Strangers Ashore: Sailor Identity and Social Conflict in Mid-18th Century Cape Town

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In February 1736 seventeen ships of the VOC return fleet, with over 1,300 men aboard (at least 1,000 of them sailors), had been in Table Bay for the unusually lengthy period of over seven weeks.[1] Tensions rose with so many men kicking their heels, little money left to spend and eager to set sail for home. The result was that 'sharp fighting and tumult broke out between the soldiers and the sailors, freely carried out with violence on both sides'.[2] Unfortunately, details of this episode are not recorded, but it was symptomatic of a number of incidents of conflict between sailors and soldiers in the port in the mid-eighteenth century and points to the need to understand more about the complexity of social relationships among the rank and file of Company employees in Dutch Cape Town.

This article stems from the work of a research project, based jointly at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape, to examine social identities in the diverse and fluctuating population of the VOC settlement.[3] In one phase of its work this project selected the 1730s for particular focus. By this time, despite its peripheral geographical position in the Indian Ocean world, Cape Town had become a key component of the VOC's system of settlements and trading posts. With a total of 1,000 Company employees stationed in the town in 1731, the Cape settlement ranked sixth among the VOC posts in terms of its official establishment.[4] In addition to this was a growing population of free burghers, slaves of Asian and African origin, freed slaves and their descendents (many females among these had married burghers, Company officials or lower-ranking employees), European and Asian convicts transported from Batavia and Ceylon, and a small number of indigenous Khoi and San. In 1731 the total recorded population came to some 3,000.[5] This was small in comparison to many of the port cities of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean at the time. Nevertheless, Cape Town and its agrarian hinterland was becoming a more complex society. A generation of locally-born settlers of European origin existed and there were clear divisions of wealth and

1 Fifteen ships of the return fleet from Batavia arrived at the Cape on 22 December 1735 (a couple of stragglers joined them in early January) and they only left on 1 March 1736 after a period of nine weeks. They were joined by another two ships that arrived from Bengal on 5 February; J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries* (The Hague, 1979-1987), vol.3, 326-9.

2 *'...een hoope spanneling en rusie tussen de militie en zeevaerende was ontstaen, en met vrij wat hevigheijd van beijde de parthijen voort geset'*, Cape Archives (hereinafter CA), Council of Justice (hereinafter CJ) 340, 66v., *vertoog* of Fiscal van der Henghel, 19 April 1736. I am grateful to Gerald Groenewald for drawing my attention to this and for providing a transcription of some of the evidence.

3 The Social Identities in the VOC Cape project is supported by the South African National Research Foundation, which is not responsible for any opinions expressed in this article.

4 F. Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18e eeuw, maar in het bijzonder in de vestiging Bengalen* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 2005, 2nd edition), 238-43. 1731 was the only year in the VOC period for which we have a reasonably accurate census of the town as distinct from its rural hinterland.

5 N. Worden, E. van Heyningen and V. Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: the making of a city* (Hilversum and Cape Town, 1998), 50.

status amongst the population in which race and gender played an important but by no means absolute role.[6]

This, however, was not all. In common with port towns elsewhere, a large number of temporary visitors came ashore from vessels berthed in its harbour. The number of ships visiting the Cape varied in any one year, but the decade of the 1730s saw the highest number of voyagers on VOC vessels travelling between Europe and Asia.[7] In 1731 32 outward bound ships with 6,766 men on board weighed anchor.[8] The number aboard the 33 returning ships is less fully recorded, although we know that they included at least 4,994 sailors, soldiers and craftsmen (as well as 301 *impotenten* or people who had been released from active VOC service and 126 passengers).[9] This excludes foreign ships, which between the 1730s and the 1750s added about another 25% to the total.[10] Moreover their arrival was not spread evenly through the seasons. Most arrived from Europe in March-May or else later in the year, avoiding the rough weather of winter from June-August, while the returning ships from Asia were clustered between late December and April. The average length of stay at the Cape in the 1730s was 24 days.[11]

Not all of these visitors went ashore for long. Many of the crewmen were kept at work maintaining the vessels and loading supplies. In at least one case a sailor refused to disembark for fear of losing all his money at the notoriously expensive Cape settlement. Most however spent at least some time in the town.[12] Shore leave was regarded as a privilege rather than a right, although in practice almost all crewmen obtained it and, as in the case of Portuguese sailors in colonial and foreign ports, they 'swarmed ashore at the first opportunity'.[13] Such temporary sojourners do not appear in the official lists and tallies of the archival records. But they do make their presence felt in the rich documentation of the Council of Justice, usually when they were involved in brawls and fights in the taverns and streets of the settlement, or when they deserted from their ships.

The nature of such records emphasizes conflict among lower-ranking men - for they were overwhelmingly male - typical of sea ports.[14] But cases of conflict detailed in these petty criminal cases can illuminate more than casual or random violence and reveal broader patterns of behaviour and identity. In particular they point to a distinctive identity among sailors, a group of Company employees that

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6 Many of these features were evident in the papers presented at the 'Contingent lives: social identity and material culture in the VOC world' conference held by the NRF project in Cape Town in December 2006. Copies of the conference proceedings are available from the Historical Studies Department, University of Cape Town. For some of the more notable earlier published arguments in this direction, see R. Ross, 'The rise of the Cape gentry', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 9, 1983, 193-217; A. Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop: een nederlandse vestingskolonie*. (Amsterdam, 1999); M. Hall, *Archaeology and the modern world: colonial transcripts in South Africa and the Chesapeake* (London and New York, 2000).

