

## “Amok!”: Mutinies and Slaves on Dutch East Indiamen in the 1780s

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ABSTRACT: In September 1782, a violent and partly successful mutiny of Balinese slaves shocked the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This article will reconstruct the history of the mutiny of the *Mercuur*, tracing its significance in the context of slavery, labour, war, and the series of “Asian mutinies” that occurred in the 1780s. The revolt of the Balinese sheds light on the development of amok as a tradition of resistance. The purpose of calling amok cannot only be explained as a direct, impulsive response to perceived injustice or violation of codes of honour. It functioned as a conscious call to arms, signalling the start of collective and organized resistance. The Balinese mutiny was both similar to and different from other European and Asian forms of revolt.

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It must have been a spectacular and terrifying scene. On 11 September 1782 two groups of armed men faced each other across the deck of the ship *Mercuur*, sailing in the Sunda Strait between the islands of Java and Sumatra. A group of European and Javanese soldiers and sailors loyal to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had taken up position on the poop deck, below them a gang of mutinous Balinese slaves stood their ground on the quarterdeck (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The mutineers were armed with cutlasses and muskets, while the company’s men carried hand grenades as well as guns and cutlasses.

Jacob Wedelaar, the officer leading the armed forces summoned to suppress the Balinese mutineers, later stated that he had tried to convince them to surrender by offering them clemency. The captain of the Javanese soldiers had translated this by calling out the word “*ampong*”. Perhaps some of the slaves were still in doubt. The German petty officer Hartwick

1. The translations of terms of specific locations on the ship are based on “Division of Space on a Mid 17th Century East Indiaman”, available at: <http://maritimeasia.ws/maritimelanka/topics/hullspace.html>.

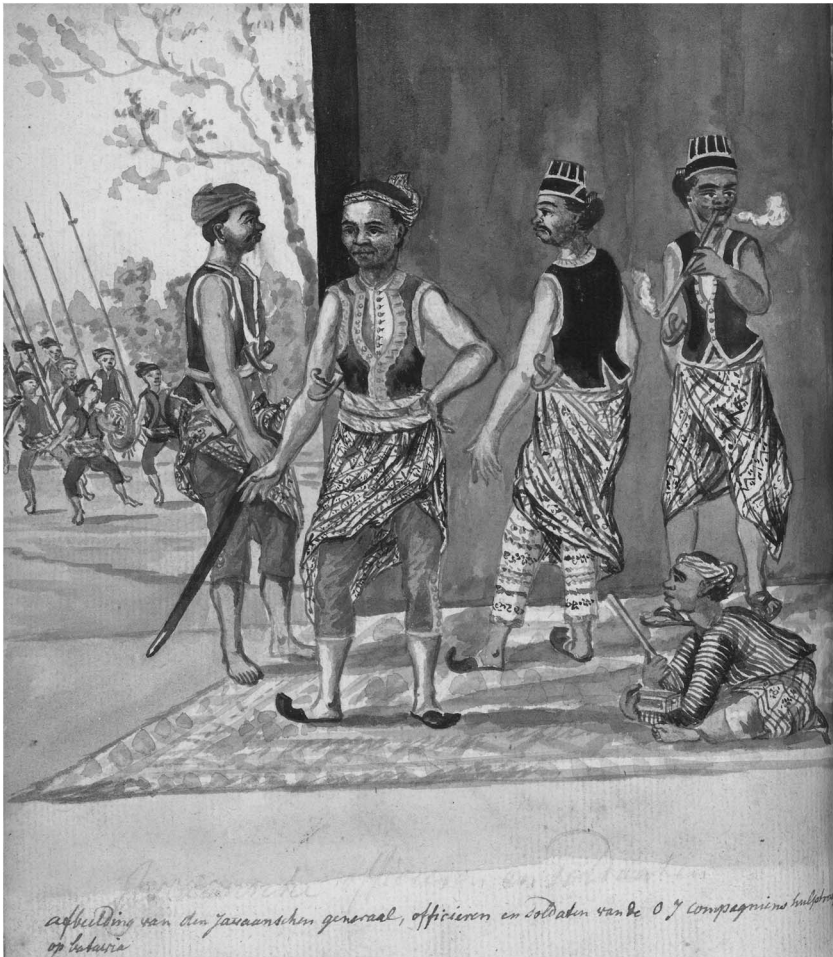


Figure 1. Javanese soldiers in Batavia. In the foreground, a Javanese general and his officers; in the background, Javanese soldiers practising drill.

Painted by Jan Brandes, 1779–1785. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Public domain

Jurgen Walrade, one of the first to board the ship, recalled that three obviously uncertain mutineers were forced to remain in the ranks. Others were clearly ready to defend themselves. The Javanese Saptoe, facing the Balinese slaves, later testified that he was immediately attacked by one of the mutineers with “a drawn cutlass”.<sup>2</sup> Walrade declared that the

2. All reports and records concerning the court case following the mutiny on the *Mercur* can be found in the Court of Justice of Batavia section in the Dutch East India Company Archive, The Hague, Nationaal Archief [hereafter NA], Archief van de VOC, 1.04.02, no. 9515.

mutineers resisted “by throwing cannon balls”<sup>3</sup> that wounded the soldiers about the knees and legs. The offer of “*ampong*” had been declined very quickly by the mutineers on the lower deck, and their stance was reinforced by repeated and growing cries of “Amok!”<sup>4</sup>

Now facing the determination of the mutineers in person, Wedelaar ordered his men to open fire on the renegade slaves. The Europeans and the Javanese threw their grenades among the mutineers and attacked them with “small gun and cutlass”.<sup>5</sup> According to Hartwick Jurgen Walrade, the attack went on for half an hour, coming to an end only after a fire started by the mutineers began to take hold of the ship. Both the forces trying to retake the ship and the mutineers were forced to leave the *Mercur*, which was soon fully ablaze and promptly sank, so that the soldiers and sailors were forced to take to the boats. The slaves attempted to reach nearby shore. Only nine of them were picked up out of the water or from islands by the crew of the warship, and were sent for trial in Batavia.

The September 1782 mutiny on the *Mercur* occurred during a pivotal period in history, at the height of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–1784), which, for the Dutch, resulted in the loss of many of their Asian colonies and marked the rise of British maritime power. The mutiny was followed by revolts of Asian slaves and sailors on board the Dutch East Indiamen *Slot ter Hoge* (slaves, 1783), *Java* (Chinese sailors and possibly slaves, 1783), and *Haasje* (slaves, 1790). They are the only “Asian mutinies” on board VOC ships ever to have been described in the Dutch historiography.<sup>6</sup> The affair on the *Mercur* was the largest of the series, and seems to have been the most serious threat to the authority of the Dutch East India Company.

It is remarkable that the mutiny on the *Mercur* has received so little attention. Although songs were written about the German mutineers of the *Nijenborg* in 1763, for example,<sup>7</sup> and a poem was dedicated to the famous VOC official Daniel Radermacher, who was the victim of the revolt by the Chinese sailors on the *Java*,<sup>8</sup> news of the mutiny on the

All source quotations have been translated into English from the original Dutch text. The original will be provided in the footnote only where confusion might otherwise arise.

