, but given the lack of absolute control the Dutch had there a similar argument was never made because it could not be enforced. Nevertheless, De Haas was also critical of the Reformed Church. He criticized their work ethic and the fact that before his tenure there was "neither a school for the European children, nor a weekly catechism in the Dutch church".²²⁷ On top of that, the "inland teachers and tutors" had swindled the local population by making them pay for all the liturgy and notebooks personally.²²⁸ This caused so much unrest, that Batavia had to interfere

²²³ F.A. van Lieburg, "Het personeel van de Indische kerk: een kwantitatieve benadering", in: G. J. Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002) 65-100: 86.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, 86.

²²⁵ "Volgens de practijke onder d' E(dele) Comp(agnie) gebied; mogen gene Moorse onderdanen haer aenmatigen het regt omde heijdenen te besnijden, en tot hare secte te verleijden, op pene van sware lijffenstraffe..." - De Haas, "Memorie van Overgave", 44V - 45R.

²²⁶ *Ibidem*, 45R.

²²⁷ Tot den tijd mijner overkomste alhier als gouverneur is 'er geen school voord' Europische kinderen, veelmin de wekelijke Catechisatie inde Nederlandse kerk gehouden" - *Ibidem*, 46V - 47R.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*, 46R.

and henceforth made the church and school books freely available.²²⁹ All things considered, De Haas was critical of both the local Muslim communities and the Reformed Church.

De Haas also mentioned that along the coast of Sulawesi the number of Muslim communities was growing, these communities were resisting Company rule in the region.²³⁰ The most important aspect of this development was that these were millennialistic Muslims. They believed “the time is coming, that her old prophecies, namely our (the Company’s) demise, and her new Monarchy, are about to be fulfilled.”²³¹ De Haas advised his successor Schagen to summon the local leaders at the slightest sign of trouble or unrest, and place them under custody. This all had to be kept close to the chest and required deeper investigation, but without these Muslims becoming suspicious of the Company’s activities.²³² Another example of this Islamophobia was on Tapa, an island south of Ambon. The *Alphoeresen* (Papuas) had built a small village on the beach that included a “Moorish temple” or mosque, and governor De Haas had not been able to find out who built it. It was therefore important, he told his successor, to find out who did this and punish this person accordingly.²³³ As a final example, De Haas wrote that there were three local *orangkayas* (chiefs) that had a seat in the *Landraad*, but as they were Muslim they were not allowed to deliberate in trials that involved Christians and a possible death penalty. The argument was “to prevent all frustrations and wrong Mohammedan feelings”, the fear was that if Muslims were to be involved in such cases their involvement would cause increased tensions.²³⁴

An interesting contrast to De Haas is the other *Memorie* from this period, written by Willem van Wijngaerden. This *Memorie* made no specific mention of religious affairs at all. As explained above, Van Wijngaerden only argues that every governor could use De Haas’s *Memorie* as a fundament to build his governorship on because of its ‘accuracy’. On the one hand, this could mean that Van Wijngaerden agreed with De Haas’s religious policies. On the other, Van Wijngaerden’s *Memorie* shows that ten years after De Haas had left there were some forms of collaboration between Muslims and the Dutch. In this case, a local Muslim named Hassan Sulayman owned a sawmill that had been providing the Dutch with timber since 1697.²³⁵ Based on his *Memorie*, we cannot be certain whether or not Van Wijngaerden had specific ideas regarding religion. What I would argue, however, is that forty years after the Great Ambonese War, Dutch rule on Ambon had become so customary that the Company thought religious zeal was no longer necessary. The seeming ‘paranoia’ of De Haas

²²⁹ De Haas, “Memorie van Overgave” 47V.

²³⁰ Ibidem, 41V.

²³¹ “meijnende dat nu den tijd voor de deure is, dat hare oud prophetien, te weten van onsen ondergang, en hare nieuwe Monarchie, staet vervult te werden” – Ibidem, 41V.

²³² Ibidem, 41V-42R.

²³³ Ibidem, 45R.

²³⁴ “dog sij moren zijnde, mogen onser dood vonnissen van Christenen niet zetten, off daer over mede besoigneren, om alle ergernisse en verkeerde Mahumetaense gevoelens voor te komen, gelijk den Teneur van haer ho(ge) Ed(elens) ordre expres medebrenge” – Ibidem, 40V-41R.

²³⁵ Van Wijngaerden, “Memorie van Overgave”, 128.

that Islam could serve as a unifying banner for resistance against the Company was not entirely unfounded, however, as the aforementioned Islamic revolts in the region made clear. Azyumardi Azra, Indonesian scholar of Islam, has argued that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Islam was reshaping the Indonesian archipelago through the interaction and confrontation with the Europeans, the Dutch in particular. Indonesian Muslims maintained large networks amongst each other, and stood in direct contact with the Islamic centres in Cairo, Mecca, and Medina.²³⁶ In other words, the Dutch presence in the region did in fact influence Islam as an alternative to European colonisation. All in all, the Ambonese *Memories* show that the governors were keeping tabs on religious developments in the Moluccas and wanted to prevent anything that hinted at a further spread of Islam, as it could undermine the position of the VOC. Religion thus seemed less important from a personal or moral perspective, and anti-Islam policies were a more defining characteristic of the Company's presence on Ambon.

Both Ceylonese *Memories* from this period make clear that religion was a notable characteristic of the Company's presence on Ceylon. Laurens Pijl provided a lot of information regarding the religious activities the VOC was engaged in under his tenure: the amount of churches in certain provinces, which ministers were employed where, and whether or not the local population embraced Christianity. The continuation of Christianity on Ceylon required the "use of all means (...), schools and churches" should be repaired and maintained, and both "the elderly, as well as the children" should go to school and attend church, because that is "the right method to convert the blind Paganism to the Christian religion".²³⁷ The local population, however, lacked the hoped enthusiasm for the Reformed Church.

The region around Jaffanapatnam, modern day Jaffna in the north of Ceylon, was of particular importance, as expressed by the province's 39 churches. Jaffna appears to have been a difficult case in particular, as the Dutch and the 'Vellala' – the land-owning nobility in the Jaffna region – were in a prolonged conflict with each other over control of the region during this period.²³⁸ This also becomes apparent in Pijl's *Memorie*, arguing that the churches required maintenance, otherwise "those indolent inhabitants, who are more heathen than inclined to Christianity" would just let the church dilapidate.²³⁹ Additionally, the people from Jaffanapatnam were "on the whole a fake, deceitful and disloyal people", and Pijl stated that even the old king Rajasinha II expressed this to Pijl in a

²³⁶ See: Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), in particular chapter 6 and 7.

²³⁷ "Tot voort setting van 't Kristendom moeten alle devoiren aangewent worden (...)dat de schoolen en kerken te lande niet comen te vervallen, maar gestatit gerepa(reert) en onderhouden, en de bejaarde soo wel, als de kinderen ter schoole, en ter kerken comen (...) 't geen de regte methode is om het blinde Heijndendom tot d'christelijke religie over te brengen" – Pijl, "Memorie van Overgave", 323-324.

²³⁸ Arasaratnam, "social and economic change", 41.

²³⁹ Pijl, "Memorie van Overgave", 196.

writing.²⁴⁰ These kinds of expression are what make the *Memories* fascinating documents, because of the interplay between ‘business memo’, personal opinion, and self-fashioning. Was the agreement of King Rajasinha II added to provide extra legitimacy to Pijl’s remarks on the inhabitants of Jaffanapatnam, or did the King of Kandy and the governor actually agree with each other? It is difficult to know for sure, but it shows that a city like Jaffanapatnam was very important to the VOC’s ambitions on the island, and that the Christian religion was actively employed to expand the VOC’s influence and create a group that was loyal to the Company, and at the same time disloyal to the local nobility.

Simons repeated similar issues regarding the state of the religion on the island as Pijl had done. Before Simons arrived in 1703, there had not been a scholastic meeting for five years. This had “caused no small confusion amongst the schools in the country”, a lot of them had been deteriorating during this period, and a lot of the material stolen. Thus, Simons argued, the schools required restoration works and maintenance.²⁴¹ The community was still reluctant to attend and this caused weekly sermons and catechisms to be suspended, while these could be “of such great use to the local children”.²⁴² Simons praised the effort most clergy were putting into providing their services, but not everybody appeared to be contributing. Some of the deacons, had been lavishly spending money on all kinds of things, and a deacon named Van den Berg had been “embezzling money”. This misbehaviour had to be put to a halt.²⁴³

Pijl and Simons both made the same remarks regarding the relatively bad state of religious buildings and disinterest among the local population. Even though the Company wanted to convert people and use Christianity as a means to expand its sphere of influence on Ceylon, its efforts were less extensive and forceful than that of the Portuguese and Spanish in their colonies. That no improvements were made in the fifteen years between the two *Memories* is illustrative of this situation. The deteriorating state of the churches and church schools could be regarded as emblematic for the Company’s religious interests: relevant when useful, but a sideshow in the grand scheme of things.

Conclusion

Having analysed the *Memories* of the 1700-period, it is time to synthesize the findings following the structure of the framework, and relate these findings back to the main question regarding the

²⁴⁰ Pijl, “Memorie van Overgave”, 196-197.

²⁴¹ “Zedert 6e november 1698 tot 8e augustij 1703 niet gehouden dat geen kleene confusie onder de scholen in t land heeft gebragt” – Simons, “Memorie van Overgave”, 105.

²⁴² “Die nogtans van soo grooten nuttigh(eijt) voorde inlandse kinderen mag werden gehouden” – Ibidem, 103-104.

²⁴³ Ibidem, 106.

narratives of the governors and the organisational identity of the Dutch East India Company.

First, let us recap the analysis of the aspects of both distinguished relationships, starting with 'the institute'. The general trend during this period was that the *Hoge Regering* was the steering party, the one who created and ordained policy, and the governors were the ones tasked with successfully executing this policy. There were local differences, however, as every region had its own goals and challenges. This comes to the fore in the governors' reflection of the ordained policy, as they tried to convey to their successors what they themselves had attempted to do in order to achieve these goals, or what they considered the best approach. Regarding the governorship, we see that there are differences between the three regions: in every region the governor had a certain 'role' to play. In Bengal the director should be more of a 'merchant-by-example', on Ambon he was more of a local prince amongst princes, and on Ceylon he was more of a 'bureaucrat'. I would argue these roles corresponded to the degree of control and territorial possession the Company had, and therefore it would be interesting to research other Company branches to see if these roles are recurring or differentiate even further. Where the *Memories* of these governors overlap is that they all considered, to a larger or lesser degree, knowledge on local matters to be an essential part of the governor's skill-set. The internal discourse of the *Memories* is the final aspect to understanding the relation the governor had with the institute. Some documents were deemed more important than others, and all three studied regions had their own specific documents that were reiterated, and whose importance was passed down from governor to governor. These documents can be regarded as so-called 'retold narratives'. In the context of the VOC, these retold narratives provide the three analysed regions with their own origin stories and explain important turning points in the Company's presence in the region.

'The other' provided the other half of the analysis. Looking at the social-cultural reflection of the governors, they had a different outlook on the local population depending on the region. In Bengal, the key-word was 'trust': which brokers could the Company trust? Could the Company trust the local authorities? The Bengalese directors almost solely concerned themselves with the local elites and local traders. These two groups were generally regarded as greedy in character and depending on whether they were a broker or held authority, supplemented with the deceitful or despotic trait. On Ambon, the governors argued that the local population was meek, and in need of good leadership, which the Dutch should provide. This paternalistic lens applied to basically the entire local population. Finally, on Ceylon, there was a mix between the two aforementioned sentiments. The parts of the local population that the Company ruled over, or those who worked for the Company were regarded as in need of proper Dutch leadership and protection against Kandy, or should be won over to the Dutch side. The local Ceylonese elites, and especially Kandy, were seen as arrogant, greedy, and basically an obstacle on the road to the Company's goals. For the 1700-period, these outlooks appeared to correlate with the Company's position of power and territorial possessions in the region.

In terms of labor and economy, the dominant economic idea was the monopoly system the

Company had pursued since its foundation. This was only a reality, however, in certain regions. In Bengal, for example, the Company was unable to obtain a monopoly on certain trade goods, but Bengal was such a profitable region that the Company was perfectly fine to participate in the trade system as it was. On Ambon, labor control formed the key to the Company's monopoly. The labor had to be either performed by the local population or slaves, giving the Company on Ambon a feudal character. Finally, on Ceylon, labor served to produce the trade goods the VOC desired, but also acted as a political tool. The cinnamon peelers in particular were used to change the local social structures and the political power of Kandy and the local elites.

Finally, there is religion. The analysis showed that religion was less relevant from a personal or moral perspective to the governors, and more aimed towards achieving local political and social goals. Bengal is an interesting outlier, as religion played no role there at all. Therefore, the Reformed faith and its propagation seemed to go hand in hand with territorial control, as was the case on Ambon and on Ceylon. The more territory the Company controlled in a region, the more the Reformed church was a part of its local identity.

Taking a step back, and looking at the question this thesis concerns itself with, what do the *Memories* of the 1700-period tell us about the VOC's organisational identity? I argue that where there is overlap in themes, topics, outlooks, the organisational identity of the VOC can be found in the overlapping ideas. For the 1700-period, the governors regarded themselves part of the bigger entity that was the Company, with Batavia clearly in charge, and the governors the ones to implement and execute the policies the *Hoge Regering* devised. An important aspect of the job was having the right skill-set, and here we see that knowledge and the procurement of knowledge were shared values. Additionally, this also meant that governors were expected to be flexible, as every region had its own challenges and required a governor to fulfil a different 'role'.

The internal discourse was a very important part of the *Memories*. The act of remembering and reflecting on the past was universal, but every region developed its own foundational stories, its own canon of relevant documents. All the governors wanted to contribute and highlight certain aspects of this regional past, as well as add their own piece of information and reflection to it. How to become part of the local canon is not clear-cut, however. Some governors obviously made a bigger impact or had a more difficult situation to overcome than others, and thus they had a certain inevitability when it came to their *Memories* being relevant. Additionally, I would argue that personal preference or 'career prospective' were important determining factors. The higher-ups in the Company would also have the chance to read the *Memories*, therefore agreeing with the right people could further your own career.

Based on the *Memories*, the Company had developed an idea of inequality towards 'the other' by the turn of the eighteenth century. This aspect also had regional characteristics, but there were some general trends to be distinguished. The disdain was predominantly aimed towards the local elites, as these were the ones that could provide, or did provide, the biggest challenge to the

Company's ambitions. In the regions where the Company also had subjects, the local populations were often also mentioned. The attitude towards these was less disdainful and more centred around the idea that 'they did not know any better', and would over time become better people if the Dutch provided proper leadership and guidance. This then justified the Company's rule over these local populations. During this period, commerce – preferably in the shape of monopoly trade – was the Company's *raison d'être*, none of the analysed governors questioned that. Labor and religion could be both used to realize socio-political goals, and an increased socio-political position would then be used to enhance the Company's economic goals.

Thus, to summarize, the Company's organisational identity around 1700 was that of a company first and foremost understanding itself as a Company, with a shared trust in the chain of the command and a professional cadre of governors, and a mixture of distrust and paternalism towards 'the other'. Although this distrust of 'the other' seemed a more general way of coping with the unknown and the uncertainties the individuals encountered in a world that was foreign to them. At the same time, the *Memories* show that the governors were acutely aware of their local situation, and adopted a local identity for the Company that corresponded to its local position of power. If, and how, this changed over time, is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter III – In Troubled Company, c. 1750

This chapter will cover the 1750-period, whereby another six *Memories* will serve as the foundation for the analysis.