7 During the decade as a whole some 74,300 voyagers arrived in 375 ships. (Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol.1, 163).

8 Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol.2, 414-421.

9 Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol.3, 298-305.

10 M. Boucher, *The Cape of Good Hope and foreign contacts, 1735-1755* (Pretoria, 1985), 5.

11 Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol.1, 68-9.

12 R. van Gelder, *Naporra's omweg: het leven van een VOC-matroos, 1731-1793* (Amsterdam and Antwerp, 2003), 285-7, 380-2.

13 A.J.R. Russell-Wood, 'Seamen ashore and afloat: the social environment of the Carreira da India, 1550-1750', *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 69, 1983, 39.

14 For commentary on the nature of these records in relation to a differing but associated topic, that of slavery, see N. Worden and G. Groenewald, *Trials of slavery: selected documents concerning slaves from the criminal records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705-1794* (Cape Town, 2005), xix-xxxi.

have been largely ignored by Cape historians. As is also now well recognized, following the pioneering work of Marcus Rediker, sailors in the early modern Atlantic world formed part of a distinctive culture and tradition.[15] These arguments relate to sailors in national navies rather than trading companies. VOC sailors often had a less established career in a distinctive cultural milieu and, as Gaastra has argued, it was seen as somewhat shameful for a Dutch sailor to be forced to enter the lower paid and more temporary employment of the VOC.[16] But, given the conflicts between sailors and soldiers in Cape Town, VOC sailor experience and the ways in which they were regarded by other lower-ranking Company employees warrants examination.

The men who came ashore at Cape Town from Company ships were a mixed assortment. A handful were passengers, others were military and naval officers and artisans. The large majority were rank and file soldiers and sailors. They arrived in a rough proportion of two sailors to every soldier on outward vessels and a figure closer to 5:1 on the return ships, a reflection of the high mortality rate of VOC soldiers in Asia.[17] Those soldiers on their way home were familiar with the ways of the VOC world and were making a second return visit to the Cape, but the majority who were en route to Asia, many of them German and Scandinavian-speakers, were away from Europe for the first time, bewildered by the novelty of their experience and by the shock of their lengthy and sometimes traumatic journey.[18]

A number of the men who came ashore stayed for longer than they had intended. Several were taken straight into the Company Hospital. For some of these unfortunates the next stop was the grave, but a number of those who survived remained in Company service at the Cape, a far cry from their original goal of riches in the East.[19] A few arrivals from Europe requested to be taken into employment at the Cape. These were usually those who could not face the prospect of further travel after a particularly unpleasant voyage out.[20] Depending on demand, between five and twenty soldiers from each incoming VOC ship might be commandeered to complete their contracts at the Cape where they manned the garrison and Company

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15 M. Rediker, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea* (Cambridge, 1987); P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The many-headed Hydra: the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000). His argument that they formed a proletarianised workforce that presaged the labour consciousness of an industrialised society, with the ship as equivalent to the total institution of the factory and an 'engine of capitalism', is more controversial and less applicable here.

16 F. Gaastra, 'Labour conditions' in P. van Royen, J. Bruijn and J. Lucassen, eds., *'Those emblems of hell'?: European sailors and the maritime labour market, 1570-1870* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1997), 37.

17 In 1731 there were 3,989 sailors and 2,140 soldiers on outward ships. (Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol. 2, 414-421). Figures are not complete for the returning ships but of those recorded in 1731, there were 1,108 sailors and 231 soldiers. (Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping,* vol.3, 302-5.)

18 For the effects of this experience see for example, R. van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur: Duitsers in dienst van de VOC* (Nijmegen, 1997), 149-72; H. Ketting, *Leven, werk en rebellie aan bord van Oost-Indiëvaarders 1595-1650* (Amsterdam, 2002); N. Penn, 'The voyage out: Peter Kolb and VOC voyages to the Cape' in E. Christopher, C. Pybus and M. Rediker, eds., *Many middle passages: forced migration and the making of the modern world* (Berkely, 2007), 72-91. I am currently working on one episode which is highly revealing in this regard, that of a near mutiny which took place aboard *Loenderveen* on its journey between the Texel and Cape Town in 1732 and caused at least in part by the conflicting cultural rituals and expectations of the sailors and soldiers on board.

