

**Seafarers or war sailors?**



Bjørn Tore Rosendahl  
**Seafarers or war sailors?**

The ambiguities of ensuring seafarers' services in times of war in the case of the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War

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## Abstract

During the Second World War, the merchant fleet and its seafarers represented Norway's most significant contribution to the Allied war effort. The seafarers constituted a considerable, heterogeneous workforce and they were mobilised to work in a dangerous situation. Ensuring the service of the merchant seafarers became a crucial task for the exiled Norwegian Government in London, which had requisitioned all available ships into one state-owned shipping company: Nortraship.

This PhD thesis covers the following overall questions: With what means were the services of the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet ensured in the Second World War, and what consequences did those efforts have for different groups of nationalities onboard Norwegian ships? These questions are discussed through three separate articles alongside an introductory section.

The three case studies show how strongly the changing historical circumstances throughout the war influenced how the different groups of nationalities employed in the Norwegian fleet were mobilised. The first article explores the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers and concludes that their service was ensured through a wide range of means, including both push and pull measures. The second article concerns the general use of foreign seafarers and finds that few war-related measures were proactively taken to mobilise foreign seafarers. In the third article, the large and atypical group of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships is explored. They achieved higher salaries and better conditions because of their protests during the war. As a consequence, the Norwegian merchant fleet nearly stopped hiring Chinese seafarers, despite the increasing need to recruit foreign crews.

This study concludes that the British influence on the mobilisation and management of seafarers on Norwegian ships was more profound than previous research would indicate. The United Kingdom was both setting the premises for and making a direct impact on the Norwegian policy. British support was also crucial to be able to enforce the increased control over seafarers. The increased state control in the Second World War politicised the shipping economy and the use of seafarers, and their conditions became diplomatic issues.

The seafarers' civilian status came under pressure in various ways during the war and this contributed to an ambiguous Norwegian policy towards them. They were sometimes treated like "seafarers" and at other times like "war sailors". This is a

constructed dual terminology, used to explore the complex and shifting relationship between normality and war in the case of the Norwegian merchant fleet.

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Looking back, there are several people who in various ways and in different phases of this study have provided me with their help and support. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and thanks to everyone who has helped and inspired me along the way.

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## 1. The research project and its overall questions

With what means were the services of the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet ensured in the Second World War, and what consequences did those efforts have for different groups of nationalities onboard Norwegian ships? These are the overall research questions examined in this article-based thesis.

The objective of this research project is to provide new empirical knowledge, interpretations and perspectives in the field of maritime history in the Second World War in general and in the context of Norwegian history in particular. To achieve this, a central instrument has been to examine the case of the seafarers on Norwegian ships by including international perspectives. This strategy is based on my perception that previous Norwegian and international research into the seafarers in the Second World War has, to a great extent, been carried out with a more limited national scope with regards to the use of historical sources and prior research.

Ensuring seafarers' services during the Second World War involved a large number of actors operating in different spheres and arenas, both geographically and organisationally. Due to the shifting influencing circumstances in the years from 1940 to 1945, the research questions demand a broad and open approach.

In order to answer the research questions, the process can roughly be divided into three.

Firstly, there was a comprehensive examination of historical sources in several archives in Norway and the United Kingdom. Of the historical sources used in this study, the majority are gathered from Norwegian authorities in exile and the state-owned shipping company, Nortraship. However, some of the most important findings are from British archives, shedding new light on the Norwegian policy. Both the British and the Norwegian sources have in common that the shipowners' and the governments' perspectives are by far more visible and accessible than the seafarers'. My use of trade union archives and some interviews with seafarers only slightly compensates for this.

The second main phase in this project was to research, write and publish the three following articles. These answer the research questions in various ways:

- I. “Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War”<sup>1</sup> (Peer reviewed. Published in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2015)

This article draws particular attention to the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers. It examines the different strategies and tools used to mobilise Norwegian seafarers. Moreover, this article compares the Norwegian and the British mobilisation strategies and it investigates how the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers was influenced by the Allies.

- II. “How to secure the participation of a foreign civilian workforce in times of war. Norwegian authorities and the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War”<sup>2</sup> (Peer reviewed. Will be published in 2017 in an international anthology.)

Foreign seafarers grew in numbers and importance in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War. This article explores the challenges that were faced and analyses the strategies used to secure the participation of these seafarers and the driving forces behind the Norwegian policy.

- III. “Not in the same boat? Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War”<sup>3</sup> (Approved for publication and will be published in a special issue of *National Maritime Research*, China Maritime Museum in Shanghai, 2017.)

This is a case study of the Chinese seafarers. They constituted the largest group of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet in 1940, but their number decreased strongly over the course of the war. This article elaborates how the Second World War influenced the situation of the Chinese seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet. It also examines the Norwegian policy towards these seamen and what consequences this policy had on Chinese seafarers serving on Norwegian ships. There are certain elements of the Norwegian policy which are described and analysed in both this article and the article about the general use of foreign seafarers. However, if a separate case study of Chinese seamen had not been carried out, central aspects of the Norwegian policy towards seafarers during the Second World War would not have been discovered.

The third and the last phase of the research project was to supplement and summarise the articles in an introductory section. This phase centres on extracting the results of

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<sup>1</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d.

<sup>2</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a.

<sup>3</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b.

the case studies, putting it into context and discussing it in light of previous research and additional findings.

This introductory section is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, the historical background to the general topic area is presented. Chapter 3 discusses the different relevant analytical perspectives and theories in the context of previous research and presents what is new in this project, in addition to the empirical knowledge. A central objective in the research project is to expand and supplement the national framework of analysis within this field of research. Thus, comparative glances have been used to avoid a national fixation from implying a blindness to external impulses and neglecting developments which took place correspondingly in other countries.

The three articles in this thesis are to be found in Chapter 4. The first article about Norwegian seafarers is the same version and identical pagination in which it was published. The two following articles about foreign and Chinese seafarers do not have the same pagination as the versions to be published later in 2017.

Chapter 5 examines the roots and the implications of the ambiguity which I conclude was shown towards the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War, and which took place in the field of tension between normality and war. I argue that this ambiguity must be considered when exploring the different ways the service of the seafarers on Norwegian ships were ensured during the Second World War. As an analytical tool, I have constructed the dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”. This construction is inspired by the different views of seafarers’ identities during the war, as given by the two central researchers which I build on and discuss in this thesis; the British sociologist, Tony Lane and the Norwegian historian, Guri Hjeltnes.

The conclusion presented in Chapter 6 is a quite brief summary of this thesis’ most vital contribution to the knowledge on this topic, together with some reflections on the implications of these research results.

The research project will not give one final answer to the question in the thesis’ title. However, by examining the ambiguities of ensuring seafarers’ service in times of war, in the case of the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War, my constructed dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors” will provide some possible answers.





## 2. Historical background to the general topic area

### Exposed seafarers in times of war

Throughout recent history, the work of a seafarer has generally been characterised by transnationality and international influences, moreso than the work of most other professions. Consequently, seafarers travelling between countries and continents as a part of their job are particularly exposed to political and economic changes on the international stage. This also applies in times of war.

When the Second World War broke out in Europe in September 1939, numerous seafarers on Norwegian merchant ships had prior experience of sailing in war zones. It was no more than 21 years since the First World War had ended. In the meantime, many seafarers had experienced the Spanish civil war at close range. Others had sailed at the Chinese coast in the 1930s, where first pirates and, thereafter, Japanese military occupation, made seafaring more dangerous.<sup>4</sup> The payment of war bonuses was a concrete signal of the risks involved. To seafarers on ships in these waters, the boundaries between war and peace could be vague.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, and the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, non-aligned Norway strove for neutrality.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, ships and crews from neutral countries also fell victims to the new great European war. According to official statistics, 377 seafarers on Norwegian ships were killed during the seven-month period of neutrality in 1939-1940, a period nearly corresponding with the so-called “Phoney War”.<sup>6</sup> Compared to what was to come later, the casualties among seafarers from both neutral and warring countries’ merchant ships were relatively low the first year of the war.<sup>7</sup>

### Norway’s merchant fleet under the control of the government in exile

On 9 April 1940, German military forces invaded Norway. The Norwegian merchant fleet was the fourth largest in the world at this point and the great majority of those ships operated abroad, illustrated in the map below. The German invasion led to a struggle to seize control of the Norwegian fleet and the ports from which those ships out at sea could sail to – either harbours controlled by the United Kingdom, Germany

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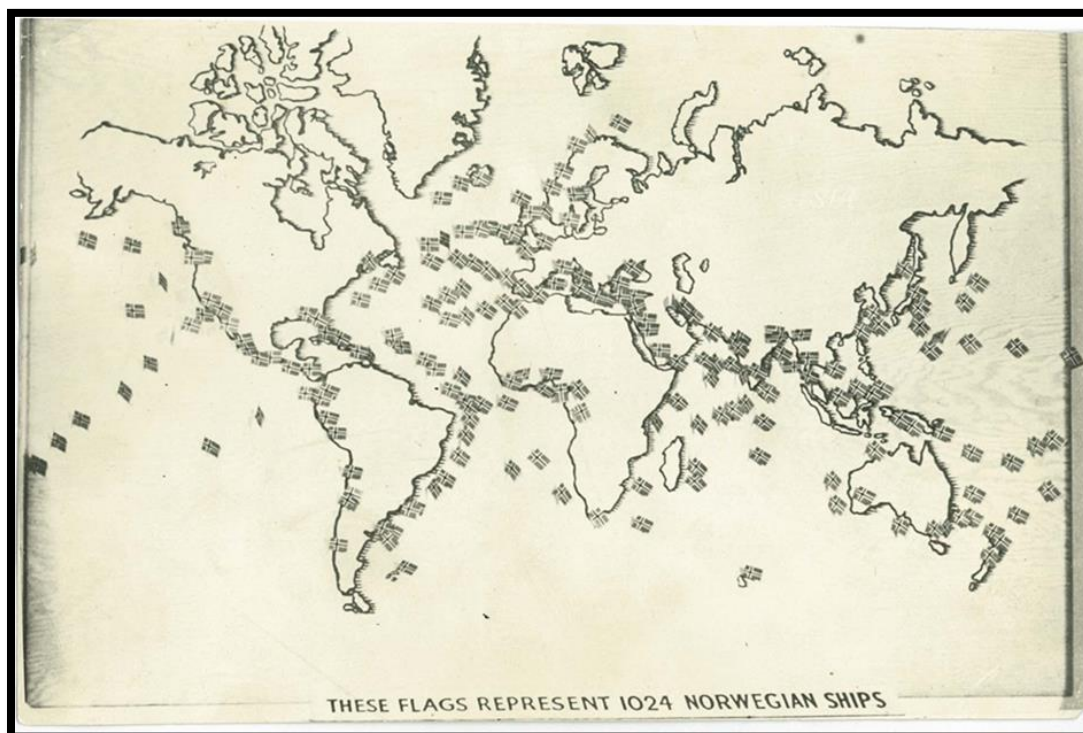
<sup>4</sup> NR, *The Norwegian Shipowner Association Members’ Magazine*, no. 4, April 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Neutrality refers to the status of a state during a war, regulated by international law and it is a complex phenomenon beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss. See Riste, 1965 for a discussion on Norwegian neutrality in WW1 and Kristiansen, 2008: 39-63 for a discussion (in Norwegian) on the question of neutrality in Norway in the interwar period.

<sup>6</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 414.

<sup>7</sup> Slader, 1995: 312.

or neutral countries. Messages telling ships what to do were promptly transmitted by radio, both from the new established Nazi authorities in Oslo and through the BBC from British and Norwegian authorities and trade unions.<sup>8</sup>



*Norwegian ships in 1940: An illustration made by the Government in exile during the war, of how the ships in the Norwegian merchant fleet in April 1940 were spread around the world.<sup>9</sup>*

During its flight from the German occupying forces, the Norwegian Government made a formal decision on 22 April 1940 to make a compulsory requisition of the “free fleet” for the duration of the war. This was made possible by forming a new organisation with the official name the *Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission*, known by its telegraphic address, *Nortraship*.<sup>10</sup> This so-called “world’s largest shipowner”<sup>11</sup> was controlled by the Norwegian Government which, from June 1940 and through the rest of the war, operated in exile in London.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 102-120; Hjeltnes, 1995: 34.

<sup>9</sup> RA, PA-1209 NTB Uf-119; Thowsen, 1992: 109.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief introduction of the establishment of Nortraship and its impact to the Norwegian government in exile, written in English, see Thowsen, 1994: 67-69. For a more comprehensive description of the history of Nortraship (in Norwegian), see Thowsen, 1992 and Basberg, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Thowsen, 1994: 69. The fact that the merchant fleet was requisitioned for use and not ownership does not prevent the use of the term “shipowner” of the requisitioner. Ref: Jenssen, 1992: 8.

<sup>12</sup> There were also Norwegian authorities situated in Oslo in 1940-1945 administrating occupied Norway subject to German control. However, any references to “Norwegian authorities” in the following will refer to authorities’ subject to the government in exile in London.

The requisition process was a complex one at political, geographical, practical and judicial levels, and was not completed until the end of 1940. In the end, except for shipmasters on seven ships in Swedish waters, all Norwegian ship Masters abroad declared their loyalty to the government in exile by telegraphing: “I hold the vessel on behalf of The Royal Norwegian Government.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, a result of the German invasion was a partition of the Norwegian merchant fleet and its crew into two parts separated on both sides of the world war conflict. The so-called “home fleet” in German-controlled areas sailed partly in the interest of the German occupier. The “free fleet” abroad was much larger with regards to tonnage and strategic value. These ships sailed for the Allies, and it is the mobilisation of the seafarers in this “free fleet” which is the subject of this thesis.

One of the central tasks of Nortraship, the newly established state-owned shipping company, was the employer management of the crews on board about 1,000 ships. Hence, about 27,000 seafarers suddenly became employees of the Norwegian Government in 1940. Of these, more than 3,000 were foreign nationals, including 1,000 Chinese seamen. The foreign seafarers proved to be both a valuable and challenging resource to ensure the service of, in times of war.<sup>14</sup>

The Dutch Government in exile organised its merchant fleet in a similar way, by establishing the Netherlands’ Shipping and Trading Committee in 1940.<sup>15</sup> Poland, Yugoslavia, Belgium and Greece were other occupied countries with an exiled government and a merchant fleet. Different ways of organising the merchant fleets were found to utilise these ships in Allied service.<sup>16</sup> Danish and French ships in Allied controlled waters were, however, forced by the United Kingdom to sail under British flag with the seamen onboard subject to British terms and working conditions.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 176.

<sup>14</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a.

<sup>15</sup> Until June 1942, the Dutch version of Nortraship was mainly run by the Dutch ship owners themselves, officially acting as an advisory committee to the Dutch government. The governmental influence reached farther and deeper into the Nortraship model, according to Kagge, 1991: 189. However, according to the Dutch historian, Saskia J. Klooster, the Dutch governmental influence reached both further and deeper than the Nortraship model from 1942, when the Dutch Government in exile in London took over the ownership of the Dutch fleet, ref: Klooster, 2014: 24, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Parts of the Greek merchant fleet were first requisitioned by the Greek Government, but after it had to flee because of the German invasion, the government controlled ships were “handed over” to the British Government, ref: Lemos, Trypanis and Perris, 1970: 174 and Harlaftis, 2015: 243-251. The lack of available research literature on the other Allied nations’ merchant fleets during the Second World War, makes the question of how their fleets were organized quite open.

<sup>17</sup> Woodman, 2004: 66. Danish ships controlled by the British were from 25 December 1943 granted permission to sail with Danish flags. Ref: Tortzen, 2003.

absence of a Danish and a French government in exile was the main reason for this difference.

#### Chartered by the Allies

Even though Norwegian ships continued to sail with Norwegian flags and with Nortraship as the seafarers' employer, the disposal of the ships was not handled autonomously. Even before Norway was occupied by Germany, nearly 40 per cent of the tonnage in the Norwegian merchant fleet was on charter, sailing to and from the United Kingdom (and France). This was based on the so-called Scheme agreement of November 1939.<sup>18</sup> When Norway was occupied and joined the Allies in April 1940, a greater share of the Norwegian fleet was gradually chartered by the United Kingdom. From 1943 there was no Norwegian tonnage left to the free disposal of Norwegian authorities.<sup>19</sup> From that moment, every Norwegian ship was chartered by either British or American authorities.<sup>20</sup> This change did not make any major impact on the seafarers' working conditions on Norwegian ships. They still had Nortraship as their employer and generally sailed under Norwegian conditions, with the exception of British and Canadian seafarers whose pension rights were strengthened when sailing on ships chartered by the British Ministry of War Transport.<sup>21</sup>

Norwegian shipowners had built up the world's most modern tank fleet in the 1930s. In 1939 only the United Kingdom and the USA had a larger tank fleet than Norway.<sup>22</sup> When the Second World War started, the importance of the supply of oil to the United Kingdom gave these oil tankers great strategic significance. From 9 April 1940 to 9 April 1942, Norwegian vessels transported between 30 and 50 per cent of all the oil imported to the United Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> This constitutes the foundation of the general perception among Norwegian historians that the seafarer's service in the merchant fleet constituted Norway's most significant contribution to the Allied war effort.<sup>24</sup> The great importance of Norwegian shipping to the United Kingdom also meant large British influence in the manner in which this transport was organised, including the

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<sup>18</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 89.

<sup>19</sup> The Hogmanay agreement. Ibid.: 421.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 421.

<sup>21</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 15.

<sup>22</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 26.

<sup>23</sup> British and Norwegian authorities disagreed on the exact the percentage. Norway claimed that the correct percentage was between 40 and 60 per cent, and the British claimed one third. Nevertheless, they agreed on the importance of the Norwegian tankers to the United Kingdom. Ibid.: 344.

<sup>24</sup> Dahl, 1995: 380; Riste, Skodvin, Gullvåg and Grimnes, 1987: 114; Nielsen, 2011: 114.

question of manpower. This thesis concludes that it was too important for the Norwegians to handle alone.<sup>25</sup>

### A dangerous job

Winston Churchill claimed after the war that the only thing that frightened him during the war was the threat of the submarines in the Atlantic.<sup>26</sup> This was based on a realistic fear of the United Kingdom's supply lines being cut off and end its ability to wage war. Germany's strong efforts in the Battle of the Atlantic underpins this important aspect of the war.<sup>27</sup> Allied controlled merchant ships were the targets of the German war efforts to reduce the tonnage available to supply the Allied war effort. Seafarers manning the merchant ships became their main victims, along with servicemen in the Allied navies.

Allied merchant ships were also sunk in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and the Arctic Ocean. When Japan and the USA entered the war in December 1941, there were practically no safe areas left on the world's seas. All the oceans were defined as war zones.<sup>28</sup> The human costs in seafarers in the Allied merchant fleets were at their highest in the years from 1940 to the turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic in April 1943.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to find reliable figures on the total death toll among the Allied merchant seafarers. In John Slader's book "The Fourth Service: Merchantmen at War, 1939-45", the total number is set at 62,933, and the number of deaths in the Norwegian merchant fleet is provided as 4,795.<sup>30</sup> According to official Norwegian statistics, 2,208 Norwegian seamen were killed in war-related shipwrecks in the fleet of Nortraship 1940-1945.<sup>31</sup> In addition, there were the 953 killed foreign seafarers who served alongside the Norwegians on the same ships during this period.<sup>32</sup> These figures indicate that a wide definition has been used by Slader in his statistics of casualties among Allied seafarers. Moreover, it implies that those who died in accidents or due to sickness etc. are probably included, alongside the deaths in both the Norwegian Navy

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<sup>25</sup> In the subchapter "An Allied question" of Chapter 5 I discuss the implications of the British impact on the Norwegian policy towards their seafarers in the Second World War.

<sup>26</sup> Churchill, 1949: 598.

<sup>27</sup> About 70 per cent of the German submarine crews were killed during the Second World War.

<sup>28</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 366.

<sup>29</sup> Slader, 1995: 312.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: 320.

<sup>31</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 414. The official statistics do not provide any numbers of how many seafarers that died from enemy action that did not involve a shipwreck, or if they are included in the number of 2,208. Hjeltnes writes that 1,324 Norwegian seafarers died for reasons other than war-related shipwrecks, like accidents, illness and ordinary shipwrecks.

<sup>32</sup> Rosendahl, 2015c.

and seafarers in the “home fleet”. This calls for caution in using Slader’s total number of 62,933 deaths in the Allied merchant fleets.<sup>33</sup>

Discussion about the figures and definitions used for the death tolls in both the Norwegian and other Allied merchant fleets does not change the overall fact that the casualty rate was relatively high and the risks comparable to servicemen in the armed forces.<sup>34</sup> This fact had both human and strategic implications. The challenge of mobilising civilian seafarers to participate in this dangerous service was one of them and is a key issue in this thesis.

#### A multitude of actors

Several actors were involved in a variety of ways and in different arenas to ensure the service of the seafarers on Norwegian merchant ships. There were governments and non-governmental organisations involved, and there were Norwegian and non-Norwegian actors.

The management of the seafarers on a day-to-day basis, was first and foremost taken care of by Nortraship. The organisation operated with two headquarters; in New York, where its director Øivind Lorentzen was based and London, where the government in exile was positioned. Additionally, there were Nortraship offices in numerous port cities around the world. The responsibility for the ships in the Norwegian merchant fleet was divided between the two headquarters which both had their own Maritime Department, acting as employers of crews on their respective ships. Close co-ordination between London and New York was crucial to secure both an equal and an efficient management of the manpower of Nortraship.

Norwegian embassies and consulates were also involved in some of the issues concerning the crews. Traditionally, they had certain formal tasks on behalf of seafarers on Norwegian ships, which were carried out both in war and peace time, like recording engagements and providing assistance to distressed seafarers. The diplomats also contributed proactively in crew issues during the war, for instance in the wide-ranging mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers in the USA, and by interacting with the Chinese seamen and their consuls in India.<sup>35</sup>

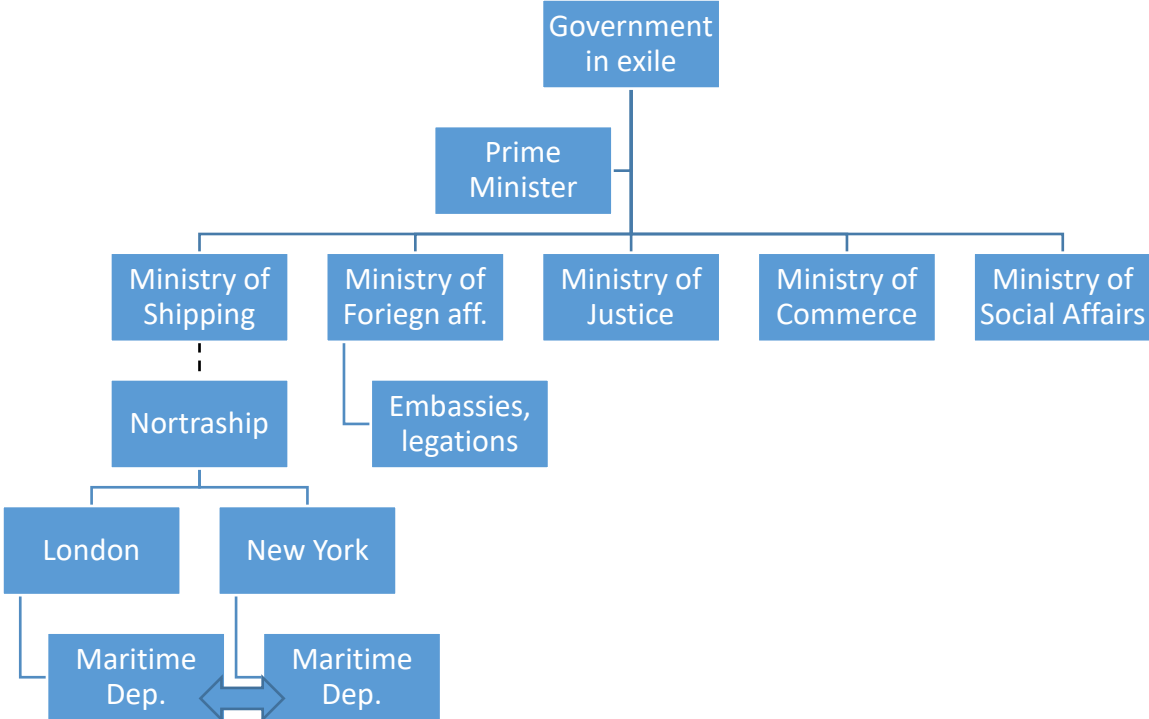
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<sup>33</sup> I have not discovered other estimates of the total number of Allied casualties in the merchant fleet, than those Slader refers to. An illuminating review of different ways of counting deaths in the British Merchant Navy is found here: Bennett and Bennett, 1999: 217-219.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 217-219.

<sup>35</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 170-173; Rosendahl, 2017b: 7-9.

One result of the state operating as a shipowner was that several of the ministries of the Norwegian Government in exile became deeply involved in the administration of the seafarers, in a wider sense than mere employer management. The ministries of Shipping, Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Supply and Justice were all central actors. This included the Prime Minister, who involved himself explicitly in wage issues.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, both permanent and ad-hoc organs and committees were established by the government in exile to deal with special issues, like the welfare of the seafarers and the administration of the conscription rules.<sup>37</sup> Questions regarding the foreign seafarers in Nortraship did not, however, involve that many Norwegian actors. These cases were mostly co-ordinated administratively by the Maritime Departments of Nortraship and the Ministry of Commerce, assisted by Norwegian consuls in some of the most important port cities, like Hong Kong and Calcutta. The figure below shows the organisation of the most central Norwegian governmental actors in the management of seafarers after October 1942 when the Ministry of Shipping was established.



*Central Norwegian governmental actors: The most central Norwegian governmental actors in the management of seafarers (from October 1942). Additionally, there were several governmental boards, committees and other types of organs which played important roles in different types of crew issues.<sup>38</sup>*

<sup>36</sup> Jenssen, 1992: 181.

<sup>37</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 170, 176.

<sup>38</sup> The illustration is based on the findings of this thesis. Governmental control over Nortraship was strengthened from 1943, ref Basberg, 1993: 100-125.

Among the non-governmental actors, the Norwegian trade unions both took and were granted central roles in the mobilising of Norwegian seafarers. The Norwegian Seamen's Union was a particular influential actor in manpower issues. The leading figure of the union, Ingvald Haugen was, for instance, the head of the Maritime Department of Nortraship in New York 1940-1941.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the organisation's power base was strong and sufficiently independent to refuse to co-ordinate its policies and demands with its British colleagues in the National Union of Seamen (NUS) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).<sup>40</sup> Generally, non-Norwegian trade unions did not play central roles when issues of manpower on Norwegian ships were negotiated.<sup>41</sup> However, both the ITF and NUS did have an impact more indirectly, both in mobilising seafarers and on the question of seafarers' terms and conditions on *Allied* merchant ships in general.

Private shipowners were the main actors in recruiting seafarers during peace time. During the Second World War, the Norwegian merchant fleet was managed by the state-owned shipping company, Nortraship, and this made the shipowners' influence less visible. Nevertheless, the Norwegian shipowners continued to make their impact, both from inside and outside the new shipping company. Even though Nortraship was government controlled, to a great extent the organisation was managed by shipowners who were trained to think like businessmen and not government officials.

The war on sea called for strict co-ordination among the Allied powers on how to organise the shipping transport with regards to both the efficient use of scarce tonnage resources, their safety, and most aspects related to the manning of the ships. Questions related to "shipping manpower" during the Second World War were closely co-ordinated among the European Allies with a merchant fleet. This took place both bilaterally and multilaterally, through organs and boards established during the war for this purpose. The multilateral organs among the European Allies, which discussed and co-ordinated manpower issues most substantially, were probably the Inter-Allied Government Committee on Shipping Man Power and its sub-committee, the Inter-

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<sup>39</sup> Hjeltnes, 1995: 54-55. Norwegian mates were hired in New York from autumn 1940 by their own trade union representatives, commissioned by Nortraship, ref: Hartmark and Norsk, 1985: 111-112.

<sup>40</sup> Silverman, 2000: 40-42.

<sup>41</sup> The NUS did however play a crucial role in mobilising British seamen on British ships. When the leader of NUS 1942-47, Charles Jarman, died in 1947, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stated the following in his memorial speech: "Mobilising the seamen of the country was one of the most remarkable efforts I have ever witnessed. When one thinks of how he, with his colleagues, never failed to find crews to take the ships to sea under the most terrible conditions, one realizes what a great leader he was. For manning those ships meant this nation's survival." (Marsh and Ryan, 1989: 153.)



Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power. The committees were established during the winter of 1942 with government representatives and officials from the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Poland and Yugoslavia.<sup>42</sup>

The sole leaders of this and similar organs were the British representatives. They usually spoke on behalf of the European Allies when questions related to seafarers were negotiated with American authorities. The Ministry of Shipping, and from 1 May 1941, the Ministry of War Transport (MoWT), were responsible for handling the British interests in these matters, with Lord Leathers as the Ministry's strong and influential leader in the years 1941-1945.<sup>43</sup> When the lack of willing crews on Allied merchant ships threatened supplies to the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Churchill also involved himself personally.<sup>44</sup> The main American actor dealing with Allied manpower on sea was Admiral Emory S. Land who led both the US Maritime Commission and the War Shipping Administration.<sup>45</sup>

The interaction of foreign actors in Norwegian crew issues depended on the kind of issue and the nationality of the seafarers involved. Many of the different Norwegian actors communicated directly with their foreign partners and counterparts. To visualise this complexity, I have examined my assembled documents regarding both the principle and the practical sides of the deportation of Norwegian seafarers from the USA to the United Kingdom. In the figure below I have drawn lines between those actors communicating with each other on these issues. Different colours represent different nationalities. Actors coloured in red are Norwegians, British are in green and the American in blue. The figure does not show what lines of communication which was most important or most used. Moreover, there were certainly lines of communication about deportation which I have not discovered in my study, particularly with regards to American authorities. The purpose of this visualisation is primarily to illustrate the complexity of both Norwegian and foreign actors and their communication.

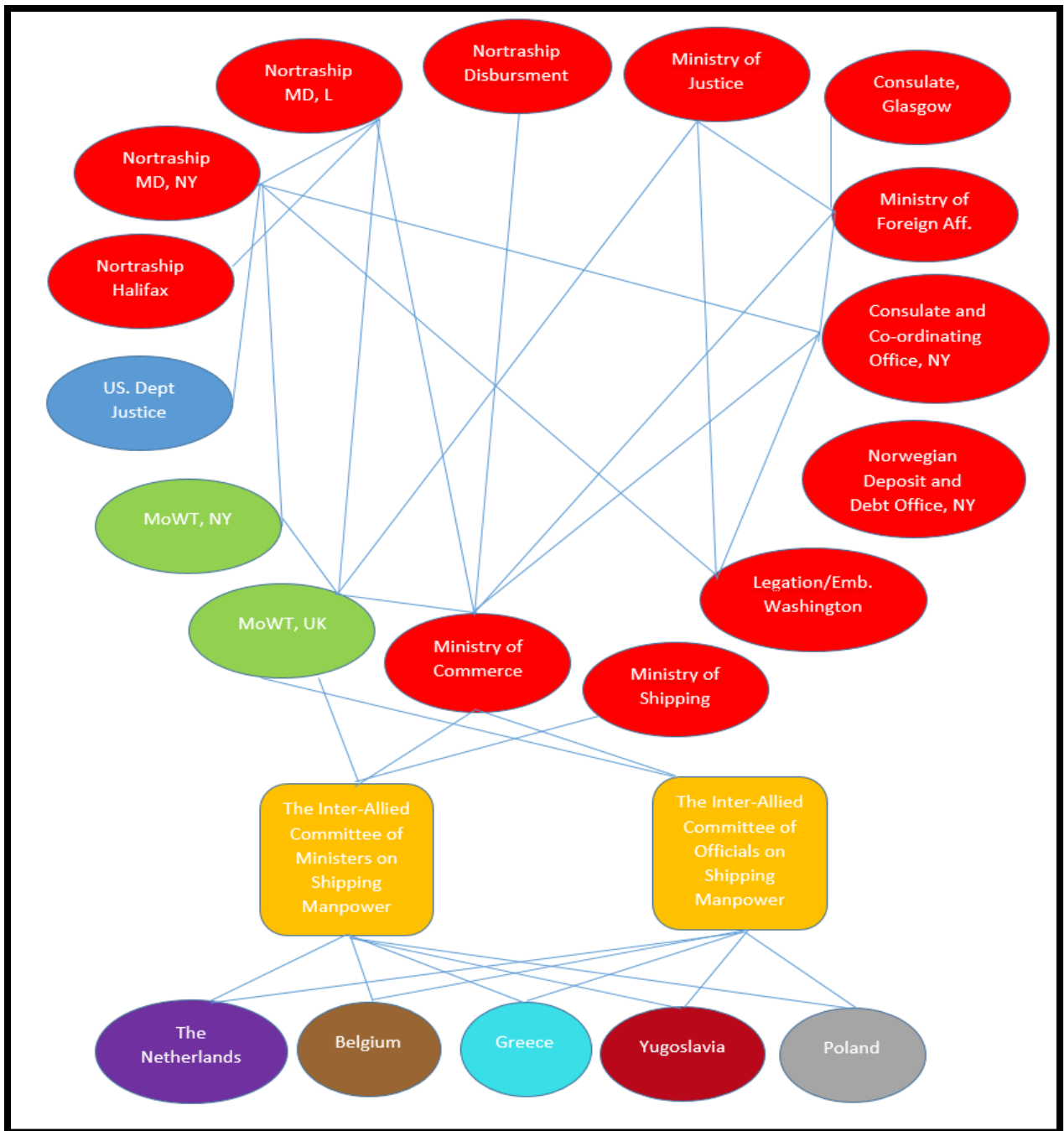
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<sup>42</sup> NA, MT 9/3555, Inter-Allied Committee of Ministers on Shipping Manpower.

<sup>43</sup> Behrens, 1955: 55.

<sup>44</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 169, 174-175.

<sup>45</sup> Emory S. Land has written in detail in his memoirs about his role during the war. Land describes his co-operation with his British allies but nothing about the other European maritime Allied nations, ref: Land, 1958.



*Actors' communication in the question of deportation: An illustration of the historical actors' communication in the question of deportation of Norwegian seafarers from the USA to the United Kingdom, based on the documents assembled in my study. It primarily visualises the complexity of both Norwegian and foreign actors and their communication. NY=New York, L=London, MoWT=Ministry of War Transport, MD=Maritime Department.*<sup>46</sup>

### Economic motives

Even though winning the war was the primary goal of shipping policy for all Allied countries during the war, it was not the only ambition for the states involved. The

<sup>46</sup> The illustration is based on my assembled documents from the archives of 11 different actors, regarding deportation of Norwegian seafarers from the USA to the United Kingdom.

income from the Norwegian merchant fleet made the government in exile economically independent and strengthened its political position among the other Allied nations.<sup>47</sup> The merchant fleet had been vital to the Norwegian economy before the war, and it was of crucial interest to the Norwegian Government and shipowners to keep it that way when the war ended. Norway was not the only seafaring nation that aimed to secure its future economy, but few countries were more dependent on their shipping industry than Norway. One of the leaders of Nortraship expressed this concern in an article during the war: “our dreams of a better post-war world [...] come to nothing [if this is not recognised by the American Allies].”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the policy regarding the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the war must be understood in the light of these dreams and ambitions of a thriving shipping industry in post-war Norway.