The second set of Bengal *Memories* is that of Jan Albert Sichterman (g.1734-1744) and Jan Huyghens (g. 1744-1750). The eighteenth century in the Mughal Empire was characterized by internal strife and instability. Traditionally, a governor in Mughal India held the title of ‘Nazim’, but due to the wealth and power of Bengal the governor became increasingly independent, which was reflected in the honorary title of ‘Nawab’ that the Nazim of Bengal carried during this period. Bengal became *de facto* independent after 1740, when one of the provincial administrators Alivardi Khan (r. 1740-1756) overthrew the Nawab of Bengal Sarfaraz Khan (r. 1739-1740) and usurped the title for himself.²⁴⁴ Bengal had always been a prosperous region and this garnered the attention of rivals. Particularly the Maratha’s, who came from the Deccan region to the south, seized the opportunity of Mughal instability to invade Bengal multiple times between 1742 and 1751. This had serious repercussion for the VOC: the prices of products rose, their artisans died or became mercenaries, and trade declined.²⁴⁵ The tumultuous situation, and the increased importance of Bengal for the Company, is reflected in the considerable increase in length of the *Memories* during the 1750-period.

Cornelis Rosenboom (g. 1748-1750) and Gerard Gluijsenaar (g. 1752-1757) have written the Ambonese *Memories* that are under scrutiny in this chapter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Company on Ambon had opted to commence with an extirpation policy to control the supply and demand of the cloves. Over the next fifty years, however, the extirpation policy proved too rigorous and this, combined with a couple of meagre harvests, had caused the supply to tank. The governors and the Company opted to plant new clove trees in the region to boost production, but around 1750 the problem had yet to be fully resolved.

And finally, we turn to the *Memories* of Baron Willem van Imhoff (g. 1736-1740) and Stein van Gollonnesse (g. 1743-1751) for Ceylon. Both *Memories* from this period are very sizeable, totalling around 450 pages combined, showing the importance of Ceylon for the VOC as a whole. With over 300 folio’s, including a table of contents, and being the most elaborate description of Ceylon and its governorship, the *Memorie* of Baron Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff was a titan amongst *Memories*. During the previous period, the Company and Kandy co-existed and cohabited on Ceylon. Over time, however, the Dutch grew increasingly frustrated with Kandy’s attempts to frustrate and pressure the Company, while Kandy grew increasingly frustrated with its *de facto* dependence on the VOC for commerce and contacts with the outside world. Both wanted to change their position, and this led to increasing tensions.²⁴⁶ This required the Company to become increasingly involved on

²⁴⁴ Lequin, *Het Personeel*, vol. I, 110.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, I, 111.

²⁴⁶ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 38.

Ceylon, which also increased expenses, which warranted further involvement.²⁴⁷ What we see across all three regions during the 1750-period are increasing costs and diminishing returns, be it through local instability, crop failures, or the costs of expansion and local competition. Looking at the larger picture, the Company was also experiencing increased competition from other Europeans such as the French and British. There is even an argument to be made that the Dutch had simply run out of luck and fell victim to climate change.²⁴⁸ In any case, the context had changed around 1750 and we have to analyse the *Memories* to see if and how this affected the governors and if this had any repercussions for the VOC's organisational identity.

Institute

VOC

The *Memories* of the 1750-period are also analysed with the framework that was outlined in the introduction, hence in this section we want to know to what extent the governors themselves or Batavia created policy, and how the governors reflected on these policies. What we shall see for the 1750-period, is that Batavia was more distant, less directly involved, in Bengal and on Ceylon. In these regions the governors themselves seemed to show more initiative regarding policy. It appeared as though the Company become more decentralised. On the contrary: little seemed to have changed on Ambon from the 1700-period in this regard.

Both Bengalese directors had to oversee the operation in Bengal during troubled times, as mentioned above, and therefore both were looking for certainty, for a foundation to build on. The *Hoge Regering* also did not seem able or willing to take a leading role in the matter, so the governors had to come up with their own playbook. Director Sichterman had made up his mind as to what he considered the VOC's goal to be in Bengal,

“this will not require much contemplation, because people will firstly see that this is the only [important] thing, to sell the goods that are not fully needed here with profit, and acquire that which the country provides against civil prices”.²⁴⁹

So according to Sichterman, the mission was twofold: sell the surplus with profit, and buy the products as cheaply as possible. This is in line with the mercantile outlook that was also the modus

²⁴⁷ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 22-23.

²⁴⁸ D. Degroot, *The Frigid Golden Age: Climate Change, the Little Ice Age, and the Dutch Republic, 1560-1720* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁴⁹ “niet veel overdenkens nodig, want men sal dan ten eersten Zien dat dit het eenigste is, de goederen die hier niet vollen en benodigt zijn met winst te debiteeren, en het geene het land uijt levert tegens civile prijzen te bemagtigen” - Jan Albert Sichterman, “Memorie van Overgave voor Jan Huyghens”, 14 maart 1744, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, 2629, 909-1008: 910.

operandi around the turn of the century.

The most interesting aspect of Sichterman's reflection on the VOC was a proposed contract with the English regarding the collection of saltpetre. Sichterman wrote that it would be expedient to do so, so that they would not get in each other's way while buying the goods they needed. He suggested involving the French as well, so that all of these nations could benefit from a common policy.²⁵⁰ Near the end of the *Memorie* Sichterman repeated this idea, that an agreement "[with] the other European nations, to draw a line with us, that would certainly be of effect".²⁵¹ The solution to the problems the VOC faced in Bengal could be solved by forging a 'European' alliance, according to Sichterman. He also looked to the English for inspiration to strengthen the VOC's position in Bengal. The well-being of the Company's employees and servants should be a priority, Sichterman argued. To illustrate his point, Sichterman explained that the local Armenians lived in abysmal conditions, because they actually did limit themselves to acting as merchants, and were thus dependent on the good will of other nations to harbour and protect them.²⁵² Whereas the "flourishing state" of British Calcutta was not only due to the size of their private trade, or the size of their jurisdiction, but also due to the "vigorous protection" the British provided to their subjects.²⁵³ An infringement on one of the VOC's local employees should be dealt with as if it were an infringement on the VOC itself. Otherwise, the Moors would have no respect for the Company, he argued.²⁵⁴ So Sichterman was very clear that he wanted the VOC in Bengal to focus on trade, but he was also in favour of becoming a more active player in the region, emulating the British model.

Jan Huyghens's *Memorie* was an evolution of Sichterman's, albeit with a more sombre outlook on the state of the trade. The textile trade was still deemed the most important aspect of the VOC's business in Bengal, but the general difficulties and decline caused Huyghens to have "many a sleepless night" and he feared the "bankruptcies that the Company in all likeliness will suffer".²⁵⁵ Interestingly, Huyghens also found the idea of the VOC teaming up with the English and the French appealing. Making a fair division would "surely have a desired effect and produce a sincere trust between the three nations".²⁵⁶ The premise was that peace amongst the Europeans would benefit them all, or at least the Company itself. Along with opening up to collaborating with other Europeans, Huyghens also instructed his instructor that adapting to the wishes of the local population was

²⁵⁰ Sichterman, "Memorie van Overgave", 940.

²⁵¹ "want om een accoord met de andere Europeese natien te sluijten, om een lijn met ons te trecken, dat zeeker van effect zoude wesen" – Ibidem, 980.

²⁵² Ibidem, 962-963.

²⁵³ Ibidem, 963.

²⁵⁴ Ibidem, 960.

²⁵⁵ "menig een slapelose nagt veroorsaekt heeft (...) te zien komen de total ruine van diverse der principaalste koop(uijden) ende banquerouten die de Comp(agnies) naer alle apparentie daar door zal komen te lijden" - Jan Huyghens, "Memorie van Overgave voor Jan Kersseboom", 16 maart 1750, NA, 1.04.02, 8800 Bengalen, 463-486: 466.

²⁵⁶ "eene billijke Verdeeling te maken zoude sekerlijk het gewenschte effect voort brengen bij al dien een op regt vertrouwen tusschen de drie naties konde te weeg gebracht werden" – Ibidem, 470.

important for a successful trade. Especially Patna was a profitable market for textile, because of the colder climate, and since “the taste of the local who desires no other colour than red, green and yellow and no heavy but light textiles”, it was important to cater to their wishes.²⁵⁷

Combining all this, both Sichterman and Huyghens argued that the VOC would be better off by abandoning its rigidness, and start thinking more pragmatically regarding its involvement with other Europeans and the local trends. Both directors wanted to steer the VOC towards a greater project of ‘we Europeans’ working together, rather than competing with each other. Recently, Benjamin Schmidt wrote an article called “Hyper-Imperialism” (2019), and in the article Schmidt argues that the Dutch, over time, projected a European vision of empire rather than a Dutch one.²⁵⁸ Though Schmidt sees this mainly as a feature of literary and scientific production in the Dutch Republic, it appears that this undercurrent was also present in Dutch Bengal. However, we need to be careful to draw far reaching conclusions from this, because in the *Memories* from Ceylon and Ambon, the British and French were mainly mentioned as opponents or competitors, if mentioned at all. The reconciliatory approach of both directors appeared more specific to the Company’s precarious position in Bengal. Nevertheless, new approaches were proposed to turn the tide of the Company in Bengal, and these came from the governors themselves rather than the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia.

“The Clove Cultivation” was still the primary reason the Company was on Ambon, according to both Cluijsenaar and Rosenboom.²⁵⁹ The latter did not mention the *Hoge Regering* much, and seemed predominantly interested in conveying to his successor that the fortifications needed to be updated, and to describe the current state of Company personnel and cloves.²⁶⁰ Rosenboom seemed satisfied with the current state of Ambon and argued that “the current favorable situation of this Government” would provide a good point of departure for his successor Jongmsa.²⁶¹

Cluijsenaar, on the other hand, explained the problems that had arisen with the Company’s extirpation policy. The extirpation had been too rigorous and this, combined with a few years of meagre harvests, had caused the supply to tank. This also caused economic problems for the Company. So now the policy was to plant new trees in the region to boost the clove productions, but so far it had not resolved the issue, “as that can be deduced from the serious terms and complaints” that found their way into the writing from both Patria and Batavia.²⁶² Still, it was up to Cluijsenaar to

²⁵⁷ “ten welke einde noodzakelijk is sig te reguleeren naar de smaak van den Inlander die geene andere Couleuren als rood, groen en geel en geene Sware maar Legte Lakenen begeerd” – Huyghens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 480.

²⁵⁸ Benjamin Schmidt, “Hyper-Imperialism: The Dutch Vision of Empire and the Expansion of the European World”, in: R. Koekkoek, A. Richard, A. Weststeijn (eds.), *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 67 – 88: 78.

²⁵⁹ “aanvangende met de importantste maaterie waaromme d'E(dele) Comp(agnie) ter principalen in desen provincie geseten is. De Nagel Culture” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 3.

²⁶⁰ For Rosenboom’s elaboration on the fortifications, see: Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 322-331.

²⁶¹ “vertoont hebbende den jegenswoordigen favorabilen toestant deses Gouvernements” – Ibidem, 344.

²⁶² “gelijk dat klaar af te neemen is uijt de erinstege termen en klagten” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 3-4.

find solutions to the problem, which he attempted by “being informed as much as possible of the situation of the spice cultivation”.²⁶³ Apparently it was Governor General Jacob Mossel (g-g. 1750-1761) who “very wisely reasoned” the creation of a six million pound stockpile of cloves to be able to deal with fluctuations in the production.²⁶⁴ This showed some involvement of Batavia, but limited still. To maintain the Company’s interests and combat smuggling, Rosenboom argued that naval patrols were both inevitable and “highly necessary”.²⁶⁵ Cluijsenaar also argued that it was important to actively prevent all private trade and smuggling, not only through decrees and placards, but also “by doing *bekruijssingen* (naval patrols) along the north and south [coast] of Larger Ceram”.²⁶⁶ This policy was recommended regularly by both the *Heeren XVII* and Batavia, according to Cluijsenaar.²⁶⁷ Batavia remained involved in Ambonese policy making, but seemed limited to ‘clove-affairs’. Both Rosenboom and Cluijsenaar also seemed less reflective on, and deviating from, policies as these had been during the 1700-period, this is a difference compared to Bengal and Ceylon in the 1750-period.

The Ceylonese *Memories* show two governors that asserted more autonomy and were pre-occupied with reforming the Company’s presence on Ceylon, while also more openly criticizing Batavia than the *Memories* from Bengal did. According to Van Imhoff, Ceylon was the most prestigious and most important possession of the Company:

“one only needs to mention Ceylon, to not just make the Dutchman, but even the Stranger[,] understand that the possession of such a significant Island and as a consequence the reign over such assets has to be important.”²⁶⁸

The importance of this ‘asset’ meant that Van Imhoff proposed a focus on maintaining and improving what the Company had, as opposed to constant expansion or short-term investment in a region. The idea was that of a soft hand with a hard stick, the VOC should strive for peace and not think about “expanding or enlarging our current possessions unless that would be necessary to the preservation of a private and beneficial enjoyment of the things that the land provides.”²⁶⁹ To that end, Van Imhoff paraphrased the famous motto visible on the Venetian arsenal “Tempore Pacis de Bello cogitat”: in times of peace one must think of war, a further illustration of Van Imhoff’s soft hand, hard stick-policy.

²⁶³ “Mijnne meeste attentie is dan ook geweest gedurende mijne regeering om zo veel mogelijk geïnformeert te werden van den toestand der specerij plantagie” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 4.

²⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 6.

²⁶⁵ Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 310.

²⁶⁶ “maar ook het doen van bekruijssingen langs de noord en zijid van Groot Ceram” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 11.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 11.

²⁶⁸ Baron Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave voor Willem Maurits Bruijnink”, 21 April 1740, NA, 1.04.02, 8979 Ceylon, 285-602: 305.

²⁶⁹ “dat men geen gedagten moet maeken tot uijtbreijdinge off vergrootinge van onse tegenwoordige possessien schoon die altot behoud van een privatief en voordeelig genot der dingen die het land geven kan nodig ware” – *Ibidem*, 357.

Interestingly, Van Imhoff openly criticized the Company for holding the “damnable maxim that a barren district is the easiest to govern”, instead a district that is doing well and lives in peace is way easier to govern because of its self-interest.²⁷⁰ After all, “a destitute mess” would have nothing to lose by opposing the VOC. This meant, however, that the number of heads (*hoofden*) should be limited, because the more there would be, the more they would extract from the district, and that would undermine Van Imhoff’s principle of increasing Ceylon’s yields and output.²⁷¹ Van Imhoff’s criticisms went further, arguing that there was a negative bias towards Ceylon. This bias was that the island would remain a “burden” for the Company, and that having any form of self-sufficiency would be very difficult, if not impossible.²⁷² However, Van Imhoff held the opinion that Ceylon could be profitable and self-sustaining, and that increasing local production on Ceylon itself would also alleviate the pressure on other VOC offices, such as Malabar, that were now predominantly occupied with producing for Ceylon, rather than producing for themselves.²⁷³

The Company would do well by not focusing too much on trade, because “one would often in the one place lose what one would gain in the other”. Trade was too volatile in terms of actual income, the fixed income from the land, such as taxes and leases was more steady and consistent. Van Imhoff noted that “it (taxes and leases) is the most substantial part of the fund of the state which one can count upon”.²⁷⁴ Every improvement of this fixed income would be “a significant improvement for the entire body”.²⁷⁵ The metaphor of a political entity, or institution like the VOC, as a ‘body’ had its roots in medieval political theory, in particular the work by Italian court writer Christine de Pizan *The Book of the Body Politic* (1407). The analogies were drawn between the cause and effect of diseases on human bodies, and the effect of unrest or instability on institutions or states. Increasing knowledge of the human body during the subsequent centuries would also expand the ‘body politic’ metaphors. The mercantilist focus of the *Hoge Regering* was questioned by Van Imhoff, all parts of the ‘body’ had to be healthy in order for the entire body to be healthy. The metaphor of ‘the clock’ was also employed by Van Imhoff, and even combined with the naturalistic view:

“all the cogs of that great watch [of the Company on Ceylon] must have her regular running if not it will be unsettled, and the concatenation of this political body, not

²⁷⁰ “die verfoeijlijke maxime dat een Kaale gemeente het gemackelijkste te regeeren is” – Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 379.

