Colonialism, Institutional Change, and Shifts in Global Labour Relations

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Changing Tides
Maritime Labour Relations in Europe and Asia*

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Abstract
This chapter explores and explains the character and impact of the “long” internationalization of maritime labour markets in Europe and Asia, from 1500 to 2000. The maritime sector provides an interesting perspective on changing global labour relations. The chapter explores the development of maritime labour relations and segmented labour markets in international shipping by studying the Dutch maritime experience from a comparative perspective. Doing so, it shows the double effect of colonialism, simultaneously integrating Asian and European maritime labour markets, while severely constraining Asian maritime labour through the rise of restrictive labour contracts and differentiating and unequal recruitment regimes.

Keywords: sailors, Asia, Europe, globalization, colonialism, segmentation, inequality

Introduction

Shipping was crucial to early modern and modern global trade. The international and mobile character of the industry had an important impact on maritime labour in various ways. The international character of the sector affected more than just maritime culture and sailors’ cosmopolitan

* This chapter originates from a paper for the workshop “Economic Institutional Change and Global Labour Relations” (International Institute of Social History [IISH], Amsterdam, September 2014).
worldview. With shipping becoming increasingly global, different local and regional maritime labour markets became entangled from the start of the early modern period onwards. European shipping companies operating in the intercontinental and overseas trade were able to use European, Asian, and Atlantic maritime labour markets. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, renewed waves of internationalization increased this process. The maritime sector – shipping and its adjoining industries – not only brought together sailors of different origins, but also linked groups working under different labour relations.

Over the centuries, the internationalization of competition for both employers and employees interacted with changing patterns of recruitment and the institutional solutions to the complex or “imperfect” character of the maritime labour market (referring to the difficulties of matching supply and demand in (long-distance) shipping). The globalizing maritime labour market is, therefore, an interesting case with regard to understanding the development of labour relations and global entanglements over time. This chapter contributes to the aims of the current volume by analysing and explaining the character and impact of the “long” internationalization of maritime labour markets in Europe and Asia, from 1500 to 2000. This contributes to our understanding of changing labour relations in different parts of the world – and how these were connected – through a global, comparative, and sectoral approach. It explores and explains the development of maritime labour relations and segmented labour markets in international shipping by studying the Dutch maritime experience from a comparative perspective. In doing so, it indicates that the forces of European colonial expansion were not only crucial in integrating labour markets globally, but perhaps even more so in the increasing segmentation of these labour markets. This is not the history of “different” (or exploitative) economic institutions changing the historical trajectory of the non-West, because it was precisely the European “inclusive” economic institutions that were imposed that resulted in rearranging market exchange and safeguarding contractual exploitation of (Asian) labour in favour of European capital, and in its shadow, European labour.

All that glitters...

The development of markets and market institutions is generally considered to have been a stimulus for the development of wage labour, either for
private companies or for the state. The development of market economies could also result in “an increase of self-employment, flexibilization of the labour market that might result in various combinations of waged work” and other constellations of labour relations. Increasingly, however, it is recognized that production for the market and the development of market economies can easily be combined with various forms of unfree or coerced labour, for example, slavery, indentured labour, etc.

We should try to disentangle this a little further. Labour relations are solutions for the allocation of labour that are shaped by various forms of compensation and coercion. Labour relations, therefore, can entail the exchange of labour effort (or labour power) for protection, money, or something else. Markets gain a role in the allocation of labour in situations where labour power is sold in return for monetary or other forms of compensation, and where there are multiple sellers and buyers. In that sense, labour markets exist when multiple potential transactions of labour power are brought together. This can happen in either a physical (real) sense, through simultaneous and direct presence, for example, in a village square or in a pub, or in an abstract sense, through the notion that there are other options that (could) act as an alternative for the proposed exchange of labour in a certain place and time.

Although markets are based on the principle of exchange, this does not mean that the labour power involved is always completely free or that the worker is always the seller or even the owner of the labour power. Marx pointed this out, referring to the shortages in the English labour market in 1834 that were solved through the forceful recruitment of land labourers for the Manchester industries. “These people were bought and sold by the agents in Manchester to the producers in Manchester, just as easy as the slaves to the cotton planters in the southern states [of the United States of America].” If “free” labour markets are markets in which free workers engage in wage labour relations through engagements that are completely without coercion, the comparison made here refers to the opposite extreme end of the range of possibilities. Slave markets can be seen as capital markets, but are labour markets as well.

From that perspective, labour markets involving coerced labour might not be considered as markets of labour (where workers sell their own labour

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1 International Institute of Social History, “Global History”, p. 12.
2 Ibid., p. 12.
3 For example, Van Zanden, Arbeid tijdens het handelskapitalisme; Banaji, Theory as History; Van der Linden, Workers of the World.
4 Marx, Het Kapitaal, p. 250.
effort), but as markets for labour power in a different sense (where the labour effort is sold, sometimes even – as in the case of slave markets – including its human carrier). These distinctions, however, are gradual. The range of historical possibilities can vary from workers selling their own labour power directly, to workers selling their own labour power through intermediaries (who might influence and even determine the conditions and buyers of the labour power to varying degrees), to workers who are to some degree forced to sell their labour power (directly or through intermediaries).5

