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Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Port Cities (Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries)

PEPIJN BRANDON*

*International Institute of Social History
Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Vrije Universiteit
De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

E-mail: pepijn.brandon@iisg.nl and p.brandon@vu.nl

NIKLAS FRYKMAN

*Department of History, University of Pittsburgh
3903 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA*

E-mail: nef13@pitt.edu

PERNILLE RØGE

*Department of History, University of Pittsburgh
3901A Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA*

E-mail: per20@pitt.edu

ABSTRACT: Colonial and postcolonial port cities in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean regions functioned as crucial hubs in the commodity flows that accompanied the emergence and expansion of global capitalism. They did so by bringing together laboring populations of many different backgrounds and statuses – legally free or semi-free wage laborers, soldiers, sailors, and the self-employed, indentured servants, convicts, and slaves. Focusing on the period from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, a crucial moment in the establishment of the world market, the transformation of colonial states, and the reorganization of labor and labor migration on a transoceanic scale, the contributions in this special issue address the consequences of

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the presence of these “motley crews” on and around the docks and the neighborhoods that stretched behind them. The introduction places the articles within the context of the development of the field of Global Labor History more generally. It argues that the dense daily interaction that took place in port cities makes them an ideal vantage point from which to investigate the consequences of the “simultaneity” of different labor relations for questions such as the organization of the work process under developing capitalism, the emergence of new forms of social control, the impact of forced and free migration on class formation, and the role of social diversity in shaping different forms of group and class solidarity. The introduction also discusses the significance of the articles presented in this special issue for three prevailing but problematic dichotomies in labor historiography: the sharp borders drawn between so-called free and unfree labor, between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, and the pre-modern and modern eras.

This special issue examines the variegated combinations of workers that formed the laboring population of colonial and postcolonial port cities in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean world from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The central question guiding each of the nine articles presented here is how the presence of a multiplicity of labor relations in a relatively confined geographical area influenced the nature of work, social control, conflict, and solidarity. Drawing on research on a large number of port cities across the Americas and Southern Asia (see [Figure 1](#)), the articles focus on the spaces and conditions under which legally free or semi-free wage laborers, soldiers, sailors, the self-employed, indentured servants, convicts, and slaves met on the waterfront. Port cities were not, of course, unique in bringing together such motley groups of workers. For example, ships, prisons, and households historically contained, in a single place, workers with vastly different backgrounds and statuses.¹ However, port cities formed a specific location in the accelerating integration of the world market – as connectors between different regions of production, trade, and consumption, as stopping points in transcontinental labor migration, and as strategic posts in establishing and securing colonial and postcolonial states. They were mixed labor zones par excellence. For this reason, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker assigned them a privileged place in their reconceptualization of early modern class formation and transnational social

1. Ships: Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807* (Cambridge, 2006); Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston, MA, 2014); Matthias van Rossum, “A ‘Moorish World’ Within the Company: The VOC, Maritime Logistics and Subaltern Networks of Asian Sailors”, *Itinerario*, 36:3 (2012), pp. 39–60. Prisons: Christian De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein (eds), *Global Convict Labour* (Leiden, 2015). Households: Marco H.D. van Leeuwen and Ineke Maas, “Endogamy and Social Class in History: An Overview”, *International Review of Social History*, 50:S13 (2005), pp. 1–23, as well as other contributions in that Special Issue.

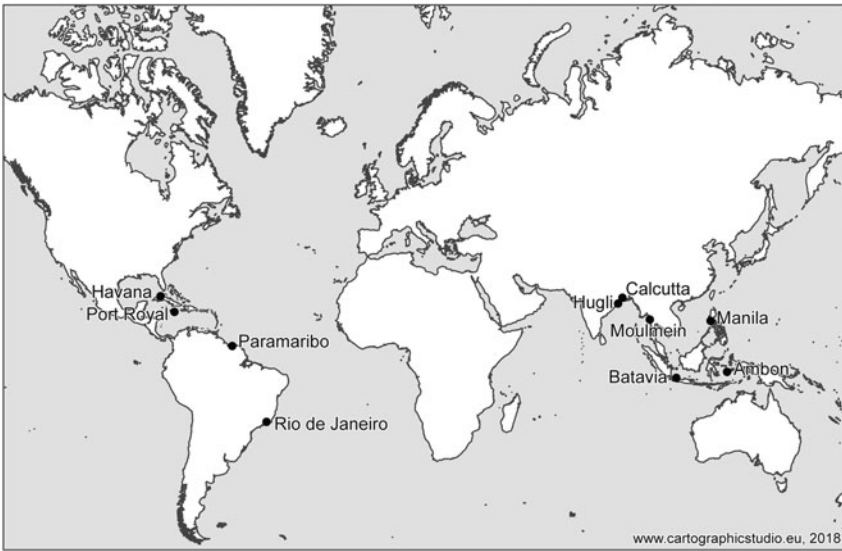


Figure 1. Port cities that are the focus of the nine contributions to this Special Issue.

struggle.² Likewise, ports and their associated industries have figured prominently in comparative labor histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³

Colonial and postcolonial port cities are the central focus of this special issue because of their ability to bring out a central theme in labor history more broadly. In her recent overview of the evolution of work in the last millennium, Andrea Komlosy argues that “the combination of labor relations at an individual point of time” is a key aspect of the long-term evolution of societies.⁴ This observation is broadly shared by researchers working in the field of Global Labor History. To give just one example, the centrality of what Komlosy calls “simultaneity” forms the basis of the long-running “Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations”, which categorizes and quantifies the different forms of labor that coexisted in countries across the world in selected years between 1500 and today.⁵ Simultaneity in

2. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Slaves, Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA, 2000).

