Cousin, Justine (Paris IV Sorbonne University), *Foreign maritime labour working on British imperial shipping companies.*

My PhD research is focused on foreign seamen working in imperial British shipping companies between 1860 and 1960, when Britannia and its ships ruled the waves all over the world. From 1849 onwards more and more extra-European seamen enlisted in shipping companies such as P&O or the Cunard, especially from imperial India and its surrounding areas – known as the famous *lascars* – but also from the Far East, the Middle East, Africa and the West Indies.

I’m especially studying labour conditions experienced aboard by this low-paid labour, going through a de-skilling process helped by the growth of steam shipping. When compared with British seamen they suffered from segregation at work – located in the engine room and in the hotel department. It also concerned where they stayed and how they were treated and disciplined by their mostly white superiors.

I also want to focus on relations between aboard and ashore in the metropolis, as foreign seamen were definitely considered very differently when they boarded out. Many of them were a transient and sometimes more permanent presence in dockside areas. They contributed in making these cities more culturally diverse, even if they often stayed in homogeneous ethnic communities. When confronted with a more hostile economic climate these foreign populations were not accepted the same way by natives in the metropolis. It is a very interesting point to consider race riots going on there between the two world wars – especially in 1919 –, as they reveal many things about the metropolitan society and its relations to ‘Others’.

The attitude of British maritime trade unions and the British state to foreign seamen is also an important aspect of this subject. *Board of Trade* regulations regulated strictly every detail of their life aboard, always in an inferior way to their white counterparts – as for food or work hours by instance. When faced with tougher pressures from the all-mighty *National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union* in the beginning of the 20th century the *Board of Trade* established stronger foreign seamen quota.

In a word the way extra-European seamen work and are seen by the metropolitan opinion and white seamen has much to do with the way the ‘Other’ colonial subject is seen in the metropolis.