#### Optimal mobilisation of resources in war

The mobilisation of Allied seafarers must be understood in the context of the warring states seeking to ensure the optimal utilisation of their economic, political and social resources. The disputed term “total war” has regularly been used by social historians to describe the massive social mobilisation which took place during the two world wars.<sup>49</sup>

Norwegian authorities mobilised civilian Norwegian seafarers in the Second World War very much like soldiers. A step-by-step process leading to a lawful conscription started in the summer of 1940 and formed the basis of all the other measures that were taken to ensure that Norwegian seafarers served on Norwegian ships. Norwegian seafarers should not, and eventually could not, choose not to sail.<sup>50</sup> However, the means to enforce the conscription rules depended on the assistance and authorisations provided in the countries where Norwegians in exile were located. The United Kingdom was, for instance, far more co-operative here than the USA.<sup>51</sup>

The manning of the Norwegian merchant fleet was conducted by many of the same institutions and by many of the same legal instruments that were used to man the military services.<sup>52</sup> This differs from the way the obligation to work was organised in

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<sup>47</sup> 90 per cent of the Norwegian Government in exile’s expenses were covered by income from Nortraship in the years 1940-1943. A substantial fund of hard currency was additionally earned due to the income from merchant shipping during the war, ref: Basberg, 1993: 138.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 182.

<sup>49</sup> Lane, 1994: 45.

<sup>50</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167-173.

<sup>51</sup> This is investigated and discussed in *ibid.*: 167-173.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 164.

the United Kingdom, where the civilian population involved in war-related work was mobilised through the Essential Work Order of March 1941. This lawfully tied workers to jobs considered critical to the war effort. The Essential Work Order was applied to the British Shipping Industry in May 1941. From then on British seamen were compelled to stay on British or Allied ships.<sup>53</sup>

The nation state and the seafarers' nationality formed the basis for the quest for an optimal mobilisation of this profession. Still, as noted above, this was carried out across national borders and by close bilateral and multilateral co-operation and influence between the Allied countries.

Seafarers constituted a crucial group to mobilise. They were not the only civilian profession directly exposed to war and close to military battles. Other groups may also experience these same situations in times of war and conflicts, like health personnel, drivers, interpreters and fire fighters. However, in the case of the seafarers in the Second World War, the combination of their importance, their large number and their exposure to war, made this group special. This was particularly true in the case of Norway, with the situation of a German-occupied country, an exiled government and a large merchant fleet.<sup>54</sup> Conscription of the civilian group of seafarers was a vital Norwegian response to the need to ensure seafarers' service in times of war. However, it could not be the only tool, and conscription could not be used by Norwegian authorities to ensure the crucial service of the foreign seafarers.

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<sup>53</sup> Behrens, 1955: 163, 171.

<sup>54</sup> The great importance of the merchant fleet's ships and crews to the Norwegian authorities serve as a central foundation in the discussions of this thesis and is both stressed and described several places, e.g. in Chapter 5 and the subchapters "Ambiguous policy: Seafarers or "war sailors"?" and "An Allied question".

### 3. Perspectives and analysis

One overall purpose of this thesis is to expand the understanding of the historical phenomenon of merchant seafarers in the Second World War. Under the assumption that it is not possible to fully know the realities of this past phenomenon, I have chosen to explore one of several possible aspects of the merchant seafarers' war history. This is conducted through the overall research questions: With what means were the services of the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet ensured in the Second World War, and what consequences did those efforts have for different groups of nationalities onboard Norwegian ships?

In the process of exploring these questions, I have been inspired by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas of hermeneutical understanding.<sup>55</sup> Gadamer stresses the importance of being conscious of the historical distance to the historical phenomenon and to recognise the presuppositions that governs one's understanding. Hence, the past must be understood on its own terms and within its own historical horizon. Moreover, Gadamer states that: "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion."<sup>56</sup> Following this ideal has proven productive in this study. This has implied a broad and international approach to the use of both historical sources and previous research.

According to Gadamer, understanding develops through conversation between "partners that seeks agreement about some matter at issue".<sup>57</sup> The analytical perspectives in this thesis must be understood in this context as a contribution to the ongoing conversation about merchant seafarers in the Second World War and to expand our understanding of this phenomenon. In the process leading to this thesis, this conversation has happened in various ways: through a discussion of previous research and direct contact with other researchers from different parts of the world. Further understanding has also been developed through arranging and participating in seminars, by editing and writing texts in books and journals, and I also had a productive research stay in China.<sup>58</sup> It is against this background that different and relevant analytical perspectives and theories are explored in this chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.: 161.

<sup>57</sup> "Hans-Georg Gadamer", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Of special importance was the international seminar I organised in 2014 and the anthology I edit, which will be published later in 2017: Rosendahl, 2017c. Moreover, I have also lead the establishment of the Norwegian Centre Seafarer History WW2 at Stiftelsen Arkivet.

## Relevant fields of research and historiography

This thesis aims to discuss with a wide field of research results, approaches and theories. In brief, my analytical perspectives are positioned at the intersection between administrative, social and diplomatic history – in an international context, with the use of some comparative glances.

### Maritime history

Traditional maritime history has generally centred on three separate and isolated subjects: maritime exploration, naval warfare, and economic affairs. Currently, maritime history is regarded as a broad, interdisciplinary theme in global history that approaches the field from a range of positions.<sup>59</sup> This thesis aims to be a part of this broader tradition within maritime history.

Within Norwegian maritime history, there is one particular research project that stands out in the historiography of seafarers and the Second World War. This is the five-volume work about the Norwegian merchant fleet in the Second World War, *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* (the merchant fleet in war, 1939-1945).<sup>60</sup> The first two volumes are devoted to the management of Nortraship and written by Atle Thowsen and Bjørn Basberg. Volume 3 and 4 are written by Guri Hjeltnes and focus on the seafarers in service of Nortraship and their war experiences.<sup>61</sup> In the last volume, the history of the ships and crews in occupied Norway is explored by Lauritz Pettersen.

*Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* was both a pioneering work and written for the general public, and the books received good reviews when they were published in the 1990s.<sup>62</sup> However, the five-volume work was not explicitly problem-based.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, only a few international comparative perspectives were made. Nevertheless, this is by far the most significant research work that has been done on seafarers in the Second World War in Norway. Even though *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* was published 20-25 years ago, it is still an invaluable source on this field of research in Norway.

Consequently, it is both a source of knowledge and a central part of the historiography to relate to, to discuss and to challenge in this thesis.

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<sup>59</sup> Hattendorf, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Thowsen, 1992; Basberg, 1993; Hjeltnes, 1995; Hjeltnes, 1997; Pettersen, 1992.

<sup>61</sup> An introduction to these two volumes was published by Guri Hjeltnes in 2000, which brought together with the two volumes in *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945*, constituted her doctoral thesis: Hjeltnes, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> One example of a Norwegian newspaper review: [www.dagbladet.no/anmeldelser/970915-anm-bok1.html](http://www.dagbladet.no/anmeldelser/970915-anm-bok1.html). (Accessed 30.11.2016)

<sup>63</sup> Hjeltnes, 2000: 48.

Until *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* was published, little historical research had been conducted into Norwegian seafarers in the Second World War. One exception was Jon Rustung Hegland who, in 1976, published the thorough two-volume *Nortraships flåte* (Nortraship's fleet), which focuses on vessels in the merchant fleet and describes many of the seafarers' most dramatic war experiences.<sup>64</sup> However, Hegland's two books do not have an academic profile or analyse the crew policy and so are of limited importance in the analysis of this thesis.

The first volume of the history of the Norwegian Seamen's Union is the most comprehensive research carried out on Norwegian seafarers in the Second World War, after the completion of *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945*.<sup>65</sup> It is written by the historian Finn Olstad, who comprehensively analyses the history of this central non-governmental actor and its members in the times before, during and after the Second World War.

Research into non-Norwegian trade union history is also highly relevant to understanding how power structures, processes, conflicts and the seafarers' working conditions on Norwegian ships were influenced and changed during the war. No matter whether this research area is labelled maritime or trade union history, it contributes to a deeper understanding of some of the questions asked in this thesis. Most relevant are the studies of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the British National Union of Seamen (NUS).<sup>66</sup> The ITF, in particular, contributes with a non-governmental view on issues seen from the outside of the Norwegian reality and viewpoint. Moreover with its deep roots to internationalism, trade union history adds transnational perspectives to the seafarers' war that have often been missing from other studies on this and similar subjects.

Internationally, there seem to be few ongoing research projects exploring seafarers during the Second World War. Major works were published in the 1980s and 1990s in some of the largest Allied maritime nations, like the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark.<sup>67</sup> Together, these publications make it possible to analyse

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<sup>64</sup> Hegland, 1976a; Hegland, 1976b.

<sup>65</sup> Olstad, 2006. Finn Olstad has also been my co-supervisor in this PhD project.

<sup>66</sup> Silverman, 2000; Koch-Baumgarten, 1999; International Transport Workers, 1996; Marsh and Ryan, 1989.

<sup>67</sup> Lane, 1990; Thowsen, Basberg, Hjeltnes and Pettersen, 1992-1997; Bezemer, 1987; Tortzen, 1981.

the case of the seafarers on Norwegian ships in a wider international perspective. This is largely absent in previous Norwegian research into this topic.<sup>68</sup>

By far the world's largest shipping nation at the start of the Second World War was the United Kingdom. Several books have been published on the British Merchant Navy, describing the dramatic events out at sea in a commemorative and heroic style, but with little or no focus on the policy that brought the seafarers into this situation. And yet, there are some good exceptions. In 1955, Charlotte Behrens wrote *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War*.<sup>69</sup> Even though Behrens wrote in a patriotic style, she provided valuable information about the British Ministry of War Transport and the bureaucratic organisation behind the British mobilisation of seafarers. Ships and crews from other European nations are mentioned as part of British merchant shipping, but not analysed deeply in this work that focuses more on logistics than on politics.<sup>70</sup>

The most influential and thorough research published on seafarers in the British merchant fleet is Tony Lane's *The Merchant Seamen's war* from 1990.<sup>71</sup> The sociologist Lane, who also has personal experience as a seaman, provides a realistic and non-heroic picture of the seafarers' war. Based both on interviews, government archival sources and statistics, he problematises the popular conception of British national unity during the Second World War. Lane's inclusion of foreign seafarers into the national narrative of the merchant seafarers' war is also significant.<sup>72</sup> Lane is also one of the few researchers who have analysed the connections between government policy and the situation of the seafarers. This makes *The Merchant Seamen's war* and other works by Lane an inspiration and of great methodological value for my analysis into the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Lane's work and material makes it possible to make comparisons between Norwegian and British policy.

My study is essentially inspired and influenced by the work of Tony Lane in two ways: the intention to challenge old narratives of seafarers' works in the Second World War and in the choice of themes to explore. Tony Lane has also provided me with

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<sup>68</sup> All the authors of *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* refer to Bezemer and Tortzen in their bibliography. Hjeltnes also refer to Lane. However, there are quite few references to these works and the other Allied maritime nation's history, in the different volumes.

<sup>69</sup> Behrens, 1955.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.: 102.

<sup>71</sup> Lane, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.: 155-188.

<sup>73</sup> Lane, 1994; Lane, 1995.



advice on parts of my thesis, regarding literature, archival sources and explanations for some of my results.

In Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, multi-volume books have been written about the merchant fleet in the Second World War. In Denmark, Christian Tortzen published his four volume *Søfolk og skibe 1939-1945* (seafarers and ships 1939-1945) in the early 1980s.<sup>74</sup> An equivalent work in the Netherlands was published by the historian K.W.L. Bezemer in 1987, with the title *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse koopvaardij in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (the history of the Dutch merchant fleet in the Second World War).<sup>75</sup> Bezemer focuses mainly on the ships and only to a limited extent on the crew policy. The anthology *De Nederlandse Koopvaardij in Oorlogstijd* (the Dutch merchant fleet in wartime), edited by Van Dissel, Elands, Faber, and Stolk, was published in 2014. Its objective was for the first time, to put the seafarers in the Dutch merchant fleet in the centre of attention in a study.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, Bezemer's works are of lesser relevance with respect to my research questions.

### **Beyond maritime history**

Other horizons than maritime history can be consulted and used as a source of understanding. Within the Norwegian nation-state framework of analysis, the policy towards the seafarers can be analysed in the context of Norwegian foreign policy. This enables a discussion with a wide range of studies where questions of formal and informal alliances, small state policy and multilateralism are among the central issues.<sup>77</sup> Among research published in this tradition, Olav Riste's two volume work on the Norwegian Government in exile during the Second World War is of special relevance here.<sup>78</sup> My research has benefited from Riste's studies in terms of understanding Norwegian policy. However, I must also correct Riste's conclusion that the government in exile acted independently in their policy towards the seafarers.<sup>79</sup> My study concludes that the British interventions to ensure the service of seafarers on Norwegian ships were early, proactive and profound.<sup>80</sup>

A broader perspective is possible if the Norwegian nation-state is abandoned as the framework of analysis in favour of analysing the seafarers' war within the

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<sup>74</sup> Tortzen, 1981.

<sup>75</sup> Bezemer, 1987.

<sup>76</sup> Van Dissel, Elands, Faber and Stolk, 2014. I am grateful to Saskia J. Klooster for this information.

<sup>77</sup> For a good overview of the Norwegian foreign policy in the 20th century written in English, see: Riste, 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Riste, 1973; Riste, 1979.

<sup>79</sup> Riste, 1973: 26, 37.

<sup>80</sup> This is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

international context of the Second World War. During the war, the merchant seafarers on Allied ships were one part of a great war machine. Merchant shipping was not a subject which could be isolated from other issues. Hence, the disposal of ships and crews was regularly discussed in diplomatic meetings and forums. Merchant shipping was a matter of military importance, because of its role in supplying the military and due to the direct interaction with the armed forces in convoys and in military operations, like the landings in North Africa in 1942 and Normandy in 1944. Moreover, the merchant seafarers constituted a large civilian work force. Thus, the seafarers' wages and conditions had implications for the rest of the civilian population and for the economy as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, administrative, military, economic, social and diplomatic history provide relevant contexts to better understand how the service of the seafarers was ensured in times of war.

To achieve such an understanding, approaches from social historians of the characteristics and mechanisms working during “total war” is helpful. Tony Lane’s article on the human economy of wartime Britain inspired me to adopt such approaches and theories to better understand the mobilisation of the seafarers in the first place.<sup>82</sup> The research of total war and historical change by Arthur Marwick has been utilised in this context to analyse the mobilisation in a broader perspective.<sup>83</sup> The British historian Jeremy Black has criticised this “war and society approach” for taking fighting out of the war and ignoring the fact that “the Axis were outfought”.<sup>84</sup> That criticism does not affect my use of the social historians’ approaches, since I do not use these theories to explain the outcome of the war.

The mobilisation of seafarers carried out by the Norwegian Government in exile in London cannot be interpreted as a Norwegian total war. It could potentially, be analysed instead as a part of a British total war, which will be discussed later. However, even if total war is not an accurate label to describe the mobilisation of seafarers on Norwegian ships, the terminology and the associated mechanisms of mobilisation in theories of total war provide a constructive horizon to answer the research questions in this study.

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<sup>81</sup> The dramatic reduction of war risk money to seafarers on Norwegian ships in June 1940, rooted in British concerns of how high Norwegian salaries could spread to British ships and then again threaten the British war economy with general pressure on wages and consequently inflation. Ref: Hjeltnes, 1995: 62-64.

<sup>82</sup> Lane, 1994: 45.

<sup>83</sup> Marwick, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Black, 2010: 122.

### International research perspectives

The seafarers in the merchant fleet served in one of the most international services in the Second World War. On-board the ships and in convoys, multinational co-operation was in full effect and on land there was close Allied co-ordination of the management of ships and crews. Hence, it seems paradoxical that previous studies about seafarers in the Second World War almost solely have been researched with one nation-state as the framework of analysis, taking mainly national perspectives and with few cross-national comparisons.

Very little research into merchant seafarers in the Second World War has been published in English from outside English-speaking countries.<sup>85</sup> This may be rooted in a lack of interest, commitment or ability to disseminate national research results internationally. Or it might be the result of commissioned research, with a precondition to publish in the national language. Consequently, this makes it harder for other scholars to make international comparisons and include international perspectives, which has been a central objective of my study.

When Norwegian historical research was comprehensively evaluated by the Research Council of Norway in 2008, it was criticised for “methodological nationalism”.<sup>86</sup> One possible definition of this is an equation between the concept of society and the nation-state.<sup>87</sup> An alternative and more comprehensive definition says that research characterised by methodological nationalism implies strong national fixation, analysis bound by national borders and that historical phenomena are explained by causes within the nation.<sup>88</sup>

Methodological nationalism is not limited to Norway or to history as a field of research. It can be found in many countries’ research traditions.<sup>89</sup> Internationally, it has been debated in social theory since 1970s, and still is, in migration studies for instance.<sup>90</sup> Migrants and seafarers have their transnational characteristic in common and this study seeks to problematise the traditional national fixation in the field of

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<sup>85</sup> This assertion is based on extensive searches in web databases, relevant journals and bibliographies, combined with communication with historians in different countries with a maritime history. There are some exceptions, however. One is the Danish history published in: Tortzen, 2003. Another one is a book published in 1948 about the Dutch merchant fleet (mainly about ships) in the Second World War: Popta, 1948. There are also some information published about Greek seafarers in the Second World War in the following books: Lemos, Trypanis and Perris, 1970: 171-175 and Harlaftis, 2015: 243-251.

<sup>86</sup> Schwach, Stråth and Norges forskningsråd, 2008: 176.

<sup>87</sup> Chernilo, 2006: 5.

<sup>88</sup> Kjeldstadli, 2009: 93.

<sup>89</sup> Nielsen, 2015: 85-86.

<sup>90</sup> Chernilo, 2006; Amelina, Horvath and Meeus, 2015.

seafarers in the Second World War. This is possible without entirely accepting the term “methodological nationalism”. The Norwegian historian Terje Tvedt has argued well against the use of this as a key concept in the evaluation of Norwegian historical research, claiming that the report neither defines or contextualises it.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, Tvedt argues that it is not research about the nation-state which is the main problem, but the perspectives, concepts and analytical models within which history has been studied and analysed.<sup>92</sup> This thesis builds on the same assumption, with the *national Norwegian* merchant fleet as a focal point, but with the objective of a wide approach to perspectives, concepts and analytical models.

Since the concept of methodological nationalism is controversial and, as shown by Tvedt, has some clear problems in methodological discussions, I will focus primarily on the concrete challenges which follows a strong national fixation in research in the following. These challenges also seem to be relevant when discussing methodologies of studying the seafarers in the Second World War. The solutions are, to a great extent, connected to include more international perspectives in research.

### **Challenges of national fixation**

The Norwegian historian Knut Kjeldstadli has identified several specific aspects to be aware of, to avoid an overly strong national fixation in historical research. Kjeldstadli summed this into three particularly academic problems. Firstly, one might be blind to impulses from abroad. Secondly, one might neglect that developments in one country might also happen correspondingly in other countries. The third problem arises from the implicit notion of society, namely that it is considered as no more than the sum of its parts.<sup>93</sup>

When examining past research into seafarers in the Second World War, the first two problems are particularly relevant. Very few works have included comparative perspectives which might have discovered impulses and corresponding processes in other countries. However, the narrow emphasis on national perspectives in maritime history has been reduced the last couple of years, probably because of the general shift in the discipline of history.<sup>94</sup> This thesis is written with an objective to contribute to a similar development into research on seafarers in the Second World War.

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<sup>91</sup> Tvedt, 2013: 492.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.: 510.

<sup>93</sup> Kjeldstadli, 2009: 94. This article was written as an answer to the evaluation report of Norwegian historical research.

<sup>94</sup> Hattendorf, 2012.

When a field of research has mainly emphasised national perspectives for many years, it is harder for new research in the field to break with this tradition and to internationalise. This could result in inertia in the system. Such influence of previous research can occur in several ways, and “path dependence” is one of these.

Consciously and unconsciously, new researchers follow the tracks of previous researchers' use of sources, methods, theories and perspectives. To achieve the objective of conducting generic research that challenges established notions and methods, awareness of the propensity of path dependence is crucial.

Furthermore, a key requirement of research is that it must relate to, verify and challenge previous research. However, if previous research is less internationally oriented, this puts greater demands on new research which might be entangled in the same frame and debate. My own experience related to the publication of an article in the renowned *Scandinavian Journal of History* demonstrates this point.<sup>95</sup> One of the reviewers' comments on the article recommended to more strongly relate to the Norwegian debate in the question about the so-called "secret funds of Nortraship". The reviewers did not suggest any international debates the article would benefit from linking with.

Internationalisation of research happens generally through two dimensions: a substantive one and an organisational one.<sup>96</sup> The substantive dimension is primarily about questioning perspectives, concepts and analytical models – as outlined in the text above. Internationalisation in the organisational dimension occurs through networking, participation in international research programs, conferences, debates and exchanges.<sup>97</sup> My own experience after organising an international history seminar in April 2014, underscores the values of the organisational dimension of internationalisation.<sup>98</sup> In addition to the direct results of a successful seminar, organising a seminar proved very useful for my own research in its aftermath. I acquired a network of researchers who can read drafts, make suggestions for publications and sources, and connect me with other researchers. This has considerably strengthened my ability as a historian to question the national narratives in my research and to bring in new, productive perspectives. A direct result of organising the seminar in April 2014 is also the anthology I have edited which will be

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<sup>95</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d.

<sup>96</sup> Schwach, Stråth and Norges forskningsråd, 2008: 156.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.: 175.

<sup>98</sup> The seminar program is found here: <http://www.stiftelsen-arkivet.no/files/Merchant-seamen-history-seminar-programme-8-and-9-April.pdf> (accessed 23.03.2017).

published later in 2017.<sup>99</sup> As described earlier in this chapter, there are very few Second World War publications covering more than one nation's seafarers, and the objective of publishing this anthology is to fill this research gap.

The most constructive contextual framework in historical research about the merchant seafarers' war will depend on the purpose of the study and the research questions. The shipowners' nationality and the flags on the ships normally decided who was responsible for organising the crews in the Allied merchant fleets.<sup>100</sup> This is an argument to have the nation state as a part of the framework for a study on this matter. Formally, each country was supposed to man their ships on their own, preferably with as many of their own nationality as possible. In Norwegian historical research, the established view is that the Norwegian Government in exile could ensure their workforce without much external intervention.<sup>101</sup> In all three of my articles I have documented an active British role in the mobilisation of seafarers on Norwegian ships. Regarding Norwegian seafarers, it was both in British and Norwegian interests to let the government in exile be perceived as the active and initiating power in the process.<sup>102</sup>

Future research projects on seafarers in the Second World War could benefit from a larger framework than the nation-state. Research based on the Allies as the basic framework would supplement the national framework and probably open new insights that previous projects have not been able to discover. There were several different and shifting Allied meeting points for co-ordination and allocation of the merchant fleets during the war. A separate study of these bodies has the potential to give new and deeper insight into many aspects of the seafarers' war. Another possible topic could be the close Allied co-operation in arresting seamen in the USA and deporting them to Europe.<sup>103</sup> A third potential topic with the Allies as the basic framework could be to analyse the trade unions' importance and influence in wartime, beyond that which has been previously published about each country's seamen's unions and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).<sup>104</sup> A further consequence of such studies could be the possibility to develop competencies in analysing when a national framework is

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<sup>99</sup> Rosendahl, 2017c.

<sup>100</sup> Charter agreements could also imply that the crew responsibility was taken care of by the charterer.

<sup>101</sup> Riste, 1973: 26, 37; Hjeltnes, 1997: 159-211. Hjeltnes stresses, though, the importance of American co-operation and assistance. Allied influence is in this thesis discussed more thoroughly under "An Allied question" in Chapter 5.

<sup>102</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 168.

<sup>103</sup> Rosendahl, 2015b.

<sup>104</sup> Olstad, 2006; Koch-Baumgarten, 1999; ITF, 1996; Marsh and Ryan, 1989.

the most constructive approach and when a more transnational framework is needed to achieve a deeper insight.

This study documents major international influences on the crew policy in the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>105</sup> There are, however, many nuances here. Some countries put heavy pressure on the Norwegian authorities to ensure the rights of their seafarers aboard Norwegian ships, while other states did not involve themselves in such matters at all. Foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships constituted a very diverse group. From Swedes, who “always” sailed on Norwegian ships and often with strong ties to a Norwegian shipowner before the war, to Chinese, who were hired in groups and got hired on a mostly ad-hoc basis on Norwegian ships for short periods of time. This heterogeneity among different nationalities of seafarers, has been taken into consideration in this study and is one of the reasons why a separate article was written on the large group of Chinese seamen in the Norwegian fleet.

Historical research has, in many cases, focused on one merchant fleet, one shipowner or one ship - and more seldom on one seafarer, which largely has been left to commemorative literature to convey. However, a new and deeper insight into the phenomenon of seafarers at war could be provided if micro studies were conducted at the individual level, where several seafarers with different nationalities were followed from ship to ship and from port to port. Such micro studies might problematise the standard view, where the national merchant fleets constitute the whole and the ships and crews are the parts. This was probably how it looked from the Norwegian Government offices and from Nortraship, where the ships and crews were controlled and co-ordinated. When a historian utilises the archives of the same institutions, it is crucial not to adopt this and other employer perspectives uncritically. Seen from below, the parts (the ships) were not necessarily considered the same way as a national whole (the Norwegian merchant fleet). Since the written sources from this period come especially from those who controlled the ship and crews, it is important to be aware that the individual seafarer’s perspective differed from those in the government and company offices. This concerned, in particular, the significant number of Norwegian seafarers living in the USA before the war started. Instead of going home when they went to shore, they had just stayed ‘out’ and their ties to Norway were weakened or even lost.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 17,23.

<sup>106</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167. The challenges of mobilising this group of seafarers are discussed here.

Above, I have claimed that previous research on seafarers in the Second World War has mainly emphasised national perspectives and argued that this is a paradox. However, this does not imply that the nation state cannot or should not be used as the framework of analysis. This depends on the purpose of the study and the research questions. In this study, it is the *Norwegian* merchant fleet that constitute this frame, but with an objective to avoid an overly strong national fixation. Moreover, the organisational dimension has been vital to realise the objective of internationalisation of my research. This does not mean that my thesis should be interpreted as a break with the Norwegian research into the field of seafarers in the Second World War, but rather an attempt to connect both Norwegian and international research to my analysis.

### Comparative glances

Transnational and international comparative perspectives are central aspects of internationalisation of research. Despite the deep and widespread multinational character of the seafarer's service during the Second World War, there is no tradition of comparative studies in this field of history. Several comparative perspectives were considered in this study, and my choice was to compare with the British merchant fleet. This thesis does, however, not include a full-scale comparative study, but rather comparative "glances" of how the British policy was conducted to ensure the seamen's service on British ships.

The United Kingdom provide several interesting comparative aspects. From the spring of 1940 until the end of the Second World War, the United Kingdom was the closest foreign partner of the Norwegian Government in exile, and often set the premises of the Norwegian policy. Hence, studying British archives also has the potential to uncover hidden roots of Norwegian policy and shed new light on the power relationship between those two countries during the war. The rich variety of accessible historical sources and relevant research publications make a solid ground for such a comparison. However, one must bear in mind the great differences between the British and the Norwegian circumstances during the war, both in terms of the countries' size and power and the different implications of mobilising seafarers whether or not they belonged to an occupied country. The potential of this difference is that such a comparison might shed new light on the implications of those circumstances.

The most fruitful country to make a comparison of the history of the Norwegian seafarers with generally depends on the research question and whether it is an objective to compare a country and a merchant fleet similar to the Norwegian. The



Netherlands have many similarities with Norway in terms of experiences in the Second World War, not least related to the seafarers in the merchant fleet. The Dutch Government, as with the Norwegian Government, found itself in exile in London and had to mobilise seafarers from there. Just like the Norwegian Government in exile, the Dutch also established a state company which organised ships and crew. The full name of the Norwegian state company Nortraship was the Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission, while the Dutch was almost identical; the Netherlands Shipping and Trading Committee.<sup>107</sup> The two state-owned shipping companies were organised in very similar ways and, although the Norwegian fleet was slightly larger than the Netherlands', there is no other Allied country where the situation was more similar to Norway. However, since very little of the Norwegian and the Dutch research into this topic is available in English, and most archival sources are in Norwegian and Dutch, a deeper comparative study requires that the researcher master both countries' languages, or co-operate with someone who does.<sup>108</sup>

In the context of this study, a Danish-Norwegian comparison has little relevance since there was no Danish Government in exile which co-operated with the Allies or mobilised their ships and seafarers in Allied service. Danish ships in Allied ports were seized in the days after the German occupation in April 1940 and put under British flag and command. To the great despair of the Danish seafarers they were long regarded as "friendly enemies" by the Allies.<sup>109</sup> The substantial difference between the Danish and Norwegian seafarers' wages is described by the Danish historian Christian Tortzen as follows: "It was no use to refer to the Norwegians. They travelled first class."<sup>110</sup> The background was primarily that Norwegians, like the Dutch, had their own government which was able to decide their seafarers' salaries and conditions to some degree. Tortzen's pointed formulation also demonstrates the value of comparisons. According to my sources, very few Norwegian seafarers felt they were travelling first class. The Danish perspective illustrates, however, that Norwegian seafarers, after all, sailed under considerably better conditions than their neighbours south of the Skagerrak.

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<sup>107</sup> Klooster, 2014: 24.

<sup>108</sup> The Dutch historian Saskia J. Klooster has informed me about the Dutch history and Dutch historiography relevant in this thesis.

<sup>109</sup> Hansen, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Tortzen, 1981 Vol. 2: 192. Original quote: "Det nyttede ikke noget at henvise til nordmændene. De rejste på første klasse."

Even though it is outside the scope of this study, there is a great research potential in a comparison between the experiences of seafarers from ships controlled by both the Allied, neutral and Axis powers. Differences and similarities uncovered from such research can provide broader knowledge about the phenomenon of seafarers at war. Unfortunately, little research has been undertaken into seafarers on neutral or Axis controlled merchant ships, with a few exceptions.<sup>111</sup> The only publication which thoroughly focuses on the ships and the seafarers that sailed along the German-controlled Norwegian coast in the so-called “home fleet” is volume number five in *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945*.<sup>112</sup>

In general, there is a great research potential in studying the seafarers’ war by comparing the different maritime nations involved. This has also been the case in this study where comparative glances on the British policy have proved useful.<sup>113</sup>

#### The impact of periodisation

Just like the framework of the analysis and possible comparisons, the choice of periodisation needs a serious discussion. When deciding the analytical perspectives in historical research, the chosen time period is a key structure. Periodisation is normally influenced by the chosen geographical and political framework. Here I will briefly illustrate how periodisation is an important aspect of the analytical perspectives of the seafarers in the Second World War in general, and in my thesis in particular.

At what year did the Second World War start? In the United Kingdom, it started in 1939, in Norway 1940, and in the USA 1941. Meanwhile in China, 1937 is probably the most common year to pinpoint as the start of the war. These years point to when the various nations formally became part of the World War as a belligerent nation. As mentioned earlier, the boundaries between war and peace were more vague for the seafarers traveling in and out of war zones.

Even though Norway strived for neutrality when the Second World War broke out in Europe in September 1939, 377 seafarers on Norwegian ships were killed before

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<sup>111</sup> The Danish historian Christian Tortzen is an exception here: he includes the seafarers along the Danish coast in his four-volume work: Tortzen, 1981 Vol. 2. Research on neutral shipping in the Second World War is found in Richard Areschoug’s book about Swedish seafarers: Areschoug, 2008. I have discovered one publication about the Japanese merchant fleet in WW2: Parillo, 1993. This however, contains very little about the seafarers. It is the same case about this book about the German merchant fleet 1939-1945: Dinklage and Witthöft, 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Pettersen, 1992. There are two other publications of relevance here: Larssen, 1946, which focuses on the ship traffic in Northern Norway and Nordanger, 1975, which covers war-related shipwrecks along the German-controlled Norwegian coastline 1940-1945.

<sup>113</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 176-177; Rosendahl, 2017a: 12, 21; Rosendahl, 2017b: 8-11.

Norway as a state formally entered the war.<sup>114</sup> In Norway, this period has been called the “Forgotten War” since the general historical research publications on Norway and the Second World War only scarcely have described this part of the war and is almost absent in public memory.<sup>115</sup> Norwegian historians like Hjeltnes, Thowsen and Olstad have been careful to commemorate the losses of ships and crews in their publications.<sup>116</sup> However, there is very little knowledge acquired about the seafarers on Norwegian ships in this “forgotten” period.<sup>117</sup> There are official statistics on the fatalities of seafarers, but it has been taken for granted by first Sjøfartskontoret (the shipping office), which made the statistics, and then historians like Hjeltnes, that the 377 deceased seafarers on Norwegian ships were Norwegians.<sup>118</sup> How many foreign seafarers who perished on Norwegian ships during this period has never been examined. In April 1940, approximately 12 percent of the crews in the Norwegian merchant fleet were foreign nationals and, even though a high percentage of these sailed in Asia outside the European war zones, some foreigners must have been among the casualties before Norway was occupied. My own examinations of some of the shipwrecks which occurred in this period show that foreign nationals *are* among these 377 casualties.<sup>119</sup>

The fact that there is no evidence or research into foreign casualties on Norwegian ships for this period illustrates two points that are relevant here. Firstly, that there has been a lack of interest and consciousness of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. The scopes of previous studies have roughly been limited to Norwegian seafarers on Norwegian ships.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the traditional “Norwegian” periodisation from 1940 to 1945 has led to noticeably less research into the period from 3 September 1939 to 9 April 1940.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Sjøfartskontoret, 1949: 3.

<sup>115</sup> A period closely corresponding with the so-called “Phoney War”.

<sup>116</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 76-83; Hjeltnes, 1995: 24-30; Olstad, 2006: 253-258.

<sup>117</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 41.

<sup>118</sup> Sjøfartskontoret, 1949: 3; Hjeltnes, 1997: 414. Moreover, both Thowsen, 1992: 72, and Olstad, 2006: 253, writes about casualties on Norwegian ships, without specifying their nationality. Olstad also includes 17 seafarers among the casualties, from eight ships lost without trace.

<sup>119</sup> One example is the ship SS *Gudveig*, where one Swedish and two Danish seamen were killed, ref: NR, K. 68 – “Krigsforliste norske skib”, File 1. It is relevant to problematise the official statistics on seafarers that died on Norwegian ships during the First World War too. Does the casualty figure of about 2.000 include foreign seafarers as well?

<sup>120</sup> E.g., Hjeltnes, 1995; Hjeltnes, 1997; Olstad, 2006.

<sup>121</sup> The five volume work *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* did in fact use 1939 as a starting point of its study and, by this, emphasised that the realities of war made its mark on Norwegian ships and crews before the German occupation of Norway in April 1940. Ref Thowsen, Basberg, Hjeltnes and Pettersen, 1992-1997.

Consequently, more than the national framework must be questioned when a research design is developed. The same applies with the limits set in periodisation, not least since the national framework often influences this.<sup>122</sup> The first volume on the history of the Norwegian Seamen's Union from 1910 to 1960, published by Finn Olstad, illustrates this point.<sup>123</sup> One aspect that strengthens the significance of Olstad's research, is that he puts the history of the seafarers' war into a larger historical context, beyond the years 1940-1945. Thus, Olstad is able to discover continuity and change that are much harder to discover if one is limited by the period when Norway was part of the war.

Nonetheless, in my study I have chosen the traditional periodisation of the Second World War in Norway: 1940-1945. There are several reasons for this, and they probably correlate with the explanations of the periodisation given in several other previous Norwegian studies. The main reason in my study is that Norwegian authorities in exile were responsible of ensuring the seafarers' service from 1940 to 1945. A start year of 1939 would have been both interesting and relevant, but would have dragged the analysis more in the direction of comparing the period of neutrality and the times of being a belligerent nation. A problem of enlarging the time scope is, naturally, the consequently larger scale of the study this would have implied. In my case, five years of war are extensive enough to study, if explored deeply enough.

