CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SAILORS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
MARKETS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY, 1600–1850

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On 15 June, 1667, the Abraham’s Sacrifice, a Genoese merchantman, was taken by an English frigate some 45 miles from Blackrock near Galway in Ireland. The ship had sailed from Genoa to Amsterdam with a cargo of wine, wool and salt, and was returning to Genoa with cinnamon, pepper, iron, lead, logwood, ebony, Brazilwood, whalebone, tar and brass. The captain, Antonio of Genoa, had perhaps opted for the unusual route around Scotland and Ireland out of fear that the ship might get caught in a battle between the English and the Dutch navies which were fighting the Second Anglo-Dutch War. In fact, that same day the Dutch were already returning from a successful raid on the Medway, having decided the war in their favour, but this cannot yet have been known off the west coast of Ireland.

The state of war was directly reflected in the composition of the crew of the Abraham’s Sacrifice, which included seven English and nine Dutch sailors. Most, if not all of the Englishmen had been taken prisoner by the Dutch earlier in the war. Lawrence Man from Dartmouth and Anthony Laghorne from Truro in Cornwall later, when questioned by the English authorities, declared that they had escaped from the Dutch before they mustered on the Abraham’s Sacrifice, at Texel and in Amsterdam respectively. Another English national, Luke Merritt from Jersey, simply declared that “being a prisoner in Amsterdam, about the beginning of December last, he was there Enterteijned bij the Cap: Antonio of Genoa, Comander of the shipp Abrahams Offering of Genoa […] to sailie in the said shipp as a Marriner at the rate of twentij Gilders per month.” The large number of Englishmen

1 TNA, HCA 32/8 II. The Englishmen declared that they had expected the ship to take what one of them, John Pomerij, called “the direct waij”: through the Channel. They believed captain Antonio to have a passport from the Duke of York, the commander of the English fleet, allowing him to sail that route.
on board the *Abraham’s Sacrifice* seems to suggest that the Dutch allowed Captain Antonio to hire prisoners.² It seems unlikely that all of them escaped and found their way separately to the Genoese ship, which was furthermore mainly manned by Dutch sailors who must have known that the Englishmen were former prisoners of war.

Nationality came to the fore when an English man-of-war was sighted. Captain Antonio ordered his crew to prepare for a fight. One of the Englishmen, Joseph Bluett, “told him that he was not willing to fight against his own nation.” Antonio answered that he would not resist a ship of the English king, but that he would fight a privateer. Bluett insisted that he thought fighting an English privateer just as wrong as fighting a ship of the king, as privateers had a commission from the king. The captain then threatened to cut Bluett down with his cutlass if he would not fight. In the end, Antonio did not have to resort to drastic measures. He did not put up a fight and the *Abraham’s Sacrifice* was taken as a prize.

The incident off Galway in 1667 points to a number of aspects of the early modern European maritime labour market. Crews were not necessarily recruited from one nationality, nor of the same nationality as the owners of the ship or the captain. In some cases a majority of the crew did not share the ship’s nationality.³ Both national and international recruitment and migration patterns among sailors emerged in

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² If they did so, the Dutch authorities avoided the costs involved in feeding, housing and guarding the prisoners, while the prisoners were still not able to serve on board British men-of-war before the end of the hostilities. Prisoners themselves would surely have preferred working, especially as pay was good while the war lasted, over being kept in prison, especially at a time when money spent on feeding prisoners had to compete with war expenses. The other side certainly did employ prisoner-of-war sailors, even in its own merchant fleet. On 11 January, 1666, Charles II had ordered that no English ship was to leave port without at least a fifth of its crew consisting of Dutch prisoners of war. Already in the previous summer the king had shown concern about Dutch prisoners escaping and so insisted on a system of documentation of any prisoners serving in the English merchant marine. CSPD 1664–1665, 469; 1665–1666, 198, quoted in Kerling, ‘Nederlandse krijgsgevangenen in Engeland,’ 5–13, 16, 51. We are grateful to Jaap Bruijn for this reference. TNA, SP 44, Entry Book 17, 164. We are also grateful to Andrew Little for his comments on this issue. By the time the *Abraham’s Sacrifice* left port, the Dutch fleets would have been manned and recruitment problems on the Dutch side would have been manageable. We owe this observation to Andrew Little.

³ For instance on the *Catharina en Sara Hendrina*, a Dutch vessel taken on 14 October 1778 off Dover (TNA, HCA32/289 (289/6), where the crew consisted of five Dutch, four Danes, four inhabitants of Bremen and one Russian. Further examples are given below.