Spinner, Weaver, Docker, Whore
Globalization and work since the eighteenth century
Lex Heerma van Voss

Please do not quote or circulate: very preliminary

Introduction

This is very much work in progress, or better yet, work that has a rich database to work from, but has yet to progress from that. My plan is to write a (not too long) book on the basis of that database, and this paper is a first attempt to find a direction for that book. Whether this text in itself should evolve into a separate paper has yet to be decided. If so, change is in order. The present text brings together parts of the conclusion of the three publications, but remains too close to these conclusions, both in findings and in formulations. It should be stressed that in each of the cases I am one of the authors of these conclusions, but in none of them I am the most important author. Whether article or book, I have yet to collect input from other sources than the present body of data. In short, this text is *very* tentative and I am *very* open to suggestions.

The good news is the data available. Over the past two decades, I have been involved in three comparative projects, each on an occupation on a global scale and over a couple of centuries. The occupations under consideration were dock workers, textile workers and prostitutes.[1] A comparative approach was developed, in which the long term development in about 25 places all over the globe was described by specialists in the history of that occupation and that area: ports (like Tanga or Rotterdam) for dock workers, textile areas (like Lancashire or Twente) for textile workers and dens of sin (like Shanghai or Amsterdam) for prostitution.[2] The history of work in these ports, textile regions and prostitution cities was described for the last couple of centuries, by historians specialised in the occupation and the geographical region, working from a set list of questions. Based on these overviews, comparative papers on different themes were written. These were discussed at a conference where the authors of all regional overviews and thematic comparisons were present, so errors in interpretation could be corrected. The overviews and comparisons where then published as a book. Basic production processes were selected: loading/unloading ship, spinning and weaving in cotton and wool, ordinary prostitution. We were looking for production processes which we would find in many periods and places. For instance silk spinning, weaving complicated patterns or male prostitution or other forms of sex work were excluded, as they are less common and/or much less studied, and therefore basic information is available to a lesser extent, making comparisons less easy.

[1] Davies, Sam, et al. eds, Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790-1970 (Aldershot etc.: Ashgate, 2000); Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk eds, *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000* (Aldershot etc.: Ashgate, 2010); Magaly Rodríguez García, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk en Lex Heerma van Voss eds, *Selling Sex in the City. Prostitution in World Cities, 1600 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). This paper and its author are much indebted to my co-organizers in each of these projects. The usual disclaimer applies also.

[2] The selection of the cases was not flawless. In the first of these projects, that on dockers, the organizers worked simply from what was offered. For the textile regions and prostitution towns a selection was made beforehand of regions or towns to be included, but not for all of these a satisfactory local overview could be organized. Nevertheless each of the three books presents a more or less acceptable global coverage.

Globalization

For the present paper we define the first wave of globalization as beginning with the establishment of oversea trade relations between Europa, Asia and the Americas in the sixteenth century, the start of colonial submission on a large scale of non-Europeans by Europeans. Among the starting dates proposed are 1492, for obvious reasons, or 1565/71, when the Spaniards conquered the Philippines and established a direct trading route between the Latin American silver mines and China. This first wave of globalization also led to price convergence between markets in different continents. And it is certainly important for our story.[3]

The period 1820-1910 saw a second wave of globalization. The transport revolution drove down transport costs from the 1820s onward: railways, steamships, better roads, more canals, refrigeration in railway cars and ships made it possible to transport basic foodstuffs and other bulk goods over far greater distances. Tariff barriers came down. Colonial powers forcefully opened Third World territories and compelled their colonial populations to produce for world markets. Workers migrated in enormous numbers. Capital was invested worldwide at a far greater level than before, or after. Prices, wages and even the rent paid for land all converged, leading some economic historians to the conclusion that real globalization only started in this period.[4]

The second wave was followed by a wave of de-globalization from about 1910 to 1950. From about 1880, countries such as Germany and France started to raise tariffs again to protect their agriculture and industry. Countries traditionally open to immigration began to restrict the influx of new people as their influence on wages became more obvious; further restrictions were prompted by the growth in welfare arrangements. Global migration flows gave way to regional circuits of refugees from wars and the attendant effects of the redrawing of national borders in both Europe and its (former) colonies. The Great Depression of the 1930s led to an increase in protectionist measures. All in all, a wave of de-globalization effects broke apart many of the links forged since 1820.

This was followed after 1950 by a renewed wave of globalization, which we are still experiencing. In what follows, I will not only deal with globalization in economic terms, but also with the effects of global movements in political thought.

The three occupations, three possible reactions to globalization, and three questions

Globalization can have different consequences for occupations and people who work in it. At least three possible reactions can be discerned.[5]

1. An occupation can profit from globalization, because it increases the demand for this kind of work (transport, financial services, language teachers);
2. Globalization can increase migration to job opportunities, as through increased links more people are knowledgeable about and can reach jobs and markets over larger distances, or send remittances home over larger distances; or

[3] Robertson, R. (2003). *The Three Waves of Globalisation. A History of a Developing Global Consciousness*. Black Point: Fernwood.

[4] Jeffrey G. Williamson and Kevin O'Rourke, "When Did Globalisation Begin?", European Review of Economic History, 6 (2002) pp. 23-50; Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, "Path Dependence, Time Lags, and the Birth of Globalization: A Critique of O'Rourke and Williamson", European Review of Economic History, 8 (2004), pp. 81-108; Jan de Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World", Economic History Review, 63 (2010), pp. 710-733. De Zwart

[5] References to literature about the impact of globalization on jobs/occupations.

3. Globalization can cause a race to the bottom. Based on more long distance trade in and transport of raw materials and finished products, the production process moves to an area with a lower wage standard. The jobs thus move, creating a loss of employment in the high wage area and a gain in the low wage area.

Of our three occupations, dockers are in the first group, prostitutes in the second and textile workers in the third. We thus have in our data set examples of quite different possible reactions to globalization. This enables us to investigate the consequences of globalization in different types of occupations. The questions we pose are:

1. What is the influence of globalization on labour relations? Does globalization have an influence on the establishment of the occupation, the organisation and character of the work, the labour relations involved?
2. What is the influence of globalization on the wage bill in the occupation?
3. What is the influence of globalization on workers' militancy?

Global capitalism, colonialism, labour organization and labour relations

Dock work

The creation of the dockworker as a separate occupation can be linked to the increase in waterborne transport. Before a specialist occupation came into being, ships were loaded and unloaded by their crews, possibly assisted by whatever casual labour happened to be available on shore. This specialisation started, with the creation of porters' guilds, in some ports already in the fourteenth century. However, it was with the first wave of globalization, which led to an increase in traffic and of ship size, that we see a large increase in the number of guilds of specialised dockers and porters.[6]

In many parts of the world, porters were organised in guilds or guild-like organisations, even if some of the organizational trappings of guilds were not particularly applicable to dock work. The amount of skill involved in dock work was limited, and there was usually no apprenticeship, masterpiece or masters' position in dock work. In an otherwise open and accessible labour market, dockers used any form of vertical segregation they could to claim a certain type of work for a specific group of workers. In the European *ancien régime* the available form of organization for this monopoly was the guild. For municipal authorities it was a way to control an otherwise unruly labour force in their ports and to ensure ships would be loaded and unloaded with reasonable speed and efficiency. The guild could limit conflicts among workers willing to do such work. Where weighing, measuring and quality control was involved there was added justification in granting the corporation a monopoly of its particular specialism in loading and transporting goods. This monopoly also was an effective way to ensure that goods actually showed up in the warehouses where they were supposed to be delivered. Guilds easily accommodated vertical segmentation of the market for dock workers, with specialisation depending on places (on board, on the quay), techniques (lightermen, crane operators, carriers, fillers of tuns), or goods (grain, wine, water, peat). This kind of vertical segmentation was also used by dockers in situations where guilds were not prevalent, and in those cases ethnical, religious or caste divisions within the labour force were also put in play. In ports like Shanghai or New York criminal gangs were able to dominate segments of the port and allocate work there.