Are there any negative aspects of the periodisation in this study? Are there aspects related to continuity and change which I miss? To detect continuity and change in mobilisation of seafarers in times of war, information on this topic in times of peace is vital. Against this background, I have searched for facts and developments in the period before and after 1940-1945 related to some of the themes investigated. By assembling figures of the proportion of foreign seafarers historically and what countries these seafarers normally came from, this has helped to understand and historicise the use of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. The great changes in the use of foreign seafarers in the period of 1940-1945 did not, for instance, seem to lead to any long-term effects on the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Schwach, Stråth and Norges forskningsråd, 2008: 174.

<sup>123</sup> Olstad, 2006.

<sup>124</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 24.

### Theoretical resources

A simple definition of theory is a set of ideas that is intended to explain facts or events.<sup>125</sup> Theories serve to help explain how parts are connected in a larger whole, and how both these connections and the wholes are changing. Historical research into the seafarers during the Second World War has, to a very little extent, been theorised, at least explicitly. The reasons for this are probably multiple and complex and I will briefly point at two possible explanations.

Firstly, this field of research has generally been a part of the greater discipline of maritime history. According to the American naval historian John B. Hattendorf's analysis of the field of maritime history, this field did not keep up with the theoretical and methodological developments elsewhere in historical research. Hattendorf claims that maritime history did not start to move "beyond its antiquarian roots" until the 1990s and the 2000s.<sup>126</sup>

Secondly, as shown previously, there have been very few studies that compare the different nations' merchant fleets or with transnational perspectives. Fields of research that are internationally oriented to a minor degree possibly tend to be less affected by theory as well, since they are less connected to developments, discourses and leading researchers in other countries.

Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands all have *one* major multi-volume work published on their merchant fleets' history in the Second World War which all new research must relate to.<sup>127</sup> However, after these works were published, very little new research has been published on this topic in these three countries. The strong gravity of the multi-volume works may have contributed to this, something for which the authors of these three works are naturally not to blame.

There are several advantages of using and relating one's own research to international theories. It may strengthen both the qualities of the arguments and the relevance of the research results. Furthermore, it can provide better opportunities to connect with international discourse.

With few explicit theories adopted in previous studies of seafarers in the Second World War, there have been correspondingly few explicit theories this project could relate to or challenge. As a consequence, I have chosen to employ theories from

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<sup>125</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theory> (accessed 30/11/2016.)

<sup>126</sup> Hattendorf, 2012.

<sup>127</sup> Bezemer, 1987; Tortzen, 1981.

neighbouring areas of historical research, in particular theories of total war as used by social historians, to describe the mobilisation of an actively participant civilian population.<sup>128</sup> Such theories have been used as a means to understand aspects of the Norwegian mobilisation of seafarers, despite the fact that warfare by a government in exile hardly in itself can be categorised as total war.<sup>129</sup>

I have also attempted to identify tendencies and patterns which can form the basis for further research and new theories. In the article about the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers I explore the possibility to make a model or a taxonomy for deciding when the national framework is the most relevant one, and when an international one is more productive. The question was whether there were any patterns that could contribute to identifying the most constructive analytical framework. In the first article concerning Norwegian seafarers, I found tendencies of Allied co-operation and influence to be strongest in measures characterised by coercion. While the Norwegian framework was dominant in most of the measures that included the “soft” efforts to mobilise.<sup>130</sup> When I examined the mobilisation of the foreign seafarers in the other two articles, these tendencies were absent. Allied co-operation and influence existed in all kinds of cases. Hence, the patterns found in the article on the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers has not been highlighted in in this introductory section. However, it would still be interesting to explore whether Allied co-operation and influence were strongest in measures characterised by coercion towards other groups of seafarers than on the Norwegian ships. This could in turn give historians a better foundation when selecting a productive frame for new studies on the topic of seafarers in the Second World War. It could also be a contribution to theorising this field of research.

Another theoretical ambition following my case study of seafarers on Norwegian ships, has been to explore the seafarer’s ambiguous roles between being a civilian or a military, how these roles were influenced by the historical circumstances and the consequences to policy. These aspects of the seafarers’ war are explored in Chapter 5, through my constructed dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”.

#### [The importance of my own presuppositions](#)

Above, I have discussed different analytical perspectives in the light of previous research, the use of national and international perspectives, periodisation and theories. These are mainly external factors. In the following, I will reflect on the importance of

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<sup>128</sup> Marwick, 1974: 172-176.

<sup>129</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 163-164.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.: 183.

my own presuppositions and how my own position may influence analyses and conclusions.<sup>131</sup>

In hermeneutics, presuppositions are termed “prejudices” by Gadamer and defined as premises that act as conditions for reasoning and accepted without any explanations.<sup>132</sup> My understanding in this context is that they form the parts of my presuppositions which I, as a researcher, must have a conscious awareness of. This is also discussed in historical theory. Behan C. McCullagh use the term “preconception” and describes how historians are guided by this:

This is usually a general idea of the parts of the subject and how they normally relate to one another. In asking herself what the subject X was like, an historian already has a concept of X which subsequently guides her inquiry.<sup>133</sup>

There is a distinction between unconscious prejudices and conscious bias, although such a distinction in many cases may have grey areas. McCullagh asks whether historians are naturally biased, since they interpret historical sources differently due to personal, social and cultural reasons.<sup>134</sup> He claims, however, that this is only a problem if the conclusions to be drawn from the sources are unclear. In my view, it is here source criticism comes into play, as the historian’s most vital tool. It also applies in cases of moral bias, to which McCullagh also refers.<sup>135</sup> In this project, the issue of moral bias has been of particular relevance in the two articles about foreign seafarers where I explore discrimination and racism on board Norwegian ships and in the Norwegian policy.<sup>136</sup> Here, a balancing act is necessary, between presenting racism in a historical context and displaying an apologetic attitude towards the phenomenon. One approach to this challenge has been to historicise the empirical evidence by documenting that there were people and organisations who objected to discrimination and racism towards foreign seafarers.

In his explanation of prejudices, Gadamer also emphasises the importance of historical consciousness; to recognise the differences between what he calls one’s historical horizon and the historical phenomena which are explored: “The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring an appropriate historical horizon, so that what

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<sup>131</sup> There is a brief distinction between presupposition and preunderstanding, ref Herreck. I use the term “presupposition”, since this is the word used in the English translation of Gadamer’s book *Truth and Method*, ref Gadamer, 2003: 159.

<sup>132</sup> Wetlesen, 1983: 226.

<sup>133</sup> McCullagh, 1997: 8.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*: 22.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>136</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 21-22; Rosendahl, 2017b: 15-18.

we are trying to understand can be seen in its true dimensions.”<sup>137</sup> Gadamer points out that past horizons are constantly in motion. However, historical consciousness helps a historian to recognise this.<sup>138</sup>

The differences in distance between the horizons in a research project varies and is affected by both time and culture. In this thesis, the distance is not long if one compares with other projects exploring ancient times and cultures. Nevertheless, the distance is far enough to recognise the differences in the horizon between myself and those who acted to ensure the service of seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet in the years 1940-1945. This calls for both cautiousness and open mindedness, when drawing conclusions from empirical sources.

A major part of this project has been empirical, gathering historical sources from a great spectre of actors. This illustrate the roots of my way of thinking as a historian, influenced by the tradition of critical empiricism which has been dominant in Norwegian historical research.<sup>139</sup> It is in the recognition of this that in this chapter I discuss in what ways different analytical perspectives can contribute to a deeper understanding of the research questions asked in this thesis.

In my analysis of foreign policy, I am influenced by political realism and its general manner of understanding power and interests as states’ primary ends of political action.<sup>140</sup> This basic view has probably coloured my understanding of the relationship between the British Government and the Norwegian Government in exile, together with my explanations of the Norwegian policy towards the seafarers.

However, a state cannot always be viewed as one rational actor, which was illustrated in numerous issues handled by Norwegian authorities in exile during the Second World War. In acknowledging this complexity, I am inspired by the American political scientist Graham T. Allison's three conceptual models of government and bureaucratic action. Allison raises awareness of underlying assumptions, he provides models of understanding, and he explains why it can be difficult to understand.<sup>141</sup> The implications of this in my study, is first and foremost a reminder to be both careful and

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<sup>137</sup> Gadamer, 2003: 160.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.: 161.

<sup>139</sup> Oppfølging av Nasjonal fagevaluering av historie: Oppfølgingskomiteens innstilling, 2008.

<sup>140</sup> A good example of analyzing diplomatic history since the Thirty Years’ War, this way, is: Kissinger, 1994.

<sup>141</sup> Allison, 1969.



open minded when I explain Norwegian government and bureaucratic action towards ensuring the service of the seafarers.

One of Allison's explanatory models is based on *Miles' Law*, the renowned formulation "where you stand, depend on where you sit".<sup>142</sup> For the readers of this study, it is relevant to know where I was sitting both before and during this research project. Since 2005, I have been employed at Stiftelsen Arkivet, a centre for historical reflection and peace building. The centre both conducts research, promotes democratic values and as an authentic site, commemorates victims of the Second World War. From 2014, I led the establishment of a national online register of all the seafarers on Norwegian ships 1939-1945, in order to both document, commemorate and honour their efforts in the war.<sup>143</sup>

To strive for independent scholarship on a memorial site has been problematised by the Dutch historian Ian Buruma, who warns about the obligations working at a memorial might give.<sup>144</sup> Transferred to my position, it can be questioned if I have or feel any obligations towards the seafarers in my study. My own personal relations at present day with a number of veterans from the war at sea, or with their family members, are also relevant information to include in this discussion. I have approached the research questions with an ideal of objectivity, with this potential conflict in mind. My general sympathy for the seafarers might have contributed to counterbalance some for the biased sources, which mostly carry the employer and shipowner perspectives. However, the study's general focus on a system level has probably reduced the potential of such conflicts and I do not see any specific issues in this study where my working position has affected my analysis.

### Ethical considerations

Openness and reflections on how one's own position may affect the choice of topics, sources and interpretations are also central requisitions in research ethics.<sup>145</sup> Hence, the above discussion on the importance of my own presuppositions and my general sympathy for the seafarers is also relevant when making ethical considerations.

Dissemination of Second World War history has regularly been subject to ethical discussions in Norway. This has most often been linked to the question of identifying

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.; Miles, 1978.

<sup>143</sup> Krigsseilerregisteret, [www.krigsseilerregisteret.no](http://www.krigsseilerregisteret.no).

<sup>144</sup> Buruma, 2009: 218-219.

<sup>145</sup> Kalleberg, Balto, Cappelen, Nagel, Nymoene, Rønning and Nagell, 2006: 10.

individuals and publicising names.<sup>146</sup> Since this thesis first and foremost operates on a macro level, exploring systems and structures more than individuals, the question of identifying individuals has not been a dilemma. I have gained access to archival sources which were restricted because they contained sensitive personal information. This sensitive material has, however, not been relevant to publicise in this study. Possible ethical dilemmas in this research project are therefore most likely not found in considerations of a person's privacy or any other risks to specific individuals.

The Norwegian guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities, calls for caution when it comes to discussing the motives of individuals: "Researchers must not ascribe irrational or unworthy motives to participants without providing convincing documentation and justification."<sup>147</sup> A central part of historical research is to uncover and discuss motives as a part of explaining historical events and developments. This has also been a central objective of this project. I generally discuss motives of actors like Nortraship, the Norwegian Government in exile and the British Government. These were, however, led by individuals. For the benefit of the overall objective of drawing credible conclusions in my own research, the requirement for documentation and justification should also apply when a government or a company is ascribed other motives than those explicitly stated. As such, should the ethical guidelines commit myself indirectly in terms of this point.

### Significant terms and concepts

Concept analysis and conceptual history help to understand the impact of language, in our understanding of the past. Hence, there are certain terms and concepts which are important, both to define and discuss, in the context of this study's analytical perspectives. This relates to the terms used for the seafarers, but also in their role as civilians, my choice of handling Norwegian authorities as one single actor and the definition of other key terms and concepts in this thesis.

#### **"War sailor"**

In Norway, today, a seafarer who served in the merchant fleet during the First or the Second World War is named "krigsseiler", which literally means "war sailor". The

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<sup>146</sup> Some examples of books which have generated public debate on the ethics of identifying individuals from the Second World War: Veum and Brenden, 2011; Veum, 2012; Solberg, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Kalleberg, Balto, Cappelen, Nagel, Nymoen, Rønning and Nagell, 2006: 22.

term was used occasionally after the First World War.<sup>148</sup> However, it was first commonly known in the general public after the Second World War, when the seafarers started to use the term “krigsseiler” about themselves. In 1951, the veterans from the merchant fleet named their own organisation *Norges Krigsseilerforbund*, or *Norwegian War Sailor Association* in English.<sup>149</sup>

“Krigsseiler” has become a common Scandinavian word since then. In Denmark, they write “krigssejler”,<sup>150</sup> and in Sweden the seafarers in war are called “krigsseglare”.<sup>151</sup> However, in the English-speaking world there are no corresponding term covering merchant seafarers in war. The British Merchant fleet is sometimes referred to as the “fourth service” alongside the army, navy and air force.<sup>152</sup> The annual day in the United Kingdom to commemorate the service and sacrifices of the seafarers in times of both war and peace, is called Merchant Navy Day.<sup>153</sup>

In the context of this thesis, the most important question regarding the Scandinavian term “war sailor”, is whether it has affected research into this subject. It is therefore relevant to ask if there are any significant differences in this field of research between the countries which have such a term and those who do not.

The term “war sailor” had, and still has, a very strong identity-building function in Norway. It contributes to underline the state of war as a significant aspect of the seafarers’ work and daily life in the war, and it emphasises the break from normal life as a civilian seafarer in peace. The identity-building function has been strengthened by the fact that seafarers continued, or rather started, to call themselves “war sailors” after the war was ended.<sup>154</sup> This can be understood as a parallel concept to “war veterans”, in which the “war sailors” in Norway also have been included in recent years.

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<sup>148</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 411. The only example I have found of the word “*krigsseiler*” in the archival and printed sources I have searched from the war period of 1940-1945, is in a report from February 1940, referred in 1944, in: *Meddelelser fra Skipsfartsdirektøren*, No. 13/1<sup>st</sup> June 1944: “Over Nordsjøen i februar 1940”.

<sup>149</sup> There is no official Norwegian definition of who is a “war sailor”, though as their status in society has improved, a tendency of a broader definition has occurred, not least from their descendants. This was one of the reasons why the personnel both of the Navy, on foreign merchant ships and in the “home fleet” in German-occupied Norway were defined as “war sailors” in the establishment of a national online register of all the seafarers on Norwegian ships 1939-1945, published in January 2016 at: [www.Krigsseilerregisteret.no](http://www.Krigsseilerregisteret.no).

<sup>150</sup> Tortzen, 1995.

<sup>151</sup> Stiftelsen Sveriges sjömanshus, 1999.

<sup>152</sup> Slader, 1995.

<sup>153</sup> The annual day is 3 September, which is the date in 1939 of the first sinking of a British merchant ship during in the Second World War, SS *Athenia*.

<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, there are some veterans who in private conversations with me have stressed that they are not war sailors – they were.

How radical a break the war was from normal life probably varied widely among the seafarers. Tony Lane argues that the transition to war was not so dramatic for British seafarers. The war made the work more dangerous for the seafarers, but it was not a part of them, according to Lane:

They went on doing their job because in war, as in peace, they had to earn a living and it was simply unfortunate and couldn't be helped that going to sea had become so much more dangerous.<sup>155</sup>

A similar understanding of the seafarers' war is not found within Norwegian research. On the contrary, Guri Hjeltnes claims that the war indeed made a great impact on the seafarers' identity, and with the liberation of Norway as the unifying goal, the seafarers developed a new culture and a new identity.<sup>156</sup>

The empirical sources investigated in this thesis provide no basis to draw conclusions about the seafarers' identity during or after the war. If both Lane and Hjeltnes are right, and the identities of British and Norwegian seafarers were significantly different, this might have been a result of the two countries' different war experience. However, there is reason to question whether the use of the Scandinavian term "war sailor" has served to exaggerate the breach between war and peace to the seafarers after the war. Can it be that the concept of "war sailor" and the strong identity mark this concept implies, have influenced historians in overstating the extent to which the Second World War really became part of the Norwegian seafarers' identity? Is the large breach between war and peace something that Norwegian and Scandinavian historians have just taken for granted or possibly overemphasised?

Despite only those who sailed in the First and the Second World War being categorised as "war sailors" in Norway, these were not the only times where Norwegian seafarers sailed in war zones. During the Cold War, Norwegians sailed under the risks of war in the Persian Gulf and to ports in Vietnam and Korea.<sup>157</sup> During the Second World War, seafarers themselves drew parallels to the fresh experiences of sailing to ports in Spain during the Spanish civil war from 1936 to 1939. This parallel was drawn when a possible solidarity renounced war bonus was discussed.<sup>158</sup> A seaman also pointed out the reference to the Spanish Civil War to me, in an interview.<sup>159</sup> However, I have not discovered any researchers who systematically have

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<sup>155</sup> Lane, 1990: 93.

<sup>156</sup> Hjeltnes, 2000: 48-52.

<sup>157</sup> Syvertsen, 2015. Syvertsen writes about Norwegian seafarers in the Persian Gulf, during the war 1980-1988.

<sup>158</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 175.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Anker Borøy, 29.8.2012.

drawn the connection between the Norwegian seafarers' experiences in wars other than the two world wars.

### **Seafarer**

“Seafarer” is not a loaded word in the same way as “war sailor”, but I use it extensively and deliberately in this thesis, since this is the common term used by and of the profession today.<sup>160</sup> In the choice between using seafarer or seaman, I have also taken into account that some women served in the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>161</sup> Though, in many cases I have also written Chinese and Indian “seamen”, since there were no women of these nationalities on Norwegian ships.

All persons that had any kind of formal position on board a ship, while at sea, are included in my definition of seafarers.<sup>162</sup> I have been cautious in my use of the term “civilian” about the seafarers, since a central finding in my study is that the seafarers' civilian status came under pressure in various ways during the war. Moreover, the gunners trained and enrolled in the Navy that served on Norwegian merchant ships are included in the definition of seafarers in this thesis.

### **The Norwegian fleet and Norwegian authorities**

My definition of the Norwegian merchant fleet also needs to be clarified. As mentioned earlier, there were Norwegian ships operating in German-occupied Norway, the so-called “home fleet”, but this is not a part of this study. Moreover, it is relevant to question if there was a Norwegian merchant fleet abroad, since it gradually became subject to British and American control. This has previously been documented regarding the management of the ships, and this thesis documents major Allied influence on the crew policies as well. Anglo-American influence did probably spread informally in the Norwegian merchant fleet too, through language and other cultural impacts. Nevertheless, the Norwegian authorities and Nortraship were the formal shipowner, the organiser and the main actor to ensure the seafarers' service on

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<sup>160</sup> The choice was made after the first article was published. This is the background why the word “seamen” has been used extensively in Rosendahl, 2015d.

<sup>161</sup> Historian Elisabeth Lønnå has documented that there were at least 240 women (93 Norwegians and 140 foreign nationals) serving in the Norwegian merchant fleet (Nortraship) in 1940-1945. 240 constitutes less than 1 per cent of the total crew. Ref: Lønnå, 2010: 96.

<sup>162</sup> Pilots, convoy commodores and his signalmen, were not recruited by Nortraship and are not a part of this analysis. The numerous British DEMS gunners were also deployed on Norwegian ships, without Nortraship being involved in the recruitment. They are included in the discussion on the British-Norwegian relationship and in the total figures of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. Among the number of 953 foreign seafarers killed on Norwegian ships, there were pilots, commodores, signalmen, and a considerable number of gunners, ref Rosendahl, 2015c: 72.

Norwegian ships. This is also the main argument to use the Norwegian – one nation’s – fleet as the main framework of analysis in this study.

Another significant methodological choice is to generally view Norwegian authorities in exile as a single actor, which is clarified in the dissertation’s articles.<sup>163</sup> By not concentrating on the internal differences between the numerous Norwegian actors involved, this strengthens the possibilities to look beyond what is “close at hand”, to identify new and external factors influencing the policy towards the seafarers.

One angle to study the Norwegian authorities’ policy towards their seafarers could have been within the context of a corporative state. Norwegian shipping policy was characterised by elements of corporatism before Norway was occupied by Germany in 1940. This was illustrated in November 1939, when the Norwegian Shipowner Association signed an agreement with the United Kingdom on their chartering of Norwegian ships, after the Norwegian Government had been central in the negotiations.<sup>164</sup> The corporative tendencies continued into wartime, when Norwegian authorities were operating from exile. Both private shipowners and trade union representatives were given central positions in the management of Nortraship. This has been termed as “inner corporatism” by the Norwegian historian Lars Christian Jenssen.<sup>165</sup> The corporative aspects of Norwegian shipping policy from 1940 to 1945 are not analysed separately in this thesis, but previous research into this has been used as a central background to explain and understand the Norwegian policy. The corporative influence has also impacted on the choice of historical sources in this study.

#### [Historical sources in this study](#)

The research questions alongside the analytical perspectives provided the basis to identify the empirical sources to be explored in this study. In research, there is not necessarily a straight line from the problem to the data collection, analysis and conclusion. In this study, all four stages of the research process have influenced each other throughout the research project. The collection and study of historical sources have partially been a parallel process interacting with the analysis. This can be understood as an exploratory research method, or a kind of a research spiral.

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<sup>163</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 160; Rosendahl, 2017a: 2; Rosendahl, 2017b: 2.

<sup>164</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 59-60.

<sup>165</sup> Jenssen, 2001: 58.

There are a large number of historical sources exposing employers' perspectives of the events and developments in the Norwegian merchant fleet from 1940 to 1945. The archives of Nortraship alone constitute of more than 1,500 metres of shelving, however large parts concern ships more than crews.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, in the choice of what sources to explore, it has been important to identify the key actors more precisely. From Norwegian ministries, offices, agencies and public bodies together, more than 30 different archives have been examined. This illustrates some of the dynamics connected with examining archives, which has mainly been conducted through two strategies: based on the presumed actors involved and by open searches on key words in online archive catalogues.

Different actors have proven to be influential in various issues. Ministries and offices which I expected would be central have, in some cases, proven to be insignificant. Instead some new and unexpected actors have emerged as important and needed to be investigated more thoroughly. Among these are Norwegian consuls in India and China and the British Ministry of Pensions and successors.

It is a privilege and an advantage for a historian in a research project to have access to a large amount of historical sources at hand. One risk, however, is that the researcher in his eagerness to search through most of this material, neglects to check less available sources that can tell a different story or provide a different perspective. This study's use of British Government records has, to a great extent, contributed to new information and a wider understanding on how the seafarers' service was ensured, beyond the Norwegian perspectives. This is also the case for the records of the Norwegian Seamen's Union, the International Transport Workers' Federation and the British National Union of Seamen, that have all brought employee perspectives into this study. This is, however, a truth with some modifications, since the trade union organisations co-operated closely with the Allied governments to ensure the seafarers' service during most of the war.<sup>167</sup> Consequently, it was relevant in several questions to ask if the trade unions represented the employers more than the employees.<sup>168</sup>

Behan C. McCullagh emphasises the possibility that the same phenomenon is described differently in different cultures.<sup>169</sup> Consciousness towards this argument has

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<sup>166</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 8.

<sup>167</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 179-180.

<sup>168</sup> This was also the case in the British merchant fleet, where the National Union of Seamen played a central role in mobilising British seamen (Marsh and Ryan, 1989: 53). According to Tony Lane, the National Union of Seamen was "compliant" towards British authorities (Lane, 1995: 61-86).

<sup>169</sup> McCullagh, 1997: 30.

proven relevant particularly in questions of conflicts between Norwegian authorities and foreign seafarers from Asia. As illuminated in this thesis' articles, the foreign seafarers' voices are more or less absent in the collected archive documents, and this strengthens the importance of being conscious of loaded terms in the documents produced by Norwegian and British authorities.<sup>170</sup> Words like strike, unrest, violence, threats and desertions are terms gathered from the letters and reports written by the employers. The horizons of the employers and the employees were significantly different. Hence, the terms used on the same phenomena were probably different. It is complex to determine when such terms should be problematised, since the counterparts' voices are few. When historical sources to shed light on this are missing, previous research is a possible source of correction.

I adopted an open approach in the question of what kind of historical material to explore in this study. The research questions may indicate an emphasis on correspondence, memos and other relevant documents produced by the key actors, and these kind of sources have also proven to be most important in this study. However, other types of historical material have provided a greater breadth of sources and enabled a deeper understanding of the questions I set out to investigate. One example of such material is the printed announcements from the director of Nortraship and how this publication was used to mobilise seafarers.<sup>171</sup> My review of these printed sources, combined with confirmation from seafarers who could verify that this publication was available to them in the war years, provide a broader basis for drawing conclusions on this communication method's impact capabilities during the war. Other publications have also proven highly relevant and useful as empirical sources. The magazine of the Norwegian Seamen's Union was during the war, used to threaten the "selfish" and "unpatriotic" seamen who did not perform their duty towards Norway.<sup>172</sup> This is significant empirical material not found in ordinary dossiers.

Oral sources have not been used as a main source in this study, since none of the key actors are alive today. The few interviews I have done were carried out for two main reasons. First, as a test to check my assumption that interviews were of limited value as a source in my study. Secondly, to clarify single questions, like whether the printed announcements from the director of Nortraship were easy accessible and read by the seafarers.

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<sup>170</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 2; Rosendahl, 2017b: 9.

<sup>171</sup> *Meddelelser fra Skipsfartsdirektøren*.

<sup>172</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 179.



### Analytical methods: How to identify a policy?

Historical sources seldom provide clear answers by themselves. They need to be both interpreted and analysed. History is a multi-methodological discipline. With a diversity of historical sources, the discipline provides a multitude of methods to choose from, and the methods must always be adapted to the research questions and the sources or the historical material used in the study. My chosen analytical methods are a result of the reflections on the different perspectives explored above. I will reflect here on the possibilities of making verifiable conclusions out of the historical sources in this study. In what way is it possible to identify a Norwegian policy, based on thousands of documents from dozens of Norwegian ministries, offices, agencies and public bodies, not acting as a single actor in all questions?

To detect and uncover patterns and causalities in the Norwegian policy towards the seafarers, an inductive-inspired method has been used, where I basically move from empirical sources to theory. According to Behan C. McCullagh, the use of an inductive method has proved itself as a reliable historical research method, although this method cannot prove that it leads us to the truth about the world.<sup>173</sup> Karl Popper's classic argument that there might always exist a grey swan, even though one only has seen white swans, is not so relevant when I draw my conclusions in this thesis.<sup>174</sup> Instead of general universal conclusions, I search for general patterns and mechanisms that worked within the phenomenon examined. Thereby, if a grey swan appears, it means little if it arrives alone.

In my work with historical sources I have examined the most central Norwegian and British archives which I have found relevant to answer my research questions. Due to capacity reasons in this project, *all* historical materials related to the Norwegian policy could not be examined before conclusions were drawn. I have, for instance, not examined any American archives. Guri Hjeltnes made good use of records from the American War Shipping Administration in her discussion about the crew situation, and my article about the mobilisation of Norwegian could possibly have been complemented with material from the same archives.<sup>175</sup> I would still argue that the article managed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mobilisation of the Norwegian seafarers.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> McCullagh, 1997: 33.

<sup>174</sup> Popper, 2003: 42.

<sup>175</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 159-211.

<sup>176</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d.

With a wide range of sources available, a key question is how many instances are needed to determine a pattern, a policy or a strategy? For example; is one document stating that the Norwegian policy is to avoid official agreements with China enough to claim that this was the Norwegian policy during the war?<sup>177</sup> The possibility of making valid conclusions of such findings will vary from case to case, after thorough source critical treatment of each document and each individual case, and in different contexts. Hence, there is no purpose in setting up a fixed standard for what is needed to make valid conclusions here. In the case of the Norwegian policy of avoiding agreements with China, an important factor to trust the content of the document was that it was written in the context of an internal evaluation on the inside of Nortraship in May 1945.

Deductive hypothesis-driven methods are only rarely used by historians. Due to this thesis' research questions and the limited initial knowledge on this field, a hypothesis-driven method was not concluded as a fruitful option. However, when exploring the historical sources and developing knowledge on these issues, a more deductive form of analysis has gradually taken place, as theories of patterns and causalities have emerged. One of these hypotheses is that there was greater British influence on the Norwegian policy than what has previously been assumed, explicitly by Olav Riste and more indirectly by Guri Hjeltnes.<sup>178</sup> A consequence of this is that I have been seeking more evidence to make more valid conclusions about this observation.

### New perspectives

In this chapter, I have discussed how different analytical perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of my research questions. A central objective with this study is to expand and supplement the national framework of analysis within this field of research. The nation-state is the main framework in this thesis' analysis, but at the same time concrete measures are taken to avoid the negative aspects brought forward by the evaluation report on Norwegian historical research.<sup>179</sup> This is primarily done by bringing in both historical sources and research from other countries, and by including comparative perspectives.

With respect to the historiographic status, I will argue that the findings of my study are not limited to the empirical results. One finding is that the different analytical

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<sup>177</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Note Nortraship MD, 19.5.1945; Rosendahl, 2017b: 10.

<sup>178</sup> Riste, 1973: 26, 37; Hjeltnes, 1995; Hjeltnes, 1997. This is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5, under the section *An Allied question*.

<sup>179</sup> Schwach, Stråth and Norges forskningsråd, 2008.

perspectives discussed in this chapter, provide the possibility of understanding the situation of the merchant seafarers on Norwegian ships in an Allied context. Another result is an ambiguous Norwegian policy towards the seafarers. The background and implications of this policy will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5, where I analyse the outcomes of the research project beyond the published articles.



## 4. Published articles from this study

Article 1: “Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War”

Peer-reviewed and published in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 40 (2), in 2015.

Published here with double pagination and with the layout from *Scandinavian Journal of History*. Cross-references to this article (in the introductory section) are based on the pagination of the journal (p. 159-194).

Reference:

Rosendahl, B. T. (2015d). Patriotism, money and control: Mobilization of Norwegian merchant seamen during the Second World War. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 40 (2), 159-194.



Article 2: “How to secure the participation of a foreign civilian workforce in times of war. Norwegian authorities and the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War”

Peer-reviewed and will be published in the coming anthology *Allied Seafarers in the Second World War* (provisional title) in 2017.

Published here with double pagination (not with the pagination from the anthology). Cross-references to this article (in the introductory section) are based on the pagination of the article from 1-26.

Reference:

Rosendahl, B. T. (2017a). How to secure the participation of a foreign civilian workforce in times of war. Norwegian authorities and the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War. In Rosendahl, B. T. (Ed.), *Allied Seafarers in the Second World War* (provisional title). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.





# How to secure the participation of a foreign civilian workforce in times of war

## *Norwegian authorities and the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War*

Written by Bjørn Tore Rosendahl

### Introduction

During the Second World War, states depended on the allegiance of an actively participating civilian population to ensure the optimal mobilisation of social resources.<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian government in exile depended particularly on the contribution of the seafarers to man the merchant fleet, committed to the Allied side in the years 1940-45. However, an increasing share of the seafarers in this fleet were foreign nationals. How did the Norwegian authorities secure the participation of this *foreign* civilian workforce in times of war?

Norway's merchant fleet was the fourth largest in the world in 1940. When Norway was occupied by Germany on 9 April that year, the fleet was divided in two parts: the so-called "home fleet" in German-controlled areas and the much larger "free fleet" which operated abroad. During its flight from the German occupying forces, the Norwegian government requisitioned the "free fleet" for the duration of the war. This was done by establishing a new organisation, controlled by the government in exile. The official name of the body was *The Norwegian Shipping and Trade Mission*, mostly known by its telegraphic address, *Nortraship*.<sup>2</sup>

The new organisation operated a fleet of approximately one thousand ships. Without a sufficient number of co-operative crew on board these ships, the Allied war effort could be jeopardised. This was a view shared by Norwegian and British authorities.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the economy of the Norwegian government in exile depended heavily on the income from the merchant fleet.<sup>4</sup> Roughly 27,000 men and women worked on ships controlled by Nortraship in 1940. 3,246 of these seafarers were foreign nationals. They constituted about 12 per cent of the entire crew, proportions that increased in the course of war and made the Norwegian fleet even more dependent of foreign seafarers.<sup>5</sup>

This article aims to analyse the Norwegian strategies used to secure the participation of foreign seafarers during the Second World War. Which challenges were faced, what were the

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, Tony 1994. *The Human Economy*: 45.

<sup>2</sup> The requisition was restricted to the usage of the ships for the duration of the war. For a brief introduction written in English of the establishment of Nortraship and its impact to the Norwegian government in exile, see Thowsen, Atle 1994. *The Norwegian Merchant Navy in Allied War Transport*: 67-69. For a more comprehensive description of the history of Nortraship (in Norwegian), see Thowsen. *Nortraship: Profitt og patriotisme*, and Basberg. *Nortraship: Alliert og konkurrent*.

<sup>3</sup> This was for instance illustrated when the Allied Maritime Courts were established in United Kingdom, ref Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 168-170.

<sup>4</sup> Thowsen 1994: 69.

<sup>5</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, *Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943*, 25.1.1944.

driving forces behind Norwegian policy, and which external actors influenced this important issue with the management of the Norwegian merchant fleet?

The subject of this study is the Norwegian authorities in exile, which are viewed here as a single actor. Questions regarding foreign seafarers were mostly co-ordinated administratively by the Maritime Departments of Nortraship in London and New York, the Ministry of Commerce and by Norwegian consuls in some of the most important port cities. These issues were seldom discussed on a political level or caused internal disagreements. Occasionally, there were some internal tensions when Nortraship went beyond its ordinary duties as a shipowner and carried out tasks related to seafarers that normally were within the jurisdiction of the consulates.<sup>6</sup> Such internal tensions were, however, an exception.

The archives created by Nortraship, the Ministry of Commerce and Norwegian consuls, constitute the most important sources in this study. However, the Norwegian policy towards foreign seafarers cannot be fully understood in the light of Norwegian archives alone. Hence, British historical sources have been used to add perspectives and views from central partners and counterparts to the Norwegian authorities. These have, in particular, been gathered from the archives of the Ministry of Shipping/Ministry of War Transport and the Ministry of Pensions. Sources found in the archives of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the British National Union of Seamen have also contributed to a broader understanding of the impact of trade unions.

The foreign seafarers who served on Norwegian ships during the Second World War are defined as one group in this study, but they are too heterogeneous to be viewed as one actor. Norwegian authorities considered foreign seafarers differently from case to case during the war: as one common group, divided into nationalities, or treated individually. The foreign seafarers were also divided into "white" and "coloured" crew, with "Asian" sometimes used instead of "coloured".<sup>7</sup> Ideally, the views and perspectives of the foreign seafarers should be taken into account in this study, when analysing the Norwegian policy towards them. However, most of these seafarers' voices are absent in both Norwegian and British archives. It has not been possible to identify any oral sources or written accounts to compensate for this. This article has to be read with this lack of historical sources in mind. Likewise, it is essential to be conscious of the fact that some of the historical sources carry loaded terms which might not be easy to contextualise when their counterparts' voices are missing. Words like strike, unrest, violence, threats and desertions are gathered from the letters and reports written by employers. Terms used by the employees on the same phenomena may well have been different.

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<sup>6</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da/L0047, Circular from Utenriksdep. 16.12.1943.

<sup>7</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, *Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943*, 25.1.1944.

## Status of research

No comprehensive research has yet been published on the general use of foreign seafarers in merchant shipping during the Second World War. There is however research conducted on Indian and Chinese seafarers on British ships. These studies have provided some of the basis to compare the Norwegian and the British policy in this article. Moreover, this research adds valuable insight into the situation of Indian and Chinese seamen, and to these seamen's approaches in central conflict issues.