3. Original: “het werpen van kogels”.

4. Officer Jacob Wedelaar referred to “het herhaald roepen van amok” [repeated cries of amok]. Petty officer Hartwick Jurgen Walrade referred to their refusal of the “*ampong*”, “door het herhaald roepen van amok aan teneemen” [by taking up the repeated cries of amok].

5. Original: “klein geweer en sabel”.

6. K. van der Tempel, “‘Wij hebben amok in ons schip’: Aziaten in opstand tijdens drie terugreizen op het einde van de achttiende eeuw”, in J.R. Bruijn and E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga (eds), *Muiterij. Oproer en berechting op schepen van de VOC* (Haarlem, 1980), pp. 123–147.

7. J.C. Mollema, *Een muiterij in de achttiende eeuw: Het afloopen van het Oost-Indische Compagnieschip Nijenborg in 1763* (Haarlem, 1933).

8. Van der Tempel, “Wij hebben amok”.

*Mercur* was mentioned only in the *Groninger Courant* of 1 July 1783. The report stated that a Danish ship had brought unconfirmed news that “a Dutch East India Company ship” lying before Batavia had been overrun by its slaves. The report in the paper did not mention the wrecking of the ship, but did say that only a few of the fugitive slaves had been recaptured.<sup>9</sup> It seems that, apart from that report, the Dutch East India Company successfully managed to keep the affair quiet. No eyewitness accounts were published, and in other newspapers the *Mercur* was not mentioned by name.

Despite the contemporary and historical silence that has blanketed events on the *Mercur*, the mutiny is both interesting and important. The uprising of seventy-nine Balinese slaves who were able both to fight and to operate a ship must have sent a terrifying message to the officials of the company, who immediately ordered an investigation into the treatment of Asians on board company ships throughout their settlements.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it ordered that slaves on warships be dispersed, and trained only as sailors, not soldiers, in order to “prevent accidents as on board the ship *Mercur*”.<sup>11</sup> That illustrates how the mutiny, interestingly enough, is pertinent not only to the tightening of VOC regulations on the slave trade and slave behaviour, but also to the VOC’s increasing use of Asian labour at sea, which included both maritime and military manpower, and both free and unfree. The mutiny on the *Mercur* therefore figures in the middle of what were then sometimes contradictory developments.

This article will reconstruct the history of the mutiny of the *Mercur*, placing it in the context of slavery, war, and the series of mutinies that occurred in the 1780s, as well as the company’s use of Asian military and maritime labour. At the same time, it will emphasize that such mutinies were not merely moments of blind aggression, nor were they the result of the abstract structural forces of sharpening class relations. Although both violence and structure are important, it is essential to note that mutinies are also moments of vigorous agency, moments of revolt by people who are normally dominated, ruled, or even abused. Mutiny might be a moment of ultimate and empowering refusal, the beginning of recognition that working and living circumstances do not have to be accepted passively but can be changed. The mutiny on the *Mercur* brings to light precisely such a moment, when the Balinese slaves took their place on board ship – and for a short time had a role in history. This article, therefore, will try to listen closely to the voices of those otherwise silenced and forgotten Balinese slaves.

9. *Groninger Courant*, 1 July 1783, pp. 1–2.

10. Van der Tempel, “Wij hebben amok”, p. 145.

11. J.A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek 1602–1811*, X (Batavia, 1885–1900), p. 592.

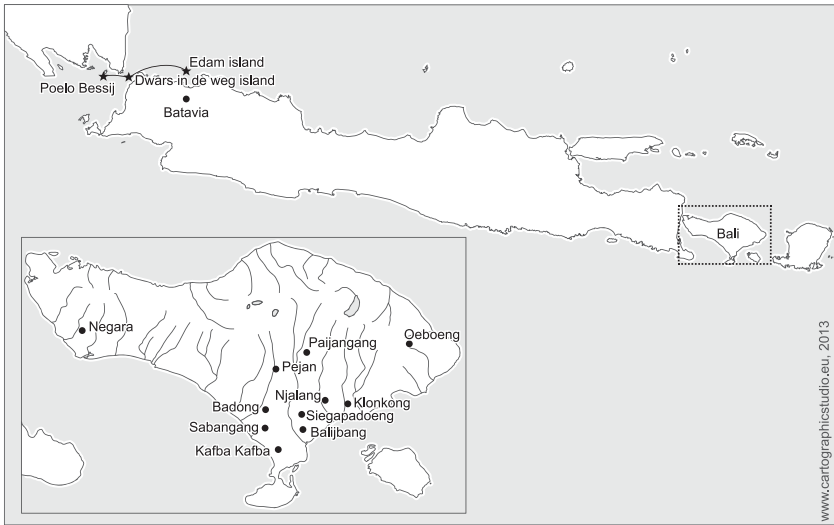


Figure 2. Java and Bali.

### MARITIME LABOUR AND DIVERSITY

But first let us return to the mutiny. It all started early in the morning of 6 September when the *Mercuur* was lying off the island of Edam near Batavia. The crew of the *Mercuur* consisted of thirteen European and twenty-six Javanese sailors under the command of Captain Claas Roem, an experienced officer who had worked for the VOC since 1752.<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 1782, the crew was complemented by seventy-nine Balinese slaves all of whom – apart from a certain Likop, who belonged to the second equipage master, Willebrord Peusenswere – were the property of a private trading association called the “Sociteit van de Cotter de Batavier”. The slaves came from different regions seemingly from all over Bali rather than having one common area of origin,<sup>13</sup> although they appear to have been well aware of where each of them originated on the island. Such awareness perhaps indicates both extensive interaction within the group of slaves, which might naturally occur on board ship, as well as the importance of references to local origin in the process of identification (Figure 2).

Such a polyglot ship’s company was not uncommon for the Dutch East India Company. The VOC acted as a truly multinational corporation,

12. “Generale Zeemonsterrol 1782”, NA, VOC, no. 5230.