It is possible that different workers under these different conditions compete – or are made to compete – in the same labour market. For example, in the labour market for local transport work in the city of Batavia in the eighteenth century, one could hire workers who were free citizens of the city, but also slaves who were hired out directly by their masters, and even slaves who were (temporarily) allowed by their master to look for so-called coolie labour.6 Nowadays, the Netherlands witnesses the introduction of involuntary labour by the unemployed, as they are being made to work (mainly in low-skilled positions) under the threat of losing social benefits. Simultaneously, there are debates around the increased employment of voluntary workers (without compensation) in positions where free wage workers were previously employed, for example, as bus drivers on local public transport routes that are considered unprofitable.7 Other recent examples can be seen in the use of forced labour by prisoners in the US, and also in cases concerning the exploitation of migrant workers who are bound by legal restrictions or through (illegal) practices, where their passports are taken away.8

These contingencies are a reminder, first, that markets are not dependent on complete freedom, but can function fairly well with elements of coercion. Second, that what happens as a result of the development of market economies or simply within markets seems to be less the product of a certain economic rationality, but appears more shaped by the actors

5 Examples of slaves hiring themselves out or being hired out as coolies were common in eighteenth-century Batavia. Examples of recruitment through intermediaries were not uncommon in the Dutch Republic. See Van Rossum, Werkers van de wereld.
6 Van der Chijs, Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek, vol. 5, p. 379. More information can be found in my paper “Transforming the Coolie”.
7 See the recent debates on displacement (verdringing) and “forced” labour in the Netherlands. There are similar debates in Germany.
8 Examples come from around the globe, but a striking recent example is the allegations against the conditions of workers in Amazon distribution centres in Germany: BBC, “Germany Probes”; Bennett, “Amazon Warehouse Staff”; Van Rossum, “Redirecting”.
involved, their ideas, their organizations, their actions to represent their interests, and their formal and informal agreements. It problematizes the often idealized free basis of “inclusive economic institutions”, securing “property rights”, market transactions, and contractual agreements. All these insights are not necessarily new, but remind us that we need to look at markets as “constituted by the law that enforces the bargains made in them”, as well as shaped by the informal rules of engagement.

**Hoisting for wages**

Maritime labour for long-distance shipping is an interesting case, as it seems to have been characterized by employment through wage labour relations and internationalization from early on. In this sense, the international character of the occupation, and the level of predominance of wage labour, might be compared with the case of military labour, although some groups of mobile workers might also be considered, such as maids and artisans in early modern Europe.

Wage labour, of course, was not the only possible labour relation under which maritime labour could be employed. Several examples point to the possibility of using slave labour. In most of these instances, however, slaves employed as sailors seem to have been a small and controllable minority amongst a crew mainly consisting of wage workers (in the case of nineteenth-century Arabian Seas steam and local dhow shipping) or local war bands (in the case of Balangingi slave raiders). One of the main exceptions may have been rowing galleys, where rowers could be easily controlled and disciplined. Especially on board sailing, and later steam and motor, vessels engaged in long-distance shipping, however, employing slave labour for maritime work on board ships was problematic, as it resulted in too many problems with controlling the labour force and too many opportunities for

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9 Tilly provides an important framework on the societal and economic game involved: Tilly, *Durable Inequality*.
11 See, for example, Van Royen, Bruijn, and Lucassen “Those Emblems of Hell”?, Van Rossum, *WERKERS VAN DE WERELD*.
12 Zürcher, *Fighting for a Living*.
13 Warren, *The Sulu Zone*, p. 188; Sheriff, *Dhow Culture*, pp. 99-100; Ewald, “Crossers of the Sea”. The examples provided by Winterbottom for the East India Company do not convince us that the EIC employed slaves on board their ships for maritime work on a large scale: Winterbottom, “From Hold to Foredeck”. 
flight and insurrection. The disastrous experiment of the Dutch East-India Company (VOC) with slave sailors on the *Merruur* in 1782, ending in a mutiny and successful escape by most of the slaves, illustrates this point well.\textsuperscript{14} It must be noted that the VOC had already anticipated the problematic nature of employing slaves as sailors, by promising them monthly payment for their work and the prospect of gaining their freedom after several voyages.

Another possibility sometimes hinted at may have been the option of sailing ships with merchant sailors, who work together on voyages, each with their own share in the cargo. This notion of “shipper-passengers”, introduced by Van Leur as part of the concept of “peddler trade”, may have been the case amongst certain local communities, but there is very little evidence for the widespread use of this model, as has been discussed on previous occasions.\textsuperscript{15}

In early modern Asia, just as in Europe, sailors mainly seem to have been engaged in wage labour relations. As one of the first global companies to have heavily invested in both shipping between Asian destinations and in intercontinental shipping between Europe and Asia, the VOC found it relatively easy to recruit sailors in various Asian regions. In different periods, they recruited in and around Java, Formosa (present day Taiwan), Malacca, the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, Bengal, and Surat.\textsuperscript{16} By the time the VOC was interfering in maritime Asia, Asian sailors themselves often referred to their work – on ships of European companies but also explicitly on Asian ships – as being “hired” men, having “engaged in the service” of a captain, and the like.\textsuperscript{17} Recruitment was often carried out per voyage, and labour conflicts arose when payment or the time or place of disengagement seemed not to match the agreements.\textsuperscript{18}

The existence of wage labour in maritime Asia was not an isolated phenomenon. It seems to have been part of larger developments related to the development and presence of market economies in Asia well before the arrival of European maritime powers, for example, in military and other labour markets in parts of Java and India.\textsuperscript{19} This reminds us of the important insight that labour markets and market economies “have come into

