

# WILEY

---

'Wherever profit leads us, to every sea and shore...': the VOC, the WIC, and Dutch methods of globalization in the seventeenth century

Author(s): Claudia Schnurmann

Source: *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Special Issue: Asian Travel in the Renaissance (SEPTEMBER 2003), pp. 474-493

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24413463>

Accessed: 22-04-2020 13:16 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Wiley is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Renaissance Studies*

*'Wherever profit leads us, to every sea and shore . . .':<sup>1</sup> the VOC, the WIC, and Dutch methods of globalization in the seventeenth century*

CLAUDIA SCHNURMANN

The history of Dutch Atlantic expansion as embodied in the activities of the Vereenigde Westindische Compagnie (WIC) was for a long time overshadowed by the 'glorious' deeds of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)<sup>2</sup> in the Asian and Pacific regions, and therefore largely neglected by the academic world.<sup>3</sup> On the rare occasions when the WIC was not ignored and the two companies were compared, the WIC was always described as a failure, while the VOC successes were noted and even celebrated.<sup>4</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to question these historical assumptions.

A new comparison of both companies, focused on their institutional frames, aims, ideas, and politics, should treat them as separate units. The companies' members and employees (whether civil servants, merchants, soldiers, or settlers) were endowed by the companies' founders – officially the Dutch Republic, unofficially citizens who covered the complete social scale of the Netherlands – with comparable authority, but how were they affected

<sup>1</sup> The quotation from the poem by Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) follows the English translation made by Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe* (London, 1952), 7; see C. R. Boxer, 'The Dutch East-Indians: their sailors, their navigators, and life on board, 1602–1795', in C. R. Boxer, *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia, 1602–1795* (London, 1988), 81.

<sup>2</sup> The literature dealing with the VOC fills several shelves; see the references in Femme S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen, 1991); C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire* (London, 1965); *idem*, *Jan Compagnie in oorlog en vrede: Beknopte geschiedenis van de VOC* (Bussum, 1977); Eberhardt Schmitt, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der europäischen Expansion* (4 vols, Munich, 1986–8).

<sup>3</sup> On the history of the WIC, see for example: Boxer, *Dutch Seaborne Empire*; W. R. Menkman, *De Geschiedenis van de West Indische Compagnie* (Amsterdam, 1947); J. G. van Dillen, *Van Rijkdom en regenten: Handboek tot de economische en sociale geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek* (The Hague, 1970); W. J. van Hoboken, 'The Dutch West Indian Company: the political background of its rise and decline', in J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossman (eds), *Britain and the Netherlands* (London, 1960), 41–61; Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen, 1994); Ruud Spruit, *Zout en Slaven: De Geschiedenis van de Westindische Compagnie* (Houten, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> One of these rare birds, a direct comparison between both companies, was made by German historian Horst Lademacher, 'Ost- und Westindische Kompanie. Bemerkungen zum Aufbau eines Kolonialreiches', in Bernd Wilczek (ed.), with the assistance of Jos van Waterschoot, *Amsterdam 1585–1672: Morgenröte des bürgerlichen Kapitalismus* (Bühl-Moos, 1993), 42–59. On the importance of capital and know-how from the southern provinces (today's Belgium) to the companies' foundation, see E. Stols, 'De zuidelijke Nederlanden en de oprichting van de Oost- en Westindische Compagnieën', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 88 (1973).

by their overseas experiences? Questions like this lead us to analyse structures that were transplanted from the Netherlands to non-European soil, with particular emphasis on how this transfer affected the territories and the lives of the people in colonized regions, how these changes affected the interdependencies of the colonized overseas regions, how they influenced the behaviour of European rivals in the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, and, finally, how they shaped these companies' importance, impact, and opportunities in the formative seventeenth century.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW 'TO EVERY SEA AND SHORE'

At the outset, both the VOC and the WIC had much in common, not only in respect of their personal and financial structures, but also in their ideological backgrounds. Both represented Dutch responses to long-standing Spanish and more recent English claims, challenges, and initiatives; even more importantly, the foundation of both companies has to be viewed within the context of the ongoing struggle between Habsburg Spain and the Netherlands (1566–1648). From the point of view of rivalry and competition between various mercantile interest groups within the Netherlands, the VOC, founded in 1602, gained the undisputed pole position, although within the wider European mercantile world the VOC's foundation followed the pattern set in part by London merchants in 1599/1600.

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, Dutch merchants and shippers from Holland and Zeeland finally gave up any inhibitions they might have harboured and began to intrude into the Iberian hemisphere created by Spanish and Portuguese monarchs with papal assistance in the last decade of the fifteenth century (papal charters of 1493, the Spanish–Portuguese treaty of Tordesillas of 1494).<sup>5</sup> Following Columbus's landfall in the West Indies in October 1492, the Spanish-born head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Alexander VI, had decided in 1493–4 to assign the monopoly for missionary work as well as trade in most of the New World, the Atlantic Ocean and its islands, and the American continent itself, to the monarchs of Castile and Aragon. Some months later, these monarchs went one step further. In the treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, an agreement was formed to divide the globe between them on their own terms; papal approval of the treaty was considered unnecessary. According to this treaty, the Spanish monarchs owned the western hemisphere except for part of the South American continent, later called Brazil, while the whole of Africa and Asia went to the Portuguese crown.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Batllori, 'The papal division of the world and its consequences', in Fredi Chiappelli (ed.), *First Images of America. The Impact of the New World on the Old* (2 vols, Berkeley, 1976), I, 211–20.

<sup>6</sup> See the documents in their original language with English translations in Frances G. Davenport (ed.), *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies* (4 vols, Gloucester, MA, 1967), I, *passim*. The different Iberian attitudes to colonialism are discussed in Claudia Schnurmann, *Europa trifft Amerika: Atlantische Wirtschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit 1492–1783* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1998), 18–21.

At first, these events received little attention from the other European monarchs. This was to change after Europe had become divided into Protestant and Catholic countries. Anglican England under Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) and the mainly Calvinist Dutch Republic – which had established itself in the fight against its sovereign, the Most Catholic Spanish King Philip II (r. 1556–98), who had lost his subjects' loyalty finally in 1581 with the *acte van afzwering* – no longer tolerated Spanish and Portuguese monopolistic claims. Dutch citizens, merchants, craftsmen, and bankers alike set out to acquire their own share of this tempting global enterprise. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century the presence of a growing number of Dutch ships in Asia, together with a lively public debate in the Netherlands about the merits of founding trading companies as a means to advance Dutch interests in the region, awakened fears in England of losing out once more to Dutch competition. Thanks to their efforts, Dutch ships and middlemen controlled not only the continental trade in English cloth but the cross-continental exchange of goods from southern Europe, Middle Europe, and the Baltic Sea, having left the former dominant Hanseatic league far behind. As a result, the Anglo-Dutch alliance suffered its first fissures, an alliance formed in 1585 with the treaty of Nonsuch in response to Spanish threats to Dutch liberties and privileges, as well as to English security concerns in the Channel region and economic dependencies on the Dutch market.