²⁷¹ Ibidem, 379-380.

²⁷² Ibidem, 437.

²⁷³ Ibidem, 438.

²⁷⁴ “maken het allwesendlijkste fons van den staat uijt waar op men tellen kan” – Ibidem, 447.

²⁷⁵ “alles wat men aan dit lid verbetert eene wesentelijke verbeteringe voor het geheel lighaam kan werden geheeten” – Ibidem, 447.

less than that of the natural where one part is lacking or suffering something, the whole body will be out of order.”²⁷⁶

These mechanistic/naturalistic metaphors and world-views show that Van Imhoff’s thinking and writing were very much influenced by the Enlightenment, and that he wanted to reshape or reform the Company on Ceylon according to his ideals.

Governor Van Gollonnesse subscribed to most of Van Imhoff’s ideas and criticism, and thus sought to further implement and enhance these. Van Gollonnesse was more critical towards the VOC’s personnel on Ceylon, though, than Van Imhoff was. After arriving on Ceylon to take up his new task as governor, Van Gollonnesse found that the *gecommitteerden* (VOC employees with an official task) “were completely ignorant of these things”, meaning the tasks they were supposed to do.²⁷⁷ Van Gollonnesse thus found himself dependent on the local heads to inform and educate him on the matters at hand. The employees were not only ignorant; many of them were also incompetent, lazy, and unruly according to Van Gollonnesse.²⁷⁸ This expressed itself in the quality of the *thombo* (land registers), that were often incorrect or sloppy, which was detrimental to a Company pre-occupied with landownership and land distribution.²⁷⁹ Control of the land allowed the Company to reallocate the land to whomever it saw fit, and control of the land meant control of the products it yielded. In short, Van Gollonnesse made the case for professionalizing the VOC’s bureaucrats. He advised his successor to assign “a couple of competent *gecommitteerden*”, to make sure that knowledge was preserved, documented, and available when needed.²⁸⁰ If Ceylon could be made more profitable and the VOC’s personnel more professional, then the Company would benefit as a whole, but compared to the previous period this had to be achieved not through austerity and trade, but through taxes and increased production.

Governor

Advancing fifty years in time is a good moment to take another look at how the governors reflected on their own profession and what they considered to be the main ingredients that made a good governor. The analysis will show that the 1750-period was for the larger part a continuation of the local ‘roles’ that had been established previously. In Bengal, mercantile prowess was still the main

²⁷⁶ “gaan alle raderen van dat groote uurwerk moeten haeren reguleeren loop hebben so het niet onstelt sal raken, en de Concatenatie van dit politicque lighaam is, niet minder als die van de natuurlijke waar waar van soo eenig lid jets scheelt of lijden moet, het geheel Lighaam als buiten ordre geraekt.” – Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 494-495.

²⁷⁷ “ten eenemaal in die dingen onkundig” – Stein van Gollonnesse, “Memorie van Overgave voor Gerard Joan Vreeland”, 28 February 1751, NA, 1.04.02, 2772 Ceylon, 394R-460R: 411R.

²⁷⁸ Ibidem, 454R.

²⁷⁹ Ibidem, 411V.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem, 411V.

characteristic a director should possess. On Ambon the ‘local prince’ continued to be the default, and on Ceylon the governor’s proper skill-set remained that of a ‘super-bureaucrat’ slash negotiator. Expert knowledge was a great asset, as this philosophy was shared by all governors of this period. The local uncertainties, in Bengal and on Ceylon in particular, did prompt a stronger emphasis on diplomatic skill and mental agility to navigate the obstacles and challenges that were present.

In Bengal, director Sichterman early on informed his successor that “that [*Memorie*] left by sir De Roo to sir Huijsman, is the most the my taste”, hence Sichterman also agreed with the ideal of the governor as a ‘merchant by example’ that was already promoted during the 1700-period.²⁸¹ The disappearing of the old context and the new uncertain one, prompted Sichterman to further emphasize “that loyalty, diligence and expertise are the principal qualities” a director should have.²⁸² Expert knowledge of the local affairs was increasingly important to get a grip on the new reality, and however much a director thought he knew, he should not entertain the illusion that there would be nothing left to learn.²⁸³ For example, a director ought to make informed decisions regarding the Company’s wares, based on acquired knowledge of the supply and prices of the Company’s competitors.²⁸⁴ Most of Sichterman’s *Memorie* is nevertheless devoted to explaining how to get certain wares, and trade analysis. He was self-aware of this, and wrote that based on what he had explained about Bengal so far could lead somebody to think that being a good merchant or having knowledge of the Bengal trade, would be sufficient to govern the VOC’s Bengal office.²⁸⁵ “However”, Sichterman added, “there is more to it than that, one should also have knowledge of the nature (*aard*) of the Moors, her style of government and customs.”²⁸⁶ Although trade was still important, expert knowledge and procuring information was equally important to be successful.

Huyghens built on the ideas laid out by Sichterman, but recommended to his successor the “beneficial lesson, that one has to somewhat conform himself to the tempers of those who are at the helm”, since they had the power to do the Company either a service or a disservice.²⁸⁷ Therefore, in order to achieve this, Huyghens stated it was important to know the “nature” of the individual local regents and agents, of which he would provide a short overview for his successor to benefit from. Acquiring these insights was not easy, which is why Huyghens addressed the need to rely on the people who worked on the subaltern VOC establishments. These junior branches would be closer to, and have more interaction with the local regents and agents, and would thus have more

²⁸¹ Sichterman, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 915.

²⁸² “dat trouwe, ijver en kennisse van zaken de principaalste hoedanigheeden zijn” – Ibidem, 914.

²⁸³ Ibidem, 914.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem, 956.

²⁸⁵ Ibidem, 959.

²⁸⁶ “dog daar behoort meer toe, men dient ook kennisse te hebben vanden aard den Mooren haere Regerings wijze en gewoontens” – Ibidem, 959.

²⁸⁷ “gestelde Heijlzame les, dat men zig wat schicken moet naar de humeuren der geene die het roer in handen en Vermogen hebben om de Comp(agnies) dienst of ondinstant” - Huyghens, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 482.

information and a better understanding of how to “behave” in relation to their characters.²⁸⁸ Huyghens brings to the forefront the idea of the well-informed diplomat, a role description we have also seen mentioned in the previous period. The director should be well-informed and accommodating to the local elites and intermediaries, because they could either secure or damage the VOC’s enterprise in Bengal. Having expert knowledge was also important because the director of Bengal could no longer rely on his knowledge of, and good standing with, the Mughal government as it had lost influence over the Bengal region. At the same time it is interesting to see that Huyghens placed more trust in, and responsibility with, the subaltern branches and their staff, something that did not seem so self-evident to other governors. He argued that it was important to maintain “harmony” and make sure that everybody was appointed to the right tasks.²⁸⁹

In short, halfway through the eighteenth century the prerequisite for good governorship was still being a skilled merchant. The two main characteristics of a good merchant were the virtue of expert knowledge and diplomatic skill, supplemented with knowing the way of the least resistance to the desired goal, and knowing the competencies of the personnel that worked for the Company.

The Ambonese *Memories* show that the ideal of a governor who was ‘visible’, knowledgeable, and basically acted as a local prince was still the dominant ideal, as it was during the previous period. Although the *Hongi* had by this point in time lost its main use as a war fleet, it still provided Dutch rule with a means to create cohesion among the Ambonese, as well as a show of Dutch power. This importance was not lost on governor Rosenboom, who argued that it was important that the governor of Ambon personally participated in the *Hongi*. If the governor was hindered in attending, then his second in command should participate.²⁹⁰ This shows that visibility and approachability remained an important aspect of being a governor on Ambon. Rosenboom further argued that

“such a parade in front of the remote natives is necessary in many ways, if only to keep her in proper subjugation and as a result of long absence give no space to the regents of the villages (orang kayas) to abuse their subjects, from whom now and then complaints surface”.²⁹¹

Hence the role of the governor in relation to the *Hongi* was also that of a ‘travelling court’, where the victims of local oppression could make their appeal to the Company overlords. This seems all very reminiscent of the Christian and Islamic ideals of a ‘just ruler’, who is both approachable for his subjects as well as a bulwark against the corrupted local officials, who serve only their own interests.

²⁸⁸ Huyghens, “Memorie van Overgave”, 482.

²⁸⁹ Ibidem, 485.

²⁹⁰ Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 311-312.

²⁹¹ Ibidem, 312.

Having local knowledge and knowledge of the Company's personnel, also made its way in the *Memories* from this period. Local knowledge was obtained through the reading of other documents, in particular the *Ambonsche Landbeschrijving* of Rumphius as we shall read below. This had been the case during the previous period as well. At the end of the *Memorie*, Cluijsenaar remarked that "were I to follow the entry in some *memories* of our predecessors" he would have to give a description of the qualities and conduct of the Company servants on Ambon.²⁹² However, "I want to refrain from doing so in order to not be accused of partiality", the required knowledge of the Company's servants would come to Cluijsenaar's successor soon enough once he took office Cluijsenaar stated.²⁹³ This shows Cluijsenaar's idea of the vices and virtues of being an Ambonese governor: it is not professional to either positively or negatively write about your subordinates. Rosenboom, the other *Memorie* from this period, did give a description of the personnel. So while the ideal of the governor needing to be in the know about the personnel is present in both periods, the idea of writing this down for posterity was rejected by Cluijsenaar as partisanship. Additionally, Cluijsenaar informed his successor that he had instructed and ordered his subordinates, the heads of the spice producing branches, "to in person annually traverse the [spice] forests to that prescribed end (i.e. the cloves cultivation) in so far it is possible for her to do so".²⁹⁴

Based on the both Ceylonese *Memories* from circa 1750, the ideal of the governor of Ceylon was that of a 'super-bureaucrat': diplomatically skilled and having expert knowledge of both the Company and the local context. Van Imhoff illustrated this by stating that in order to enjoy that which the country provides and could provide in the future, "one must first and foremost know what this land already provides[,] what it could provide and then research how one can maintain a beneficial enjoyment [of this land]".²⁹⁵ His predecessors had lacked coherence and a certain critical self-reflection in their *Memories*, Van Imhoff argued. Some described the boring day-to-day operations, others just blurted out some of their ideas without any real consideration or *desseijn* (design), there were those who discussed the trade, those who discussed judicial matters, or the agriculture, but none of them discussed the Ceylonese system as a whole and Van Imhoff wanted to change that. A governor should choose the "interest of the Company" as the subject of his *Memorie*.²⁹⁶

The skill-set of the governor was understood in more diplomatic terms by Van Gollonnesse. He argued:

²⁹² "Wanneer ik het ingevoerde bij sommige memories van onse predecresseuren wilde volgen, zoude alhier nog resteeren te beschrijven, de qualiteijd der dienaren met hare conduite" – Cluijsenaar, "Memorie van Overgave", 24.

²⁹³ "maar ik zal mij daar van enthouden om niet van partialiteit beschuldigt te werden" – Ibidem, 24.

²⁹⁴ "ik de opperhoofden, der specerij gevende comptoiren circulair hebben aangeschreven en gelast, selver in persoon 's jaarlijks eens ten voorsc(hreven) eijnde de bossen te doorkruisen in zoverre het haar maar immers doenlijk is" – Ibidem, 7.

²⁹⁵ "moet men eerst en voor al weten wat dit land thans geeft wat 't nog geeven kan en dan onderzoeken hoe men een voordeelig gnot van het eene en andere kan hebben en behouden" – Van Imhoff, "Memorie van Overgave", 410.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem, 320.

“meanwhile it is necessary, that a superintendent according to the intent of the High Honorable Gentlemen principals and the High Indies government, must predominantly focus on, living harmoniously as much as possible with this [Kandian] Court.”²⁹⁷

The Ceylonese governor should strive towards a harmonious relationship with Kandy, which was also in line with the desires of the *Hoge Regering*. Fortunately, Van Gollonnesse also elaborated on the specifics of what this ‘harmonious’ attitude entailed. He quoted from a missive sent by Batavia in 1743, which explained that one should “carefully wait” before jeopardizing the authority of the Company. A governor “should at the right time know when to give and to take, sometimes signs of seriousness, then in turn accommodation and leniency” to keep the Kandian court within “certain reasonable boundaries”, because the Company needed its friendship.²⁹⁸ Similarly, Van Gollonnesse expressed that the acquisition of knowledge regarding the local situation and population was important. Van Gollonnesse even went as far to call it “not one of the least duties of a superintendent” to get to know all the local heads (*hoofden*) and make sure they don’t extort the “poor community”.²⁹⁹ The VOC governor had to be a good leader, which was understood in terms of protecting the local population from the exploitation by the local elites. To be able to do so, the procurement of knowledge was again emphasized. Van Gollonnesse recommended that if his successor found himself lacking in that regard, he should let him inform himself by the people working for, and the local heads that were loyal to, the Company.³⁰⁰ Therefore, Van Gollonnesse stated in agreement with Batavia, that the governor had the task of appointing the right *hoofden* who had “profound knowledge” of the local population he was meant to oversee and the services they had to provide, but who at the same time was neither too self-serving, nor too soft. Last but not least, linguistic skills were also recommended, especially for the people who came into regular contact with the native population.³⁰¹ The ideal of the governor showed continuity in relation with the previous period, and overall diplomacy and expert knowledge were still the dominant aspects. Van Imhoff added a very outspoken vision and ‘keeping the Company’s interest in mind’ as part of the skill-set. However, it also seemed that after Van Imhoff’s reforms the *Hoge Regering* attempted to tighten the reigns somewhat to prevent Ceylonese governors from becoming too autonomous and audacious again, as had been the case a century ago

²⁹⁷ “Midlerwijlen is het noodzakelijk, dat een hoofdgebieder volgens de intentie der Hoog Edele Heeren principalen en de Hooge Indiase regering, sig voornamentlijk daarop moet toeleggen, om met dit Hoff so veel mogelijk in een goede Harmonie te leven” – Van Gollonnesse, “Memorie van Overgave”, 404R.

²⁹⁸ “Dat men eerst en alvorens sig sorgvuldig wagte, door onredelijke behandelingen of blijken van eijgen interest, die agting en dat ontsag te verliesen (...) en dat men voorts ter regten tijd weet te geven en te nemen, om dan eens wat blijken van ernst, dan weder daar gerief en inschikkelijkheid die gene te contenteren en binnen sekere redelijke bordres te houden, welkers vrindschap men tot bevordering van 's Comp(agnies) saken nodig heeft en niet ontberen kan” – Ibidem, 404V – 405R.