19 77 (60.6%) out of the total of 127 Company employees who arrived at the Cape in 1730-1 had begun their careers there as sick men take off ships and placed in the Cape hospital. Calculated from analysis of the Cape muster roll (VOC 5179) and *scheepsoldijboeken* in the Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

20 For example, in 1733, two members of the *Loenderveen* crew requested permission to stay at the Cape as artisans after a disastrous voyage in which 59 out of the 150 on board died en route. (Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol 2, 424-5, Nationaal Archief, The Hague (hereinafter NA), VOC 5960, 5 and 6).

outposts and occasionally worked as *knegt* overseers on settler farms. Some subsequently stayed and became burghers.[21] Sailors were rarely removed from the ships in this way, although a small number were posted on shore at the *werf* (wharf).[22]

The experience of the sailors differed from those of soldiers in a number of other ways. Most would have had some previous experience of life aboard ship, many on previous voyages with the VOC.[23] A much higher percentage of sailors than soldiers were of Dutch origin: some 60% as opposed to 30% of soldiers.[24] The remainder came primarily from the Baltic. They were experienced in the seafaring traditions of the maritime provinces of the Netherlands, even if not necessarily on long-distance voyages to Asia. Unlike soldiers, many of whom by the eighteenth century came from inland northern and central Europe and whose hope (usually unfulfilled) was to make a quick profit in the East and return home, sailors tended to see their work aboard ship as a more permanent activity.

I was first alerted to the distinctiveness of sailors in Cape Town by the perjorative way in which they were viewed by other Company employees. In a case of dispute between blacksmiths and their *baas* in the Company forge in 1752, for example, the threat of demotion to the rank of sailor was sufficient to cause a complete walkout.[25] This might be explained simply by the reduction of pay and removal of such slender privileges as belonged to artisans in the VOC. However in other cases involving soldiers, who were on similar pay and lacked any distinctive position in the Company hierarchy of employment, it is also clear that to be associated with sailors was considered dishonouring, and this is a factor confirmed by some of the comparative literature on the Dutch-VOC world.[26] Sometimes sailors employed on the *werf* administered whippings to soldiers, a punishment which was calculated to increase the dishonour involved. The ultimate dishonour for a soldier was to be permanently reduced to the rank of a sailor. For example, one Laurens Barmanije van Loropsant, a soldier stationed at the Castle who stabbed a visiting sailor in a brawl in November 1731, admitted his offence but begged to be given 'an honourable punishment and that I might remain a soldier'. His wish was ignored as he was banished from the colony 'in the status of a sailor'.[27]

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21 Of the 127 soldiers stationed at the Cape who had arrived in 1730-1, 16 worked as knegts and 4 became burghers. 41 completed their contracts in the garrison and then returned home, while 36 went on to other parts of the VOC empire in Asia. 24 died in service as soldiers, and 6 deserted. Calculated from analysis of the Cape muster roll (NA, VOC 5179) and *scheepsoldijboeken*.

22 For a preliminary demographic analysis of soldiers and sailors posted at the Cape establishment, see J. Parmentier and J. de Bock, 'Sailors and soldiers at the Cape: an analysis of the maritime and military population in the Cape Colony during the first half of the eighteenth century' in N. Worden, ed., *Contingent lives: social identity and material culture in the VOC world* (Cape Town, 2007), 549-557.

23 J.R. Bruijn, 'Career patterns' in P. van Royen, J. Bruijn and J. Lucassen, eds., *'Those emblems of hell'?*, 27-30.

24 J.R. Bruijn and J. Lucassen, eds., *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie: vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu ingeleid, bewerkt en voorzien van een studie over de werkgelegenheid bij de VOC* (Groningen, 1980), 21; Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol. 1, 146-7; D. de Iongh, *Het krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie* (The Hague, 1950), 79.

25 N. Worden, 'Artisan conflicts in a colonial context: the Cape Town blacksmith strike of 1752', *Labor History*, vol. 46(2), 2005, 163.

26 For example, A.Th. van Deursen, *Plain lives in a golden age: popular culture, religion and society in 17th century Holland* (Cambridge, 1991), 25; C. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600-1800* (London, 1965), 69, 77-8, 81; R. Dekker, 'Labour conflicts and working-class culture in early modern Holland.' *International Review of Social History*, vol. 35, 1990, 377-9, 405-7; S. Schama, *The embarrassment of riches: an interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age* (London, 1987), 246; van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur,* 152. The Company ranked sailors and soldiers in different categories, but there was no great distinction in their pay. Company sailors, except for the lowliest ships' 'boys', received f.8-9 per month, which compared with the standard f.9 paid to soldiers.

27 CA, CJ 335, 335-8; CJ 13, 68.

Rediker has cogently argued that eighteenth-century sailors developed their own solidarity marked by a distinctive code of conduct forged in the context of the harshness of their working conditions, in which anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism played a key role. This, as much as their liminal status as strangers on shore, explained their lowly reputation throughout the early modern Atlantic world.[28] Certainly the experience of life on board before arrival at the Cape played a key role in the distinctiveness of sailor identity. VOC vessels differed from the merchant naval ships of Rediker's analysis in that soldiers and sailors lived and worked together in close proximity. However they were still differentiated. As the more experienced crewmen, the sailors were at an advantage over the usually wholly inexperienced (and sometimes terrified) soldiers. Soldiers were obliged to undertake watch duty and occasionally other tasks on board.[29] Sailors often complained that they were incompetent seamen, while the soldiers in turn resented having to undertake ship's duties, especially during crises such as bad weather, or (as was not infrequently the case) when high mortality led to a shortage of hands.[30]

Rivalries under these circumstances were both spontaneous and ritualised. Sailors taunted soldiers with their inferior knowledge of Dutch and the incomprehensibility of their mixed German and Scandinavian dialects.[31] The boisterous rites of passage on entry into the southern Atlantic were usually carried out by sailors with the novice soldiers as targets. Aboard *Loenderveen* in 1732, one sailor terrified the impressionable soldiers by informing them after they left S.Tiago: 'Now the devil rules, there is no God any more'.[32] In short, the experience of seaboard life had done little to change the situation since the outward-bound Governor Aert Geysels wrote to the Amsterdam *kamer* from Table Bay a hundred years earlier: 'the sailors are the deadly enemies of the soldiers'.[33] It is scarcely surprising that these rivalries were transplanted on to land once the ships arrived in Cape Town.