Dutch and English privateers, with the backing of their governments, endeavoured to damage Spanish interests in their Asian and American possessions by destroying Spanish property and invading regions claimed under the papal bulls. Between 1580 and 1640 – when the Portuguese crown was involuntarily united with the Spanish crown – former Portuguese colonies in India and the Far East became additional targets of Dutch and English economic envy, depredations, and incursions, as well as ideological rancour. Of particular importance was the trade in spices, especially pepper, cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon, which the Portuguese controlled as a result of their successful exploration and military fortification of the sea routes in the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and near the Cape of Good Hope.

Efforts in the second half of the sixteenth century to break Portuguese control of these sea routes through the establishment of alternatives had been blocked by the Turks' aggressive policies in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean. In particular, the pepper trade via Italy had been the domain of the London-based Levant Company, founded in 1592 by merging the Venice and Turkey companies. The predecessors as well as this newly founded Levant Company followed the organizational pattern of regulated companies. They worked on co-operative principles in which short-term associations of merchants aimed for quick profits. These companies received little support from their monarchs and were granted only limited rights. In a way, this type of company was a relic of the past; during the later Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century it had often been used by Hanseatic, Dutch, or Italian merchants.

Dutch merchants, eager to get a footing in Asian trade, had pooled financial and naval resources on a short term basis, authorizing individual journeys. In what is known as the 'Voorcompagnieën', these enterprises led to some forty ships being sent to Asia between 1595 and 1600, returning with profitable luxury goods in high demand from European customers.<sup>7</sup> As a result, English merchants trading to Russia, the Indian Ocean, or the Far East felt obliged to change their mercantile methods. On 16 October 1599, a remarkable meeting took place at Hampton Court Palace near London. Queen Elizabeth I welcomed leading representatives of the Levant Company; these merchants expressed their fear of losing the booming pepper trade to the Dutch. Dreading the loss of much needed taxes to the royal treasury, Elizabeth and the merchants agreed on the outlines of a charter that led in December 1600 to the foundation of a 'company of merchants of London trading into the east Indies'. It boasted over 200 members.<sup>8</sup>

In the charter, new and old principles of trade and commercial management were blended cleverly. On the one hand, it was normal to name a company by emphasizing its urban origins as well as the region in which the company was permitted to trade. These traditional features were matched by strikingly innovative ones that encompassed a series of new legal possibilities as well as important organizational innovations. The company, soon conveniently called the East India Company (EIC), was not only invested with mercantile privileges; the crown provided it with parts of its own jealously guarded rights of sovereignty. In the Asian trading regions assigned to the EIC, the newly chartered company could act as the crown's *alter ego*, with the capacity to form treaties, conclude international agreements, and take military action. The fact that the EIC was a joint stock company was particularly significant. This organizational form made more efficient use of its shareholders' investments by granting the company the quality of a corporate person. Until 1657, however, the 900 shareholders avoided long-term investments; thereafter the stockholders at last granted permission to use the company's finances for long-term trading purposes. This change significantly improved the company's capacity for systematic planning and employment of sophisticated financial strategies.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> J. R. Bruijn, F. S. Gaastra, and I. Schöffer (eds), *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries* (3 vols, The Hague, 1979–87), *passim*; Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*.

<sup>8</sup> In 1698 the EIC was reformed in order to solve internal problems. An important sign of its prospective importance for the national economy and identity was its renaming. Its urban origin was forgotten, and instead it was titled 'The English company trading to the East Indies'.

<sup>9</sup> K. H. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint Stock Company, 1600–1640* (London, 1965); *idem*, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (Cambridge, 1978); L. Blussé and Femme S. Gaastra (eds), *Companies and Trade: Essays on European Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime* (Leiden, 1981); Larry Neal, 'The Dutch and English East India Companies compared: evidence from the stock and foreign exchange markets', in James D. Tracy (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350–1750* (Cambridge, 1990), 195–223; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflicts, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Cambridge, 1993).

On the other side of the English Channel, in the Dutch provinces of Holland and Zeeland, merchants quickly learned their lesson. Pressed by the States General assembled in the Hague, by the influential politician Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619), and by the impressive prince Maurits of Orange (1567–1625), the competing groups of merchants and towns in the leading maritime provinces gave up their infighting, dissolved newly established companies like the Vereenigde Zeeuwse Compagnie (Veer and Middelburg), the Nieuwe Brabantse Compagnie, or the Eerste Vereenigde Compagnie op Oost-Indië tot Amsterdam, and agreed to merge forces. In March 1602 a new, nationwide operating company, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), was created by a state's charter that imitated the example set in London two years earlier.

THE COMPANIES' ORGANIZATION, FINANCING, AND AGENDA:  
THE VOC AND THE WIC AT HOME

In many ways, the Dutch VOC operated as a copy of the London EIC; it was not only invested with the same monopolistic area, Asia, but it also belonged to the new type of progressive joint stock company; in addition, it enjoyed strong support from the Estates General, which granted it sovereign rights, as Elizabeth I had done in England. However, from the start, the VOC improved on the London prototype by daring to risk more money. The initial capital, from shareholders all over the Netherlands and from all classes and professions, totalled nearly 6.5 million Dutch guilders. Each citizen was allowed to get involved in the company, and many citizens, merchants, manual workers, academics, teachers, and clergymen became investors, making contributions from 50 to 85,000 guilders. In Amsterdam alone nearly 3.7 million guilders were raised; a high percentage of this money came from merchants who were immigrants from the Spanish Netherlands, which still belonged to the Habsburg empire. By fleeing Habsburg oppression, commercially innovative refugees brought expertise and capital alike to their new home in Holland.<sup>10</sup> Although many of the ordinary people who had not resisted the common craze for new riches soon got cold feet and sold their shares, reducing the number of stockholders to members of big businesses, the VOC was able to retain a strong financial base that allowed it to pursue ambitious plans, grander than the English EIC's.

