

Seeing women in the early English and Dutch East India Companies^{*}

Mark R. F. Williams 

Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Williamsm64@cardiff.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on women's presence (and absence) in the archives and histories of the English and Dutch East India Companies in the early modern period. By assessing how women have been seen in and across surviving archival forms – institutional records, legal documents, personal accounts – I reveal how women have been obscured within or marginalized from such 'Company histories'. Two first-hand accounts written by women in the period – Johanna Maria van Riebeeck and Judith Weston – are analysed in depth. Grounded in the study of early modern life writing and mobility, my analysis foregrounds the preoccupations and experiences of these women as they moved across company spaces.

Making bread aboard ship was evidently easier than Johanna Maria van Riebeeck had initially expected, especially when one had access to 'hollan[d]se boter' (Holland butter). Left to rise, and then baked, 'heel goet broot' (very good bread) was indeed possible for travellers even across great distances.¹ Departing her native Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in 1709 for the Dutch 'fatherland' she had only heard about but never seen, Van Riebeeck could write back to her parents there of such daily comforts while simultaneously exhibiting a clear sense of curiosity about the various vegetables, herbs, fish and meat that sustained her and her companions.² Born in 1679, Van Riebeeck spent her life deeply embedded in the world of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, hereafter V.O.C.): granddaughter of Jan van Riebeeck (founder of the Cape Colony in 1652) and daughter of Abraham van Riebeeck (director general and then governor general of the East Indies), she had married Gerrit de Heere in 1695 and moved to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) when he was appointed its governor. The child to which she gave birth there died soon after. Her departure from Batavia in 1709 was with her next husband, Joan van Hoorn, who had been governor general of the East Indies from 1704 and was twenty-five years her elder. Their only child was stillborn. Van Hoorn had left the Netherlands at age nine; Van Riebeeck's voyage there in 1709 was at his insistence.³

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¹ Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 3v.

² The *Sandenburgh* or *Sandenburgh*, aboard which Johanna Maria travelled, was described in the ship's journal as travelling from 'Batavia naar 't lieve vaderland' (Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-10, fol. 9r: 'Dagregister gehouden op de reis van Batavia naar patria door den oud-gouverneur-generaal Joan van Hoorn met het schip Sandenburgh 1709 oktober 30–1711 juli 16').

³ B. Brommer, *To My Dear Pieter nelletje: Grandfather and Granddaughter in VOC Time, 1710–1720* (Leiden, 2015).

It was this voyage – and, I argue, these movements and displacements – that brought about the writing of Van Riebeeck's *mondprovisieboek*: an account of the food that she and her fellow travellers 'found best on the journey'.⁴ In these pages vivid descriptions of the dishes Van Riebeeck ate suggest familiar smells and preparations but also hint at unfamiliar flavours on an unaccustomed palate. Sea rosemary ('rosemarijn de maar'), when the young blades were plucked, rinsed and dried, could be viably used as seasoning; the beans that Van Riebeeck had taken from her family garden before departing had been dried in the wind and, when cooked, stuffed with dried savoury herbs, proved delicious and tender.⁵ The sea upon which Van Riebeeck travelled also offered Makassar sardines and kingfish, which, especially when roasted on a *piesang* (Malay bananas) blade and eaten with lemon and rice, were 'heel smakelijck' (very tasty); cabbage from Western Cape of South Africa, where the ship took on refreshments in January 1710 also impressed.⁶ Food, the body and the experience of travel itself merged in these pages in ways that made Van Riebeeck's trip comprehensible to her family back in Batavia. The mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar sustained, simultaneously, her body and her mind, but also afforded Van Riebeeck a means by which her family could taste, smell and see the world that unfolded in front of her as she traversed it. The world her *mondprovisieboek* permits us to see is visible to us because Van Riebeeck wanted it to be so for her parents.

The visibility of Van Riebeeck's life within and across the V.O.C. world is, of course, the exception and not the rule: while the lives of some women in the world of these trading companies remain perceptible to historians, countless others have slipped between the endless pages of those companies' archives. More than twenty years later, in 1731, Judith Fullerton – who had taken her husband's last name in India, having arrived there as Judith Weston – travelled a very similar route to Van Riebeeck from the Indian Ocean back to her native England. Rounding the Cape of Good Hope, her ship stopped at St. Helena in the southern Atlantic – an East India Company (E.I.C.) port and colony – before undertaking the final leg homewards. When we compare it to the intimate details provided by the *mondprovisieboek* of Van Riebeeck, however, we know remarkably little of Judith Fullerton's homeward voyage; what can be pieced together comes to us through the letter book of her husband and English E.I.C. merchant, John Fullerton, whose own voyage back to England followed not long after hers. John's arrival in St. Helena on 24 May 1732 prompted letters to Judith in England, initially expressing his 'disappointment of not hearing from you out of England' and wondering whether her silence was owing to 'your being unacquainted with the method of getting a L[ette]r conveyed hither' or her suspicion that he would stay in India longer to offset his 'small fortune'.⁷ Even across such distances, affection and a sense of humour are noticeable in John's letter ahead to England: noting that 'could I have lived longer without you I certainly should not come home to London in so low circumstances', John acknowledged that he had left his own brother in Madras in similarly impoverished circumstances, and joked that Judith, on seeing 'this Troublesome husband ... [would] have a good mind to send him a packing again'.⁸ When John was finally shown a letter that Judith had 'left here last year' with a Mrs. King in St. Helena, however, we learn an essential detail of Judith's voyage: she was pregnant, and had been 'brott to bed' of a boy three weeks before arriving in London. Three letters dispatched to Judith from St. Helena reiterated John's relief at the boy's birth but repeated a tone of disappointment. John wished 'much Joy of your Boy, but you well know that I wanted a girl', adding that 'I want a little Miss Judie'.⁹ In the years that followed, John's outbound letters from London to his acquaintances within and beyond the E.I.C. – including his brother in India – carried news of a baby girl miscarried in early 1733, and another boy, christened Henry William but dead at one month

⁴ 'Van de proevise daer wij ons best bij hebben bevonden, op de Rijse' (Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 1r).

⁵ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fols. 2v, 4v.

⁶ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fols. 2v, 3v; and 'Brief no 5: Johanna Maria aan Haar Ou[d]ers', 13 Jan. 1710, 'In[t]t Casteel de Caab de Goede Hoop', in *Brieven van Johanna Maria van Riebeeck en Ander Riebeeckiana*, ed. D. B. Bosman (Amsterdam, 1952; hereafter *Brieven*), pp. 68–70.

⁷ British Library, MS. Eur D602, John Fullerton Papers (hereafter 'Fullerton Papers'), fol. 1, John Fullerton, 'To Mrs J.F., M.D.L.', 'St Helena', 26 May 1732.

⁸ Fullerton Papers, Fullerton, 'To Mrs J.F., M.D.L.'.

⁹ Fullerton Papers, fol. 1, Fullerton to 'M[y].D[ear].J[udith].'; 26 May 1732; fol. 2, Fullerton to 'M[y].D[ear].L[ife].'; 26 May 1732.

old.¹⁰ John rushed to the Downs to get a letter to his brother in India notifying him of Henry William's death; he had not yet told Judith, who had been removed to the country to recover from the birth.¹¹

In themselves, the lives of these two women pose important questions about the presence and experiences of women in the histories of the Dutch and English East India Companies and the wider 'globalizing' world in which they operated. Common stories populate these glimpses of Van Riebeeck and Fullerton's lives; stories of marriage, birth, death, companionship and familial strain likely to be unsurprising to those familiar with the lives of early modern women.¹² Such experiences from the vantage point of women themselves, however, are strikingly absent from the early history of both the English and Dutch East India Companies. This lies in stark contrast with the wider early modern trend of women writing first-hand accounts of their travels in European and Atlantic contexts, forming and consolidating the 'intimate networks' that increasingly spanned these global spaces.¹³ There are institutional – and especially archival – reasons for such absences. Fundamental to this argument is the way in which both companies were – and continue to be in much historical writing – gendered. Both companies were not only predominately male in their construction, but also have tended to be seen by historians, economists, political theorists and even businesspeople as essentially male in composition throughout the early modern period.¹⁴ Much of this stems from institutional priorities and their reproduction in company archives: as I will show, women's presence in company records is most often a reflection of wider economic, social, moral and racial anxieties, and not as autonomous voices. As Philip Stern and Ann Laura Stoler have both argued, these early colonial archives offer vital glimpses – through their 'silences, dislocations, and dangers' – into how these companies wrote themselves into being, but they have also made the task of finding dissenting voices one of looking for unexpected intrusions, ambiguities and survivals.¹⁵ In circumstances such as these, simply 'seeing' women in both archival and historiographical terms not only challenges the root assumptions about the histories of these companies but also re-vision the spaces they created and the stories told about them by looking beyond the dominant male narrative. In doing so, I argue for the need to simultaneously see the essential (and essentializing) role the company's own writings and its later histories have played in narrowly defining women's place within its operations, while also challenging the role historians have played in perpetuating these narratives.