On shore the relative position of soldiers and sailors was reversed. Studies of sailors in port, both in the early modern period and more recently, have suggested that a high degree of seamen solidarity existed: 'in his free time ashore the seaman has to associate with his work colleagues, or he must go alone in a strange environment'.[34] The only people on shore with whom they had some affinity were those sailors who had been posted to work on the *werf* at Table Bay. These were relatively few in number, but it does appear that they associated more readily with the visiting sailors. Being a stranger ashore at the Cape was less of a problem for many of the soldiers from the ships since they were able to fraternise with the sizeable Cape Town garrison. Many found associates from the same or nearby places of origin in Europe, especially the German-speaking territories, with whom they

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28 Rediker, *Between the devil*, esp. ch.5 and Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-headed Hydra*, esp. ch.5.
29 R. Raven-Hart, *Germans in Dutch Ceylon* (Colombo, n.d.), 2 [citing Behr, 1644] and 29-30 [citing Schweitzer, 1675-6].
30 All of these were factors in the *Loenderveen* conflicts. For analysis of life and tensions aboard VOC vessels, see C. Boxer, 'The Dutch East-Indiamen: their sailors, their navigators, and life on board, 1602-1795.' *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 49(2), 1963, 93-5, 101 and n. 17 above.
31 Kolbe was similarly mocked on his outward journey, see Penn, 'The voyage out'.
32 '*Nu regeert de duijvel, nu is geen God meer'*, from *relaas* of *soldaat* Johannes Fijsel van Valkenauw, 8 January 1733, CA, CJ 337, 137r.
33 Cited in Boxer, 'Dutch East-Indiamen', 101.
34 V. Aubert and O. Arner, 'On the social structure of the ship', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 3-4, 1958-9, 203.

had a common background and language. Soldiers ashore were thus often in a less alien social environment than sailors and merged more readily with those stationed at the Cape.

Soldiers and sailors headed for many of the same places as soon as they landed. The small size of Cape Town meant that districts were not distinctly demarcated before the mid-eighteenth century. There were some places which were particularly associated with soldiers, notably the Castle and the Parade Ground, while the *werf* was the area where sailors tended to congregate.[35] However the usual destination for seamen on shore were any places where drink, women, and preferably both, were available. Otto Jansz van Groningen and his sailor mates from the newly-arrived ship *Snuiffelaar* persuaded a local boatman to take them ashore on the first evening they arrived and they went drinking 'as soon as they had set foot on land'.[36] In the many taverns, poorer houses and workshops throughout the settlement visiting crewmen encountered the whole range of Cape Town's diverse underclass, both resident and visiting - soldiers, Company artisans, slaves, free blacks, Chinese traders, convicts and ex-convicts, as well as burghers and free settlers. Doubtless on many occasions the sailors' participation in Cape Town's informal low life was uneventful. However unsurprisingly in an environment of young males with little to do but drink and quarrel, large numbers of fights occurred.

Visiting sailors were a prime target for attack, leading the Fiscal to comment in one case in 1734 that 'many sailors …cannot sometimes readily walk in safety along the Company's streets'.[37] Often such attacks came from soldiers stationed in the garrison and were caused by specific clashes over women, drink or accusations of theft. These were sometimes spiced with insults of a more generic nature. Thus in November 1731 Jacob Smit van Amsterdam and his *maat* Claas Jacobsz Backer van Harlingen, two sailors from the outward-bound ship *Oostrust*, were attacked by three soldiers from the Cape garrison while drinking in a house that served as an informal *shaggerij*. The soldiers were thrown out by the owner, but then lay in wait and besieged the sailors in the house for several hours before the latter were escorted back to their lodgings by one of the owner's slaves. In their defence, the soldiers claimed that the sailors had insulted them by stating that they and the whole Cape garrison were 'scoundrels and Cape pickpockets'.[38]

Another such incident took place some twenty years later. In December 1751 Corporal Hendrick de Ridder, who was garrisoned at the Castle and in charge of the night patrol, arrested two sailors from the *Schuijlenburg*, Carel Gustaaff Appelboom van Stockholm and Marten Leeman van Danzig, as they left a bar at 11 pm, on the grounds that they had stayed out after the 10 pm curfew. Dragging them back to the Castle, he proceeded to beat them up until the early hours of the

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35 Worden, 'Space and identity'.

36 '*soo ras als se voet op 't land geset hadden'*, CA, CJ 334, *relaas* of Otto Jansz van Groningen, 13 July 1730, 73r.

37 '*veele matrosen …somtijds niet veil goet op 's Heeren weegen doen passeeren'*, CA, CJ 338, *Dictum ter rolle*, 20 May 1734, 119v.