An important article of the charter granted by the States General stipulated that the use of capital was not restricted to one expedition only; instead, the company received permission from the States General to work with the shareholders' investments within a timeframe of ten years. While it is true that this stipulation weakened the shareholders' influence on the company's policy – robbing them of their ability to steer the company by

<sup>10</sup> Lademacher, 'Ost- und Westindische Kompanie', 45; Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*, 26.

withholding capital – it nevertheless strengthened the company in the long run.<sup>11</sup> Not only did the company reflect established urban interests in The Netherlands, its institutional frame also mirrored deeply rooted federal features of the Republic itself. The VOC's management was largely monopolized by the Dutch Republic, and its organization was dominated by the leading provinces of Holland and Zeeland, along with the metropolitan centres of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Middelburg.

The VOC was created by the state in cooperation with private capital as a national tool designed to fight against Spain and its satellite Portugal; yet at the same time, its organizational features were designed to satisfy the Dutch sense of particularism. It consisted of six chambers, located in Amsterdam, Middelburg (chamber Zeeland), Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. Each chamber was ruled by a group of directors, the so-called *bewindhebbers*, who chose representatives for de Heren XVII, the supreme government of the VOC. From a superficial point of view this system seemed to be quite democratic; yet closer inspection reveals Amsterdam's dominance. Almost one-third (20–23) of the seventy-six *bewindhebbers* of the six chambers belonged to the Amsterdam chamber and eight of de Heren XVII had been former members of the Amsterdam chamber, so it is no wonder that Amsterdam became the usual seat of de Heren XVII.<sup>12</sup>

The VOC was founded at a time when the outcome of the Dutch fight against the Spanish monarchy still hung in the balance; its Atlantic pendant, the WIC, came into being in 1621 after the Spanish monarch had been forced to acknowledge indirectly his former subjects as forming an independent nation by agreeing on a twelve-year armistice in 1609. The truce ended in 1621, when the Dutch–Spanish war resumed (Spain did not formally recognize the Dutch Republic until 1648, when the treaty of Westphalia was signed, ending the Thirty Years' War [1618–48] and reorganizing the political landscape of Europe). Although the position of the Netherlands had improved before the settlement, the Dutch changed neither their attitude towards the Iberian powers nor their economic policies or strategies on how to achieve political and economic success. Once again, commerce, capital, and state power worked hand in hand to produce another weapon in the struggle for Dutch independence, profit, and influence, and once again a company seemed to provide the proper and necessary means. The charter granted in June 1621 by the States General that led to the foundation of the WIC as the second semi-national company minced no words about its far-reaching purposes. Shortly after the deadline of the armistice had expired, the WIC was meant to weaken Spanish power by attacking its very lifeline, the most important resources of Spanish wealth, territorial

<sup>11</sup> Femme S. Gastra, 'Die Vereinigte Ostindische Compagnie der Niederlande – Ein Abriss ihrer Geschichte', in Eberhard Schmitt, Thomas Schleich, and Thomas Beck (eds), *Kaufleute als Kolonialherren: Die Handelswelt der Niederländer vom Kap der Guten Hoffnung bis Nagasaki 1600–1800* (Bamberg, 1988), 7.

<sup>12</sup> R. van Gelder and L. Wagenaar, *Sporen van de Compagnie: De VOC in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1988).

riches, and military opportunities in the Atlantic world, especially the Americas.

Like the VOC, the WIC was granted rights and means to undertake military action, build forts, form international agreements, capture foreign ships, and confiscate cargoes, as well as conquer, exploit, and settle land given to the Iberian monarch by papal judgement. The forty-five articles of the charter discussed in detail all eventualities which might occur in the course of Dutch settlement and trade, and especially in Iberian–Dutch military clashes in the Atlantic. In essence, these stipulations of the charter copied the Catholic privileges granted by the pope in the 1490s. They imitated their Iberian rivals' worldview by claiming the Atlantic, West Africa down to the Cape of Good Hope, and the Americas, as Dutch-controlled spheres of law, possession, trade, and interests.<sup>13</sup> It was no surprise that in 1609 Hugo Grotius, the country's most prominent promoter of free trade and *mare liberum*, fell in line with traditional supporters of early mercantilist thinking and declared the view that exclusive possession of large regions – land as well as sea, people, and resources – was agreeable to international law.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that the WIC's highly ambitious aims were meant to be achieved by copying the institutional patterns and strategies of the VOC.

The WIC's organization, as with the VOC, was deeply rooted in Dutch urban culture. Under the guidance of Amsterdam – once more successful in controlling the new company's finances and management – the WIC copied the VOC's institutional structures as well as encompassing the entire range of Dutch society in its group of shareholders. Again, citizens from everywhere in the Netherlands and from all social classes were eager to invest their money in the newly founded company.<sup>15</sup> The internal administrative structure was changed in one small, yet significant aspect. Instead of the six chambers that formed the VOC, the WIC consisted of five chambers, leaving less commercially striving areas behind: the chambers of the WIC – Amsterdam, Zeeland, Maas, Stad en Lande, and Noorderkwartier – were, like in the VOC, governed by *bewindhebbers* and headed by de Heren XIX, a body slimmed down to the Heren X in 1674 after the company's refoundation. The members assembled alternately in Amsterdam and Zeeland. After the first enthusiasm had faded, and hampered by financial setbacks, the chambers took some time to accumulate the necessary capital. Yet by 1623 the shareholders had invested around 7.1 million guilders, ready to be used for advancing the country's glory and individual profit.<sup>16</sup> Thus the framework of 1602 was recreated in 1621. Yet this was just the beginning. The real test

<sup>13</sup> See the English translation of the first WIC charter in W. Keith Kavenagh (ed.), *Foundations of Colonial America: A Documentary History, vol. 2. Middle Atlantic Colonies* (New York, 1973), 739–45.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo Grotius, *De mare liberum*, 1609.

<sup>15</sup> Norbert H. Schneeloch, *Aktionäre der Westindischen Compagnie von 1674: Die Verschmelzung der alten Kapitalgebergruppen zu einer neuen Aktiengesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Heijer, *Geschiedenis*, 33.



the company faced lay in the new territories it was to discover, conquer, and exploit. This leads to some simple but crucially important questions: what happened to the mind-boggling claims, to the demands, interests, and ideas conceived in the safety of Dutch towns when they were transported to distant worlds and exposed to new and unknown realities? How did company officials, separated from their home country by distance and poor communication, motivated too by individual interests and fearful of the dangers of traffic and wars, cope with these difficulties and pursue the WIC's imperial designs?

#### THE VOC OUTSIDE OF EUROPE

In 1603 the VOC embarked on its first enterprise by sending twelve heavily armed ships to Africa and India. That fleet charted the path the VOC was to follow in its overseas enterprises, for not only was it supposed to engage in successful mercantile business, but it was also expected to attack and conquer Portuguese strongholds in Mozambique on the East African coast and Goa on India's Malabar coast. While trading in these regions was quite successful, in this and following years the military actions were failures. Nevertheless, a pattern had been established that in years to come would dominate the VOC's politics in Asian lands and waters.