If women's presence in company spaces has been seen in such limited terms, then, it becomes all the more essential to ask what they themselves saw: what they experienced, how they wrote about it and the ways in which such acts of seeing challenge these aforementioned dominant narratives. There are depressingly few first-hand accounts by women describing the world in which these companies and those within them moved. For all the efflorescence of the Dutch 'Golden Age', for instance, it has been estimated that less than 10 per cent of the approximately 1,000 ego-documents written in those 300 years were by a woman; of those, scarce few are by women travelling beyond the Dutch Republic, let alone to or from the East Indies.¹⁶

¹⁰ Fullerton Papers, fol. 11, 'To Mr Tho[ma]s Fryor, Aprill 4 1733'; fol. 25, 'To Mr Wm Weston, London March 23 1733/4'.

¹¹ For recent discussion of intimacy and correspondence in early modern letter writing, see R. Morieux, 'Lettres perdues: communautés épistolaires, guerres et liens familiaux dans le monde maritime atlantique due XVIII^e siècle', *Annales HSS*, lxxviii (2023), 333–73.

¹² See, e.g., S. D. Amussen and A. M. Poska, 'Shifting the frame: trans-imperial approaches to gender in the Atlantic World', *Early Modern Women*, ix (2014), 3–24; M. Finn, 'The female world of love & empire: women, family & East India Company politics at the end of the eighteenth century', *Gender & History*, xxxi (2019), 7–24; D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006); S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2010); and K. Smith, 'Imperial families: women writing home in Georgian Britain', *Women's History Review*, xxiv (2015), 843–60.

¹³ S. S. Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America* (Williamsburg, Va., 2014).

¹⁴ A pattern noted in P. J. Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: comparisons and connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, lxxiii (2006), 693–712; and D. Veevers, 'Gender', in *The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History, c. 1550–1750*, ed. W. Pettigrew and D. Veevers (Leiden, 2019), pp. 187–210, at p. 192. While, as Deborah Hamer points out, scholarship on the V.O.C. has been more expansive in thinking about the role of marriage and sexual relationships in Batavia, women do not figure prominently in wider scholarship about the V.O.C. See D. Hamer, 'Marriage and the construction of colonial order: jurisdiction, gender and class in seventeenth-century Dutch Batavia', *Gender & History*, xxix (2017), 622–40.

¹⁵ P. J. Stern, 'Seeing (and not seeing) like a company-state: hybridity, heterotopia, historiography', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, xvii (2017), 105–20, at pp. 110–14; and A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009). Also see R. Raben, 'Ethnic disorder in VOC Asia: a plea for eccentric reading', *Low Countries Historical Review*, cxxxiv (2019), 115–28.

¹⁶ M. Barend-van Haften, *Op reis met de VOC. De openhartige dagboeken van de zusters Lammens en Swellengrebel* (Zutphen, 1996), p. 12.

English-language records are even more sparse, especially in the early period of the E.I.C. Carl Thompson's recent edition of women's travel writings in India, for instance, begins in 1777 with the publication of Jemima Kindersley's account of her 1764 voyage.¹⁷ Such accounts often survive only because they were published; they were tailored to appeal to a growing reading audience and very often present imagined geographies as part of memoirs or autobiography. They belong to a genre of women's travel writing made popular by the likes of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* in the latter half of the eighteenth century, recently studied by Katrina O'Loughlin.¹⁸ They neglect, however, more than a century of English and Dutch women's presence in these geographies when such genres of writing are largely absent. Consequently, we gain little understanding of not only the experiences of these women, but also what their presence did to shape or challenge the spaces across which they were moving: they instead construct 'the East' from home, recreating much of the gendered dimension of it once they have left it behind. Such published 'life writing' tended to follow on a richer and more pervasive manuscript writing culture among elite women, which texts – like Judith Weston's writings – were never published.¹⁹ While many comparable texts in early modern Europe saw women reflecting in a domestic context on the experience of childbirth, marriage and faith (to name only a few dominant themes), the writing and construction of selfhood and the process of reflection did not stop simply because the women in question were on the move. Indeed, as Zoë Kinsley has shown through analysis of women's writings from the 'Grand Tour', the experience of travelling if anything made 'the self' more challenging to see.²⁰ This, too, tempered what they 'saw', and what historians have subsequently seen in the experiences of such women: stabilized narratives driven by the priorities of the print market, often obscuring more immediate responses to such travels, but also modes of writing that are seldom read within their complex historical contexts. Attention to what was written on the move – rather than in the comforts of home and safe retrospect – helps to better understand the more immediate experience of dislocation and adjustment while also affording a more transparent account of company life for the women within it.

This article, then, places the two women with whom it began – Johanna Maria van Riebeeck and Judith Weston (later Fullerton) – at the centre of these tensions between how these companies saw women and what the women themselves then saw. It locates them outside the archival lens created by companies that primarily understood women as a medium of domestic comfort, reproductive labour or moral threat and instead looks to see them through their own words. Johanna Maria van Riebeeck's *mondprovisieboek* will remain at the centre of this analysis; to this I will add an account written by Judith Weston on her outbound voyage to India, when she was not married and independently narrating her experiences. The latter of these is presented in deliberate contrast to the Judith Fullerton we have already encountered returning to England. I employ these accounts in order to see more fully the company worlds that they themselves observed and described, contextualizing them with the records kept by those institutions and their contemporary agents. I conclude by giving closer attention to the question of what these women did not, themselves, 'see' in the course of writing these accounts. While working with the primary category of gender in thinking about the presence/absence of these women within and beyond the company record, I also ask where and for whom that visual horizon ended with respect to notions of social status and, in particular, emergent ideas of race. In so doing, I argue for the pressing need within company historiographies to more actively incorporate women into what is 'seen' in these expanding worlds, but also to see them in their own terms as articulators and beneficiaries of power and difference.

¹⁷ *Women's Travel Writings in India, 1777–1854*, i, ed. C. Thompson (Abingdon, 2020).

¹⁸ K. O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2018).

¹⁹ M. J. M. Ezell, 'Domestic papers: manuscript culture and early modern women's life writing', in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. M. M. Dowd and J. A. Eckerle (London, 2007), pp. 33–48, at pp. 34–5.

²⁰ Z. Kinsley, 'Narrating travel, narrating the self: considering women's travel writing as life writing', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xc (2014), 67–84.

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Two factors have aligned to largely – though not wholly – marginalize women from the wider histories of these companies: first, the dominant narratives of expanding global trade, encounter and colonial expansion; and, secondly, the only recent historiographical shift towards comprehending women as early colonial agents. In the case of the E.I.C., studies of the Company have tended to revise ‘trade to empire’ narratives or – more recently – the E.I.C. as a medium for shaping the terms of cultural encounter. When women (either European or Asian) are incorporated into such narratives, their place is often circumscribed within narrow definitions as intermediaries, nodes in familial networks or as early orientalist tropes. Studies by Betty Joseph, Amrita Sen, Durba Ghosh and others have brought gender and women’s history firmly into considerations of E.I.C. activity, though primarily within the scope of literary study.²¹ Studies by Aske Lauren Brock, Misha Ewen and Amy Froide have also helped to illuminate women’s relationship with the E.I.C. as litigants, antagonists and investors.²² There is a notable contrast here with the rich studies of women in the British Atlantic world, where the more established narrative is one of settler colonialism and the place of women in transplanting, expanding and reinforcing European domination.²³ These varied narratives also help to explain in part why the Dutch historiography is comparatively stronger when it comes to acknowledgement of the place of women in these early stages of the V.O.C.’s operations: early work on colonial Batavia – for instance, Leonard Blussé’s study of Cornelia Nijenroode – highlighted social control and marital conflict in Batavia as part of a wider commentary on an emerging social elite.²⁴ Recent scholarship by Danielle van de Heuvel on the wives of V.O.C. merchants, Eric Jones’s study of the ‘female underclass’ of Dutch Batavia, and Deborah Hamer’s work on the ways in which marriage delineated ‘intergroup relations’ in colonial Batavia have helped to expand these narratives while still centring the emerging categories of race, gender and social hierarchy that defined the Dutch colonial enterprise there.²⁵ Nevertheless – or perhaps because of these dominant narratives – no comparative work has been done on the place of women in and across these institutions, and their geographies remain fixed on the central locations in the British and Dutch colonial stories: India and Batavia.