38 '*schelmen en Caabse gaauwdieven'*, CA, CJ 335, *Eijsch* in case of Laurens Barmania / Burmanije van Loropsand, 22 November 1732, 326-28. The quotation is from the *relaas* of Burmanije, CJ 335, 16 November 1731, 337. See also n.27 for this case.

morning, shouting, 'Here, we've caught a couple of wolves, seize them!'.[39] In his defence de Ridder said that he had observed the sailors in the area of the Company garden, that they were drunk and looked as if they 'may have caused some disturbance' and that Carel Appelbom had sworn at him. To this de Ridder replied, while beating Appelboom with a cane, that they 'were with Christians and that no swearing was understood by the watch'.[40]

This statement is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, it may seem unlikely that soldiers in the garrison would be unfamiliar or offended by swearing. However an intriguing feature of a sailor culture which occasionally surfaces in the records is that of language. A distinctive crewman's 'rough' language existed in the Anglo-Atlantic world, 'not merely foul-mouthed but lacking in deference'.[41] Similar forms emerged in the Dutch-Germanic trading encounters of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Dutch sailors ashore in Cape Town certainly used *zeelijke woorden* (seamen's words) although it is not clear that these were confined to the use of sailors alone. In one case, the sailor Jurgen Hendrick Keijzer van Hamburg complained that a *soldaat*, Frans van der Stort, who had arrived in Cape Town on board a different ship, hurled abuse at him with 'many uncouth seaman's words'.[42]

Secondly, de Ridder identified himself and his company of fellow soldiers as '*Christenen'*. This term was usually used by Cape inhabitants of European origin to distinguish themselves from the indigenous Khoisan and slave 'heathen' of the colony.[43] By insinuating that the sailors were not behaving as *Christenen* de Ridder was placing them outside the social and cultural world with which soldiers identified themselves. Appelboom's fellow sailor Maarten Leeman van Dantzig's appeal to de Ridder to stop beating Appelboom was significant in this regard: 'don't hit him, he is a fine (*hubs*) man, he wouldn't harm a child'.[44] A *hubs* man (a Dutchified form of the German *hübsch* meaning 'a fine man' and translated in Leeman's testimony as *braaf)* was part of civilised society and not to be treated in this way. Notably, it took a fellow sailor to make this defence. In de Ridder's eyes, the sailors were not *Christenen*.

As such, sailors could readily offend those members of the lower orders of Cape Town who saw themselves as superior *Christenen*. In March 1740, Godfried Bouer van Gosselaar, a German soldier stationed at the Castle, claimed that he was walking at night past the *tapperij* (tavern) at widow Campher's house near the Company stables, when he saw three sailors who he did not know standing on the *stoep* who said to each other, 'Here comes another soldier'. When he asked 'True, what do you make of that?' ' the sailors simply replied 'Hit him!' and laid into him

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39 '*Hier heb* [sic] *wij een paar wolven gevangen… toe, raakt!',* CA, CJ 360, *relaas* of *matroos* Maarten Leeman van Dantzig, 6 January 1752, 10v.

40 '*eenige rusie mogten gemaakt hebben'; 'bij Christenen was en geen vloeken in de wagt verstonden',* CA, CJ 360, *Eijsch* in case of Hendrick de Ridder, 18 January 1752, 3r.; testimony of Hendrick de Ridder, 4 January 1752, 29r.

41 Rediker, *Between the devil*, 168.

42 '*veel brutaale en zeelijke woorden', relaas* of *matroos* Jurgen Hendrick Keijzer van Hamburg, CA, CJ 337, 54.

43 That the term referred to origins rather than faith is shown by the fact that baptised slaves and Khoi were not referred to as *Christenen*. For discussion of the term and its usage in the VOC Cape, see R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, 'European dominance at the Cape, 1652-c.1840' in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, eds., *The shaping of South African society, 1652-1840* (Cape Town, 1989), 523.

44 '*slaat hem niet, hij is een hubs* [sic] *man, hij sal geen kind quaad doen',* CA, CJ 360, *relaas* of Hendrick Otto Wolters van Hamburg, soldier in the garrison, 14r. The phrase is akin to the English saying 'he wouldn't harm a fly'.

before running off. Several of Bouer's *scheepsvrienden* (i.e. other soldiers who had been his particular supporting friends aboard ship on his outward journey) rallied to his defence and hunted down the sailors in another *tapperij*. They challenged them to a fight and in the process trashed the house. However the Fiscal reported that Bouer's account was suspect in a number of details, not least that his clothing and body were remarkably unscathed for someone who had been attacked by three men. He concluded that Bouer's over-developed sense of 'esteemed German honour' (*gewaerde duitsche eer)* was to blame, 'had he simply walked by quietly then the whole business would not have happened' but instead 'as a soldier he had to have his revenge on the sailors'.[45]

The Fiscal had put his finger on a key element of identity which was especially strong among VOC employees who came from German-speaking territories, that of honour. It is becoming increasingly apparent that honour played a central role in the determination and maintenance of status in Cape colonial society, not only amongst its upper echelons but also among the lower ranks.[46] The predominantly German-speaking soldiers of the garrison appear to have been particularly sensitive to slights or challenges from sailors who they regarded as being of lower status to themselves and which thereby offended their sense of honour.