The chronology and mixed fortunes of Dutch expansion in Asia are described at length by experts like Femme Gaastra, Kristof Glamann, and Niels Steensgaard.<sup>17</sup> Their painstaking and groundbreaking studies cannot be matched by this paper; instead, in the following pages I will emphasize the VOC's activities in Asia during the seventeenth century and the different methods the VOC adopted in relation to Asian trade, countries, territories, towns, people, their rulers, and European rivals. Apart from the fact that the arduous task of building an empire was not really characterized by continuity, strict planning, co-operation, or crystal-clear explicitness, four models can be distinguished of how the Dutch secured and maintained property, influence, power, and prestige.

#### Model 1

Due to the self-imposed task of fighting Portuguese strongholds, the VOC turned to East Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Persia, but put special emphasis on the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Following the Portuguese example, the VOC conquered Portuguese trading posts (for example,

<sup>17</sup> See references in Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*, 181–8; Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago and London, 1974); Kristof Glamann, *Dutch–Asiatic Trade 1620–1740* (2nd edn, The Hague, 1980); L. Blussé and J. de Moor, *Nederlanders overzee: De eerste vijftig jaar 1600–1650* (Franeker, 1983); M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *De VOC in Azië* (Bussum, 1976).

Colombo in 1656) and successfully established factories as evidence of its presence. These were mostly placed on India's long coastlines on the periphery of local territories, and blended commercial interests and military action by hiding numerical weakness behind martial appearance. At first, military power was used to fight the Iberian monarchs; later the VOC's heavily armed vessels and soldiers were also employed against Asian rulers and rivals from France, Sweden, and Denmark, and, after 1620, from England. In short, the VOC not only assumed an active role in the transfer of European conflicts to Asia – for example, in the Ambon massacre of 1623<sup>18</sup> – but became profoundly entangled in internal Asian wars, too. In so doing, the company used internal disputes between local princes to strengthen its own position. Dutch merchants mostly lived in trading towns along the coastlines, once again imitating the Portuguese, who, as the saying went, preferred to live like crabs near the surf. Inhabiting the remote periphery of native states, the Dutch newcomers, like their Portuguese predecessors, were able to make contact with the local populations and adjust in some degree to local cultures, habits, and sophisticated fashions which were tempting and attractive to people not used to this level of luxury. Although indigenous rulers retained their power for much of the seventeenth, and in some cases even for a number of decades into the eighteenth century, their influence in the peripheries of their territories was so slight that European merchants ran little risk of incurring the rulers' displeasure when mixing with indigenous populations.<sup>19</sup>

## Model 2

The second model fits the concept of informal colonialism; it was realized in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand (Siam). After several failures, the VOC successfully established trading posts in these countries that were needed for the supply of goods for its internal Asian and Asian–European trading activities. The most important factory was founded in Siam in 1613; from 1688 onwards, only Dutch merchants had access to Thai trade and resources; they lost their privileged access to the Thai market in 1756. Another interesting place was Tonking in North Vietnam: it was Dutch-dominated from 1640 to 1699 and provided the VOC with silk necessary for the exchange with Japan. Model 1 and especially the trade-oriented model 2 came closest to de Heren

<sup>18</sup> In 1623 the conflict between Dutch and English rivals for the island's riches escalated; several English people were killed. Shocked by this experience, English forces for the time being pulled back from the Pacific arena. Nevertheless the events in Ambon remained in public memory, evident whenever England tried to provoke the Netherlands or had to legitimize anti-Dutch policy. See Public Record Office SP 84/178 fols 58–9; M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, 'Aspects of Dutch colonial development in Asia in the seventeenth century', in J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann (eds), *Britain and the Netherlands in Europe and Asia* (London, 1968), 56–82; Herbert H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland 1625–1672* (Princeton, 1978), 258.

<sup>19</sup> Gastra, 'Vereinigde Ostindische Compagnie', 29; Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800* (Minneapolis and London, 1976), 317ff.

XVII's idea of a maritime empire, especially in the light of their concern that military expenses not exceed commercial profits.<sup>20</sup>

### Model 3

The third model forms an exception insofar as Dutch presence was based on local sufferance and local power, and depended solely on the native rulers' goodwill, for neither Dutch military power nor Dutch attempts to resort to the otherwise successful strategy of 'divide et impera' could be applied to China or Japan. Both empires were much too strong, too densely peopled, too remote from the mother country, and on far too high a cultural level for them to have bent to a handful of traders hailing from a distant continent considered by Chinese and Japanese rulers as lacking in cultural achievements. Compared with the Far East's progressive medicine, industry, and *savoir vivre*, even the Dutch, although highly sophisticated from a European perspective, at best measured up to what today would be considered 'third world' inhabitants in Asian eyes.<sup>21</sup>

Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch could get a foot in the door only by remaining content to live in, and trade from, permitted restricted places. Even so, in China the Dutch residential presence was rather short-lived. Driven out of Macao by the Portuguese in 1622, the VOC founded Fort Zeelandia in Formosa (Taiwan) in 1624. This stronghold soon became quite important both from a commercial as well as a strategic perspective. In 1662 the company lost Formosa to China for good, as well as some smaller trading factories nearby. After several attempts by the VOC to regain Taiwan had failed, Dutch shipping to China stopped in 1690. Henceforth the VOC relied more and more on traditional Chinese junks to supply Dutch trading posts with Chinese goods in the Pacific region. While Dutch posts were lost and active Dutch–Chinese trade was reduced to occasional visits by Chinese junks and yearly expeditions of VOC merchants to Canton, the limited Dutch success nevertheless bestowed prestige on the VOC and evoked envy, especially in England, where less successful rivals in London nicknamed the Dutch 'the Chinese of Europe' because of their trade with the Far East, their importation of Chinese goods, and the Dutch craze for Chinese porcelain, lacquerwork, and other fancy household stuffs.<sup>22</sup>

Even more prestige, profit, and durability, but still less freedom, characterized Dutch trade with Japan. Replacing the Portuguese merchants as the only Europeans granted access to Japan, the VOC after 1641 was just a bird in a gilded Japanese cage. The Dutch merchants were restricted to the island of

<sup>20</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*, 56ff.

<sup>21</sup> Frederic Mauro, 'Towards an "intercontinental model". European overseas expansion between 1500 and 1800', *Economic History Review*, 14 (1961), 1–17; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (2 vols, New York, 1974–80).

<sup>22</sup> P. J. van Winter, *De Chinezen van Europa* (Groningen, 1965).