[6] Rediker, *Between the devil*, pp. 89-92. Jan Lucassen, 'Work on the docks: Sailors' labour productivity and the organization of loading and unloading', in Richard W. Unger (ed.), *Shipping and Economic Growth 1350-1850* (Brill: Leiden, 2011), 269-278.

These two configurations of dock labour, a phase before specialised dockers existed and a phase where a monopoly was maintained by guilds or similar organisations, were part of one of the outcomes of the dockers project. They can be distinguished, and historically often precede two other configurations: the casual phase and the period of de-casualization. Especially the casual configuration has traditionally drawn attention from labour historians, much more than the other three. Characteristics of the four configurations are listed – schematically - in table 1.

Table 1. Configurations of dock labour.

	Pre-docker	*Monopolistic*	*Casual*	*Post-casual*
globalization		first wave	second wave, de-globalization	third wave
ship	sail	sail	steam	motor
cargo	general	general	bulk	containers
loading by	seamen	porters, etc.	dockers	dockers
using	hand (cranes)	hand + cranes	hand, elevators	crane
level of technology	low	low	low	high
wage level	low	high	low	high
labour intensity	low	low	high	low
work gangs	non-existent	within guild	very important	less important
hiring through	captain	guild	foremen (gang, shape-up)	pools, stable employment
worker activism	-	through guild	direct action (union)	union
level of organization	none	local	local/national	national

Based on Van der Linden and Heerma van Voss

The change from the second, monopolistic, to the third, casual, configuration was clearly linked to the second wave of globalization, and the concomitant increase in port traffic. By the 19th C large ports were spread all over the globe. One of the forms taken by the globalization movement of the nineteenth century was colonialism. To ship to the West raw materials from colonial or dependent economies and to supply those territories with finished industrial products from the capitalist core, existing ports were expanded (Shanghai, Buenos Aires, Colombo) and new ports (Hong Kong, Kobe, Yokohama) were created from scratch. By the end of the second globalization wave, some of the largest ports in the world were to be found in each of three categories: ports that had been large

harbours before 1820, ports that had expanded only through the increased flow of goods, and ports that had not even existed before the wave of globalization started.

Often this necessitated the digging of a canal or docks, or building quays or creating other facilities to allow new, larger steamships to use a port. The increased investment in facilities and ships called for a speeding up of turnaround times and the increased throughput caused a greater demand for labour. They were reasons enough for shipping companies to break the stranglehold of monopolistic corporations. Local authorities, anticipating the growth of their ports as they took part in world trade, were willing to help end the monopolies, while an increase of immigration assured large enough workforces even at the peak of maritime traffic. The developments in Marseilles around 1860, analysed by Sewell, offer an excellent example. In 1856 the digging started for large new docks sited away from the old port and its adjacent working-class neighbourhoods. These new docks were to operate with labour-saving equipment, especially steam-driven hydraulic cranes and lifts, and they were intended to receive all steamships calling at Marseilles, so they would accommodate the new, large capital-intensive steamship companies. When a showdown took place in 1864, the Compagnie des Docks manned its dock with unskilled, mainly Italian immigrant workers and decisively beat the workers' corporation: an event which ushered in the new configuration of casual dock labour in Marseilles.[7]

As this development took place globally, the typical port labour force came to be composed of casual workers, who had to turn up once or twice a day in search of a day's work. In the US, this was termed the "shape-up". As there was a large supply of casual dockers, many of them immigrants, American dockers tried to secure jobs by organizing themselves into permanent gangs and by establishing vertical boundaries between ethnic groups. In New York for instance, Afro-American dockers were ousted by Irish in the first half of the nineteenth century, who in turn experienced fierce competition from Italians by the end of that century. Each nation of immigrants reigned in its own part of the port. Blacks did the least coveted jobs. In New York and New Orleans different ethnic groups organized themselves into different locales and unions, although New Orleans could boast cooperation among unions and on the job between black and white in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Along the West Coast too gangs were organized along ethnic lines. Casual dockers could be hired individually, but often they were hired as gangs. In the first case it was important for dockers to keep on the good side of the foremen who did the actual hiring, in the latter case to be part of a good gang, which would be hired often and would get to do the better jobs.

The influence of globalization on dock labour can be measured quite directly when we have time series for port traffic. Such figures can be offered here for three ports: Antwerp, Genoa and Rotterdam, from the latter part of the second wave.[8] Until the end of the first wave in 1913, they show an increase in traffic, even if this is less pronounced in Genoa than in Rotterdam. This is visible in figure 1.

---

[7] Sewell W.H., Jr., "Uneven development, the autonomy of politics, and the dockworkers of nineteenth-century Marseille", American Historical Review, 93 (1988), 604-637.

[8] Economic History Workshop (Center of Economic Studies, University of Leuven) www.econ.kuleuven.ac.be/ew/academic/econhist/. R. Loyen, 'Functional shifts in the port of Antwerp. A throughput model', *International journal of maritime history* 13 (2001) 2, 73-93. www.fhk.eur.nl/websites/ra . Marco Doria, "Les dockers de Gênes: le travail entre économie et politique de 1800 à la Seconde Guerre mondiale", in *Dockers de la Méditerranée à la mer du Nord. Des quais et des hommes dans l'histoire* (Aix en Provence, 1999), 15-43, 16.