These preoccupations among historians are in no small part reflective of these companies’ own ways of ‘seeing’ women, and their subsequent presence or absence in company archives. Two trends have shaped first *whether* and then *how* women appear in the archives of the E.I.C. and V.O.C. The first is that both companies regulated the travel of women through and within their respective ports, fortifications, colonial settlements and ships. Much of the documentation of women’s experiences that survives in their archives therefore pertains to controlling the movement of women through what were understood to be – and enforced as – essentially male spaces. For instance, Danielle van den Heuvel has made an extensive study of the *maandbrieven* (letters attesting to their character and ensuring payment for the costs of the voyage) used by the V.O.C. to document the passage of wives and relatives into the East Indies.²⁶ Such work again offers fleeting glimpses of these women’s engagement with life aboard V.O.C. ships and abroad, but again largely through the records of observing male writers: women like Regina Bois, who travelled with her husband, Johannes Linnesmit – a cook’s mate

²¹ B. Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago, 2004); D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006); Sen, ‘Sailing to India: women, travel, and crisis in the seventeenth century’, in *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World*, ed. P. Akhimié and B. Andrea (Lincoln, Neb., 2019), pp. 64–80.

²² A. L. Brock and M. Ewen, ‘Women’s public lives: navigating the East India Company, parliament, and courts in early modern England’, *Gender & History*, xxxiii (2021), 3–23; and A. Froide, *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors During Britain’s Financial Revolution, 1690–1750* (Oxford, 2016).

²³ See, e.g., M. Ewen, ‘Capital and kin: English women’s intimate networks and property in Barbados’, *Itinerario*, xlvii (2022), 325–32; M. Ewen, *The Virginia Venture: American Colonization and English Society, 1580–1660* (Philadelphia, 2022); *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800*, ed. D. Catterall and J. Campbell, (Leiden, 2016); M. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016); *Women and Religion in the Atlantic Age, 1550–1900*, ed. E. Clark and M. Laven (New York, 2016); and Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*.

²⁴ L. Blussé, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht, 1986).

²⁵ D. van den Heuvel, ‘Bij uijtlandigheid van haar man’. *Echtgenotes van VOC-zeelieden, aangemonsterd voor de kamer Enkhuizen (1700–1750)* (Amsterdam, 2005); E. Jones, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines: a History of the Female Underclass in Dutch Asia* (De Kalb, Ill., 2010); and Hamer, ‘Construction of colonial order’.

²⁶ Van den Heuvel, *Echtgenotes*, p. 23.

(‘Coksmaat’) aboard the *Lagepolder* from Enkhuizen in 1735 – are attested to only insofar as their burden to the company was eased through the couple’s financial guarantees.²⁷

Secondly, at an institutional level, much of the V.O.C.’s surviving archive up to the mid eighteenth century is concerned with women primarily in their perceived capacity to either stabilize or disrupt the terms of trade and colonial control. The *compagniedochters* of the V.O.C. – the ‘Company Daughters’ – have received the most attention. Begun in 1622, this plan to subsidize the travel of single women to V.O.C. territories in exchange for their settlement there lasted only ten years, but anticipated later European schemes such as the *filles du roi* of late seventeenth-century New France.²⁸ Primarily illiterate women of lower social status, such groups again afford very little by way of access to the everyday experience of life in the V.O.C. beyond the associative connections of marriage, ship journals and burials. Even the names of these women are hard to find. In 1635 the arch-colonialist governor general of Batavia, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, acknowledged that only by permitting intercultural marriage could the V.O.C. retain a foothold in Batavia. This, however, followed on and was an attempt to respond to the perceived dearth of (free, white, European) women in Batavia: in 1632 women comprised only 22 per cent of the free population there, with extramarital sex, prostitution and rape a commonplace across categories of culture, social status and slavery.²⁹ While this shift permitted an unusually powerful group of *mestiza*³⁰ women to influence in the V.O.C. world, their lives, too, are usually only fleetingly documented in surviving records, consigned to the reified categories of race and social status created and perpetuated by their colonial observers.³¹

Similar trends are apparent in the E.I.C.’s records: women appear – but rarely speak – primarily when material concerns and the control of space attracted the company’s attention. Early descriptions of misdemeanours in the company’s court books, for instance, provide references to women as little more than a sinful distraction from the continuation of trade. In December 1624 one Captain Greene was brought before the E.I.C. court because he

kepte 2 Portugall women ... in his Cabbin a yeare together [*sic*] At Mozambique hee refused 600: for theire ransome, gave them costly apparell and made more provision for them then the shippes companie ... drinkeing immoderately and lost much money at dice.³²

Marrying across cultural boundaries continued to be a subject of concern for the E.I.C. throughout the century. When Major William Puckle inspected the E.I.C. fort at Machilipatnam in 1675 as part of widespread company reform, women again embodied temptation across religious and cultural boundaries to the detriment of profitable trade:

One Hull came forth Smith or Armorer & so served in ye Fort ... [H]e pore man marryed a Portugall woman yt proved unfaithfull to his bed & falling out wth her on that occasion she sought to be divorced from him, not being able to bear ye reproach & affronts &c left ye Fort & his wife at Madrass³³

Women in such instances – listed only as ‘Portugall women’ – appear only as fragmentary traces in the company archive: nameless, with only the associative qualities needed in the record to complete the narrative around the man at the actual centre of controversy. As Amrita Sen and Betty Joseph have shown in greater detail, such early constructions of masculine company space rested on the supposed absence of English women within its factories and the construction of non-English women

²⁷ Van den Heuvel, *Echtgenotes*, p. 23.

²⁸ Most recently M. Ketelaars, *Compagnies dochters. Vrouwen en de VOC (1602–1795)* (Amsterdam, 2014). For *filles du roi*, see M. A. Zug, *Buying a Bride: an Engaging History of Mail-Order Matches* (New York, 2020), ch. 2.

²⁹ U. Bosma and R. Raben, *Being ‘Dutch’ in the Indies: a History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920* (Singapore, 2008), esp. ch. 1.

³⁰ I employ the term *mestiza* here to refer specifically to women understood to have been of ‘mixed race’ origins. I acknowledge that the term *mestizo/a*, however, has much wider connotations both historically and currently, which cannot be addressed here.

³¹ Bosma and Raben, *Being ‘Dutch’ in the Indies*, ch. 1; see also Hamer, ‘Construction of colonial order’, pp. 629–31, for the wider narrative of the ‘Company Daughters’ and context.

³² Brit. Libr., IOR/H/29, Extracts from E.I.C. court books concerning misdemeanours.

³³ Brit. Libr., IOR/G/26/12.

(and often men by association) as essentially antithetical to the profitable continuation of trade.³⁴ As with the V.O.C., many of these women became important figures able, as Sen has argued, to 'push the boundaries ... of domestic life and global trade'; however, their presence in company archives is at times limited to their narrative utility as temptresses, adulterers or even carriers of disease.³⁵

Rare instances where petitions, wills and other legal documents survive in the E.I.C.'s records provide a glimpse into how women could engage with, shape and survive in the company's shadow. We know, for instance, that women regularly petitioned the committee for shipping in this period; however, these petitions were destroyed by the company itself in the mid nineteenth century as part of a wider effort to parse what was thought useful to the E.I.C.'s shifting legal and imperial status from superfluous (and potentially inconvenient) records. Indeed, as Antonia Moon has suggested, it was only through the intervention of other tea merchants voicing concern over the historical value of some company records that saved 'cash books, customs accounts, invoices' and other materials.³⁶ With regard to the aforementioned petitions by women, these institutionally driven purges have left only scattered minutes referencing their receipt, and for only two years in the seventeenth century (along with thirty-two years of such documentation for the early nineteenth century).³⁷ In this sense, we must also acknowledge that institutional 're-vision' frames what historians can and cannot see in such archives: not only what these companies recorded 'in the moment' but what was later redacted, rerecorded or destroyed in the articulating of new institutional visions.³⁸ But even these few surviving examples confirm the presence of women at the periphery of the company's gaze:

28 August 1685 At a Committee for Shipping – It is ordered that Anna Peddy Jane Davis and Darcey Johnson have liberty to goe to their Husbands paying their Passages. And that Thomas Lewes Acquaint them that Children dye fast in those long Voyages.

11 October 1686 ... Upon reading the petition of Ann Plasted wherein she begs two months pay for Ffrancis Chaire her servt's care in helping to save the Compa[ny]'s goods, when shp Phoenix was lost at Scilley he being carpenters mate at 50s p mensem. Wee have made Inquiry into the matter of fact and find that 40 was given to her as to others in the like case, she being very poor and an object of charity. Are of Opinion that fforty shillings more may be given her out of the Poor Box.