Deshima in Nagasaki harbour. There they lived in splendid isolation, enlivened only by the yearly journey to the emperor's court in Edo (Tokyo) or by visits from prostitutes procured through Japanese mediation in nearby Nagasaki. Offspring produced in this kind of intercultural contact were forbidden to leave the empire but had to stay with their indigenous mothers.<sup>23</sup>

#### Model 4

The last model fits the concept of formal colonialism best: by blending commercial and economic interests, territorial expansion, and permanent settlement in Java, from the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, the Dutch VOC managed to change from a trading company to one that also functioned as a territorial ruler. At the same time, Indonesia reflected the Dutch concept of maritime colonialism as formulated in the first years of the VOC's existence.<sup>24</sup> From 1619 Java provided the company with the strategically important harbour, Batavia, which made it possible to control vital seaways and remained accessible in all seasons – even the monsoon season. Batavia quickly emerged as the VOC's Asian centre.<sup>25</sup> Taking traditional Dutch sympathies for decentralization into account, this indeed implied an unusual decision; its status, however, was later to be challenged by sub-centres in Colombo and Melaka (Malacca). Both ports managed to circumvent Batavia by establishing direct sea-links with the home country.

The Governor-General resided in Batavia. Together with his council, the so-called Hoge Indiane Regering, they formed the highest body of the VOC outside the Netherlands. Batavia became the heart of Dutch trade within, from, and to Asia. All Dutch ships had to call at Batavia and all decisions taken by the governors, directors, or so-called *opperhoofden* in other Asian sites had to be confirmed with the Governor-General, who was responsible to de Heren XVII back home. This chain of command reflected a concept developed in Europe without any regard to overseas realities, regional interests, and human behaviour. The concept had its pitfalls. Immense power grew out of the charter's articles, granting the right to wage war and conclude peace, and to make other treaties. This, together with Batavia's commercial success – thanks to trade within Asia as well as to Asian–European trade – could tempt an ambitious Governor-General to lose sight of the company's needs and instead try to supplement Dutch commercial activities with

<sup>23</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Gaastra, 'Vereenigde Ostindische Compagnie', 14; see P. J. A. N. Rietbergen (ed.), *De eerste Landvoogd Pieter Both (1568–1615), Gouverneur-generaal van Nederlands-Indië (1609–1614)* (2 vols, Zutphen, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Batavia was to become an interesting mixture, blending Dutch urban architecture and Asian environment. On its social, economic, and political development, see J. G. Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, 1983); L. J. Blussé, *Strange Company. Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht, 1986).

the acquisition of territories; by doing so he would enlarge the Governor-General's powers with the competences of a territorial ruler and improve his position by controlling trade, production, and the indigenous labour force through repression, slavery, and violence. Small wonder that the military enthusiasm of some VOC officials annoyed de Heren XVII, who, as merchants focused on personal gain and larger profits, loathed to lose control of the company's purses to some faraway power-hungry company officials.

In 1614 Governor-General Jan Pietersz Coen wrote to de Heren XVII: 'Your honorable Lords should know that the Asian trade has to be protected by arms; these arms however have to be paid by profits from trade: that means in Indonesia we cannot trade without war and we cannot wage war without trade.'<sup>26</sup> Although it is true that personal ambitions as well as local opportunities benefited from the length of time it took to communicate between Batavia and the Netherlands, it is equally true that Coen was pointing out a simple necessity. The administration on the spot had to make decisions at once; it could not wait for the nine to twelve months a decision of de Heren XVII took to arrive from Europe; on occasion the governors-general exploited the delay in communication with de Heren XVII for their own purposes and made decisions which definitely did not please the moneylenders back home. In 1649 Cornelis van der Lijn bluntly declared that he could not wait for the decision of de Heren XVII, who treated the colonial staff members like children.<sup>27</sup>

Although in the long run the administration in Batavia successfully expanded its power across Indonesia and, untroubled by humanitarian scruples, brought more and more land, people, and precious resources like spices under its control,<sup>28</sup> this policy did not gain de Heren XVII's unqualified support. However, this approach helped to create a regional power base that did not depend on the establishment of European settlements mirroring Dutch society. Yet the costs for this policy were high. After the 1690s it necessitated expensive military establishments that contributed to the Company's permanent financial troubles.<sup>29</sup> In a way, this colonial expansion, especially the massive financial investment necessary for becoming a commercial *and* a territorial power in Indonesia and on the other spice-producing Pacific isles like Ambon, Seram, and Banda, led to the Company's rapid decline in the eighteenth century and to its end in 1795.<sup>30</sup> The cost of

<sup>26</sup> My translation of the Dutch quotation in Lademacher, 'Ost- und Westindische Kompanie', 47.

<sup>27</sup> Gaastra, 'Vereinigde Ostindische Compagnie', 25.

<sup>28</sup> In several cases the local population of Pacific islands was forced to labour or migrate and even suffered death when economic interests of the VOC seemed to be at stake. Nature itself was not exempt from Dutch interventions: spice trees which needed many years before they produced the desired fruit were destroyed to protect the companies' monopoly and price policy. See Gaastra, 'Vereinigde Ostindische Compagnie', 15ff.

<sup>29</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*, 132; Femme S. Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC: De financiële en commerciële politiek van de bewindhebbers, 1672–1702* (Zutphen, 1989), 283ff; J. P. De Korte, *De jaarlijkse financiële verantwoording in de VOC* (Leiden, 1984), *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> For detail on the VOC's development during the eighteenth century, see for example Gaastra, *Geschiedenis*; and especially Peter Harmen van der Brug, *Malaria en malaise: De VOC in Batavia in de achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1994).

administrative staff, mariners, and soldiers necessary to control native populations and European rivals was immense; the dangers and the high mortality rate of Dutch staff intensified the employees' wishes to return home, which again increased costs because it necessitated new replacements.<sup>31</sup>

Dutch expansion across Asia was not only the result of individual ambitions and co-operative energy, but to a great extent a reaction to urgent mercantile needs. Due to the fact that Asian consumers were not especially interested in goods made in underdeveloped Europe (with the exception, for example, of products like woollen cloth), the goods Europe needed had to be bought with Asian products and American precious metals, especially silver. This need for Asian products forced the Dutch to play a greater role in Asian markets and global commerce than they probably initially envisioned. Closer involvement with Asian markets forced colonial administrators and merchants to loosen their ties with their homeland, although de Heren XVII sustained internal Asian trade activities.<sup>32</sup> The VOC officials had to react to local conditions, but the tendency to autonomous action by VOC officials in Asia was neither foreseen nor applauded by company officials in the Netherlands.<sup>33</sup>

Actions and reactions, European demands, and Asian realities created a mixed bag of problems for the VOC. At home the VOC had its troubles and disputes; these were intensified by developments in Asia. Confronted with special conditions, the pretence of group solidarity slowly eroded. Varying regional conditions in Asia contributed to this process. Far away from the Netherlands, the VOC was less a monolithic colossus than something shaped by the many regional policies and conditions that developed under the institutional umbrella called the VOC.