13. Several places were mentioned: Negara, Pejan, Balij Klunkong [Klungkung], Paijantang [Payangan or Pangyangan?], Oeboeng [Abang?], Balijbang [Beng?], Njalang [Nyalian?], Siegapadoeng [Singapadu?], Balij Kafba Kafba [Kaba-kaba?], Balij Badong [Badung?], and Sabangang [Tabanan?]. Present-day names of presumed places of origin are stated in brackets.

employing people from different continents and origins in the same functions and working environments. Besides the diverse north-west European workforce recruited by the VOC in the Dutch Republic, the VOC made extensive use of local Asian labour markets.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the personnel of the various VOC offices in Asia consisted of European and Asian employees. Asian or Eurasian workers might be employed as sailors, soldiers, writers, carpenters, smiths, or as simple unskilled workers. The VOC used both free and unfree labour, and a reconstruction by Jan Lucassen estimates employment of Asian labourers at 6,000 at the beginning of the seventeenth century rising to about 21,000 by the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

On board its ships the VOC employed European and Asian labour in mixed crews, leading to what must have been intimate contact between groups of different origin in closely confined working environments.<sup>16</sup> The employment of Asian maritime labour was on the rise especially in intra-Asiatic shipping. For the mid-seventeenth century there are numerous references to the employment of Chinese sailors, and from at least 1670 onwards there are references to the recruitment of Asian sailors in VOC reports,<sup>17</sup> and the continuous employment of Asian sailors can be traced in the annual reports of VOC personnel from 1691 onwards.<sup>18</sup>

14. J.R. Bruijn, "De personeelsbehoefte van de VOC overzee en aan boord, gezien in Aziatisch en Nederlands perspectief", *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 91 (1976), pp. 218–248; I.G. Dillo, *De nadagen van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie 1783–1795: Schepen en zeevaardenden* (Amsterdam, 1992); J. Lucassen, "A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595–1795", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66:2 (2004), pp. 12–39; M. van Rossum *et al.*, "National and International Labour Markets", in M. Fusaro and A. Polonia (eds), *Maritime History as Global History, Research in Maritime History*, XXXXIII (St John's, Newfoundland, 2010), pp. 47–72; M. van Rossum, "De intra-Aziatische vaart: Schepen, 'de Aziatische zeeman' en ondergang van de VOC?", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 8:3 (2011), pp. 32–69.

15. Lucassen, "A Multinational and its Labor Force", p. 15.

16. H. Ketting, *Leven, werk en rebellie aan boord van Oost-Indiëvaarders (1595–1650)* (Amsterdam, 2002). See also E. Goffman, *The Prison* (New York, 1961); P.E. Pérez-Mallaina, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD, 1998); M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seaman, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987).

17. Van Rossum, "De intra-Aziatische vaart", pp. 37–39, 48–52.

18. The *Generale Zeemonsterrollen* (maritime muster scrolls) are part of the *Generale Land- en Zeemonsterrollen*, an annual overview of personnel employed in Asia by the Dutch East India Company, both on land and at sea. During the seventeenth century several summaries had been produced based on estimates. In 1686 the VOC decided to construct an annual overview, the *Generale Land- en Zeemonsterrollen*. However, the first overview was not produced until 1691. The information in the *Generale Zeemonsterrollen* has been entered into a database containing a list of all VOC ships in Asia in June of every year in the period 1691–1791. No *Zeemonsterrollen* have survived for the years 1702, 1707, and 1792–1795. Although information varies in different periods, for most years the database provides information on the crew, their origin (European or Asian), location of recruitment, hierarchical structure, wages, and several other characteristics. For more information, see van Rossum, "De intra-Aziatische vaart", pp. 37–39.



In the period from 1670–1750 the Asian sailors employed on board ships active in intra-Asiatic trade were mainly of Indian origin recruited predominantly from Bengal. That did not necessarily mean that they all originally came from Bengal. Indian crews seem to have engaged in a wage labour relation which could last several years. In the second half of the eighteenth century the VOC increasingly recruited sailors of Chinese, Javanese, and Malayan origin, and the importance of Asian sailors to the intra-Asiatic shipping activities of the VOC increased continuously during the period, the proportion rising from just a few per cent in the second half of the seventeenth century to nearly 50 per cent in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> It should be emphasized here that in general the VOC used more or less free wage labourers as sailors. The use of slaves as sailors by the VOC seems to have been marginal and resulted mainly from acute labour shortages caused by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.<sup>20</sup>

These are important findings for our assessment of Asian mutinies at the end of the eighteenth century. They show the importance of Asian labour to the Dutch East India Company and its shipping in Asia. The VOC had a long and involved experience with Asian sailors and with the employment of widely diverse crews on its ships. Furthermore, the company was experienced in employing slave labour in different environments, such as company workshops and households, but had much less experience with using slaves as crews for its ships. Of course, that does not mean that problems did not occur as a result of shipboard hierarchy, repression, or other factors. It does mean, however, that the trouble they had with Asian workers – free or unfree – cannot be explained simply by inexperience with Asian labour in general on the part of the VOC.

#### SLAVES AT SEA

Going back to the morning of 6 September 1782, we find some of the Javanese sailors, including Soeroe and Soelo, still at breakfast in the galley.<sup>21</sup> Another Javanese sailor was on watch for incoming vessels, and several other Balinese slaves testified to having been in the galley. Half of the group of slaves, however, were called on deck for exercises with Snaphaunce muskets under the command of the first mate, who was a European. Such intensive training involving slaves must have been a rather rare sight on company ships.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* Asian sailors seem even to have been employed on a relatively equal basis compared with European sailors. They were confined to more menial “common sailor” roles, but received more or less the same monthly wage: 7.5 guilders for an Asian sailor, and 9 guilders for an Asian sailor with military skills. European sailors were recruited in the Dutch Republic for wages varying from 5 to 11 guilders; soldiers were recruited for 9 to 10 guilders per month.

21. The Dutch original refers to the “bak”.

Slaves were not absent from early modern shipboard life in Asia. Slavery and the slave trade were widely in existence throughout the Indian Ocean region.<sup>22</sup> On slave-trading routes therefore slaves might have been on board as human cargo, which in the case of the VOC company trade would have meant that slaves were on board in large numbers, as they were, for example, on the *Hogergeest* while it was attempting the direct voyage from the east coast of Africa to Batavia in 1684. The *Hogergeest* went off course and instead sailed along the coast of Malabar and on to Ceylon. During the voyage it was confronted with a conspiracy to revolt among the slaves, and was faced with the deaths from sickness of the captain, various other company employees, and 108 of the 274 slaves. That tragic voyage was reason enough to propose the abandonment of direct slaving voyages to Batavia and to set up the operation of a slave-trading route via the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>23</sup>

Besides slaves as company trading cargo, they were also often on board as the possessions of individual VOC employees. That is shown, for example, in the muster rolls that have been preserved for company ships sailing between Batavia and Deshima in the 1780s, on board 7 of which were registered 145 individually owned slaves. In 1781, the *Mars* had 103 sailors on board and 39 slaves who were individually owned, mainly by the higher-ranked company officers. Most of those slaves were owned by the Deshima director M.I. Titsingh, who owned fifteen of them, and the equipage master Dirk Jan Vinkemulder, who owned nine. But that other higher-ranked members of the crew also owned slaves is shown by the examples of the captain Hermanus Siedenburgh with four slaves, officer Jochem Brandt who had two slaves, and the steward Federik Willem Recke with one.<sup>24</sup>

The private possession of slaves by VOC sailors and administrative personnel might have been motivated by status or convenience, but it was also a matter of money. Individually owned slaves could function as an important source of private trade for company servants. As with other types of private trade, the VOC tried to minimize and control what could be a profitable business. A regulation announced in 1776 for VOC captains stipulated that the maximum number of slaves that a captain was allowed to transport was eight, the maximum for the first mate being four.