3 November 1686 ... That a Report be drawn to the Court, that Bridget Tutchin, Widdow, whose husband was Minister at Ffort St George and dyed there, have a pention of 2s: 6d p week allowed her out of the Almshouse Stock she being very Poore and of sober life & conversation³⁹

The destruction of these petitions, combined with the subsequent disappearance of these women from the company's institutional concern, leaves many of their stories lost to historians. The committee's notes hint at the demands placed upon these women through intimate connections with the company, echoing the V.O.C. wives mentioned above in their suffering of distance, loss and poverty. Petitions by women such as Anna Peddy, Jane Davis and Darcey Johnson – sparingly noted, resolved and appended with the morbid note of maternal responsibility that they should be warned 'children dye fast in those long voyages' – nevertheless suggest co-ordinated efforts by women to respond to such demands and create spaces for themselves within or around company operations. Only in rare cases do these petitions – and the networks to which they can yet attest – help to reveal a fuller life for many of these women beyond the E.I.C.'s glimpses.⁴⁰ These references do, however, emphasize two key themes in determining whether women warranted the E.I.C.'s attention: their familial, and

³⁴ A. Sen, 'Travelling companions: women, trade and the early East India Company', *Genre*, xlviii (2015), 193–214, at p. 193; and Joseph, *Reading the East India Company*, pp. 4–5.

³⁵ Sen, 'Traveling companions', pp. 210–11.

³⁶ A. Moon, 'Destroying records, keeping records: some practices at the East India Company and at the India Office', *Archives: the Journal of the British Records Association*, xxxiii (2008), 110–21, at pp. 113–17.

³⁷ I am grateful to Dr. Margaret Makepeace, lead curator of the East India Company Records, for this information.

³⁸ I am thankful to John Gallagher for making this point.

³⁹ Brit. Libr., IOR/L/MAR/C/27A.

⁴⁰ Rare examples Martha Parker and Mary Vincent have been highlighted in A. Laursen Brock, 'Martha Parker's trials: women's networks in the East India Company trade', *Journal of Women's History*, xxxv (2023), 30–50.

especially childbearing, role as the company's presence solidified around the Indian Ocean world; and, not coincidentally, their mortality.

Cycles of life and death within the E.I.C.'s operations provided one of the few reasons for it to document the existence of women in its territories. As Durba Ghosh has recently reiterated for later periods of British colonialism in India, 'Death and marriage were two of the few occasions when women ... appear in the colonial archives of India.'⁴¹ The same can be said of earlier periods. Early but scattered lists of those 'English Men and Women' in company spaces confirm the presence not only of women there but also of the wider family unit and the constant spectre of death. A list from 30 August 1675 in Bombay (now Mumbai) records twenty-six English women along with seven daughters on the island; but subsequently the death of sixteen women (and nine children, three of them girls) between November 1672 and August 1675.⁴² Four years later, a list made for Bombay notes thirty-six women on the island, with five women having died in the previous year (as well as eight children, two of them girls).⁴³ Even with such lists, however, the company's attention focuses primarily on the continuance of the family unit and the stability of English presence: one list (likewise made in 1675) of the orphans known to the company in Bombay reveals that, while young girls like Hannah Hawkins might find themselves alone and in need of the company's support, only the cause of their father's death is noted within 'ye Compa:s service.' The fate of her mother is not even discussed. Such notable absences might even suggest illegitimate birth or that mothers like Hannah's were native and her children a source of shame.⁴⁴ The death of English women abroad only fleetingly catches the company's attention in the course of documenting their material wealth and its distribution. For instance, an account of the sale of one Elizabeth Arwaker's goods in front of the deputy governor and council of Bombay in 1701 provides tantalizing glimpses into Arwaker's life there. Possibly the widow of a pepper trader named James Arwaker, she left '6 china boules', '2 old landskipps' (landscape paintings), 'a box of pipes', 'Gownes, petticoats & fanns', various containers of arrack (a distilled alcoholic drink from the subcontinent), and 'a slave man and woman' and 'a slave boy'. Her combined property was sold at a sum of £1,904, with a total balance of £1,936 paid into the company's coffers. Her funeral charges are noted as costing £46.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, whereas dozens of such accounts and wills survive for the E.I.C.'s male servants through to the eighteenth century, there simply are not enough relating to (and certainly not written by) women to develop a sense of comparison or trends.⁴⁶

In terms of what these records allow us to 'see' of women's lives, these glimpses already tell us a great deal about women's presence in company histories. First among these is the gendered economy of the companies themselves, which valued (or devalued) women within a narrow preoccupation with trade and control, primarily in their embodied capacity to ensure profitable presence through marriage and reproduction. Here – at least in the company's own records – we can already see the preoccupations that would later drive what Margot Finn has termed the 'booming British birthscape' of later colonial India.⁴⁷ When women were otherwise 'seen' and become visible in the historical record, it was most often as a consequence of their assumed capacity to disrupt and destabilize profitable trade and social hierarchies through – primarily – assumed sexual licentiousness. As Kathleen Wilson has argued, this reflects a wider association between governmental incompetence, unreliable patriarchal control and indigenous reclamation, with women's names and actions primarily registering in company sight in the course of rectifying such 'problems'.⁴⁸ The fundamental tension remained that women were simultaneously understood to be necessary on grounds of sex, family stability and sociability, but also as a problem to be managed, often to the detriment of the historical record. Third, and as a

⁴¹ D. Ghosh, 'Revisiting sex and the family', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xxxii (2023), 79–85, at p. 80.

⁴² Brit. Libr., IOR E/3/36, fols. 46r–48v.

⁴³ Brit. Libr., IOR E/3/40, fols. 205r–206r.

⁴⁴ Brit. Libr., IOR E/3/40, fol. 209r; and Ghosh, 'Revisiting sex and the family', p. 83.

⁴⁵ Brit. Libr., IOR G/40/23, fols. 46r–48v.

⁴⁶ See Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, esp. ch. 4, which deals with wills and wider legal documents in the reconstruction of women's lives in later colonial archives.

⁴⁷ M. Finn, *Imperial Family Formations: Dynastic Strategies and Colonial Power in British India, c.1757–1857*, ch. 2 (forthcoming). I am grateful to Margot Finn for permitting me to read early drafts of her book. Finn also uses the term *birthscape* in 'Female world of love & empire'.

⁴⁸ K. Wilson, 'Rethinking the colonial state: family, gender, and governmentality in eighteenth-century British frontiers', *American Historical Review*, cxvi (2011), 1294–322.

consequence of this archival construction, there remains a historiographical assumption that women, where present in these spaces, largely did not influence or inform the (initially) emergent global economies or cross-cultural encounter and globalization that dominate much of the current historical narrative. Despite this, as my brief surveys have already suggested, alternative narratives might be read even within company archives: of shared female space (especially while travelling); of embodied experience beyond the reproductive, especially through family intimacy; and of material gain and the acquisition (or loss) of power. The question therefore remains: what changes when, instead of seeing through the eyes of these companies, we are permitted to see what the women themselves saw?

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Johanna Maria van Riebeeck's *mondprovisieboek* is one of only a few surviving accounts written by women in the course of the V.O.C.'s existence to reflect substantively about their experiences, whether of travelling on a V.O.C. ship or of visiting V.O.C. possessions in Batavia or the Cape Colony in present-day South Africa. There are relatively few other substantive first-hand accounts by Dutch women during this period making similar voyages. For instance, *dagboeken* or journals written by the sisters Maria and Johanna Lammens (1736) and Helena Johanna and Johanna Engela Swellengrebel (1751) have survived from later decades detailing their authors' journeys, respectively, outbound to Batavia and returning from the Cape of Good Hope to the Dutch Republic.⁴⁹ These are, in contrast to Van Riebeeck's archival traces, more directly concerned with life aboard ship. They describe, for instance, the regular drinking of coffee each morning, the social calls made to other women aboard ship, books read, and times of waking and to bed. In such sources can be seen echoes of some of Van Riebeeck's concerns in her aforementioned *mondprovisieboek*. The Lammens sisters were also intrigued by the natural world that surrounded them aboard ship, often as it manifested in the daily routines of sociability and sustenance: in May 1736 they were impressed by a 'halve coorde' (a tuna – the Dutch term a corruption of the Portuguese *albacora*) more than one and a half metres in length, which, when cut open, was revealed to contain 'veel visjes' (many little fish), one of which they then preserved in brandy ('brandewijn').⁵⁰ The Swellengrebel sisters in 1751 aboard the *Liefde* were similarly concerned with documenting a combination of the quotidian and the embodied experience of travel. Seasickness characterized the earliest days of the trip from 6 March ('zeeziek geweest'), but regular consumption of coffee in the family dining room ('eetzaal') and visits from the ship's doctor swiftly eased the illness. Rhythms of regular sleep and sociability structure the Swellengrebel's journal, noting waking times and sleeping times with regularity and noting those moments when – for instance, due to the rocking of the ship ('slingeren') – those routines were disrupted.⁵¹

For both sets of sisters, however, food was central to these accounts of travel and endurance and, alongside a wider sense of sustaining routine, forms the central focus of what they 'see' in these texts. This, in itself, affords some insight into the importance of Van Riebeeck's own *mondprovisieboek*. A single day for the Swellengrebel's could be described almost entirely through what was eaten and with whom: on 11 March, having awakened at eight o'clock, they ate 'biscuit and butter with cheese' for breakfast, emerging to the halfdeck at eleven o'clock to see how far the ship had sailed since the previous day (thirty-three miles, they noted), before lunching on sauerkraut ('suurkool') with smoked sausage, bacon, roasted pork ribs, smothered lamb, 'rolpens' (a sort of stuffed sausage) with apple, salsify ('schorseneele') and green peas. An early evening snack of almonds and walnuts was followed by bringing 'peepernooten [*sic*]' (small, spiced biscuits) and raisins above deck before drinking coffee with friends, returning again to the table in the later evening to eat warmed leftovers from lunch alongside rice with raisins and fish.⁵² Novel foods and those encountered along their respective journeys take pride of place in these narratives, especially in moments of need: the Lammens sisters were noticeably relieved when their brother, towards the end of their journey to Batavia, returned from Lantjang (near Aceh) with fresh fruit and vegetables, including pineapples and 'goedaris' fruit (a

⁴⁹ Barend-van Haeften, *Op reis met de VOC*, pp. 11–48.