#### THE WIC AND THE ATLANTIC STAGE

From the beginning, the WIC's tasks were clearly defined. Its field of operation was the Atlantic ocean, the whole American continent, and the western half of Africa. The sphere of the VOC's influence started on Africa's southern tip, the Cape of Good Hope. There in 1652 the VOC had founded a trading post that experienced and survived hard times.<sup>34</sup> The WIC's

<sup>31</sup> For the figures on the number of mariners, soldiers, and administrative staff, and the mortality rate, see Gastra, 'Vereiniged Ostindische Compagnie', 14ff, 30ff; Gastra, *Geschiedenis, passim*; Bruijn *et al.*, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 1, 144.

<sup>32</sup> 'Seide aus China und Persien, Kupfer und Silber aus Japan, Reis aus Hinterindien, Textilien aus Vorderindien, Opium und Salpeter aus Bengalen, Zimt aus Ceylon, Tee und Porzellan aus China, Kaffee aus Mokka (und später Java), Edelhölzer, Farbhölzer, Gewürze und Drogen – alle diese Produkte transportierten holländische Schiffe. Der Gewinn aus diesem innerasiatischen Handel ermöglichte den europäisch-asiatischen . . . Warenaustausch'. Ilja Mieck, *Europäische Geschichte der Frühen Neuzeit. Eine Einführung* (6th edn, Stuttgart, 1998), 248. See also Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade 1585–1740* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Gastra, *Geschiedenis, passim*.

<sup>34</sup> R. Elphick and H. B. Gilioomee, *The Shaping of South African Society 1652–1820* (London, 1972).

operational tasks rested on three pillars of Dutch strength: expertise in mercantile shipping and profitable commerce; experience in naval warfare, privateering, and land war; and the deeply rooted desire to found settlements and towns.<sup>35</sup> All three pillars were incorporated into the WIC charter granted in 1621. The WIC wasted no time in pursuing its goals. Settlements, trade, and war were all started simultaneously, with but different results and varying long-term consequences.

The Dutch had to battle Portuguese and Spanish colonies and trading posts all at once in the western hemisphere, due to the union of the two countries in 1580. Since they were nearer to their home ports as well as to the decision-making royal courts, and thanks as well to long-established familiarity with the Atlantic arena since the fifteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese colonists – officials, planters, merchants, and soldiers – maintained a stronger position there than in Asia where they had to satisfy themselves with trading-posts and temporary residences. A large part of the treasures stored in Iberian coffers came from South American silver and gold mines; new Spanish and Portuguese societies emerged in the New World. The wide range of skin colours in Portuguese Brazil – creoles, mestizos, and mulattos – testified to greater tolerance in Portuguese territories than in Spanish American colonies like Cuba, Mexico, Peru, or Chile. Spanish women who were willing to emigrate disapproved of the sexual morality implied in this greater tolerance.<sup>36</sup>

### **Pillar 1: privateering, naval warfare, and territorial conquest**

Direct confrontations were surprisingly rare given the fact that the Dutch–Iberian war ended in 1648 with the treaty of Westphalia. Only then did the Dutch Republic officially join the family of European nations. The charter of the WIC had been packed with instructions about conquering territories, building forts, and taking rich Iberian prizes. All these things were done. But they lacked for the most part the breathtaking glory of the much earlier Spanish exploits, although Johan de Laet, the promoter of the WIC's aggressive course, counted nearly 600 ships that were captured from the enemy with goods worth more than 118 million guilders, enriching the coffers of Dutch shareholders.<sup>37</sup>

Prize-taking and Dutch aggression did not often come to public attention – with two exceptions in 1628 and in 1630. In September 1628 the Dutch admiral Piet de Heyn won eternal fame when he captured the *flota*, the Spanish silver fleet in Matanzas Bay off the Cuban shore, loaded with

<sup>35</sup> On the importance of urbanism and urban rulership in the Dutch Republic, see for example J. L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Renate Pieper, 'Hispanoamerika: Die demographische Entwicklung', in Walther L. Bernecker *et al.* (eds), *Handbuch der Geschichte Lateinamerikas* (3 vols, Stuttgart, 1994–6), I, 313–28, Schnurmann, *Europa trifft Amerika*, 73.

<sup>37</sup> Heijer, *Geschiedenis*, 65.

precious metals, coins, jewels, and colonial products like indigo, Asian silk, and hides, worth all in all more than eleven million guilders. 177,000 Amsterdam pounds of silver were worth about eight million guilders.<sup>38</sup> This event was celebrated in the Dutch press, praised by pamphlet writers, marvelled at in poems, and glorified in popular songs. They made Piet de Heyn a great national hero. These sudden riches not only improved the company's very strained financial situation, they gave prestige, self-confidence, and new energy as well. Provided with a welcome injection of fresh means, amounting to nearly seven million guilders, and a distribution of dividends of 3.5 million guilders to highly pleased shareholders, the WIC started anew on conquering the Portuguese sugar colony of Brazil. Earlier efforts in 1623–4 to attack Brazilian Bahia had miserably failed, draining the WIC's funds.<sup>39</sup>

In 1630 the Dutch fleet and soldiers were even more successful. Helped by Jewish residents of Brazil, who had been forced to hide their faith and opposed Portugal's Catholic government in Brazil, the Dutch managed to conquer the sugar centres of Olinda and Recife of Pernambuco. From 1636 to 1644 Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (1604–79), an enlightened and capable nobleman, acted as governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil. Although the colony was retaken by the Portuguese in January 1654, when Lisbon exploited its English ally's war against the Dutch Republic (1652–4), Dutch possession of Brazil had its impact on Dutch art history as well as on the Netherlands' role in Atlantic history. It introduced new subjects and objects into Dutch art (now proudly exhibited, for example, in The Hague's Mauritshuis). The Dutch intermezzo in Brazil, however, had less pleasant consequences, too: it brought the WIC into active contact with the African slave trade. Before conquering Brazil, Dutchmen had made their appearance on Africa's west coast. Here they took Portuguese posts like Sao Jorge da Mina in 1596, and in 1612 established Fort Nassau as well as other forts on the Gold Coast. Yet in these early days Dutch trade was restricted to the exchange of European consumer items for African goods; it did not include the acquisition of slaves. Only the possession of a colony whose sugar economy was based on black slavery helped to destroy the few tender Dutch scruples against a trade that had not been mentioned in the charter of the WIC, but which would in years to come play an important role. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, the Dutch outdistanced their European rivals by conquering and establishing forts and trading posts on the West African coast.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> S. P. L'Honoré Naber and I. A. Wright (eds), *Piet Heyn en de zilvervloot, Bescheiden uit Nederlandsche en Spaansche archieven* (Utrecht, 1928); J. C. M. Warnsinck, *Drie zeventiende-eeuwse admirals: Piet Heyn, Witte de With, Jan Evertsen* (Amsterdam, 1943); Pieter Emmer *et al.* (eds), *Wirtschaft und Handel der Kolonialreiche* (Munich, 1988), 463–7.