22. M. Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of World History*, 14 (2003), pp. 131–177; R.B. Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), pp. 43–72.

23. W.P. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, IV (The Hague, 1960–1997), p. 744.

24. "Monsterrol van het schip Mars", NA, Archief van de Factorij Japan, 1.04.21, no. 1475.



The reason for the regulation was an excess of private slave trading, with one captain mentioned as having been found embarking as many as 131 privately owned slaves. In March 1778, the regulation concerning the private sale of slaves was sharpened to forbid the sale in Batavia of slaves over the age of 25 years. In December 1782, the regulation was tightened even further in order to reduce “the all too disadvantaging and too much flourishing private trade in slaves”.<sup>25</sup>

As company trading goods, slaves on board VOC ships were sometimes put to work at sailors’ tasks. In the 1680s the VOC stressed that during slave-trading voyages from the Cape to Batavia the slaves could “be trained for working on board the ship”, as “these slaves would be very well suited to become good sailors”.<sup>26</sup> Slaves with seafaring skills, whether acquired in company service or before their enslavement, seem to have had disadvantages as well as they were more prone to mutiny at sea. In 1686, seven illegally transported slaves rebelled during a voyage on the sloop *Steenbock* from Zolor to Coepang in the Indonesian archipelago. They murdered the assistant Hendrik Tiling and two sailors, forced the quartermaster and two other sailors off the ship, and sailed the vessel to Wolowea, taking the native wife of assistant Tiling and her female servant with them.<sup>27</sup>

#### FEAR AND CONTROL

The omnipresence of slaves, both at sea and on land, made their owners anxious. The VOC tried to control not only the trade in slaves, but also the possession and management of them, as well as the way slaves were expected to behave.

The regulation of March 1778 strove “to restrain the insolence and malevolence of slaves” such as would otherwise have led to rowdiness, robbery, and murderousness in and around Batavia. It was stressed that there should be severe punishment for any slave who offended or played his or her master false. It was announced that Christians were not permitted to have either their slaves or their children circumcised by “Mahometaanse Priesters” – Muslim “priests”. Slaves were not allowed to ignite fireworks, and any slave who walked into Europeans or “people wearing hats” on purpose should be flogged – although with the exception of slaves walking in front of carriages with the task of warning or removing people in the street in order to prevent accidents. Slaves were not allowed to ride horses in the city,

25. Original: “overmatigen nadeligen en al te verre g’extendeerden particulieren handel in slaven”. Regulations of 11 October 1776 and 17 December 1782; Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, pp. 49, 640.

26. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, IV, p. 744. Original: “tot scheepsdiensten goeffent werden”; “daartoe die natie sigh zeer wel schicken wil en goede matrosen maackt.”

27. *Ibid.*, V, p. 117.

even when they had the job of moving them from place to place, and they might not drink *arak* nor any other liquor in bars or pubs; nor were they allowed to enter Chinese gambling houses. Slaves were not allowed to sell any goods without permission, and extensive rules were formulated concerning slaves being on the street or out of their masters' houses in the evening, and with regard to the finding and return of runaway slaves.<sup>28</sup>

The fear of slaves was illustrated tragically by the events on the VOC ship *Slot ter Hoge*, sailing from Batavia to the Dutch Republic in the autumn of 1783, the year after the mutiny on the *Mercuur*. On the way to the Cape of Good Hope, Admiral Breton was warned by the slaves Floris and Wantrouw that there were rumours of a conspiracy among the slaves to run amok as they were being transported to the Cape as private trade goods.<sup>29</sup> After some inquiry, the information turned out to have come from the slave Fortuyn, and acting on his information the officers of the *Slot ter Hoge* imprisoned six slaves and began interrogating them – using torture – about the suspected plans for an uprising. Under pressure and begging to be pardoned, the slaves confessed and implicated others, which resulted in twenty slaves being accused of conspiracy. The officers decided in a ship's council to execute all of them directly by putting them overboard with their hands and feet tied.

It is clear that the ship's council sought support for their decision from the rest of the crew. The junior officers and the foremen of the different groups of European, Chinese, and Javanese sailors and Balinese slaves working as sailors were separately consulted and all agreed to the "sentence". However, subsequently, back in the Dutch Republic, the directors of the VOC did not approve the decision taken on the *Slot ter Hoge*, being displeased at the "informal" procedure followed and at the fact that the accusation of conspiracy had originated from only one of the slaves. The VOC directors apparently gained the impression that the whole event had been precipitated by collective fear rather than any real threat of mutiny.

Despite the directors' dislike of the course of events in 1783, the fear of slaves seemed not to have been an incidental phenomenon, but instead something structural. In June 1781, the same fear had been expressed in a proposal to provide for the company's urgent need of sailors. Their need for labour made it necessary not only to recruit more Asian sailors but also to try to employ slaves as sailors. The first experiment was intended to be done by employing "30 to 35 slaves from the craft quarters for every ship, in order to use them for work on homeward bound voyages after

28. "Plakaat ter betuugeling van de moetwil en insolentie der slaven", 31 March 1778, NA, VOC, no. 3504, fos 2042–2048.

29. The slave's name "Wantrouw" – meaning "Distrust" – is ironic in this case. It is important to note that (unless employed as sailors on board company ships) Asian subjects were not allowed to be taken to Europe without permission. Regulations on slaves were especially strict.

being trained in the profession of sailor”.<sup>30</sup> The slaves would gain their freedom after completing two return voyages. However, it was stressed in the proposal that only the best and most able men should be chosen in order not to tempt the “murderous character of this nation”, which could make the “slightest grievance” result in the most “horrible consequences” on board ship.<sup>31</sup>

### SLAVES, SLAVING, SAILING

The Dutch had long experience both of slave trading and the employment of slave labour in the Americas and the East Indies alike.<sup>32</sup> The Dutch East India Company – and its personnel individually – participated in the slave trade from fairly early on. The Company, however, was one of many participants in a flourishing and complex trade. In the east Indian Ocean region slaves were exported from the east African coast to north-eastern Africa, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and India. Sometimes African slaves would also be traded in the Indonesian archipelago and beyond. From the mid-eighteenth century slaves were increasingly traded to the Cape, Madagascar, Zanzibar, and other regions in Africa. Malagasy slaves were

30. Original: “30 a 35 uit het ambagtsquartier [...] voor ieder schip om, na alvorens eenige tyd op de schepen in het scheeps-werk onderweesen te zyn, vervolgens met dezelve naar Nederland te stevenen”.

31. Original: “dat de keuse soude moeten geschieden uit de beste en bekwaamste, die veelyds niet te missen zyn, als om dat de moordlust, zoo eygen aan die natie, over de minste verongelyking akelige gevolgen op een schip zoude kunnen veroorzaaken”. References from “Middelen ter voorziening in de behoefte aan matrozen voor Compagnie’s retourschepen”, 5 June 1781, Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, X, pp. 491–495.