⁵⁰ Barend-van Haeften, *Op reis met de VOC*, pp. 80–1.

⁵¹ Barend-van Haeften, *Op reis met de VOC*, p. 123, 'Woensdag den 10'.

⁵² Barend-van Haeften, *Op reis met de VOC*, p. 124.

corruption of 'gandaria' or mango plum). These they fell upon quickly as they were 'very pleasant in our parched bodies'.⁵³ Their respective horizons – their lines of sight – are expansive enough to take on and describe the novelty of the unfamiliar in sustaining routine and bodily health, but returning to and narrating familiar and comfortable rhythms where opportunities arose.

As Kathleen Burke has pointed out, Van Riebeeck's correspondence back to her parents in Batavia was built on the continuation of her identified role as a housewife ('huysvrouw') and deploying of her elite status to leverage V.O.C. provisions across those areas over which it claimed sovereignty.⁵⁴ From the point of her departure in Batavia (where she reassured her parents that she would be well provided with vegetables) to her descriptions of the Cape Colony (where she revelled in fresh fruit and toured the company garden), food served as a powerful symbol of Van Riebeeck's encounter with the novel and 'exotic' but also assurances of her continued health and role as housewife. In the first letter sent to her parents on her arrival in the Cape she emphasized the benefits of the colder climate than that in Batavia: she and her husband were able to eat, sleep and be much fresher of body ('vrisser van lighaam').⁵⁵ While, as Kathleen Burke has noted, Van Riebeeck thought little of the Cape and especially of the Khoekhoen ('Hottentots' to the Dutch), whom the Dutch had displaced, the female vantage point her correspondence affords nonetheless reinforces the centrality of embodied experience in the maintenance of intimate connections back in Batavia.⁵⁶ The moment of her arrival in the bay includes joy at seeing fresh greens, beautiful flowers and fresh fruit brought aboard; she also swiftly took occasion to send goods back to her parents on the next returning ship, including ripe almonds, onions (which, she ventured, were larger than the Javanese, with which her mother was familiar), a cheese and pears (including saffron pears wrapped in paper).⁵⁷

What Van Riebeeck 'saw', then, was evidently conditioned by her professed aim to retain a sense of social status (particularly as an obedient housewife) while also employing her discerning eye for valuable, nourishing food across these spaces to inform and sustain her family on the event of their own anticipated voyages. It is within this context that we must understand her *mondprovisieboek*. We know from Van Riebeeck's correspondence that she intended a copy of this to be sent back to her parents – more specifically her mother – to aid in their own planned voyage to the Netherlands at the end of her father's tenure in Batavia.⁵⁸ To this end, Van Riebeeck's recipes offer a rare glimpse into not only the embodied experience of women's mobile lives in the early modern period, but also how they prepared one another through that experience to survive in such circumstances. The recipe book is populated by a mix of ingredients from across and beyond the V.O.C.'s own colonial geographies: among the first recipes recommended by Van Riebeeck is one for rolpens, 'now and then baked in the pan with *piesang* [bananas – a Malay word later incorporated into Afrikaans through Dutch colonialism] ... stuffed with dried Cape apples in small pieces, and some Javanese onions'.⁵⁹ This, in itself, suggests an interesting mixture of a dish that – as mentioned above – would appear in the menus of outbound Dutch women, but here mixed with ingredients reflective of the journey westward. The acquisition and preservation of familiar herbs and spices to aid in the flavouring of dishes is central to many such recipes. Herbs such as '*gedrooghde peterselie en gedrooghde boonskruijt en rosemarijn*' (dried parsley and dried savory and rosemary) could be made into 'small clumps in the wind' before being packed into bottles until rehydrated in lukewarm water.⁶⁰ The familiar meats and sauces that Van Riebeeck noted as having enjoyed on her journey are also discussed in terms of how long they would last once made, providing these comforts for longer periods aboard ship. For instance, while she noted that her friend

⁵³ Barend-van Haeften, *Op reis met de VOC*, p. 113: 'tgeen alle seer aangenaam was, in ons verdroogde lichamen, wagten niet lang om van alles te proven'.

⁵⁴ K. Burke, "'I hope it tastes good': gender, race and class in colonial kitchens in the Dutch Indian Ocean empire", *Gender & History*, xxxiv (2022), 690–707, at p. 695.

⁵⁵ 'Brief no 5: Johanna Maria aan Haar Ou[d]ers', 13 Jan. 1710 (see n. 6), p. 68.

⁵⁶ Burke, "'I hope it tastes good'", pp. 693–8.

⁵⁷ 'Brief no 8: Johanna Maria aan Haar Ou[d]ers', 30 Jan. 1710, 'In[']t Casteel de de Goede Hoop', in *Briewe*, pp. 74–80; and 'Brief no 9: Johanna Maria aan Haar Moeder', n.d., in *Briewe*, pp. 81–2.

⁵⁸ 'Brief no 5: Johanna Maria aan Haar Ou[d]ers', 13 Jan. 1710, p. 70: 'De memorie van onse provisie en andere goetje, sal ik niet nalaten met de nadere scheepen moeder toe te senden'.

⁵⁹ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 2r.

⁶⁰ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 4v.

Grisella Vlasvat had made sausages of ox meat, pork and cow back in Batavia before their departure, Van Riebeeck adds that such products 'remained good for weeks, but should not be kept in large pots'.⁶¹

While comfort in familiar recipes surviving the journey is evident – for instance, the aforementioned recipes to make bread aboard ship with 'little water' – dishes such as 'groene kajang' or green satay with pieces of bacon or cooked sausage are recommended combinations of Dutch and Indonesian foods with Cape supplies.⁶² Here we see a more adaptive and expansive hybridity in the acquisition of such foods, mixing what would offer comfort with what could be sustainable and healthy along the journey. The practicalities of where to find approximations of familiar ingredients dominate much of the recipe book. For instance, Makassar sardines (from the southern peninsula of Sulawesi) and salted kingfish are recommended, the former roasted in a dried banana leaf on a small grill; but, Van Riebeeck recommends that smaller, learner fish such as mullet must be dried in small 'korreffjes' or baskets surrounded by straw before then being left to dry on the halfdeck in the wind.⁶³ For an example of this for her mother's own reference, Van Riebeeck notes 'these small mullets are dried in Batavia by the Chinese ... and is called *she soeiho*'.⁶⁴ The last of these suggestions is particularly intriguing, alluding to the multilingual environment of Batavia in which Van Riebeeck's mother would be asking for the dish but also – alongside the *groene kejang* and the *piesang* – suggesting that eating 'home' for Van Riebeeck was not simply about eating conventional Dutch foods. Rather, ensuring that she was eating well and maintaining good health meant locating that food in the familiar market stalls and languages of the Batavia she had left and where her parents remained, as well as the extended geographies of the Western Cape and beyond. As with the Lammens and Swellengrebel sisters, Van Riebeeck clearly maintained a concern for ensuring that food – its preparation, consumption and social value – helped to ensure a continued sense of 'home' while in transit and the stability of the bodies it nourished. What 'home' was, and the food that underpinned it, looked different for Van Riebeeck by virtue of her Batavian childhood, but the impulse to recreate it and speak to it across thousands of miles remained.