\textsuperscript{14} Van Rossum, “Amok!”.
\textsuperscript{16} Van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld*; Van Rossum, “A ‘Moorish World”.
\textsuperscript{17} Van Rossum, “The Rise of the Asian Sailor?”
\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, the conflict preceding the mutiny on an Asian vessel in 1784: Van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld*, pp. 360-362.
existence not once, but several times throughout history and in multiple regions of the world, and have in many cases also disappeared."^{20}

The slow decline of wage labour and labour markets in parts of Asia after the arrival of European imperial powers is important to note here. Recent estimates by Ulbe Bosma show a decline of the share of commodified labour from 53 per cent in 1650, to 38 per cent in 1800 and 36 per cent in 1900.^{21} In a recent critique of colonial history (and historiography) of the Dutch East Indies, Jan Breman also points out the coercive effects of colonial policies, isolating agrarian production areas and introducing obligated labour services.^{22}

So, what are the implications of all this? Wage labour seems an old phenomenon, a solution to the problem of allocation of labour that has been employed many times in the history of complex human societies, especially for workers in specific occupations, including sailors. Being recruited per voyage or for multiple years, sailors gained rights (such as receiving wages and food), but also had duties and obligations (such as having to stay in service for a certain amount of time). The contract these wage workers engaged in could often be enforced by physical or legal violence.^{23}

At the same time, it seems clear that if being a wage worker is just another way of ensuring a livelihood, it becomes obvious that workers do not necessarily limit themselves to wage work alone (and where possible or needed, combine it with other strategies) or for their entire lives (so they can shift to different labour relations or strategies during their life). Sailors in particular – as becomes clear from the histories of European and Asian sailors from the eighteenth into the twentieth century – often try to profit from the opportunities provided by the mobile character of their work, through legal or illegal forms of private trade. This seems to have been done both by European VOC sailors and by Asian sailors. It is important, therefore, not to reify this as a characteristic of either Asian or European labour relations, as seems to be the tendency in literature on, for example, Chinese sailors.

All of this also suggests that if wage labour was a normal and long-lasting solution for the allocation of labour, it is no longer one unique transition to

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22 Breman, *Koloniaal profijt*.
23 As in the case of the VOC: see Van Rossum, “Claiming Their Rights?”.
wage labour that should be explained. It becomes important to look at the multiple ways in which labour markets developed, rose, and sometimes declined. It also becomes crucial to look at the different possible transitions of labour relations in the long term. Of course, it becomes important to try to understand how wage labour relations related to other labour relations, and how this affected the positions and relations of workers. In essence, the question shifts from the problem of where and when wage labour arose – and whether this transition was complete or not – to where and when wage labour was in use, in what specific context, and under what conditions.

**Not perfect, but how does it work?**

An important starting point is the observation that the mobile and global character of the maritime industry ensured that maritime labour markets were “imperfect”. This was especially the case in the age of sail, with seasons and monsoons dictating the rhythm of shipping, but it still characterized the maritime industry in the age of steam and motor engines, with economic flows dictating the need for transport and shipping. The difficulty and irregularity in the way that supply of and demand for labour were adjusted, was important in shaping the organization of and mediation in labour markets. This “imperfect” character might be seen as distinguishing for maritime labour markets, although one could wonder whether “perfect” labour markets actually ever really exist or existed. A crucial question, therefore, is what solutions are created by the actors involved, and how these solutions shape the relations between employers, intermediaries, workers, and their organizations.

There are a number of solutions for such imperfect labour markets. Three hypothetical options might be identified:

1. A completely casual situation: individual crew members are employed wherever they are needed and potential employers take whomever they can find. A casual labour market can function when there are enough sufficiently skilled workers around in the places where labour might be needed, such as overseas port cities. All this can be supported by intermediaries who do not have an influential role in the recruitment process, but merely facilitate the lodgings and bars where workers and employers meet.
2. A completely mediated situation: entire crews or individual crew members find work (or are supplied) through recruitment intermediaries who make sure that workers are available at the time they are needed. This seems to occur when there is a shortage of (sufficiently skilled) workers or a shortage of work. Intermediaries assume an influential role, steering the conditions under which and employers for whom workers will be recruited, controlling workers when they are still potential recruits, indebted them, etc.

3. A completely formalized situation: individuals find work through (official) government or labour union recruitment bureaus, which ensure recruitment through procedures that offer workers more or less equal opportunities to find work, ruling out intermediaries and particularism.

None of these situations, of course, occur in such a “pure” form. Most of the time, there are combinations of these solutions at work, or competing. In the case of long-distance shipping in early modern Europe and Asia, maritime labour markets seems to have been characterized by intermediate forms of casual and mediated solutions, as the two following cases show.