32. On the slave trade and slavery in the Dutch East Indies see Vink, “World’s Oldest Trade”; G.J. Knaap, “Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia”, in G. Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 193–206; R. Raben, “Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia”, in P. Boomgaard, D. Kooiman, and H. Schulte Nordholt (eds), *Linking Destinies: Trade, Towns and Kin in Asian History* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 119–140; W.O. Dijk, “An End to the History of Silence? The Dutch Trade in Asian Slaves: Arakan and the Bay of Bengal, 1621–1665”, *IIAS Newsletter*, 46 (2008), p. 16; Anthony Reid and J. Brewster (eds), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St Lucia, 1983); A. van der Kraan, “Bali: Slavery and Slave Trade”, in Reid and Brewster, *Slavery*, pp. 315–340; B. Kanumoyoso, “Beyond the City Wall: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia 1684–1740” (Ph.D., University of Leiden, 2011). Far more research has been conducted on the Dutch West Indies. See, for example, J. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990); H. den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven. Scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674–1740* (Zutphen, 1997); P.C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel, 1500–1850* (Amsterdam, 2000); R. Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Africa: De illegale goederen- en slavenhandel op West-Afrika tijdens het achttiende-eeuwse handelsmonopolie van de West-Indische Compagnie, 1700–1734* (Amsterdam, 2008); M. van Rossum and K. Fatah-Black, “Wat is winst? De economische impact van de Nederlandse trans-Atlantische slavenhandel”, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 9 (2012), pp. 3–29.

shipped to Muslim markets, but also to the Cape, Batavia, and other European settlements.<sup>33</sup> Slaves from India were traded to the Indonesian archipelago as well as to the east of the Indian Ocean region. In the Indonesian archipelago multiple slave-trading routes existed, although slaves seem to have been “generally drawn from the eastern and northern part of the Archipelago, where Islam had not yet a firm foothold and weak polities were prone to internecine warfare and slave raiding”.<sup>34</sup>

Destinations for the south-east Asian slave trade often included the major cities in the western part of the archipelago, with Batavia an important centre. The number of slaves imported to Batavia has been estimated at several thousand a year, and in the 1770s and 1780s, for example, contemporary estimates mention an annual import of some 4,000 slaves.<sup>35</sup> Most of those slaves were brought in by private European and Asian traders, by company personnel, or by illegal trade, so that the slave population of Batavia amounted to over 40,000 in 1779, out of a total population of 172,000. Slaves came from many different places, although most of them were from south Asia and the Indonesian archipelago, especially Bengal, Sulawesi, and Bali. The specific conditions and relations under which slaves lived varied significantly, and modes of unfree labour differed from slavery to debt bondage and from temporary to lifelong and hereditary “unfreedom”.

No direct details are available of the specific type of slavery of the Balinese slaves involved in the mutiny on the *Merccuur*, although some information can be deduced from the context. Apart from the slave of the second equipage master, the Balinese slaves on the *Merccuur* consisted of a large group under the single general ownership of the *Sociteit van de Cotter de Batavier*. Combined with their displacement from their direct social environment, that might indicate a more formal and definite type of slavery, and this seems to be confirmed by the decision the slaves took to rise up in order to flee. The north-easterly winds prevailing around Batavia in September might have influenced the westward course taken by the ship after the mutiny, although that naturally took the slaves further away from Bali. Apparently they were willing to take their chances elsewhere.

Definite forms of slavery were not exceptional for Bali, where slavery was also widespread in the indigenous society. In Bali, many slaves were owned by the rulers and the aristocracy and worked as servants or on the land.<sup>36</sup> It is unclear how far the Balinese slaves on the *Merccuur* were

33. G. Campbell, “Slavery and the Trans-Indian Ocean World Slave Trade: A Historical Outline”, in H. Prabha Ray and E.A. Alpers (eds), *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 286–305.

34. Raben, “Cities and the Slave Trade”, p. 132.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

36. Van der Kraan, “Bali: Slavery”; Knaap, “Slavery”, p. 195.

already accustomed to their position as slaves, and that might well have been an important factor in the mutiny since recently enslaved men can be expected to be more prone to revolt than those who have become more accustomed to being slaves. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Balinese origin of the *Mercur* slaves might not have been entirely random. As Bali was a Hindu society and most of the free company personnel were either Christian or Muslim, employing slaves specifically from that island might have been important to the company policy of “divide and rule”.

The outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War at the end of 1780 had rendered VOC navigation between the Dutch Republic and the East Indies difficult. As a consequence, the VOC faced shortages of European labour in Asia and the proposal of June 1781 to employ slave sailors on homeward-bound ships was one of the solutions. It is uncertain if the experiment had been put into effect, but only six months later the company decided to adopt more drastic measures. In January 1782 it was proposed by the Governor General “to experiment with” buying Balinese slaves in order to explore whether it “would be possible to educate them in sailing”.<sup>37</sup> It was decided to buy around 100 *kloeke*: (strong) Balinese aged fifteen to twenty-five years old, and to turn them into sailors.<sup>38</sup>

Only a few months later the Balinese slaves were placed on board the *Mercur*. They were to be trained in the work to be done on board ship, “as well as to handle cannons and Snaphaunce muskets”,<sup>39</sup> and for this training the slaves appear to have been divided into different groups.

#### A CALL FOR AMOK

So there they were, early in the morning of 6 September 1782, exercising with the Snaphaunce muskets. The slaves had been divided into well-trained and less well-trained groups, and the better trained slaves were made to exercise first as an example to the others. After that it was time for the less well-trained slaves to exercise, but as they began their drills one of them, Njoman of Njalang, apparently failed to hold his head in the right way. The first mate, training the slaves, corrected Njoman roughly with “a blow to the head” and “by turning his head”, which infuriated Njoman. He grasped the barrel of his Snaphaunce musket by the muzzle end and took a swing at the head of the mate, crying “Amok!” as he did so.

From then on the situation developed quickly. The call for amok was taken up by the Balinese slaves, who were “calling amok as with

37. Original: “een preuve te neemen”; “of het mogelyk zy die landaard aan den zeedienst te gewenne”.

38. “Plaatsing Balinese slaven als matrozen op Comp: oorlogschepen”, 18 January 1782, Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, X, p. 592.

