Project proposal and group charter

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1. **Justification of RQ**

Research on the complexities of employment within the VOC can be critical for several reasons, particularly in its relevance to today's context. By employing individuals from different origins—often as a strategy to control and oversee local labor—the VOC may have created hierarchies that strengthened colonial power structures. When examining contemporary workplaces, it is essential to acknowledge how historical colonial systems have shaped current patterns of workforce structures. We can draw parallels between the principles of the VOC and today's discourse on how diversity may influence access to economic opportunities and different ranking systems. This historical perspective reveals that the marginalization of certain groups may still exist in today's society, and we must recognize this to strive for equal working environments.

Previous research showed that Dutch workers had higher promotion rates than non-Dutch (Bruijn & Gaastra, 2012; Wezel & Ruef, 2024) and that Europeans enjoyed better conditions than their Asian counterparts (Lucassen, 2004). This study delves deeper by examining job prospects within the European workforce as it has not been a homogenous group, pursuing the following research questions

RQ: How did the evolving diversity of the VOC workforce in the 18th century shape employees' working conditions and opportunities?

Thesis statement:

Despite the VOC's multi-national workforce, analysis of 18th century pay ledgers will illuminate the professional advantages awarded to Dutch-originating employees, with non-Dutch-originating employees having been over-represented in lower-paying jobs and less likely to receive promotions.

2. **Data criticism**

The dataset for this study consists of three files: The VOC pay books (VOC-soldijboeken), VOC passenger lists (VOC-opvarenden), and VOC beneficiaries (VOC-begunstigden). The original dataset had significant weaknesses, limiting research validity. Petram et al., (2024) addressed these by disambiguating individual records, standardizing names, and adding wage and rank details, making it possible to study the VOC workforce from various perspectives with a level of reliability and validity that was not

previously achievable. While this improved completeness and usability, certain limitations remain:

Firstly, standardizing, linking, and clustering data does not come without a certain level of personal interpretation. Rank classification is particularly prone to error due to ambiguous job titles and changes in rank meanings after 1784, when higher designations were applied to lower roles to attract skilled workers (Lucassen, 2004).

The dataset also only includes individuals who enlisted in the Dutch Republic, excluding Asian personnel which made up a large part of the workforce (Lucasson, 2004). Most records pertain to the Dutch Republic and Dutch-speaking Southern Netherlands which represents findings of previous research (Bruijn & Gaastra, 2012). This however introduces possible biases since VOC clerks were likely more familiar with Dutch locations, reducing spelling variations compared to international origins. Transcriptions by merely Dutch researchers possibly further favored Dutch origins. In general, with our research looking at the origin of employees, the unequal distribution of employees between the different regions might negatively impact the statistical analysis of the data.

Another issue is the dataset's focus on employment rather than individuals. The original VOC pay ledgers, designed solely for salary calculations, closed employment records at the end of an employee's service. Subsequent re-employment was recorded separately, resulting in fragmented data for those who served multiple times.

Despite these limitations, the enhanced dataset provides a comprehensive overview of the VOC workforce and is well suited for studying the company's dynamics and environment.

3. Action plan

The data in the enriched dataset (Petram et al., 2024) should be sufficient to answer the research question. No further standardization is necessary. In order to facilitate large-scale comparison, Petram et al.'s place of origin classification scheme into nine culturally distinct regions will be retained. For each disambiguated employee, their number of contracts, parent rank and the corresponding mean salary will be selected as dependent variables, and subsequently linked to the independent variable: region of origin. Using these variables, an analysis will be conducted on how region of origin correlates with distribution of junior and senior titles, re-employment rate and promotion rate upon re-employment.

4. Group charter

Group 1 case study: *The Dutch East India Company's Eighteenth-Century Workforce.*

Group members:

Name:	Discipline:	Skills:
Denin Lunja	Computer Science and International Business Administration.	Programming, Work with spreadsheets, Visualization.
Maiss Aldahoul	MKDA (Art).	literature research, organization and planning, summarizing, oral presentation.
Nicola Roos	Linguistics (+Sociology minor).	Detailed work, writing, literature research.
Rasmus Laubinger	Communication Science.	Scientific writing, SPSS.
Tamara van Maarseveen	MKDA (Media).	literature research, writing, poster/slide design.

Communication is mainly through team WhatsApp group and video meetings twice a week (Monday – Friday). However, we recognize the importance of in-person interaction and will have face-to-face meetings when necessary.

The group has decided to use a Google Doc to share drafts, ideas, and the work process before uploading them to GitHub.

To address potential challenges in the future, such as data selection and decision-making or accessing external sources, the group will provide regular feedback and hold brainstorming sessions through tracing back our steps to pinpoint and solve issues.

The group aims to create a balance between time investment and quality of the deliverables while leveraging the diverse skills and academic backgrounds of its members to gain different perspectives.

References

Bruijn, J.R. & Gaastra, F. S. (2012). The career ladder to the top of the Dutch East India Company: Could foreigners also become commanders and junior merchants? In M. van der Linden & L. Lucassen (Eds.), *Working on Labor* (pp. 213-235). Brill.

Lucassen, J. (2004). A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595–1795. *International Labor and Working Class History*, *66*(66), 12–39. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547904000158

Petram, L., Koolen, M., Wevers, M., & van Lottum, J. (2024). Charting Lives and Careers: Enriched Data About the Dutch East India Company's Eighteenth-Century European Workforce. *Journal of Open Humanities Data*, *10*, 44–44. https://doi.org/10.5334/johd.210

Wezel, F. C., & Ruef, M. (2024). Cracking the deck: National origins and promotions in the Dutch East India Company, 1700–1796. *Organization Studies*, *45*(7), 1039–1061. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406241248985