Figure 1. Troughput in Antwerp, Genoa and Rotterdam (tons): growth 1876-1913

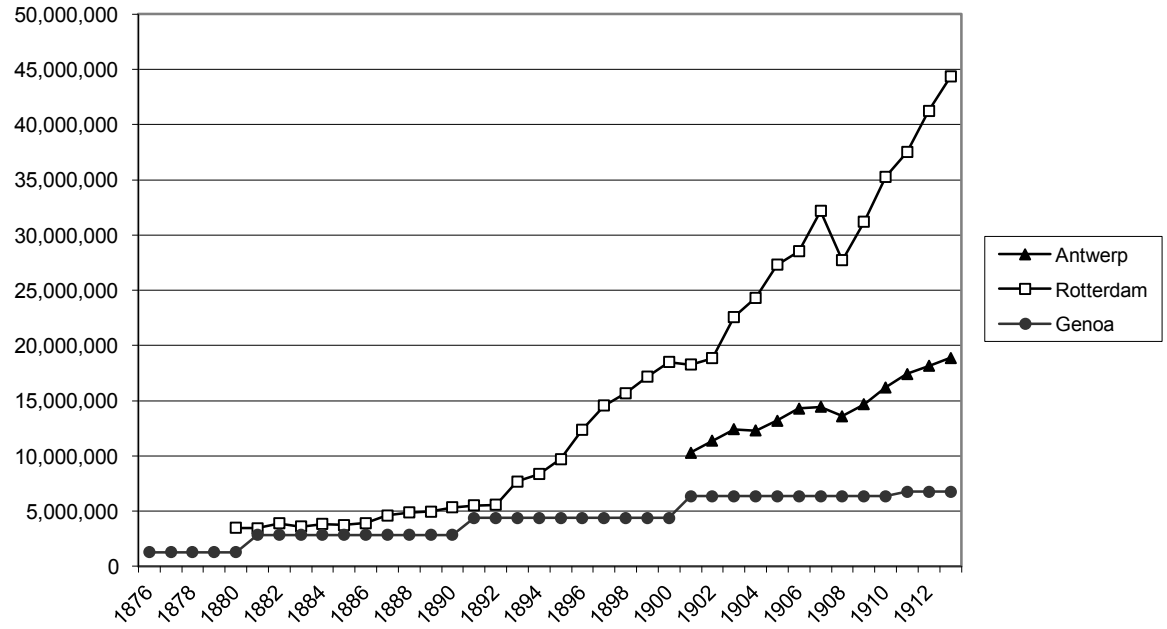
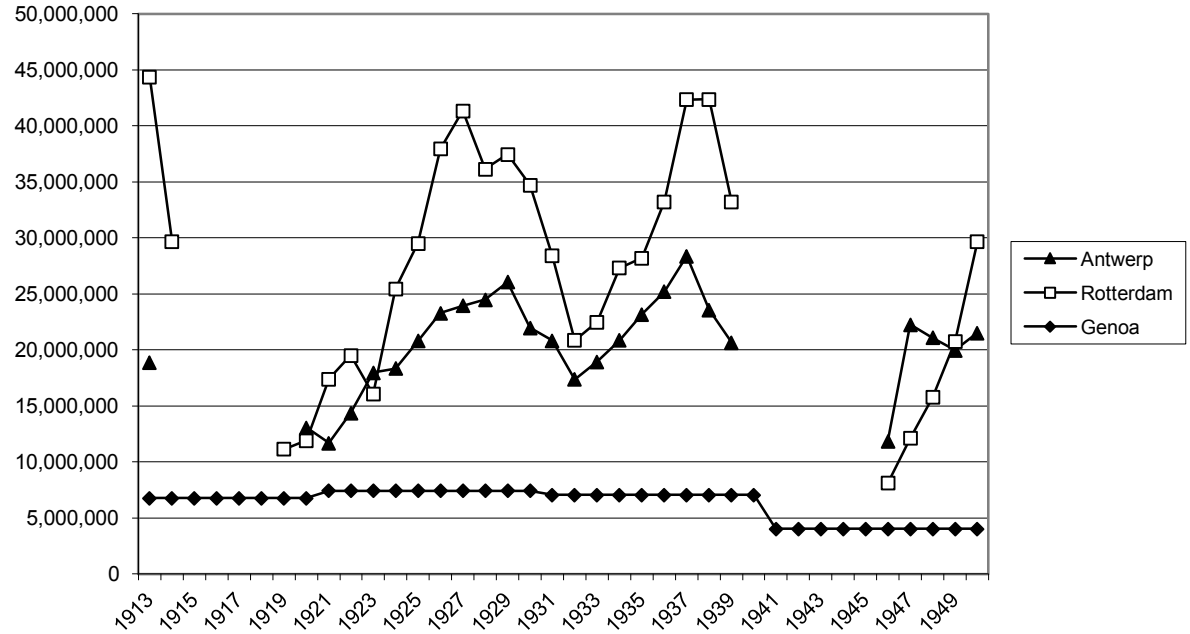


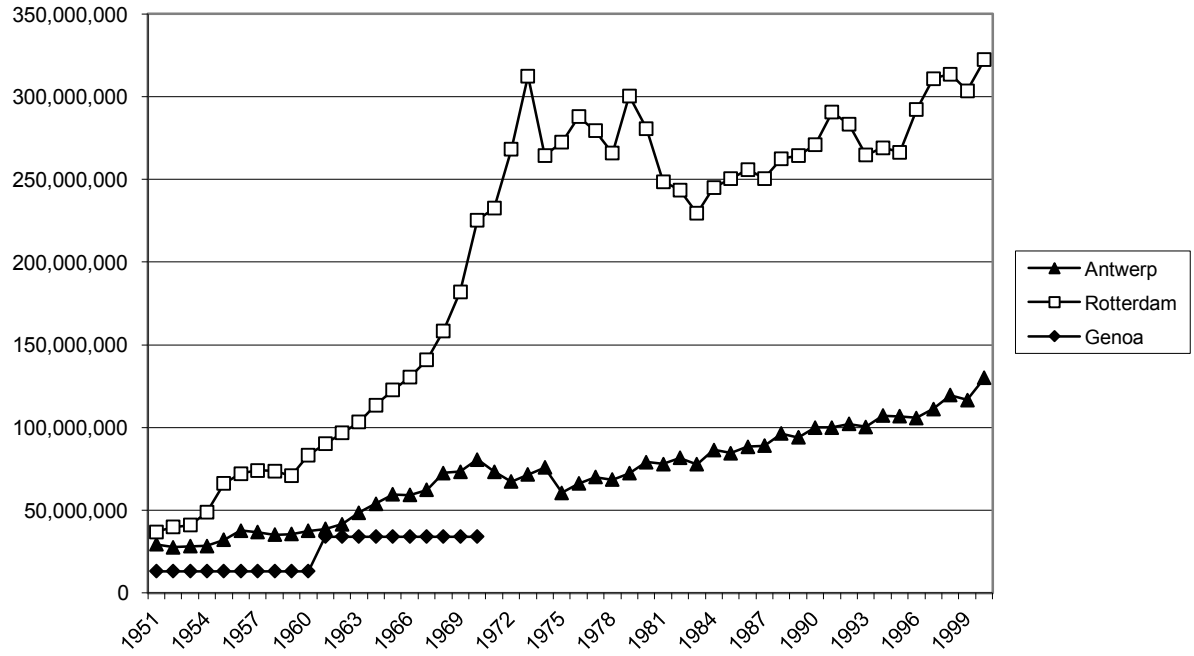
Figure 2 gives the throughput in the period of de-globalization between 1913 and 1950. This period shows wild fluctuations. The impact of both World Wars and the depression of the 1930s is clearly visible. There is no overall growth.

Figure 2. Troughput in Antwerp, Genoa and Rotterdam (tons): stagnation 1913-1950



Growth resumes in the third wave of globalization, as figure 3 registers.