3. Sam Davies et al. (eds), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History 1790–1970*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 2000); Raquel Varela, Hugh Murphy, and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Workers Around the World: Case Studies 1950–2010* (Amsterdam, 2017), available at <http://www.open.org/search?identifier=625526>, last accessed 15 February 2019.

4. Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 years* (London, 2018), p. 223.

5. Karin Hofmeester et al., “The Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000: Background, Set-Up, Taxonomy, and Applications”, working paper, 2016, available

this approach is seen as a permanent feature of the development of labor relations rather than a mere transitory phenomenon.⁶ It challenges linear notions of working-class formation based on largely European models.⁷ Traditional labor history tended to focus on a single type of laborer (most of the time the male, wage-earning proletarian), often did so only within a national framework, and theoretically assumed that social systems are defined by one type of labor relation (for example, feudalism by the labor of serfs, and capitalism by wage labor).⁸ The influence of the more open-ended approach is evident in the recent wave of “new histories” of North American capitalism, especially in their treatment of plantation slavery in connection with the expansion of wage labor in the world’s industrial centers. However, whereas the “new histories” primarily look at the simultaneity of different forms of labor in parts of the global economy that are geographically distant from each other, a focus on port cities allows the authors of this Special Issue to examine their combination in a single place.⁹

The nine contributions presented here originate from two international workshops held in 2016 and 2017 that were co-organized by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the Collège d’Études Mondiales in Paris, and the University of Pittsburgh.¹⁰ Taking as the point of departure the interaction of multifarious groups of laborers along the quays and docks and in the bustling neighborhoods that stretched

at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/4OGRAD>; last accessed 6 November 2018. For publications arising from this project, see <https://collab.iisg.nl/web/labourrelations>; last accessed 9 August 2018.

6. Komlosy, “Introduction”, *Work*; Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2008).

7. Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam, 1999). Some important strands of historiography that started from the problem of simultaneity predated the challenge to the old paradigm mounted by Global Labor History, for example the long line of debates in Latin America on capitalist development in underdeveloped countries and the “articulation of modes of production”. Other similar challenges emerged more or less in the same period. These include Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), and Linebaugh and Rediker, *Hydra*.

8. For the differences between the two approaches, see the recent exchange in this journal between Peter Ackers and Marcel van der Linden. Peter Ackers, “Workers of the World? A British Liberal-Pluralist Critique of Marcel van der Linden’s Global Labour History”, *International Review of Social History*, 62:2 (2017), pp. 253–269; Marcel van der Linden, “Ghostbusting or Real Pluralism? A Brief Response to Peter Ackers”, *International Review of Social History*, 62:2 (2017), pp. 271–278.

9. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Capitalism: The Reemergence of a Historical Concept* (London, 2016); Sven Beckert and Christine Desan (eds), *American Capitalism: New Histories* (New York, 2018).

10. The workshops took place on 6–7 May 2016 and on 5–6 May 2017 at the University of Pittsburgh. We would like to thank all the participants, commentators, and visitors for their valuable input, as well as our fellow organizers Marcus Rediker and Françoise Vergès.

behind them, participants reflected on the following questions. How did the interaction of laborers under different labor relations affect the economy of port cities and the rise of global capitalism? How did the employment of these laborers at the same site affect the development of new forms of social control, the racialization of hierarchies, and changes in gender relations? How did the influx of large numbers of laborers of different statuses change patterns of forced and voluntary labor migration, including opportunities for desertion, marronage, and jumping ship? How did the interactions of different groups of laborers in port cities affect the development of working-class cultures, forms of solidarity, and theories and practices of resistance?

The topic, geographical demarcation, and temporal framework were chosen to challenge three prevailing but problematic dichotomies in labor historiography: the sharp borders drawn between so-called free and unfree labor, between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, and the pre-modern and modern eras.

This introduction situates the interaction between different types of laborers in the social environment of the port city, in the different imperial and oceanic settings, and in wider systemic shifts that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the abolition of slavery in the Americas, the strengthening of colonial states, and changes in transoceanic circuits of indentured and convict labor. In his afterword, Marcus Rediker will draw out what the contributions to this Special Issue reveal about the nature of the “motley crew” – the multi-status, multi-ethnic, and in all imaginable ways diverse working class that was thrust together to create and channel the commodity flows that made capitalism global.