This is evident in a number of the cases of conflict in the judicial records. For example on the evening of 10 February 1736, at the height of the fighting between soldiers and the sailors of the return fleet, one Jan Frans Wentsel together with two of his drinking companions from the Company garrison was spoiling for further action. When the three of them met the sailor Abraham van der Tant in the street, Wentsel recognised him as one of a group of sailors that had that afternoon smashed the windows of a house, and hurled a stone at him. The outnumbered Abraham responded with a mixture of fear and attempted appeasement, 'Oh God, is that you, I'll give you a pint of wine', an offer that the soldiers were happy to accept but which was denied to them when Abraham escaped from their clutches and ran off.[47]

Abraham's offer of wine, albeit made here in coercive circumstances, is indicative of a specific culture of drink as social transaction. Provision of alcohol was a recognised mechanism in early modern Northern Europe to atone for wrongs committed.[48] Abraham van der Tant's offer might have reflected this after the window-breaking episode. It was also more generally a mechanism for establishing social contact among strangers. The recipient thereby became indebted to the provider; the 'Other' was attempting to socialize on equal terms. An intriguing example of a contest of status between soldiers and sailors which centred around such drinking

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45 '*Daer komt weder een soldaet aen'; 'Dat is waar, wat wilt gij daarvan hebben?'; '..had hij maar sagtjes voorbij gegaen, dan was van die geheele saek niets geworden.[maar]..moest als een soldaet revensie hebben van die mattrosen'*, CA, CJ 345, *Dictum ter rolle* in case of Godfried Bouer, 31 March 1740, 14-19. The quotations are from 16v. and 17r.

46 A key study is R. Ross, *Status and respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750-1870: a tragedy of manners* (Cambridge, 1999). See Worden 'Artisan conflicts' for comment on German concepts of artisan honour and N. Taylor, 'A scapegoat of status on the streets of 18th century Cape Town', *Historical Approaches*, vol. 4, 2005-6, 12-18 for a case involving honour and status among the soldiers of the night watch.

47 '*Och mijn god, ben je daer, ik sal een pintje wijn geven'*, CA, CJ 340, *vertoog* in case of *soldaat* Jan Frans Wentsel, 19 April 1736, 68r. Wentzel later attacked an innocent burgher mistaking him for Abraham.

48 For discussion of this in relation to artisan honour, see Worden, 'Artisan conflicts', 164.

rituals took place in October 1736 when the sailor Gerrit Roodenkerk bought a bottle of wine for the company of two soldiers and two other sailors that had met in a *tapperij*. One of the soldiers, Nicholas Kinkel van Maints [Mainz], subsequently boasted somewhat unconvincingly, 'Do you know that you have drunk with a baron?' to which Roodenkerk replied, 'I know that you give yourself that name, but are you nonetheless not content with the bottle of wine I gave you?' This was enough to affront Kinkel's heightened sense of status and he hurled accusations that Roodenkerk was 'a rogue, scoundrel and tumbler… no honest fellow'. The two men proceeded to fight with Kinkel, in a distinctly unbaronial manner, pulling out a knife and stabbing Roodenkerk in the head.[49]

The social significance of drinking is also evident in a case in late March of 1736, after the return fleet which had caused so many tensions had left town. Pieter van Hegeraad [alternatively spelt Heegerhaut] van Wesel, a garrison soldier, took exception at finding another soldier from the Castle (who he did not know personally) drinking with a sailor in the *tapperij*. He then 'berated the soldier as being completely despicable since he drank liquor with a sailor rather than fighting with him' saying, 'I'll teach you better than that sailor' and challenged him to a fight outside. In his mind the honour of another soldier had been called into question by drinking with a sailor rather than fighting with him.[50]

Spierenburg has analysed the way in which knife fighting in early modern Amsterdam was a recognised mechanism for dealing with conflicts, insults and challenges to honour among men of the lower social ranks, especially in taverns and among soldiers and sailors.[51] The two cases just discussed show that such rituals were transplanted to the Cape. Pieter van Hegeraad challenged his fellow soldier to a knife fight, caused by the slight to soldier honour that he believed his opponent had committed by drinking with a sailor. Nicholas Kinkel was not only deceitful in his boastful claims to baronial status, but he also cheated in the rules of fighting by pulling out a knife without warning against an opponent who had none.[52]

Knife fighting was characteristic of masculine popular culture. Not only were VOC sailors part of the working environment of a ship that was confined to men alone but, in contrast to most port cities and colonial settlements, they also found themselves in a primarily male environment once ashore in Cape Town. The dominating presence of the garrison and the absence of an indigenous or immigrant settlement of a more balanced gendered composition meant that Cape Town's resident population was overwhelmingly male. This was even more acutely so when the fleets were in harbour.[53] Women usually feature in the records on the margins,

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49 '*Weet jij wel dat je met een baron gedronken hebt*' ; '*ik weet dat je de naam daervan hebt, maar zijt gij nog niet te vreeden met de fles wijn dien ik heb gegeeven'; 'een canalje, schelm, en buijtelaer…geen braaf carel'*, CA, CJ 340, *Eijsch ende conclusie* in case of Nicolaes Kinkel van Maints, 11 October 1736, 228-33. The quotations are from 230r.