This concern for not only preparedness but also the management of time aboard ship in the maintenance of one's health and enjoyment of the food is at the centre of much of Van Riebeeck's writing. She notes that she spent two weeks before departure drying beans 'grown in our garden' in the wind, and that she staves off cockroaches ('kakkerlakken') as her 'groenten' (greens) deteriorated by keeping the greens in bamboo containers elevated above the deck in the corner of her rooms.⁶⁵ The preservation and protection of fresh water aboard ship – a daily need for any traveller, whatever their status – was detailed by Van Riebeeck as needing a cloth in addition to the wooden lid to filter any foulness but also gather rainwater. Here, too, the objects of family life in Batavia populated the journey as Van Riebeeck imagined it for her parents: she suggested large Tonquin pots ('groote tonquinse potten') – named for the northern region of present-day Vietnam and a staple of V.O.C. shipping – could be used for such water storage.⁶⁶ Such items populate other parts of Van Riebeeck's prescribed routines for her parents: for the rehydration of dried beans, for instance, and for boiling out the salt water in their preparation she recommends a small Japanese copper kettle ('een kleen japans koper thee keteltje').⁶⁷ Finally, she recommends two lamps, one that can be burned 'evening and day' but easily cleaned, the other with a sconce to be hanged on the halfdeck to facilitate eating there in the evenings. Such small observations help to illuminate what Van Riebeeck saw, and what we might see, as the spatial limits of her life aboard ship. Moreover, it permits us to imagine – through her account – how she saw the ship itself as more than a male-dominated space of sailors and supercargo: it became

⁶¹ Brommer, *To My Dear Pieternelletje*, p. 28; and Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 2r: 'Sousijse van varkens en osse of koeje vlees – Heeft juff vlasvat ook gemaack [sic] en is heel goet, en smakelijck geweest, en is weeken goet gebleeven, maar moet in geen groote potten gedaan worden.'

⁶² Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 4v.

⁶³ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 3v.

⁶⁴ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 4r.

⁶⁵ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 5v: 'Al dese groente moeten in de wint gedrooght worden, en dan in kleen ... bamboese korrelies, gedaan worden, en met linne, buijten om benaaijt worden, voor de kakerlacken.'

⁶⁶ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 7r. For Tonkin ceramics in Batavia and beyond, see K. Nguyen-Long, 'Vietnamese ceramic trade to the Philippines in the seventeenth century', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, xxx (1999), 1–21.

⁶⁷ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoorn-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-12, fol. 7v.

a space in which women – if only elite women – could incorporate elements of the familiar to make it comforting (if not comfortable).

Van Riebeeck's *mondprovisieboek* provides us with a number of important insights into these mobile worlds beyond what the institutional records of the V.O.C. offer. These recipes were written with the most intimate of purposes: the sustained health of Van Riebeeck's family in the course of a highly demanding voyage. While V.O.C. and E.I.C. records afford fleeting glimpses of men's diets aboard ship and once in Asia for the sake of sustaining trade, Van Riebeeck's *mondprovisieboek* employs preoccupations with food, the body and sociability to decidedly different ends.⁶⁸ The *mondprovisieboek* allows us to connect the novel geographies of her movement within the V.O.C. world to the immediate need to help her parents gain the practical knowledge that she was actively accumulating. Thinking of recent work by Catherine Field and others, such sources might be thought of a means of 'writing the self' insofar as it helped Van Riebeeck create a sense of relative safety in these new spaces, populated by foods both familiar and sustaining for her parents in their anticipated voyage.⁶⁹ As with her contemporaries, there is also a clear concern here for the perseverance of social activity and the reinforcement of social status – eating is decidedly a social undertaking in Van Riebeeck's writings and food played a central role in her continued duties as wife and daughter – but the *mondprovisieboek* reflects a more intimate geography of the foods, both familiar and unfamiliar, sustaining a daughter's body across thousands of miles. In this sense, the world that Van Riebeeck 'saw', and the one that she transmitted back to her parents in Batavia, was one that was not only replete with a mix of both novel and familiar sensory experiences, but also fundamentally sustainable for the community that mattered most to her. The work that the *mondprovisieboek* permits us to see is that of Van Riebeeck adjusting to her mobile life by taking an active part in sustaining the family the V.O.C. now set at the other side of the world.

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The experience of Judith Weston (later Fullerton) in 1727 – just over fifteen years later – reveals similar preoccupations to those of Johanna Maria van Riebeeck: the centring of embodied experience in the course of both her outbound voyage and her visit to company factories, but also a pervasive concern for exercising agency within these unfamiliar and often restrictive new environs. The surviving first-hand account written by Weston defies easy categorization. Then twenty-six years old, Weston was one of nine children of a then-impooverished Surrey family with roots there dating back to the twelfth century; her father John – once high sheriff and knight of the shire for Surrey in 1699 and 1701 – had died in 1712 and left the family with little money, so her brother William had found work with the E.I.C. as registrar to the council at Fort William in Kolkata.⁷⁰ Weston's professed purpose in travelling in 1727 was to visit her brother; however, internal references within the handwritten pages suggest she may have had a view towards publication, or at the very least a readership beyond herself. She notes, for instance, while commenting on her reception in Fort St. George (in present-day Chennai) that

[a]n English reader may imagine me very ... conceited to express any uneasiness [*sic*] at being distinguished in so extraordinary a manner but as I was at an extraordinary distance in an extraordinary country remarkable for levity.⁷¹

There are also indications within the text that it was – at least in part – being written in transit. She notes of Madras/Chennai that 'we stayed near a fortnight ... [but] I shall not mention more

⁶⁸ On this, see, e.g., Huntington Library, MS. 83394, Notebook of James Houblon, fols. 18[rv]–20[rv]. Also see *The Social History of English Seamen, 1650–1815*, ed. C. Fury (Woodbridge, 2017).

⁶⁹ C. Field, "Many hands hands": writing the self in early modern women's recipe books, in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. M. M. Dowd and J. A. Eckerle (London, 2016), pp. 49–63.

⁷⁰ E. W. Brayley, *A Topographical History of Surrey* (5 vols., London, 1841), ii, 81–7. I am grateful to Margaret Makepeace for this reference.

⁷¹ Brit. Libr., MS. Eur B 162, Judith Fullerton Papers (c.1727), 'Account by Judith Weston, later Mrs John Fullerton, of a voyage to Madras in the East Indianman "Stretham" under Capt George Westcott, East India Company commander 1720–47, to join her brother William Weston' (hereafter 'W.A.'), fol. 9r.

of that place till my return home as my visit there was too short to regard anything but pleasure.⁷² As the pages themselves suggest, what survives was clearly being edited by Weston in the course of its writing: there are unfinished sentences, phrases and words struck out (usually for the sake of alternate phrasing or clarity), and it ends abruptly without a clear narrative end. Internal references to her travelling companions – most notably Mary and Elizabeth Russell, the daughters of former president of Fort William, John Russell – help to confirm the date of the outbound voyage; Weston later notes retrospectively that ‘[T]he Eldest Miss Russel with Extream Reaching broke some vessel in Her stomach w^{ch} was the cause of her death tho a year after’.⁷³ While this suggests the account was written closer to Weston’s return to England in 1732, it may also suggest a blurring of her own memory of these events, as both Russell daughters married shortly after their arrival but Mary (‘the eldest’ on the voyage) died in August 1732.⁷⁴ In this sense, Weston’s account sits within an ambiguous genre: thinking of Amy Culley’s work on women’s life writing, it suggests a measure of spontaneity in its construction but also an apparent consideration of a hypothetical, perhaps female reader.⁷⁵ It remains worthwhile to think of Weston’s account as an essentially hybrid text, evidently revisited and recorded with a view towards posterity, but also intimate and reflective. Like Van Riebeeck’s *mondprovisieboek*, it asks that we think as much of what Weston *wants* her reader to see as what she herself saw and recorded.

Though Weston’s motives for writing are vague, the content of her account is remarkable in that it not only represents one of, if not *the* earliest account by an English woman travelling to Asia, but also affords us a remarkably candid gaze upon it. While Weston’s ‘English reader’ may be an unspecified one, what the text presents is a young woman’s view of the outward travel experience and the immediate environment of the E.I.C.’s factory at Fort St. George – all spaces conventionally imagined to be male. In keeping with both the committee for shipping’s records and the aforementioned V.O.C. *dagboeken*, Weston’s travel was largely within a contained space with other outbound women whom she does not initially name: she lists them only as ‘four women pasengers [*sic*] beside my self [*sic*].’⁷⁶ Only through incidental mention of their suffering or social sufferings do we later learn that two of her companions were daughters of the aforementioned Russell family: despite being something comparable to E.I.C. royalty, they are not central ‘characters’ in her narrative.⁷⁷ Far from a sense of solidarity with them, Weston employs these other women as a device to illustrate her own hardiness aboard ship:

High ... seas were our fate for three weeks in which time extream sickness was suffered by all the women except myself ... [F]or one fortnight we never pulled off our cloths or lay in a bed ... [T]he chief diff[iculty] to me was to satisfie hunger for as the sea air agreed perfectly with me I had a constant appetite & while my companions were groaning with sickness & calling for proper utensels I was contriving striving to get to a Hamper in w^{ch} was a fine cold buttock of beef.⁷⁸

The buttock of beef – ‘a delicious rep[a]st’ – being eaten, Weston notes that

I like honest Sancho caressed good cheer & as often by night as day replenished to the astonishment of my poor companions who could neither eat, drink, or sleep.⁷⁹

Like Van Riebeeck, the embodied experience of this journey – though in different directions – remained central to the description. Where Van Riebeeck’s aim in her *mondprovisieboek* was to employ

⁷² W.A., fol. 10r.