The most authoritative source on the history of Chinese and Indian seamen on British ships during the Second World War, is *The Merchant Seamen's War*, written by the British sociologist, Tony Lane. In this primary-source-based analysis, Lane problematises the popular conception of British national unity during the Second World War and includes the 'sons of empire' in this narrative: "The longer the war continued, the more divided Britain became. The same divisions applied on ships crewed by Indians and Chinese."<sup>8</sup> Lane points to strikes and mass desertions as evidence of the conflicts on board the British ships. In the years 1940-1945, the Norwegian merchant fleet also faced challenges connected to strikes and mass desertions from Chinese and Indian seamen. These conflicts happened to a great extent similarly and simultaneously on Norwegian and British ships.

In *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*, Gopalan Balachandran analyses how the war influenced the situation for, and the status of, Indian seafarers on British ships.<sup>9</sup> He provides explanations to the strikes by Indian seamen and contextualises these by concluding that they, "went into the strikes as coolies. They came out then shortly afterwards, as workers."<sup>10</sup> This gives a more complex understanding of the strikes by Indian seamen than Norwegian sources alone can provide. Ceri-Anne Fidler also provides a solid historical background of Indian seamen on British ships and their working conditions in her doctoral thesis, *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*.<sup>11</sup> Both Fidler and Balachandran show that the level of salaries for Chinese and Indian seamen on British ships could not be isolated from each other.<sup>12</sup> Higher salaries to the Chinese legitimised Indian seamen's demands of an increase as well, which they, to a certain extent, were granted.

Yvonne and Charles Foley present the Chinese seafarers' perspectives in their as yet unpublished book *Chinese Seamen from Liverpool*.<sup>13</sup> According to Foley's, Chinese cultural values meant that the relationship between the seaman and his employer should not be purely monetary, and that, "the Chinese mariners believed that their loyalty to their employer should

<sup>8</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 8.

<sup>9</sup> Balachandran, 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*.

<sup>10</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 263.

<sup>11</sup> Fidler, Ceri-Anne 2011. *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*.

<sup>12</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 262; Fidler, Ceri-Anne 2011. *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*: 43.

<sup>13</sup> Yvonne and Charles Foley (Unpublished book manuscript). *Chinese seamen from Liverpool*.

have been met with reciprocal loyalty to them.”<sup>14</sup> Gregor Benton shares the same view on the Chinese seamen’s expectations of their employers in his book, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism. Forgotten histories, 1917-1945*.<sup>15</sup>

Earlier research into trade union history adds transnational narratives to the seafarers’ war. Victor Silverman has conducted research on the trade unions and the seafarers. In *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labour, 1939-1949*, Silverman displays how the different seafarers’ trade unions both co-operated and failed to do so, in the struggle against their common fascist enemy.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Silverman helps to understand why the trade unions during the Second World War only played a minor role in the question of wages and conditions of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships.

Hardly any research has been done on foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War. Guri Hjeltnes briefly touches upon this topic in her two volumes about the Nortraship seafarers, in the comprehensive five-volume work of the Norwegian merchant fleet in the Second World War, published in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> My own research on foreign seafarers includes a separate case study about the Norwegian policy towards Chinese seamen. Relevant conclusions from that case study are drawn into this article’s discussion about the Norwegian policy towards foreign seafarers in general.<sup>18</sup> In the question of casualties and war caused deaths among the foreign seafarers, I will rely on my research results published in the commemorative book I edited on this topic in 2015, *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War*.<sup>19</sup>

### Who the foreign seafarers were, and how it shifted

To understand the Norwegian strategy with regards to the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War, one has to examine who the seafarers were and in what numbers, and how the war influenced this. Foreign seafarers began to serve in the Norwegian merchant fleet in 1854 after new legislation lifted the ban on hiring foreign crew on Norwegian sailing ships. In April 1940, about 12 per cent of the seafarers on Norwegian merchant ships were foreign nationals.<sup>20</sup>

At that time, the Chinese constituted the largest foreign national group on Norwegian ships, numbering approximately one thousand. A number of Norwegian shipping companies had

<sup>14</sup> Yvonne and Charles Foley (Unpublished book manuscript). *Chinese seamen from Liverpool*: 46.

<sup>15</sup> Benton, Gregor 2007. *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*.

<sup>16</sup> Victor Silverman 2000. *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labour, 1939-1949*.

<sup>17</sup> Hjeltnes, Guri 1995. *Sjømann. Lang vakt. Handelsflåten i krig, 1939-1945. Vol. 3*: 145-150. The statistical information referred to here, is taken from one single report made by Nortraship in 1944: RA, *Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, "Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943"*, 25.1.1944.

<sup>18</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore (unpublished article) *Not in the same boat? Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War*.

<sup>19</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War*. This was also published in Norwegian in 2015, with the title: *De var også krigsseilere, omkomne utenlandske sjøfolk på norske skip under andre verdenskrig*.

<sup>20</sup> NOU 1982: 31 1982. *Utenlandske arbeidstakere i den norske handelsflåte*: 11, 37.

established themselves in the East Asian market in the 1920s, with routes to China as well as coastal routes within China.<sup>21</sup> In this trade, it was customary to recruit entirely Chinese crews, under the command of a few Norwegian officers. Communication and the payment of wages was usually conducted through one, two or three so-called 'Headmen', who acted as leaders of their 'China crew'. These Chinese seamen sailed in Asia on different articles of agreements, or employment contracts, than other seafarers. In brief, this implied fewer rights and lower salaries. Until the Second World War, Norwegian shipowners generally regarded Chinese seamen to be good, cheap and loyal crewmembers.<sup>22</sup>

The second largest foreign national group on Norwegian ships during most of the war were seamen from India.<sup>23</sup> Most Indian seamen were Muslims coming from Punjab and Bengal in Northern India, but there were also quite a few Christians from Goa.<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner of organisation to the Chinese crews, the Indian seamen on a ship were normally under the leadership of a *Serang*. This person was also in charge of recruiting seamen, usually in their home villages or regions.<sup>25</sup> Indian seamen on Norwegian ships were employed on the same articles of agreements that were used on British ships for Indian seamen living in India; the so-called *Lascar Agreements* of 1923.<sup>26</sup> Lascar articles set out standards of wages, working conditions and food rations, which were identical regardless of the nationality of the ship.<sup>27</sup> The salaries given to the so-called 'lascars' were generally substantially lower than what the Chinese seamen received.

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<sup>21</sup> Bruusgaard, Kjøsterud & Co. from Drammen and Wallem & Co from Bergen, in particular.

<sup>22</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Memorandum to Capt. Ole Bull from Chr. Blom, 13.1.1942.

<sup>23</sup> In 1943, the Indian seamen were only fewer than the British, who then had become the dominant foreign nationality in the Norwegian fleet.

<sup>24</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 174; Punjab is an area which today is located in both India and Pakistan. Gopalan Balachandran claims that the majority came from today's Pakistan. Ref: Balachandran, G. 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 10.

<sup>25</sup> Fidler, Ceri-Anne 2011. *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*: 2-3, 122.

<sup>26</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L150, Indian seamen file, Agreements for Lascar.

<sup>27</sup> Fidler, Ceri-Anne 2011. *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*: 109.

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**Agreement for Lascars.**  
(Foreign-going Ships.)

Regulated by the Government of India in Council.

**WARNING.**—No coloured or "Chinese" seamen should be allowed to land in the United Kingdom for discharge except in the following cases:—(1) If he produces satisfactory evidence of British nationality; (2) If he has signed on in the United Kingdom for the round voyage; (3) If, though signed on abroad, he can prove that he is domiciled in this country, and has been in the habit of signing on at British ports; (4) If he has signed on at any distant foreign port, or that his repatriation would be almost impracticable; (5) If the owners or Agents guarantee in writing his repatriation as passenger and that a passage has been or is about to be booked for him. In such a case the seamen should be given leave to land on condition that he leaves the United Kingdom within a specified time, and (where possible) by a specified route.

\* Any Breach, Interlocation, or Alteration in this Agreement will be void unless made with the consent of the persons interested, and attested by some Shipping Master, Superintendent of a Mercantile Marine Office, or Consular or Colonial Officer.

An agreement for Foreign-going Ships employing Lascars or other Native Seamen, made pursuant to the Indian Merchant Shipping Act, 1923 (XXI of 1923), between the master of the Ship \_\_\_\_\_ of the Port of \_\_\_\_\_ Tons, and the several persons whose names are set hereto, shipped on board the said ship within the territories under the Government of India.

**AGREEMENT AND ACCOUNT OF CREW.**

Name of Ship.	Official number.	Port of Registry.	Port number and date of Register.	Registered Tonnage.		Nominal Horse Power of Engines (if any).
				Gross.	Net.	
SS Løvstad		Norway		3246	1782	
REGISTERED MANAGING OWNER OR MANAGER.						
Name.	Address. (State No. of House, Street, and Town.)		No. of Seamen for whom accommodation is certified.		FOR PARTICULARS AS TO LOAD-LINE, SEE PAGE 2.	
H. S. Sundt	Oslo, Norway					

The several persons (hereinafter referred to as the said crew) whose names are hereto subscribed, and whose descriptions are contained herein, and of whom the said Ship, or any other vessel to which they may be legally transferred, in the several capacities expressed against their respective names, on a voyage from Oslo to any other ports or places within the limits of 60 degrees North and 60 degrees South Latitude, trading to and fro as the nature of the service or employment may require, for any period not exceeding six months [provided that this period may be extended by a period not exceeding six months by any other further agreement entered into under Section 126(3) of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1924] and finally to be discharged at Oslo within the said six months from the date of this Agreement.

Provided always that—  
(a) save under special agreements voluntarily undertaken, the said crew shall not be employed on any other vessel.

It is further agreed that, in the event of any of the said crew being subscribed sustaining any personal injury (including injury resulting in death) by accident arising out of or in the course of his employment under the agreement when the ship is in British India, the owner of the ship shall pay such amount of compensation as he would have been liable to pay under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, being Act No. VIII of 1923 of the Indian Legislature, as amended from time to time, if the accident had occurred while the

**Articles of agreements for Indian crews:** Indian seamen on Norwegian ships were employed on the same articles of agreements that were used on British ships for Indian seamen living in India - in this case for the crew on the Norwegian ship SS Løvstad in 1943. (RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L150, Indian seamen file, Agreements for Lascar)

The possibility of employing entirely Asian crews was limited geographically to Asia by Norwegian law. Elsewhere, recruitment to the lower positions on board became an increasing problem over the course of the Second World War. Those who were young seafarers of lower rank in 1940 had advanced to better jobs on board the ships, and it was difficult to replace them. The usual way to supply the ships with young ratings in times of peace was to recruit boys who had just finished primary school, but this became almost impossible when the Norwegian merchant fleet was organised from exile, with hardly any replacements from occupied Norway. Hence, the lack of young ratings became more and more evident as the war went on. The solution was to increase the recruitment of foreign seafarers from nations with little or no earlier history of service on Norwegian ships, but first and foremost from the United Kingdom. By 1943, British seamen had become the majority among foreign nationals in the Norwegian merchant fleet. They were 2695 in total, constituting 57.6 per cent of all the foreign seafarers.<sup>28</sup>

The total numbers of seafarers on Norwegian ships had, due to all the losses from 1940 to 1943 in the war, been reduced by 32 per cent. Still, as illustrated in the diagram below, the number of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian fleet increased in the same period both in relative and absolute terms. According to Nortraship statistics, they were 4,675 in total in

<sup>28</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, "Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943", 25.1.1944.

1943, constituting 25 per cent of the fleet's manpower.<sup>29</sup> There is no accessible information on the number of foreigners on Norwegian merchant ships when the war ended in 1945. The first official post-war figures are from January 1946, and are similar to the pre-war situation, with 10.4 per cent foreigners out of 18,000 seafarers in total. This indicates that the extensive use of foreign seafarers only was a temporary change, limited to the times of war. However, it is worth noticing that the relative increase of foreign seafarers in the period 1940-1945 becomes considerably higher if ships staffed by subordinated crews from Asia are excluded from the statistics.<sup>30</sup> During the war, the Asian seamen ceased to represent the majority amongst the foreign crew in the Norwegian merchant fleet. Asian seamen became fewer on Norwegian ships, both relatively and in absolute numbers. This development was primarily a result of the smaller number of Norwegian ships trading in Asia and to a deliberate policy to stop hiring Chinese and Indian seamen.

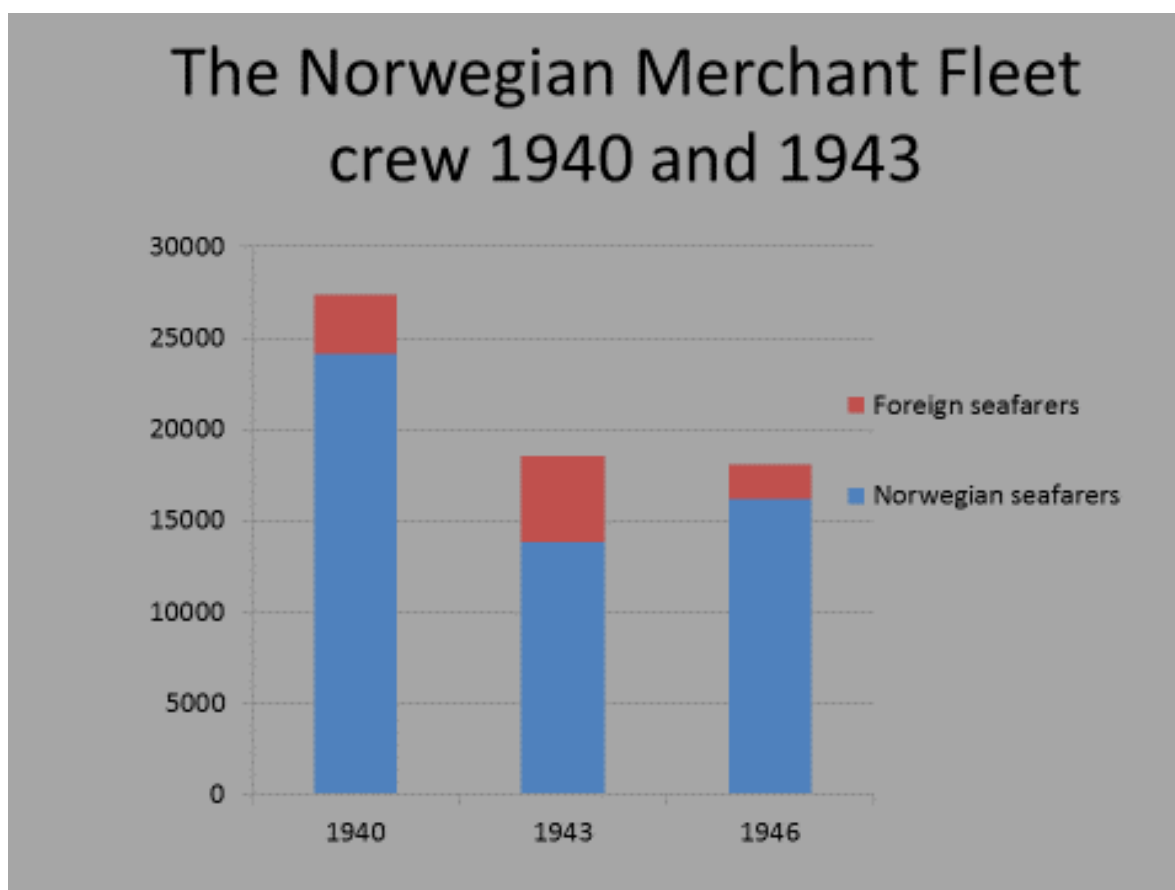


DIAGRAM: The Norwegian Merchant Fleet crew 1940, 1943 and 1946

Seamen from China and India were at the centre of attention in the Norwegian efforts to mobilise foreign seafarers during most of the war. Conditions and measures suitable to secure

<sup>29</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, "Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943", 25.1.1944.; During the war, about 140 of the foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet were women, ref. Lønnå, E. 2010. *Sjøens kvinner: ute og hjemme*. Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press.

<sup>30</sup> *Norske skip i utenriksfart 1946-1948. Norges offisielle statistikk XI. 73.*

the service of these seafarers in times of peace turned out to be inadequate during war. New problems demanded new solutions. Which measures were taken by the Norwegian authorities operating from exile, to secure the participation of foreign seafarers?

### Identification and participation

To the Norwegian authorities, the liberation of Norway was the motivating factor considered most important to be maintained among the Norwegian seafarers throughout the war.<sup>31</sup> Chinese and Indian seamen on Norwegian ships probably did not identify so very strongly with the liberation of Norway, or with the European war as such. Tony Lane concludes that it was very unlikely that Indian seamen on British ships felt any allegiance to the British cause either.<sup>32</sup> China's war with Japan started formally in 1937, and when Pearl Harbor was attacked 7 December 1941, China officially joined the Allies. Nonetheless, Gregor Benton claims that, "few Chinese sailors could identify with the European war."<sup>33</sup>

However, this article analyses how Norwegian authorities tried to secure the participation of foreign seafarers and not the inner motives of these seamen. There are no indications of Norwegian authorities appealing to the war effort when mobilising foreign seafarers. They were most likely recruited to do a job with few references to the war.

Arguments and considerations connected to the common war effort were, however, drawn into the interallied communication between consuls and other official representatives of the foreign seafarers' nations.<sup>34</sup> These were arguments that could be used by both the country of the shipowner and the seafarers – and it was brought in regularly. The United Kingdom in particular referred to the war effort when promoting co-operation and co-ordination.<sup>35</sup> Lord Leathers, the British Minister of War Transport, stated the following at the first meeting of Allied Ministers on Shipping Man-power in early 1942: "Joint Allied action means that each Ally will be able to say that its man-power policy is an Allied policy – a joint policy for winning the war."<sup>36</sup>

It is in this light one should see the dramatic increase of recruitment of seafarers from the United Kingdom and Canada to Norwegian ships during the war. This mobilisation took place

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<sup>31</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*.

<sup>32</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 184.

<sup>33</sup> Benton, Gregor 2007. *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*: 60.

<sup>34</sup> One example is a Chinese consul insisting on fair treatment of Chinese seamen by referring to the war effort as one of the arguments. Ref: RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L150, Letter from Chinese consul in Calcutta to Norwegian consul in Calcutta, 2.7.1942.

<sup>35</sup> Some examples: NA, LCO 2/1406, Description: Powers and jurisdiction of Allied Governments over their nationals in Great Britain: proposal to set up Norwegian courts, Allied Powers (Maritime Courts) Bill, 1941; NA, PIN 15/3231. Description: Casualties: Norwegian ships on time charter and Norwegian seamen on British ships. Date: 1940-1953 (Several documents from 1942); NA, MT 9/3629, Compensation: Discussions with Allied Governments and United Kingdom Government departments about the treatment as regards compensation, insurance etc. of British Seamen serving on Allied ships on time charter to the Ministry of War Transport. Note, 30.7.1942; MRC, ITF, 159/3/D/10 Correspondence of British Secretariat, Notes on meeting held 13.5.1942.

<sup>36</sup> NA, MT 9/3555, Inter-Allied Committee of Ministers on Shipping Manpower. Notes for First Conference with Allied Ministers, Notes for the Minister's speech (Lord Leathers).



in close co-operation with those Allied nations. About 6,000 British seamen served on non-British merchant ships in 1943, mostly in the Norwegian and Dutch fleet.<sup>37</sup> The British government had no power to compel their seamen to serve on Norwegian ships. Seamen could only be asked to volunteer.<sup>38</sup> It is unknown whether the British or Canadian authorities referred to the common Allied cause, when their seafarers were asked to volunteer on other Allied nation's ships. This is an interesting question, but outside the scope of this project.

The Norwegian merchant fleet also depended on the use of seafarers from neutral countries, especially from Sweden.<sup>39</sup> A Swedish seaman serving on a Norwegian ship was interviewed in the Nortraship sponsored book from 1943, *Tusen norske skip (A Thousand Norwegian Ships)*, edited by Lise Lindbæk.<sup>40</sup> The main narrative here is that this Swedish seaman is by no means neutral. This tells us primarily how Norwegian authorities wanted the foreign seafarers to appear and to be understood, more than what they really were driven by. Regarding Swedish seafarers, it is worth noting that they – coming from a neutral country – were accepted to the Royal Norwegian Navy's gunner department for the merchant fleet, where seafarers were trained to be gunners. Few if any of the seafarers who deserted were gunners – they appear to represent a group of highly motivated seafarers.<sup>41</sup> The military tasks and status of being a gunner implied more than just doing a job. Seafarers enlisting to this kind of service made a deliberate and explicit decision to fight in the war.

In contrast to the Swedish seafarers who were trusted to be gunners, after 1941 Finnish seafarers were no longer trusted to be signed on Norwegian ships at all. Their country's participation in the German invasion of the Soviet Union led to the conclusion that Finnish seafarers were a security risk. Still, the risks involved were not considered overly serious, as Finnish seafarers already serving on Norwegian ships were given permission to continue their work.<sup>42</sup>

Due to the fact that the majority of the foreign seafarers did not have the retrieval of a free home country as a potential motivational factor, one would possibly expect that a higher rate of desertions would appear among the foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships than among the Norwegian seafarers. By assembling the reports of desertions from Norwegian ships in United States ports in the period of 1943 to 1945, I can document that the percentage of foreign deserters corresponds more or less with their total number in the Norwegian fleet. This is illustrated in the diagram below. The percentage of foreigners among the deserters in these

<sup>37</sup> RA, Nortraship NY MD (S-2131) Da/L025, P.M. Kaptein Ole Bull, 15.6.1943.

<sup>38</sup> NA, MT 9/3629, Compensation, Notes meeting Inter-Allied Sub-Committee, 5.5.1942; RA, Handelsdep. In London (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter MOWT to Handelsdep., 10.5.1943.

<sup>39</sup> In 1940, there were 135 Swedes on Norwegian ships – in 1943, the number was 112. Totally, 71 Swedish seamen were killed in war caused shipwrecks in the "free Norwegian fleet", 1940-1945. Ref: RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, "Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943", 25.1.1944; Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War.*

<sup>40</sup> Lindbæk, Lise 1943. *Tusen norske skip, en antologi over norske sjøfolks innsats i den annen verdenskrig.* An English version of this book was published in 1968, with the title *Norway's New Saga of the Sea.*

<sup>41</sup> AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, B. 7, Ingvald Haugens saker, "Komite til behandling av Nortraships forslag av 22. sep. 1942 om utvidelse av skytterordningen".

<sup>42</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L0119, Letter from Forsyningsdep to Utenriksdep, 15.12.1941.

two years varied between 15 and 30 per cent, and as earlier noted; in 1943 foreign seafarers constituted 25 per cent of the total crew on Norwegian ships. Nortraship's own explanation of the desertions among Norwegians and foreigners on their ships was that it was the same motivation working in both groups – higher wages elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> This interpretation was characteristic of the Norwegian approach to mobilise foreign seafarers.

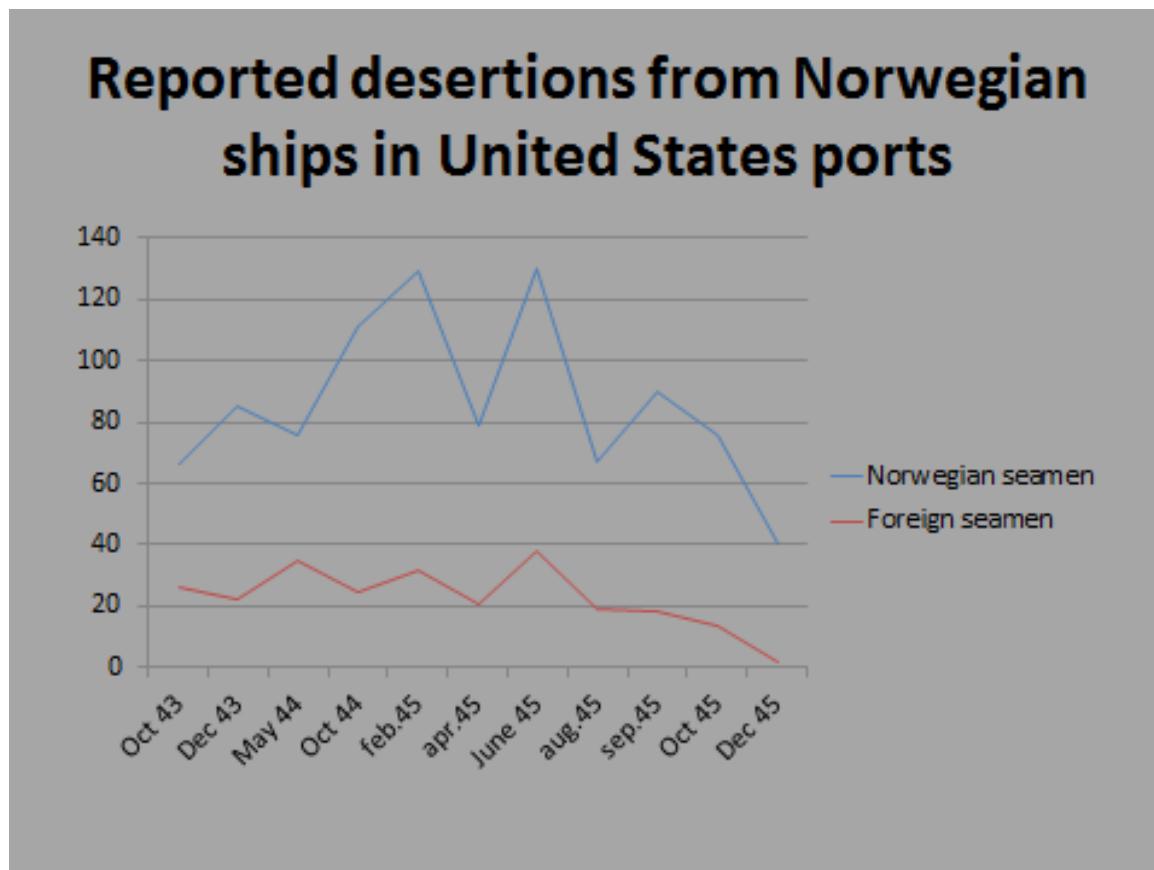


DIAGRAM: Desertions from Norwegian ships in United States ports<sup>44</sup>

### The Norwegian wage policy

What role did the level of wages, bonuses and other payments play to secure the service of the foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships? The best paid seafarers among the European Allies were those employed through ordinary contracts in the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>45</sup> Behind this Norwegian wage policy was the idea that the level of payment should be a signal of how the society valued the Norwegian seafarers and a hope that this would give motivation for further effort.<sup>46</sup> Providing high wages was an explicit and deliberate tool for motivation

<sup>43</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Nortraship NY, 13.4.1943.

<sup>44</sup> Based on figures found in documents in: RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L026.

<sup>45</sup> Olstad, Finn 2006. *Vår skjebne i vår hånd: Norsk Sjømannsforbunds historie. Bind 1: 296-297.*

<sup>46</sup> Jenssen, Lars 1992. *Lønn for strevet: Tarifforhandlinger og hyrer under den sosialdemokratiske orden i Nortraship-flåten.*

during the war.<sup>47</sup> Was this policy limited to the Norwegian seafarers, or was money also used deliberately to motivate the foreign seafarers?

The available historical sources give no evidence of a comprehensive wage policy towards the foreign so-called “white crew” on Norwegian ships. The level of wages and bonuses paid to these seafarers normally followed the same relatively high level of their Norwegian colleagues. According to the Danish historian Christian Tortzen, seafarers on Norwegian ships sailed first class compared to crews on Danish ships, who received British wages, which were considerably lower.<sup>48</sup> The relatively high payments made it attractive for seafarers from other Allied countries like the Netherlands to serve on Norwegian ships.<sup>49</sup> This was probably an unintended consequence of the wage policy towards the Norwegian seafarers.

Subsequently, issues related to the terms and conditions of foreign seafarers from Western countries causing conflict were unrelated to salaries and bonuses. It was rather about access to certain rights, like pensions, compensation in case of shipwreck, repatriation, detention allowances etc. These issues will be dealt with later in this article.

Chinese and Indian seamen were normally hired on different articles of agreement than the other seafarers on Norwegian and other Allied ships which, in brief, implied fewer rights and lower salaries. The level of salaries and war bonuses became major cause for conflict between these seamen and the major Allied seafaring nations, and threatened the participation of these seafarers.

During the early months of the Second World War in 1939, the British merchant fleet experienced an extraordinary wave of strikes by Indian seamen and subsequent strikes and mass desertions by Chinese seamen. From the shipowners’ perspective, this was outrageous and created a great deal of problems.<sup>50</sup> From the seafarers’ perspective, the strikes showed that they could no longer “be brushed aside”.<sup>51</sup> British authorities responded by putting hundreds of Indian seamen in jail. The British answer also included ‘pull measures’, like appointments of welfare officers and, most importantly; increased wages.<sup>52</sup>

In a House of Commons debate on 14 November 1939, Emanuel Shinwell from Labour drew this conclusion after strikes and desertions struck the British merchant fleet:

Shipowners on the other side of the House, and shipowners outside the House, have in the past availed themselves of cheap Lascar and Chinese labour. We have warned them on this matter, and now, in time of war, in time of national emergency and crisis, we can no longer rely on these seamen.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 175.

<sup>48</sup> Tortzen, Christian 1981-1985. *Søfolk og skibe 1939-1945: Den danske handelsflådes historie under anden verdenskrig, Vol 2*, 192.

<sup>49</sup> Klooster, Saskia (2015). *Who were the Dutch seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet?*: 69.

<sup>50</sup> Lane, Tony 1990 *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 156.

<sup>51</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 194.

<sup>52</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 194.

<sup>53</sup> House of Commons debates, 14.11.1939 ([www.theyworkforyou.com/debates](http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates)) Access date: 3.3.2017

Shinwell questioned the loyalty of seamen from China and India from the position of a Labour MP and as an earlier trade union activist organising British seamen. Some years later, Norwegian authorities with a shipowner's perspective reasoned similarly, after strikes and desertions developed on Norwegian ships.<sup>54</sup>

Instead of proactively improving the Asian seamen's conditions as a positive means to motivate them to continue their service, the Norwegian authorities reluctantly accepted to increase their pay after protests arose in the course of the war. The level of war risk bonuses turned out to be the most important conflict issue. It was not automatically given or increased in step with the rising risks of war, which was dramatically accentuated by major events and changes in the different theatres of war. In May 1940, there were already reports of Chinese seafarers' families being worried about the war risks and asking for compensation for the lack of war bonuses on Norwegian ships.<sup>55</sup> From 1942, Chinese protests, strikes and desertions became a major problem, according to Norwegian authorities.<sup>56</sup> The same kinds of opposition from Chinese seamen appeared simultaneously on ships from other Allied countries, especially the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> The background of the escalation was Japan's attack on the American naval base Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. As a consequence, Norwegian and other Allied ships were suddenly considered enemy vessels by Japan, and it became substantially more dangerous to sail in Asian waters. The death tolls on Norwegian ships documents the increased risk. During the Second World War, 252 Chinese seamen were killed in 23 war-related shipwrecks of Norwegian ships. Of these, only two incidents occurred before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Moreover, all 86 Indian casualties on Norwegian ships during the war, happened after 7 December 1941.<sup>58</sup> Japan joining the Axis powers also meant that Chinese seamen on Allied ships lost the possibilities of returning home to China. This grew to be a huge stress factor for numerous Chinese seamen who were mostly stuck in India, unable to return to their families.

Norwegian authorities did not pursue an independent wage policy towards their Asian crew. Their policy was co-ordinated between the European Allies, under the leadership of the United Kingdom. This Allied co-operation had an overall goal: to increase the salaries as little as possible.<sup>59</sup> In 1942 however, the British and the other Allies had to give in to the Chinese demands of improved wages and conditions.

It is noteworthy to see how the Norwegian authorities accepted these improved terms. The Norwegian strategy during the war was to avoid any official agreements with the Chinese government at all costs. Individual agreements with those who protested were preferred.<sup>60</sup> When the United Kingdom made an official agreement with China in April 1942, which

<sup>54</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Db/L104, *Rapport over mannskapssituasjonen, Ole Bull 8.5.1945.*

<sup>55</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Shanghai, Kina (S-2611) Db/L0295, Letter from Generalkonsulatet i Shanghai, 02.05.1940.

<sup>56</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L072, Letter from Nortraship to MOW, 16.3.1942.

<sup>57</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 167.

<sup>58</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War*: 21.

<sup>59</sup> NA, PIN 15/3231, Minutes of Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power, 9.6.1942.

<sup>60</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fc L0203, Letter from Klavenes & Co to Nortraship, 5.2.1941.

regulated both working conditions and wages, Norwegian authorities rejected starting negotiations that could lead to a similar agreement. The same conditions granted by the British were instead implemented for Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. The reasoning behind this strategy was to end the protests of the Chinese seamen, but at the same time avoid binding agreements that could prove costly in the future. At an Allied meeting in June 1942, the Norwegian government officially guaranteed that Norway would not grant Chinese seamen higher wages those paid by the British.<sup>61</sup> The Netherlands had earlier this year defied the United Kingdom and conceded higher war risk money to their Chinese crew.<sup>62</sup> The Norwegian statement of not paying higher wages to Chinese seamen than the British, stood in contrast to the wage policy towards Norwegian seafarers, which were less frequently submitted to Allied co-ordination and control.<sup>63</sup>

From the perspectives of the Norwegian shipowners operating under the management of Nortraship, their Chinese seamen went from being seen as good and loyal seafaring crewmembers with low wages, to be judged as expensive (meaning “with European wages”) and associated with trouble and unrest.<sup>64</sup> A direct consequence was a deliberate goal from the Norwegian authorities to minimise the hiring of Chinese seamen, in favour of seafarers from other countries. This was, however, difficult to implement completely.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese seamen were initially better paid than Indian seamen, and British officials became concerned with this pay gap during the war.<sup>66</sup> According to Balachandran, increased Chinese wages and war bonuses resulted in strikes among Indian seafarers on British ships.<sup>67</sup> There are indications of a similar mechanism working on Norwegian ships.<sup>68</sup> Norwegian historical sources show no bilateral relations between Norwegian and Indian governmental officials on this matter. It is reasonable to believe that not only the problems, but also the solutions, were closely connected to the handling of the same issues in the British merchant fleet.

The history of Indian seamen on Norwegian ships is quite similar to the history of Chinese seamen. Strikes and protests contributed to Nortraship’s decision to minimise the hiring of this nationality group as well. When the war was over, it was reported that there were no Indian seamen serving on Norwegian ships organised from Nortraship in New York, and Chinese seamen were limited to work as catering staff.<sup>69</sup> However, the phasing out of Asian

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<sup>61</sup> NA, PIN 15/3231, Minutes of Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power, 9.6.1942.

<sup>62</sup> Yvonne and Charles Foley (Unpublished book manuscript). *Chinese seamen from Liverpool*: 39.

<sup>63</sup> Jenssen, Lars 1992. *Lønn for strevet: Tarifforhandling og hyrer under den sosialdemokratiske orden i Nortraship-flåten*.

<sup>64</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, *Memorandum to Capt. Ole Bull from Chr. Blom*, 13.1.1942.

<sup>65</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Db/L104, *Rapport over mannskapssituasjonen*, Ole Bull 8.5.1945.

<sup>66</sup> Fidler, Ceri-Anne 2011. *Lascars, c.1850 - 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India*: 43.

<sup>67</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 262.

<sup>68</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Db/L104, *Rapport over mannskapssituasjonen*, Ole Bull 8.5.1945.