50 '*dien soldaet voor alles wat leelijk was uijtscholt, ter saeke hij met een matroos de questi afdronk en niet liever met hem wilde vegten*'; '*Ik sal jou wel beeter leeren als die matroos'*, CA, CJ 340, *Eijsch en conclusie* in case of Pieter van Heegerhaut van Wesel, 8 March 1736, 24-7 [modern pencilled pagination, 61-67]. Quotation is from 25r.

51 P. Spierenburg, 'Knife fighting and popular codes of honor in early modern Amsterdam' in P. Spierenburg, ed., *Men and violence: gender, honor, and rituals in modern Europe and America* (Columbus, 1998), 108-9.

52 On seeing this Roodenkerk called out, 'Rogue, you have a knife!' ('*Canalje je hebt een mes'*), CA, CJ 340, *Eijsch en conclusie* in case of Nicolaas Kinkel van Maints, 11 October 1736, 231v.

53 Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town*, 50. In 1731 there were also more men than women in the free burgher population, as well as among the imported slaves and convicts.

as tavern keepers or as prostitutes. Sailors thus inhabited a strongly homosocial world in which manliness was expressed in 'rough' work cultures, whoring and hard drinking and in which conflicts of interest easily turned into physical violence. On shore sailor masculinity competed with that of soldiers and landsmen.[54]

As those excluded from the *Christenen,* how did sailors interact with others in the town who were similarly outcast, the slaves? There was no common ethnic identity. Until late in the eighteenth century, VOC sailors on both the outward and the home fleets were European in origin and I have not yet found evidence of Asian seamen ashore in Cape Town.[55] An exception was the enterprising escape of two Cape-born slaves on separate occasions in 1751-2 aboard vessels in the harbour, one of whom passed himself off as a sailor from St.Helena.[56] But cross-racial socialising was well established in the tavern culture of early Cape Town, where Asian and African slaves, free blacks and Chinese traders and exiles associated with soldiers and sailors.[57] This did not prevent slaves from reporting sailors who had committed crimes, such as theft or desertion, to the authorities.[58] Sailors, as temporary visitors, were not integrated into the underground networks of the Cape settlement. There was one incident where sailors hurled racial abuse at the slaves of the Fiscal, calling them *verdoemde swarte aepen* ('damned black apes') when they refused to allow the drunken men into the Fiscal's house to lay a complaint, but the fact that they then challenged them to a fight (rather than simply attacking them directly) may have shown that they viewed them more as equals than as servants.[59] The Fiscal's slaves, anyway, got the better of them by accepting the challenge and making as if to accompany the sailors to open ground where they could fight, but in fact delivering them into the hands of the authorities.

Scholars have argued that sailors associated with slaves in American ports and supported their aspirations for freedom.[60] The impact of the ideological ferment of the late eighteenth-century Atlantic on the underclass of the Cape is a topic needing research, although we do know that in 1808 two Irish sailors were a catalyst for the colony's only major slave uprising.[61] There is a tantalising hint of collusion between sailors and slaves from earlier in the eighteenth century. Two sailor deserters, one of whom had been on the run for ten years, were captured by the landdrost in the Picquetbergen in 1738. He reported that he could obtain no information from farmers in the region of any crimes they had committed, but that he had heard that were planning to incite a party of slaves to 'make their way to

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54 For explorations of this in the context of nineteenth-century British seamen, see V. Burton, '"Whoring, drinking sailors": reflections on masculinity from the labour history of nineteenth-century British shipping' in M. Welsh, ed., *Working out gender* (Aldershot, 1999), 84-101.

55 Asian sailors were only recruited for the VOC return fleets from the 1780s when there was an acute shortage of European seamen. (Boxer, 'Dutch-East Indiamen', 86; Bruijn and Lucassen, *Op de schepen*, 22; I. Dillo, '"Omtrent de zwakken staat der zeevarende": het zeevarend personeel van de VOC, 1783-95', *Leidschrift*, vol. 4 , 1987-8, 23-40).

56 Both made the mistake of enlisting as VOC crewmen and were recognised and caught when they returned to Cape Town several years later. (Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of slavery*, 285-8 and 302-5)

57 W. Dooling, 'The Castle: its place in the history of Cape Town in the VOC period', *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 7, 1994, 9-31.

58 For examples, CA, CJ 12, case of *matroos* Frederick Christiansz., 11 May 1730, 21; CA, CJ 20, *Rollen*, case of *matroos* Hendrick Pennink van Uijhegt, 3 July 1738, 61-3.

59 CA, CJ 337, request from Fiscal, 5 February 1733, 6-8.

60 J. Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the streets: merchant seamen in the politics of Revolutionary America' *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 25(3), 1968, 380; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many–headed Hydra*, 179-88 and 199.

61 On the 1808 revolt, see K. Harris, 'The slave "rebellion" of 1808', *Kleio*, vol. 20, 1988, 54-65.

a Portuguese settlement' although he had no firm evidence of this and the men of course denied it.[62] The suspicion may tell us more about the concern of farmers in remoter rural areas than anything else.