Figure 3. Troughput in Antwerp, Genoa and Rotterdam (tons): growth 1951-2000



Spinning and weaving section to be developed

Contrary to dock work, which was created as a new occupation when port traffic increased, spinning and weaving were already ubiquitous before the first wave of globalization. Traditionally, the global dominance of Western, and especially the British textile industry was explained as a consequence of superior. Over the past two decades, this has been supplemented with a convincing literature which pointed out that non-western hand weaving could hold its own against mechanised weaving in the west for a much longer time than previously thought. Parthasarathi and others have drawn our attention to the fact that the quality and the price of Indian cottons were such that European producers could not compete. In colonies like British India and the Dutch East Indies, indigenous textile production was muzzled by colonial governments, which wanted the colonies to produce raw materials and at the same time wanted to foster the textile industry in their metropolitan countries. The colonies thus became important markets for the textiles produced in the home countries.[9] If we take into account the whole production chain, including the growing of the raw material, it is clear that this is a typical case where global capitalism used violence on a global scale to reorder the whole commodity chain of cotton goods on a capitalist basis.[10]

Prostitutes

Prostitution is famously the world's oldest occupation, but just like with dockers and textile workers, for sex acts to be exchanged against money, exchange has to be monetarised and there has to be a market and enough demand for the service for an occupation to establish itself. In Latin America, the encounters with the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors around 1600 dramatically changed

[9] Parthasarathi, Van Nederveen Meerkerk.
[10] Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*

indigenous societies, which led to forms of sexual exchange which had been previously unknown locally and inscribed known ones with a European moral matrix. Elsewhere, this transition happened only fairly recently. At the turn of the twentieth century, Nairobi was a recently founded colonial administrative and military town. It drew immigrants from the surrounding areas, where native tribes found a livelihood in agriculture, especially raising cattle. This hinterland had been plagued by rinderpest, and social relations had been changed by increasing monetization, induced by taxes introduced by the British. Prostitution as an occupation only became established in the 1910s. Luise White quotes Amina Hali, who was born around 1895, and who described her first contacts as a prostitute:

> "When we went to pick beans, we sometimes found these Kibura [white] men, so it was extra money, we went to pick beans and had a man in secret. Sometimes a woman would go there just for the men, she would take a *gunnia* [gunny sack] so that no one would be suspicious, it looked like she was going to pick beans but she would use the gunnia as a blanket … When they saw a woman lying on her gunnia they would take out their money, and she would motion for him to lie down with her. They paid us and sometimes they gave us babies, so we were rich, we had money and babies that way."[11]

In many places prostitution was established well before 1500, even if the cultural connotations vary, as do the ways in which prostitution was organized or regulated. Globalization in two ways influenced the conditions under which prostitutes worked: by influencing the regulation of prostitution, and through its impact on migration. Prostitution is not only an occupation, it also constitutes a sexual act which in most religions and cultures was and is frowned upon. Indeed it is uncommon to regard prostitution as an occupation, and some authors can only regard it as a form of rape.

Historically, before the second half of the nineteenth century, the two most common approaches were prohibition and criminalization or tolerance. Quite often, prostitution was formally forbidden in either case, and the difference was whether the authorities made an effort to stamp out the practice or thought it better to supervise and therefore tolerate it at least under certain circumstances (in specific neighbourhoods, or limiting prostitutes to certain ways of advertising the business and soliciting clients, only within brothels, etc.). In the course of the nineteenth century an increased awareness and anxiety concerning uncontrolled sexuality arose, and this in turn led to an increase in regulation. Regulation entailed registration and regular health checks. This form of registration and regulation was only viable in states in which a large amount of information about the population was processed by the administration. It had started in (post)revolutionary France, partly to protect soldiers and (male) citizens from venereal disease. Consequently, the system of regulation that came into was – outside France - often referred to as the "French System".

Many towns in Europe and the Americas adopted the regulated system in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The regulations forced upon colonial settings by imperial powers were particularly harsh. In the 1860s, Great Britain introduced the Contagious Diseases Acts in garrison towns, both in Britain and abroad. The measures were specifically intended to secure the imperial project and combat the consequences of the "necessary evil" of prostitution for the British troops. The system did not extend to London, where a combination of "informal regulation" and

[11] Luise White, *The Comforts of Home. Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago and London, 1990), p. 41. White dates this recollection to the years 1909-1916.

repression continued to be practiced throughout the nineteenth century. In the colonies, the regulation of prostitution served a dual goal: on the one hand, protecting colonial soldiers and settlers from venereal diseases, and on the other hand, controlling interracial sexual encounters, which the British, like other imperial rulers, attempted to limit.

Table 2. Official attitudes towards prostitution

	17th century	18th century	1780s-1800s	1810s-1840s	1850s-1870s	1880s-1900s	1910s-1930s	1940s-1960s	1970s-2000
Tolerance	Amsterdam Cairo Calcutta Havana Bruges London Mexico C Shanghai	Paris	Sydney Johannesburg	Chicago Florence Moscow Rio de J Jaffa	Havana Perth	Rio de J (independent sex work)	Rio de J (restricted areas)	Amsterdam Paris Tel Aviv	Buenos Aires Florence Johannesburg La Paz Mexico C Moscow Perth Bruges
Prohibition/ criminalization/ abolition	Hanoi Istanbul *Moscow* Paris Vienna	Moscow *Stockholm*	*Amsterdam* Florence Bruges	Cairo Havana		Amsterdam Chicago *Rio de J* Vienna *Sydney* Singapore	Chicago Calcutta Johannesburg (racial) Moscow	Cairo Casablanca Hanoi Havana London *Mexico City* Shanghai *Tel Aviv*	Paris *Stockholm (clients)* *Vienna*
Regulation	Florence		Cairo Paris		Calcutta Florence Mexico C Stockholm Vienna Singapore Moscow Bruges	Buenos Aires Cairo Hanoi Istanbul Johannesburg La Paz Paris Shanghai Tel Aviv	Casablanca Lagos Perth	Buenos Aires Singapore	
Emancipation									Amsterdam Sydney Vienna

Cities are mentioned in the period when they adopt a policy, and their names are not repeated in later periods, unless they change policies. City names in italics designate attitudes to procuring, brothel keeping etc

While in the colonies regulation was deemed to be unavoidable, in Europe it came under increasing criticism. From the end of the nineteenth century the idea of (especially white) women as victims of procurers and traffickers emerged. This, and the protest against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which made any women walking outdoors in a garrison town liable to being arrested on the suspicion of prostitution, led to a movement of abolitionism. The abolitionist movement over time was increasingly supported worldwide by the first wave of the feminist movement. Around the turn of the century, the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children was established, which strove to repress the international "white slave traffic". In the early twentieth century international conventions against trafficking were adopted, and the League of Nations in the 1920s assembled a committee to investigate and discuss the international traffic of women. As table 2 shows, these international activities inspired many countries to draw up abolitionist legislation, even if it sometimes took decades for those laws to be implemented. The authorities in many towns

only enforced legislation against activities that facilitate prostitution (pimping, soliciting, brothel keeping) and did not criminalize prostitution itself.