39. Original: “zo wel met het canon als de snaphaan te leeren manouvreeren”.

one voice".<sup>40</sup> Djoedoe from Balijbang declared that the call for amok was repeated by "a crowd".<sup>41</sup> Likop from Balij Paijangang declared that "amok has been called for by everyone present on deck and having exercised".<sup>42</sup> Several of the slaves joined in beating the first mate with their Snaphaunce muskets,<sup>43</sup> while the mate, surprised and wounded, staggered to the captain's cabin. The Balinese slaves followed him into the cabin with "Snaphaunce muskets and cutlasses in their hands" and beat him to a pulp.<sup>44</sup> In his statement before the Court of Justice, the slave Likop stated that he had afterwards found the first mate on the floor, lying dead with his "head crushed and a large wound in the throat".<sup>45</sup>

In the meantime, the slaves spread all over the ship, storming the powder magazine and cutting the anchor rope. The European and Javanese sailors did not put up a fight but fled the ship almost immediately. The Javanese sailors Kappar, Soeroe, and Soelo declared that they either jumped or fell from the ship, that they took hold of a plank and swam to the island of Edam, or they were picked up by the crews of smaller boats which happened to be passing.<sup>46</sup> The Europeans took flight in a small boat and were pelted with *koogels* (which can mean either bullets or cannon balls), bottles, and other items. The ship was soon completely in the hands of the mutinous slaves.

The mutiny was marked by a clear division of tasks. Weapons were handed out and mutineers were assigned to their roles. Likop was assigned to the kitchen, Djoedoe and Galantrik seem to have been in charge of the cannons – and of firing on the warship's *Compagnies Welvaren* that was soon in pursuit of the *Mercur*. Sisoepa and Interan were in charge of the wheel, Tedoën and Loewas of the remaining small boat. Leadership seems to have been divided by Njoman from Njalang and Doekoetoet from Balij Kloukong. It is not quite clear who had the upper hand. Djoedoe claims that Doekoetoet had made himself leader of the mutinous slaves and that Njoman had "also commanded".<sup>47</sup>

40. Original: "als uijt eenen mond amok is geroepen".

41. Original: "een menigte".

42. Original: "door alle geagter op geweest zijnde en geexerceert hebbende balijsche slaven als uijt eenen mond amok is geroepen".

43. Later, in his testimony before the Court of Justice, Djoedoe from Balijbang confessed to having called for amok and to having beaten the first mate. Likop stated that it had been Passak from Pejan, Tjimoen from Sabangang, Ketoet from Bebong, and Sittend and Djoedoe from Balijbang.

44. Original: "snaphaanen en houwers in de hand".

45. Original: "het hoofd verbrijsseld en een groote wond in de keel".

46. The Javanese sailors Soeroe and Soelo stated they were in the galley ("bak" or "galjoen") of the ship at the time of the mutiny – the same place as the slave Tedoën claims to have been (and from where, according to Djoedoe's statement, he took a "rijst stamper", a rice masher, as a weapon).

47. Original: "mede gecommandeert".



Mewa from Bali Negara claimed that Doekoetoet was alone in his leadership – and mentioned that he walked around the ship with a “parasol”.<sup>48</sup> Tedoen and Likop mention only the leading role of Njoman.

Likop described an atmosphere of intimidation. He claimed the leadership of Njoman in the mutiny was based largely on fear, stating that he was first forced to help with the attack on the fleeing Europeans, and after that he was forced to work in the kitchen preparing food for the others. Furthermore, Likop stated that slaves attempting to flee were threatened and that Passeer from Bali Kafba Kafba was killed trying to escape. The emphasis on the intimidating leadership of Njoman might have served to downplay Likop’s own role in the mutiny, for, after all, he was suspected of attacking company employees at both the beginning and end of the mutiny. We should bear in mind too that Likop was the slave of the second equipage master and seems to have been the only slave who was not part of the group owned by the Sociteit van de Cotter de Batavier. At the same time, however, it is not unlikely that coercion might very well have been an integral part of enforcing and sustaining cohesion and loyalty during the mutiny.

Two interesting things about the beginning of the mutiny remain to be noted. The slaves seem to have been in possession of “cutlasses”<sup>49</sup> almost immediately when the fight broke out between the exercising slaves and the first mate. Likop declared that the cutlasses were brought on deck by “one of the youngest slaves”,<sup>50</sup> while Djoedoe mentions that the cutlasses came from a “case” on deck,<sup>51</sup> that had been opened by “a young Balinese slave”. The speed with which the cutlasses appeared in the drama raises questions. Was it an indication of prior preparations for the mutiny? Or was it quick thinking and alert assistance by the boy who was used to a servile role in an adult environment?

The VOC officials at least found the scenario of a prepared revolt not unlikely. In the trial of the nine mutineers brought to the Court of Justice significant attention was paid to the start of the mutiny and the origin of the weapons used. The fear of a “conspiracy” to run amok was also crucial to the events on the *Slot ter Hoge*. The confessions to conspiracy made by the slaves should be addressed with caution as they were obtained by torture. Nevertheless, the possibility that amok was premeditatedly organized by sailors or slaves was identified not only by the authorities but by the slaves and sailors themselves. The question figures prominently in the statements of Javanese sailors about a mutiny on board a Macao

48. Original: “sombreel”.

49. Original: “houwers”.

50. Original: “door een der jongste balijsche slaaven die den stuurman had opgepast een menigte op het dek zijn gebragt en door de overige opgenomen”.

51. Original: “geweerkist die op het dek stond”.

ship in 1783 near Pisang, south of Malacca. Interrogated before the Court of Justice of Batavia, three Javanese mutineers declared that, after a dispute over payment of wages and threats by the captain that he would impress them as soldiers on Macao, “Sie Dolla, one of them, had advised them, quietly, to make *amok*”. The next evening, “at eight o’clock”, two of the Javanese had “called *amok*”.<sup>52</sup> The eleven mutineers killed several Europeans and Chinese – the Macao sailors on board fled.

The same strategy could very well have been employed by the Balinese slaves on board the *Mercuur*. The assistance of the young slave and the joint call for amok would fit perfectly in that scenario. The mishandling of the musket by Njoman could have served as a method of provoking maltreatment by the first mate. The furious reaction of Njoman, the strike at the first mate and the call for amok therefore served to signal the start of the mutiny. The ready availability of weapons and the reasonably high level of organization that characterized further developments during the mutiny might also point to the scenario of a planned uprising.

The navigational skill of the Balinese slaves is another intriguing aspect. The slaves managed to set sail almost immediately after the mutiny. They overran the ship near the island of Edam in the roads of Batavia, where the first attempt to retake the vessel was made by the warship’s *Compagnies Welvaren*. The slaves then set sail westwards in the direction of the Sunda Strait – in the opposite direction to their home island of Bali. Near the island “Dwars in de Weg” a second attempt was made to recapture the ship but, successful in resisting the second assault, the mutineers sailed or perhaps drifted even further west.<sup>53</sup> They were at the latitude of the island “Poelo Bessij, lying just under the highlands of Lampong” (south Sumatra) when the third and final attack took place.<sup>54</sup>

It is unclear whether the two sails of the *Mercuur* had already been set before the mutiny, or if it had been done by the slaves themselves directly after the mutiny. Likop claimed that the slaves sailed with “the two sails that had already been set”. Djoedoe, however, claimed that the two sails “were set on the order of Njoman and Doekoetoet”. Mewa at first claimed that he was below deck, but later stated that he and others had helped with handling “the sails and the cannon”. Tedoen stated the two sails were already set when he came on deck and that later he helped

52. Original statement by the Javanese sailors Salieden, Kadol, and Boejang: “Dat op die drijgementen, een van hun met naame Sie Dolla, hun in stilte had aangeraeden om amok te maken. Dat vervolgens ’s avonds de klokke agt uren door voorm. Saleedien en Sie Dolla Amok was geroepen geworden”; NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 9515.