²⁹⁹ “En het is geen van de minste pligten van een Gebieder en landregent, dat hij alle dese hoofden selfs leert kennen” – Ibidem, 419R.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem, 419V.

³⁰¹ Ibidem, 434R.

under the Van Goens family. We can see this in the *Memorie* of Van Gollonnesse, where he tries to anchor his ideas to those of Batavia. In short, the autonomy of Ceylonese governors and Ceylon's status vis-à-vis Batavia was a conundrum that the *Hoge Regering* could not seem to solve.

Internal Discourse

The following section will analyse how the governors reflected on the writings of their predecessors and other company-related documents. Company-related documents and *Memories* of predecessors continued to play a role in the 1750-period, and the three studied regions continued to develop their own retold narratives. There were some differences, however, that were caused by changing local circumstances and the Company's changing position overall. In Bengal this led to the internal discourse taking a new direction, as the old foundation disappeared over the course of the eighteenth century. On Ambon, the internal discourse seemed to stagnate. And finally, on Ceylon the discourse was expanded and also shifted as the governors of Ceylon had to manoeuvre between the local context and Ceylon's position in relation to Batavia.

The *Memories* from Bengal show a change in the internal discourse. The firman continued to play an important role in Sichterman's *Memorie*, which was the earlier of the two analysed for this chapter. By that time, however, Mughal power had already been dissipating from the region for a while, yet Sichterman and the Company tried to hold on to something they knew and were familiar with. In Sichterman's 1744 *Memorie*, the firman is still upheld as the foundation of the VOC's presence in Bengal:

“since we fair in these lands have been established, by a favourable admission of the sovereign and the Company to deprive the regents of all opportunity to form pretensions, it is very convenient, to be able to show at all times, that that admission [is] derived of the highest authority, provided it is renewed from time to time.”³⁰²

The ideal situation in his *Memorie* was still that if the local princes and regents were attempting to harm or fool the VOC, they should be countered by using the firman. This had been a tried and tested method, as we also saw during the 1700-period. It was a real problem for Sichterman when he found out that the current firman was left unsigned due to the sudden passing away of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah (r. 1707-1712), because this technically left the VOC unprotected by the law.

³⁰² “aangezien w' eerlijk in deze landen gestabileerd zijn, door een geunstige toe lating vanden souverain ende Comp(agnie) om de regenten alle occasie tot het formeeren van pretentien te benemen, veel gelegen legt, om ten allen tijd al een onwederspreekelijke wijze te kunnen aan thonen, dat die toe lating vande hoogste magt afgevloeijd, mits(gaders) van tijd tot tijd gerenoveert is” - Sichterman, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 975.

Sichterman explained that as soon as he arrived in Bengal he called in favours from the highest ministers at the court in Delhi to get the firman signed, sealed, and delivered, fearing it would be deemed null and void otherwise. He succeeded in doing so, and in 1736 the Mughal Chancellor sanctioned the firman originally issued by Bahadur Shah at the beginning of the eighteenth century.³⁰³ In practice, this meant that the governors had operated from a disputable legal status for 25 years.

Reality had already changed by the time Sichterman wrote this, however. The Persian Nader Shah (r. 1736-1747) struck a decisive blow against the Mughals in 1739, and this gave the peripheral regions the opportunity to assert their autonomy. Henceforth, Mughal authority definitively ceased to be in Bengal when Alivardi Khan usurped power in 1740, and the VOC's firman lost its status and function as a result. This, in my opinion, is the primary reason that it is no longer mentioned in Jan Huyghens's *Memorie* of 1750. Now the governors had to deal with the local powers directly, and the search for new footing replaced the reiteration of the firman and its uses. As mentioned before, Sichterman put himself in line with the ideas of De Roo. But he went one step further: in a rare instance of direct intertextual critique of another high ranking Company official – Commissioner General Van Rheeede – who was the head of an anti-corruption investigation committee in the late seventeenth century – Sichterman pointed out that although he agreed with van Rheeede on most of his views, he did not agree with the notion of acting as mere merchants. Instead, he advocated a stance of protecting the VOC's employees, to show the locals that the Company takes care of its employees.³⁰⁴ What makes this an interesting anecdote, is that most of the times the governors only mentioned a predecessor or other official who they agreed with, or who had provided useful information on a certain topic. It is rare to find an example like this of engaging with the written argument of somebody else and giving a written critique of it.

In the other *Memorie*, director Huygens positioned himself in line with Sichterman, explaining that “I don't know how to give Your Honor any better council than to follow the same”.³⁰⁵ Since Sichterman was the only director to have experienced both the old and new situations, Huyghens used his *Memorie* as the fundament to work from, which explains the relative absence of other documents or mentions of other directors in Huyghens's *Memorie*. So after the Mughals lost their power in Bengal and the firman lost its enforceability, the directors of Bengal started looking for new ways to secure the VOC's position. They searched for new guidelines within their own documents, and informed each other which their predecessors' ideas they found to be the most viable or aligned themselves with. The internal discourse halfway through the eighteenth century became more diverse, not by choice, but by necessity.

Internal discourse in the Ambonese *Memories* remained very limited, which is an interesting

³⁰³ Sichterman, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 976.

³⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 960.

³⁰⁵ Huyghens, “*Memorie van Overgave*”, 482.

characteristic. Rosenboom advised his successor to read the “diverse orders, *memorien*, resolutions, placards, letters and what more resides at the secretariat”.³⁰⁶ He also added that

“with the bequeathed *Memories* of most of our Predecessors Your Noble Honorable will extensively argued the foremost Main Point[,] being the Clove Culture”.³⁰⁷

Despite emphasizing he would not expound on the matter, because it had already been done by his predecessors, Rosenboom still spent some pages discussing the clove cultivation. An old acquaintance that made its way into the recommendations was Rumphius’s *Ambonsche Landsbeschrijving*, which remained the go to reference work for Ambonese governors to enhance their local knowledge. Rumphius was also mentioned by Cluijsenaar to his successor, in addition “some of the successive bequeathed *memories*” are also important to gain insight into the Company’s operation on Ambon and its inhabitants.³⁰⁸ By this time, some other *Memories* were made available in print, Cluijsenaar mentioned, which is an interesting development and indicates an opening of the information streams between Batavia, Ambon, and other Company territories as well.³⁰⁹ All in all, the lack of internal discourse is an indication that the Company on Ambon had no need for new ideas or other viewpoints, it tried to do what it had always done, and it seemed to work. Therefore, its regional identity also could not, or did not have to, change.

What we see in the Ceylonese *Memorie* is the continuation of ‘thinking in eras’. By this point in time, new eras had been added and Van Imhoff’s *Memorie* in particular attempted to create a whole new era of internal discourse, while reiterating important documents of figureheads of the previous eras. No surprise then, that Van Imhoff’s *Memorie* stood out in comparison to the other *Memories* that were analysed in terms of discussing and referring to other works and documents. The importance of the Maatsuyker *Memorie* was reaffirmed by Van Imhoff. Almost a century later, Van Imhoff still legitimized VOC rule on Ceylon as “this country, for the most part or taken in the broadest sense, by means of Conquest with a more than average and absolute sovereignty ruling supremacy fell into our hands”.³¹⁰ He placed the Maatsuyker *Memorie* in the category of useful documents regarding the history of the Company.³¹¹ The Maatsuyker *Memorie* still formed one of the foundational documents of VOC rule on Ceylon. Van Imhoff also made reference to another famous colonial production: the

³⁰⁶ “tot diverse ordres, memorien, resolutien, Placcaten, Brieven en wes meer ter secretarije van Politie berustende” – Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 304.

³⁰⁷ Bij de nagelate Memorien van meest alle onse Predecresseuren zuld U Ed(ele) agtb(are) omstandig beraisonneerd vinden het voornaamste of Hoofd Poinct teweten dat der Nagul Culture” – Ibidem, 305.

³⁰⁸ “sommige der successive nagelaten memories bij de respectie Heeren Gouverneurs” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 2.

³⁰⁹ Ibidem, 6.

³¹⁰ “dit land, in het gros off inden ruijsten sin genomen, als bij Conqueste van eene met een meer dan gemeene en absolute souveraniteijt heerschende oppermagt, ons toegekomen zijnde”, Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave, 385-386.

³¹¹ Ibidem, 310.

book *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien* (Old and New East Indies) (1726) by Francois Valentijn. It was a massive five volume work, utilizing internal VOC documents and maps, but at the same time Valentijn took a lot of the claim for the intellectual labor of unmentioned others. Van Imhoff described the work as “in many aspects deviating from the truth, nevertheless for the Company still very damaging”, furthermore it belonged to the category of “superficial” knowledge.³¹² It was useful, but at the same time damaging because it apparently did not portray a truthful picture of the ins and outs of the Company. Van Imhoff expected his successors to already have a deeper understanding of Ceylon than was presented in such public works.

Regarding his predecessors, Van Imhoff divided the Company’s rule of Ceylon into two main categories: the pre-1681 Batavia memorandum (which was also prominent during the previous analyzed period), and the post-1681 era.³¹³ In practice, Van Imhoff actually distinguished four eras of Ceylonese government. The first one he referred to as the “Concept of the gentlemen Van Goens father and son”, which was characterized by the idea of bringing Ceylon under the Company’s control through military power.³¹⁴ The second era was the 1681 memorandum era, where the *Hoge Regering* changed the Ceylonese approach by giving some land back to the King of Kandy in an attempt to re-establish friendly relations, and issue budget cuts.³¹⁵ The third era started with the Bekker governorship in 1707, where the relationship with Kandy and the Company’s subjects was superseded once again. However, Van Imhoff argued that this period was one of “incompetence and self-enrichment”, that would have been impossible to continue given the VOC’s “dire straits and current austere state of the Company’s business”.³¹⁶ And finally, the fourth era started when Van Imhoff himself became governor of Ceylon. Humble as he was, Van Imhoff hoped the course he had plotted out “if God allows it[,] I wish[,] might last the longest, because I image the Company and the country with its inhabitants would thereby not fare badly”.³¹⁷ He positioned himself as a new chapter of VOC rule on Ceylon. Though, he argued, others must have also had a good feeling about their concepts and their governance, but these feelings are unwarranted if their “prevalent value” is not demonstrated

³¹² “bij den inveelen van de waarheijd devieerenden dog voor de Comp(agnie) nog thans seer schadelijken valentijn in dat Bekende oud en nieuw Oost Indien en gehoord ook nevens alle 't geen men verder ten dien aspecten uijt boeken en papieren profiteeren kan, alleenlijk tot die kennisse de welke bij mij schoon deselven ook noodsaekelijk en nut is, niet verder dan voor superficieel word aangesien.” – Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 310.

³¹³ Ibidem, 316.

³¹⁴ Ibidem, 316.

³¹⁵ Ibidem, 317.

³¹⁶ “scheepje 't sedert die tijd over een anderen boeg soo omtrent den vorst als 's Comp(agnies) onderdanen gewend, dog door swaar bellasten en stijfzeijl voeren, gevoegd bij de (ver)keerden Coursen der onkunde, en eijgenbaat ook sodanig van tijd tot tijd gekraakt en uijt den anderen gewerkt is, dat het in't krappe vaarwater der tegenwoordige soberen gesteldheijt van 's Comp(agnies) zaeken alomme niet veel langer zoude hebben kunnen zeebouwen” – Ibidem, 318.

³¹⁷ “die God geeft dat naar mijnen wensch langs duuren mag, om dat Ik mij verbeelden de Comp(agnie) en 't land met dies ingesetenen daarbij niet qualijk zullen vaaren.” – Ibidem, 318.

first.³¹⁸ Thus, the entire *Memorie* served as Van Imhoff's justification of his new course and why it would be for the best. He summarized his vision at the end of his *Memorie*: utilizing the positive aspects of the previous periods, relying less on Kandy, and, most importantly, focusing on improving the land under the VOC's control.³¹⁹

The impact of Van Imhoff's *Memorie* was substantial, Stein van Gollonnesse wrote to his successor Gerard Vreeland that Van Imhoff's *Memorie* was the go-to reference for a description of Ceylon, because it gave such elaborate and detailed descriptions of all aspects of the island and its governance.³²⁰ Furthermore, Van Gollonnesse argued that "not only for Your Honorable (Vreeland) but for all the next governors of this island (...) it should serve [as a guideline]".³²¹ Van Gollonnesse's *Memorie* also showed similarities with Van Imhoff in the case that it referred to other *Memories* when it came to certain aspects of Ceylon, its regions, or the VOC's enterprise there. To gain further information regarding the desired Ceylonese cinnamon, Van Gollonnesse advised his successor to read Thomas van Rhee's 1697 *Memorie*. Similarly, he stated that the descriptions of the different species of dyer's madder (*verfwortel*) could be found in Van Rhee.³²² In matters of Kandian diplomacy, relations with local leaders (*hoofden*), and general economic policy, Van Gollonnesse referred to Van Imhoff.³²³ This cross-referencing of where to find information on different topics indicates that the size and importance of Ceylon required a more holistic approach to gain a clear understanding of the different regions and aspects of the VOC's presence, what had happened during the governor's time in office, and what his successor could and should keep an eye out for.

Nevertheless, Van Imhoff's *Memorie* would become the new benchmark for Ceylonese governors. Van Gollonnesse contributed to this by stating that "all that I have done here, is based on the mentioned his Honorable's instruction", and that Ceylon is currently in good condition thanks to the "wise arrangement of high mentioned his Honorableness, that I have executed to my ability".³²⁴ Van Gollonnesse advised his successor Vreeland to continue these policies, unless Batavia ordered him not to, or if a changing context required it.³²⁵ These *Memories* also showed that the past still played an important role in the present, in terms of legitimacy and reflection. Furthermore, the governors of Ceylon either had knowledge of others writing about the Company, such as Valentijn, or were at least encouraged to take notice of such works and reflect on them.

³¹⁸ Van Imhoff, "Memorie van Overgave", 319.

³¹⁹ Ibidem, 598.

³²⁰ Van Gollonnesse, "Memorie van Overgave", 394V-395R.

³²¹ "daarom niet alleen voor Uw Edele maar voor alle volgende gebieders deses eilands tot een sijnesura (...) zal moeten dienen" – Ibidem, 394V.

³²² Ibidem, 435V, 438R.

³²³ Ibidem, 403R, 419R, 441V.

³²⁴ "dat alle het geene ik alhier heb uijtgevoerd, na den leest van Hoog gem(elde) zijn Edelheijds voorschrift is geschoeijd en dat de goede gesteldheijd, waar in dit eiland zig thans door Godes zegen bevind in de buijten gemene voordeelen, die sedert eenige jaren herwaarts zijn behaald, alleen moeten toegeschreven werden aan de wijze schikking van Hoog gem(elde) sijn Edelhijid, die ik na vermogen ter uijtvoering heb gebragt en waar bij UwEdele noodzakelijk zal dienen te continueren" – Ibidem, 395R – 395V.

³²⁵ Ibidem, 395V.

Other

Social-cultural

In this section we continue the line of inquiry established in the previous chapter as to how the governors described other peoples and cultures.