Case I: Recruitment in South and Southeast Asia, the eighteenth century

Not much is known (yet) about recruitment in early modern Asia, but the available evidence seems to indicate a situation in the labour market that was marked more by casual solutions than by heavily mediated ones. Asian sailors could be recruited as individuals – possibly also through direct recruitment by European or Asian ship officers – being engaged mainly in wage labour relations. This seems to have been at least the case in Surat, as well as in Bengal, Malacca, Batavia, and other parts of Java.24

An incident in Malacca in February 1735 is intriguing in this regard.25 Lying at the port of Malacca, the Batavian burger Gidion Schrijver had sent out his “moor bootsman” Aldsie with “40 rijksdaalder en 12 stuivers”

24 Van Rossum, Werkers van de wereld.
25 Please note that the following paragraphs are taken from a previous paper, “The Rise of the Asian Sailor?”, published as Van Rossum, “The Rise of the Asian Sailor”. This example is one of the few cases with elaborate historical evidence of recruitment practices. It has therefore been included in this chapter in order to emphasize the seemingly more casual and less mediated nature of Asian maritime labour markets in comparison with early modern Europe.
to recruit ten new Moor sailors in Malacca. Once employed on the ship, however, one of the sailors was discovered to be the inland soldier Joan de Choisa, who had fled the service of the Dutch East India Company.26

Both soldier De Choisa and foreman Aldsie were taken into custody, and before the Raad van Justitie (High Court) an interesting controversy developed around the recruitment of De Choisa by Aldsie. Joan de Choisa claimed that Aldsie had been aware of him being a soldier. The two would have met in a Chinese bar in Malacca and it was the foreman – according to De Choisa – who told him to meet again in the same bar two days later. Aldsie assured De Choisa that he could arrange transport away from Malacca and Aldsie took the soldier to the house of “Moor Aboe Backar”. There they cut off his hair and Aldsie gave him sailors’ clothes to the value of nine rupees.27 In the evening, they took him on board the ship of Gidion Schrijver as a sailor, where he was discovered to be a deserting soldier within two days.

The Moor foreman Aldsie was also taken into custody after Joan de Choisa was interrogated. Aldsie, however, denied the charges of having consciously recruited a deserting soldier. Being interrogated with force (“ad torturam”), Aldsie persisted that he had met Joan de Choisa in no other place than the house of Aboe Backar. Contrary to the claims of De Choisa, Aldsie stated that he had not met the soldier earlier (in a Chinese bar) and had not made any agreement regarding his transport. Aldsie did not deny having bought De Choisa his clothes and recruiting him as a new sailor (“als een nieuw aangeworben matts”), but maintained his declaration that he did not know that De Choisa had been in the service of the company (“sonder kennisbe voorens gehad te hebben dan de selve ten dienste der E: Comp: is geengageert geweest”).28

The example is an illustrative incident. It shows an instance of the easy recruitment of “Moor” – probably Indian – sailors in one of the main ports of the Malaysian peninsula. It shows a European captain employing European and Asian labour, and thus making good use of the local maritime labour markets. Furthermore, what is interesting is that the foreman and sailor might have met either at a Chinese bar or at the house of the Moor, Aboe

26 “door een van zijn matroosent in presentie van zijn schrijver en stuurman g’rapporteert dat zig aan boord op hield een zoldaat in dienst der E: Comp”, National Archives [NA], VOC, 9373.
28 NA, VOC, 9373.
Backar. There seems to have been no established relation between the recruited (De Choisa) and the foreman (Aldsie) in the sense of social or financial bonds (debts, family ties, regional connections, etc.). The advance or investment provided to the new recruit, in the form of a haircut and sailors’ clothing, is somewhat similar to the patterns of recruitment known for European sailors. As far as the role of the middleman – Aboe Backar – is described, this seems to have been limited to perhaps providing clothing (De Choisa’s version) or temporary lodging (as might be the conclusion from the version of Aldsie, claiming to have met De Choisa at Aboe Backar’s house).

The case of De Choisa in Malacca occurred around the time that the maritime labour market in the Dutch Republic seems to have taken a completely different turn. With regard to recruitment by the VOC in Asia, there are few indications that recruitment patterns changed significantly during the eighteenth century. It was only towards the end of the century, after and around the Fourth Dutch-Anglo War, that labour shortages and pressures for the recruitment of Asian sailors seem to have made the role of intermediaries more important. At the same time, however, payments for Asian sailors could have risen significantly as well.29

Case II: Recruitment in the Dutch Republic, circa 174030

In the Dutch Republic, the maritime labour market seems to have undergone important changes around the middle of the eighteenth century. An interesting indication for this is the absence of new recruits at the time of departure of the VOC fleet leaving the republic to go to Asia. In the Dutch Republic, absentie had a specific meaning in the context of the Dutch East India Company. For the crews ready for ships to Asia, this was not a temporary absence from the work place, but absence at the time of the departure of the fleet. This meant that absent workers destined for the service in Asia missed their ship. This made absence at the time of departure effectively an act of desertion. The absence of recruits at the departure of the fleet to Asia was therefore taken very seriously. For example, a quartermaster, who had decided to take his recruitment bonus – worth two months of wages – and run away, was caught and imprisoned. According to Bicker Raije, who mentions the incident in his diaries, a woman came by the prison

29 Van Rossum, Werkers van de wereld, ch. 5.
30 The following paragraphs are based on the paper “Desertion by Sailors, Soldiers, Slaves and Convicts in the Eurasian Empire of the Dutch East India Company”, presented at the ENIUGH Conference in Paris (September 2014) and published as Van Rossum, “‘Working for the Devil’”.
and claimed that they had exchanged wedding vows and that she was pregnant with his child. There was no clemency; the quartermaster was to marry the woman while remaining in chains and then taken on board the next departing ship to work as a sailor without wages.31

The absence of VOC employees ready for departure in the Dutch Republic was strongly on the increase from 1745 onwards. Absence was at times linked to the origin and occupation of the worker. There had been a temporary rise of the level of absence between the years 1687 and 1694, especially among workers originating from the regions directly bordering the Dutch Republic, Scandinavia, and the Baltic area. In general, however, the levels of absence do not seem strongly related to the regions of origin of the absentee workers from Europe. For workers originating from the rest of the world,

31 Bosman, De polsslag, p. 129. Original: “veroordeeld om eerst in de Boeien met die vrouw te trouwen, dan binnenskamers gegegeseld te worden, en dan geboeid aan boord gebracht te worden om als matroos voor de hoofdofficier te varen.”
often the West and East Indies, the level of absence at the time of departure in the Dutch Republic was actually much higher. The relationship between occupation and absence is also stronger. Workers recruited for lower occupations, such as soldiers, young sailors, sailors, and boys in particular were absent at the time of departure. Compensation and career opportunities were an important factor: workers in higher occupations, such as officers, petty officers, artisans, and so on, were less likely to be absent.