The existence of such *drosters* (runaways) was of concern to the Cape authorities. Slaves who escaped from their owners and soldiers who deserted from the Cape Town garrison formed the majority, but some sailors were also among their number.[63] The records for the 1730s show that some 45 sailor deserters were punished during the decade.[64] Of those whose ships could be identified, 26 were from outward-bound vessels and 8 from the return fleets. Unlike the soldiers stationed at the Cape, they lacked the contacts or local geographical knowledge to get very far. Most are better described as 'stragglers' rather than determined deserters.[65] They were absent for only a few days and did not leave the town, usually claiming drunkenness or a hangover as the reason for missing their departing ship. A few new arrivals reported that the experience of their outward voyage had been so bad that they were reluctant to return to their ship for the onward journey to Asia. A common cause of complaint was bad provisions or ill-treatment by officers. Johann Frederikus Spannhoek van Paderborn, who deliberately missed his ship's departure in 1736, said that this had been his first voyage to the Cape and he had not realised how long the journey took.[66] One *jonge* from Amsterdam attempted to stow away on the return fleet.[67]

There were very few sailors who deserted for longer periods into the interior regions. When this did happen it was because they had committed a more serious crime and hence were fugitives from justice.[68] To an outsider, Cape Town was part of an isolated settlement and not one in which most sailors wished to be for longer than was necessary.[69] In contrast to the prospect of wealth and adventure that awaited runaways in Asia, they had little reason to desert.[70] Sailors on the return fleet to Europe had especially little incentive to remain at the Cape.

Those sailors who were longer-term deserters were stationed in the colony, usually at the *werf*. One Hans Pietersz van Hoesum, who had arrived at the Cape in 1714, decided in 1719 to 'run away inland and lead a tramp's existence' and was only recaptured 14 years later.[71] A rare exception was Bartolomeus Bilo van Hamburg, a German sailor who arrived on the outward-going ship *Stijkbolle* in 1729 and

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62 '*naar een portugeesche comptoir te begeven'*, CA, CJ 20, *rollen* 13 March 1738, 19-22.

63 On this phenomenon see N. Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways: eighteenth-century Cape characters* (Cape Town, 1999) and N. Penn, 'Great escapes: deserting soldiers during Noodt's Cape Governorship, 1727-1729' in N. Worden, ed., *Contingent lives*, 559-588, to be republished in *South African Historical Journal*, December 2007.

64 These figures and the comments which follow are drawn from reports in the Council of Justice Criminal *rollen*, CA, CJ 12-20.

65 This follows the terminology used by N.A.M. Rodger, 'Stragglers and deserters from the Royal Navy during the Seven Years' War', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 57, 1984, 56-79. See P. Earle, *Sailors: English merchant seamen, 1650-1775* (London, 1998), 169 for a similar pattern of temporary absence.

66 CA, CJ 18, 9 January 1736, 3-6.

67 Jan van Ham van Amsterdam, CA, CJ 14, 7 February 1732, 9-10.

68 For example, Augustus Scheffelaar, *matroos*, was accused of manslaughter in June 1733 and fled into the interior, CA, CJ 337, 197-214 and CJ 785, 287-90. He remained on the run several months later and I have not found evidence that he was ever recaptured.

69 This parallels the low sailor desertion rate in other isolated ports, such as Gibraltar, Rodger, 'Stragglers and deserters', 59.

70 For Asia, see G.V. Scammell, 'European exiles, renegades and outlaws and the maritime economy of Asia, c.1500-1750', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 26, 1992, 641-661.

71 '*landwaarts in te loopen drossen en vagabondeeren'*, Hans Piertersz van Hoesum, CA, CJ 15, f.96-8, 19 November 1733.

deserted for three years until he was apprehended by a burgher near Rondebosch.[72] It is not known how such runaways survived, although general labour shortages in the farming districts meant that they might have found ready casual employment with no questions asked. One enterprising deserter from the *werf* obtained food and shelter from inland farmers over a period of six weeks by claiming that he was working on behalf of the *equipagemeester* thus raising the prospects of soliciting orders for provisions.[73]

The numerous cases of bands of soldier *drosters* in the judicial records rarely included sailors. When sailor runaways did converge in groups they tended to do so with fellow seamen and for briefer periods. In one case in March 1738, a group of 9 *drosters* who had gathered in the *tuinen* at the foot of Table Mountain and who had been on the run for between 14 days and a month consisted of three sailors from passing ships, three from the local *landsboot*, one serving on the *werf*, one who ran away from the Company Hospital and a Dutch convict who had just arrived from Batavia.[74]

The evidence from the judicial records of this period thus suggests that the conflicts between soldiers and sailors in Cape Town were not only those of men in an environment where drink flowed and masculine rivalries flared. Many of the cases reveal fundamental distinctions between the experiences of visiting sailors and the soldiers on shore, based on differential experience on board ship, of status on land and of a highly developed sense of honour, especially among German-speaking soldiers. When taken together with the prolific existing historiography on slavery and on Khoisan-colonist relations, as well as work on artisans and poorer settlers, these studies point to a richer understanding of what historians are increasingly coming to realise was a complex and diverse society among the labouring population of eighteenth-century Cape Town.

72 Bartolomeus Bilo van Hamburg, CA, CJ 14, 27 March 1732, 22-24.
73 Pieter de Vriend van Brabant, CA, CJ 18, 27 September 1736, 64-5.
74 CA, CJ 20, 27 March 1738, 26-29.