From the third quart of the twentieth century other global movements, the sexual revolution and the second wave of feminism, again led to a change in policies. Many towns now opted for toleration. Two minority strands, both strongly influenced by feminism, chose diametric opposed policies. One tried to emancipate prostitutes by treating prostitution as ordinary work (e.g. Sydney, Amsterdam). The other tried to stamp out prostitution by prosecuting clients, reversing a centuries' old tradition of prosecuting pimps and prostitutes and not clients (e.g. Stockholm, Paris).

The movement to combat trafficking mentioned above was a typical case of a moral panic.[12] Sensational press publications suggested that a large number of women and girls were abducted or misled to work as prostitutes in foreign brothels, for instance English girls in continental brothels. Over time, the distance over which these girls were supposed to be trafficked, increased. The concern was specifically directed towards "white" slavery. The concern of the activists was not that any girl might be abducted and forced to work as a prostitute, but that this might happen to Caucasian girls. When for example international concern about white slavery led to pressure on Bombay police commissioner Stephen M. Edwardes (1909-1917) to act against trafficking in European prostitutes, he declared the adjective 'white' incorrect for Bombay, as the women "were chiefly of Eastern European origin". Catering to anti-Semitic sentiments, Edwardes also reported repeatedly that many 'white' prostitutes were actually Jewish.[13] Clearly, Mr. Edwardes considered Jews and East Europeans less white than other whites and trafficking in these cases consequently less urgent.

A global migration network of white prostitutes certainly existed around the turn of the twentieth century. European prostitutes were available in places like Mexico City, Shanghai, Bombay and Buenos Aires. They were however not typically forced to travel there but went for better markets. Real trafficking existed, with a considerable percentage of women being sold into prostitution against their will and against their expectations. This was not 'white', but Asian. In places like Shanghai, in Bombay and in Chinese prostitution in San Francisco, women were led to brothels by false promises of marriage or employment as mill worker or nanny. This was possible in societies where one could have property rights in women, for instance through debt bondage. Even in cases where women ended up in brothels to pay off for instance a debt occurred by their parents, this was not always involuntary.[14]

Historically, the large majority of migration moves by prostitutes were thus voluntary. This migration of prostitutes to continents, countries and cities where they could meet clients, coincided with the waves of globalisation, at least with the second and third waves. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, this especially concerned European women travelling to other parts of the world, Chinese women travelling to the U.S., and Japanese women going to other parts of Asia. The third wave of globalization shows a trend of women from the "Global South" travelling to the "Global North".

---

[12] Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des blanches. Enquête sur la fabrication d'un fléau*

[13] Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct. Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (New Delhi, 2009) pp. 57-58.

[14] Lex Heerma van Voss, 'The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labor Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900', in: M. van der Linden & L. Lucassen (eds.) *Working on Labor* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 153-170.

The labour relations under which women worked in prostitution have varied considerably. Technically, most of them were either self-employed, or in wage labour. Streetwalking, working from homes – both either with or without a pimp - were fairly common, as was working in a brothel. The spread of telephones and the Internet has increased the possibilities to work from home. Given the secretive nature of prostitution, and the transient nature of much of it, it is very hard to say something definitive about the numbers of prostitutes working under different sets of conditions. In periods of regulation working in brothels was sometimes prescribed for registered prostitutes (e.g. in Mexico City or Paris), but the uncertainty about the number of unregistered streetwalkers, makes it uncertain whether regulation actually increased the percentage of prostitutes working in brothels.

Labour relations in prostitution were very much influenced by the way state or urban authorities set the legal framework. Especially if prostitution was illegal, self-employed sex workers – particularly streetwalkers – faced harassment not only by clients, but also by the police. On the other hand, when prostitutes were working under debt-bondage or coerced labour relations, in contexts of abolition or prohibition, they were even more at the mercy of their pimp or madam because of their illegal status. This also goes for present-day illegal migrant women. In cities where sex workers operate in a legal environment, illegal prostitution has not disappeared. Illegal migrants still experience the detrimental effects of clandestine prostitution. The position of prostitutes on the whole is the best, if prostitution is legal, and if all women are free to enter or leave any occupation they prefer, but this set of circumstances is rare.

Capitalism and the wage bill

Dock work

The monopoly enjoined by dock workers in the monopolistic configuration, enabled them to rise wages. In the case of guilds, the monopoly was underwritten by the local authorities, who also had an interest in keeping wages low, as this would make their port more attractive to visiting ships. In the casual phase of docking, port employers relied on the competition between gangs or individual workers at the shape-up to drive down wages. Dock workers could increase their income by working many and attractive shifts, which usually depended upon belonging to a gang with a good reputation. Given the central role in the port of cheap labour, the incentive to introduce labour saving machinery, like elevators and cranes, was not always foremost on the minds of port employers.

As we saw in the 1913-1950 period de-globalization led to stagnation in port traffic and to violent fluctuations in traffic figures. Average and even good gangs were therefore less certain of working enough shifts to earn a good living. That state of affairs must have increased support for decasualization among that part of the port labour force. In the same period the position of all players changed. Trade unions became more accepted, especially in the 1910s, during the economic crisis of the 1930s in a number of European countries and the US, and again during and just after the Second World War. The World Wars made the efficiency of port facilities a matter of life and death, giving governments an added incentive to intervene to regulate labour. The same years of political and economic crisis saw increased government interference in labour relations and in the economy generally. Lastly, employers were less sure of an unlimited supply of cheap labour thanks to immigration restrictions and a strained labour market during the World Wars and the upswing of the business cycle in the early 1920s. Trade unions and the authorities therefore became more able to push through decasualization, and workers and employers became less reluctant to accept it.

So, when a new period of globalization and increase in port traffic started around 1950, it did so under radically different circumstances than surrounded the nineteenth-century wave of globalization. The result too was drastically different: decasualization instead of casualization, a trend soon reinforced by technical developments. The adoption of earlier technological improvements, like elevators and fork-lift trucks, had been uneven since those improvements had been in competition with abundant cheap labour. If the increase in port traffic caused by the post-1950 wave of globalization had been met by unchanged technology, then the number of dockers would have needed to grow immensely. But introduction of the container from 1956 meant that development went in the opposite direction.[15] The port labour force was reduced. The effect on port labour relations was likewise in the opposite direction: the pre-1913 wave of globalization had led to casualization, the post-1950 wave reinforced decasualization.

Earlier changes from one configuration to the other took place at different times in different places. Pockets of monopolistic labour relations survived within largely casualized ports and some ports casualized decades before others. But the container forced the simultaneous introduction of decasualized port labour all over the world. Ripples of change travelled round the globe much more quickly than they had done in the nineteenth century, and they were combined with social changes, for instance to workers' incomes and housing, which led to the disappearance of the typical casual dockers' culture. The numbers of dockers fell by 90%, while the work of those handling the containers changed dramatically. The casual docker had performed backbreaking, dirty, low paid manual work at unpredictable hours, alternating long waiting periods with succeeding shifts of intense work. The crane operators which handled the containers performed regular, clean, skilled work with little physical strain at predictable hours and against adequate pay. Of course, casual dockers remained an option for employers for as long as goods continued to be shipped by methods other than in containers, and the remaining casual dockers fought the decasualization process with it's lay-offs fiercely. But as globalization marched on, their struggle proved to be as much a rear-guard action as the resistance to the previous wave of globalization had been for the monopolistic workers in Marseilles and similar ports.