PORT CITIES, LABOR, AND COMMODITY CHAINS

The integration of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans into increasingly capitalist circuits of international trade was already well underway before the period under study in this Special Issue. From the late fifteenth century, Portuguese and Spanish ships turned seas and oceans into global highways whose maritime infrastructure connected an expanding web of ports and their respective hinterlands. By the late sixteenth century, the Spanish treasure fleet and the Manila galleons had merged Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Ocean economies into an incipient single trading system to secure for European markets the Chinese goods that American silver allowed them to procure. Other European powers further integrated existing and novel subsystems across the globe when they joined the Spanish and Portuguese in the following century, linking together over vast distances peoples, polities, economies, and ecosystems. The complex processes they unleashed transformed the world beyond recognition, tilting the global balance of power towards the Western Eurasian periphery. While global and world historians

have explored these broader transformative currents from a bird's-eye view, regional specialists have long concentrated on important subsystems connected to the rise of the global economy. Whole fields have been built up around particularly the Atlantic and Indian Ocean regions, which continue to generate important research and debates.¹¹ The recent emphasis on the porousness of borders, imperial entanglements, and connected histories is simultaneously bringing scholars of separate ocean worlds into dialogue.¹² New multi-sited studies of labor within, beyond, and across empires complement this trend, highlighting through a combination of global, regional, and local scales the processes that structured the lives of laboring people.¹³

Port cities have rightfully come to play a prominent role in this literature. Yet, despite a flurry of important studies on everything from the peculiarities of gender and sexuality on the libertine waterfront to the unstable formation of national, imperial, and cosmopolitan identities in the maritime borderlands, the majority of work remains focused on the commodities that came from the hinterland, passed through port and onto ship, and from there were transported across the oceans and on to other destinations.¹⁴ During the past few decades, historians have uncovered in granular detail the credit arrangements and familial, diasporic, and religious networks that made this trade possible, the legal and fiscal frameworks that supported it, and the public-private military infrastructures that protected it.¹⁵ But while a rich

11. Classic meta narratives include Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, 3 vols (London, 1981–1984); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols (Berkeley, CA, 2011). For the Indian Ocean, the classic studies include Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985), and Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500–1800: Collected Essays* (New Delhi and New York, 2001). For the Atlantic, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944).

12. See the forum edited by Amélia Polónia, Ana Sofia Ribeiro, and Daniel Lange on “Connected Oceans: New Pathways in Maritime History”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 29:1 (2017), and David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge, 2018).

13. For some recent examples of such multi-sited labor histories, see Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC and London, 2015); Molly A. Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492–1700* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018).

14. For a sampling of recent work, see Brad Beavan, Karl Bell, and Robert James (eds), *Port Towns and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront, c.1700–2000* (London, 2016); and Jessica Choppin Roney, “Distinguishing Port Cities, 1500–1800”, *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15:4 (2017). For a recent collection focused especially on port city merchant networks, see Adrian Jarvis and Robert Lee (eds), *Trade, Migration and Urban Networks in Port Cities, c.1640–1940* (Liverpool, 2008).

15. See, for example, Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT, 2009); Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World, 1450–1800* (Aldershot, 1996); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge, 1995); Sebouh Aslanian, *From the*

and varied literature has grown up around port city merchants engaged in international commerce, the physical labor that actually moved commodities across the global marketplace has received far less attention.¹⁶

As the articles collected in this volume demonstrate, the concentration of vast numbers of specialized workers in port cities, and their complex combination at key nodal points in a globe-spanning network of commodity chains, is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, they show clearly just how much physical labor was required to make the early modern market work. This basic observation clashes even with prominent strands of Marxist historiography, otherwise quite attuned to the role of labor in history, which have tended to treat the market as a sphere where commodities circulated as if by magic and without the blood and sweat of human toil.¹⁷ Envisioning commodity circulation in such a way not only excludes the labor that was directly implicated in the transportation of goods. It also hides the varied and vast amount of labor that built, maintained, and protected the infrastructure that made such movements possible, including roads, canals, streets, warehouses, stables, wells, aqueducts, barracks, prisons, fortresses, shipyards, docks, seawalls, and breakers.

This volume concentrates primarily on colonial and postcolonial port cities in the Americas, the greater Indian Ocean world, and the western Pacific rim. Depending on whether they were initially the products of European colonization, such as Paramaribo in Dutch Suriname or Rio de Janeiro in Portuguese Brazil, or instead indigenous cities conquered and integrated by expanding maritime empires, such as Manila in the Spanish Philippines or Calcutta in British India, the infrastructure supporting their integration into global economic networks either had to be built from scratch or expanded dramatically.

Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa (Berkeley, CA, 2011).

16. Merchant seamen and dockers are partial exceptions to this picture, as are the many workers directly involved in shifting goods from ship to shore and beyond in the current era of containerization and the logistics revolution. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987); Sam Davies et al., *Dock Workers*; Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 2008); Stefano Bellucci et al., “Introduction: Labour in Transport: Histories from the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America), c.1750 to 1950”, *International Review of Social History*, 59:S22 (2014), pp. 1–10; Peter Cole and Jennifer Hart, “Trade, Transport, and Services”, in Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Handbook Global History of Work* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2018), pp. 278–295, especially pp. 278–282.