<sup>69</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Db/L104, *Rapport over mannskapssituasjonen*, Ole Bull 8.5.1945.

crew in the Norwegian merchant fleet, was only temporary. By the early 1950s, both Chinese and Indian seamen served on Norwegian ships in considerable numbers.<sup>70</sup>

### Welfare and pool systems

There were further potential “pull measures” than just money. To motivate Norwegian seafarers, welfare measures like healthcare, recreation houses and libraries were used instrumentally.<sup>71</sup> This was also the case when a pool system for Norwegian seafarers was established in 1943. A pool system secured a daily income for seafarers while waiting to be hired on a ship. This was supposed to motivate Norwegian seafarers to stay on Norwegian ships, but it was also seen as a natural consequence of a stronger enforcement of the conscription rules, which did not include foreign nationals.<sup>72</sup>

Norwegian authorities made few if any efforts to improve the welfare of their foreign seafarers. They did not appoint welfare officers to this group, as the British did towards the Indian seamen. Nor was a pool system established for any of the groups of foreign nationals.<sup>73</sup> In 1943, the Chinese consul in Calcutta suggested that a separate Norwegian pool was established for Chinese seamen. The consul pointed at the British, who organised separate Chinese seamen’s pools.<sup>74</sup> He did not refer to a country more similar to Norway; the Netherlands, which had their own pool for Chinese seamen, too.<sup>75</sup>

Norwegian authorities did not emphasise pools and welfare as mobilisation tools to their Indian and Chinese seamen, mainly because they could afford to refrain. The Norwegian merchant fleet had become less dependent on the service of seamen from India and China in the first two to three years of the war, as they gradually had been replaced by seafarers from other countries. It was both possible and seen as less trouble to provide manpower elsewhere. In the course of the war, the Norwegian fleet instead became heavily dependent on the service of British seamen. They did not require any Norwegian pools or welfare measures, because this was already supplied by their home country.

### The role of the United Kingdom

As a result of the Essential Work Order from May 1941, British seamen were conscripted to the Merchant Navy Reserve Pool.<sup>76</sup> The fact that the Norwegian merchant fleet was given the

<sup>70</sup> In 1950 1099 “Lascars” were reported serving on Norwegian ships, ref: RA, Direktoratet for sjømenn (S-3545) Da/L85, Statistikk utenlandske 1951-1952. 2141 Chinese seamen signed on or off an Norw ship at the Norw consulate in Hong Kong in 1953, ref: RA, Direktoratet for sjømenn (S-3545) Da/L85, Brev fra Det norske konsulatet i Hong Kong til 3. Sjømannskontor, 05.04.1954.

<sup>71</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 18-20.

<sup>72</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 175-176.

<sup>73</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Skipsfartsdep 17.4.1945.

<sup>74</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L090, Letter Chinese Consul General Calcutta to Nortraship Calcutta, 22.6.1943.

<sup>75</sup> RA, Nortraship NY MD (S-2131) Da/L025, Pro-memo Norwegian Consulate NY, 10.6.1944.

<sup>76</sup> NA, MT 9/3555, Inter-Allied Committee of Ministers on Shipping Manpower. Notes for First Conference with Allied Ministers, Notes for the Minister’s speech (Lord Leathers).

possibility to recruit seafarers directly from these manning pools illustrates the close Allied co-operation on shipping manpower during the Second World War. However, the British government set as a condition that the manning pool approved each seaman that was recruited on an Allied ship. Moreover, the approvals would be given for “one voyage only at a time”.<sup>77</sup> The Norwegian merchant fleet used this source of manpower extensively during the war, which resulted in British seamen in 1943 representing 57.6 per cent of all the foreign nationals on Norwegian ships.<sup>78</sup> This development made Norwegian authorities even more dependent on their closest ally.

About one thousand of the British manpower on Norwegian ships were serving as gunners in 1943, operating the armaments that were installed on Norwegian ships from the summer of 1940 and onwards. The machineguns and canons needed skilled personnel, and it was not until June 1941 that the Norwegian government in exile was able to educate their own gunners.<sup>79</sup> The demands of war also entailed the need for more telegraph operators in the Norwegian merchant fleet, and this was solved by the help of the United Kingdom, too. As many as 366 telegraph operators on Norwegian ships were British in 1943.<sup>80</sup>

The lack of young ratings in the Norwegian merchant fleet became more and more evident as the war progressed. In 1943, there was only one Norwegian working as a deck boy on a Norwegian ship. The number of nearly 700 British ‘boys’ on Norwegian ships the same year, underlines the dependency on support and goodwill from the United Kingdom.<sup>81</sup> Among the 323 British seamen who were killed in service on Norwegian ships, at least 66 were ‘boys’ under 18 years of age.<sup>82</sup> The high number of young British boys serving in the Norwegian merchant fleet was a deliberate “desire” from the British side.<sup>83</sup> Nortraship complained that these boys stayed on Norwegian ships for too short a time and accused the United Kingdom of using Norway to train their youth to become seafarers: “Hence, we have only had them as apprentices for later use in the English merchant fleet.”<sup>84</sup>

The Norwegian dependency on British seamen and the British government strongly influenced the Norwegian policy towards British seamen. This was illustrated in the discussion of granting pensions to dependents of deceased British and Canadian seafarers on Norwegian ships not sailing on British charter. Even if they were not entitled to such pension rights *legally*, the Norwegian authorities decided to give in for *political* reasons and with the

<sup>77</sup> NA, FO 371/32720, Inter-Allied Sub-Committee on Shipping Manpower, 1942. Note of meeting of Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Manpower, 31.3.1942.

<sup>78</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, *Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943*, 25.1.1944.

<sup>79</sup> Sjøforsvarets skytteravdeling for handelsflåten, in English: The Royal Norwegian Navy's gunner department for the merchant fleet.

<sup>80</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, *Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943*, 25.1.1944.

<sup>81</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, *Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943*, 25.1.1944.

<sup>82</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War*: 32; www.krigsseilerregisteret.no

<sup>83</sup> RA, Handelsdep. (S-3567) Da/L0011, *British seamen on Norwegian ships* (undated).

<sup>84</sup> Original quote: “Vi har altså kun hatt dem som lærlinger for senere bruk i den engelske handelsflåten.” Ref: RA, Handelsdep (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship to Handelsdep, 5.12.1942.

purpose to receive British goodwill.<sup>85</sup> This only concerned a small number of seafarers and was not a costly concession.

Norwegian authorities did not succumb easily when more expensive insurance liabilities were at stake. The British War Risk Insurance Office (WRIO) had taken over the insurance responsibility of Norwegian ships and crews after the German occupation of Norway. The office refused originally to accept to cover the responsibility for pensions and injuries to seafarers from nations not covered in the War Risk Insurance agreement of 1940 – with the exception of British seamen. In the heated discussions that followed, Norwegian authorities threatened to replace foreign seafarers with Norwegians covered by the War Risk Insurance. The withdrawal of approximately one thousand Norwegians in the British Navy was presented as one possibility.<sup>86</sup> Even if this was probably not a credible threat, a sort of compromise was found in late 1942, when seafarers from British dominions were included in the Norwegian war insurance agreement with WRIO.<sup>87</sup>

However, the disagreements between the Norwegian authorities on the one side and the Canadian and the British governments on the other continued on several issues concerning Canadian and British seafarers' rights on Norwegian ships. The British government pressed hard against the Norwegian government to secure that British seamen on Norwegian ships were not given lower compensation and poorer conditions than they would have received serving on British ships.<sup>88</sup> One of these rights was detention allowances for seafarers captured and imprisoned by the enemy. Norwegian authorities succumbed and granted this right to British seamen on Norwegian ships. The logic behind the decision was this:

Since our fleet cannot work without English seamen, we have to give in to the English terms. It would not be fair to pay detention allowances only to the Englishmen. It should be made applicable to all crews on Norwegian vessels (black and Chinese seamen possibly excepted).<sup>89</sup>

The Norwegians gave in to the British terms. But the argument of fairness “to all crews on Norwegian vessels” did not follow. Detention allowances were only given to seafarers from countries having bilateral agreements with Norway. Seafarers from other countries were instead given the right to achieve a kind of gratia payment. Norwegian seafarers in the Norwegian fleet were naturally granted the rights of receiving detention allowances.<sup>90</sup> This is one of very few examples where external pressure to improve the conditions of foreign seafarers led to better conditions for Norwegian seafarers.

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<sup>85</sup> RA, Handelsdep. (S-3567) Da/L006, Letter Nortraship to Skipsfartsdep, 11.12.1943.

<sup>86</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. Nortraship, 1.3.1943.

<sup>87</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. *Erstatning for kanadiske sjøfolk på norske skip*, 28.10.1943.

<sup>88</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. *Erstatning for kanadiske sjøfolk på norske skip*, 28.10.1943.

<sup>89</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, *Note, Handelsdep*, 7.12.1942. Original quote: “*Da vår flåte ikke kan drives uten engelske sjøfolk er vi nødt til å akseptere engelskmennenes betingelser. Det vil ikke være rettferdig å ha en ordning med betaling i fangenskap gjeldende bare for engelskmenn. Den bør gjøres gjeldende for alle mannskaper på norske skip (svarte og kinesere muligens undtatt).*”

<sup>90</sup> Detention allowances were October 29 1943 officially granted by the Norwegian Government in exile. More details about the implementation of detention allowances is found here: Hjeltnes, 1997: 484-488.



However, there was another case that followed the same pattern. It is an example that says a lot about the contemporary mentality towards seafarers, and was related to their rights to receive sick pay. The Norwegian rules included a clause stating that the seafarer lost his right to sick pay when the sickness or injury was caused deliberately “due to his own wilful act or fault, or to his own misbehaviour”.<sup>91</sup> In those cases it was the seafarer's country of origin, and not the ship owner, that was obliged to pay the expenses of medical treatment. The interpretation and practise of this clause in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the first years of the war was that venereal diseases were regarded as self-inflicted. Consequently, seafarers unable to go to sea because of such diseases would not receive sick pay from Nortraship, the shipowner and employer. The economic responsibilities for the foreign seafarers suffering from venereal diseases was consequently handed over to the seafarers' home countries.<sup>92</sup> In 1942, between 33 per cent and 43 per cent of Norwegian seafarers on sick leave were under treatment for syphilis, so this assumedly concerned quite a few seafarers and involved substantial costs.<sup>93</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the Home Office withdrew the opportunity for Allied seafarers with venereal diseases to apply for jobs onshore in 1942, after concluding that seafarers were deliberately getting sick to avoid duty at sea.<sup>94</sup> However, when the British authorities discovered that their own seafarers were denied the right to sick pay due to similar suspicions, a stern complaint was sent to Norwegian authorities. In order to resolve this issue, in 1944 a condition was set such that Nortraship was to continue recruiting from the British manning pools.<sup>95</sup> Among the national actors in and around the Norwegian merchant fleet, both the trade unions and different medical personnel had been arguing to change the definition of “a wilful act” in the sick pay rules.<sup>96</sup> However, it was the British that had the power to achieve this change.

### Negotiations with states

As shown above, the British state both secured and threatened the vital services of the large group of British seafarers on Norwegian ships. This was not the only foreign government Norwegian authorities encountered in its efforts to secure the participation of foreign seafarers. The Second World War made states, instead of trade unions, into partners and counterparties of the Norwegian authorities. One factor contributing to this development, was that agreements made on interstate level in peacetime turned out to be insufficient when the realities of war became apparent. New deals had to be made with new actors on the stage. This politicised the use and the conditions of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet.

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<sup>91</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L023, Letter Nortraship NY to Generalkonsulat NY, 5.5.1944.

<sup>92</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L084, Letter to MOWT from Nortraship, 4.8.1943.

<sup>93</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, Memorandum: “*Sykeligheten blant norske sjøfolk i New York*”, Det norske helsekontor New York, 2.1.1943.

<sup>94</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L085, Registreringskontoret i London (R.I.L.) Rapport for 1942.

<sup>95</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L023, Letter Nortraship NY to General consulate NY, 5.5.1944.

<sup>96</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L023, Letter Nortraship NY to General consulate NY, 5.5.1944.

In the interwar years, Norwegian shipowners developed a good relationship with the Chinese Seamen's Union. This co-operation secured a stable and inexpensive Chinese workforce on Norwegian ships.<sup>97</sup> In the times of war however, the Chinese State, through its embassies and consulates, acted as their seamen's trade union. This was also a result of the seamen's own response to conflicts on board ships on the subject of salaries or other working conditions. In these cases, the Chinese seamen to a large extent complained to the nearest Chinese consulate.<sup>98</sup> The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) advised Chinese officials on how to negotiate terms and conditions for Chinese seamen.<sup>99</sup> When it came to the level of salaries, the Chinese state achieved significantly better results during the war than the trade union did in peacetime. With the Chinese government as a counterpart it was probably harder to explain why "white" seafarers received better conditions and higher wages than Chinese seamen. Still, there were limits to the bargaining power of the Chinese government. The Norwegian authorities succeeded in their strategy to avoid an official agreement between the two countries, despite Chinese suggestions of this.<sup>100</sup>

The Norwegian strategy of making agreements on an individual level rather than on a general basis, was more challenging when Nortraship approached Canada to recruit "white" seafarers.<sup>101</sup> The Canadian government saw this as a great opportunity to train their own youth to become seafarers, and at the same time give valuable support to the Allied war effort.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the Canadians set clear conditions before they would let their youngsters be hired on Norwegian ships; their legal rights and status needed to be clarified.

These issues became complicated for the Norwegian authorities to handle, because of Canada's status as a British Dominion. It was unclear to the Norwegians whether or not the British government was negotiating on behalf of the Canadian government. Furthermore, it was not clear was if Canadian seafarers were automatically covered by the same set of rules as British seamen on Norwegian ships, regarding War Risk Insurance.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to free repatriation when Canadian seafarers signed off a ship, the Canadian government demanded the same level of compensation as the Norwegians for Canadian crewmembers when a vessel was lost through enemy action.<sup>104</sup> Principally, Canadian seafarers on Norwegian ships did not have these rights to compensation. Only seafarers from Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark did, because Norway had made separate and mutual agreements with those countries during the interwar years.<sup>105</sup> These functioned as additional agreements to the ILO convention of 1920 on seafarers' rights in the case of

<sup>97</sup> RA, Handelsdep. i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship to Forsyningsdep., 6.8.1942.

<sup>98</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Memorandum to Capt. Ole Bull from Chr. Blom, 13.1.1942.

<sup>99</sup> Benton, Gregor 2007. *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*: 57, 62.

<sup>100</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship MD to Nortraship NY, 31.8.1942.

<sup>101</sup> RA, Nortraship NY MD (S-2131) Da/L025, Note from Nortraship, 14.8.1943.

<sup>102</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter Canadian Department of transport to Nortraship, Montreal, 7.5.1943.

<sup>103</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. "Erstatning for kanadiske sjøfolk på norske skip", 28.10.1943.

<sup>104</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. "Erstatning for kanadiske sjøfolk på norske skip", 28.10.1943.

<sup>105</sup> RA, Handelsdep. in London (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship, "Forlisoppgjør gjeldende fra 1.12.1942".

shipwrecks.<sup>106</sup> However, this set of agreements was not adaptable to the situations that arose during the war with changing nationalities on-board ships. New deals and agreements had to be made in the wake of large groups of new nations like the Canadians entering the Norwegian ships. The British Ministry of War Transport played a key role here, having the authority to determine the coverage ratio of the insurance responsibility of Norwegian ships and crews through the British War Risk Insurance Office (WRIO).<sup>107</sup>

The British, Canadian, Swedish and Chinese government, all intervened and engaged themselves in improving their seafarers' conditions on Norwegian ships as a direct result of the war, acting almost like trade unions.<sup>108</sup> Seafarers' wages, compensation for war injuries and repatriation rules became diplomatic issues between governments, and not only a case between the Norwegian employer and its employees. This was no longer an issue restricted to the shipping economy. It had become a part of a political economy. One of the general characteristics of the total Second World War was the appearance of a far greater state control, which took place to ensure the optimal mobilisation of economic, political and social resources.<sup>109</sup> The handling of the foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships was no exception.

The involvement of the states contributed to improve the foreign seafarers' conditions on Norwegian ships in the Second World War. Whether these improvements would be permanent in a post-war world remained to be seen. Shipowners in the management of Nortraship expressed their hope that this was not the case. In their eyes, the rising wages would snowball leading to enormous extra costs to the shipping industry, and which could influence the competitiveness future shipping business.<sup>110</sup> These considerations played important roles when outlining the Norwegian strategy to secure the vital services of foreign seafarers. The Norwegian and the British government agreed. In an Allied meeting in May 1942, just as the Chinese seamen were conceded a major increase of salaries, the British and Norwegian representatives underlined their consensus that, "these arrangements should be for the duration of the war only".<sup>111</sup>

When the war was over, Norwegian shipowners acted quickly against the consequences of the war time concessions admitted to foreign seafarers. The following circular were distributed from the Norwegian employer association of the shipping industry in October 1945:

Nortraship has, during the war, been forced to agree on a series of conditions to have the opportunity to sign on seafarers of the above nationalities on Norwegian ships. These provisions may incur the shipowners considerable expenses. [...] We would therefore consider

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<sup>106</sup> Unemployment Indemnity (Shipwreck) Convention, 1920. (ILO Convention No 8) Convention concerning Unemployment Indemnity in Case of Loss or Foundering of the Ship.

<sup>107</sup> RA, Handelsdepartementet i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, P.M. *Erstatning for kanadiske sjøfolk på norske skip*, 28.10.1943.

<sup>108</sup> Ref engagement from the Swedish state: RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L023, Letter Foreign Min. T. Lie to Legation in Stockholm, 18.1.1943.

<sup>109</sup> Lane, Tony 1994. *The Human Economy*: 45.

<sup>110</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da L024, Letter from Nortraship MD to Nortraship Australia, 13.4.1943.

<sup>111</sup> RA, Handelsdep, Skipsfartsavd (S-1409) 1/Da/L0267, Note of third meeting, 5.5.1942.

it fortunate if You would instruct Your captains to the greatest possible extent to avoid signing on of Britons, Canadians, Chinese and Lascars on Your ships.<sup>112</sup>

### Peripheral trade unions

While the governments acted like trade unions, the unions themselves only played minor roles in questions relating to foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. They were neither a central partner nor an important counterpart, in contrast to the role of the Norwegian Seamen's Union in mobilising Norwegian seafarers.<sup>113</sup> Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the National Union of Seamen (NUS) co-operated closely with the authorities to ensure their members' commitment on British ships.<sup>114</sup> The NUS never seemed to have engaged directly with Norwegian authorities, despite the large number of British seamen serving on Norwegian vessels. The loyalty the NUS demonstrated towards British authorities was possibly transferred and maintained towards Norwegian authorities too. Furthermore, it was probably more difficult to act collectively on Norwegian ships, since the British seamen never formed an entire crew there, just like the Chinese and Indian seamen in many cases.<sup>115</sup>

The Chinese trade unions made several attempts to play a part in the negotiations about Chinese seamen on British ships, but the Ministry of War Transport rejected this and preferred dealing with the Chinese embassy in London.<sup>116</sup> Forming ties with trade unions in the West strengthened the bargaining hand of the Chinese unions, but it was not enough to be recognised as an equal negotiating partner to the British government.<sup>117</sup> Even if there is no explicit evidence to attest to the face, it is reasonable to believe that Norwegian authorities followed the United Kingdom as a role model on this issue too.

There are few traces of Indian trade unions in the Norwegian archives used in this study. Norwegian authorities probably did not have to pay any attention to the trade unions of the Indian seamen, which were even weaker than the Chinese unions. According to Balachandran, "the unions followed rather than led" the Indian seamen when the strikes and unrest took place on British ships in 1939.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, the trade unions of Chinese and Indian seamen did not manage to co-operate or co-ordinate their efforts either. This was, according to a

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<sup>112</sup> NR, Skipsfartens arbeidsgiverforenings cirkulære 1945, Sirkulære 31.10.1945, Advarsel mot forhyring av britiske, kanadiske, kinesiske og lascar mannskaper. Original quote: "Nortraship under krigen har vært nødsaget til å gå med på en rekke betingelser for å få anledning til mønstre sjøfolk av ovennevnte nasjonaliteter på norske skip. Disse bestemmelser kan pådra rederne betydelige utgifter. (...) Vi ville det derfor anse det for heldig om De ville instruere Deres kapteiner om å i størst mulig utstrekning å undgå påmønstring av briter, kanadier, kinesere og lascarer på Deres skip."

<sup>113</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 179.

<sup>114</sup> Lane, Tony 1995. "The 'People's War' at Sea: Class Bureaucracy, Work Discipline and British Merchant Seamen, 1939-1945". *Scottish Journal of Labour History*, 30: 61-86.

<sup>115</sup> Tony Lane use this as an argument why Arab, African and Caribbean seamen did not attract official attention. Ref: Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 157-158.

<sup>116</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 165.

<sup>117</sup> Benton, Gregor 2007. *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*: 62.

<sup>118</sup> Balachandran 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c.1870-1945*: 263.

Chinese trade union leader in 1943, due to the “ill-treatment” of Indian and Chinese seamen on Allied ships.<sup>119</sup>

Even if trade unions did not play a direct role in securing the participation of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships, their influence more generally on mobilising seafarers was substantial. The ITF was on the frontline here, co-ordinating the national unions in their struggle against the common fascist enemy in a variety of ways. Alongside the NUS, the ITF established a trade union for seafarers in exile.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, the ITF collaborated closely with the European Allies to ensure American support to force Allied seafarers in America to sail on Allied ships.<sup>121</sup> In 1942, the ITF gave the following statement: “This is a total war and we recognise and proclaim that seamen have a duty to fulfil.”<sup>122</sup> The Norwegian merchant fleet probably reaped the benefits of this attitude indirectly when it came to secure the vital service of foreign seafarers during the Second World War.

### Cultural differences and difficulties

As previously shown, Indian and Chinese seamen’s strikes and desertions threatened the manning of both the Norwegian and the British merchant fleet. Nortraship’s explanation of the desertions was that seafarers in general deserted for the same reason; higher wages elsewhere.<sup>123</sup> Not everyone agreed with this conclusion. In 1943, the American War Shipping Administration criticised their European Allies, and the British in particular, for their “long established prejudices and discriminatory practices” towards Chinese seamen.<sup>124</sup> The Americans saw this as an important reason for the desertions. This interpretation of Chinese actions is supported by Yvonne and Charles Foley, and Gregor Benton. They argue that the desire for *equality* was the main reason for the Chinese seafarers’ protests and desertions during the war.<sup>125</sup>

Were Norwegian prejudices, discriminatory practices and racism, as well as the lack of cultural understanding, obstacles to secure the participation of foreign seafarers? The answer is probably yes, in the sense that it contributed to and increased the intensity of conflicts. Still, there are few reasons to believe that Norwegian authorities would have given in more easily to the Chinese demands if they had understood that that equality meant more to them than the cash. Nortraship would probably have started the process of replacing the Chinese anyway due to economic reasons.

Fear of cultural conflicts on board the ships influenced the choice of countries for recruitment. The Director of Nortraship, Øivind Lorentzen, suggested in 1942 to start employing seafarers

<sup>119</sup> BL, IOR/L/E/9/976, Seamen - Indian Seamen's trade unions, Newspaper article in *Lloyd's list*, 14.9.1943.

<sup>120</sup> Being in a strong and independent position, the Norwegian Seaman’s Union did not join this “exile union”. Ref: Silverman, Victor 2000. *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labour, 1939-1949*: 40.

<sup>121</sup> Koch-Baumgarten, Sigrid 1999. *Gewerkschaftsinternationalismus Und Die Herausforderung*: 99.

<sup>122</sup> MRC, ITF, MSS.159/1/4/23, Memorandum ITF 19.2.1942.

<sup>123</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Nortraship NY, 13.4.1943.

<sup>124</sup> Lane, Tony 1990. *The Merchant Seamen's War*: 168.

<sup>125</sup> Benton, Gregor (2007) *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*, 60; Yvonne and Charles Foley (Unpublished book manuscript) *Chinese seamen from Liverpool*, 39.

from countries in the West Indies and Central America.<sup>126</sup> One of the reasons was possibly to avoid seafarers from countries with a state and a diplomatic corps that would act in lieu of a trade union.

However, Lorentzen's suggestion met stiff resistance from Norwegian trade unions, just as the National Union of Seamen had protested against similar plans for the British fleet in 1940.<sup>127</sup> The Norwegian Seamen's Union warned strongly against using coloured seamen on deck or in the engine room. They would only recommend deploying them to work as boys in the mess or in the salon.<sup>128</sup> One argument was the lack of competence. Another issue was connected to the question of race. With support from the Seamen's Union, Nortraship concluded in the end that they preferred to hire unskilled Canadians:

If the [Canadians] do not distinguish themselves by their skills, at least they are white, and regarding the race problem I would like to recall to mind the trouble that has already occurred on a couple of ships crewed with mixed-races.<sup>129</sup>

Unskilled Canadians were given priority to seafarers from the West Indies and Central America. Problems connected to racism on Norwegian merchant ships were naturally not something special connected to the war. It existed before 1940 and after 1945.<sup>130</sup> Since the Nazi rhetoric was so strongly connected to racism, it is relevant to ask if this made any impact on how racism and discriminatory practices were dealt with among the seafarers that risked their lives in the war against Nazi Germany. Did the ideological aspects of the war influence the attitude and politics towards non-western seafarers?

What is seen as a paradox today was not as obvious during the war. However, someone did at the time, raise the link between Chinese wages and equality of races. Mr. Philip Noel-Baker did so in the British Parliament as early as in 1941.<sup>131</sup> Problems connected to racial discrimination in Allied shipping, in particular, was raised by the trade unions – some of the same unions which had protested against mixing races on-board ships. The Norwegian Seamen's Union got Haakon Lie, one of the most dominant Norwegian politicians after the war, to translate a leaflet about the human races which aimed to overcome prejudices among Norwegian seafarers against coloured people.<sup>132</sup> The ITF passed resolutions that demanded better conditions for non-white seafarers and to put an end to the racial discrimination against

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<sup>126</sup> AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, B. 13, Ingvald Haugens saker, 'Mannskapsproblemer i USA. Handelsdepartementets komite 1941-42', Letter from Severin Jantzen (Nortraship) to Bemanningskomiteen 3.6.1942.

<sup>127</sup> NA, CO 318/444/3, West Indian seamen: recruitment, 1940-1941, Note 18.11.1940.

<sup>128</sup> RA, SMK, Regj. Nygaardsvold (S-1005) M/L16, Generalsekretær Sønsteby's bemerkninger til komiteinnstillingen, 23.7.1942.

<sup>129</sup> RA, Nortraship NY MD (S-2131) Da/L025, Note from Nortraship, 14.8.1943. Original quote: "Om enn ikke disse siste utmerker seg ved noen dyktighet, så er de iallfall hvite og en tør i forbindelse med raseproblemet minne om at det allerede på et par skip med besetning av blannet rase, har vært tilløp til vanskeligheter."

<sup>130</sup> Olstad, Finn 2006. *Vår skjebne i vår hånd: Norsk Sjømannsforbunds historie. Bind 1*; Halvorsen, Terje 2007. *Vi seiler for velstand og lykke: Bind 2*; Michelet, Jon 2007. *Havets velde: Sjøfortellinger*.

<sup>131</sup> House of Commons debates, 8.4.1941. Ref: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1941-04-08a.1395.8>

<sup>132</sup> Olstad, Finn 2006. *Vår skjebne i vår hånd: Norsk Sjømannsforbunds historie. Bind 1*: 448-449.

these seafarers.<sup>133</sup> Still, international solidarity among the trade unionists, proved unable to overcome the long-held prejudice against Chinese seamen in particular.<sup>134</sup>

Trade unions used the ideological aspects of the war as a central argument more actively when the war had ended and the post-war shipping world was about to be formed. Moreover, both Indian and Chinese representatives argued for equal pay for equal work, on the basis of lessons learned after six years of war.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

Remarkably few changes were proactively made as a consequence of the war to secure the participation of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet. However, regulations, agreements, working conditions and mobilisation measures that were suitable in peace, turned out to be inadequate during war.

One significant change resulting from the war on an interstate level was the joint control and co-ordination of Allied shipping manpower, with the utilisation of foreign seafarers as a central issue. Allied, primarily British, co-operation and influence had a strong impact on Norwegian policy towards foreign seafarers during the Second World War, just as it did when it came to the use of Norwegian seafarers.<sup>136</sup> This is not surprising but still worth noting, since historians have presented the handling of the seafarers as something the Norwegians could take care of quite independently.<sup>137</sup> The British influence made greatest impact by being the leading example that other Allied nations found it wise to follow, but also by pressuring Norwegian authorities when there were conflicting interests. The United Kingdom held the strongest position in the relatively few cases where there were conflicting interests with their Norwegian allies, being the clearly more significant supplier of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. Normally, the two countries shared a common interest in securing a stable and inexpensive workforce in all the Allied merchant fleets.

While Norwegian seafarers were both pushed and pulled into duty, the government in exile had few “push measures” available when mobilising foreign civilians in times of war. The British “pull measures” for their own civilian population during the Second World War were made possible by “delivering social reforms and by celebrating the contributions of persons of lowly status”.<sup>138</sup> Neither of these measures were used systematically to mobilise foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet. The foreign seafarers were primarily mobilised to do a job, by few references to the war, with a possible exception of those mobilised from Allied countries like the United Kingdom and Canada.

<sup>133</sup> MRC, ITF, 159/1/5/12, International Seamen’s meeting January 30th and 31st 1943, Resolutions.

<sup>134</sup> Silverman, Victor (2000) *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labour, 1939-1949*, 42-45.

<sup>135</sup> AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, J11, "Avisutklipp", Articles in newspapers with reports from the International Shipping Conference in Copenhagen, November 1945.

<sup>136</sup> Rosendahl, Bjørn Tore 2015. *Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War*: 184.

<sup>137</sup> Riste, Olav 1973. *London-regjeringa, Vol. 1*: 26 and 37.

<sup>138</sup> Lane, Tony 1994. *The Human Economy of the British Navy*: 45.

In several of the conflicting issues connected to the foreign seafarers, the business aspects were strongly emphasised by the Norwegian authorities. The Norwegian historian Atle Thowsen has claimed that the two key motives which determined Norwegian shipping policy during the war, were profit and patriotism.<sup>139</sup> Norway was not the only seafaring nation that aimed to secure its future economy during the war, but few were more dependent on their shipping industry than Norway. The role of the state is an interesting aspect here. The fact that Nortraship was a government-controlled organisation reduced, to an extent, the commercial priorities of its management. Nortraship was managed by shipowners used to thinking like businessmen, and not as government officials. Moreover, pursuing profit was also a deliberate Norwegian policy, which secured the financing of the government in exile and was a strong foundation to their struggle towards a free Norway. Profit considerations also aimed to ensure that shipping could be the cornerstone of the economic growth in a post-war Norway. The consequences for the foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships of this profit focused policy, were that they first and foremost were seen and treated as hired labour.

This approach did not go without its conflicts. Seamen from China and India reacted with protests, desertions and strikes. Other nation states also opposed the Norwegian policy. In peacetime, trade unions usually constituted the counterpart to the employer. In the Second World War, governments with seafarers on Norwegian ships acted like trade unions, while the unions themselves only played minor roles.

Norwegian authorities generally gave in to demands coming from the United Kingdom and Canada, while strikes and desertions from the Asian crews led to a deliberate reduction of seafarers from this part of the world on Norwegian ships. In brief, the Norwegian merchant fleet went from using Chinese crewmembers in peacetime, to British ones in wartime. This was only to be a temporary change. In the early 1950s, Asian seamen had once again returned to Norwegian ships in considerable numbers, while there were few British left. Even though the Norwegian policy towards the foreign seafarers was characterised by measures used in peace, the nationality of the seafarers was a major consideration in wartime.

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Article 3: “Not in the same boat? Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War”

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## Not in the same boat?

### Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War

Written by: Bjørn Tore Rosendahl

#### Introduction

Norway was invaded by Nazi Germany on 9 April 1940. At that moment there were about 1,000 Chinese seamen serving on ships in the Norwegian merchant fleet. Chinese seamen had been hired in great numbers during the interwar years by shipowners who wanted cheap, hardworking seafarers on their ships trading in Asia. While fleeing the German invaders, the Norwegian Government requisitioned the merchant fleet for the duration of the war. Consequently, the Chinese seamen became employees of an exiled government at war with Germany, which later also would include the other Axis powers of the Second World War.

This article examines how the Second World War influenced the situation of the Chinese seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet. What was the Norwegian policy towards these seamen, and what consequences did this policy have on Chinese seafarers serving on Norwegian ships?

Norway's merchant fleet was the fourth largest in the world in 1940. So when Germany occupied the country, it was vital that the Norwegian Government on their way to exile in London, manage to obtain control over most of the country's merchant fleet. This was organised through the new state owned shipping company, *Nortraship*.<sup>1</sup> Receiving supplies and support of a sufficient number of crew was a necessary precondition to the successful management of the Norwegian merchant fleet. This included foreigners. Because of the war, the proportion of foreign seamen increased in the Norwegian merchant fleet from 12 per cent in 1940 to 25 per cent in 1943 – numbering 4,675 persons in total. Conversely, the numbers of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships decreased. When the war started, Chinese mariners constituted the largest group of foreigners in the Norwegian merchant fleet, numbering approximately 1,000. However, at the end of the war, there were only about 200-300 left.<sup>2</sup>

Questions relating to Chinese seamen hardly ever caused internal Norwegian disagreements or were lifted up to a political level. Such issues were normally coordinated administratively by the Maritime Departments of Nortraship in London and New York, in partnership with the Norwegian Ministry of Commerce and consuls in some of the most important port cities in

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction written in English of the establishment of Nortraship and its impact on the Norwegian Government in exile, see Thowsen, 1994: 67-69. For a more comprehensive description of the history of Nortraship (in Norwegian), see Thowsen, 1992 and Basberg, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L085, «Mannskap på skip under Nortraships kontroll 9. april 1940 og 30. juni 1943».

Asia. Hence, the archives produced by these actors are the main sources in this study and I will mainly treat the Norwegian authorities in exile as one actor.

The Norwegian historical sources are complemented with primarily British governmental archives, with an ambition to both compare these and to see the Norwegian policy from a British point of view. I have not managed to identify any accessible Chinese Governmental archives that shed light on Norwegian policy.<sup>3</sup> However, some letters from Chinese officials are to be found in both Norwegian and British archives and present their views on several of the topics in this article.

A study of Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet should ideally be seen from both Norwegian and Chinese perspectives as well as those of the employer and the employees. The least difficult parts to document are the perspectives of the Norwegian employers. The perspectives of the Chinese seafarers on Norwegian ships are much less extensively available in any of the aforementioned archives. With the lack of other archival sources that would have uncovered their perspectives, this article has to be received with this information in mind.

### Status of research

No comprehensive research has previously been done on Chinese seafarers on Norwegian ships in the Second World War. This is a topic which, so far, has only been briefly mentioned in some of the syntheses which have been published on Norwegian maritime history until now.<sup>4</sup> However, some research has been done specifically on Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. Most thorough is the master's thesis by Yen Yin Kwan about the history of Chinese immigration to Oslo.<sup>5</sup> Of special relevance is her overview on the recruitment of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships from 1890 to the 1970s. A more limited study by is done by archivist Leif Thingsrud. He has examined a sixth of the 2,000 index cards of Chinese seamen that served in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the war.<sup>6</sup> On that basis, Thingsrud presents a summary on where most of the Chinese seamen were born, where they lived and on what terms they were employment.

Several books have also been published referring to experiences of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. These are based more on popular conceptions and memories, than by historical research.<sup>7</sup> Jon Michelet is an exception among these authors, problematising the stereotypes of Chinese seamen in his documentary book *Havets velde: Sjøfortellinger* (The mighty ocean: Sea stories).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> During the Second World War, Wellington Koo was China's ambassador to the United Kingdom and led the negotiations with the British authorities on behalf of the Chinese regarding their seamen's wages and conditions. Charles Foley has searched the Wellington Koo papers (Box 50 'Chinese Seamen 1942-47', Wellington Koo Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, New York, USA). He found no references to Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships here.

<sup>4</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 37, 71-78; Halvorsen, 2007: 83-90.

<sup>5</sup> Kwan, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Thingsrud 2015. Thingsrud works at the Norwegian National Archives in Oslo.