Spinning and weaving

The equivalent of the cranes and containers in the textile industry was the mechanization of production. In cotton spinning, for instance, labour productivity (the amount of fibres to be spun per hour) increased spectacularly since the introduction of Hargreaves' spinning jenny in 1767: in the 1960s it had multiplied by 500 times with the then common type of automatic ring spinning machines. In the same period, productivity in cotton weaving increased 220-390 times. In combination with import restrictions, the technological advances in the eighteenth century finally enabled Britain to compete with high-quality, but cheap, Indian cottons. Because international competition was vital to the textile industry, other regions soon reacted, either by import substitutions or by copying British technology. Not only countries in 'the West' responded by mechanizing their textile industries in the nineteenth century: countries like India, Japan and China also industrialized from the 1860s onwards. In most cases, workers in branches that were mechanized experienced a considerable loss of income and employment. Also within the factory system, the introduction of new machinery could lead to wage losses. The multiple loom system

[15] Marc Levinson, *The Box. How the Shipping Container made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton 2006).

would not have been profitable if employers had not decided to cut piece rates with every extra loom that was attended by one worker.

In contrast with the docks, were female dockers were rare, in the textile industry the use of female and child labour was another way for employers to lower the wage bill. Already in the Middle Ages most women were excluded from a vocational training and from guild regulated jobs, which made it difficult for them to acquire the necessary skills for well-paid jobs. This institutionally and culturally defined division of labour implied that the number of women available for low-skilled jobs, like hand spinning, was high. And conversely, the large supply of female labourers kept spinning wage rates low. Throughout history skill was closely related to the construction of gendered work and low payment for women. Female workers were paid less because they were supposed to be low-skilled, but at the same time, work could be considered low-skilled and thus low-paid, exactly because it was performed by women. The work of women and children could also be paid less because it was perceived as supplementary to the family income, regardless of whether this was actually the case. The low payment of textile work performed within the household, could lead to wages below the minimum subsistence level. In many cases, spread around the globe, this was only possible because families continued to farm a plot of land and managed to stay alive by the returns from their agrarian activities, like in 18th century China or in Egypt in the early 20th century.

This leads us to the strategy in the employers' quest for lower wages which is central to this discussion: the relocation of the industry to areas where nominal wages were lower. This can be advantageous to the new groups of workers drawn into the textile industry, who may experience a real wage increase. But in actual practice working conditions in these young, relocated factories are often horrific: dangerous, unhealthy, long hours of heavy work, and badly paid. To this is often added the strain of accommodating to factory work for the first time. Competition in the labour market or the lack of job opportunities outside the textile industry will in some cases even make these new workers take on work at below subsistence wages, especially when their wages from textile production were supplemented by income or food acquired from agricultural activities.

Historically, the relocation of the textile industry is visible on three different scales. The first level was a regional shift, in which parts of the textile industry, usually spinning and sometimes also weaving, were moved from an urban location to relatively nearby rural areas. This development already started in textile centres in North-western Europe before 1650. An early example is the shift of the woollen industry from the cities of Holland to rural provinces in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Similar developments took place in other parts of the world, in countries as far apart as Egypt, Japan or the Ottoman Empire. The second level on which a shifting geographical division of labour can be discerned was the inter-regional level. In the US, such a development took place in the late 19th and 20th Centuries, when the textile industry in the Northeast slowly but surely lost ground to the southern textile mills. More recently, shifts on this level occurred when the markets in Eastern European countries, such as the Czech Republic, started to open up and textile firms proved to be competitive with western European industries.
The third level of displacement of the textile industry is the global level. Globalization of textile production actually has a long history. As we have seen, India was the most important cotton producer on the world market before British industrialization took off in the late eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, it was recognized by both foreign and domestic investors that countries like India, China and Japan could compete with western textile industries exactly because of their cheap labour.

Clark has shown how productivity and low wages interplay in this relocation process. He calculated manufacturing costs in cotton weaving for three high wage areas, three intermediate countries and three low wage countries in 1910. His results are summarised in table 3.

Table 3. Comparative costs in cotton weaving, 9 countries, c. 1910

	Weekly wage rate (US $)	Machinery per worker (loom-equivalent)	Corrected labour costs (US $)	Manufacturing cost (England = 100)
New England	8.80	2.97	6.04	125
USA South	6.50	2.65	5.00	115
England	5.00	2.04	5.00	100
Spain	2.70	0.91	6.05	132
Mexico	2.60	1.15	4.61	119
Italy	2.40	0.88	5.56	120
Japan	0.80	0.53	3.08	101
India	0.78	0.50	3.18	91
China	0.54	0.48	2.30	75

Source: G. Clark, 'Why isn't the whole world developed? Lessons from the cotton mills', *Journal of Economic History* 47 (1987) pp. 141-173, here cited after Singleton, *World Textile industry*, 27

As is clear from table 3, the low wage countries could compete with English production costs. Their lower labour productivity was more than offset by low wages. The countries in the intermediate group could not. Both regions of the US only partly offset their high wages through higher productivity.

The relocation process accelerated after the Second World War, when decolonization changed the international market situation, and stimulated national industrial programs in many non-western countries. Simultaneously, the development of the welfare state drove up wages in many western countries, and as a consequence, the textile industry was one of the first to be relocated to low wage parts of the world. In the 1950s through 1970s, many western countries, like Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, experienced a steep decline in their textile industries. From the 1980s onwards the US and Japan textile industries collapsed under the competition of low wages areas, particularly China and the Indian sub-continent. But also non-western countries like Turkey lost their share on the world market. In 1998, hourly wages in the textile industry of India, China or Indonesia (averages of US $ 0.25-0.50 dollars an hour) were only a fraction of wages elsewhere in the world. In Turkey, this average was already remarkably higher ($ 3), not to mention hourly wage levels in the UK or US textile industry ($ 13-15) and especially countries like Japan, Nederland, Denmark or Austria ($ 20).

Whether it was achieved by organisation the industry more rationally or any of the mechanisms mentioned above, there is ample evidence for a historical trend in - usually successful - attempts to reduce labour costs as a percentage of total production costs. As an empirical example for this a rough calculation of the developments in the Dutch-Belgian textile industry can serve. In the Dutch city of Leiden in the 17th century, labour costs constituted almost 40% of the total production costs of a woollen cloth. Spinning and weaving alone accounted for almost 30% of all

production costs. When Leiden textile merchants decide to contract out the spinning and weaving of wool to the countryside of Tilburg, wages formed only 27% of the total costs of one piece of cloth in the second half of the 17th century. Around 1800, wage costs in the Belgian cotton industry formed 40-45% of the total production costs. Developments at the Voortman firm, one of the largest cotton producing companies in the city of Ghent until the 1870s, show a continuous decline of the share of wage costs in the nineteenth century, to less than 20% in 1900. In the 1920s, the percentages were even lower. At that time, in the Dutch cotton industry, labour costs formed about 10% of the total production costs in spinning factories, 13% in combined (spinning and weaving) factories, and 18% in weaving factories. In the woollen industry, labour costs were somewhat higher: 18% and 24% for spinning and weaving respectively. With the development of labour legislation and the social welfare state, however, wage costs in most 'western' countries started to rise in the decades following the Second World War. Around 2000, the average labour costs in total of manufacturing costs in EU textile production had risen again to 40 per cent. These percentages were much lower in Turkey (17% in 1998) and China (c. 10% in 1997). India and Indonesia represented the lowest share labour costs in textile production: 1% in 1997.[16]