17. See, as an example, Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*. Robert Brenner’s critique of Wallerstein likewise ignores the productive labor of transportation workers: Robert Brenner, “The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism”, *New Left Review*, 1/104 (1977), pp. 25–92. Peter Linebaugh articulates a similar point about the labor that makes the market in “All the Atlantic Mountains Shook”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 10 (1982), pp. 87–121.

During the early modern period, this infrastructure was concentrated mostly at the port and in the city itself. Commodities usually arrived either by coastal and riverine transport, or by ocean-going ships from a more extensive “maritime hinterland” that included both distant ports and nearby productive “hinterseas”, such as fishing grounds, oyster beds, or the wreck sites that Kevin Dawson explores in his contribution to this Special Issue.¹⁸

By the nineteenth century, some ports that had previously been oriented predominantly toward the sea and each other began to extend their influence deep into landlocked interiors. This created new waves of labor migration, first sending out soldiers, settlers, and slaves to conquer and work the land, followed by thousands of laborers to build the roads, canals, and railroads that physically integrated and drained the new hinterlands of agricultural commodities and funneled them towards the rising industrial cities of the metropole.¹⁹ On the back of these transformations, some ports, for example New York in the United States or Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, managed to remake themselves into new centers of imperial power. In the process, they spawned yet another round of labor-intensive infrastructure construction as their populations grew into the hundreds of thousands and their urban landscapes were transformed to rival established seats of power in the old world.²⁰

MIGRATION, GENDER, AND PORT DEMOGRAPHY

The demographic specificities of port cities in the colonial and postcolonial world had a large impact on how groups of workers interacted. Historically, port cities everywhere have been characterized by “a disproportionate dependency for population growth on in-migration and the specific configuration of migrant streams”.²¹ But an important difference in the way that colonial port cities met their labor requirements when compared to their metropolitan counterparts was the preponderance within this in-migration stream of coerced workers, including slaves, indentured servants, debt

18. Mary Draper, “Timbering and Turtling: The Maritime Hinterlands of Early Modern British Caribbean Cities”, *Early American Studies*, 15:4 (2017), pp. 769–800.

19. This process has received particular attention in the historiography of North American nineteenth-century capitalism. See, for example, Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Survival, and Slavery in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore, MD, 2009); Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (Cambridge, 1993). For nineteenth-century Havana and its hinterland, see Evelyn Jennings’s contribution to this Special Issue.

20. On New York, see Brian Phillips Murphy, *Building the Empire State: Political Economy in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia, PA, 2015). On Rio, see Martine Jean’s contribution to this Special Issue.

21. Robert Lee and Richard Lawton, “Port Development and the Demographic Dynamics of European Urbanization”, in *idem* (eds), *Population and Society in Western European Port-Cities, c.1650–1939* (Liverpool, 2002), pp. 1–36, 11.

peons, prisoners of war, convicts, and conscripted military personnel.²² Although particular sectors within these port city economies continued to experience both acute and chronic labor shortages well into the nineteenth century, as the mad scramble for labor in both Evelyn Jennings's and Martine Jean's articles in this Special Issue illustrate, more well-established port cities – fed by continuous in-migration from their own rural hinterland and far-distant regions overseas – tended to develop sizeable wage labor, informal, and criminal sectors that operated alongside highly coercive labor relations. In addition, port cities also received large numbers of transitory migrants, such as sailors and soldiers, who often worked as day laborers or carried out specific tasks for local employers.²³ Taken together, this made for an unusual degree of diversity and flexibility in the combination of port city labor relations.

Their distinct migratory patterns also influenced the demography of port city laboring populations in another significant way: more than is often acknowledged, resident port city workforces were predominantly female. In addition to the regular coming and going of migratory male seafaring labor, depending on a city's size and location, the seasonal arrival and departure of fleets could mushroom or collapse a town's population overnight, suddenly adding or subtracting several thousand mostly young and single men to and from a population that often did not exceed 20,000. This not only gave many colonial port cities constantly fluctuating population levels and a huge number of temporary residents, it also increased dramatically the proportion and economic importance of women among the permanent and semi-permanent population.²⁴ Common images of brawny longshoremen, careless sailors, or bean-counting clerks thus obscure the far more typical female port city worker. As both Titas Chakraborty's and Melina Teubner's contributions to this Special Issue highlight, women's indispensable labor assured the reproduction of those predominantly male workers who were more directly involved in the movement of goods and the building of the infrastructure that supported it.

Port cities have frequently been described as enclaves of potential and contested freedom. For example, Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell have

22. See the contributions of Matthias van Rossum, Clare Anderson, and Evelyn Jennings to this Special Issue.

23. Karwan Fatah-Black, "Slaves and Sailors on Suriname's Rivers", *Itinerario*, 36:3 (2012), pp. 61–82. The idea that, from the point of view of the city workforce, sailors, soldiers, and company employees should be viewed as temporary migrants connects to the typology of migration as developed in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "Theorizing Cross-Cultural Migrations: The Case of Eurasia since 1500", *Social Science History*, 41:3 (2017), pp. 445–475.

24. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (Champaign, IL, 1987); Elaine Forman Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630–1800* (Boston, MA, 1998); Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell (eds), *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2012).

suggested that female port city workers were often able to carve out independent survival and career trajectories that would have been far more difficult to accomplish in either the ossified social order of a metropolitan port or in the violent environment of the colonial hinterlands.²⁵ Similarly, those whose racial or ethnic heritage might identify them as bound laborers in the hinterland often found in the fluidity of social relations that prevailed on the waterfront the ability to disappear and obfuscate their personal history.²⁶ Moreover, the difficulty of maintaining effective social control and surveillance among the broad diversity of workers who toiled side by side, and lived together along the waterfront, combined with the easy availability of news and rumors from similar communities overseas, often allowed for the emergence of counter-hegemonic, cosmopolitan, anti-racist working-class cultures that in moments of crisis could make port cities the centers of revolutionary mobilization.²⁷ Such militancy never went unchallenged, however. As the history of eighteenth-century barrels, nineteenth-century militarized docklands, and twentieth-century container ships demonstrates, authorities may have found it difficult to break working-class power on the waterfront, but they often managed to gain the upper hand – at least temporarily – by developing new technologies, new ways of eroding inter-group solidarity, and new mechanisms for social control.²⁸

FREE AND UNFREE LABOR

The distinction between free and unfree laborers is perhaps the most generic way in which to capture the dividing line between the groups of workers encountered in port cities. It has long been central to the historiography

25. Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, “Introduction: Mother Courage and Her Sisters: Women’s Worlds in the Premodern Atlantic,” in *idem* (eds), *Women in Port*, pp. 1–36, 9–24.

26. On desertion and port cities, see Matthias van Rossum and Jeanette Kamp (eds), *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History* (London, 2016); and Titas Chakraborty, Matthias van Rossum, and Marcus Rediker (eds), *A Global History of Runaways: Labor, Mobility, and Capitalism, 1650–1850* (Berkeley, CA, forthcoming). On marronage, see Linda Rupert, “Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean”, *Slavery & Abolition*, 30:3 (2009), pp. 361–382.

27. The classic statement is Linebaugh and Rediker, *Hydra*. See also Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London, 2018). Even today, port city workers are among the most militant sectors of the global labor movement: Jake Alimahomed-Wilson and Immanuel Ness (eds), *Choke Points: Logistics Workers Disrupting the Global Supply Chain* (London, 2018).

28. On working-class struggle and eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century transportation technologies, see Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 153–183, 371–441; on containerization and the logistics revolution, see Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis, MN, 2014).

on the “making of the working class”. But it is also a highly problematic one, as a large body of literature demonstrates.²⁹ For example, to consider wage labor as free labor does not make much sense for one of the emblematic groups of wage laborers in port cities: sailors. Even when working under contract and for a wage, which was not always the case, the conditions of their employment often imposed severe limits on their freedom of movement, stipulated corporal punishment for even minor offenses, and mostly entailed long-term contracts that they could exit before their time was due only through desertion or death.³⁰ Important differences between such “bound” wage laborers and those working in absolute dependency certainly existed. Nevertheless, it makes much more sense to understand the growing differentiation between them as taking place within a wide spectrum of coerced labor relations, than through a clear juxtaposition.³¹ Similar conclusions have been drawn by Paul Craven and Douglas Hay, who have looked at the evolution of penal codes for slave labor and contractual employment in the British Empire. Complicating the notion of a clear evolutionary path from unfree to free labor, they argue that “penal sanctions not only persisted but increased in much English and colonial master and servant law in the eighteenth century, and enforcement rates increased significantly in Britain in the nineteenth century, and massively in many colonies”.³² Again, in their recent special issue in this journal, Clare Anderson, Ulbe Bosma, and Christian De Vito outlined how, in the course of the nineteenth century, convict labor increased on a massive scale. In colonial contexts, this type of labor directly complemented indentured labor as a new, state-organized source of

29. Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, “Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South”, *The American Historical Review*, 88:5 (1983), pp. 1175–1200; Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997); Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2001); Alessandro Stanziani, “Introduction: Labour Institutions in a Global Perspective, from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century”, *International Review of Social History*, 54:3 (2009), pp. 351–358; Alessandro Stanziani, *Labor on the Fringes of Empire: Voice, Exit and the Law* (Cham, 2018); Komlosy, *Work*.

30. Rediker, *Between the Devil*; Van Rossum and Kamp (eds), *Desertion in the Early Modern World*. The same can be said for soldiers, another omnipresent group of waged workers. Erik-Jan Zürcher (ed.), *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour, 1500–2000* (Amsterdam, 2014), available at <http://www.open.org/search?identifier=468734>, last accessed 15 February 2019.

31. Marcel van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labor”, in *idem* and Magaly Rodríguez García (eds), *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016), pp. 293–322.