⁷³ W.A., fol. 3v: ‘[T]he Eldest Miss Russel with Extream Reaching broke some vessel in Her stomach wch was the cause of her death tho a year after’.

⁷⁴ J. Burnell, *Bombay in the Days of Queen Anne*, ed. S. T. Sheppard (London, 2016), pp. 155–6.

⁷⁵ A. Culley, ‘Women’s life writing in the long eighteenth century: a critical survey’, *Literature Compass*, xii (2015), 1–11.

⁷⁶ W.A., fol. 1r.

⁷⁷ See Burnell, *Bombay in the Days of Queen Anne*, pp. 155–6.

⁷⁸ W.A., fol. 1v.

⁷⁹ W.A., fol. 2v. Weston’s reference to *Don Quixote* builds on a peak in Cervantes’s popularity at the end of the seventeenth century; see D. B. J. Randall and J. C. Boswell, *Cervantes in Seventeenth-Century England: the Tapestry Turned* (Oxford, 2009), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv. Reading of chivalric fiction by women was not uncommon in early modern Europe, as Stacey Triplette points out in *Chivalry, Reading, and Women’s Culture in Early Modern Spain* (Amsterdam, 2018).

her gathered knowledge of food to sustain her family in a later journey, Weston employs narratives around food to simultaneously express some sympathy with the other women on board while reinforcing her affability and endurance.

Beyond what was eaten and the illness of her companions, Weston marks the passage of time by listening to the noise of the sea and remarking on the effect of the weather on the mood of those aboard ship. She notes, for instance, '[W]hen a ship works hard it causes a disagreeable noise as the wood opens & shuts wch with the lamentation of the numerous dumb creatures ... [T]he extream roaring of the waves & the clamorous [*sic*] hurry of the sailors causes a horrible din.'⁸⁰ In such instances hearing, as well as seeing, the unfamiliar on such travels was evidently central to Weston's experience: the 'horrible din' is as important to conveying a sense of perseverance as the demands on her body.⁸¹ However, when the weather shifted to a 'steady gale', they could 'clean our persons comfortably to enjoy plentyfull meals and quiet nights'.⁸² Quieter days even offer a rare glimpse into on-board activities rarely documented in other sources: for instance, with a steady gale the

young Gentlemen aboard desired the Capⁿ permission to act the orphan w^{ch} he consented & petition us to supply Calista &c with womens [*sic*] apparel w^{ch} we joyfully did

This performance that evening – probably Thomas Otway's *The Orphan*, given the title and characters mentioned⁸³ – employed the deck as a stage with the Captain and ladies offered a box of their own; described by Weston as 'so great a perfection', it was dampened only by the accidental stabbing of one actor, 'w^{ch} proved Surgeons work for a month'.⁸⁴ For Weston, though, what brought the greatest joy in the production was 'the seeing all the common sailors so happy they all hang on the shrouds like rats bees with the happiest contenances [*sic*] imaginable'.⁸⁵ The striking out of 'rats' and substitution of 'bees' suggests a more sympathetic view of the common sailor in such description; however, while the account generally helps to reveal a more convivial (and theatrical) life aboard E.I.C. ships, such swift adjustments of phrasing also help to remind us of the distance that remained between Weston and those surrounding her on the ship.

Weston's account becomes especially remarkable on her arrival in India. Unsurprisingly, her first observations tend towards the weather and customs at Fort St. George: greeted by her brother's attorney, one Mr. Stratten, she is told it would 'alarm the town' if she and the other 'new Ladys' arrived in the heat of the day rather than in the 'cool of the evening'.⁸⁶ From this initial moment of acclimatization, though, much of Weston's further account revolves around encounters with other women rather than the men of the fort. For instance, she expresses a relief at being housed with 'a lady of Mr Stratten's acquaintance', having heard that 'ladys abroad have often met with very cheap treatment'.⁸⁷ She is promptly requested to meet with the fort's governor, Robert Adams, but through the person of a Mrs. Hunter, whom Weston describes as 'young handsome well fashioned & sociable', and who had been 'but a few years in India'.⁸⁸ She later learns that Hunter's husband was then in China. Adams's invitation had come about through his having known Weston's brother and wishing to offer her better accommodation, having heard that the Russell sisters, with whom she had made the journey, had been put up in a local Punch House.⁸⁹ Such details provide a complex moment of visibility for

⁸⁰ W.A., fol. 2v.

⁸¹ The importance of soundscapes in such travels has recently been shown in T. Irvine, *Listening to China: Sound and the Sino-Western Encounter, 1770–1839* (Chicago, 2020).

⁸² W.A., fol. 2v.

⁸³ W.A., fol. 4r. Debate as to the staging of plays on E.I.C. ships extends back to the possible performance of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* aboard the *Dragon*; see R. Barbour and B. Klein, 'Drama at sea: a new look at Shakespeare on the *Dragon*, 1607–08', in *Travel and Drama in Early Modern England: the Journeying Play*, ed. C. Jowitt and D. McInnis (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 150–68. I am grateful to Laurence Publicover for this reference.

⁸⁴ W.A., fol. 4r.

⁸⁵ W.A., fol. 4r.

⁸⁶ W.A., fol. 5r.

⁸⁷ W.A., fol. 6r.

⁸⁸ W.A., fol. 8r. Robert Adams's wife, Margaret, is referred to only briefly here but took up his overseas correspondence on his death in London on 8 April 1738, writing to a former correspondent of his, 'I am now renewing in Floods of Tears the Agonizing pain I felt in the last moment of my Dear Mr Adams when I tell you he is for ever gone from me'. See Brit. Libr., IOR/H/37, 'Robert and Mrs Adams' Letterbook', 'To Mr Dom: Rodriguez – London, Cavendish Square, July ye [blank] 1738', fol. 398.

⁸⁹ W.A., fol. 9r.

these women through Weston's eyes: a sense of some camaraderie and compassion for these women who had been mistreated in their accommodation and in their long periods of separation from their husbands, as well as an apparent awareness of shifting fortunes and shared space. We gain through her observations not just a sense of where women were in these company spaces, but also indications of their quality of life and the emotional demands placed upon them across these distances. Weston's reading of these spaces – and her writing about them – reflect a sense of anxiety and at times fear of these environs but also hints at how relief and reassurance could take form at such remove.

While much of the remainder of Weston's account revolves around the new routines in which she finds herself – for instance noting that after breakfast 'you divert your self the best you can in a lazy way till eleven then dress for dinner wch is alwaies at twelve' or that 'you must undress as for bed' in the afternoon to avoid 'sweat[ing] to death'⁹⁰ – her account is perhaps most valuable for those rare moments of dissent from these social conventions. It seems clear that Weston found life as a woman among company servants disconcerting: Governor Adams is described as having 'more lust than manners ... attack[ing] us strongly at dinner' and 'putting us all to sail [*sic*] like a Hog merchant'.⁹¹ Adams, stating that there were 'no men likely to marry worth having' called the circumstances of Weston and her companions 'very melancholy' as they were 'but coarse goods'.⁹² Weston, evidently insulted by this, asked whether the governor would put them up at outcry (that is, public auction, as though they were simply goods) the next day; the governor 'from that time never attacked us'.⁹³ Here, crucially, is an honest break on Weston's part with the narrative from within the company's factories – that she should necessarily be abroad in order to find a husband rather than to simply see her brother as she expressly wished. Adams was notably deprecating of both the 'value' of these women in such a market and the understood quality of men within the company circuit; however, Weston's apparent (at least, claimed) forthrightness and exception to being reduced to a 'hog' on such a market once again helps to complicate the singular vantage point afforded women travelling within the E.I.C. world solely as marital objects.

The surviving letter book of her husband, John Fullerton, once again reminds us that Judith Weston would eventually marry and return to England. However, candid moments such as these where Weston speaks of a collective 'us' – the women with whom she travelled and in the context of unfamiliar and overwhelmingly male spaces – suggest again that the singular narratives dominant in the E.I.C.'s records were resisted even at the time, if only (as I will explore below) among women of comparable social status and race. As with Van Riebeeck, Weston's account helps us to chart spaces in these emergent geographies that were being actively shaped and experienced by women, rather than simply being created for them as spaces of containment and company utility. The connections these created could be sustained and seen in such small spaces as the private rooms of a ship and the entertaining rooms of a company governor, or across oceans.