<sup>7</sup> Lilius and Fasting, 1956; Wikborg and Bruusgaard Kiøsteruds, 1959; Møller, 1984; Gøthesen, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Michelet, 2008.

My own research on Chinese and other foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships led to the publishing of a commemorative book I edited and published in 2015; *Foreign seafarers remembered. Foreign seamen killed in service of the Norwegian Merchant fleet during the Second World War*.<sup>9</sup> On the question of casualties and deaths due to the war among Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships, I will rely on my research results which are published in this book.

The conditions of Chinese seamen on British ships were not considerably different from Norwegian ships and, as we will see, the United Kingdom was the leading example among the Allies in several issues concerning Chinese seamen. Hence, research published on Chinese seamen on British ships is relevant to understanding Norwegian policy and the Chinese seamen's conditions on Norwegian ships.

The most authoritative source on the history of Chinese seamen on British ships during the Second World War is *The Merchant Seamen's War*, written by Tony Lane. In the context of seamen from the British colonies, "sons of empire", serving in the British merchant fleet, Lane also analyses the situation of the Chinese seamen on British ships during the war. In contrast to the perception of unity in the "People's War" in the United Kingdom, he emphasises the divisions on ships and between seamen and their employers, with numerous strikes and desertions among the Chinese crews due to low salaries and bad treatment.<sup>10</sup> Similar turbulence and discontent were also seen on Norwegian ships with Chinese seafarers on board.

Apparently, no historical research has been published so far in China on their seafarers' participation in the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> There are, nonetheless, some Chinese voices brought to the surface in Western research literature. Yvonne and Charles Foley present the Chinese seafarer's own perspectives in their as yet unpublished book *Chinese seamen from Liverpool*.<sup>12</sup> Gregor Benton also uses Chinese sources and perspectives in his study *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism. Forgotten histories, 1917-1945*.<sup>13</sup> In the chapter on Chinese seafarers, Benton draws particular attention to the work of the trade unions.

### **The pre-war history of using Chinese seamen**

In 1940, a vast majority of foreign seamen on Norwegian merchant ships were Asian. There were a substantial number of so-called Lascars, seamen from India, but the far largest national group was the Chinese.

The background to this was the growth of Norwegian shipping in China in the 1920s. In 1925 there were as many as 60 Norwegian ships involved in the so-called "China trade".<sup>14</sup> This

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<sup>9</sup> Rosendahl, 2015b. This was also published in Norwegian: Rosendahl, 2015a.

<sup>10</sup> Lane, 1990: 8.

<sup>11</sup> According to Han Qing at Dalian Maritime University in China, who is currently (2016) conducting a research project on this topic.

<sup>12</sup> Foley and Foley, Unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> Benton, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> NR, 1829 – Spørsmål om dannelse av gruppe for redere i Kinafarten, "Opgave over redere som har skibe i Kinafart pr. 1/11 - 1925".

expansion took place during a turbulent period in China. Between the two world wars, the weak state was troubled with civil wars and by warlords controlling different parts of the great country. Piracy was a threat to all civilian ships off the coast of China. Pirates were robbing, kidnapping and sometimes even killing crews and passengers on board the ships.<sup>15</sup> The risks of piracy in China led to a change in the accident compensation insurance for Norwegian seafarers during war.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, piracy made the Norwegian Government appoint a committee to consider whether civilian ships should be armed, and even whether navy ships should be sent to China to protect Norwegian ships.<sup>17</sup> None of these proposals were implemented, but they give an indication of how seriously piracy in China was looked at in Norway at the time. This probably coloured how Norwegian decision makers looked at China and the Chinese some years later, when a new world war arrived.

There were two major Norwegian shipping companies in particular that specialised in trade in the Far East before the war, employing a great number of Chinese seamen: Wallem & Co from Bergen and Bruusgaard, Kiøsterud & Co. from the city of Drammen.<sup>18</sup> Bruusgaard, Kiøsterud & Co. established themselves on liner routes between Hong Kong, Saigon and Bangkok in 1922, and later to Haikou and Shàntóu. This was possibly due to close connections with two of the Chinese family business dynasties, Wang Lee and Eng Hock. Bruusgaard, Kiøsterud & Co. took also part in the so-called coolie trade, transporting Chinese workers to Siam and the Malay peninsula.<sup>19</sup>

Norwegian legislation from 1854 restricted the maximum number of a ship's crew allowed to be foreigners to one third.<sup>20</sup> The law also set the minimum wages due to seamen.<sup>21</sup> Both these rules were dispensed with when hiring Chinese seamen on coastal trade in China and elsewhere in the East. These seamen sailed under special terms and conditions. Instead of being served food while at sea, the Chinese seamen received a (small) food allowance and prepared their own food. The allowance was illustrated when the crew on SS *Woolgar* was stuck in a harbour in Japan in 1938 due to repairs. The Chinese seamen then demanded an increase of the food allowance because of the high price of rice in Japan.<sup>22</sup> Another factor that meant Chinese seamen were considered cheap labour is that they were not entitled to be paid overtime. Despite these conditions, before the war they were regarded as good and loyal crewmembers, able to work hard under harsh weather conditions.

Owing to the Chinese seamen's ignorance of the foreign language and the proper process, their contracts were generally monopolised by the contractors, or shipping masters<sup>23</sup>, in Hong

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<sup>15</sup> Lilius and Fasting, 1956.

<sup>16</sup> NR, «Ekstraordinært generalmøte 14.09.1939».

<sup>17</sup> Fylkestidende for Sogn og Fjordane, 23.02.1931.

<sup>18</sup> Gøthesen, 1990: 83.

<sup>19</sup> Wikborg and Bruusgaard Kiøsteruds, 1959: 65.

<sup>20</sup> Kwan, 2013: 56.

<sup>21</sup> Halvorsen, 2007: 83.

<sup>22</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Shanghai, (S-2611) Db/L0293, File: «Forhyrings- og mønstringsforhold SS *Woolgar* of Tønsberg».

<sup>23</sup> Shipping masters were by several seamen called «shipping mashers», due to their bad treatment of seamen. Ref: RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Shanghai, (S-2611) Db/L0192/0009, Chinese Seamen' Union letter to Norw Consul 25.06.1923.



Kong and Singapore.<sup>24</sup> Chinese seamen were basically engaged on Norwegian vessels in two ways. The seamen on larger ocean-going vessels were normally engaged by crew contractors associated with the local Norwegian Consulate. On small coastal ships, arrangements were instead made directly between the Master and the Chinese personnel on board, usually through a so-called “Headman” in each department of the ship.<sup>25</sup> The Headman was also the person that received the salary on behalf of the whole “China crew” or the part of the crew that he was responsible for. Apparently, Norwegian shipowners also cooperated closely with the Chinese Seamen’s Union in the recruitment of Chinese seamen. Until the Second World War, this system secured the Norwegian merchant fleet a stable, hardworking workforce at low pay for several years.<sup>26</sup> In China, seamen on Norwegian ships were apparently regarded as both well-paid and privileged.<sup>27</sup>

### Consequences of war

When Norway entered the Second World War in 1940, about 1,000 Chinese seamen hired on different Norwegian ships automatically followed into the workforce of Nortraship, the newly established state-owned shipping company. In the Nortraship archives there are about 2,000 index cards of Chinese seamen that served on Norwegian merchant ships during the Second World War.<sup>28</sup> The tradition of employing Chinese crews without registering their names makes it probable that the total numbers of Chinese seamen serving on Norwegian ships during the war were considerably higher than 2,000. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that Nortraship did not know the names of their Chinese crew on several occasions, when a ship was lost.

In his examination, archivist Leif Thingsrud has selected index cards of Chinese seamen, concluding that the Chinese seamen were normally not tied to any nation’s merchant fleet but hired when there was a ship that needed crew for a limited period of time.<sup>29</sup> This explains why several of the seamen were registered with Singapore, Bombay, Calcutta and even New York as their home. Thingsrud finds that the birthplaces of the Chinese seamen were most often central Chinese port cities like Shanghai and Shàn-tóu. Seamen from Shanghai were labelled by British authorities as “troublemakers” and “left wing agitators”.<sup>30</sup> As expected, only a small minority on Norwegian ships came from Northern China, and almost nobody came from inland China.<sup>31</sup>

Japan’s war with China started in 1937, but this war did not stop Norwegian shipping in China. The war hindered some freight, but it also led to new kinds of goods being transported and to higher profits.<sup>32</sup> War risk bonus were paid to Norwegian seafarers sailing in these

<sup>24</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Ambassaden/Legasjonen i Beijing, Kina (S-2610) Da/L0096, Note from: Ministrere des Affaires Etrangères de la République Chinoise, 16.01.1941.

<sup>25</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Ambassaden/Legasjonen i Beijing, Kina (S-2610) Da/L0096, Letter from Acting Consul of Norway in Singapore to Norw Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24.04.1941.

<sup>26</sup> RA, Handelsdep. i London, (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship to Forsyningsdep., 6.8.1942.

<sup>27</sup> RA, Handelsdep. i London (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship to Forsyningsdep., 6.8.1942.

<sup>28</sup> Thingsrud 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Foley and Foley, Unpublished: 24.

<sup>31</sup> Thingsrud 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Norwegian Shipowner Association members’ magazine, 6.6.1938.

waters in periods before 1940.<sup>33</sup> However, hiring Chinese seamen continued as normal until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. This watershed event changed the situation dramatically for Allied merchant shipping in Asia in general and for Chinese seamen in particular. China joined the Allies, and Allied merchant ships suddenly became enemy vessels to Japan.

A consequence of this situation was a significant reduction in the number of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. There were three main interrelated reasons for this reduction. Firstly, there were substantially fewer Norwegian ships trading in the East, where most Chinese crews were hired. Secondly, the dangers of war suddenly became much more apparent as ships were being sunk and crews getting killed. The death toll on Norwegian ships documents this. 253 Chinese seamen were killed serving in the Norwegian merchant fleet. This happened in 23 war-related shipwrecks, of which only two occurred before the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>34</sup> The third reason for the reduction in the number of Chinese seamen was connected to their new and worsened situation. The seamen's reaction to these circumstances made Nortraship try to replace them.

### Handling conflicts with seamen in exile

The relatively high number of deaths demonstrates that the Chinese seamen were right to fear the higher risks at sea and explains the rising Chinese demands for higher war bonuses. According to the extracts of the journal on the Norwegian ship *MS Høegh Silverstar*, unrest among the Chinese crew started immediately after Pearl Harbor: "Since 7 December 1941, the deck crew has always been rebellious and uneasy, unwilling to work and have increasingly adopted a threatening attitude."<sup>35</sup> Several ships reported of similar problems. Norwegian maritime authorities seemed well prepared to get the USA on its side as Allies in the world war.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, they appeared unprepared for the implications of having Japan as an enemy and the consequences this implied for their Chinese crew. Hence, Norwegian authorities showed little sympathy or understanding for their seamen's conduct. The following quote from an internal memorandum in 1942 shows quite well how the Norwegian employers changed their views on the use of Chinese crew in the course of the war:

We have been extremely pleased with our Chinese crews ever since we started using them in 1932. [They had] no overtime, [and were] more loyal to us than any Norwegian crew. [But now] they are afraid of the war and when they get "panicky" they are very hard to deal with. Then they usually call on their Chinese Consul, [who are] worse than any Philadelphia lawyer.<sup>37</sup>

Unrest among Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships grew, and not only because of the rising dangers of war. Japan joining the Axis powers also meant that Chinese seamen on Allied

<sup>33</sup> Norwegian Shipowner Association members' magazine, 4.4.1939.

<sup>34</sup> Rosendahl, 2015b.

<sup>35</sup> Original quote: "Siden 7. desember 1941 har dekksmannskapet hele tiden vært opprørsk og urolig, uvillig i arbeide og har stadig inntatt en truende holdning.» Ref. RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L154, *MS Høegh Silverstar*, Journalutdrag, 25.2.1942.

<sup>36</sup> Rosendahl, 2015c: 170.

<sup>37</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Memorandum to Capt. Ole Bull from Chr. Blom, 13.1.1942.

ships were cut off from the option to going home, a situation they had in common with their Norwegian seafaring colleagues. To the Norwegian authorities, this was first and foremost seen as a problem because the Chinese had a clause in their contracts which guaranteed them a free voyage or repatriation back home after ending their service. This led to a situation in the summer of 1942 where 4,500 Chinese seamen maintained by different Allied shipowners in Calcutta. Nortraship was obliged to cover the living expenses of 642 of these seamen.<sup>38</sup>

The Consul General of China in Calcutta demanded that Norwegian authorities repatriate their Chinese seamen to Chongqing where the nationalist government of China was seated.<sup>39</sup> Since the Burma Road was blocked by the Japanese, the only way to reach Chongqing was by plane. However, sending Chinese seamen home by an expensive airlift was out of the question for Norwegian and other Allied countries.<sup>40</sup>

Having thousands of unemployed Chinese seamen stuck in Indian port cities was unbearable for the Allied maritime nations paying the maintenances, the Chinese Government representing the seamen and the Indian Government having to deal with the seamen on shore. The Chinese seamen were not satisfied with the situation either. The Norwegian Consul General in Calcutta reported in October 1942 that Norwegian officers had to “fetch rifles to defend themselves” against recently signed off Chinese crews who were demanding higher payment. The consul furthermore reported that a “Rowdy crowd of Chinese thrice invaded my office in force of 30 to 50 with knives 2 feet long.”<sup>41</sup>

Against this background, and at the suggestion of the United Kingdom, the Chinese and Indian Government agreed to establish a Chinese Service Corps, tasked with taking care of Chinese seamen living on shore in India on allowances from their former European employers.<sup>42</sup> The labour corps was inaugurated 22 October 1942, and higher officers from China arrived in India to persuade seamen to join.<sup>43</sup> From this moment, seamen signing off a ship only had the right to receive maintenance for 15 days, and unemployed Chinese seamen in India were conscripted into the Chinese Service Corps. The establishment of these labour corps units was followed by strict instructions from Nortraship that Chinese seamen should no longer be employed with the right of free repatriation.<sup>44</sup>

From a government perspective, the labour corps were seen as a good solution for all parties. The Chinese seamen, though, were frustrated and angry about the attempts to force them into labour corps. In early December 1942, a major protest broke out in Calcutta and Indian police

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<sup>38</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L150, Letter Norw. Consul to Nortraship L, 11.8.1942.

<sup>39</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L154, Letter Chinese Consul Calcutta to Port Police Calcutta, 12.11.1942.

<sup>40</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L154, Letter from Acting Consul General for Norway in Calcutta Turner Morrison & Co.

<sup>41</sup> BL, IOR/L/PJ/7/5703, Letter from N.O.I.C. Calcutta, 26.10.1942.

<sup>42</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L072, Letter to Nortraship from MOWT, 19.3.1942.

<sup>43</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L150, Letter Norw. Consul to Nortraship L, 11.8.1942.

<sup>44</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Nortraship NY, 13.4.1943.

had to rescue the Chinese Consul General who feared being killed by the protesting seamen. Boarding houses were wrecked, and tear gas was used to control the demonstrators.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the protests and reluctance from the Chinese seamen, the labour corps solved the Allied shipowners' problems for a while. However, in April 1943, similar problems arose again. This time it was in Bombay, where Norwegian authorities had to pay maintenance for 200 Chinese seamen on shore. The blame for this problem was laid upon the Chinese Government and its consuls.<sup>46</sup> The solution was again to seek help from, and cooperation with, the United Kingdom who were experiencing the same problems.

Chinese seamen were not stuck only in India. In 1943 there were a considerable number of Chinese survivors from Norwegian ships living in South Africa. Nortraship was very dissatisfied that the Chinese would rather stay in South Africa, paid by their Norwegian employer, than finding themselves a new job. To solve the costly problem of guaranteeing their maintenance, the United Kingdom was asked for assistance here as well.<sup>47</sup> The sources do not say how or even if the British managed to help their Norwegian allies, either in Bombay nor in South Africa.

A different kind of problem occurred in Suez. The high war risk associated with sailing in the Mediterranean resulted in several Chinese seamen refusing to continue or demanding higher wages when their ship entered Suez from the Indian Ocean. When the Norwegian ship *SS Sygna* entered Port Suez in early 1941, threats and protest evolved among the Chinese seamen, fearing that they would enter the war zone and demanding compensation for this. The situation was so tense that the captain called upon military guards to lock up his protesting Chinese seamen.<sup>48</sup> In the end, the problem was solved by granting an increased war bonus to the Chinese crew to proceed to Port Said and back. In the aftermath of this conflict, the Chinese Consul General in Calcutta defended his countrymen's behaviour and blamed the Norwegian captain for breaking the contract which said that the seamen were not supposed to sail west of Port Suez, and he reminded them that the Chinese seamen "are uneducated people, the benefit of doubt must be extended to them".<sup>49</sup>

In the case of *SS Sygna* and other ships on voyage westwards, Chinese seamen signing off in Egypt became a general problem. The right to sign off was a part of their contractual rights. However, since Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships did not have a legal right to stay in Egypt, Norwegian authorities feared that they would be placed in one of the notorious Egyptian prisons when signing off here.<sup>50</sup> As a solution, the Chinese seamen were instead put in detention centre until they could be hired on a ship going eastwards.

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<sup>45</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L112, Letter Norw Consul Calcutta to Norw Consul in Bombay, 8.12.1942.

<sup>46</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131), Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship L to Nortraship NY, 13.4.1943.

<sup>47</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L073, Letter from Nortraship to MOW, 13.8.1943.

<sup>48</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L1504, Letter Chinese Consul General Calcutta to Norw Consul General Calcutta, 21.7.1941.

<sup>49</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da L1504, Letter Chinese Consul General Calcutta to Norw Consul General Calcutta, 21.7.1941.

<sup>50</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fc/L0203, Letter Norwegian Consulate in Egypt to Nortraship, 15.4.1942.

To understand reports of Chinese seamen reacting with strikes, threats, riots and violence one must take into account the source of these reports; the counterparts. Even though a majority of the sources here are one-sided and biased, it nevertheless shows the high level of intense conflict and gives an impression of what kind of issues provoked the unrest. It was mainly connected to the level of payment, the risks of war or a combination of these two factors.

Losing contact with their homeland and families was a major stress factor for the Chinese seamen. Their actions must be seen in this context too. Norwegian seamen were in the same situation and this constituted a central underlying element in the mobilisation strategy designed to strengthen their spirit.<sup>51</sup> Few if any similar measures were made for the Chinese seamen in exile. An additional burden was the very strong American restrictions on Chinese seamen's shore leave possibilities when their ship entered a port in the USA. In the spring of 1942, these discriminating rules led to restlessness and violence among Chinese seamen on Allied ships in American ports.<sup>52</sup>

### **War time concessions**

Nortraship reported regularly of problems with desertions and strikes among their Chinese crew - especially in the spring of 1942. The seamen's demands were clear: they wanted higher salaries.<sup>53</sup> This was not a Norwegian problem but a common Allied one. The Chinese crews' demands, protest and strikes got results and during 1942, their wages were increased radically. The monthly payment for an able seaman was raised from NOK 47 to NOK 314.<sup>54</sup> The total wages for a Norwegian in the same position at that time was NOK 536.<sup>55</sup> Holiday entitlements were made equal to those of Norwegian seamen, as were the rights to compensation in case their ships were sunk as a result of enemy action.

Through the eyes of the Norwegian shipowners in the management of Nortraship, their Chinese seamen went from being seen as good and loyal seafaring crewmembers with low wages, to be perceived as expensive – that meant being paid European wages – and associated with trouble and unrest. A direct consequence was a deliberate policy from the Norwegian authorities to replace the Chinese with seamen from other countries.

The European Allies coordinated closely with regard to their wage policy towards the Chinese seamen. This happened multilaterally in forums like the Inter-Allied Government Committee on Shipping Man Power and its sub-committee, where ministers and their leading bureaucrats respectively met to discuss and coordinate crew questions.<sup>56</sup> Norwegian authorities also coordinated the Chinese seamen's wages and conditions bilaterally with the United

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<sup>51</sup> Rosendahl, 2015c.

<sup>52</sup> Knauth, 1943. A more thorough study of Chinese seamen's desertions in the USA, is found in Oyen, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa L072, Letter from Nortraship to MOW, 16.3.1942.

<sup>54</sup> RA, Handelsdep. London, (S-3567) Da/L0006, Letter Nortraship to Forsyningsdep., 6.8.1942.

<sup>55</sup> Jenssen, 1992: 202.

<sup>56</sup> Inter-Allied Government Committee on Shipping Man Power and Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power were established in 1942. These committees replaced the Allied Shipowners' (Personnel) Committee, to strengthen and lift crew questions to a governmental level. Ref: RA, UD (S-2259) Dyg/L12128/03, Note by minister Wold, 13.2.1942.

Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> The common allied goal was to keep the wages as low as possible.<sup>58</sup> However, in 1942 the allied shipping countries had to give in to the Chinese demands.

It is noteworthy to see how the improved terms were accepted and implemented by the Norwegian authorities. The Norwegian strategy throughout the war was to avoid at all costs any official agreements with the Chinese Government.<sup>59</sup> Nortraship described its policy in an internal note in 1945: “Our strategy has always been to respond evasively in all cases and to try to avoid any definitive agreement with them.”<sup>60</sup> Individual agreements with seamen who actually protested were preferred. In 1941, the master of the Norwegian ship *MS Pleasantville* did so to avoid his Chinese crew getting help from a Chinese consul who probably would have called for “Norwegian wages” and no difference between Chinese and “white” crews.<sup>61</sup> Afterwards, Nortraship recommended that more shipmasters should act the same way when their crew demanded higher pay.<sup>62</sup>

When the United Kingdom made an official agreement with China in April 1942, which regulated both working conditions and wages, Norwegian authorities refused to start negotiations with China to reach a similar agreement. Instead, the same conditions as granted by the British were implemented for Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. The logic behind the Norwegian strategy was to calm down the protesting Chinese seamen, but at the same time avoid binding agreements that could prove costly in the future. In a meeting in the *Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power* in June 1942, the Norwegian Government official guaranteed that Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships would *not* be granted higher wages than those the British had negotiated.<sup>63</sup> This promise stood in contrast to the Norwegian wage policy regarding Norwegian seamen, which to a lesser degree aimed to be at the same level as their allies.<sup>64</sup> However, Allied unity on the regulation of Chinese seamen’s payment was not always there. Earlier in 1942, the Dutch had defied British pressure and awarded their Chinese crew higher war risk money.<sup>65</sup>

In *The Merchant Seamen’s War*, Tony Lane describes how low wages and bad conditions made Chinese crewmembers “vote with their feet” and desert British ships in great numbers.<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to see how the Norwegian authorities interacted with, were influenced by and viewed the British policy in light of this. Normally it was only after the British granted better

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<sup>57</sup> RA, Utenriksstasjonene, Generalkonsulatet i Calcutta (S-2602) Da/L150, Letter from Norw. Consul in Calcutta to MOWT Calcutta, 6.6.1942; RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L073, Letter from Nortraship to MOWT, 23.5.1945; RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L073, Letter from Nortraship to MOWT, 13.3.1943.

<sup>58</sup> NA, PIN 15/3231, Minutes of Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power, 9.6.1942.

<sup>59</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L022, Letter from Nortraship MD, 13.12.1945.

<sup>60</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Note Nortraship MD, 19.5.1945. Original quote: «Vår taktikk har hele tiden vært å svare unnvikende på alt mulig og å forsøke å unngå noen definitiv avtale med dem.»

<sup>61</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fc/L0203, Letter from Klavenes & Co to Nortraship, 5.2.1941.

<sup>62</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fc/L0203, Telegram from Nortraship NY to Nortrashipl L, 15.2.1941.

<sup>63</sup> NA, PIN 15/3231, Minutes of Inter-Allied Sub-Committee of Officials on Shipping Man-power, 9.6.1942.

<sup>64</sup> Jenssen, 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Foley and Foley, Unpublished: 39.

<sup>66</sup> Lane, 1990.

conditions to the Chinese that the Norwegians followed suit. There was even some frustration inside Nortraship that the British seemed to treat their Chinese crews like their own.<sup>67</sup>

In peace time, the Norwegian shipowners had developed a good relationship with the Chinese Seamen's Union. During the war, the Chinese State, through its embassies and consulates, acted in many ways as their seamen's trade union – and with greater success than the real union had achieved before the war. Chinese officials formed ties with Western trade unions and received advice from the International Transport Workers' Federation.<sup>68</sup> When negotiating with the Chinese Government, it was more difficult to explain why “white” seamen should have better conditions and higher wages than the Chinese doing the same job. China was not the only state acting as trade unions for their seamen on Norwegian ships. The Canadian, Swedish and, most of all, British governments followed the same line. This politicised the use of and the situation for foreign seamen in the merchant fleet, to the frustration of Norwegian shipping interests. Nortraship feared the rising costs of giving in to the demands of better pay and stronger rights for Chinese seamen, not least in terms of how this could influence shipping business in the post war world. Against this background it is telling how the Chinese demands were criticised by Nortraship:

“[The Chinese] show complete lack of cooperation and are only using the present position to improve their own lot without any thought of the war effort. Until they learn to behave themselves we can have nothing whatever to do with them.”<sup>69</sup>

As a direct consequence of unrest and higher salaries, Norwegian authorities started to replace the Chinese with seamen from other countries. This process continued when the Second World War was over, where action was taken against the consequences of admitting war time concessions to seamen from China. Based on this, a circular was distributed from the employer association of the shipping industry in 1945 with the advice: “to the greatest possible extent to avoid signing on Britons, Canadians, Chinese and Lascars on Your ships.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Compared with other nationalities and fleets**

How unique were the conditions for the Chinese seamen compared with other foreign nationalities in the same fleet? As indicated earlier, the terms and working conditions for the Chinese seamen shifted dramatically through the war years. When the war started, they were at the bottom end regarding the level of payment, with only the so-called Lascar crews from India having lower salary. From 1942 a dramatic increase of wages was granted. The rising costs of using Chinese seamen was one of the main reasons for searching elsewhere to recruit seamen to the Norwegian merchant fleet. Moreover, seamen from countries in the West Indies

<sup>67</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Note Nortraship MD, 19.5.1945.

<sup>68</sup> Benton, 2007: 57, 62.

<sup>69</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131), Da/L025, Letter from Nortraship, India, 27.1.1944.

<sup>70</sup> NR, Skipsfartens arbeidsgiverforenings sirkulære 1945, Sirkulære 31.10.1945, Advarsel mot forhyring av britiske, kanadiske, kinesiske og lascar mannskaper. Original quote: ««Nortraship under krigen har vært nødsaget til å gå med på en rekke betingelser for å få anledning til mønstre sjøfolk av ovennevnte nasjonaliteter på norske skip. Disse bestemmelser kan pådra rederne betydelige utgifter. (...) Vi ville det derfor anse det for heldig om De ville instruere Deres kapteiner om å i størst mulig utstrekning å undgå påmønstring av briter, kanadier, kinesere og lascarer på Deres skip.»

and Central America did not have a state or a diplomatic corps supporting them in the same way, which made them easier to deal with than their Chinese colleagues.

In 1940, seamen from India were the second largest nationality represented on Norwegian ships after the Chinese and, in 1943, after the dominant group of British seamen. The Norwegian policy towards their Indian seamen is quite similar to how the Chinese were handled. The Indian seamen's wages were also increased, but still kept below the Chinese. However, as the war progressed, Indian strikes and protests made Nortraship try to replace this group as well.<sup>71</sup>

Formal diplomatic agreements made 20 years before the war regulated several of the foreign merchant seamen's rights regarding war insurance and what kind of compensation they were entitled to in case their ship was sunk. In 1920, 25 seafaring countries signed an ILO convention which guaranteed some minimum rights to the seamen of the signing countries in such cases.<sup>72</sup> Among four of these nations, Norway made an additional agreement which secured stronger rights to pensions etc.<sup>73</sup> China did not belong to any of these countries involved and this was one of the reasons why their seamen entered the war with a lack of rights that the majority of other nations' seamen on Norwegian ships already had. Hence, the Chinese seamen in the Norwegian fleet started more or less from scratch regarding terms and conditions, but ended up with great improvements thanks to both their own protests and their own active government. Moreover, the combination of a strong Chinese collective identity and no repatriation possibilities further explains why the European Allies had to accept many of the Chinese demands.<sup>74</sup>

The Norwegian merchant fleet gradually became less dependent on its Chinese crew during the war, which were dwindling, and more reliant on the incoming British seamen. There was a different story on British ships. The British merchant fleet was in no position to swap their Chinese crews with other nationals in the same way as the Norwegian fleet did. The Chinese on British ships represented many more, both in relative and absolute numbers. In April 1945, there were as many as 10,000 Chinese seamen on British ships and only 200-300 in the Norwegian fleet.<sup>75</sup> This explains why the British Government, and not the Norwegian, made official agreements with the Government of China about the terms and conditions for Chinese seamen. Britain's dependency on these seamen was also demonstrated by the fact that it established separate pools for Chinese seamen, as did the Dutch Government in exile.<sup>76</sup> In comparison, Norwegian authorities only granted a form of allowance to their Chinese seamen on shore "to keep the best of them".<sup>77</sup> The Chinese were also granted free medical examination – but not free medical treatment.

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<sup>71</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Db/L104, Rapport over mannskapssituasjonen, Ole Bull 8.5.1945.

<sup>72</sup> Convention concerning Unemployment Indemnity in Case of Loss or Foundering of the Ship. (ILO Convention No 8).

<sup>73</sup> Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and the Netherlands.

<sup>74</sup> Benton, 2007: 59.

<sup>75</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Skipsfartsdep., 17.4.1945.

<sup>76</sup> Benton, 2007: 56.

<sup>77</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131), Df/L144 Møtereferat 12.12.1944.



### Recruited to fight a war or do a job?

Were the Chinese seamen recruited to Norwegian ships to fight a war or to do a job? According to Gregor Benton, the Chinese seamen were not likely to identify with the European war.<sup>78</sup> In all phases of the war, patriotism and the retrieval of a free Norway were the motivational factors which were considered most important to maintain and cherish among the *Norwegian* seamen.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese and Norwegian seamen had in common that an Axis power occupied their homeland. From exile, Chinese leaders attempted to keep the seamen focused on the anti-Japanese resistance at home.<sup>80</sup> However, there is no evidence that the Norwegian authorities appealed to this when mobilising Chinese seamen. They were most likely recruited to do a job, with few references to a fight against Japan.

Regarding motivation, one would possibly expect a higher rate of desertions to appear among Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships than among Norwegian seamen. The high number of Chinese seamen that deserted British ships also supports such an assumption. Between August and December 1942, 32 per cent of all Chinese seamen on British ships calling at New York deserted. In 1943 the proportion was 25 per cent.<sup>81</sup> Valid and relevant empirical data on Chinese desertions on Norwegian ships are not accessible. There are lists and figures of desertions from ships in United States ports showing that foreign seamen deserted in about the same relative number as their Norwegian colleagues.<sup>82</sup> However, since there were so few Chinese on Norwegian ships trading at U.S. ports, this data is not valid to draw any conclusions. What is known is that Nortraship complained of desertions among their Chinese crew in particular.

The state owned shipping company's explanation to the desertions was that Norwegian and Chinese seamen in general deserted for the same reason; higher wages elsewhere.<sup>83</sup> This way of analysing the Chinese behaviour is questioned by both Yvonne and Charles Foley and Gregor Benton. They argue that the importance of *equality* was the main reason for the Chinese seafarers' protests and desertions, and they both refer to a memorandum written by the British Ministry of War Transport in 1942, which concluded that "equality of War Risk money meant more to them than the mere cash."<sup>84</sup> From the Nortraship offices in London, this distinction was probably not so easy to recognise or to accept.

### A policy towards lost, missing and captured Chinese crew?

Throughout the war, a significant number of Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships were taken as prisoners by German or Japanese forces. This actualised the question of what kind of responsibility Nortraship had towards employees that were captured by their enemies. This

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<sup>78</sup> Benton, 2007: 60.

<sup>79</sup> Rosendahl, 2015c.

<sup>80</sup> Benton, 2007: 60.

<sup>81</sup> Lane, 1990, 168.

<sup>82</sup> Between 20 and 40 foreign seamen on Norwegian ships deserted every month in United States ports from October 1943 to June 1945. Based on figures found in documents in: RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L026.

<sup>83</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Da/L024, Letter from Nortraship London to Nortraship NY, 13.4.1943.

<sup>84</sup> Benton, 2007: 60; Foley and Foley, Unpublished: 39.

was a situation and a question Norwegian authorities in exile seemed poorly prepared to handle.

One problem was that on some ships Nortraship did not even know the names of the Chinese crew, a consequence of using the so-called “Headmen” to recruit Chinese seamen.<sup>85</sup> This was the case with SS *Hai Tung*, which in December 1941 disappeared without a trace en route from Bangkok to Singapore. The ship was probably sunk by a Japanese submarine and there were no signs of survivors from the crew of 5 Norwegians and 44 nameless Chinese. The lack of names meant that it was practically impossible for Nortraship to search for them through the Red Cross in Japanese prison camps. Furthermore, it was impossible to inform or help any of the seamen’s relatives. Even a year after the war had ended, when reporting to Chinese authorities, Nortraship was not able to identify the names of the deceased Chinese crew of SS *Hai Tung*.<sup>86</sup> These kinds of experiences during the war made Nortraship aware of the importance of knowing the names of their crew. Consequently, messages were distributed to the Norwegian captains on ensuring better registration routines of their Chinese crew and to transfer this information to Nortraship.<sup>87</sup>

The Norwegian Government in exile was criticised for the lack of help that was provided to several of the Norwegian seamen that were taken into Axis captivity during the war.<sup>88</sup> Still, those efforts were probably considerably better than what was being done for the Chinese seamen in the same situation. Again, the United Kingdom was the role model, setting the standards for the responsibilities the Norwegian authorities had towards Chinese and other foreign seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet who were held in prison camps. One key issue was if these seamen were to be granted the rights of detention allowances. Even Norwegian seamen did not originally have the right to receive such payments. The Norwegian Government in exile gave in to British pressure and granted the right to *British* seamen on Norwegian ships. The logic behind the decision was this:

Since our fleet cannot work without English seamen we have to give in to the English terms. It would not be fair to pay detention allowances only to the Englishmen. It should be made applicable to all crews on Norwegian vessels (black and Chinese seamen possibly excepted).<sup>89</sup>

The last comment of making possible exceptions for black and Chinese documents the way seamen from different countries and races were categorised, and how these groups would be discriminated against regarding salaries and other kinds of terms and conditions. The argument of fairness “to all crews on Norwegian vessels” did not carry through when the final decision was made. Detention allowances were only given to seamen from countries with bilateral agreements with Norway. Seamen from other countries like China were instead formally given the right to achieve a kind of gratia payment. Informally however, detention allowances were tacitly accepted because “it was difficult not doing it”, and with British help

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<sup>85</sup> The Dutch Merchant fleet also lacked several names of Chinese seamen lost at sea, ref: Saskia Klooster, Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (e-mail 5.11.2014).

<sup>86</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fc/L0188, List of Chinese seaman, lost or missing.

<sup>87</sup> Nortraship and Skipsfartsdirektøren, 1940-1945: no. 12, 1943.

<sup>88</sup> Hjeltnes, 1995: 364.

<sup>89</sup> RA, Handelsdep. London, (S-3567) Da/L0006, Note, Norw. Ministry of Trade, 7.12.1942.

“camp pocket money” was paid out to Chinese prisoners in Germany.<sup>90</sup> When the war ended, Nortraship also acknowledged that it had to pay maintenance and take responsibility for the repatriation of the former prisoners back to China.