Most important, and providing a better explanation for the increase in absence from the 1740s onwards, might be the strong relationship between absence and debt. This, however, was not similar to the impact of debt on desertion oversees, where increasing debts would lead to increasing levels of desertion. In the case of absence in the Republic, the occurrence of workers’ absence seems to have been lower for workers with debts that had been arranged via the company. Some elaboration is important here.

At their recruitment in the Dutch Republic, workers could sign a *maandbrief*, a letter entitling relatives to a regular payment of a part of the workers’ wages while he was overseas, and a *transportbrief*, a letter of debt which arranged the payment of one specific sum of money from the wage account of the worker to either a relative or someone else. Both payments would only be effected after the VOC employee had earned enough money through service overseas. The *transportbrief* had priority over the *maandbrief*. In a case where workers had both a *maandbrief* and a *transportbrief*, it was possible that the *transportbrief* was assigned to either family or to debtors, such as intermediaries in the process of recruitment and the provisioning of clothing and equipment.

The *transportbrief* was mainly used as a payment for debts accrued by the worker before departure. Recruitment intermediaries, such as boarding house masters, hawkers, and provisioning specialists, would make sure to appropriate the *transportbrief* of the worker after (or before) providing the worker with the necessary equipment and services. The *transportbrief* served as payment for this, and was sold by boarding house masters for a price that was lower than the actual value of the letter, but high enough to compensate for the costs and to profit from it. The buyers of the *transportbrief*, so-called *ceelkopers*, speculated on a reasonable return rate from the payments on these letters of workers. For workers who only signed the *transportbrief*, it seems to have served only as a way to pay off debt, and not as a payment for relatives, as they did not sign the *maandbrief*, meant as a service exclusively for relatives. The need to pay off debts through a *transportbrief* without assigning money to relatives through a *maandbrief* indicates the involvement of intermediaries in the recruitment process and the dependence on
the services of these intermediaries at the time of recruitment. Of course, foreign workers, often arriving in Amsterdam and other chamber cities without the necessary contacts and knowledge, were more dependent on such intermediaries and were more vulnerable to the possible malpractices that accompanied them.

Table 8.1 Share of absent VOC employees with a transportbrief, but without a maandbrief (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All recruits</th>
<th>Absent in Republic</th>
<th>Deserted overseas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1680-1700</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1720</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720-1740</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740-1760</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760-1780</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780-1800</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VOC Opvarenden

The functioning of this system of debts and transportbrieven, however, does not offer sufficient explanation for the absence of workers. During the eighteenth century, there was both a strong increase in the level of absence and in the level of workers with a transportbrief and no maandbrief, rising from 50 to 60 per cent around 1700, to 75 to 85 per cent in the period from 1740 to 1780. The simultaneous rise of the levels of absence and debt, despite the paradox that debt had a limiting effect on absence, indicates an increase of the role of recruitment-related intermediaries, as well as an increase in the character of the recruitment process, entailing more control over the recruit. Up to 1740, the levels of debt of absent workers – as indicated by the transportbrieven – were fairly similar to the average. This changed, however, in the 1740s, as the level of absenteees with debts dropped significantly at the same time that the level of overall absence increased. The increased role of recruitment intermediaries must have coincided with the increased control of these intermediaries over the workers who signed the transportbrieven that formed their payment. The fact that indebted recruits who can be traced through the transportbrieven had a relatively high level of presence, must have been the result of boarding house masters and other intermediaries.

32 The percentage of workers with a transportbrief, but no maandbrief remained between 50 and 65 per cent in the period up to 1733. It then rose in the period 1734-1742, to between 65 and 70 per cent, and fluctuated between 75 and 85 per cent in the period 1743-1780: VOC Opvarenden.
making sure that their indebted workers would be on board at the time of departure; securing their payment through the transportbrief.\textsuperscript{33}