32. Paul Craven and Douglas Hay, “Introduction”, in *idem* (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC and London, 2004), pp. 1–58, 27.

coerced labor to replace slavery.³³ Meanwhile, coercion continued to play an important role in the working lives of sailors and soldiers, especially but not exclusively those recruited among colonial subject populations.³⁴

Putting interaction between workers of different statuses center stage shows that the boundaries between free and unfree laborers were porous not only in legal terms, but also in daily practice. This is even so at the individual level. In their own lives, many workers experienced a variety of gradations of coerced labor relations. Recently arrived slaves from Africa in an Atlantic or Indian Ocean port might have experienced personal independence, or slavery of different types, before being captured by Europeans. Meanwhile, artisans working along the waterfront might previously have been slaves, indentured servants, or soldiers, or might even have fulfilled several of these roles at the same time.³⁵ Collective experiences also blurred group distinctions. Whether diving for treasure in the Caribbean (Dawson), building roads and prisons in nineteenth-century Havana and Rio de Janeiro (Jennings and Jean), loading and unloading goods for the Dutch East India Company in Batavia in the seventeenth century (Van Rossum), or performing the work of war and conquest (Thomas), mixed groups of workers often performed more or less the same tasks in close proximity, if not jointly. Furthermore, the image that emerges from the articles gathered here is one of laborers of different statuses intermingling in many settings outside of their workplaces. They encountered each other when socializing in spaces such as bars and brothels (Chakraborty), around street stalls selling food (Teubner), or at public festivities and riots (Brandon). On and off the job, they depended on each other for care, provisions, protection, or news. None of the contributions idealize these daily encounters and dependencies. Sometimes they were extremely unequal, competitive, hostile, and exploitative. But not always. Even though the comparative lack of sources on ordinary people in non-conflictual situations means that the importance of mutual trust and everyday solidarities across sectional interests is underrepresented in the archives, cooperation and common resistance, sometimes across seemingly impregnable barriers, are a crucial part of the history of port city class formation.³⁶

33. Christian De Vito, Clare Anderson, and Ulbe Bosma, "Transportation, Deportation and Exile: Perspectives from the Colonies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *International Review of Social History*, 63:S26 (2018), pp. 1–24.

34. Alessandro Stanziani, *Sailors, Slaves, and Immigrants: Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750–1914* (New York, 2014), pp. 33–68.

35. Marcel van der Linden, "The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 82 (2012), pp. 57–76, 63–65.

36. Nineteenth-century slave narratives are one set of sources in which the individual impact of such solidarities can be quite clearly observed. See, for example, Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (1845)", in William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (eds), *The Civitas Anthology of African American*

While neither freedom, nor unfreedom, nor the distinction between them, were absolute, there were of course stark differences in levels of coercion experienced by various groups of workers. Often, the fear of being pushed downward on the scale of coercion created competition and hatred between groups that could be exploited by those in power. Indeed, all the evidence collected in the articles presented here suggests that ruling classes were frequently highly conscious of the specific mixture of backgrounds and statuses that went into the port city populations under their control. Seeking the in-migration of specific types of laborers functioned primarily as a condition for economic expansion, but it was also a useful political instrument. In her study of the West African slaving port of Benguela, Mariana Candido describes how this dynamic worked not only between so-called free and unfree laborers, but also among different groups that entered colonial society as coerced laborers. From the seventeenth century onward, Portuguese rulers increasingly shipped European convicts from Portugal and Brazil to different colonies to replenish their local white populations. As Candido describes,

though considered criminals elsewhere, they became the face of the Portuguese colonial state and were employed in the military forces and official colonial positions. Whites were saved from hard labor, showing the importance of skin color in defining roles in the Portuguese empire. Governors constantly requested more people, especially convicts from Brazil, although they also complained about their highly disruptive behavior.³⁷

Spatial segregation, if necessary, enforced by military means, and the creation of strict rules and taboos about interaction across boundaries of status, gender, or ethnicity became important instruments of control.³⁸

THE ATLANTIC AND INDIAN OCEANS, SEVENTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Looking at combinations of labor relations in port cities in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries brings out notable connections, similarities, and parallels that the historiographical division between the two basins tends to obscure. Certainly, major differences existed, and it is important to recognize that they did. It is clear that before the mid-eighteenth century early modern European powers were far less able

Slave Narratives (Washington, DC, 1999), pp. 105–194, 139–140. For another example of interracial solidarity on the waterfront, see Michael D. Thompson, *Working on the Dock of the Bay: Labor and Enterprise in an Antebellum Southern Port* (Charleston, SC, 2015).

37. Mariana P. Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and its Hinterland* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 92.

38. Remco Raben, “Batavia and Colombo: The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities, 1600–1800” (Ph.D. dissertation, Leiden University, 1996). See in particular the contributions by Brandon and Jennings in this Special Issue.

to impose themselves in the broader Indian Ocean region than in the Americas. Large Eurasian states, such as the Ottoman and Mughal empires and Ming and Qing China, were formidable powers capable of confining first the Portuguese, and then the Spanish, Dutch, English, French, Danish, and Swedish, to the edges of their territories. Only from the mid-eighteenth century onward, and with accelerated force from the nineteenth century, were Europeans – whose technological, military, and fiscal tools of domination had been sharpened through inter-European rivalry – able to turn the tables on Eurasian empires, and that only at a moment when the internal struggles of the latter weakened their ability to resist European military aggression. In contrast, the devastation wrought by Conquistadors in the Caribbean islands and against the Aztec and Inca empires triggered a demographic crisis that allowed Europeans to take control of islands, littorals, and vast land masses at a much earlier stage.³⁹