What happened to Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships taken prisoner by the Japanese is even more unclear. Some seamen were probably not sent to prison camps at all after being captured. Norwegian authorities were for instance doubtful if detention compensation was to be paid out to the crew of *SS Prominent* due to information that this crew apparently had not been detained by the Japanese.<sup>91</sup> There are, however, too few reports on this issue to draw any conclusions with any certainty of how widespread this was. Seamen that were proved to have survived Japanese captivity were paid compensation for this after the war.<sup>92</sup>

At least 953 foreign seamen from 36 nations were killed while serving in the Norwegian merchant fleet during the Second World War.<sup>93</sup> 253 of them were Chinese citizens. The mortality rate among Chinese seamen whose Norwegian ship was sunk was higher than 50 per cent, while the corresponding mortality rate among Norwegian seafarers was 22 per cent.<sup>94</sup> There are several sources of error here. This is however a significant dissimilarity, with many possible causes. It is difficult to link the differences of mortality to explicit aspects of the Norwegian policy towards the Chinese seamen. It nevertheless illustrates the fact that the risks of being a merchant seaman were significantly higher the first 2-3 years of the war, when the rate of Chinese seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet was highest.

Relatives of Chinese seamen killed were entitled to some form of compensation from the Norwegian authorities. In many cases, payment of this compensation was complicated due to the widespread lack of updated crew lists and, consequently, information on the names of their next of kin. Difficulties regarding the spelling of Chinese names made it even more challenging to identify relatives that were entitled to compensation from Nortraship. The amount of the compensation depended on when the incident happened, since Norwegian authorities gradually admitted to better compensation rules. The last extension was agreed from 1 January 1945 when the Chinese on Norwegian ships were admitted the same compensation rates for war injuries as Chinese in British service. The war was then almost at an end, and the rules were not made retroactive, so this was a cheap concession to make.

### **Being a Chinese seaman on a Norwegian ship and the example of *SS Woolgar***

Degrading attitudes towards Chinese seamen were widespread both in the Norwegian shipping offices and on board the ships. This was naturally not a just a war phenomenon. Racism and discrimination on Norwegian ships existed before and after the Second World War.<sup>95</sup> Despite the strong connections between racism and the Nazi rhetoric, the ideological aspects of the war hardly influenced the attitude and politics towards Chinese seafarers at all. This is not surprising. What is seen as a paradox today was not as obvious during the war,

<sup>90</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Note Nortraship MD, 19.5.1945.

<sup>91</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Letter Norwegian Consulate Shanghai to Nortraship, 27.1.1947.

<sup>92</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), Fa/L022, Letter Norwegian Consulate Shanghai to Nortraship, 27.1.1947.

<sup>93</sup> Rosendahl, 2015b: 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*: 26.

<sup>95</sup> Olstad, 2006; Halvorsen, 2007; Michelet, 2008.

even though there were some, particularly among the trade unionists, that raised the race issue at sea in light of the war against Nazism.<sup>96</sup>

On many ships there were clear divisions between those regarded as white crew and the others. Dorte Østreng has studied internal relations on multi-ethnically crewed ships in the modern era, with a case of Norwegian officers and Philippine crews. She concludes that on ships with only two large groups of nationalities, divided into officers and crew, contact between these two groups is almost absent. Then the stereotypes of the other are not challenged either.<sup>97</sup> This can explain the deep divisions existing on several ships sailing with Norwegian officers and “China crews”. In the context of Chinese seafarers in European shipping 1880 to 1950, the historian Lars Amenda describes this phenomenon as creating different “parallel worlds” within a ship.<sup>98</sup>

How such divisions on board influenced the situation when a ship was sunk and the crew had to enter their lifeboats, is a very interesting aspect of the stories of the survivors during the war. These challenges were exposed in the wake of the Japanese sinking of the Norwegian steamship *SS Woolgar*, west of the island of Java in February 1942. Lack of trust between the seven Europeans and the 32 Chinese, divided between two lifeboats, led to an almost violent conflict about the food and where to navigate.<sup>99</sup> In the end, after 12 days in the open sea, the survivors of *SS Woolgar* parted. Half of the Chinese seamen went off in one boat. All the Europeans together with the rest of the Chinese continued in the other lifeboat, and their time at sea lasted for 88 days, until they saw land.<sup>100</sup>

The survivors believed they had reached Ceylon and freedom, but it turned out to be the Andaman Island off the coast of Burma, and subsequently Japanese captivity. In this boat, 6 of the 7 Europeans survived, but all the 17 Chinese died before they reached land. Nortraship’s comment about the high casualty rate of the Chinese seamen indicates both that there had been conflicts in the lifeboat and that the Chinese were held responsible for their own deaths:

Admittedly, they lost all the Chinese, but it was primarily due to the Chinese’s own behaviour. It would have been impossible for the 5 white seamen to keep in check all the Chinese and the boat.<sup>101</sup>

What happened to the other lifeboat was for a long time unknown. While searching the files of Nortraship, I discovered that one Chinese seaman actually survived in the other lifeboat. In

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<sup>96</sup> MRC, ITF, 159/1/5/12, International Seamen’s meeting January 30th and 31st 1943, Resolutions; AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, J11, "Avisutklipp", Articles in newspapers with reports from the International Shipping Conference in Copenhagen, November 1945.

<sup>97</sup> Østreng, 2007: 36.

<sup>98</sup> Amenda, 2012: 51.

<sup>99</sup> Similar stories of conflicts among survivors from different cultures is referred in Bennett and Bennett, 1999: 187-189 and Lane, 1990: 173, 252.

<sup>100</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 71-78.

<sup>101</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), G/L0427, Letter from Maritime Dep 1.11.1945. Original quote: “Riktignok mistet de alle kineserne, men det må vesentlig skyldes kinesernes egen opptreden. Det vilde vært helt umulig for de 5 hvite å holde styr på alle kineserne og båten.»

his report to the Norwegian consulate, the seaman gave a quite different version than the Norwegian officers, about the first 12 days of the lifeboat journey, when they were all together. Serious allegations were aimed at the surviving Europeans; that they had taken all the food from the “Chinese lifeboat” by force. However, the Norwegian officials rejected the Chinese survivor’s version completely and only referred to the reports from the Norwegian officers on this matter.<sup>102</sup>

Today it is impossible to decide if it was the Norwegians or the Chinese survivors that were lying in their reports. No doubt there had been a tense and almost violent conflict in those two lifeboats. Both parties had vested interests in being seen as the responsible and honourable party afterwards. The way Norwegian officials totally rejected the Chinese version of the story, without any signs of investigation, shows that Chinese were not seen as equals and that there was an expectation of Norwegian seamen acting heroically in such situations. It is likely that the Nortraship managers’ attitudes was shaped more by popular conceptions of “Chinese” than by dense experience. The inter war period where Chinese pirates threatened Norwegian shipping was still in close memory and probably contributed to colour these conceptions.

The narrative of Western seamen who never gave up, in contrast to the more fatalistic Asians, has been dominating in Norwegian and Western stories of shipwreck survivors from the Second World War. Charlotte Behrens writes, for example, in *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War* (1955) how seamen used to see fatalistic Indian seamen as easily giving up during shipwrecks.<sup>103</sup> Other British researchers have, however, questioned this narrative. G.H. and R. Bennett find a tendency in the reports from shipwrecks to criticise “Arab, Chinese or Indian seamen as a scapegoat group where similar uncooperative behaviour by British seamen would have been reported as a failure by particular individuals.”<sup>104</sup> Tony Lane argues that European seamen survived longer in lifeboats because they had a better diet in the first place when the ship was sailing, and this made them better able to cope with enormous strains in a lifeboat.<sup>105</sup> The newly discovered story from the only Chinese survivor of SS *Woolgar* is nonetheless a reminder to challenge the old narratives about the survivors. It is also worth noting that the seaman who survived the longest lifeboat journey in the Second World War was a Chinese seaman. Poon Lim survived 133 days on a raft. He was the only survivor from a crew of 54.<sup>106</sup>

The survivors of SS *Woolgar* went through the longest lifeboat journey from a *Norwegian* ship during the Second World War. Their story of survival is heartbreaking and demands the highest respect. However, in the official narrative of the sinking of the ship, there was no place for the only Chinese survivor, Wang Bao-Deh. In January 1947 he was paid 4 months and 14 days’ wages “in full and final settlement of any and all claims on the Norwegian SS *Woolgar*.”

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<sup>102</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118), G/L0427, Letter from Nortraship London to the Norwegian Consulate in Shanghai, 10.12.1946.

<sup>103</sup> Behrens, 1955: 156.

<sup>104</sup> Bennett and Bennett, 1999: 188.

<sup>105</sup> Lane, 1990: 181.

<sup>106</sup> McCunn, 1985.

## **Not in the same boat**

The Second World War caused major changes to Chinese seamen in the Norwegian merchant fleet. Japan's entry on the Axis side of the war made sailing far more dangerous and isolated Chinese seamen from their home country. It was also the war that brought the Chinese Government in, acting as their seamen's trade union quite successfully if one looks at the improvements of wages and the different kind of rights that Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships gradually were granted in light of the rising risks of war.

However, from the Norwegian perspective, the Chinese seamen went from being valued as good and loyal seafaring crewmembers with low wages, to being considered as expensive and associated with trouble and unrest. Subsequently, the Norwegian authorities replaced most of the Chinese with seamen from other countries and, when the war ended, there were only a couple of hundred left. The Norwegian policy towards Chinese seamen differed considerably compared with the policy concerning seamen from Norway or the United Kingdom who were not replaceable in the same manner as the Asian crew.

The United Kingdom played the role of both the leading example and the aide in the Norwegian handling of conflicting issues like Chinese wages and their repatriation. This is not surprising, but still worth noting as an important explanation to the conditions of the Chinese seamen on Norwegian ships. Apart from following their British ally in many areas, the Norwegian policy was strongly based on commercial interests. Norwegian authorities saw and treated the Chinese seamen primarily as hired labour, making a judgement based on how the work essential to the war could be done at a price that would not be bad for business. Some years into the war, it was acknowledged to a greater degree that times of war demanded more from the employer. The names of the seamen that risked their lives sailing in those dangerous waters had to be documented. Moreover, better compensation rules in case of shipwreck, death and captivity were also conceded to the Chinese seamen.

The consequences of what was not done were possibly greater than what was actually done by Norwegian authorities. The policy towards Chinese seamen was rarely proactive. Instead of increasing wages as a positive means to motivate to continued service, the Norwegian authorities reluctantly increased their payment when forced by their protests in the course of the war. This policy was largely deliberate. Avoiding officially binding agreements with the Government of China was a central Norwegian strategy, aiming to secure Norwegian shipping in a post-war world. A great cultural distance combined with patronising behaviour towards the Chinese seamen in the Norwegian fleet contributed to further undermine the seamen's confidence to their employers and strengthen the intensity of conflicts when they arrived.

These findings lead to the conclusion that neither the Chinese seamen, nor their Norwegian employers, felt very strongly that they were all in the same boat during the Second World War. In the grey zones between doing a job and fighting a war, divide proved generally stronger than solidarity.

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- National Union of Seamen (NUS)
- Trades Union Congress



## 5. Further results generated by the research project

The three articles in this thesis are all separate scholarly works, with their own research questions and conclusions. They were designed as different parts of my thesis, and they are tied together through this thesis' overall research questions. The thesis as a whole is, however, larger than those three parts, which is also the purpose to be demonstrated and illuminated here. In Chapter 3, this extended context was presented through the discussion of different analytical perspectives. In this chapter, I will present and discuss three main overall results which are generated by the PhD project as a whole, and that could not be explored comprehensively in the individual articles.

First and most importantly, I explore the ambiguous Norwegian policy towards the seafarers in war, which was carried out in the field of tension between normality and war. This is explored through my constructed dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”.

Secondly, I explore how the politicisation of shipping economy influenced the way in which the seafarers' service was ensured. I pursue this with a particular emphasis on the impact of the Norwegian state operating as a shipowner during the Second World War.

Thirdly, I discuss the implications of a significant result from all three articles: that the influence of, and co-operation with the United Kingdom made a decisive impact on the Norwegian policy towards their seafarers in the Second World War.

I will mainly base the following discussion on the results from this thesis' articles, except for the first section about the ambiguous policy, where I also build my arguments on some additional empirical findings made in this study.

The mobilisation of seafarers on Norwegian ships took place in a special context in the Second World War, and the historical circumstances these years influenced the mobilisation in various ways. The Norwegian context with a German occupation, an exiled government in London and a large merchant fleet requisitioned into a state-owned company, made a great impact on how the service of the seafarers was ensured. This fact must be taken into consideration when the possibilities of generalisations from this study are considered. However, the comparative glances in this study provide an interesting result. Even though the sum of the circumstances was very different from the British ones alone, developments that took place in the Norwegian fleet

happened nearly correspondingly in the British merchant fleet.<sup>180</sup> The Norwegian situation was not so exceptional, after all.

#### Ambiguous policy: Seafarers or “war sailors”?

In this section, I discuss the ambiguous policy towards the different national groups of seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet from 1940 to 1945. I will argue that the ambiguity towards the seafarers’ role as civilians is necessary to take into consideration when trying to understand the different ways the service of the seafarers on Norwegian ships was ensured in this period.

My use of the seafarers’ “role” in this discussion is quite wide. It both alludes to their formal status as either civilian or military, the character of the seafarer’s situation and the deviation from normality in the situation of war. As a helpful tool to explore the ambiguity towards the seafarers, I have constructed the dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”, inspired by the different approaches of Tony Lane and Guri Hjeltnes to the seafarers’ identities in war as described in Chapter 3. Tony Lane argues that the transition to war did not imply a dramatic change of identity for British seafarers. According to Lane, “The war touched them. The war collided with them. But it was not of them.”<sup>181</sup> Guri Hjeltnes claims that the war made a great impact on the Norwegian seafarers, and with the liberation of Norway as the unifying goal, they developed a new culture and a new identity – as “war sailors” (my interpretation).<sup>182</sup>

It is important to stress that through this constructed terminology I do not seek to uncover the seafarers’ *real* identity, but rather try to explore different aspects of the seafarers’ war in changing circumstances, and what consequences this had on the mobilisation of seafarers on Norwegian ships.

The parameters used to identify the ambiguous policy towards the seafarers in wartime are basically related to aspects challenging their civilian status and to the kind of push and pull measures which were employed to mobilise them. Compared to normal procedures in peace, continuity of these parameters is interpreted as a “seafarer” perspective, while changes are generally understood in a “war sailor” perspective.

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<sup>180</sup> Some examples: Deeper and wider control enforced towards the seafarers (ref the subchapter “A politicised shipping economy in war” later in this chapter), improved welfare measures (ref Rosendahl, 2015d: 177) and Chinese seamen’s strikes and the subsequent increase of their wages (ref Rosendahl, 2017b: 10).

<sup>181</sup> Lane, 1990: 93.

<sup>182</sup> Hjeltnes, 2000: 48-52.

## Norwegian ambiguity

The Norwegian ambiguity towards the seafarers' roles was constantly in motion, influenced by the historical circumstances, or the context surrounding the seafarers. The largest shift in the circumstances and the role of seafarers on Norwegian ships, in particular for Norwegian seafarers, occurred when Norway became a belligerent state in April 1940. From this point on, there was no doubt that their ships were legitimate targets to be captured or sunk by an enemy.

Doubt and uncertainty characterised some of the Norwegian authorities' handling of the seafarers in the merchant fleet, after Norway's transition from a neutral to a belligerent and occupied country in April 1940. One example was the new tariff agreement applicable on Norwegian ships. This was pressed forward in June 1940 by British authorities, who paid their seafarers considerably less than the Norwegians. Hence, the new agreement led to a dramatic reduction of the war bonuses on Norwegian ships.<sup>183</sup> Afterwards the negotiator from the Norwegian Seamen's Union claimed that the German invasion of Norway was a "force majeure", which made him accept the deal.<sup>184</sup> It is not known if the trade union made the comparison with soldiers' payment, but the reduction of war bonuses to seafarers implied that the payments to these two groups became more in line with each other. The pre-war tariff agreements alongside other terms and conditions were not adapted to a belligerent state. In the tension between market thinking and war reality, it was hard to find a correct and consistent level of wages, compensation and other kinds of payments.<sup>185</sup> The articles in this thesis provide several examples of such cases, which affected both Norwegian and foreign seafarers.<sup>186</sup>

Several direct and indirect consequences of the Norwegian entry to the war put pressure on the civilian status of the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet. A visual example was that the merchant ships were painted in the military colour known

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<sup>183</sup> A secret part of the agreement included the payment from the British Ministry of Shipping to a fund, "the Nortraship fund", to benefit Norwegian seafarers after the war. After the war, many seafarers felt huge anger and bitterness towards the Norwegian Government, since the money in the fund was not paid out directly to all the seafarers that had participated during the war, but instead was distributed over time to seafarers or next of kin in need of financial help. In 1972 the conflict was ended by an Ex Gratia payment from the Norwegian state to the seafarers employed in Nortraship. Ref: Olstad, 2011; Hjeltnes, 1997: 491-548.

<sup>184</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 173.

<sup>185</sup> A thorough study of the processes around tariffs and wages on Norwegian ships during the Second World War (in Norwegian) is found in: Jenssen, 1992.

<sup>186</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 173-175; Rosendahl, 2017a: 5, 11-12, 17; Rosendahl, 2017b: 9-12.

as “Admiralty grey”.<sup>187</sup> The merchant ships began to appear more like naval ships and started to sail in military-protected convoys. Moreover, armaments were installed on Norwegian ships from the summer of 1940 and onwards. Despite the weapons being installed on the merchant ships for defensive use, it involved problems with international law.<sup>188</sup>

The guns needed skilled personnel, and the British Royal Navy and the Royal Artillery Maritime Regiment usually provided this service in the first years of the war, alongside 100 servicemen from the Royal Norwegian Navy.<sup>189</sup> From June 1941, the Royal Norwegian Navy's Gunner Department for the Merchant Fleet began its work to train Norwegian gunners.<sup>190</sup> The military tasks and status of being a gunner implied more than just doing a job. Seafarers enlisting in this kind of service made a deliberate and explicit decision to fight a war.<sup>191</sup> However, Norwegian gunners were also signed on the ships as able seamen and had duties as part of holding that position on board.<sup>192</sup> The arming of the merchant ships and the seafarers operating these weapons, was possibly the most explicit challenge to the civilian status of the seafarers on Allied merchant ships during the Second World War. An indication of this as a crucial issue was the strong opposition from the Norwegian trade unions to the “militarisation” of the merchant fleet, as they put it.<sup>193</sup> The resistance was rooted in a fear that the merchant fleet, as a consequence, would be subject to military discipline and command.

The armament also raised questions about pacifists or conscientious objectors who refused to operate weapons on merchant ships. This did not apply to many seafarers, but it was a question of principle. Nortraship in London feared that pacifism was going to be used as an excuse to avoid duty, while Nortraship in New York did not see this as a problem, with only two known examples of pacifist seafarers in November 1943.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Hjeltnes, 1995: 106.

<sup>188</sup> Schau, 1995: 70; Hegland, 1976a: 203.

<sup>189</sup> Hegland, 1976a: 199.

<sup>190</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 14-15. In Norwegian: Sjøforsvarets skytteravdeling for Handelsflåten.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.

<sup>192</sup> Hjeltnes, 1995: 155.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*: 152-157.

<sup>194</sup> RA, Nortraship NY, MD (S-2131) Df/L144, Møtereferat sjømannspoolene, 3.11.1943.

## The enemies' perspective

The explicit and visual militarisation of Allied merchant ships probably influenced the way their enemies regarded the civilian status of the Allied seafarers. I limit my discussion here to briefly outline the *German* position towards the civilian status of the Allied seafarers.<sup>195</sup> The German practice was dynamic, dependant on the shifting circumstances and on how the Allies regarded and treated captured merchant seafarers from the Axis states. The German view on the Allied seafarers' status was challenged and a shifting practice towards the seafarers was shown, particularly in two types of situations.

Firstly, in connection with attacks on and sinking of merchant ships. According to the London Submarine Protocol signed in 1936, unarmed merchant vessels “could not be sunk without the ships' crews and passengers being first delivered to *a place of safety*”.<sup>196</sup> Shortly after the outbreak of the war, it was clear that this provision was not widely followed by any of the warring states. The Submarine Protocol was disregarded by all sides, and not being obligated to rescue survivors was seen as a logical extension of operational practices in war.<sup>197</sup> The armament of merchant ships was probably both one of the consequences and one of the reasons for this practice.

Nevertheless, German U-boat crews assisted survivors numerous times following a sinking. According to the British historian Harry Bennett, this was because “the custom of the sea” in these situations took precedence over the demands of war.<sup>198</sup> The Laconia Order, issued by the Grand Admiral Dönitz in September 1942, sought to put an end to all German efforts to save survivors of sunken ships. The order emphasised that merchant seafarers should be treated as enemies and argued that “rescue contradicts the most basic demands of the war: the destruction of hostile ships and their crews.”<sup>199</sup> Despite the Laconia order to “stay firm”, there were several examples where German U-boat crews helped merchant seafarers from vessels they had just sunk.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> A broader study of this topic should also include the Japanese and Italian position, as well as a deeper investigation of the Allied procedures towards seafarers on merchant ships from Axis countries. Some information on the Japanese position and actions towards survivors from Allied merchant ships is found here: Hjeltnes, 1997: 80; Bennett, 2011: 25.

<sup>196</sup> Second London Naval Treaty.

<sup>197</sup> Bennett, 2011: 32.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*: 19, 34.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*: 18.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*: 21.

The second type of situation where the German treatment of the Allied seafarers was variable, was in cases where seafarers were taken as prisoners. The formal status the seafarers were given in captivity had consequences on how the seafarers should be treated. The legal consequences of seafarers on Norwegian ships being taken as prisoners on armed civilian ships, with the fear of being regarded as “francs-tireurs”, or irregular military personnel, was a major Norwegian concern.<sup>201</sup> Both soldiers’ and non-combatant prisoners’ rights in captivity were regulated by the Geneva conventions.<sup>202</sup> The Geneva conventions were, however, not clear how to categorise captured seafarers from merchant ships. In the early period of the Second World War, both sides of the conflict regarded merchant seafarers as “non-combatant prisoners” to be exchanged as soon as possible. When the United Kingdom returned to its former practice from the First World War of classifying the seafarers as prisoners of war, this made Germany follow the same practice.<sup>203</sup>

The status of seafarers in captivity also depended on the circumstances. 807 captured Norwegian seamen were shipped home to Norway and set free by German authorities on 3 May 1941.<sup>204</sup> In September 1943, crews from ships failing to break out from Sweden with the so-called “Kvarstad vessels”, were punished much harder. In this case, the Red Cross advised Norwegian authorities that obtaining status as a British prisoner of war was the only protection these Norwegian seafarers could realistically be granted.<sup>205</sup> The captured Norwegian seafarers from the “Kvarstad vessels” were instead convicted of leaving Norway without German permission, and therefore treated as “Nacht und Nebel” prisoners. This led to the tragic consequence that 43 of the 151 prisoners died in captivity. The advice from the Red Cross seemed to be correct, in the sense that British seamen on the same vessels were treated like regular seafarers in captivity. They were placed in the Milag camp together with most other captured Allied merchant seafarers.<sup>206</sup>

### **An inconsistent policy**

Related to the issue of status in captivity, was the right to receive detention allowance, which meant that the seafarer was given the right to a basic salary while in captivity.

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<sup>201</sup> AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, B. 7, Ingvald Haugens saker, P.M. Justisdep.

<sup>202</sup> Fiset, 2003: 1644.

<sup>203</sup> Lane, 1990: 211. Seafarers on Norwegian ships were also in Japanese and French captivity, ref: Hjeltnes, 1995: 333-391; Hjeltnes, 1997: 251-287, 484-488. This is not dealt with here because of the limited place available and since it is the principal consequences of seafarers in war time captivity which is explored here.

<sup>204</sup> AAB, Norges Sjømannsforbund, J11, Avisutklipp, Fritt folk, 5.5.1941.

<sup>205</sup> RA, Handelsdep., Skipsfartsavd. (S-1409) 1/Da/L0267, Note, 22.9.1943.

<sup>206</sup> Hjeltnes, 1995: 418-420; Johansson, 2016: 356-361.



The Norwegian policy in this question was characterised by ambiguity towards the seafarers' role and status in war. This study has shown that Norwegian authorities accepted the shipowners' responsibility to pay detention allowance, much due to pressure from the British authorities regarding the rights of British seafarers on Norwegian ships to receive detention allowance. This was tacitly accepted because "it was difficult not doing it" and this is one of very few cases where external pressure to improve the conditions of foreign seafarers led to better conditions for Norwegian seafarers in the Norwegian fleet.<sup>207</sup> Detention allowances were, however, only made applicable to seafarers from countries with bilateral agreements with Norway.<sup>208</sup> Seafarers from other countries like China and India, were instead admitted the right to receive a kind of gratia payment. Informally however, and with British help, "camp pocket money" was paid out to Chinese prisoners in Germany. After the war, Nortraship also acknowledged that it had to pay maintenance and take responsibility for the repatriation of Chinese seamen.<sup>209</sup>

Legal, economic, political and moral considerations, all played a part in this policy making which accentuated the ambiguous role of the seafarers in war.<sup>210</sup> Nortraship compared the seafarers' service with the military, when the seafarers were informed in 1943 about their right to receive detention allowances. In the communication with the seafarers, Nortraship argued that it was unfair that the seafarers did not receive this right until now, "since they are mobilised to their service to an equal degree as the military forces and are exposed to the risk of war captivity. In the English and Dutch merchant navy, seafarers are set on equal terms with the military."<sup>211</sup> This is an example of Nortraship communicating to their employees more like "war sailors" than regular seafarers. However, the original Norwegian reluctance to grant detention allowances shows that this was an ambiguous position. The Norwegian policy was not consistent and it treated the nationalities onboard Norwegian ships differently.

This thesis' findings about the great emphasis on propaganda as a means to mobilise Norwegian seafarers, underlines the ambiguous approaches towards the seafarers.<sup>212</sup> In

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<sup>207</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 15; Rosendahl, 2017a: 16.

<sup>208</sup> Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, in addition to the United Kingdom and Canada who negotiated this right during the war, ref: Rosendahl, 2017a: 18.

<sup>209</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 15.

<sup>210</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 16; Rosendahl, 2017b: 15-16.

<sup>211</sup> *Meddelelser fra Skipsfartsdirektøren*, No. 2/7th oktober 1943 Original quote: "ettersom de i like høi grad som de militære er mobilisert til sin tjeneste og er utsatt for å komme i krigsfangenskap. I den engelske og hollandske handelsmarine er sjøfolkene stilt på like linje med de militære."

<sup>212</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 178.

the messages to the Norwegian seafarers in the early years of the war, sacrifices and heroism were presented as duty and morale, and the seafarers were constantly reminded that the question they would be asked after the war was this: What did you do during the war? When the situation improved and the possibilities of winning the war became more prosperous, a more factual propaganda was both more reasonable and appropriate. The printed announcements from Nortraship and the member magazines of the trade unions were gradually filled with content more adapted to regular seafarers than “war sailors”.<sup>213</sup>

“Push measures” not normal in peace time, like conscription, were used as an argument to grant detention allowances to Norwegian seafarers. Moreover, the manning of the Norwegian merchant fleet was conducted through many of the same institutions and legal instruments as the military services.<sup>214</sup> This differs from how the obligation to work was organised in the United Kingdom, where the seafarers were mobilised on the same legal basis as other civilians in essential war work.<sup>215</sup> From the British perspective, seafarers were one of several civilian professions crucial to the war effort. To the Norwegian Government operating in exile, the seafarers were the only one.

The formal conscription of Norwegian seafarers was followed up by concrete measures that made it harder to escape from service in the merchant fleet. My thesis’ article on the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers uncovers how this was conducted by establishing new governmental institutions, maritime courts, a common Allied deportation system, and most importantly; through Allied co-operation.<sup>216</sup> In addition to the dangers of war, it was this lack of freedom and use of force that differed most from normal times. A plausible explanation of why Norwegian authorities approached the Norwegian seafarers differently from the foreign seafarers, was that foreign citizens could not be forced on duty.

The risks of war did not change the normal age limits to work in the Norwegian merchant fleet, which was different to those in the military services. In December 1941, the obligation to register and work was expanded to involve all Norwegian citizens outside Norway, above the age of 16. From 1942, military service was

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.: 178-183.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.: 164.

<sup>215</sup> The legal basis for this was the Essential Work Order, in 1941, ref: Behrens, 1955: 163, 171.

<sup>216</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167-173.

mandatory for men between the ages of 18 and 55.<sup>217</sup> This meant that boys between the age of 14 and 17 who were too young to fight in the armed forces, were regarded as old enough to serve on merchant ships, ships that were armed and regularly exposed to military attacks.

The traditional way to recruit young Norwegian ratings was almost impossible to continue from exile. There was a serious proposal from the *Crew and Conscriptio* *Board* in New York that Norwegian boys between 16 and 18 years living in the USA should be called to duty in the Norwegian merchant fleet. It was the *legal* aspects that stopped this proposal, and not moral or political considerations.<sup>218</sup> Instead, a great number of British boys under 18 years of age were hired on Norwegian ships. Among the 323 British seamen killed in service on Norwegian ships, at least 66 were “boys” under 18 years of age.<sup>219</sup> The youngest was probably the 14 years and 4 months old Michael Goulden from Hull, whose obituary is shown below. Recruiting British boys under 18 years of age was possible, since being a seafarer was defined as a civilian job.<sup>220</sup> The crews were treated like regular seafarers in the question of age.



*Michael Goulden's obituary: Michael Goulden was 14 years and 4 months old when he was killed on a Norwegian ship in 1941. He was probably the youngest seafarer killed on a Norwegian ship and possibly the youngest British service casualty during the Second World War.*<sup>221</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 161.

<sup>218</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 164.

<sup>219</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 15.

<sup>220</sup> Behrens, 1955: 162, 170. The Essential Work Order tied British seamen between the age of 18 and 60 to employment on merchant ships.

<sup>221</sup> I am grateful to William McGee, archivist in the British National Merchant Navy Association, for making available a copy of Michael Goulden's obituary and a document showing his date of birth.

## **Different approach to foreign seafarers**

A significant difference between the British and Norwegian seafarers' situation during the war, was that the Norwegian crew members lost contact with their homes and families in occupied Norway. This was an abnormal and stressful situation for the seafarers. However, the German occupation was also a crucial motivational factor, a motivation in which Norwegian authorities understood as vital to be maintained throughout the war.<sup>222</sup> This manner of motivation was identical with how soldiers were encouraged.

Central parts of China were also occupied during the Second World War. From exile, Chinese leaders attempted to keep Chinese seamen on Allied ships focused on the anti-Japanese resistance at home.<sup>223</sup> However, there is no evidence that the Norwegian authorities appealed with reference to the liberation of China when they mobilised Chinese seamen.<sup>224</sup> Chinese seamen were most likely recruited to do a job as regular seafarers, with few or no references to join in the fight against Japan.

There were significant differences with regards to the mobilisation of Norwegian and foreign seafarers. Norwegian seafarers were both pushed and pulled into duty through a wide range of tools for mobilisation adapted to the reality of war.<sup>225</sup> On the other hand, the Norwegian authorities had few, if any, “push measures” available when they tried to mobilise foreign civilians in times of war. Welfare and propaganda were available “pull measures”, but remained unused. Wages and conditions were generally only raised reactively in situations where it was absolutely necessary. The foreign seafarers were primarily mobilised to do a job, with few references to the war.<sup>226</sup>

Norwegian profit considerations became most apparent in questions related to the foreign seafarers.<sup>227</sup> Profit is usually a main priority for a shipowner, and the prosperity of the shipping business was also in the interest of the Norwegian society in the war years of 1940-1945. When the Norwegian employers pursued profit during the war, conflicts with the employees were often the result. This was particularly the case with Indian and Chinese seamen who were sufficiently numerous to act as a group, and in the case of the Chinese, supported by their diplomatic missions abroad.

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<sup>222</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 183.

<sup>223</sup> Benton, 2007: 60.

<sup>224</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 13.

<sup>225</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 183.

<sup>226</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 23.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*: 23.

When these findings are connected to the terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”, it is reasonable to conclude that Norwegian seafarers to a greater extent were mobilised as “war sailors” and the foreign seafarers more like regular seafarers. In Chapter 3, I referred to Tony Lane’s assertion of normality and his argument that the transition to war was not so dramatic for British seafarers. By swapping *British seamen* with *Norwegian employers* in Lane’s quote, this describes quite aptly the basis on which the foreign seafarers were approached. Norwegian employers “went on doing their job because in war, as in peace, they had to earn a living and it was simply unfortunate and couldn’t be helped that going to sea had become so much more dangerous.”<sup>228</sup>

### **In the field of tension between normality and war**

The formal status of the merchant seafarers was discussed and problematised between the Allies during the war. In 1943, the US. State Department requested a statement on the status of Norwegian seafarers and if they were considered to be a part of the armed forces. The Norwegian embassy in Washington D.C. was unsure about the answer but was instructed by Norwegian authorities in London that: “They are not subject to military discipline and are not integrated into the Norwegian armed forces.”<sup>229</sup> However, the consequences of defining the merchant fleet as a part of the armed forces was discussed as a means to make it easier to release and transfer Norwegian seafarers serving in the US military forces into the Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, a central British official working as a special envoy to the British Merchant Shipping Mission in Washington D. C., used the term “semi-militarized” about the seafarers.<sup>231</sup> The many military decorations awarded to seafarers on Allied ships were also a recognition and a symbol of the military character of their service.<sup>232</sup> The Norwegian merchant fleet with its seafarers was treated like a military branch in this context.<sup>233</sup>

It is difficult to draw any overall and definitive conclusions today with regards to the seafarers’ own identity and if they regarded themselves as regular seafarers or “war

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<sup>228</sup> Lane, 1990: 9.

<sup>229</sup> RA, Nortraship-L, MD (S-2118) Fa L0019, Note Norw. Emb. Washington to State Dep, 23.8.1943.

<sup>230</sup> RA, Nortraship-NY, MD (S-2131), Db L104, Minutes 18.6.1943.

<sup>231</sup> RA, UD (S-2259) Dyg/L12128, British memorandum by T.T. Scott, 28.2.1942.

<sup>232</sup> RA, SMK, Regj. Nygaardsvold (S-1005) M/L0016, Letter from "Komite for å behandle de disiplinære forhold i handelsflåten (Keilhau)" to Handelsdep, 27.2.1941. Totally 6,500 war medals were awarded to seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet until 1950, more than any other Norwegian group during the war. Behind this practice laid a clear conviction that medals and decorations would stimulate the fighting spirit. It was pointed out that other Allied powers had great success with the propaganda of decorating their civilian seamen. Ref: Rosendahl, 2015d: 182.