<sup>39</sup> Heijer, *Geschiedenis*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> See Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990).



**Pillar 2: settlement – the establishment of more durable colonies**

Well before the WIC was founded, Dutch ships had made their way to the Americas, and Dutch capital had provided the means for other nations' enterprises. Funded by the VOC, the Englishman Henry Hudson had explored North America's east coast in 1609. During this expedition Hudson discovered what the VOC named Noord Rivier and which later was renamed the Hudson River. The WIC inherited the VOC's claim to the right of first discovery; in 1624 the company founded on the isle of Manhattan the nucleus of Nieuw Nederland, to be followed from 1634–6 by the foundation of Dutch settlements in the Caribbean (Sint Maarten 1630, Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, 1636). Other colonies, like New Sweden on the Delaware in 1655 or Surinam in South America, were conquered in 1667. Those territories changed proprietors quite frequently; they were taken and retaken until they were finally lost by decisions made back home. As an example, the most important Dutch stronghold on the North American continent, Nieuw Nederland, was lost to England in a surprise attack during peace-time in 1664, which was confirmed by a diplomatic settlement in 1667. In 1673, during the third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–4), the territory was retaken by a Dutch force, only to be lost for good in 1674 in the treaty of Westminster. Nieuw Nederland mutated into New York. This is not the place to describe Nieuw Nederland's history at length. Scholars have written extensively on this topic; the rich texture of its history continues to be enlarged by new and exciting evidence.<sup>41</sup> However, it should be mentioned that Nieuw Nederland from its beginning was planned as a permanent settlement based on European agriculture, manufacture, and the fur trade with Indian peoples. At first, the colonial economy was monopolized by the WIC; after much haggling, the WIC then had to give up its overall monopoly and open the fur trade to colonists; in addition, the company in 1639 adopted a new land policy. In 1647 Pieter Stuyvesant became governor not only of a Nieuw Nederland shaken by an Indian war but also of Curaçao in the West Indies. Underlying this development was the WIC's intention to copy VOC strategy by binding its American colonies together, connecting the entrepôt Curaçao with Spanish American resources on the one hand and with demands of the self-sustaining settler-colony in the North on the other. As official policy this co-operation failed, but in the 1670s it proved successful when organized by private entrepreneurs from New York.<sup>42</sup> While the first Dutch colony in

<sup>41</sup> See Oliver Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (Ithaca, 1986); Charles Gehring and W. A. Starna (eds), *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634–1635. The Journal of Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert* (2nd edn, Syracuse, 1991); V. C. Bachman, *Peltries or Plantations: The Economic Policies of the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland 1633–1639* (Baltimore, 1969); Jaap Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest: Nieuw-Nederland in de zeventiende eeuw* (Leiden, 1999), gives a broad overview of the most important literature regarding Nieuw Nederland.

<sup>42</sup> See Claudia Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten. Engländer und Niederländer im amerikanisch-atlantischen Raum 1648–1713* (Cologne, 1998), *passim*.

America was lost in the seventeenth century, other colonies like St Maarten, the ABC-isles (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao), and Surinam remained in Dutch possession until well into the twentieth century.

Notwithstanding the colonies' fate, white settlers who came with the WIC's encouragement and permission to the New World left significant traces. Although they did not arrive in great numbers – and in contrast to the VOC settlement-efforts they frequently did not come from the Netherlands at all but from France, Belgium, and Germany – many of them stayed and made their impact on colonial society. An interesting example is the German Jacob Leisler (1640–91), who in 1689 staged with the so-called 'Leisler's rebellion', the New York version of England's Glorious Revolution (1688–9). Leisler, a New York merchant and leader of the local militia, convinced a majority of the colony to take the side of the Dutch-born Protestant, William of Orange, who had come to the throne by parliament's grace, ousting the Catholic James II (r. 1685–9) and ruling jointly with James's daughter Mary.<sup>43</sup> The Dutch colonial societies in the Americas consisted not only of men, who stayed for a short time, but mostly of families, who were determined to stay for good. Due to Dutch tradition, many women soon pursued their own vocation in the Atlantic economic world; they traded, owned ships, and acted on their husbands' behalf when the latter made business trips to Europe or travelled to other colonies.<sup>44</sup> Nieuw Nederlanders were busy as planters, farmers, merchants, labourers, clergymen, and soldiers, often pursuing all these professions simultaneously. In contrast to the VOC, where more and more soldiers had to be employed in order to stave off increasing English and French inroads, the WIC after 1648 emphasized the civil aspect of colonizing, although Indian wars, European attacks, and invasion fears were recurrent features that had to be dealt with.

### Pillar 3: trade

Recent research describes three types of trade the WIC tried to control in the seventeenth century:<sup>45</sup> (i) the trade between the Netherlands and America; (ii) the triangular trade between the Netherlands, Africa, and America; and (iii) the intercolonial trade, uniting Dutch, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and English colonies in a close-knit network that was outside WIC's influence. Of special importance is the already mentioned slave

<sup>43</sup> Jacob Leisler now is the subject of an international research project. Three work-groups in Göttingen, New York, and Penn State University are currently collaborating on a multi-volume edition of Leisler's documents trying to reconstruct his Atlantic network. See David W. Voorhees, 'The "Fervent Zeale" of Jacob Leisler', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 51 (1994), 447–72; Claudia Schnurmann, 'Die Rekonstruktion eines atlantischen Netzwerkes – das Beispiel Jakob Leisler, 1690–1691. Ein Editionsprojekt', *Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte*, 2 (2002), 19–39.

<sup>44</sup> Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten, passim*.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk geweest*; Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*; Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden, 1998).

trade and its function in the relationship between the WIC, Curaçao, and Surinam.<sup>46</sup>

In 1674, the year Nieuw Nederland finally became New York, the WIC was re-established and began to adopt a new commercial and colonial strategy. Freed from the dangers stemming from English threats to its North American colony, the second WIC concentrated its efforts on those colonies it was left with. Of special importance became Curaçao, the hub of Dutch trade in the West Indies and an important bridgehead to Spanish America.<sup>47</sup> On a smaller scale, tiny Caribbean islands had strategic as well as commercial advantages, providing fish-exporters back home with salt or playing the part of a smuggler's eldorado.