The failure of European states and companies to build a plantation sector in the New World based on indigenous labor and indentured Europeans prompted them to carry over twelve million African captives across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1900, approximately the same number of Africans as were forced into Asia as slaves between 800 and 1900.⁴⁰ African slavery and the racial hierarchies that accompanied it consequently shaped labor relations in the Atlantic basin more pervasively than in the Indian Ocean. As a result, until well into the nineteenth century, Abolitionism, a movement that runs throughout many of the contributions in this Special Issue, remained much more focused on the plantation complex in the Atlantic than on the extensive but more dispersed use of slave labor in the Indian Ocean.⁴¹

Yet, one can easily overstate the contrasts between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Enslaved Africans were traded into both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans; both basins saw the enslavement of indigenous populations and the modification of pre-existing forms of coerced labor; and both regions witnessed different combinations of plantation slavery with household slavery, indentured servitude, wage labor, and penal labor. In this Special Issue, Van Rossum's contribution in particular brings out the large variety of coerced labor relations at different locations in the seventeenth- and

39. John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London, 2007), chs 1–3.

40. Robert O. Collins, “The African Slave Trade to Asia and the Indian Ocean Islands”, *African and Asian Studies*, 5:3–4 (2006), pp. 325–346.

41. On the Dutch slave trade in the Indian Ocean, see Markus Vink, “The World's Oldest Trade”: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century”, *Journal of World History*, 14:2 (2003), pp. 131–177; Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, “Private Slave Trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean World: A Study into the Networks and Backgrounds of the Slavers and the Enslaved in South Asia and South Africa”, *Slavery & Abolition*, 38:1 (2017), pp. 95–116. For other European powers, see Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, OH, 2014).

eighteenth-century VOC empire, challenging the notion that European companies across the board resorted to “milder” forms of exploitation in the context of the Indian Ocean world.

The centrality of race in defining different groups of workers thrown together in colonial port cities is a particularly strong theme in Atlantic history. Yet, this process is often studied separately from the development of ethnic categorizations as a tool of colonial administration in other parts of the world. Reading Brandon’s and Thomas’s articles side by side offers a way to discern more nuanced parallels and differences in the processes of racialization that played out in both oceans, though not necessarily at the same time or in the same form, nor perhaps to the same degree. Brandon’s article pays close attention to racialization and social control in eighteenth-century Paramaribo. His contribution highlights the fact that despite the preponderance of African slavery, race as a category of separation always operated in combination with other markers of difference. It also shows racialization to have been a contested process, sometimes reinforcing competition between groups of laborers with diverging economic interests, but at other times clashing with everyday solidarities. A good example of the latter is the story of a German immigrant in Paramaribo, Christiaan Crewitz, who had first carved out a living for himself by “catching tortoises with the Indians”, before being arrested for illegally serving beer and soup to black slaves at his tavern.

Similarly drawing attention to the importance of overlapping forms of categorization, Thomas shows the obsession of British officials with the composition of the military forces sent by the British East India Company to conquer Manila in the Seven Years’ War. In doing so, they not only attached importance to the balance between European and Asian soldiers, but also to a large variety of differences within these broad groups (including Catholic Swiss, Irish, and Scottish troops, as well as French deserters, “sepoys”, “Coffreys”, “Topasses”, “Chinese coolies”, and “lascars”). Significant differences were introduced in the payment systems and the enforcement of discipline between these groups, even if they performed the same type of military labor. Nevertheless, Thomas describes instances in which laborers merged into a motley crew that not only captured Manila, but also plundered, protested, and deserted together. While ethnic categorization and racialization offered colonial and postcolonial governments in the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds an impressive tool of social control between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, solidarity and camaraderie among workers continued to find ways to challenge it, even if only intermittently.

Interesting parallels also existed with respect to the roles performed by women in both ocean basins. Chakraborty’s and Teubner’s contributions both address the issue of economic opportunities for women in the reproductive trades. In her article on women in household and caregiving occupations in East India Company ports in eighteenth-century Bengal,

Chakraborty reveals how women who attained their freedom after years of enslavement as household workers sometimes managed to gain economic independence through their ongoing contribution to these industries. Such economic autonomy resonates with Teubner's attention to the upward mobility of female street-food vendors who worked in Rio de Janeiro between the 1830s and 1870s. Her article mentions the example of an enslaved woman from Africa, Emília Soares do Patrocínio, who sold vegetables at different stands at the city market. That such female labor was not confined to petty trades is shown by the fact that the same Emília Soares do Patrocínio was able to acquire considerable wealth and become the owner of enslaved workers herself, leaving to her heirs several properties, twenty slaves, jewelry, and money. As the transition from slavery to slave ownership in the latter example suggests, upward mobility for individuals did not necessarily imply the negation of wider oppressive structures. The multi-layered inequalities that shaped reproductive labor are brought out in the horrible story related by Chakraborty of the rape of the two slave girls Sabina and Biviana, nine and five years old respectively, by EIC sailors Michael Cameron and John Massey.