<sup>233</sup> Henriksen, Weber and Brazier, 2017: 103.

sailors” in the years of the Second World War. This is also beyond the scope of this study. In March 1941, Norwegian seafarers shared their views on their roles in the printed announcements from the director of Nortraship. These announcements were distributed to Norwegian seafarers all over the world. “We’re a sort of frontline soldiers, and we are aware of that,” held a seafarer in the first interview.<sup>234</sup> In the second interview, a different seafarer reflected on their role in light of the new armaments onboard their ship and was quoted: “We are actually pure warriors now.”<sup>235</sup>

This study has not discovered any evidence that proves that Norwegian authorities instrumentally tried to make the seafarers feel like soldiers, warriors or “war sailors”. However, as shown in this section, many aspects of the policy did point in that direction. Not all did, and this applied particularly the policy towards the foreign seafarers. An ambiguous policy was conducted towards a profession which never really found its place in the war. This was possibly the reason why Norwegian authorities displayed this ambiguity explicitly during the war, by categorising the seafarers in separate columns in their internal statistics; neither as civilian work or a part of the armed forces.<sup>236</sup>

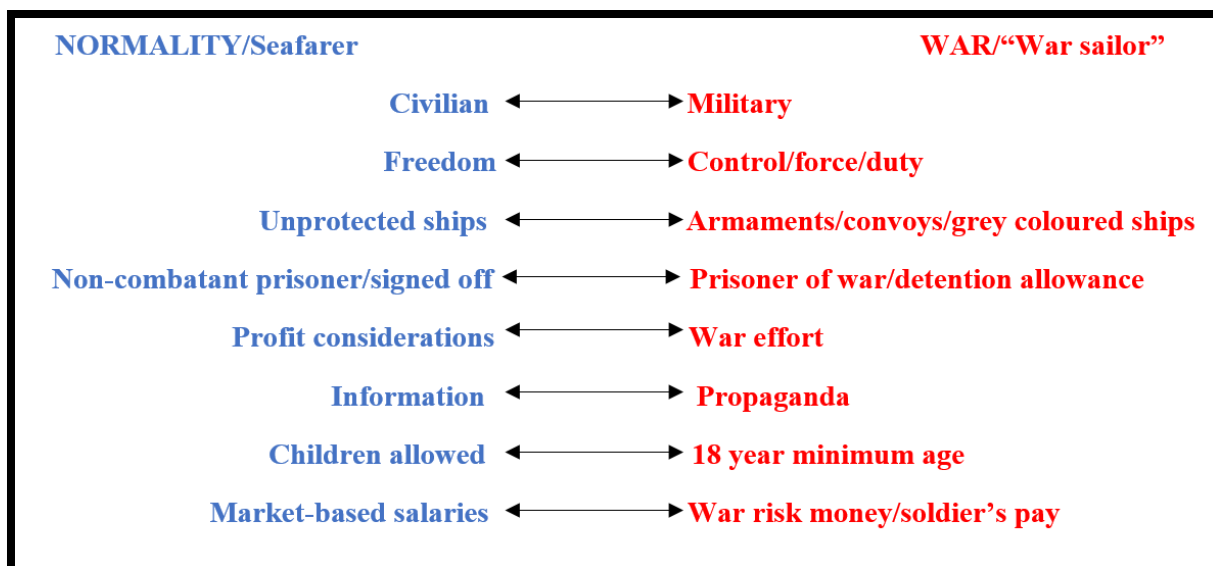
The ambiguous policy towards the seafarers in war took place in the field of tension between normality and war, between a regular seafarer and a “war sailor”. This is visualised in the figure below, where I show some of the topics in which the ambiguity was immanent and displayed.

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<sup>234</sup> *Meddelelser fra Skipsfartsdirektøren*, No. 16/13th March 1941. Original quote: “Vi er jo en slags frontsoldater og det er vi jo klar over.”

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, Nr. 17/27. mars 1941. Original quote: “Vi er faktisk rene krigere nu.”

<sup>236</sup> RA, SMK, Regj. Nygaardsvold (S-1005) M/L16 Mannskaps- og vernepliktsstyrets virksomhet. III. 1.7.1943 – 30.6.1944.



*Ambiguous policy in the field of tension between normality and war.*

The chosen policy was very much influenced by the seafarers' nationality. The impact of other Allied nations in an environment of a politicised shipping economy, also made a difference.

*A politicised shipping economy in war*

A well-known characteristic of total war is a far greater state control as a response to the wartime challenges.<sup>237</sup> In the words of Tony Lane, the state then takes on many of the characteristics of a command economy.<sup>238</sup> This thesis' findings related to the Norwegian merchant fleet, support the view that the Second World War did result in increased state control over the shipping economy and the seafarers.<sup>239</sup> In this section I will explore how the politicised shipping economy influenced the ways the seafarers' service was ensured, with particular emphasis on the impact of the Norwegian state's role as a shipowner during the Second World War.

Economics and politics are not separated in shipping in times of peace, with market forces occasionally overwhelmed by the use of political power.<sup>240</sup> In the Second World War, the normal power structures were both challenged and changed by new interests implied by the needs of war. Yet, the market forces continued to work, sometimes with states as a supportive actor. This was also the case when the Norwegian Government in exile went into business as a shipowner. Atle Thowsen has earlier documented that profit considerations impacted strongly on Nortraship's disposal of the ships in the

<sup>237</sup> Beckett, 2001: 32-33.

<sup>238</sup> Lane, 1994: 45.

<sup>239</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167-173; Rosendahl, 2017a: 19.

<sup>240</sup> Cafruny, 1987: 2.

Norwegian merchant fleet.<sup>241</sup> Profit considerations were also taken into account related to employee matters, but this was significantly more evident related to questions concerning foreign rather than Norwegian crews.<sup>242</sup> When the end of the war came closer, considerations regarding shipping business in the post-war world created tensions between the Allied nations. Norwegian authorities suspected both British and American authorities would promote their own shipping business in certain crew questions. The United Kingdom was accused of exploiting the Norwegian merchant fleet as an arena to train their own seamen.<sup>243</sup> The American merchant fleet was regarded as a great potential competitor to the Norwegian fleet when the war was ended. Nortraship was therefore conscious of approving skilled Norwegian seafarers to serve in the growing American merchant fleet, which needed highly skilled personnel.<sup>244</sup>

The active role of the Norwegian Government in exile included more than promoting the nations' future business interests. Deeper and wider control was enforced towards Norwegian seafarers to secure their service on Norwegian ships.<sup>245</sup> The same phenomenon was seen in the United Kingdom, where according to Tony Lane, "the penal net became wider and more inclusive as the war progressed".<sup>246</sup> Moreover, this thesis documents that a common *Allied* penal net was developed, which particularly targeted seafarers located in the USA, through political lobbyism and a common Allied deportation system.<sup>247</sup> When the control measures were co-ordinated between the Allied nations, the net got more and more efficient.

The wider and more inclusive state control over the Norwegian seafarers was followed by legal regulations and an adaption of the bureaucratic organisation needed to meet the new requirements. Normally, the institutional development followed in the paths of the expanding regulations.<sup>248</sup> The establishment of the Norwegian Ministry of Shipping in October 1942, was one of the changes taking place at the top of the bureaucratic organisation.<sup>249</sup> This strengthened the political control over Nortraship.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Thowsen, 1992.

<sup>242</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 19.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>244</sup> RA, Nortraship L, MD (S-2118) Fa/L0019, Letter from Handelsdep. 22.5.1943.

<sup>245</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167-173.

<sup>246</sup> Lane, 1995: 83-86.

<sup>247</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 171-173.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* 170.

<sup>249</sup> An illustration of the most central Norwegian governmental actors in the management of seafarers (from October 1942) is found under the subchapter "A multitude of actors" of Chapter 2.

<sup>250</sup> Basberg, 1993: 121.



It seems however, that the forming of new governmental bodies operating directly with the seafarers affected the mobilisation efforts more directly.<sup>251</sup> A side effect of the increased bureaucratic organisation was internal Norwegian tensions of who was to take care of certain seafarer issues in harbour cities around the world, where Nortraship offices emerged during the war. The Norwegian Government in exile's role as a shipowner challenged the traditional responsibilities of the foreign service missions towards crews on Norwegian ships.<sup>252</sup>

The expanded bureaucracy was not unique to Norway. Similar expansion developed in the United Kingdom. The British Ministry of Shipping was originally a First World War institution which was reinstated again with the outbreak of a new war in 1939. In 1941 the division was moved to the Ministry of War Transport under the leadership of Lord Leathers.<sup>253</sup> The British bureaucracy was well organised to implement the increased control of British seamen. According to Tony Lane, no other industry in the United Kingdom had an equivalent bureaucracy, supported by both trade union officials and shipowners, to create a "broadly consensual punitive regime".<sup>254</sup>

Another element of the politicisation of shipping economy in the Second World War is exposed in this thesis' analysis of foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships. War made states the most central actors in the efforts to ensure the service of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian fleet.<sup>255</sup> Seafarers' wages, compensation for war injuries and repatriation rules became diplomatic issues between governments and not only agreed between the employer and the employees. This result of the politicisation of the use and situation of foreign seafarers occasionally frustrated Norwegian authorities.<sup>256</sup> It may seem paradoxical that the Norwegian state-owned shipping company was annoyed that other states involved themselves actively in this sphere of the economy. This possibly reflects the fact that Nortraship recruited its leaders widely among shipowners, who were used to thinking like businessmen and not like government officials.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> E.g., The Crew and Conscriptio Board (Mannskaps- og Vernepliktsstyret, MVS), ref: Rosendahl, 2015d: 170.

<sup>252</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 2.

<sup>253</sup> Behrens, 1955: 55.

<sup>254</sup> Lane, 1995: 83-86.

<sup>255</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 17-20; Rosendahl, 2017b: 11.

<sup>256</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 17-19; Rosendahl, 2017b: 11.

<sup>257</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 23.

## **A state-owned shipping company**

The Norwegian Government in exile's requisition of the merchant fleet was one expression of the politicisation of shipping economy in the war.<sup>258</sup> This leads to the question if the Norwegian model of forming a state-owned shipping company made any difference to the situation of the seafarers in the years of war. In my article dealing with the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers, this question was discussed in the context of the broad measures that were taken to improve the Norwegian seafarers' welfare and social conditions. My conclusion was that, from the Nortraship point of view, several arguments pointed in the direction of a strengthening of welfare and taking social responsibility. Being a governmental institution was one of these motives.<sup>259</sup> However, compared with the British merchant fleet, where the private shipowners retained their role as employers of seafarers, the situation was not dramatically different. British authorities also saw the need for and the importance of improving welfare among Allied seafarers.<sup>260</sup>

Nortraship feared however, that the new welfare benefits granted in the times of war would prove to be costly for the private shipowners in the future.<sup>261</sup> Its role as a state-owned company did not hinder such considerations, and actions were taken to prevent costly measures to shipowners in the coming post-war world.<sup>262</sup> There were some situations during the war, where it was unclear whether it was the state or the shipowner who were obliged to pay for, for example, seafarer's recreation homes, detention allowances and sick leave.<sup>263</sup> This might be judged as an irrelevant question when the state was the shipowner. However, with peace in sight, the long-term effects of an extension of the shipowners responsibilities towards their employees were matters of significance.

Even if the existence of a state-owned shipping company did not prevent market forces from working during the war, this way of organising a business did challenge the traditional profit considerations of the employer. In the war years, there were different views on Nortraship's role. Trade unions raised the questions of whether Nortraship should be compared with other state enterprises, and if their leaders should act like

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<sup>258</sup> A similar model of a requisition of the Norwegian merchant fleet in case of war, was implemented into Norwegian military plans during the cold war. Ref Jenssen, 2001: 257-258.

<sup>259</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 176-178.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*: 177.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*: 177.

<sup>262</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 11-12.

<sup>263</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 16.

governments officials or traditional shipowners.<sup>264</sup> An open conflict broke out in 1942, where both the government in exile and the trade unions demanded larger influence over Nortraship. The conflict was rooted in the ongoing discussion, through the years of the war, on how to view Nortraship. It ended with the transmission of some authority from Nortraship to the Ministry of Shipping in 1943, but without any increased trade union control.<sup>265</sup>

This did however, not lead to any major shifts in Nortraship's policy towards the seafarers, according to the cases explored in this thesis. Based on my extensive archive studies, I conclude that the shipowner perspective endured throughout the war. The Norwegian model with a state-owned shipping company made some impact on the conditions of the Norwegian seafarers in the years from 1940 to 1945, but hardly impacted the situation of the foreign seafarers.<sup>266</sup> It is reasonable to assume that a state operating as an employer would tend to approach their employees sailing in war zones as "war sailors" in greater extent than shipowners more used to act and think in the context of normal business. However, this hypothesis is not supported consistently in my thesis' empirical sources. The shipowners' influence from the inside of Nortraship reduced the possible impact of a state-owned shipping company.

The politicisation of Allied merchant shipping economy in the Second World War impacted strongly on the situation of the seafarers in the Norwegian fleet. To the Norwegian crews, this meant being subject to a wide-ranging force and control. Some groups of nationalities on Norwegian ships benefited from the involvement of their governments involvements and negotiations of improved terms and conditions. The Norwegian model of a state-owned shipping company did not end the focus on profit. The Norwegian shipping policy promoted both the war effort and the nations' future business interests, and these dual and sometimes conflicting objectives contributed to the ambiguous approaches which in many cases was shown towards the seafarers.

#### An Allied question

A significant result drawn from all three articles in my study is that Allied, and primarily British, co-operation and influence had a strong impact on the Norwegian policy to ensure the seafarers' service in the Second World War.<sup>267</sup> This is not

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<sup>264</sup> AAB, Norsk Sjømannsforbund, Box 9, Ingvald Haugens saker, Letter to the Norw. Gov. from Sjømannsforbundet, Maskinistforbundet, Styrmannsforeningen and LO, 14.5.1942; RA, SMK, Regj. Nygaardsvold (S-1005) M/L0032, Uttalelse fra Nortraship London, 20.1.1943.

<sup>265</sup> Basberg, 1993 106-121.

<sup>266</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 177; Rosendahl, 2017a: 23.

<sup>267</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 183; Rosendahl, 2017a: 14-19; Rosendahl, 2017b: 11.

surprising, though, but still worth emphasising, because this partly contradicts and partly adds to other historians' conclusions. Olav Riste claimed in his standard reference work about the Norwegian Government in exile, that the management of the seafarers was something Norwegian authorities could take care of quite independently.<sup>268</sup> Guri Hjeltnes writes in depth about the internal Norwegian processes regarding the manpower situation, where she also emphasises the important role of the American authorities, but also the British to a limited extent.<sup>269</sup> Against this background, I will first discuss the implications of my findings through the prism of Norwegian-British bilateral relations, before I quite briefly reflect on what perspectives this thesis might bring into the British war history discourse.

### **The Norwegian perspective**

Probably because of the disproportionate relationship between Norway and the United Kingdom in 1940-1945, in terms of power, the countries' bilateral relationship has been researched more from a Norwegian perspective than from a British. Olav Riste's two volume work from the 1970s, is the most comprehensive research published about the Norwegian Government in exile during the Second World War.<sup>270</sup> Riste did not, however, focus his analysis on the policy and handling of the merchant fleet. The history of the merchant fleet and Nortraship is in Riste's own words, only to be found "between the lines".<sup>271</sup> Riste claimed that this was a topic for future historians to study. This task was accomplished when the five volumes of *Handelsflåten i krig 1939-1945* were published about 20 years later.<sup>272</sup>

Riste claimed that he wrote his analysis with the merchant fleet in mind, but he did not possess the knowledge which Thowsen and Basberg later provided of the disposal of Norwegian ships during the war, nor the knowledge Hjeltnes provided on the crew issues. It is reasonable to question the consequences of Riste's choice of referring the research on shipping to later historians, when shipping and managing strategically important transportation by sea was the government in exile's most important economic and political asset and wartime task, but also with regards to the high number of exiled Norwegians serving in this fleet. When the most authoritative

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<sup>268</sup> Riste, 1973: 26, 37.

<sup>269</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 159-211. The Norwegian Maritime Courts in the United Kingdom is not mentioned here, for instance. The courts were vital tools to enforce discipline and to ensure that compulsion was applied entirely and efficiently to Norwegian seafarers, ref: Rosendahl, 2015d: 168-170.

<sup>270</sup> Riste, 1973; Riste, 1979.

<sup>271</sup> Riste, 1973: 10.

<sup>272</sup> Thowsen, Basberg, Hjeltnes and Pettersen, 1992-1997.

research into the Norwegian Government in exile 1940-1945 was conducted without deep insight or close attention to the handling of the merchant fleet and its seafarers, this must surely have influenced the overall conclusions regarding the Norwegian-British relations. In 1995, Riste published an article on the relationship between the Norwegian and British governments in the Second World War at a time when the research of Thowsen and Basberg had recently been published.<sup>273</sup> In the 1995 article, Riste did not indicate any changes to his previous conclusions, but instead stressed the importance of the merchant fleet in this relationship. He concluded that Norway was a junior partner to the United Kingdom in the war, except in shipping, but claimed that Norway also acted as a junior partner in this field.<sup>274</sup>

Until the Second World War, Norway had officially been a non-aligned country since its independence from Sweden in 1905. However, geopolitical and economic factors tied Norway to the United Kingdom, and Norway was in Olav Riste's words, a "neutral ally" of the United Kingdom in the First World War.<sup>275</sup> The contextual background was the great extent to which the Norwegian merchant fleet was chartered by the British Government. Twenty-two years later, during the Norwegian campaign from April to June 1940, British and Norwegian soldiers fought side by side against German forces. When the Norwegian Government went into exile in June 1940, there was also some minor military co-operation in practical terms between the two countries. Norway's alliance with the United Kingdom was, however, first officially announced 15 December 1940.<sup>276</sup>

The main Norwegian narrative provided by Riste is that the Norwegian alignment to the United Kingdom was debated and unresolved, until the pro-British Trygve Lie replaced Halvdan Koht as a Foreign Minister in November 1940. From this point on, the Norwegian Government in exile went from an ad-hoc war policy, to a systematic adaption of all measures under the perspective of the liberation of Norway.<sup>277</sup> A formalisation and a signal of a deepening of the new Norwegian alliance policy was the military agreement with the United Kingdom, signed in May 1941. The agreement regulated the relationship between the Norwegian Armed Forces deployed in the United Kingdom and the British Government.<sup>278</sup> For a long time, this has been

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<sup>273</sup> Hjeltnes' two volumes in this series were published in 1995 and 1997.

<sup>274</sup> Riste, 1995: 47.

<sup>275</sup> Riste, 1965.

<sup>276</sup> Riste, 1995: 43.

<sup>277</sup> Riste, 1973: 66; Riste, 1979: 389.

<sup>278</sup> Riste, 1973: 235. The full text of the military agreement is transcribed here.

regarded as a central milestone in the bilateral relations between Norway and the United Kingdom in the Second World War.<sup>279</sup>

The formal military agreement of May 1941 probably had a greater symbolic meaning and prestige than the utilisation of merchant ships and crews. However, from the perspectives of the United Kingdom, the merchant fleet of Norway with its seafarers, was considerable more important than its armed forces. This was shown in the case of foreigners living in the United Kingdom, where British authorities considered calling-up seafarers as more urgent than military conscription.<sup>280</sup> In shipping, the two countries began to operate as allies out of necessity almost immediately after the German invasion of Norway. This was not limited to the British chartering of Norwegian ships. In the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers, British authorities worked proactively and co-operated closely with Norwegian authorities during the war.<sup>281</sup>

This thesis' findings of early, proactively and deep British interventions to ensure the service of seafarers on Norwegian ships does not imply dramatic changes in the overall narrative of Norwegian-British relations. Rather, it supplements and clarifies aspects of this topic which previous have been unknown or ignored. Riste claims that the new alliance policy from the winter of 1940/41, resulted in a "pragmatic co-operation policy", and that this was materialised in the mobilisation of Norwegian resources, like the merchant fleet.<sup>282</sup> In the thesis' article of the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers, I find that Norwegian and British authorities already interacted profoundly on this issue from the summer of 1940.<sup>283</sup>

The high political level of some of the actors involved demonstrated that this was an issue important to the war effort. In the article about the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers, I showed that Prime Minister Churchill personally intervened early on to put an end to the strikes on Norwegian ships.<sup>284</sup> In July/August 1940, his involvement was crucial, when the Minister of Supply, Trygve Lie, was persuaded by British authorities to travel to the USA and negotiate with the protesting seafarers.<sup>285</sup> Moreover, in 1941 Churchill was instrumental in the approval of the Allied Powers (Maritime Courts)

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<sup>279</sup> Sverdrup, 1996: 85.

<sup>280</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 169.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

<sup>282</sup> Riste, 1979: 389.

<sup>283</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 168-170.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.* 174.

<sup>285</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 174.

Bill, which from a legal standpoint was regarded as a “an infraction of a well-known principle of sovereignty” in the United Kingdom, but was a matter of policy.<sup>286</sup> British authorities started the legislative process in August 1940, because of Norwegian problems to enforce the conscription laws and to secure discipline among their seafarers.<sup>287</sup> I will argue that British measures were not taken with Norwegian neutrality as the basis, but with Norway as a de facto ally.

From a Norwegian point of view, the lack of a formal alliance was apparently not seen as an obstacle to close co-operation and a partial submission to the United Kingdom in the management of the ships and crews in the merchant fleet. This was probably less problematic when a civilian profession went to war than soldiers, even though the risks of their service were comparable, and even though the civilian seafarers as a group – in the case of Norway – were of considerably greater importance to the Allied war effort than the military soldiers.

Moreover, in the disposal of their merchant fleet in 1940, Norwegian authorities had arguably limited space to manoeuvre. The United Kingdom depended on Norwegian shipping, and during the days before and after the German invasion of Norway the United Kingdom seriously considered whether they should take forcible possession of Norwegian ships and hinted about this towards Norwegian authorities.<sup>288</sup> Norwegian merchant shipping was at the time closely integrated into the overseas trade system of the British Empire, and this both pushed and pulled the Norwegian government further towards subordination and co-operation with the United Kingdom. The Norwegian dependency upon the United Kingdom got even stronger when the Norwegian Government went into exile in London. The British-Norwegian relationship was from then on clearly marked by the facts on the ground: an exiled government of a small power, residing inside the borders of a great power.

### **From a British perspective**

There is little research conducted from a British perspective into the general involvement of the United Kingdom in mobilising Norwegian and other Allied seafarers. This reflects the lack of research into the exiled governments in United Kingdom in general. One exception is *Governments in Exile, 1939-1945*, written by

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<sup>286</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 169; Chorley, 1941: 118.

<sup>287</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 169.

<sup>288</sup> Thowsen, 1992: 104.

the war correspondent and diplomat Eliezer Yapou and published in 2005.<sup>289</sup> The different European governments in exile and their nations' Second World War history is outlined here, but there are no comprehensive analyses of the role of these governments in relation to British policy and British warfare.

When Winston Churchill gave his famous "Their Finest Hour" speech on 18 June 1940, he spoke of "the resolve of Britain and the British Empire to fight on, if necessary for years, if necessary alone."<sup>290</sup> This probably contributed to the widespread perception after the war that the United Kingdom and the British Empire from June 1940 had been "Standing Alone", until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.<sup>291</sup> In a bigger picture, the efforts from, and the co-operation with, the different governments in exile did not seem to matter much to the British warfare, at least on the military front. There were other fronts and other aspects of significance, where the resources of the occupied countries mattered more, shipping in particular. Few researchers have comprehensively studied the contribution of the crews of the Allied European merchant fleets in general. Behrens, however, includes the occupied Allied countries' merchant fleets as an integrated part of the British resources when she writes about the British Government's use of Allied *ships*:

Though the Allied ships were put into British service on terms which were the result of negotiations between governments concerned; though they flew their own flags and were manned by their own crews, and though their governments were given the right to be consulted about how they should be employed, nevertheless it was the British Government that made the plans and dispositions. The Allied ships, though they preserved their identity, became a part of the British pool.<sup>292</sup>

Researchers have used the concept of "total war" to explain the British and the Allied victory in the Second World War, by the argument that the Allies "mobilised the highest production capacity and the greatest human masses."<sup>293</sup> Total war is a disputed concept and researchers even disagree over its definition.<sup>294</sup> The British military

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<sup>289</sup> Yapou, 2005. The manuscript was completed in 1995.

<sup>290</sup> <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/122-their-finest-hour> (accessed 31/01/2017.) Later in this speech, Churchill emphasised that the British were not alone, when he said that: "Czechs, Poles, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians have joined their causes to our own". The expression "if necessary for years, if necessary alone", was also used by Churchill in his "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" speech, June 4 1940, ref: Churchill, 1949.

<sup>291</sup> In *The Myth of the Blitz*, Angus Calder examines the events of 1940 and 1941 - when Britain "stood alone" against the Luftwaffe - and of the sustained myth of Britain's "finest hour". The co-operation with the governments in exile is however not included in his discussion (Calder, 1991).

<sup>292</sup> Behrens, 1955: 102.

<sup>293</sup> Hobson, 2005: 296. Original quote: "mobiliserte den høyeste produksjonskapasiteten og de største menneskemassene".

<sup>294</sup> Chickering and Förster, 2010: 13.



historian Brian Bond has called total war a “myth”.<sup>295</sup> Another British military historian, Hew Strachan, takes a more pragmatic approach, when he concludes that the Second World War was “the nearest the world has come to total war because the ideas of total war and the means of modern war were simultaneously deployed.”<sup>296</sup> Roger Chickering and Stig Förster conclude that the most common and practical approach is to treat total war as an “ideal type”, a model that features a number of characteristics.<sup>297</sup>

Total war can serve as an instructive concept to understand the mobilisation of the seafarers during the Second World War, provided the concept’s limitations are kept in mind.<sup>298</sup> This thesis’ findings underscore the necessity to avoid national fixation in total war studies.<sup>299</sup> In the crucial question of shipping, the British mobilisation of merchant ships and crews included allied nations like Norway. The mobilisation of the civilian population in the “total war economy” of the United Kingdom must therefore be understood beyond the nation state, the Empire and its citizens.<sup>300</sup>

The British historian Arthur Marwick has claimed that in total wars “the domestic front becomes as important as organization of the military front.”<sup>301</sup> I will argue on the basis of the general results of this thesis and its many cases of ambiguous approaches to the seafarers’ role, that the boundaries separating the military and the domestic front were not always clear. To supplement Marwick; the domestic front was not only as important as the military front, it was also, to a great extent, a part of it.

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<sup>295</sup> Beckett, 2001: 25.

<sup>296</sup> Strachan, 2001: 273.

<sup>297</sup> Chickering and Förster, 2010: 2. This conclusion is made on the basis of five conferences and subsequent publications on the history of total war.

<sup>298</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 40.

<sup>299</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 24-41.

<sup>300</sup> Based on an analysis of the British war economy, Broadberry and Howlett claim that: “The scale of mobilization is probably sufficient to justify the use of the term “total war economy” to describe Britain during World War II.” Furthermore, they claim that “the importance of overseas financial aid allowed Britain to become “overmobilized,” so that we need to think in terms of a Western Allied Economic Market.” Broadberry and Howlett conclude too that the war economy eclipsed national boundaries. (Broadberry and Howlett, 2010: 176.)

<sup>301</sup> Marwick, 1974: 172-176.



## 6. Conclusions

In general, the distinction between military personnel and civilians became less clear between 1939 and 1945.<sup>302</sup> This was also the situation on Allied merchant ships, where the seafarers' civilian status came under pressure. One of the results was an ambiguous Norwegian policy to ensure that the seafarers carried out their ordinary jobs under extraordinary circumstances.

The ambiguous policy towards seafarers on Norwegian ships is explored in this thesis through my constructed dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors”.<sup>303</sup> The terms are used to explore the relationship between normality and war in the Norwegian merchant fleet, inspired by the different approaches to the seafarers' identity in the war, presented by the British sociologist, Tony Lane, and the Norwegian historian, Guri Hjeltnes.<sup>304</sup>

One important factor explored in this study is the consequences of the politicisation of the Allied merchant shipping economy in the Second World War. This development made a large impact on the seafarers in the Norwegian fleet.<sup>305</sup> It laid the ground for a wide-ranging force and control over Norwegian crews and the use of foreign seafarers and their conditions in the Norwegian fleet became diplomatic issues between governments.<sup>306</sup>

In the context of this study, the Norwegian model of a state-owned shipping company (Nortraship) was a central element of this politicisation. Norwegian shipping policy was supposed to promote both the war effort and the nations' future business interests. The shipowners' influence from the inside of Nortraship strengthened the business interests in these priorities. This applied particularly to matters relating to foreign seafarers, and led to conflicts with both seafarers and other governments.

A central conclusion of this study is that Allied, and primarily British, co-operation and influence had a larger impact on the Norwegian crew policy than has been shown by previous research.<sup>307</sup> This finding is a result of this thesis' objective to expand and supplement the national framework of analysis within this field of research.

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<sup>302</sup> Hobson, 2005: 294.

<sup>303</sup> See the subchapter “Ambiguous policy: Seafarers or “war sailors”?” of Chapter 5.

<sup>304</sup> Lane, 1990: 90-93; Hjeltnes, 2000: 48-52.

<sup>305</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 177; Rosendahl, 2017a: 17-19; Rosendahl, 2017b: 11.

<sup>306</sup> The consequences of the politicisation of shipping economy are explored in the subchapter “A politicised shipping economy in war” of Chapter 5.

<sup>307</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 183; Rosendahl, 2017a: 14-19; Rosendahl, 2017b: 11. This is summarised and explored more deeply in this introductory section, under the subchapter “An Allied question” of Chapter 5.

The changing historical circumstances in the period 1940 to 1945 strongly influenced how the different groups of nationalities employed in the Norwegian fleet were mobilised. The Norwegian seafarers' service was ensured through a wide range of both push and pull measures. This is shown in the article "Patriotism, Money and Control: Mobilization of Norwegian Merchant Seamen during the Second World War".<sup>308</sup> The pull measures were strongly coloured by the war situation, by appeals to patriotism and the liberation of occupied Norway. Those measures were usually handled autonomously by Norwegian authorities, in close co-operation with the trade union organisations.

The compulsory duty to sail on Norwegian ships was the fundament of the mobilisation of Norwegian seafarers throughout the war. To be able to push these seafarers into duty, help and support from the United Kingdom and the USA was decisive. The establishment of Allied maritime courts in the United Kingdom and a common deportation system of Allied seafarers from the USA to the United Kingdom, are two new and central findings in this context.<sup>309</sup> These are some of the building blocks of the article's main contribution, which is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mobilisation of the Norwegian seafarers during the Second World War.

Fewer war-related measures were used to mobilise the foreign seafarers on Norwegian ships compared with Norwegian seafarers. This is a central conclusion in the article "How to secure the participation of a foreign civilian workforce in times of war. Norwegian authorities and the use of foreign seafarers during the Second World War".<sup>310</sup> The foreign seafarers were primarily mobilised to do a job, like ordinary seafarers. However, working conditions and mobilisation measures suitable in peace turned out to be inadequate in war. This resulted in conflicts between Norwegian authorities and seafarers from China and India, and with the governments of China, the United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden.<sup>311</sup> Historical research into the Second World War has so far paid little attention to foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet. This study has brought forth new empirical information on who these foreign seafarers were and how the nationality of this growing group of seafarers changed over the course of the war. In brief, the Norwegian merchant fleet went from using Chinese crewmembers in peacetime, to British ones in wartime. This was only a temporary

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<sup>308</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d.

<sup>309</sup> Rosendahl, 2015d: 167-173.

<sup>310</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a.

<sup>311</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 17-19.

change. By the early 1950s, considerable numbers of Chinese and other Asian seamen had once again returned to Norwegian ships, while there were few British crew members left.<sup>312</sup>

Central aspects of the Norwegian authorities' policy towards seafarers in the Second World War, would not have been discovered, without a separate case study of the Chinese seafarers. This is presented in the article "Not in the same boat? Chinese seamen in the Norwegian Merchant Fleet during the Second World War".<sup>313</sup> Chinese seafarers were the largest group of foreign seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet in 1940. While foreign seafarers in the Norwegian fleet from 1940 to 1945 increased both in relative and absolute terms, the number of Chinese seafarers was reduced considerably. This was the result of a deliberate policy by Norwegian authorities, who changed their view on Chinese crews during the war. From being regarded as good, loyal and low-cost crewmembers, they were considered as expensive and associated with trouble and unrest.<sup>314</sup> The background for this change was the collision between the Norwegian policy of business as usual, and the Chinese seamen and their government representatives' demands that the war should result in equality in terms of higher wages and better conditions. Tensions and conflicts were in turn compounded by cultural differences and a patronising Norwegian policy.<sup>315</sup>

Despite strikes, disciplinary problems, the lack of certain types of seafarers and cultural distances between the crews and the employers – and despite the risks involved – Norwegian authorities generally managed to mobilise enough seafarers to keep the ships sailing. This success was vital to the Allied war effort, but also to the status of the Norwegian Government in exile, since the merchant fleet was its main asset both politically and economically.

The relationship between normality and war in the Norwegian merchant fleet was shifting, depending on the circumstances, the types of issues and the seafarers' nationalities. Conflicts occurred more easily when the war did *not* influence the means used to ensure the service of the seafarers in the Norwegian merchant fleet. In this study's terminology, these conflicts mainly occurred in situations where seafarers were treated as seafarers only, and not as "war sailors".<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Rosendahl, 2017a: 24.

<sup>313</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b.

<sup>314</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 18.

<sup>315</sup> Rosendahl, 2017b: 19.

<sup>316</sup> See the subchapter "Ambiguous policy: Seafarers or "war sailors"?" of Chapter 5.

In the extension of this study, it is relevant to question how the seafarers were approached by Norwegian authorities in the years after the war, when they were veterans. These were difficult times for many of the seafarers from the Second World War. One aspect was the difficulties in being granted war pension. After years of restricted practice, a legislative breakthrough came in 1968. This change was based on a recognition of the high risks involved of being a seafarer in war, together with new medical research into the long term psychological effects from sailing in war zones.<sup>317</sup> More research should be done to explore if the dual terminology of “seafarers” and “war sailors” is a constructive perspective to explain the many difficulties the seafarer veterans’ faced in the post-war era, including their challenges and the obstacles they faced with regards to finding their place in the Norwegian society and in the Second World War narrative.<sup>318</sup>

My study has illuminated historical perspectives of more general features of making service in civil or unresolved civil-military roles in war situations. This may well have implications in similar situations in the present society. I will argue that these research results are relevant to consider in other cases when a state engages civilians to work in war zones, in particular if their status as civilians is ambiguous, dubious or fragile. If so, this may imply that regulations, agreements, working conditions and other mobilisation tools suitable in peace are not adequate during war. Moreover, the use of a foreign labour force does not necessarily change this or make it less problematic to maintain normality in war.

International perspectives have proved to be productive to develop a deeper understanding of the Norwegian history in this study. The Norwegian nation-state as a framework of analysis was no barrier to this. Hopefully, this thesis’ results from a Norwegian case will contribute to a deeper understanding of the general phenomenon of Allied merchant seafarers in the Second World War. The context of the seafarers on Norwegian ships was not identical to other nations’ merchant fleets, but it was comparable. The similarities and parallels found in this study, in the situation of and the policy towards other Allied seafarers supports this thesis’ objective of relevance beyond the Norwegian case. Allied seafarers’ services were ensured in an Allied

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<sup>317</sup> Hjeltnes, 1997: 458-464.

<sup>318</sup> This topic is most comprehensively discussed in Hjeltnes, 1997: 367-552. Two shorter, but more updated discussions about the recognition of the seafarers’ war effort are found in Rosendahl, 2015a and Henriksen, Weber and Brazier, 2017: 96-119.

context, so historical research on the seafarers' war will benefit from including Allied perspectives.





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- Norges Sjømannsforbund (the Norwegian Seamen's Union)

#### **NR: Norges Rederiforbund (the Norwegian Shipowners' Association, Oslo)**

- Norges Rederforbund
- Skipsfartens arbeidsgiverforening

#### **RA: Riksarkivet (the Norwegian National Archives, Oslo)**

- Direktoratet for sjømenn (S-3545)
- Handelsdepartementet (S-1409/S-3567): i London, Skipsfartsavdelingen
- Lie, Trygve (PA-1407)
- Nortraship London (L): Disbursement Dep., Hysing Olsens arkiv (Directors Office), Information Department, Legal Department, Maritime Department (MD)
- Nortraship New York (NY): General Files, Maritime Department (MD)
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i Shanghai, Generalkonsulatet i San Fransisco, Ambassaden/Legasjonen i Beijing

## THE UNITED KINGDOM

### **BL: British Library (London)**

- India Office Records and Private Papers (IOR)

### **NA: National Archives (Kew, London)**

- Board of Trade and Ministry of Transport and successors, included the Ministry of Shipping, the Ministry of War Transport, the Ministry of Transport. (MT)
- Colonial Office and Predecessors: West Indies Original Correspondence (CO)
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- Krigsseilerregisteret (war sailor register): [www.krigsseilerregisteret.no](http://www.krigsseilerregisteret.no)
- Merriam-Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com>
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