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America or the Poorhouse: Broader Migration Patterns of the Early 20th Century and Individual Maritime Stories

Anne de Klerk and Jelle Lammerts van Bueren

Introduction

The Holland-America Line (HAL) is the most famous Dutch shipping company of the past two centuries. From the late nineteenth century onwards, its passengers would depart from the main station in Rotterdam to embark on a transatlantic journey, traveling all the way to New York City.¹ Despite the company's name not everyone's journey started in Rotterdam and ended in New York. Some migrants traveled all the way from Russia or Israel to ship out from Rotterdam to the American metropole. Moreover, New York was certainly not always the final destination. Many migrants traveled on to hinterland destinations like Chicago and Philadelphia.²

In this article, we aim to answer the following question: what was the motivation behind these thousands of transatlantic journeys? We figure that – like most historical research questions – the research necessary can either follow a quantitative or a qualitative method. For this article we decided to do both, and to simultaneously highlight the pros and cons of both of these approaches.

We will start with a quantitative research method in which we analyze over 20.000 cases using the computer programs OpenRefine and R. Next, we will try to accomplish the same objective via qualitative research by detailing two individual travel stories in a historical narrative of two now-famous passengers. In the end, we will compare the benefits and drawbacks of both methods and consider how they could complement each other in future research. Before presenting the data and the individual case studies, however, we will first provide a brief overview of transatlantic migration history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This overview will allow us to

¹ A.D. Wentholt, *Brug over den Oceaan: Een Eeuw Geschiedenis van de Holland Amerika Lijn* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1973) 17; 115-117.

² For a more detailed overview of departures and destinations, the online City Archives of Rotterdam can be consulted via the following link: <https://stadsarchief.rotterdam.nl>.

contextualize our findings within the broader historiography of transatlantic migration.

The Historiography of Transatlantic Migration

‘An ordinary laborer who is not a craftsman has often only the choice between America or the poorhouse.’³ These are the words of a nineteenth-century farmer from the small Danish island of Bornholm. According to this farmer, Swedish competition made life in the isolated community impossible.⁴ His pessimistic take on economic opportunities on the European continent was not just limited to Bornholm. As Hasia Diner has stated in her work on European migration to the Americas, people from all European nationalities traveled to the United States in search of a livelihood that was better than the one they left behind.⁵

Before elaborating on the activities of the Holland-America Line, it is vital to discuss the larger concept of transatlantic migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We will show that three major trends can be distinguished within this larger development. First, transatlantic migration was a truly European phenomenon and included, at different times, people from all over the continent. Secondly, economic motives were a continent-wide factor for the move. And thirdly, political motives were also, in certain cases, connected to a transatlantic voyage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Lan Abramitzky, Leah Platt Boustan, and Katherine Eriksson, building on the work of Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson, aptly show how the concept of transatlantic migration rolled out over the continent as a wave during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Migrants from

³ K. Hvidt, *Flight to America: The Social Background of 300.000 Danish Emigrants* (New York: Academic Press, 1975) 129.

⁴ Ibidem, 129; C. Tilly, ‘Migration in Modern European History,’ *CRSO Working Paper* 145 (1976) 17.

⁵ H. R. Diner, *Hungering for America : Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) xvi.

⁶ R. Abramitzky, L. P. Boustan and K. Eriksson, ‘Europe's Tired, Poor, Huddled Masses: Self-Selection and Economic Outcomes in the Age of Mass Migration,’ *The American Economic Review* 102 (2012): 5, 1832-1856, here: 1836; T. J. Hatton and J. G.

the British Isles and contemporary Germany were the first to go to the Americas *en masse*, from 1850 onwards. They were followed by Scandinavian migrants, such as the farmer from Bornholm, in the early 1870s. Starting in 1880 Southern and Eastern Europeans also tried their luck.⁷ According to Drew Keeling, this massive form of migration was enabled by the lowered costs of the endeavor, thanks to the use of steamships.⁸

At the time, European wages were increasing, and people made enough money to undertake the journey to the other side of the Atlantic. According to the current historiography, financial hardship at home was one of the main reasons why Europeans decided to leave everything behind and depart for a continent unknown.⁹ Carl Strikwerda argues that economic migration was often linked to state-induced schemes that made people eager to leave their homeland.¹⁰ He explains that

migration and the more open international world of which it was a part only flourished because governments supported it with monetary stability, financial interpenetration, virtually open borders, and legal near-equality for foreigners.¹¹

Williamson, "What Drove the Mass Migrations from Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century?" *Population and Development Review* 20 (1994): 3, 533-559; T. J. Hatton and J. G. Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Nomic Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁷ Abramidzky, Boustan, and Eriksson, 'Europe's Tired, Poor, Huddles Masses,' 1836.

⁸ Ibidem, 1836; D. Keeling, "The Transportation Revolution and Transatlantic Migration, 1850-1914," in *Research in Economic History Volume 19*, ed A. J. Field, G. Clark, and W. A. Sundstrom, 39-74 (Stamford: JAI Press, 1999).

⁹ Abramidzky, Boustan, and Eriksson refer to the following works in their article: Hatton and Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration*; Hatton and Williamson, "International Migration in the Long Run: Positive Selection, Negative Selection, and Policy," in *Labor Mobility and the World Economy*, ed F. Fodders and R. J. Langhammer, 1-31 (New York: Springer, 2006); K. H. O'Rourke and J. G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); O'Rourke, "The Era of Free Migration: Lessons for Today," *IIIS Discussion Paper* 18 (2004).

¹⁰ C. Strikwerda, 'Tides of Migration, Currents of History: The State, Economy, and the Transatlantic Movement of Labor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999): 3, 367-394, here: 367-368.

¹¹ Ibidem, 383.