Abolitionism, one of the major forces that transformed the world in the nineteenth century, is another important backdrop against which to explore changes in labor relations in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean jointly rather than separately. The campaign to abolish slavery was spearheaded by the British, but only after the burning of Cap François and the violent interaction among slaves, sailors, free Africans, and *petits blancs* in revolutionary Saint-Domingue had ended slavery in Haiti. The ending of the legal slave trade pushed European states and capitalist interests in one region after another to find alternative sources of labor. In doing so, they altered inter-oceanic migration flows considerably.⁴² While East African slaves were systematically channeled into the Atlantic to work on plantations, at least from the 1770s, plantation owners and states also began to tap into alternative pools of Asian labor. As Jennings's contribution shows, between the 1840s and 1870s, Chinese workers were forced into the Atlantic to work as contract laborers, under deeply exploitative conditions, to help the Spanish build the railroads that connected Havana to Cuban sugar plantations in the hinterland. This happened on the heels of decades of failed experiments with different forms of labor relations to build up Cuba's infrastructure. Other interlinked migratory patterns also allowed Abolitionism to thicken

42. On the abolition of slavery in a global context, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009). On the transition to a multiplicity of labor regimes on the heels of abolition, see, for instance, Laurence Brown, "The Three Faces of Post-Emancipation Migration in Martinique, 1848–1865", *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 36:2 (2002), pp. 310–335. On the Cap François uprising, see Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, 2010).

connections between the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Clare Anderson's contribution to this volume reflects how penal labor, long exploited in the Atlantic in conjunction with plantation slavery, expanded in the Indian Ocean in the nineteenth century. Her contribution highlights the fact that penal labor was marketed as a form of "enlightened labour relations" in India to "seek advantage in global markets that were increasingly sensitive to the expropriation of slave labour."

CONCLUSIONS

Combinations between the different kinds of labor implicated in capitalist development are still primarily examined across long distances, through the working of anonymous markets, global commodity chains, or a spatial division of labor between core and peripheral regions within the world economy.⁴³ So far, interconnectedness in Global Labor History has therefore mostly taken the form of "teleconnections" – the kind of dependencies between workers in different parts of the world that arise as a result of the consumption of distantly produced goods. Such connections, while potentially having an enormous impact on people's lives, can largely exist without leaving a trace in the participants' consciousness.⁴⁴ Situations in which combination took place in close proximity – through joint work in a single environment, workplace, or even work process – have not received comparable attention. Colonial and postcolonial port cities form an ideal case study to look at this particular form of "simultaneity" of different types of labor relations. Sometimes through microhistory, sometimes through long-term comparative history, the contributions gathered in this special issue show that central hubs in the developing world market were built by highly diverse laboring populations that interacted in close proximity. This also allows the authors to address the key questions that lay at the foundation of this project in new ways. There is now an enormous body of literature that shows why and how the emergence of global capitalism did not promote a single and universal shift from "unfree" to "free" labor. Nevertheless, there were significant differences over time and place in the composition of such mixed labor systems, as well as in the intensity of interaction that they entailed, and port cities prove to be a good vantage point from which to

43. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*; Ed Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, 2014). Chris Evans, "El Cobre: Cuban Ore and the Globalization of Swansea Copper, 1830–70", *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 27:1 (2014), pp. 112–131; Dale W. Tomich, "World of Capital, Worlds of Labor: A Global Perspective", in *idem*, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, 2004), pp. 32–55.

44. Van der Linden, "Promise and Challenges", p. 68.

examine such varieties and changes. In general, the articles show that it was precisely the relative freedom of movement and the easy availability of contact provided by port cities that also made them battlegrounds for the increase in social control and the refinement of apparatuses of repression. Migration was an essential determinant of class formation in port cities, continuously changing the composition of the labor force in terms of background, gender, and social status, while at the same time underlying the wild circulation of experiences, ideas, and forms of resistance. New connections and solidarities could and did emerge in the process, as did new animosities that rulers hardly ever failed to exploit.

Most of the articles in this special issue start their explorations from a single place. However, what these case studies aptly demonstrate is that the “simultaneity” in different types of labor relations that fueled the integration of world markets was often conditioned by inter-oceanic processes, which in individual port cities received a variety of expressions depending on the ways in which specific local, regional, and global forces combined at a given time and place. The impact of Abolitionism on the composition of port city working classes is a case in point, showing highly diverse outcomes, though nowhere simply leading to a transition from coerced to free labor. To wholly capture the scope of such processes, it would be necessary to expand the frame even beyond the Atlantic and Indian oceans to see how continental societies and empires evolved in the same period. But we also need to keep in view the insights that this series of single case studies offer us. While most of the time long-term global transformations remain like the rumbling of the waves in the distance, the nine contributions here speak directly to the ways in which managing the social composition of the port city remained a social experiment that often far exceeded the capacities of the authorities. A key factor in this – one that port city authorities and metropolitan states tried to counter but never could completely predict or control – was the self-activity of the various groups of port city workers. The balance of forces between the state, individual employers, and laborers that contributed to the specific mixture of free and unfree laborers employed in the port was never static. Partly, it was determined by the social struggles between all the different groups that made up port city societies. Partly, it was a product of the seismic shifts in global connections that undergirded the rise of capitalism, to which the labor of port city workers so significantly contributed.