53. It seems that during the second attack the top of the mast of the *Mercuur* was blown off.

54. “Poelo Bessij” refers to the present-day island of Pulau Sebesi, near Lampung (South Sumatra).

“in taking care of the sails”.<sup>55</sup> Whether or not the sails had already been set before the mutiny, the slaves’ ability to resist their attackers for five days and to navigate from Edam to Poelo Bessij seems to indicate a rather high level of organization and seamanship.

The mutiny on the *Mercur* seems to have been a revolt against more than just shipboard hierarchy and violence. In the mutiny the Balinese freed themselves from the status of slave. They established a new social order that was in many ways an inversion of the normal situation. The slaves used their newly gained freedom to eat more diverse food (ships’ biscuit, fish, and meat), but also to open the sailors’ chests to look for liquor and European clothes. Ashore, slaves were not allowed in bars and taverns but after the mutiny they gained access to beer, wine, and distilled “white liquor”.<sup>56</sup> The “European” clothes<sup>57</sup> found on board led to a carnivalesque sort of costume play. Doekoetoet was described as using a *sombreel* – a parasol or sun-hat – as a sign of his leadership and Djoedoe admitted that he had donned a white “shirt” or *baaijtje* (Figure 3).<sup>58</sup> Intarang, Loewas, and Mewa were said to have worn white trousers. The imprisoned slaves disagreed about Likop’s clothes: Djoedoe declared Likop wore a white shirt, Tedoen states he had white trousers, while Mewa declared he had a red *baaijtje* and black trousers.

This defiance of social and ethnic categorizations did not last. After five days, early in the morning of 11 September 1782, the mutiny was broken. After two failed attempts to repossess the ship the European and Javanese soldiers managed to climb up the rear of the vessel and take the poop deck, from where they launched their attack on the mutineers. The ruthless reckoning of Jacob Wedelaar with the mutinous Balinese slaves seems completely in line with VOC regulations stating that renegade slaves who refused to surrender “should be killed in the best way possible”.<sup>59</sup> Both the soldiers and the Balinese slaves were forced to leave the ship as fire engulfed it. Only nine slaves were picked up from the sea and nearby islands. A few other mutineers were mentioned as having died during the mutiny and subsequent fighting. Perhaps some slaves drowned trying to reach shore, but it is likely that a large number of the seventy-nine slaves did manage to escape. If so, the mutiny was, at least in part, successful.

55. Original: “mede op de zeilen te hebben gepast”. Tedoen furthermore claimed to have done nothing else than attend the sails and keep an eye on the warship. He stated that he stopped doing so when Njoman ceased giving orders.

56. Original: “witte soopjes”.

57. Original: “Europeesche kleederen linnen en ander goed”.

58. Original: “hembt of baaijtje” (a *badjoe*: jacket or shirt).

59. Original: “neer te maken en van kant te brengen”, “op de best mogelykste wyze”, “Plakaat ter betuegeling van de moetwil en insolentie der slaven”, 31 March 1778, NA, VOC, no. 3504, fos 2042–2048.



Figure 3. A young slave with a parasol.

*Painted by Jan Brandes, 1779–1785. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Public domain.*

The events might have sent an important message to slaves and other workers concerning the possibilities of revolt.

The nine mutineers who were finally brought to trial in Batavia showed little solidarity. Likop was one of the first to make a statement. As early as 12 October, a few days before the interrogation of the European and Javanese crew members, he seems to have confessed to the events of the

mutiny more or less voluntarily. He gave court officials detailed information with which they could interrogate the other mutineers. Djoedoe, Mewa, and Tedoen were interrogated as a group. It seems there might have been a short-lived attempt to “hold the line” under questioning, with the three stating that they were not certain of the course of events and that they were unaware of the role of their fellow mutineers. Soon, however, Mewa confessed that Djoedoe had indeed been one of the slaves who joined the assault on the first mate. After that, solidarity broke down and the men confessed to the mutiny pretty freely.

### BLOODY ENDINGS

The mutiny on the *Mercur* in 1782 was the first of a small series of mutinies by slaves and Asian sailors on homeward bound VOC ships and must have been an impressive event. The Balinese slaves murdered a first mate and took possession of a company ship. They held out for a number of days and made their way to South Sumatra chased by a warship. The *Mercur* was eventually set on fire and sank and the VOC tried to hush up the events. The only news report, in the *Groninger Courant*, did not name the ship and was based on information from a Danish vessel. Despite that, the affair must have had a significant impact. It is most likely that some at least of the Balinese mutineers did manage to escape. Accounts of the mutiny and its repression might have been given by the runaway slaves, but also by the Europeans and Javanese who returned to Batavia. The mutiny of the *Mercur* might have been an inspiration for the mutinies and conspiracies on the *Slot ter Hoge* (1783), the *Java* (1783), and the *Haasje* (1790).

It is uncertain, however, if all this should lead us to speak of an “age of mutinies”, although a few other references to mutinies are indeed known for the period. The mutinies of Europeans, however, were mostly en route from Europe to Asia, as in the case of the mutiny on the *Gerechtigheid* (1782), the *Venus* (1782), and the *Barbestein* (1786). Mutinies by Asians occurred while ships were lying off Batavia (*Mercur*), or en route from Asia to the Cape (*Slot ter Hoge*, *Java*, *Haasje*). Other mutinies by Asians occurred outside the service of the VOC as well, for example on a Macao ship in 1783 near Pisang, south of Malacca – where eleven Javanese sailors, one Malayan, and a Moor rebelled against the Europeans and Chinese on board,<sup>60</sup> or the mutiny by Asian passengers on the *Vrouwe Agatha*, a ship hired by the VOC and sailing from Batavia to the Cape in 1792.<sup>61</sup> These mutinies seem to have been related to wartime pressure on

60. NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 9515.

61. Cape Town Archives Repository, South Africa, Resolutions of the Council of Policy of Cape of Good Hope, C. 204, pp. 6–57.

labour markets and working conditions. Perhaps tales of mutiny inspired others. It is impossible, however, to trace direct links between the different mutinies.

Mutinies by both Asians and Europeans seem to have occurred regularly throughout the history of the VOC, those in the 1780s conceivably being part of a series of revolts during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and later. There seem to have been earlier concentrations of mutinies and revolts too. The 1680s, for example, saw a noticeable series of mutinies when slaves rebelled on the VOC ship *Hogergeest* in 1684, the Dutch private sloop *Steenbock* in 1686, and another privately owned Dutch vessel, also in 1686. Furthermore, Christian Asian sailors mutinied on a VOC *pantjalang* in 1688 and Chinese and Javanese sailors rebelled on a private vessel belonging to Dutchman Jacob Janssen de Roy in 1691. However, it is uncertain if and how these different mutinies were related. A thorough reconstruction of mutinies in Asian and other seas would be an interesting way forward as such research could reveal peaks in mutinies over time and place, and might reveal patterns.