Bengal Director Sichterman argued in his *Memorie* that it would be wise to “conform somewhat to the nature and mood of those in charge”, because they were the ones who held sway over “the ship of the Company’s wealth”.³²⁶ Contrary to Ambon and Ceylon, the relationship with the local population was only described with regards to the local intermediaries and elites on whom the Company depended. For Sichterman, it was of the utmost importance to maintain friendly relations with these elites. Also requests should be treated with care, because “the Moors such direct dismissal of their requests, even though [done] for good reason, easily take [it] for some kind of scorn”.³²⁷ They were more accustomed to delays than refusal according to Sichterman, this had to do with the fact that the Moorish elites were used to “slavish submission”, and not outspokenness. To maintain good relations, it was therefore important that the Company’s *wakils* (representatives) were knowledgeable of these customs.³²⁸ Regarding communication, Sichterman had some more advice: since the local elites wrote their letters in “the Persian style”, meaning “everything [is] with exaggeration proposed”, the VOC officials could also engage in more exaggeration and outcry to plead their cases or defend themselves from accusations. As long as the local elites were treated with respect for their stature, Sichterman figured this approach would cause no harm to the Company.³²⁹

Due to the destructive raids of the Marathas, the peasants saw their livelihood disappear and were inclined to take up the sword, thereby leaving behind “a deplorable and easy life, as long as it is peace, and when war breaks out, to find a means of existence” as a mercenary.³³⁰ Sichterman appeared to understand the peasants’ choice given the nature of the situation. He did criticise the local elites, however, who during these troubling were “increasing [their] avarice” and who figuratively stole the local population their shirts and still begrudged them for having skin on their bodies.³³¹ Here we see the idea of ‘the little man’ needing to be protected by the Dutch, or Europeans, against the

³²⁶ “ik wil zeggen zig wat schicken naar de naturellen en humeuren der geene die het voer der regering in handen hebbende, het sloop zo van 's Comp(agnies) welvaart de cours veeltijds zo hoog en laag kunnen doen nemen, als het hen behaagt” – Sichterman, “Memorie van Overgave”, 964-965.

³²⁷ “de Mooren zulke directe ontseggingen van hunne versoeken, schoon met nog zo veel reeden, ligt voor een soort van hoon op nemen” – Ibidem, 969.

³²⁸ Ibidem, 969.

³²⁹ “ja al was het met wat groter ophef, het welk de Regenten, als men maar d'eerbied voor haer personen Conserveert, niet mishagen zal, dewijl zij althoos in hunne brieven naarden Persiaansen steijl alles met exagaratie voorstellen, en daar aangewend zijn.” – Ibidem, 974.

³³⁰ “een groot deel wevers het swaard te omgarden, en dus een otieus en gemackelijk leven, zo lang het vrede is, en als het oorlog werd, een middel van bestaan te vinden” – Ibidem, 919-920.

³³¹ “toe nemende schraap zugt van 's Nawabs bloedverwanten ende verdere Moorse groten, die den ingezetten het hemd hebbende helpen afhaken, nog de huijt schijnen te misgunnen” – Ibidem, 918-919.

arbitrary and oppressive nature of the local elites. This would become official Dutch colonial policy in Indonesia during the nineteenth century.³³²

The Nawab and Diwan of Hooghly were kind to the Company, according to Huyghens. But the Diwan had recently been forced to pay 200.000 rupies to an unspecified cause, therefore Huyghens advised his successor to make sure none of the Company's subjects were to fall into his hands, otherwise the Diwan would use the Company to make up for his expenses.³³³ Huyghens explained that the locals were always keen to make up pretexts to collect fines, but the Diwan should be "treated in a friendly manner on all Occasions".³³⁴ The main trait that Huyghens attributed to the local elites was greed. He argued that "the only means to obtain Friendship of the local, is to buy it, and once it has been bought, so must one maintain it with gifts".³³⁵ His successor should keep the personal preferences of the local elites in mind to find the best gifts, additionally, the gift should be as low-budget as possible because "once the local has received his [gift] the same always must be provided with others of higher value."³³⁶ What we see here is a continuation of the ideas that were already present during the 1700-period: the local elites were despotic and greedy. Contrary to the previous period, the local intermediaries have disappeared to the background, and the local rulers and officeholders now appear to be the sole focal point of social-cultural interactions and stigmatisation.

The social-cultural image that the Ambonese *Memories* from this period depict appeared to still have been largely influenced by Rumphius's work. Rosenboom argued that in line with this work, the local populations "are lazy and effeminate people, not caring for tomorrow, when they have bread for today".³³⁷ The locals were also poor, but not dissatisfied, but "to the highest degree envious and jealous to one another" and they would not hesitate to bring ruin to their neighbour.³³⁸ It appeared that the ideas regarding the local populations had their origin in Rumphius's work and were persistent through both time periods. At the same time, however, Rosenboom argued that the "contentious and Pleadthriftly Temper of the Local" gave the *Landraad* and judicial council a lot of work.³³⁹ This shows that the local population engaged with the Dutch institutions that allowed them to both co-opt, and resist, Company rule in the region.

Cluijsenaar also emphasized that the local population was "overall lazy[,] sluggish and

³³² J. van Goor, *Kooplieden, Predikanten & Bestuurders Overzee: Beeldvorming en plaatsbepaling in een andere wereld* (Utrecht: HES, 1982), 154-155, 157.

³³³ Huyghens, "Memorie van Overgave", 483.

³³⁴ "om hem bij alle Occasies op eene Vriendelijke wijze te bejegenen" – Ibidem, 483.

³³⁵ "Het eenigste middel om de Vriendschap der Inlandees te verkrijgen, is deselve te kopen, en heeft men ze gekogt, zo moet men ze met geschenken onderhouden" – Ibidem, 484.

³³⁶ "daar d'inlandees zinen hebben deselve altijd met andere van meerder Waarde moet suppleeren" – Ibidem, 484.

³³⁷ "als luije en verwijfde menschen, niet sorgende voor den van morgen, wanneer zij brood voor heden hebben" – Rosenboom, "Memorie van Overgave", 305.

³³⁸ "Armoedig genoeg, dog dat nu al gewoon, en daar om niet te onvrede, maar inden uijttersten graad afgunstig en Nijdig den eenen tegens den ander" – Ibidem, 305.

³³⁹ "in den Raad van Justietie en den land Raad die door het twist zieke en Plijtzugtige Humeur van den Inlander al vrij wat werk geeft." – Ibidem, 337.

predominantly in this regard pretty negligent” concerning their obligations to the Company.³⁴⁰ They would rather spend their time “with the hunt, the fishing[,] and other activities”.³⁴¹ The heads of the local villages (*orangkayas*) fulfilled an important link in the Company chain, because they were responsible for overseeing the collection and delivery of the cloves, and levying the taxes. According to Cluijsenaar, however, these village chiefs were problematic, because they “do not care if her *negorijs* (name for Ambonese villages) people come to deliver many or little cloves”.³⁴² On top of that, the village chiefs skimmed most of the tax money, so all in all Cluijsenaar argued they were unreliable business partners.³⁴³ His advice to his successor was, therefore, to spur these local elites to try harder regarding the clove cultivation and its collection.³⁴⁴ The local elites and the governors’ views on them are a returning topic throughout all the studied *Memories*, although the Ambonese ‘flavour’ of the debate is more aimed towards trying to co-opt these local elites and making sure they did their job for the Company. The local elites were not immune from Company jurisdiction, however. Cluijsenaar explained that in one of the villages on Ceram, the local population had left and came to the Company to accuse their *orangkaya* of “defloration and rape of young girls and women, even in their mosque (*massige*) or temple”.³⁴⁵ The governor had tried to investigate and resolve the issue during the *Hongi* tour, but “the obstinacy and disobedience of that people” had hindered this process.³⁴⁶ Cluijsenaar eventually did resolve the matter and replaced the *orangkaya*, but this is an interesting example of the social dynamic between Company, local elites, and local population. The governor clearly had to uphold ‘justice’ in the region and had to protect its subordinates against such abuse, but at the same time they struggled with the local population, whose cultural differences led to misunderstanding and by abstraction to negative characterizations. I would argue the governors of Ambon generally were a bit more restrained in their discussion of the local elites, especially compared to Bengal and Ceylon. These elites were instrumental in the Company’s success in the archipelago, and their historical disruptive power was in the back of the governors’ mind.

Based on the *Memories* from Van Imhoff and Van Gollonnesse, a negative image of Kandy is brought to the fore, more so than in the *Memories* from the previous period. Van Imhoff hoped that Kandy and its inhabitants realized “how much his temporary prosperity on the Company’s friendship

³⁴⁰ “den inlander in 't gemeen luy traag en voornamentlijk in dit articul vrij negligent is” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 5.

³⁴¹ “bemoeijende haar meer met de jagt het visschen en andere besigheeden.” – Ibidem, 10.

³⁴² “om dat het haar thans om het even is of haar negorijs volk veel of weijnig nagelen komen te leveren” – Ibidem, 9.

³⁴³ Ibidem, 9.

³⁴⁴ Ibidem, 8.

³⁴⁵ “excepto de negorij Hoalorij gelegen op Cerams binnecust, van waar de oudstens en volkeren zijn uijtgeweken om de wille van haar hoofd den Orang Kaij Pattilima die zij beschuldigde van defloratie en verkragting van jonge meijesjes en vrouwen, zelve in haar massige of tempel” – Ibidem, 21.

³⁴⁶ “maar de obstinaat en ongehoorsaamheid vandat volk” – Ibidem, 22.

depends and how much his (Kandy) interests are intertwined with hers (the Company)".³⁴⁷ It would be better if the mutual guarantees and interests were more enshrined, Van Imhoff argued. The problem was, according to him, the "fickle mood and deceitfulness of this nation", whose words "were as if written on water".³⁴⁸ Kandy was "insatiable" and the "despotic rule and the absolute slavish governance" they exercised meant they couldn't care less if their subjects were ruined or not.³⁴⁹ This, in Van Imhoff's opinion, made a sustainable peace between the Company and Kandy impossible in the long run.³⁵⁰

Van Gollonnesse argued that a lot of the captured elephants were dying too much because of "a poor method" the local hunters used to capture them. Convincing these suppliers of a method with a lower elephant mortality rate proved difficult "because it is a novelty, of which the local, that never reasons, is very averse".³⁵¹ The irrational other in contrast to the rational European was an important trope in colonial discourse that developed over time and was used to attempt to getting a grip on the cultural differences that the Europeans encountered. In giving his opinion on the cinnamon peelers, Van Gollonnesse expressed such ideas. The Chialias (derived from the Singhalese word *Salagamas*, the caste of the cinnamon peelers) were "a bold and moody people!" But at the same time, the Kandy government had managed to sway the peelers to their side and set them up against the VOC, causing them to refuse to do their work for the VOC.³⁵² Van Gollonnesse assumed this was due to the fact that the Kandian king was still underage, and therefore under the control of the magnates (*Hofsgrooten*). But the young king had taken up "the sword of state" on 31 January 1751, therefore Van Gollonnesse expressed his expectation that the king would soon retake the reins himself.³⁵³ Following custom, as well as attempting to gain favours, Van Gollonnesse had sent a delegate to present the young king with a big gift.³⁵⁴ This showed an interesting dynamic, where the actual diplomatic problems between Kandy and the Company were rhetorically shaped as the Kandy government inciting the local people against the VOC. This characterization was also present in the *Memories* from the previous period and had deep roots in Dutch writing and self-legitimacy. It was the same argument that was initially used by the Dutch to legitimize their revolt against the Kingdom of Spain in 1568. The Dutch argued they still recognized the Spanish King Philip II's authority, but that he had been influenced by corrupted advisors, and that his governors had infringed the Dutch estates their rights and privileges, which the

³⁴⁷ "hoe seer zijne tijdelijke wel vaaren van de vriendschap der Maatschappij afhangt en hoeseer zijne belangen met de haare verknopt zijn" - Van Imhoff, "Memorie van Overgave", 339.

³⁴⁸ "het wispeluurige humeur en bedriegelijkheid van dese natie, welkers woorden soo als zij zelfs voor een spreekwoord gebruiken gerekent moeten werden als of zij op het water geschreeven waaren" - Ibidem, 340.

³⁴⁹ "haare onverzadelijkheid en mag men zeggen onbeschaamtheit om altijd noch meer te hebben het despotique bestier en die absolutie slaafsche heerschappij die zij exerceeren waardoor het haar even veel scheelen kan off den onderdaan eens geruineert werd off niet" - Ibidem, 340.

³⁵⁰ Ibidem, 341.

³⁵¹ "om dat het een nieuwigheid is, waar van den inlander, die noijt redeneert, seer afkeerig is" - Van Gollonnesse, "Memorie van Overgave", 431R.

³⁵² Ibidem, 399V.

³⁵³ Ibidem, 396V.

³⁵⁴ Ibidem, 397R.

Dutch argued they would protect by means of force if necessary.³⁵⁵ So, if the new king of Kandy would succeed in increasing his authority, and maintain good relations with the Dutch, everything would be fine, if relations turned sour, it would be to blame on the king's inaptitude and his corrupt advisors, thereby allowing the Dutch to present themselves as the reasonable party in the debate.

Van Gollonnesse communicated the idea that harmonious relationships were preferable, and that the governor should not be irritated by minor issues, because these “have their origin more in the stubborn nature of this nation than from malicious intent to harm the Honorable Company”. Van Gollonnesse argued that this “impertinence” would dissipate when Kandy realized that the VOC would be vigilant in upholding its rights and privileges on Ceylon.³⁵⁶ The argument was that Kandy and the local population couldn't help themselves in the way they acted, because it was in their nature. But as long as the Company would keep its composure and not be impressed by these trifles, then Kandy would inevitably become more complacent.

The *Memories* from this period show a basic continuation of the characterizations that were already established during the 1700-period: the elites were greedy and despotic, the local population needed protection, but were also regarded as lazy. At the same time, these characterizations were more ‘intensified’ compared to the previous period. They already resemble the stereotypical orientalism and racism that we have come to associate with European colonialism, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Labor & Economy

Regarding labor and economy, this thesis wants to know which economical system the governors deemed best suitable to the Company's needs during the 1750-period, and by proxy what this meant for ideas on labor. What we will see is that the governors tried new approaches to deal with the increasing costs and diminishing returns of the eighteenth century. These approaches can be summarized as experiments in autarky and diversification, in contrast to the trade supremacy and monoculture of the previous period. As a result, access to labor also became more important, be it through wages or an increased reliance on ‘contractual’ and servile labor. An interesting aside is that slaves and slavery seemed to have disappeared from the *Memories* of this period. It remains difficult to say, however, if the governors changed their stance on the matter, if slavery was deemed unfeasible, or that slavery had become widespread enough that the governors did not bother to go into specifics.

³⁵⁵ M. van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555-1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 122, 139; M. van St. Aldegonde, *Oraison des ambassadeurs du serenissime prince Matthias archiduc d'austriche Etc.. Gouverneur des pais bas & des Estats generaux desdits pais* (Antwerp, 1578).

³⁵⁶ “die meer haren oorsprong hebben uijt den kregeligen aard dier natie als uijt een boos opset om de E(dele) Comp(agnie) kwaad te doen” - Van Gollonnesse, “Memorie van Overgave”, 404R.