In his study into the personnel of the VOC, J.R. Bruijn signalled the increasing scarcity of qualified sailors for the VOC and the Dutch Navy in the 1740s and 1750s.\textsuperscript{34} The crisis of recruitment in the 1740s was not only a question of the shortage of skilled labour. More importantly, the recruitment system in chamber cities, such as Amsterdam, underwent a change in character, developing into a system with more deceptive and violent characteristics, resulting in rising levels of both absenteeism and debt.\textsuperscript{35} Examples of riots related to the recruitment of sailors and soldiers show the large scale of the recruitment industry and the sometimes violent ways in which boarding house masters secured their business. The volkhouder (boarding house master) Jan van Swol had around 300 people in his boarding house at the Zeedijk in Amsterdam in 1754. A fight broke out between the men of the boarding house master and his “clients”, who complained about the food. Some of the angry recruits were arrested, but the others took over the boarding house and declared that “they had made the house into an imperial free city, and that everyone was allowed to enter and leave freely”.\textsuperscript{36} This was a reference to the coercion and control that were inherent to many of the boarding houses. Walking away was not simply allowed. Some boarding houses may have had a closer resemblance to a prison than to a guest house. A few years later, “a few hundred Noors or Juts” attacked a boarding house in Amsterdam, because the boarding house master “did not want to release some of their mates”. They confronted the “servants or overseers” who worked for the widow who owned the house. After that, “zielverkopershuis at the Zeedijk was completely plundered, everything in the house was destroyed, the porcelain cabinet thrown on the ground, a clock smashed, and even the parrots were killed”. Furthermore, the sailors “freed everyone who were locked up there and chased them out of the house”.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} One might argue that it is not the intermediary retrieving the transportbrief who has a stake in making sure that the recruit is actually on board during departure, but the buyer of the transportbrief. However, this might underestimate the role of personal contacts and credibility in the buying and selling of the transportbrieven, or to rephrase this, the boarding house master who did not prevent their recruit from fleeing before departure may have a hard time selling his transportbrieven or may have seen their value drop significantly.

\textsuperscript{34} Bruijn, “De Personeelsbehoeftes”.

\textsuperscript{35} Gaastra, “The Recruitment of Soldiers”.

\textsuperscript{36} Bosman, De polsslag, p. 154. Original: “dat zij nu van het huis een keizerlijke vrijstad hadden gemaakt, en dat iedereen er naar believen in en uit mocht gaan.”

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pp. 196-197. Original: “door honderden Jutten of Noren, hun maten, niet meer wilde overdragen of loslaten, zielverkopershuis op de Zeedijk geheel geplunderd; Alles in huis was
The labour markets in Europe and Asia became increasingly entangled from 1500 onwards. This was not a process initiated one-sidedly from Europe and radiating outwards. The process of the internationalization of labour markets developed independently in different parts of the maritime world. For early modern Europe, three regions have been distinguished in the way that maritime labour markets functioned. First, regions where maritime labour was employed through international recruitment of “free” labour, as was the case mainly in the Dutch Republic, recruiting sailors from Northwestern Europe. Second, regions where sailors were mostly employed from within “national” boundaries, sometimes with a small amount of additional international recruitment. This was the case, for example, in Denmark, France, England, and Spain, where recruitment was mainly free, with the exception of periods of war. Third, regions where both free and unfree recruitment took place from within and outside “national” borders, mainly in the regions around the Baltic and Mediterranean. Similar recruitment patterns developed in Atlantic shipping. In the Atlantic region, however, the levels of international recruitment, perhaps due to the long distances involved, were higher than in European shipping, especially for shipping from regions in Northern Europe, such as Denmark, Hamburg, Prussia, and Bremen. French, Spanish, and English vessels were often still manned by “nationals”, but here as well, there tended to be more non-nationals on board. National regulations, such as the English Navigation Acts (1651) and the laws regulating the Spanish Atlantic trade route (the Carrera de Indias) (1658), officially limited the number of “foreign” sailors that Spanish and English ship owners were allowed to employ on board their ships. In practice, these regulations were often ignored or circumnavigated, leading to the recruitment of Portuguese, Italian, Flemish, Dutch, and German sailors. Shipping in the Atlantic was marked by another important development. In addition to the international recruitment of

vernield, een porseleinkast met porselein omvergesmeten, een staande klok verpletterd, zelfs een papegaai en de kanaries waren vermoord, haar knechten of toezichthouders; Ze hebben iedereen die daar opgesloten zat laten lopen en het huis uit gejaagd.”

38 This paragraph can also be found in the paper “The ‘Yellow Danger’?”.
39 Van Lottum, Lucassen, and Van Voss, “Labour Markets”.
40 Van Lottum, Across the North Sea, pp. 136-137.
42 Van Rossum et al., “National and International Markets”, p. 57.
43 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, pp. 19-20, 80; Pérez-Mallaina, Spain’s Men of the Sea, pp. 56-57.
“white” European and American sailors, shipping in the Atlantic increasingly witnessed the recruitment of crew members of African or African-American origin. Sometimes, these sailors were slaves, working for their owner as a sailor, for example, on vessels from the Caribbean, North America, and Brazil. More often these sailors could be free black men, sometimes freed slaves, earning a living through maritime work in the Atlantic.

The developments in maritime Asia did not, as could be argued for the Atlantic, only result from the European expansion and the developments in European shipping. Recruitment of maritime labour outside ethnic or national (group) boundaries was not an exclusively European phenomenon, but seems to have been common in Asia as well. Internationalization in Asian maritime labour markets outside and before the arrival of the Portuguese, the VOC, and other European trading companies, is more difficult to trace and leaves much room for future research. The various regions of maritime Asia, however, had already been connected by intensive long-distance shipping long before the arrival of Europeans. There is evidence that the same can be said for the maritime labour markets in Asia. Recent studies indicate that shipping with crews of mixed origin was a common phenomenon in Asia. For shipping over long distances and regional routes in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean, in particular, maritime labour could be recruited from the many different port cities of maritime Asia.