Returning to the late eighteenth-century Asian mutinies, there seem to have been some important differences between the mutiny on the *Mercur* and the role of slaves in later incidents. First, the position of the slaves was completely different. The Balinese slaves on the *Mercur* were enslaved labourers trained for military and maritime tasks. The slaves conspiring or revolting on the *Slot ter Hoge*, *Java*, and *Haasje* were the property of highly ranked individual crew members, presumably functioning as servants or as “cargo” for private trade. A group of slave sailors were also on board the *Slot ter Hoge*, but they apparently agreed to the death sentence of the slaves suspected of conspiracy. Second, the mutinies on the *Java* and the *Haasje* resulted in a careful and secretly planned killing of European officers at some moment when they would be most vulnerable – after nightfall, during dinner, or in their sleeping quarters. On the *Mercur*, the mutiny ignited on deck and in broad daylight. In both cases cruel treatment does seem to have been an important factor in the mutinous behaviour.

Once freed from their normal hierarchy by a violent moment of revolt, the mutiny on the *Mercur* developed in a controlled manner. The homogenous background of the slaves, all of whom were Balinese, and their status as slave sailor-soldiers might have been an important factor in shaping the course of events. The slaves seem to have had a rather high level of organization and of maritime and military skill. According to the statements given, the mutineers accepted a form of personal leadership (Njoman, Doekoetoet) and division of tasks. Discipline on board was enforced by coercion and the threat of killing, and at least one slave was indeed killed for trying to leave the ship. The immediate availability of weapons and the collective response of the slaves to the call for amok might



be indications of preparations made for the mutiny. Meanwhile, the aim of the mutiny seems not to have been to return to Bali but to gain freedom by taking over command of the ship. The mutineers set sail for south Sumatra, presumably using the north-eastern winds prevailing in September. In the meantime, the slaves celebrated their temporarily gained freedom on board ship with a somewhat carnivalesque inversion of the social order.

The open and shared outcry for amok in the case of the *Mercur* is striking and brings into play an interesting issue. From the nineteenth century onwards, amok has been generally defined as an irrational – and often individual – act of violence performed by “native” men. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* in 1911 portrayed it as “homicidal mania”.<sup>62</sup> The nineteenth-century Dutch linguist P.J. Veth used a very similar definition that tended to explain the phenomenon in a psychological way, describing it as an instance of “rage”, leading native men to kill everyone standing in their way. According to Veth amok would be closely related to *mata glap* – a situation in which someone would be blinded by fury. He referred to the “calling of amok” as a phenomenon that emerged from such a desperate and misguided state of mind.<sup>63</sup> Others have framed “running amok” as not completely irrational, but nevertheless an individual act – as “a culture-specific syndrome wherein an individual unpredictably and without warning manifests mass, indiscriminate, homicidal behavior that is authored with suicidal intent”.<sup>64</sup>

The process of pushing the phenomenon into a narrow psychological framework continued throughout the twentieth century. Researchers went in “search of the true amok” in Malay culture, and found that “both the subjects and the Malay culture view amok as psychopathology”.<sup>65</sup> In a 1999 article, a distinction was made between two types of amok related to different psychological disorders. Studying the present-day occurrences of amok, Manuel L. Saint Martin stated that “beramok is plausibly linked to a depressive or mood disorder, while amok appears to be related to psychosis, personality disorders, or a delusional disorder”.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast then to received wisdom from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, the events presented in this article show that there is evidence to rethink the psychological definition of amok as individual and irrational rage. On board the *Slot ter Hoge* amok appears to have been a conscious act of revolt, which according to the reports took the form of a “conspiracy” to run amok among the slaves. The Dutch officers referred

62. “Amuck, Running”, *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th edn, 1911).

63. P.J. Veth, *Uit Oost en West. Verklaring van eenige uitheemsche woorden* (Arnhem, 1889).

64. J.C. Spores, *Running Amok: An Historical Inquiry* (Athens, OH, 1988), p. 7.

65. J.E. Carr and E. Kong Tan, “In Search of the True Amok: Amok as Viewed Within the Malay Culture”, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 133 (1976), pp. 1295–1299.

66. M.L. Saint Martin, “Running Amok: A Modern Perspective on a Culture-Bound Syndrome”, *Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 1:3 (1999), pp. 66–70.

to “murder or massacre under the name of amok”.<sup>67</sup> The mutiny on the Macao ship in 1783 seems to have been planned the day before the “calling of amok” occurred. On the *Mercuur* as well, amok took the form of a full-blown mutiny. These mutinies and conspiracies show amok as a collective and rational act. The amok played out by the Balinese slaves is revealed as a conscious and rational act of defiance, and so we can see some light thrown on a tradition of resistance that was rather different from the “traditional” late-colonial perception of amok.

The Asian mutinies on board Dutch East Indiamen at the end of the eighteenth century establish amok as an indigenous claim to resistance. The moment of amok might be linked to notions of honour, as noted by Nigel Worden.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, however, the purpose of calling amok clearly goes beyond readiness to defend honour or reclaim self-worth. At the start of the mutiny, the direct individual response to perceived injustice or violation of codes of honour (a blow to the head) is taken over by peers in the group. At the end of the mutiny, facing armed troops, the mutineers again collectively cried out for amok. The “call” for amok was not then an act of an enraged lone killer, but played a key role in the mobilization of the group of mutineers. It functioned as a conscious call to arms, as a battle cry as well as a call for solidarity. Collectively rising against authority, the Balinese slaves seem to have employed the call for amok both as a defence of basic morals against maltreatment and as a way of gaining their freedom.

In its manifestation, the uprising shows similarities with other forms of conscious revolt, especially European maritime mutinies. The capture of the ship, the decision to set sail with the aim of gaining freedom, and the temporary inversion of social order are characteristics found in other mutinies. The level of organization and possible preparation are striking and interesting aspects. On the other hand, the Balinese mutiny on the *Mercuur* seems to have had a much more violent beginning than many other mutinies. Amok might well have been a pluriform but distinct tradition of resistance, with similarities to European-style mutinies. This seems to open up a promising area for fruitful future research, which could shed light on the development of amok as a tradition of resistance with distinctive cultural patterns, but we should keep in mind links and comparisons to other European and Asian forms of revolt. Such research will also enable us to understand better the historical interplay between local and global influences on traditions of revolt, as well as the transformation of fluid indigenous traditions into static “colonial” and “psychologized” categories.

67. Van der Tempel, “Wij hebben amok”, p. 130.

68. N. Worden, “Public Brawling, Masculinity and Honour”, in *idem* (ed.), *Cape Town: Between East and West. Social Identities in a Dutch Colonial Town* (Hilversum, 2012), pp. 194–211.