Prostitution

In most countries, until well into the twentieth century, female wages were well below male. In most occupations, a woman could not earn a wage that would be sufficient to support more family members than herself. A major exception was prostitution. In the case of Nairobi mentioned above, a male observer said:

> "I remember seeing Nandi [a Kenyan tribe] women before the German War [World War I]. They were cutting wood over near Muthiaga and they took it to Mambase Village to sell. Some of these girls would go … with anybody, even white men and Indians. You could give her anything you wanted – half a rupee, one rupee – but some men gave a cow or some goats. You know, in those days a very important African only made Rs. 4 or Rs. 5 a month, and workers got even less. So these prostitutes really made a lot of money – more than most men – and they even raised their prices after the German War. That's how they came to have so many houses in Pumwani."[17]

Although we may doubt that a prostitute commonly earned a cow by performing a sex act, Nairobi prostitutes actually owned many houses. Generally, women in prostitution could earn much more than in other occupations open to most of her sisters. Across time and space, quite often, the price for intercourse equalled the day income of a male unskilled worker. So, even if many women may not have liked this occupation, they probably decided to stay in the business because of a lack of equally rewarding options and because in most cases they had already suffered shame and been branded for doing something illegal or "immoral". Moreover, judging from an admittedly limited number of personal accounts, many prostitutes seem to have preferred prostitution to other occupations which were not only badly paid but also exhausting and often dangerous. "Ordinary" work outside the sex trade often also involved rendering sexual services, as sexual harassment was (and still is) fairly common in domestic and factory work, as well as in the retailing sector, bars and restaurants and the entertainment industry.

---

[16] International Textile Manufacturers Federation. *International Production Cost Comparison,* 1997, p. 19.

[17] Elderly Kikuyu man, interviewed in 1966, quoted in Kenneth G. McVicar, 'Twilight of an East African Slum: Pumwani and the Evolution of African Settlement in Nairobi' PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1968, 240-241. Here quoted after White, *Comforts of Home*, p. 41.

Prostitution is a typical service, not a good, and as a number of other services does not lend itself much to mechanisation. There is no equivalent to the spinning Jenny or the container in prostitution history. Apart from employers resorting to violence to force women to accept lower wages, the main force driving wages down is migration to prostitution centres, as described above. Contrary to the trend in much of the literature to link the prevalence of prostitution to industrialization, in the comparative project the conclusion was that the link with urbanization is clearer. This is already directly clear from the prevalence of prostitution in pre-industrial towns. With colonization and global trade the number of towns increased. The number of single young men and women in towns contributed to offer and demand for the prostitution sector. Women migrating in search of sex work looked for the market and the anonymity of numbers in towns. Women migrating in search of other work also migrated to towns, and sometimes had to revert to sex work because of unemployment, pregnancy or poverty.

Waves of globalization and militancy

Dock work

The physical nature of dock work may have meant that dockers always were a redoubtable work force. But their strategies have been much influenced by the changes described above. In the monopolistic configuration, dockers fiercely defended the rights of their group to their vertical segment of the work.

In the casual configuration, dockers were known for their militancy and solidarity. In the most inspiring cases their weak position in the labour market would move dockers to identify more closely with the excluded than with the potentially included. This, and perhaps also the fact that they were often recruited from sailors or migrants and in any case realized that they were involved in a global activity, made dockers apt to pursue acts of unselfish international solidarity. As early as the Great London Dock Strike of 1889, dockers as far away as Australia contributed heavily to the strike fund, helping to bring victory to the London dockers. Indeed, this was one of the reasons that many labour historians wrote about dock work.

Casual dockers, characteristically, were not bound to a single long-term employer. They were therefore free of the informal restraints accompanying a client-patron relationship. Although clearly they were in a dependent, even weak position while on the job, the risks of striking were limited, for workers who change their place of work one a daily basis have less to fear from dismissal than those with a semi-permanent employer do. When grievances arose on casual jobs constraints of time would be very strong; workers needed to act instantly before a particular work assignment had been completed. There was no opportunity for long-term planning of resistance, nor to build up strike funds nor any powerful trade-union organization. Such working conditions naturally encouraged immediate “direct” economic action against employers.[18] The very mobility of the labour force at once offered it an alternative strategy for bettering its circumstances: move to another job if better conditions should be offered. It also prevented it from safeguarding its gains by any other means than direct action.

Notwithstanding the problems of organizing casual workers, trade unions were formed. Early attempts often organized only the dockers in a specific niche, which replicated earlier forms of

[18] Van der Linden and Thorpe 1990.

vertical organization.[19] Docker trade unions before the 1880s often resembled the guilds in their organization. They aimed not at organizing the largest possible number of dockers, but rather at limiting the number of those employed in their trade. The vertical distinctions between trades were more important to these unions than the horizontal dividing line between employers and workers. Following on from these older local and ephemeral organizations, to an amazing degree trade unions were established on a permanent basis internationally in the years 1888-1891.[20] These trade unions, owners of regular shipping lines (whose schedules required planned regular and brief turnaround times) and governments often were in favour of regulating the port labour market, and therefore of de-casualization schemes. Other employers end the bulk of the dockers were much more critical. The latter tended to prefer syndicalist trade unions, whose strategies suited the more volatile approach of the dockers.

As we saw, globalization brought a steady increase in port traffic in the period before 1913 (Figure 1). With labour demand growing year by year, an experienced gang could increase its shifts as much as its members desired. In such circumstances casual workers employed in a good gang could expect to gain little from decasualization, but casual workers who did not belong to a good gang would probably lose their jobs because of it. So neither group was likely to favour it. Workers in a niche protected in some way by vertical segmentation could only expect to lose that protection in the event of decasualization. As all segments of the labour force risked losing something and none stood to gain clearly, it is no wonder that decasualization proposals met with little enthusiasm among dockers.

However, in the period from 1913-1950 de-globalization led to overall stagnation in port traffic and to violent fluctuations in traffic figures (Figure 2). Averagely good and even better gangs were therefore less certain of working enough shifts to earn a good living. That state of affairs must have increased support for decasualization among that part of the port labour force. In the same period the position of all players changed. Trade unions became more accepted, especially in the 1910s, during the economic crisis of the 1930s in a number of European countries and the US, and again during and just after the Second World War. The World Wars made the efficiency of port facilities a matter of life and death, giving governments an added incentive to intervene to regulate labour. The same years of political and economic crisis saw increased government interference in labour relations and in the economy generally. Trade unions and the authorities therefore became more able to push through decasualization, and workers and employers became less reluctant to accept it. In Hamburg, a port dominated by regular liner service, a decasualization scheme was adopted as early as 1906. Other experiments were introduced in the 1910s and 1930s. These systems differed in the way jobs were allocated and in their durability, but they all distinguished between groups of workers with different claims to employment. So, vertical divisions based on job specialization gave way to horizontal divisions based on access to employment in an otherwise homogenized labour market. This change was made easier in ports where vertical divisions were not strengthened by ethnic, racial or religious fault lines in the labour force. Typically, one group would be practically certain to be hired and were entitled to a form of compensation if not, while a second group had to appear every day to ask for work but were not sure they would be hired and a third group would be called on only when labour demand peaked. The changes brought by the container were – after a time lapse - the death knell for the syndicalist militancy of the docker.