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We must also be attentive, however, to the fact that, even within the expanded horizons these accounts provide, both women also operated within noticeable boundaries and blind spots. The spaces in which they moved were not only gendered, but also clearly racialized in terms of both inclusion and omission. In Weston's entire account, there is no mention of non-European women; the only mention of non-white actors comes in brief moments where she perceives a threat to the bodily stability at the centre of her wider account. For instance, she is received at Fort St. George on disembarkation by 'fourteen black fellows ... who were so near being naked that I cannot say the bit of covering was of any service'.⁹⁴ These 'black fellows', as she terms them, are described as 'singing the whole way' towards shore but she expresses fear that 'in case the surfe filled our boat they might seize me & dive with me down to the bottom'. She thanks God that 'I escape their black paws'.⁹⁵ While 'black'

⁹⁰ W.A., fol. 10v.

⁹¹ W.A., fol. 9v.

⁹² W.A., fol. 9v.

⁹³ W.A., fol. 10r.

⁹⁴ W.A., fol. 5v.

⁹⁵ W.A., fol. 5v.

in this instance probably connotes darker-skinned Indian men – rather than the ‘swarte’ (‘black’) people whom Van Riebeeck encounters in the Cape Colony, below – there is no mistaking here the dehumanizing language employed by Weston and conflicting sense of both preservation and threat. The naked, animalistic (‘paws’) bodies of these men do the essential work of protecting Weston’s body while also posing what she sees as a real physical threat. Such foreign bodies are without name or form in Weston’s sight: a threat from below as Weston otherwise moves within white, colonial circles at Fort St. George.

In Van Riebeeck’s case, non-Europeans are only a peripheral feature in her writings, though – unlike Weston – they are at times named. Her enslaved cook, Juni, is mentioned in her letters home; as Kathleen Burke has shown, though, his role in the letters was to establish continuity in her diet from home and Juni was sent home shortly after their arrival at the Cape. Juni’s movements and activities are framed, as Burke argues, largely through terms of what gives Van Riebeeck comfort and her own ‘bodily wellbeing.’⁹⁶ Tellingly, her willingness to allow Juni to depart back to Batavia is only on the condition that she had, herself, departed for Holland and that he might then be of use to her mother.⁹⁷ Juni, in effect, becomes little more than a device through which to reinforce Van Riebeeck’s continuance of status and an ongoing sense of domestic stability and safety – a means of assuring her parents that the ship was a home away from home. The ship’s register for the *Sandenburgh* on which she travelled makes note of ‘zwarte jongens’ (black boys) and other enslaved people but these young boys are never seen in Van Riebeeck’s letters and not mentioned in the *mondprovisieboek* in even the most menial acts of food preparation or the operation of the ship.⁹⁸ Black women receive some notice from Van Riebeeck, but primarily when their wider connections warrant comment. For instance, as Burke has noted, a ‘swarte vrouw’ (black woman) named Ansiela is noted in her correspondence home because of a claim on the latter’s part that she had worked in the household of Van Riebeeck’s grandfather, Jan van Riebeeck, noting Ansiela’s marriage to a European and thereby placing her within the ‘prism of respectability and status’ that afforded.⁹⁹ Again, and perhaps tellingly, another non-European woman named by Van Riebeeck is referred to as ‘Swarte Maria’ (Black Maria/Mary) in the Cape Colony, who provides her with two sacks of seeds to send back to Batavia to Van Riebeeck’s father; however, Van Riebeeck notes that Maria claimed to have been the daughter of a woman who had worked in her grandfather’s house – that of the first Dutch colonizer of the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck. Van Riebeeck notes in the same letter a ‘very old blind Hottentot woman’ (‘heele ouwe blinde Hottentotin’) named Cornelia, and two Khoekhoe men named only as Dobbeltje and Vogelstruys (Dutch nicknames rather than in any Khoe language variant), had also been met in her visit, adding – tellingly – that there was a ‘great affection towards our family’ among these people.¹⁰⁰ Like Weston, Van Riebeeck’s gaze offers fleeting glimpses of these individuals still very much perceived by Europeans to be at the margins of colonial Dutch society; however, we must acknowledge that the glimpses afforded – born of utility, social status and necessity – nevertheless keep such individuals at the periphery of our historical sight. Van Riebeeck’s concern for writing with her family in mind, and the likely reassurances of encountering family associations abroad briefly elevated the black labourers and bodies she saw into something worthy of remark and record; they sustained her body or nurtured her sense of dislocation before receding again from the story. For Weston, the absence of such personal connections left the ‘black paws’ to recede back into the sea once they had served their narrative purpose.

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These blind spots and peripheries in Weston and Van Riebeeck’s vision should remind us that seeing and being seen in the emergent global spaces of the early modern period were mutually constitutive acts. The insights provided by women’s first-hand accounts of moving through these spaces help to

⁹⁶ Burke, “I hope it tastes good”, p. 695.

⁹⁷ ‘Brief no 15, Johanna Maria aan Haar Moeder’, 12 March 1710, ‘In[']t Casteel de Goeje [sic] Hoop’, in *Briewe*, p. 94.

⁹⁸ Nationaal Archief, Collectie Van Hoor-Van Riebeeck, 1.10.45-10, *Sandenburgh* logboek.

⁹⁹ Burke, “I hope it tastes good”, p. 698; and ‘Brief no 18: Johanna Maria Aan Haar Ou[d]ers’, 16 March 1710, ‘In[']t Casteel de Goede Hoop’, in *Briewe*, pp. 102–4.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Brief no 13: Johanna Maria aan Haar Ou[d]ers’, 15 Feb. 1710, ‘In[']t Casteel de Goede Hoop’, in *Briewe*, p. 88.

challenge the dominant narrative – pervasive even today – that women were absent and otherwise passive participants in company life and affairs. Shifting our gaze from the concerns and myopias of the company archives allows us to move beyond an understanding of these mobile lives shaped solely by the conventional focus on economic expansion and pre-colonial power within exclusively male spaces. The examples of Weston and Van Riebeeck help to extend our historical horizon beyond the fleeting glimpses offered by these archives and instead provide a focused and detailed look at these worlds through the eyes of some of those women. Doing so has shown the centrality not only of embodied experience and the retention of intimate bonds for these women, but also how they engaged with, questioned and upheld different systems of order in those spaces they encountered.

Fundamentally, it remains the case that these companies were unequivocally patriarchal, in both structure and ethos, when it came to women's place in their worlds. Beyond brief moments – such as Weston's challenging of Governor Adams's treatment of her and her companions – there are fleeting few examples of outright opposition to these structures. Likewise, the comprehension and application of emergent categories of race and colonial dominance are clearly evident in both accounts, through both inclusion and omission. In these moments of life writing, both women found in company travel a variety of languages to reinforce or gain status at the expense of these groups, not through any sense of camaraderie or companionship they occasionally offered to other white, European women. Black and indigenous bodies perform much of the work in these accounts to sustain and define the embodied experiences of both Weston and Van Riebeeck, but they are often bodies without names or names learned through familial and colonial interest. Here, we must acknowledge the insight that these women offer historians into company life beyond male spaces nevertheless keeps such groups largely at the periphery or wholly unseen.¹⁰¹

The act of life writing in these environments, however, remains important to understanding how these women engaged with their new surroundings and found agency within patriarchal systems that were never wholly settled. Both Weston and Van Riebeeck undertook these acts of writing as a means of balancing the familiar and unfamiliar, navigating between them in order to consolidate their sense of self in transit. Taking their bearings along the way, both women looked to familial connections, spousal or sisterly responsibilities, and the embodied experience of travel as languages through which to both understand and convey to others their perseverance across these vast distances. In such instances, simply seeing an item of food, noting how it was prepared, the company in which it was eaten, how it smelled or where it had come from, was also an act of understanding life on the move and what it meant to them. It is through such constitutive acts that women created – both externally and internally – the sort of 'intimate networks' suggested by Susanah Shaw Romney.¹⁰²

Whether or not the East India Companies saw a world in which women played a significant part, women were, from the outset, seeing that world and finding new ways understand themselves within it. While I have argued for the need to both read against the company archive and look beyond it in order to retrieve these experiences, there is no question of the value in doing so and the stakes apparent in neglecting them. The 'global turn' of the early modern period, for which these trading companies have been made out to be harbingers, cannot be left as a story of men moving through predominantly male spaces, only occasionally providing glimpses of women when their interest permits us to do so.¹⁰³ These two accounts make clear the presence of women across these periods of encounter, expansion and empire while also bringing their experiences directly to the centre of our vision. However rare such accounts undoubtedly are, they allow us to see differently a world that they may not have seen as being created with them in mind, but which they were unquestionably active in creating.

¹⁰¹ On gender hierarchies and empire, see A. M. Poska and S. D. Amussen, 'The Atlantic World', in *A Companion to Global Gender History*, ed. T. Meade and M. Wiesner-Hanks (2nd edn., London, 2020), pp. 413–30.

¹⁰² Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, *passim*.

¹⁰³ M. Wiesner-Hanks, 'Early modern women and the transnational turn', *Early Modern Women*, vii (2012), 191–202.