The maritime labour markets of Europe and Asia were related from the moment that structural maritime connections between the two regions came into existence. With European maritime expansion, however, maritime labour markets throughout the globe increasingly became entangled. The changing character of the relations between these markets can be roughly divided into five stages. Partly overlapping, these range from more or less separate maritime worlds around 1500 to almost completely interconnected markets. The stages are:

1. Almost entirely separated labour markets in maritime Europe and maritime Asia (before 1500).
2. Increasing connection between Asian and European maritime labour markets as a result of the introduction of European labour supply and

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44 Bolster, Black Jacks, pp. 84-86.
45 Christopher, Slave Ship Sailors.
46 Although lack of sources seems to be a problem here.
demand in Asian maritime labour markets. The European and Asian maritime labour markets become intertwined in Asia; only really small numbers of Asian slaves and sailors make it to Europe, mainly through Portuguese shipping (1500-1750).

3. Increasing integration in intercontinental shipping between Asia and Europe, especially from the early eighteenth century onwards, through recruitment of Asian sailors for shipping from Asia to Europe by East India companies and the settlement of Asian sailors, notably in London. The VOC is somewhat late in employing Asian sailors for intercontinental shipping and puts up barriers against the settlement of Asian sailors in the Dutch Republic (1700-1800).

4. Increased and accelerated internationalization of the recruitment of maritime labour in shipping in Asia (from the late eighteenth century onwards) and in intercontinental shipping (from the 1830s onwards). Simultaneously, a breaking down of barriers to the employment of “foreign” crews and increased regulation of colonial recruitment, ensuring the supply of (increasingly cheaper) Asian maritime labour (1800 onwards).

5. Near complete integration of European and Asian maritime labour markets, movement and settlement of Asian and European sailors in both Asia and Europe (now also outside London) (1870 onwards).

From internationalization to segmentation

The concise overview of Eurasian maritime labour and its labour relations and recruitment, especially in the early modern period, indicates that wage labour was the dominant mode of employment for sailors in both Europe and Asia. Case studies into the work and lives of European and Asian sailors in the service of the Dutch East India Company suggest that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Asian and European sailors performed similar work for similar wages. Although a European company, framing its Asian environment in its rather “Dutch” world view, the VOC provides an important example, as throughout almost the entire seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was the largest trading organization active throughout Asian waters working with European and Asian sailors. The bargaining position of Asian sailors seems to have been somewhat better than that of

48 Figures for Asian and European sailors on European merchant fleets are available in Van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld*, at the beginning of chapter 3.
European sailors. In the second half of the eighteenth century, this resulted in better regulations in the sphere of health care, lower punishments, lower debts, and attempts to prevent maltreatment by company authorities.49

Recruitment patterns were mainly intermediate forms between the “casual” and “mediated” modes, but an important distinction seems to have been that whereas Asian maritime labour markets may have been more characterized by casual recruitment patterns, the maritime labour market in the Dutch Republic became characterized more by mediated, often more coercive, recruitment patterns from 1740 onwards.

This all changed rapidly from the early nineteenth century. Increased European colonial interference in Asian societies, and especially Asian labour markets, resulted in changing recruitment patterns, the breakdown of negotiating positions, and the lowering of wages and working conditions for Asian sailors. Diverging wages, and therefore diverging costs of European and Asian labour, changed the relation between European and Asian sailors drastically. Colonialism and the reform of Asian labour markets undermined the position of Asian sailors and advanced the position of employers and intermediaries, and their control over the (Asian) workforce.50 Colonialism, in that respect, was not only an important factor in the increasing integration of labour markets, but at the same time in the increasing segmentation of these labour markets.

On the rapidly expanding British merchant fleet, Asian sailors were forced to be engaged under so-called “lascar articles” from the 1820s onwards. These articles contained separate conditions of engagement for sailors from the British Asian colonies, including contract durations of several years, but also prohibitions to be discharged in Britain and other restrictions. These regulations were accompanied by fundamental changes under expanding colonialism in the first half of the nineteenth century. Recruitment practices in British India were re-organized through (colonial) recruitment offices, backing up the employers’ interests. Simultaneously, colonial maritime employers were successful in “reinventing ‘traditional’ recruitment practices” to exert control over their (colonial) labour force, reviving traditions that had not been around in this form during the “more than two centuries [in which] ‘lascars’ had been employed on European vessels”.51 Under the influence of rising colonialism, early in the nineteenth century,

49 Again, this becomes clear from Van Rossum, Werkers van de wereld.
50 Balachandran, Globalizing Labour? This has also been pointed out in reviews of this book, including my review in Indian Historical Review, 41 (2014), pp. 357–360.
51 Balachandran, Globalizing Labour?, p. 18.
century, maritime recruitment patterns in Asian seem to have changed from "casual" to "mediated".

Simultaneously, European sailors – who had experienced this shift, at least in the Dutch Republic, but presumably also elsewhere, almost a century earlier – gained the increasing attention of political reformers and labour unions, striving for the improvement of their working conditions and their position in the labour market (from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century). With the rise of labour union organization, this led to attacks on the "mediated" recruitment systems for European sailors – in the early twentieth century in the Netherlands – and recruitment became increasingly organized through bureaus of maritime employers and sometimes through bureaus of governments or labour unions. The "formalization" of European sailors' recruitment was in sharp contrast with the continuation of the "mediated" recruitment of Asian sailors, creating a division between better-paid European workers and their lower-paid Asian counterparts. These groups partly competed, as they were employed in the same occupations.