[19] For instance in Barcelona. See Gelabert 1999, 111.

[20] As was noted for Britain in Hobsbawm 1976 and is evident from many of the port studies in Davies 2000.

Spinning and weaving

Dockers may have been a typical occupation for militant syndicalism, among textile workers mainstream reformist trade unions dominated. Textile workers' trade unions have long been as much a showcase of labour history as the textile industry has been for the history of the Industrial Revolution. In emerging industrial countries, textile workers often formed an important section of the urban proletariat. In Egypt in the 1950s textile workers formed more than 40 per cent of the industrial workforce. Under these circumstances textile workers were understandably in the vanguard of Nationalist and Socialist/Communist revolutions when these took place: the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Young Turk movement of 1908, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Egyptian Revolutions of 1919 and 1952, the Indian anti-colonial movement which led to Independence in 1947, the Chinese Revolution of 1949. These revolutionary movements were all intertwined with textile workers' militancy and strikes. However, the strength of textile trade unions in these countries in the years mentioned, was in itself caused by the race to the bottom move of the industry across the globe, and thus part of the weakness of textile workers on a global scale.

We can also see this from data presented by Beverly Silver in her study of globalization and workers' movements. She presents an overview of global labour unrest in the textile industry between the 1870s and the 1990s, which is reproduced here as Table 4. The table is based on data gathered from the New York Times and the Times of London, about labour unrest worldwide. The countries mentioned are those that were responsible for at least 1 per cent of labour unrest in the world textile industry, as registered by these two newspapers. The decade or decades in which each country experienced high points of labour unrest are marked.

Table 4. Labour militancy in the textile industry, 1870-2000

	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
UK	X						X						
Russia				X									
US					X		X						
Spain					X		X		X				
Poland						X							
China						X							
Germany						X							
Australia						X							
India						X							
France							X						
Belgium							X						
Canada							X		X				
Mexico							X						
Egypt									X				
Pakistan									X				

Source: Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor. Worker's Movements and Globalization since 1870* (Cambridge 2003) p. 82.

Broadly speaking, we can see the race to the bottom at work: over time high points of labour unrest tend to proceed from countries with relatively high wages, to countries with a relatively low wage standard. The race to the bottom also helps explain why the structural bargaining power of textile workers has traditionally been weak, all this militancy notwithstanding. In most of history, the textile workers' trade unions were fighting an uphill battle. The social distance between workers and

factory owners was large. The importance of cotton prices and the business cycle in cotton manufacturing brought the employers periodic spells in which they were well stocked but markets were slow. In these circumstances they were quite willing to fight the unions, as a strike or lockout only saved paying wages. Typically, lockouts were more pervasive in textile mills than in most other industries. The successes that the trade unions could claim, often took the form of preventing, delaying or softening turns for the worse.

The clearest case where textile workers' trade unions were successful for a longer period of time was the classical one: in England, in the Lancashire cotton industry. The Lancashire trade unions of cotton operatives knew a period of successes and strength from the 1870s, which also translated into high wages for their members. Following Silver's analysis of global strike patterns, we can explain this by the dominant position of Britain in the development of the global textile industry, especially in cotton. This enabled the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners to become one of Britain's strongest unions. British cotton spinners were very productive. The stable rate list established in England by employers and the union gave both parties an incentive to increase production.

For the textile workers, the most militant period is the period of de-globalisation between the second and third wave of globalisation. Even if the large conflicts were often rear-guard actions, they stood the best chance of succeeding when international competition was mitigated.

Prostitutes

As prostitutes had usually a semi-legal occupation at best, attempts at unionization or collective militancy are rare. As immigration increases competition, established prostitutes may have fared best in the period of de-globalisation. Organisations that defend the rights of sex workers have existed from the last quarter of the twentieth century. Even if they have grown much in a short time, they have organised and mobilised only a tiny fragment of prostitutes. They are clearly linked to the movement for sexual liberation and especially second wave feminism, even if feminists do not agree in their appreciation of the effort to describe prostitution as work and to emancipate prostitutes as workers.

Conclusion

Classical labour history looked only at some of the phenomena discussed in this paper: classical trade unions in textiles, and syndicalist militancy and international solidarity among dockers. Prostitutes fell outside its scope, as well as labour activism in the first and most of the third wave of globalisation. Looking at global connections places the struggle of workers in a broader context. We have identified three possible relations of occupations with globalization, and analysed an example of each type over three waves of globalisation. An explanation of labour militancy needs to include the extraordinary individuals and the organisations that classical labour history used to focus on. However, these made history not under circumstances of their own choosing. Looking at these circumstances, and especially at those linked to globalisation, helps us understand strategic choices of workers organisations.

Textile workers embraced vertical guild organisations, like many other artisans. But in the economically most developed countries these did not protect them from a race to the bottom. Their trade unions in Britain were for a remarkable long period successful, but elsewhere the reformist textile workers unions could only wage a rear guard action against the industry's tendency to move

to low wage areas. They succeeded best in this in the de-globalisation period of 1913-50. These types of organisations came less natural to dockers.

Dockers performed essential work in the nods of globalisation, but their position was weakened by the ease with which the occupation could be entered by recent immigrants or other workers without very much training. They therefore in the first wave embraced vertical, guild like organisations, although these were less suited to their occupation. Dockers were nevertheless attracted to them, because they gave them a monopoly on certain goods, places or work processes. With the increase in traffic in the second globalisation wave, these organisations were broken and casual work came to dominate the ports. Militant syndicalism became the logical weapon for dockers, given their volatile work relations. Members of good, mediocre or bad gang, and most shipping employers, stood to gain little from de-casualization. This changed in the period of de-globalisation, when work and thus earnings became intermittent even for members of good gangs. This tipped de scales, and made de-casualization possible. The third wave of globalisation therefore started under quite different circumstances from the second. Perhaps the third wave could have given rise to renewed casualization, had not the container changed the work of dockers fundamentally, making the vast majority of them redundant.

Ideas about and policies towards prostitutes were exported from the European core to colonies from the sixteenth until the twentieth century. Many of these policies were aimed at criminalizing, containing or abolishing prostitution. Women however, faced with very limited opportunities on the job market and with low wages, continued to flock to urban centres, and many of them earned some or all of their income as prostitutes. Their weak legal and social status prevented effective organisation.

Specification of the influence of globalisation on these three occupations confirms the general notion that globalisation may decrease prices and create new opportunities, but on the whole weakens the position of workers.