Trade in Bengal was in dire straits, particularly the Company's main trade good in Bengal: textile. Sichterman explained his successor that this subject was "the most saddening matter", because Sichterman said it had been in decline for some time now, as his successor Huyghens could read in other *Memories*.³⁵⁷ The weavers could only be encouraged to stay by giving them more gifts, causing the profits of the Company to decline.³⁵⁸

In an attempt to counteract the loss of the local artisans due to the regional wars and raids, and be less dependent on third-parties, Sichterman opted to take matters into his own hand and wanted to attract more weavers to directly work for the Company, just as the English did in Calcutta.³⁵⁹ The Company had already established its own textile manufactory in Cassimbazar in 1653, the silk-production epicentre in Bengal, albeit with varying degrees of success over the years. After the Marathas had burned down most of Cassimbazar during their incursion in 1742, the Company lost its own production capacity.³⁶⁰ Sichterman wanted to re-establish such a production centre closer to home, in Chinsura. This would allow the Company to have access to cloth "in times of trouble" and be less vulnerable to the local unrest, as well as less dependent on external suppliers. To achieve this, he wanted to "add some more land to Company's village, to imitate them (the English) therein", but the local regents, despite showing willingness to cooperate at first, were "greedy" and came up with "all kinds of pretences" to make it as expensive as possible.³⁶¹ This withheld Sichterman from proposing the idea to the *Hoge Regering*, but he advised his successor to try it nevertheless when the unrests had settled down a bit. After all, Sichterman said proverbially, "He who wants to win, must [take a] risk".³⁶²

Another risk Sichterman was willing to take was to buy larger quantities of the local suppliers to outwit the English and French, but he advised his successor to keep this "hidden from our own local servants". Otherwise, they would tell the local merchants who would then refuse to drop their prices, which is what Sichterman hoped to broker by buying larger quantities.³⁶³ Sichterman wanted to work together with the other Europeans, but on other occasions he sought to beat them to the punch. On the one hand, he was dependent on the local merchants and suppliers, on the other hand, he distrusted them for banding together against the Company. The ambivalence is also noticeable here.

As mentioned earlier, Huyghens's outlook on the state of economic affairs was not better than

³⁵⁷ "Den in saam van Lijwaten ten dezen hoeft Comp(toire) die de importanste, dog teffens ook voor mij de voordriettigste stoffe is" – Sichterman, "Memorie van Overgave", 917.

³⁵⁸ Ibidem, 919.

³⁵⁹ Ibidem, 929.

³⁶⁰ Prakash, *Economy of Bengal*, 113-114.

³⁶¹ "de in halige aard der tegenwoordige regenten, die zig daar toe mogelijk eerst bereijdt vaardig thonen, maar in 't vervolg met allerhande pretentien voordien dag komen zouden, om ons dien gunst ten duursten te verkopen" – Sichterman, "Memorie van Overgave", 930.

³⁶² "het spreekwoordt die winnen wil moet wagen" – Ibidem, 930.

³⁶³ "de quantiteijdt van het gevorderde voor onze eijgene in landse bediend(ers) verborgen te houden, om dat de Inlandse coop(uijden) zulx door deselve te weten krijgende, hunne whare op geld houden zo als dat te meermalen ondervonden is." – Ibidem, 946.

Sichterman's. Although peace had returned, Huyghens mentioned that "many villages depopulated, de Weavers partially deceased and partially fled and entire regions that beforehand very flourishing were[,] into Deserts have changed".³⁶⁴ He advised his successor to purchase the textiles with either cash or credit because Huyghens figured that "in this way maybe slowly but steady many wealthy Merchants will lure to this village, whose stay here for the Company, can be nothing other than advantageous."³⁶⁵ The goal was to restore trade to prosperity again, and the Company had to become the most attractive option for the traders that had survived the prior turbulent years.

Not wanting to rely on the textile trade alone, Huyghens looked at the other goods the Company got from Bengal to see if these could be increased in profitability. Opium in particular proved popular, and Huyghens explained that it was "absolutely Necessary" to not just have abundant cash, but also to obtain it from the suppliers in time, otherwise it would be gone.³⁶⁶ Besides the opium, the Company also bought saltpetre there and Huyghens made clear that the availability of cash was the biggest hazard in obtaining the goods the Company needed.³⁶⁷ Besides increasing trade revenues, Huyghens still sought to cut expenses but "no matter how much I dedicated myself to decrease the expenses, so have these however three years in a row repeatedly increased".³⁶⁸ Thus Huyghens "wanted to confess" that he did not know any tools to reduce the expenses of the Company, his successor Kersseboom had to rely on his own experience and the competence of his subordinates.³⁶⁹ Despite the upheaval of Nadir Shah's invasion, the Maratha incursions, and the small size of the Bengal territories, Sichterman argued that Bengal was still one of the more profitable *comptoirs* of the Company. When looking at the trade goods, "in so far one on the current sales prices in the Netherlands reflects, has lost much of her lustre", but the large quantities compensated the small profits, resulting in a large profit either way.³⁷⁰ There was still hope for the future. Trade was still the principle way through which the directors in Bengal sought to generate revenue, because they lacked the territorial possessions to levy taxes or lease. Both Sichterman and Huyghens did attempt, however, to increase local production in an attempt to circumvent to local instability the region was plagued with at this time.

The clove monopoly was still the driving force behind the Ambonese governors' economic reasoning during the 1750-period, but there were also experiments to produce other goods

³⁶⁴ "dat veele dorpen ontvolkt, de Wevers ten deele gesneuveld en ten deele gevlugt en heele landstreeken die bevorens zeer florisant waren genoegzaam in Woestijnen veranderd zijn" – Huyghens, "Memorie van Overgave", 467-468.

³⁶⁵ "om dat men daar door misschien van langzamer hand veele vermogende Koopluijden in dit dorp zal locken, Welkers verblijf alhier de Comp(agnie), niet dan avantageus kan zijn." – Ibidem, 467.

³⁶⁶ Ibidem, 473.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem, 479.

³⁶⁸ "Hoe zeer ik mij ook toelegd heb om de lasten te verminderen, zo zijn dezelve egter drie jaren na den anderen door ons voorkomelijke oorzaken telkens vermeert" – Ibidem, 484.

³⁶⁹ Ibidem, 484-485.

³⁷⁰ "in zo verre men op de presente verkoop prijzen in Nederland reflecteerd, wel veel van haere luijster verloren heeft" – Sichterman, "Memorie van Overgave", 916.

locally. Rosenboom limited himself to writing that the success of the cloves harvest depended on “a temperate weather” during the summer months and the grace of the Lord, otherwise these “tender” cloves would be destroyed.³⁷¹ Cluijsenaar elaborated on the subject: he argued that the locals were more interested in maintaining the trees and plantations that serve their daily need, and that they needed “to be continuously urged and even forced” to take care of the Company’s spice gardens.³⁷² The surprise of the governors over the locals not sharing the Company’s economic rationale was a returning topic throughout the *Memories*. Some of the islands in the Moluccas had a so-called ‘inner forest’ and ‘outer forest’, depending on their relative location, where the spice trees were growing and where extirpation needed to be performed. Cluijsenaar informed his successor Idsinga that it would be beneficial to close down the inner forest on, for example, Bonoa and Manipa, or lower the price per extirpated tree “to lure more people from other places thither” to the outer forest and increase extirpation efforts there.³⁷³ Extirpation still existed throughout this period but focused on the illegal spice growth, as production numbers had to be increased again as a result of failed general extirpation policy of the previous period.

The Ambonese *Memories* from this period also reveal that the broader Company economic trend during the eighteenth century of attempting to diversify production was also present on Ambon. Rosenboom argued that the trade in cloves could be complimented with textile, as the local population was very fond of Indian textiles.³⁷⁴ The idea during this period was to look if the clove monopoly could be supplemented with other sources of income, as trend that we already have seen in Bengal, and will also see on Ceylon. For Rosenboom, another important contribution to this was the lease of land, which would provide the Company on Ambon with a “sweet” source of income.³⁷⁵ Cluijsenaar also argued in favour of this. The textile trade was an important instrument to generate extra income, but the excessive profits of the previous year could probably not be repeated.³⁷⁶ A start had been made with the production of Indigo under Rosenboom.³⁷⁷ But Cluijsenaar explained that this yielded to little result and was shut down again by order of the *Hoge Regering* in 1753.³⁷⁸ The plan was now to ‘localize’ the indigo production, and Cluijsenaar explained it was now his successor’s responsibility to “increase the locals taste [for that], and I wish that Your Honorable may have better results than

³⁷¹ “de even uijt bottende Nageltjes zeer nedelig, die deselve om haare Tederheijd ter nederslaan en dus hangt naast des Heeren Zeegen, den overvloed of schaarsheijd deser vrugten voor het meeste gedeelte af van een gemaatigt weder in de maanden Junij, Julij, Augustus, en September” – Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 308.

³⁷² “makende veel meer werk van hare vrugbomen en andere plantagies die haar dagelijks wat fourneeren moeten zij steeds aangespoort en selver met bedwang gehouden werden om het bepaalde getal, laat staan meerder bomen behoorlijk te observeeren” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 5.

³⁷³ “omme meerder menschen van andere plaatsen derwaarts te locken” – Ibidem, 13.

³⁷⁴ Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 317.

³⁷⁵ Ibidem, 318.

³⁷⁶ Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 16.

³⁷⁷ Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 314.

³⁷⁸ Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 13.

me”, because Cluijsenaar’s attempts had been fruitless.³⁷⁹ At the same time, Batavia ordered to incite the local population to grow *Padij* (rice) and pepper.³⁸⁰

All in all, the clove monopoly remained the main focus of the Company’s economic efforts and rationale on Ambon, but it also seems labor control issues were less pressing than they were in the previous period. Additionally, there were experiments to generate additional, recurring revenue, the only problem seemed to be a lack of focus. Batavia wanted to try several things, and would relegate the project to a slow burn or abandon it in favour of something else if results did not come fast enough. In turn this meant the governor had to micro-manage a lot of the process and attempt to effectively utilize the available labor.

The Ceylonese *Memories* revolved around trying to make Ceylon more self-sufficient and more profitable. In turn this meant that labor was an important topic for Van Imhoff and Van Gollonnesse. During the previous period, the Company sought to promote and enlarge the number of cinnamon peelers, because their number had been declining, as Laurens Pijl already mentioned. This served two purposes: firstly, more peelers meant more production, and secondly, it served as a means to bind people to the Company while at the same time undermining the authority of Kandy. The decline in cinnamon peelers seemed to be a never ending issue, however. Van Imhoff also expressed his disappointment that it was difficult to find people who were willing to become a cinnamon peeler, and that their number had been drastically reduced over time.³⁸¹ The reason, according to Van Imhoff, was the workload. The cinnamon peeler caste had to work for the VOC, as well as perform menial services for the local landlords, prompting “those who can shake off the yoke [to] do so eagerly and transform into *Lascorijn* (soldier caste) or something else, that provides a lazier and easier life”.³⁸² “Although”, Van Imhoff argued, “I judge a *Majoraal* (village chief) to be far more useful for the Company and the land than ten *Lascorijns*, or other lazy creatures”, the provincial governors on Ceylon (*disavas*) should treat the *Lascorijns* well, however, because if this caste were to become hostile towards the Company, they would cause serious problems as the VOC relied on the *Lascorijns* for its local military force.³⁸³ Van Imhoff would grumble about the cinnamon peelers and their never ending “complaining and requesting while they are the best seated amongst all of the Ceylonese inhabitants”, and that they particularly acted in this way when the peeling season was around the

³⁷⁹ “den Inlander aldaar wat smakelijker te maken, en ik wensche dat UwEd(ele) daarinne beter mogt renteeren als ik” – Cluijsenaar, “Memorie van Overgave”, 13.

³⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 14.

³⁸¹ Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 397.

³⁸² “dien een jeder die dat pak afschudden kan sulks gaarne doet en tot *Lascorijn* of jets anders overgaat, dat een luijer en gemakkelijker leeven geeft” – *Ibidem*, 397.

³⁸³ “door de respective *Dessaves* so veel mogelijk de hand boven 't hoofd gehouden, en soo veel soulaas toegebracht moet werden als immers geschieden kan, terwijl Ik een *Majoraal* veel nuter voor de Compagnie en voor het land ordeele als thien *lascorijns*, of andere luije schepsels” – *Ibidem*, 397.

corner.³⁸⁴

A few years later, Van Gollonesse claimed that under his auspices the number of cinnamon peelers, the *Chialias* caste, had increased from 968 in 1697, to 2924 in 1751.³⁸⁵ Apart from expanding the available labor pool, it is also an example of Van Gollonesse arguing to have as much cheap labor as possible, as the peeling of cinnamon was part of the *Chialias*'s labor duties towards their Dutch overlords and meant they would have to be paid little to no wage. At the same time, Van Gollonesse argued for strict punishment if a peeler failed to "fulfil his tax" without valid reason, otherwise there would be "a couple of hundred vagabonds" who would try to dodge their peeling obligation.³⁸⁶ Strictness was apparently the way to go for Van Gollonesse, and the judicial system the means of enforcing Dutch labor demands. At the same time, he advised his successor to keep an eye out for developments in the *buitencomptoir*, the outer offices, where a lack of local labor had prompted the VOC officials to enlist around 600 coolies and criminals convicted to penal labor.³⁸⁷ This cost the Company more money than the 1200 laborers that were enlisted at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which is why Van Gollonesse was in favour of prudence towards the outer office officials, and austerity regarding the facilities for the laborers.³⁸⁸ Van Gollonesse built on Van Imhoff's autarkic ideas as a means to improve Ceylon in standing with Batavia.

The dynamic was interesting: the Company on Ceylon relied on the cinnamon peelers, forced laborers, and day laborers for their labor force, but at the same time Van Imhoff and Van Gollonesse communicated that it was the due to the lazy nature of the people, or the exploitation by the local land lords that these laborers were often unwilling and unreliable, hence undermining the Company. Labor and economic policies were adapted to local situations. For example, Van Imhoff stimulated agricultural production on Ceylon, which initially worked well. Batavia, however, put a halt to this because the Ceylonese coffee and pepper were competing too much with Javanese coffee and pepper.³⁸⁹ The *Hoge Regering* went along with Van Imhoff's and Van Gollonesse's ideas and suggestions, as long as they did not interfere too much with the status quo, or required too much monetary investment.

³⁸⁴ "dat dit volk nimmer op houd met klagen en versoeken hoewel zij het beste geseten zijn onder alle de Ceijlonse inwoonders" – Van Imhoff, "Memorie van Overgave", 469.

³⁸⁵ Van Gollonesse, "Memorie van Overgave", 433R.

³⁸⁶ "dat men noijt een Canneel schiller, die sijn taxt niet voldoet en geen wettige reden van dat versuijm weet te geven, sonder straffe vrij laat, want men heeft jaarlijks ten minsten enige honderde Vagabonden, die pirewaaijen en uijt weelde of luijhijd wijnig of geen Canneel schillen" – Ibidem, 434R-434V.

³⁸⁷ Ibidem, 455V.

³⁸⁸ Ibidem, 455V-456R.

³⁸⁹ Schrikker, *Colonial Intervention*, 35.

Religion

For the final section, the question is which role the Reformed religion played in the *Memories*, and, if so, how other religions were described. Overall, religion played less of a role in the 1750-period, than during the 1700-period, but it remained an important topic in the Ceylonese *Memories*. However, there appeared to have been a trend reversal on the matter. The governors that wrote about religion did so in a more introspective and reflective way: What is the state of the church under the Company? How do we make the local population more interested in the Reformed faith? Will God help the Company return to prosperity if we work harder to spread his faith? The uncertainties the governors of Ceylon were facing, translated to them questioning the Company's relation to the Reformed faith in general.

As mentioned before, religion was absent as an aspect in the *Memories* of Bengal, neither Christianity nor other religions were mentioned or discussed. What came closest, perhaps, was the systematic use of the word 'Moor' to refer to the local Muslims. Moor, however, is more cultural and ethnical in denomination than theological. If we take a step back and look at the larger picture, I would argue that this indicates that territoriality and religion went hand-in-hand for the Company: territorial possession meant subjects to rule over, and subjects to rule over required a means to create loyalists amongst these subjects, or at least prevent disloyalty, and a set of customs and ideals that could be used to undermine local power structures. This does not mean that the governors themselves were not, or could not be, devoted Christians, because they probably were given the era, but in Bengal it was just not a part of the Company's local identity.