Surinam, the sugar colony, had adopted the staple of Brazil. Taken from the English in 1667, this colony was owned by the Dutch province of Zeeland. Surinam experienced dire straits due to a lack of provisions, an inadequate animal labour force, and insufficient labourers desperately needed for the making of sugar. In the 1670s, several famines, natural catastrophes, and Indian wars ravaged the 1,000 settlers from the mother country and the British Isles; these ordeals widened the gap between the colonists' expectations and their diminishing respect for Zeeland's authority and efficiency.<sup>48</sup> In 1682 Zeeland had to give in; it sold the colony for 260,000 guilders to the WIC, which tried to make good for the loss of Brazil. Only one year later the WIC succumbed to its financial constraints. Unable to meet its obligations as sole proprietor of Surinam, it sought and found rich partners, like the city of Amsterdam and the important family of the van Sommelsdijck. In May 1683, the three founded the Societeit van Suriname.<sup>49</sup>

In dealing with both tropical colonies, Curaçao and Surinam, the company through the Societeit pursued different policies. Curaçao, the Dutch ticket to Spain's American riches, was granted more freedom and received more attention, soldiers and *predikanten* (reformed ministers). Surinam, on the other hand, was subjected to the darker aspects of the Societeit/WIC's mercantilist principles. The colony was forced to trade only with The Netherlands. Exportation of the country's colonial products, like refined sugar, raw sugar, molasses, and wood, was restricted to The Netherlands, while for the importation of food, household goods, luxuries, and especially black labour, the colony was expected to rely exclusively on the company's mediation – and with graceful acceptance of Dutch prices, although they could have been purchased much cheaper elsewhere in the West Indies.

<sup>46</sup> Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*, passim; Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*.

<sup>47</sup> See Klooster, *Illicit Riches*.

<sup>48</sup> Victor Enthoven, 'Suriname and Zeeland. Fifteen years of Dutch misery on the Wild Coast, 1667–1682', in John Everaert and J. M. Parmentier (eds), *International Conference on Shipping, Factories and Colonization* (Brussels, 1996), 250–65.

<sup>49</sup> Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*, passim; Gerard Willem van der Meiden, *Betwist Bestuur: Een Eeuw strijd om de macht in Suriname, 1651–1753* (Amsterdam, 1986).

In the seventeenth century, the WIC dominated the Atlantic slave trade; most of the kidnapped black Africans were sold via Curaçao to Spanish America; when legalized in 1662, this exchange increased in scale. The WIC again bought the *asiento*, the Spanish monopoly to supply Spanish America with black labour.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the WIC in 1674 changed its priorities, putting the slave trade first on the list of economic interests. This change of priorities was resented in Surinam; the colony's staple economy depended entirely on black slavery. When the newly founded Societeit van Suriname could not supply the necessary numbers of African slaves nor provide the colony with sufficient goods, more and more of Surinam's colonists – Dutch and English Christians, as well as Dutch and Sephardic Jews alike – turned to English colonies for help. They first approached Barbados, relying on familial, religious, and long-established connections; later, Surinam planters turned to North American colonies like New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania, creating their own intercolonial network while cheerfully ignoring the companies' mercantilist charters and Dutch demands.<sup>51</sup>

In the early eighteenth century two events finally lightened Surinam's burden. The WIC lost its role as the leading slave-trader in the Atlantic region to Great Britain and the Societeit gave in to some of Surinam's demands for a more liberal trade policy. As a result of intricate political dealings in 1713, Great Britain was granted the *asiento* in the treaty of Utrecht; nine years earlier, in 1704, the Societeit van Suriname had to legalize the colony's intercolonial trade on Surinam's terms.<sup>52</sup>

#### SUMMARY

Horst Lademacher summarizes a commonly held opinion when he calls the WIC the inferior sister of the VOC, because the WIC had been, he claims, far behind the VOC's economic and political achievements.<sup>53</sup> This statement simplifies history because it does not clarify the criteria on which the interpretation is based. In this paper I have argued that various facts, events, and structures have to be considered before one describes one company as a success story and the other as a failure. The figures for short-term profit, national income, imports, and exports are important, as are the numbers for ships and capital, and, last but not least, the numbers of officials, settlers, and goods involved in the activities of these companies.<sup>54</sup> But other questions are even more significant: what kind of role did territorial property play, and

<sup>50</sup> Postma, *Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade*, 33ff.

<sup>51</sup> Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*, *passim*.

<sup>52</sup> Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*, 307–9.

<sup>53</sup> Horst Lademacher, *Geschichte der Niederlande: Politik, Verfassung, Wirtschaft* (Darmstadt, 1983), 147; Lademacher, 'Ost- und Westindische Kompanie', 58ff.

<sup>54</sup> Many figures are given in Rothermund, *Europa und Asien*, *passim*.

how important was the longevity of colonies or the impact of colonial products on Dutch culture and everyday life? What was more significant, short-lived successes or policies that shaped developments for long periods? Taking all this in account, it is not appropriate to put some aspects to the fore while ignoring or neglecting others simply because they do not fit the prevailing image.

I have taken another approach in this paper. Without doubt VOC and WIC were the brain-children of one culture dominated by merchants, their capital, and their far-reaching commercial interests. Their origins, organization, and institutional framework followed one concept; they were chartered to function in comparable contexts. In the beginning, the conditions were quite similar, having been generated from commercial enterprise and anti-Spanish policy. But these similarities vanish as soon as the companies are viewed in the context of the different overseas territories assigned to them. For there, conditions varied dramatically, not only in relation to forms of settlement, but also trading possibilities and markets, as well as labour supply.

The WIC representatives were initially confronted with indigenous people only, but in the end had to bend to European rivals, too. While both companies in different fields had impressive (if sometimes short-lived) successes and provided the young Dutch Republic with the remarkable status of a commercial power that practised its own early modern version of globalization, in building up a permanent and lasting presence they had to act and react to rapidly changing local and regional conditions. The Heren and the governors-general of both companies opted for different approaches. Their scale ranged from tolerance to violence, and from co-operation to suppression and inflexibility. There existed not one VOC nor one WIC operating around the world and putting the Dutch Republic in the core of the early modern globalization process, but many VOCs and WICs adopting different attitudes, proceedings, and actions that paid tribute to Dutch individualism and pluralism.

Georg-August University Göttingen