If we are to understand “institutions” as humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interactions, the global history of the maritime sector shows the simultaneous integration of Asian and European maritime labour markets with increasing constraints on Asian maritime labour resulting from colonial (and Western capitalist) powers. Crucial to this process were both (penalized) labour contracts and differentiating recruitment regimes. It is important to note that these could be considered "inclusive" economic institutions, organizing market exchange and safeguarding contractual agreements. These contracts, however, were extremely unbalanced, favouring the claims of employers on (contracted) labour power over (the protection of) the rights of the workers. Similar to the Dutch and other European maritime and military labour contracts of the early modern period, sailors were obliged to serve for years once they had signed a contract. Systems of penalties, criminal punishment, and the restriction of mobility bound workers severely.

Between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, a fully globalized maritime labour market emerged that was marked by large inequalities and tense conflicts between employers, workers, and different groups of workers. Under the pressure of the destructive effects of colonialism – actively breaking down well-established labour markets and demolishing the position of colonial workers – and the mobilizing effects of mass ideologies, rallying around nationality, race, and class, European and
Asian sailors were set against each other.\textsuperscript{52} Class ideology created a clear division between workers and employers, pushing for solidarity amongst divided groups of workers, but at the same time problematizing the role of groups of workers that had not (yet) organized and participated in this struggle. Colonialism, at the same time, had made Asian sailors colonial “subjects”, who were paid less and were perceived to be “inferior” and “less capable” workers. The colonialism and global capitalism nexus, and the wave of economic-institutional changes it forced upon the world, pushed Asian sailors into a specific “inferior” position.

The consequent explicit competition between Asian and European sailors resulted in two distinct strategies to cope with this division in one of the first real global workforces. European – especially social-democratic – labour unions opted for nationalist strategies in which the role of Asian sailors was seen as that of obstructors of what was perceived by European workers as “their” more “developed” class struggle. This resulted in explicit racist campaigns against Chinese and Indian sailors in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{53} Other groups, often revolutionary organizations of European and Asian sailors, opted for the opposite strategy of internationalist solidarity by attempting to organize and create links between European and Asian sailors. These conflicts echoed into the Second World War, after which the scene would again change drastically as result of decolonization and changing regulation, but also maritime industries becoming unrestricted by using flags of convenience.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter traces the “long” internationalization of maritime labour markets in Europe and Asia (1500 to 2000) and tries to explore and explain developments in maritime labour relations and the segmentation of maritime labour markets through the Dutch case. It indicates that wage labour was a normal and long-lasting solution for the allocation of labour in the maritime sector across the globe. The chapter, therefore, does not try to explain a transition to wage labour, but points out that the question must be shifted from the problem of where and when wage labour arose – and whether this transition was complete or not – to where and when wage labour was in use, in what specific context, and under what conditions.

\textsuperscript{52} Van Rossum, \textit{Hand aan Hand}.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.; Tabili, “The Construction of Racial Difference”; Wubben, “Chinezen”.
Historical evidence for the functioning of maritime labour markets in Europe and South and Southeast Asia indicates that in the case of long-distance shipping, maritime labour markets in these different parts of the world were characterized by intermediate forms of casual and mediated wage labour relations.

The labour markets in Europe and Asia became increasingly entangled from 1500 onwards. This happened in partly overlapping stages: from almost entirely separated labour markets in maritime Europe and maritime Asia (before 1500); increasing connections between Asian and European maritime labour markets through intensified intra-Asiatic shipping (1500-1750); increasing integration in intercontinental shipping between Asia and Europe, including the recruitment of Asian sailors (1700-1800); increased and accelerated the internationalization of recruitment of maritime labour in shipping in Asia (from the late eighteenth century onwards) and in intercontinental shipping (from the 1830s onwards); and finally, near-complete integration of European and Asian maritime labour markets, and the movement and settlement of Asian and European sailors in both Asia and Europe (1870 onwards).

In this process of globalizing maritime labour markets, the position of European and Asian sailors – and as a result also the relations between these workers – changed drastically. In the eighteenth century, Asian sailors seem to have had a relatively good bargaining position, apparently better than that of European sailors. From the early nineteenth century onwards, increased European colonial interference in Asian societies – and especially in Asian labour markets – resulted in changing recruitment patterns, the breakdown of the negotiating positions, and the lowering of wages and working conditions for Asian sailors. Undermining the position of Asian sailors, colonial reforms advanced the position of employers and intermediaries, and increased their control over the Asian workforce. Under the influence of rising colonialism, early-nineteenth-century maritime recruitment patterns in Asia seem to have changed from “casual” to “mediated”. Under the pressure of political reformers and labour union organizing, the mediated recruitment systems were in decline for European sailors, and recruitment was increasingly formalized through bureaus of maritime employers and sometimes through bureaus of governments or labour unions.

The global history of the maritime sector, therefore, is a key example of the double effect of colonialism, simultaneously integrating Asian and European maritime labour markets, while severely constraining (or even “binding”) Asian maritime labour through (penalized) labour contracts and
differentiating recruitment regimes. Colonialism, in that respect, was not only an important factor in the increasing integration of labour markets, but at the same time in the increasing segmentation of these labour markets. It must be noted that this is not just the history of “different” economic institutions altering the history of the non-West. The institutions enforced on Asian (maritime) labour markets can be considered “inclusive” economic institutions, organizing market exchange and safeguarding contractual agreements. These contracts, however, safeguarded deals made in power relations that were extremely uneven, almost solely focusing on the employers’ rights to the exploitation of and control over (Asian) workers, by the claim of employers on (contracted) labour power over (the protection of) the rights of the worker. As a result, the interplay of colonial and global capitalistic expansion pushed Asian sailors into an “inferior” position, leading to explicit and racialized competition between Asian and European sailors.

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