During this time period, religion seemed to have become less important in the Ambonese *Memories*. Writing to his successor Nicolaas Jongsma, governor Rosenboom mentioned that "the State of the Churches and Schools[,] through the Lord's Mercy[,] is in a blooming state", because Batavia had pledged the assistance of a religious college to help the local educational and clerical efforts.³⁹⁰ Rosenboom also touched upon a more practical aspect: he mentioned that the newly built "Malay Church" has a "numerous religious community who long for the word of God to be proclaimed there". The job requirement, however, was the ability to speak the Malay language, because one Dutch minister who was currently attempting to acquire the skill, seemed to be failing, and the other lacked the proper character to connect with the Ambonese Christians.³⁹¹ Besides this, Rosenboom only mentioned religion when expressing his hopes for a successful cloves production and harvest: that "opulent or meagre harvest depends more on the blessing of the Lord, than on human

³⁹⁰ "Den Staat der Kerken en Schoolen is door des Heeren Genade in eene bloeienden staad na het ingekomen rapport van den Eerw(aarde) Predicant Werner Netman" – Rosenboom, "Memorie van Overgave", 335.

³⁹¹ "De Nieuw Opgetimmerde Maleijdsche Kerk die vrij lang onderhanden geweest is, zal nu ook binnen korten wel instaad gebracht zijn, om de Talrijke Gemeente die daar na Rekhalt, daar inne des Heeren woord te verkondige" – Ibidem, 336.

precaution”, he did so twice.³⁹²

Cluijsenaar did not mention religion at all in his *Memorie*. While it is difficult to be absolutely certain, the evidence from the *Memories* does indicate that religion became either less interesting or less important on Ambon during the eighteenth century. In *Indisch Sion*, ecclesiastical historian G.J. Schutte argues that image of the Dutch Reformed Church under the auspices of the Company as unsuccessful and unprofessional, is based on nineteenth century critiques and therefore incorrect.³⁹³ While Schutte’s remark is interesting, the book fails to actually provide an alternative interpretation and thereby does not refute the aforementioned narrative. Combined with Azyumardi Azra’s research into Islam in the Indonesian archipelago during this period, the question remains whether or not the Dutch Reformed Church was trying too hard, or not trying hard enough to spread and solidify the Reformed Church in the region. As we shall see in the context of Ceylon, my argument would be that religion served a more instrumental purpose for the Company, and if these goals had been achieved, or could be achieved, without elaborate conversion and religious investment, the Company would just choose the path of least resistance. Nevertheless, more research is required to provide a better picture of these developments.

Religion did play a central role in Van Imhoff and Van Gollonnesse’s thinking about the Company on Ceylon, albeit with a different focus than the previous period. Where in the previous Ceylonese *Memories* religion was described in more instrumental terms in relation to the advancement of the VOC’s cause, around 1750 religion became more introspective. It was thanks to God that the VOC had gained this empire, Van Imhoff argued, God should therefore be repaid by promoting his truth amongst the Company’s subjects on Ceylon, and in turn he would aid the Company to renewed prosperity.

As mentioned before, Van Imhoff often employed the body-metaphor in his argumentation, and he also applied it to religion. Van Imhoff held the opinion that “the First Limb of state is equitable the Clergy”, although not the standard interpretation of the word, but the more literal interpretation which to him meant “the primary object of all people inhabiting Earth[,] I mean The Faith”.³⁹⁴ Therefore, religion and the religious community on Ceylon were the most important aspects of the Company on Ceylon, Van Imhoff argued. His reasoning for why this was the case, was interesting: would God have created the Earth and everything on it, just for men to enjoy? Would God not want

³⁹² “de opulente of den schralen insaam meer van den Zegen des Heeren afhangt, dan van menschelijke voorsorge” – Rosenboom, “Memorie van Overgave”, 306, 309.

³⁹³ G.J. Schutte, “Ten geleide”, in: G.J. Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002) 7-8: 7.

³⁹⁴ “Het Eerste Lid van staad is billijk de Geestelijkheid niet so seer naar de ordinaires interpretatie van dat woord als wel ten opsigte van desselfs eijgentlijke beteekeninge wanneer daar onder komt tebegrijpen dat voornamste object van aller menschen inwooninge op aerden Ik meene Den Godsdienst” – Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 495.

men “to do something for the one from whom he derives his origins”?³⁹⁵ In Van Imhoff’s view, the Dutch owed it to God to repay him for their ascension on the world stage, and the way to do so was by spreading the faith. Not because “God should be served because he has demanded it, but [because] that it is even so fair and proper[,] as well as for the People so useful”.³⁹⁶ The results had left little to the imagination, to Van Imhoff’s disappointment.³⁹⁷ He remained hopeful, however, because the people of Ceylon were not “so stubborn and unwinnable” in terms of religion. God’s church could flourish on Ceylon “because one[,] through the acquired absolute mastery here in the country[,] to that end is much closer as Elsewhere”.³⁹⁸ To achieve this, he stimulated clergymen in learning the local language, and had instituted a printing press to help spread the liturgy in the local language.³⁹⁹ Despite Van Imhoff’s zealous ideals, he remained practical as to how to achieve these.

Religion had been important to Van Imhoff, and it was also important to Van Gollonnesse. He argued that an “adequate household” was pivotal to the VOC, but the first pillar of this household should be “the Reformed Religion”.⁴⁰⁰ Additionally, it was thanks to “God’s blessing” that the VOC operation was doing well on Ceylon, albeit in combination with the instructions left by Van Imhoff in his *Memorie*.⁴⁰¹ Nevertheless, Van Gollonnesse argued that the Dutch clerical operation on Ceylon was lacking. Despite the “Devout and noble goal” of “our praiseworthy Paymasters [in Batavia]”, the “blind heathens and stray Papists” could not be guided toward the true faith when the Dutch clergy could not address them in a language they could understand.⁴⁰² Batavia was more involved in terms of religion on Dutch Ceylon, it was more centrally organised. It appears that the central organisation of the Dutch clergy via the Dutch Republic also transferred to the VOC domains. Van Gollonnesse concluded with expressing the hope that Batavia would do their utmost to properly train the clergy it had so “abundantly” provided.⁴⁰³ The Dutch clergy did not seem to be the only obstacle, however, because the local population could not be incentivized to attend school and sermons. Van Gollonnesse was disappointed, as he had hoped that utilizing the local language in religious education would

³⁹⁵ “zou de schepper de Eijnden der aarde den Menschen wel alleen daerom geschapen hebben dat hij naar zijn sin maar soude leven, sonder jets teden voor den geen van wien hij zijnen oorsprong ontleent” – Van Imhoff, “Memorie van Overgave”, 496.

³⁹⁶ “dat God gediend moet werden om dat hij het bevoelen heeft, maar dat het zelfs soo billijk en betamelijk ook voor den Mensche soo nodig oirbaar” – Ibidem, 497.

³⁹⁷ Ibidem, 500.

³⁹⁸ “een volk woont, dat in der daad nog soo hardneckig en onverwinnelijk in dat stuk niet is, en de gelegentheit tot het planten eener Gode behaagelijken Kerke hier soo favorabel als ergens moet g’oordeelt werden te zijn om dat men door het verkreegene absolute meesterschap hier te lande daartoe veel, nader als Elders is” – Ibidem, 499-500.

³⁹⁹ Ibidem, 501.

⁴⁰⁰ “Onder de Geschiede Huijshoudinge word de eerste plaats gegeven aan De Gereformeerde Gods Dienst” – Van Gollonnesse, “Memorie van Overgave”, 442.

⁴⁰¹ Ibidem, 395V.

⁴⁰² “Intussen dewijl er geen de minste vrugt van alle de moeijte en kosten, die onse loflijke Betaals Heeren uijt een regt Godvrugtig en edelmoedig oogwit komen te doen, te wagten is, so lange onse leeraren het woord der waarhijd aan de blinde hijdenen en dwalende Papisten niet in eene voor haar verstaanbare tale komen te verkondigen” – Ibidem, 444R.

⁴⁰³ Ibidem, 444R.

“convince [the local population] of [the] truthful religion”.⁴⁰⁴ Unfortunately for him, this did not seem to increase attendance. The *Hoge Regering* had ordered the absence-fines to be suspended at first, but that “more harm than good has [been] done and with that stupid folk has been noted to be a tacit consent, to persevere in her error”.⁴⁰⁵ Eventually, it seemed that Van Gollonnesse had managed to persuade the *Hoge Regering* to “finally ordain” to reinstate these fines.⁴⁰⁶ Despite his effort, however, Van Gollonnesse admitted near the end of his *Memorie* that the prospects of ‘God’s Church’ on Ceylon were still as unfortunate as they had been under Van Imhoff.

Overall, religion had a revival of interest under Van Imhoff, and subsequently under his successors who were impressed by Van Imhoff’s new course for Ceylon. This highlights the importance the Company attributed to Ceylon in general. For Van Imhoff and Van Gollonnesse, religion became a moral duty to remain in God’s favour, rather than merely a tool to establish loyalty as it had been for Pijl and Simons. Religious affairs remained more centrally organised than other aspects of the Company, but money and effort were sparingly invested by the *Hoge Regering*.

Conclusion

As was the case in the previous chapter, the following section will summarize the findings of the analysis for the 1750-period, and subsequently connect these to larger scope of the thesis.

The most convenient way to approach this is by staying close to the employed analytical framework, therefore this thesis shall first look at the ‘institute’ relationship and its correlating aspects. Compared to the previous period, Batavia and the *Hoge Regering* were less important to the governors. The narrative was that the governors should take it more upon themselves to search for new paths and solutions to the problems they faced. Especially in Bengal and on Ceylon the bureaucratic centre of the Company’s enterprise was more distant and less of a driving force than before. Probably one of the most remarkable developments was the attempt at European co-operation in Bengal. On Ambon, however, there was more continuation in terms of Batavia’s influence and the governor’s more managerial role. It seemed that in the eyes of the governors a more decentralised Company would be better equipped to reinvigorate the Company’s role on the Asiatic stage. While the governors took matters more into their own hands, their narrative of what the right skill-set for a governor remained virtually the same as it had been during the previous period. In Bengal, mercantile prowess was still considered the main attribute for a Bengal director. On Ambon the ‘local prince’ continued to be the default, and on Ceylon the governor’s proper skill-set remained that of a ‘super-

⁴⁰⁴ “door het aanleren der Inlandse Talen als het enigste middel, om den Inlander door Onderwijsinge in ene voor haar Verstaanbare Tale te overtuijgen van de waarhijd onser Religie” – Van Gollonnesse, “Memorie van Overgave”, 443R.

⁴⁰⁵ “meer quaad als goed heeft gedaan en bij dat domme volkje genoegzaam is aangemerkt geworden als een stilswijgende toestemminge, om in hare dwalingen te volharden” – Ibidem, 444V.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibidem, 444V.

bureaucrat' slash negotiator. Larger contextual changes such as in Bengal and on Ceylon compelled the governors to place a larger emphasis on diplomatic skill than before, as it was now important to forge new alliances and power structures in the search for stability and prosperity. They all agreed on one thing, however, and that was the importance of knowledge. The mantra of 'knowledge is power' was a central part of the Company's organisation during both periods. Internal discourse had grown in importance compared to the previous era. The three studied regions continued to develop their own retold narratives, but this was largely fuelled by the changing realities of the mid-eighteenth century. In Bengal this led to the internal discourse taking a new direction, the old firman-based regional foundation disappeared in search for something new. On Ceylon the discourse was expanded and Van Imhoff attempted a paradigm shift, but this put Van Gollonnesse in the awkward position of having to do what was best for Ceylon while simultaneously remaining loyal to Batavia's wishes. At the same time, internal discourse was very limited in the *Ambonese Memories*, which further illustrates the idea that the extent of the internal discourse was closely correlated to internal instability and external challenges.

Now we also have to look at 'the other'. The *Memories* from this period show a continuation of the characterizations that were already established during the 1700-period: the elites were greedy and despotic, the local population needed protection and guidance, but were also regarded as lazy. However, these characterizations were more 'intensified' compared to the previous period, they had become less nuanced. The characterizations started to resemble the stereotypical orientalism and racism that we have come to associate with European imperialism, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this period the governors made inroads into rethinking the Company's economic principles and foundations. Their approaches can be summarized as experiments in autarky and diversification, in contrast to the trade domination and monoculture of the previous period. As a result, access to labor became more important, be it through wages or an increased reliance on 'contractual' and servile labor. This created a problem for both Company and governor however, as access to more labor also required a deeper regional involvement, which would also require more financial means. Overall, religion played less of a role in the 1750-period, than during the 1700-period, but it remained an important topic in the *Ceylonese Memories*. However, there appeared to have been a trend reversal on the matter. The governors that wrote about religion did so in a more introspective and reflective way: What is the state of the church under the Company? How do we make the local population more interested in the Reformed faith? Will God help the Company return to prosperity if we work harder to spread his faith? The uncertainties the governors of Ceylon were facing, translated to them questioning which role the Reformed faith had to play within the Company's organisation.

These findings require us to ask the questions what they can tell us about the VOC's organisational identity during the 1750-period. The 1750-period is best summarized by the notion of 'reflection and differentiation': where during the previous period the Company had a more

homogeneous appearance overall, by the middle of the eighteenth century the Company developed more differentiated regional identities. The governors took more initiatives and created more of their own policies, except on Ambon where things continued as they had done before. In general, however, it seemed the governors were looking to reinvent how the Company operated to deal with the challenges the Company faced, and the answer was to focus less on an overarching Company structure and more on regional autonomy. The ideal of the governor and accompanying skill-set continued to be that of expertise and the different regional roles that had been established over time: the merchant in Bengal, the local prince on Ambon, and the super-bureaucrat on Ceylon. The internal discourse produced a similar picture. The directors and governors of Bengal and Ceylon were looking for new foundations, to reinvent themselves, while on Ambon it was business as usual. In the grand scheme of things, however, this further subscribes the proposed idea of differentiation: the three regions had less in common with each other than they did fifty years ago. *Memorie* writing also grew in importance during the eighteenth century, both from a bureaucratic point of view and a career point of view. Since the Company was in dire straits, if a governor found a successful way to generate regional success he could be on his way to a promotion to Batavia. This happened, for example, to Ceylonese governor Van Imhoff, who became Governor-General after his term as governor and was allowed to try and replicate his reforms on a larger scale.

Looking at the *Memories* the governors regarded ‘the other’ from a perspective of inequality, from a moral high ground. As the Company’s fortunes continued to decrease it was easier to accuse the local population of laziness or to blame the local elites for being greedy and haughty, than to see the bigger picture or point the finger at oneself. At the same time, the attempts at increased involvement in places like Ceylon also required justification for such increased involvement. In economic terms, the governors started to rethink the Company’s traditional monopoly-oriented system. The governors attempted to bring diversification and more autarky of the economic foundations of the Company in the mainstream of the organisation. The Reformed faith moved further to the background and became less a part of the Company’s identity, but in some regions, such as Ceylon, it remained important and was a tool of introspection.

Thus, to summarize, in the middle of the eighteenth century the Company’s identity – at least on the level of the governors – was in flux. It was no longer self-evident that the Company understood itself as a Company, the governors sought to adapt themselves to the changing world and the changing position of the Company therein. The middle of the eighteenth century was a period of reflection: How should this Company operate? What should ‘we’ do? Where are we going? The governors were focused on their regional position, the proverbial other was regarded with a sense of disdain. The Company had become an archipelago in contrast to the more homogenous entity it was around 1700.

Conclusion

General Conclusion

Now that we have arrived at the conclusion, it is important to readdress the main questions that were proposed in the introduction: Firstly, which narratives did the governors communicate, how did these change over time and through different regions? Secondly, what do the answers to the first question imply for a VOC organisational identity?

Let us begin with the first question. The *Memories* of the Dutch East India Company governors show that the narratives of the Company can be characterized by both continuity and discontinuity over time, as well as uniformity and regionalism in terms of space. In other words: these narratives were dynamic, rather than static. The temporal and spatial changes were the result of the changing geopolitical status of the Dutch Republic and the VOC, and the Enlightenment as a 'new' way to view to world. To substantiate this claim, an overview of this thesis's findings is in order, starting with the 'Institute' relationship.

First there is the 'VOC' aspect, where we see temporal discontinuity in the sense that the *Hoge Regering's* influence diminished over time, but also spatial uniformity as this trend was present in all three studied regions to a larger or smaller degree. Around 1700, the *Hoge Regering* sought to profit as much as it could via its monopoly system. The three studied regions had their own challenges, and the governors tried to convey to their successors how they themselves had attempted achieve the goals set by Batavia. In Bengal the Company would be best served by maintaining close and good relations with the Mughal court, and stick to what it did best: being traders, and not seek to expand its territorial possession or authority. Looking at the 1750-period, we see that the Bengal directors argue in favour of a more active stance in local matters, and a possible collaboration with the other European powers to overcome the instability and chaos that had befallen Bengal as the Mughal influence over the region disappeared during the first half of the eighteenth century. On Ambon, the governors argued the Company was best served by controlling the local political structures by co-opting the local elites. Over time, Batavia remained more involved on Ambon than in the other two studied regions, but this involvement was limited to 'clove-affairs'. How to deal with the other local challenges was left more and more to the Ambonese governors to figure out themselves. And finally, on Ceylon, Batavia had ordered the governors to be thriftier and economically austere. In turn, the governors of Ceylon argued that the best way to achieve this was through trade expansion and maintain good diplomatic relations with the local King of Kandy. Here, as in the other two regions, Batavia moved to the background when comparing the earlier period with the later period. The governors asserted more autonomy and sought to reform the Company's presence on Ceylon along more autarkic lines, conveying the idea that if Ceylon was more profitable and stable, than the entire Company would benefit from this.

Regarding the Governor, we see continuity over time and spatial regionalism. The governor had a certain 'role' to play, or an ideal to live up to, in each of the studied regions: in Bengal the director should be more of a 'merchant-by-example', on Ambon he was more of a local prince amongst princes, and on Ceylon he was more of a 'bureaucrat'. These roles correlated with the amount of territorial possession and control the Company had in the region, it would be interesting therefore to research if and how these roles recur in the rest of the Company's branches. All three 'ideal governors' did share the notion that knowledge was one of the most important skills a governor should possess. In the later period diplomatic skills were also added to this to better be able to deal with the instability and changing context the studied regions faced.

A similar pattern is discernible for the Internal Discourse. Regional identities and administrative cultures had already formed around 1700, and each region had its own canon of documents and materials whereby the *Memories* and other writings that were passed from governor to governor formed the backbone of these local discourses. In Bengal, the firman that the Company had obtained from the Mughals was the most important local document. The firman guaranteed the Company's legal status in the region, and thus served as a defensive tool against other local players that could or sought to harm the VOC in Bengal. On Ambon, there was one source of information in particular that became a staple for the Ambonese governors, and that was Rumphius's *De Ambonsche Landbeschrijving* (1675). The book served as one of the main sources the governors were supposed to use to enhance their local knowledge. On Ceylon, the main documents were the Johan Maaysuijker *Memorie* to his successor, the Batavian Resolution of 1689, and Van Imhoff's *Memorie*. These documents allowed for a certain 'thinking in eras' regarding the Company's presence on Ceylon. The Maatsuijker *Memorie* served to assert the Company's local legal claims, and explained how the Company had established itself on Ceylon and obtained these claims in the first place. The Batavian Resolution of 1689 laid out a new course for the Company's presence on the island as envisioned by the *Hoge Regering* that was focussed on better diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Kandy. Van Imhoff's *Memorie* formed the blueprint for 'a new age' of Dutch Ceylon, which was supposed to be an answer to the Company's local economic and diplomatic struggles, and revitalize the Company's operation on the island. This shows that over time these regional identities and administrative cultures were expanded upon or changed to suit the local needs. These canons can be regarded as so-called 'retold narratives' and provided the VOC with its own regional origin stories and foundations on which its presence could be built and legitimized both internally and externally. This gave the Company a lot of flexibility in presenting themselves and dealing with local circumstances.

The second relationship was to 'the Other'. The Social-Cultural aspect showed temporal continuity and spatial uniformity. The local elites were described as despotic and/or untrustworthy, whereas the local population was tame, sheepish, lazy, and in need of proper guidance. This was the case in all studied regions, and over time this sentiment was intensified and became more abstract in its descriptions. I argue this is the result of two developments: First, the increasing challenges and

struggles the Company faced over the course of the eighteenth century. It was generally easier to place the blame for the VOC's downturn increasingly on 'the other' than locating the problem with the Company itself. The second development was the spread of the Enlightenment ideals and mentality. 'The other' needed to be antagonised to serve as a mirror for the Company and act as an argument for incentivising internal reforms or projecting a sense of moral superiority.

Looking at Labor and Economy, there was temporal discontinuity and spatial uniformity. During the 1700-period commerce was the de facto mode of economic thinking, the trade monopolies had to be upheld, expanded, or obtained. Labor played a minor role and was mostly done by slaves and day-labor. This had changed by the 1750-period, the Company faced increased competition and diminishing returns, this led to trade and monopolies no longer being the default economic outlook. The governors of Ceylon and Ambon, and to a lesser degree Bengal due to lack of territorial possessions, now started experimenting with autarkic economic systems and diversification of their production and crops. To achieve this, the Company increasingly relied on the local population for its labor supply.

Finally, religion was also characterised by temporal discontinuity and spatial uniformity. As already mentioned, the propagation of the Reformed faith seemed to go hand in hand with territorial possession. This is illustrated by the fact that religion was completely absent from the Bengal *Memories*. In the first period, the Reformed faith was used – if possible – in an instrumental fashion to create loyalty among the local population while at the same time weakening the local power structures of the local elites or opponents. This was particularly noticeable on Ceylon. During the second period, religion was relegated to the background in the *Memories*, with the exception of Ceylon. There, religion became a means of moral reflection on the state of the Company itself. The studied *Memories* showed no real mention of, or interest in, other religions. In this regard there was also an exception, but this time on Ambon during the 1700-period. The spread of Islam was kept a close eye on, and active policies were made to curb the spread or even root it out altogether. This was the result of a number of Islamic revolts in the Ambon region prior to the 1700-period, as mentioned in the first chapter.

Combing all this information, we turn to the second question: what does this tell us about the organisational identity of the Dutch East India Company? All the different branches related to the central entity they were a part of. These branches shared commonalities, but as this thesis has shown these different branches also developed their own distinct local discourses. Bengal, Ambon, and Ceylon had more in common with each other around 1700 than they did around 1750. Over time, the Company seemed to decentralise, either intentionally or unintentionally. The act of remembering and reflecting on the past, present, and future was universal, but alongside the identity of the Company every region developed its own foundational stories and its own ideals of the governor and his recommended skill-set. The governors contributed to shaping and reproducing both an organisational and local identity for the Company. As we can see through the temporal comparison, the main drivers

of fixation, renegotiation, or change were the different experiences and different people rising to the top of the organisational hierarchy. Becoming part of the Company canon was not a clear-cut process, however. Some governors obviously made a bigger impact or had a more difficult situation to overcome than others, allowing for a greater probability of their *Memories* and ideas to develop into canon. Additionally, I would argue that personal preference or ‘career prospective’ were important contributing factors to establishing local discourse and canon. The higher ranked officials in Batavia, for example, would be able to read the *Memories*, therefore agreeing with the right people could further your own career. A prime example of this being governor Van Imhoff, his vision for Ceylon and his *Memorie* would provide a new foundation for his successors on Ceylon, and subsequently his promotion to Governor-General allowed him to implement his vision on a Company wide scale. What this shows is that the VOC, and by proxy the Dutch Empire in Asia, was not a static entity or merely the periphery of the Dutch Republic, instead it formed its own centres and peripheries, its own narratives, and its own identities. Understanding and analysing this ‘self-understanding’ of historical people such as the Dutch East India Company governors provides important new insights and balance to both the historiography, as well as to the bird’s-eye view that historical research almost inevitably entails.

Reflection and Debates

Of course, as a historian it is important to reflect upon my analysis. The main contributions of this thesis are its methodological innovation and providing a new angle to approach the history of Dutch Empire. Although this has been shown many times over the past decades, this thesis once again emphasises the value of borrowing ideas from fields such as archaeology, sociology, and anthropology, and combining these with historical research. In this particular case, I am referring to the anthropological concept of ‘organisational identity’ that was a major inspiration for this thesis and its analytical framework. What this concept allowed this thesis to do was to use the different *Memories* and combine them into a qualitative dataset that can be used to analyse how these individual Dutch East India Company officials related themselves to the larger collective, how a notion of shared identity or shared ideas influenced the interaction with the outside world, and how these ideas differentiated, changed, and were transferred and recorded over time. The Ceylonese *Memories* have been published before, but the Bengal ones had not, and for Ambon only fragments of the *Memories* were published. Therefore, the transcripts of the twelve studied *Memories*, particularly those of Bengal and Ambon, and potentially making these accessible to a larger audience should be regarded as a major contribution of this thesis. I would have liked the *Memorie*-sample size to have been bigger than twelve as this would have allowed for a better differentiation between individual opinions and actual narrative trends on a regional level, but there is a limit to what one can research for a master thesis. This regional focus also made it difficult to take into account the *curriculum vitae*

– so to say – of the governors, as they also held offices in other regions before and after becoming the governor of one of the regions under scrutiny. After all, being a company-man was a career that spanned years or even decades for some individuals, making it basically impossible to trace potential changes in their individual thinking and attitudes by only focusing on a snapshot. The large amount of data in itself provided a challenge to separate the essential data from the side issues – albeit colourful and interesting ones –, which necessitated the use of a framework such as I created for this thesis. At the same time this research has shown the underutilised richness the *Memories* have to offer in larger comparative research on the Dutch Empire, raising the question why the *Memories* are relatively underused in early modern colonial research.

With the findings of this thesis in mind, some of the works and debates that were elaborated upon in the introduction need to be readdressed. In the introduction this thesis mentioned that the Enlightenment played an important role in during this period in world history, and that the Enlightenment formed a major driving force behind changing notions, ideas, and worldviews in the *Memories*. Thus, the findings of this thesis have to be juxtaposed with some of the authors that have written on the Enlightenment in the context of empire and colonialism. Regarding the Dutch case vis-à-vis Tricoire's interpretation of Enlightened Colonialism from his French case study, I would argue the Dutch case mostly adheres to the notions proposed by Tricoire: the local elites were actively engaged with the Dutch, although the scope of this thesis did not allow me to look into whether or not this also allowed these local elites to create their own versions of the Enlightenment narrative. The Dutch also made clear distinctions between themselves and the local populations, leading to a form of segregation. As argued above, I see this due to 'the other' needing to be antagonised to serve as a mirror for the Company. Where this thesis disagrees with Tricoire's argument is that the imperial agents did not intend to change colonial practice, because it definitely did change over time. As is often the case, this boils down to question as to what 'colonial practice' meant in the greater context of colonial history and where the emphasis is placed. The Company governors' actions perhaps did not lead to changes or a better situation for the local population, but the governors definitely made changes and enhancements to the Dutch colonial practice for the Dutch themselves.

Another important development is explained by Osterhammel and Schmidt. They argue in their works that the understanding of a universal 'Europeanhood/Eurocentrism' was one of the significant changes that the Enlightenment brought about. It is interesting that this development can be seen in the *Memories* in Bengal, and absent in the other two regions. Here, the directors argued in favour of cooperating with the French and British and work together against the local Indian states and populations. I would argue that this is due to the VOC having more and deeper interactions and confrontations with other Europeans in the Indian subcontinent, whereas the Company operated more isolated on Ceylon and on Ambon. Over time, the more diverse European presence in India would have allowed the Dutch to develop the idea that they had more in common with other Europeans than with the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, incentivizing acceptance of, and cooperation with,

these other Europeans.

Moving forward, there have been recent attempts to provide the Dutch Empire with its own *longue durée* history and the main product so far has *The Dutch Empire Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (2020), where several historians collaborated to integrate the Dutch Empire into global visions of empire, with a main focus on the trope of Dutch exceptionalism and intellectual history. This work has provided interesting new insights, but the problem is that this work is still very focused on the Dutch Republic, and the imperial period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of where ideas are developed and which perspectives are considered. The Company-era and its diverse landscape overseas are mostly ignored. This thesis has shown that the governors actively reflected on which parts of the Company's knowledge production and experience they deemed valuable and useful for their office. Local developments and the Company's position of power played a big role in creating regional identities and administrative cultures. As the continuities and discontinuities in colonial ideas and practice are important in the current direction of the debate on colonialism, the Company-era and the different regional and employee influences and perspectives should be a more integral part of the research on Dutch Empire.

Finally, we have to look at the larger picture, and return to the historiographical discourse and the 'status' of the Dutch East India Company. As mentioned in the introduction, there are several views on the 'status' of the Dutch East India Company: Was the VOC the prototype of a multinational? The pre-cursor of the nineteenth century Dutch colonial state? An entity in and of itself, a company-state? I would argue that these governors did not understand themselves as any of these three options. This argument ties in with Cooper's critique of colonial research and its tendency to categorize history and retrospectively project modern conceptions back unto the past. What this thesis wanted to show is history as process and continuous contingency: around 1700 the governors understood themselves as an integral part of the large and powerful Dutch Empire, and the goals they pursued and the revenue they generated contributed to that greater project, as well as their own individual motivations and goals. Fifty years later, under influence of the Enlightenment narrative and changing geopolitical realities, they questioned the previous status quo and the governors understood themselves as in need of making changes and becoming more territorially invested in their regions to reinvigorate this empire project. In their historical moment, however, these governors could not know how the future would unfold, or how our contemporary world would look back at their life and times. Therefore these governors, and by extension the VOC as a whole, did what they thought was best, for themselves, the Company, the Dutch Republic, God, their curiosity of a larger, unknown world that was out there, or whatever motivation or reason they could have had. The governors understood themselves, the Company, and their local context, in varying ways dependent on location and moment in time. These different self-perceptions are not at odds with each other, they co-exist. One only needs to ponder one's own life and choices to know that we have different complementary identities co-existing with each other all the time, and that your own life, or by extension historical processes, are

not easily reduced to singular understandings. In short: if we look back at the Dutch East India Company from the outside perspective of the historian it were all the above mentioned options, but in trying to understand the self-perception of the people who were a part of it, the inside perspective so to say, it was none of these options. It is this seeming tension, I argue, that we as historians need to embrace and complement our research with in order to gain an even better understanding of the past, so that we can recognize the object of historical research as something that 'was', and something that is still in the process of 'becoming'.

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