In his work on migration from Great Britain to the United States, William E. van Vugt additionally explains that living costs were rising and that the prospect of moving to America seemed financially attractive to those who lived in Europe.

Besides this combination of rising wages, cheaper travel, governmental support, increased living costs at home, and a positive prospect abroad, there was another motive for migration at play for some marginalized groups. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in Eastern Europe, persecution was still a common sight. In 1881 for example, several Russian pogroms led to the migration of hundreds of Eastern European Jews to the United States, after their appeal for asylum in France had been denied. This resulted in one of the first major waves of Jewish migration in the modern age.¹² Another example of political and cultural motives for transatlantic migration was the migration story of several Alsatian Frenchmen. These nationalists departed for the United States of America, rather than to live under German domination in Europe.¹³

A Short History of the Holland-America Line

Transatlantic journeys were enabled by several steamship companies like the American Line, North German Lloyd, and the Hamburg-America Line.¹⁴ The Holland-America Line (founded in 1873) – or the Dutch American Steamship Company in full – was one of the most prominent of these companies. Its roots can be traced to three businessmen from Rotterdam called Otto Reuchlin, Lodewijk Pincoffs, and Antoine Plate.¹⁵ They put together the money to buy old ships in 1871 and within two years they created a transatlantic transport service. The company was very commercial and did not have a clear preference for the transport of either persons or cargo. In fact, during its first voyage to the United States, the *Rotterdam* was only

¹² Z. Szajkowski, 'How the Mass Migration to America Began,' *Jewish Social Studies* 4 (1942): 4, 291-310, here: 291-292; 295.

¹³ Ibidem, 296.

¹⁴ The passenger lists of these lines can be found via the online international Gjønvik-Gjønvik Archives.

¹⁵ Wentholt, *Brug over den Oceaan*, 28.

transporting 70 passengers, while it was mostly stacked with tulip bolls and Dutch gin for the American market.¹⁶

The company endured some fierce competition from the aforementioned foreign shipping companies. It also had to deal with a generally low demand for transatlantic transport in the Netherlands. The HAL, therefore, started to attract passengers from other areas than Holland and at the same time opened up alternate destinations for both its cargo and passengers.¹⁷ Besides the single and return tickets to the New World, the HAL also organized a limited form of recreational travel. From the late nineteenth century onwards, several cruises were organized, including one from New York to Palestine. It should be noted, however, that recreational travel only formed a very small part of the HAL's business at the beginning of its enterprise. Migrants and cargo were its primary forms of income, and this meant that the fleet was almost exclusively destined for this kind of travel.¹⁸

A Quantitative Data Analysis of HAL passengers

Now that a historiographical image of transatlantic migration patterns and the HAL's role within them has been established, we can turn to the quantitative analysis that is one of the two main pillars of our article. For this quantitative investigation, we used the resources of the City Archives of Rotterdam (Stadsarchief Rotterdam) which are open to the public. Among many other (digitized) documents presented on their website, they offer complete registers of the paid passage fees by the HAL's passengers of the twentieth century.

For this investigation we have focused our efforts on the passenger lists of the year 1901 consisting of more than 20.000 travelers. Naturally this year only represents a limited number of the total amount of passengers that crossed the Atlantic in the twentieth century. However, an analysis of this large number of cases will adequately help us to identify where

¹⁶ Wentholt, *Brug over den Oceaan*, 28-33; A. J. Schoonderbeek, 'An Outline of the History of Holland America Line Part 1,' <https://www.captainalbert.com/holland-line-ships-past-and-present/an-outline-of-the-history-of-holland-america-line-part-1/> (accessed on December 11, 2021).

¹⁷ Wentholt, *Brug over den Oceaan*, 34-42; 60-61; 67-69.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 61-67.

the passengers of the HAL came from and where they traveled to at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The data was organized per two months, resulting in six separate datasets.¹⁹ Before we could analyze the data, we cleaned and organized the original datasets. For the purposes of transparency and reproducibility we will briefly summarize this process, for which we used the application OpenRefine. During this process we deleted the unnecessary metadata, transposed the departure and arrival locations from rows into columns, and brought back the number of locations from 1.500 to a mere 100 by hand. We did this by correcting misspellings and fixing abbreviations, removing different spellings for the same location. Finally, we added several extra columns with information derived from the existing data. These included the continent or country of origin, as this information was vital to create maps of our data. After this intensive process of cleaning and organizing, we have created multiple visual representations of the data in R, to achieve the goal of our research project.²⁰

According to the registers, a total of 20.326 people crossed the Atlantic Ocean with the help of the HAL in 1901. Apart from people's names there is little personal information written down in the lists which can indicate who they were. No nationality, occupation or age can be extracted from the data. Only the passengers' place of departure and intended place of arrival had been recorded.

With exactly this data we created maps to visualize where our passengers departed from, and where they intended to go. Most of the passengers – 19.975 to be specific – departed from Europe. A mere 290

¹⁹ The passage fees registers can be accessed via the following link: <https://stadsarchief.rotterdam.nl/zoek-en-ontdek/archieven/zoekresultaat-archieven/?mizig=349>. The six datasets used by us are: (1) 318-04.778, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, jan.-feb., 01-01-1901 t/m 28-02-1901*, (2) 318-04.779, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, mrt.-apr., 01-03-1901 t/m 30-04-1901*, (3) 318-04.780, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, mei.-juni., 01-05-1901 t/m 30-06-1901*, (4) 318-04.781, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, juli.-aug., 01-07-1901 t/m 30-08-1901*, (5) 318-04.782, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, sep.-okt., 01-09-1901 t/m 31-10-1901*, (6) 318-04.783, *Register van passagegelden, lijn Rotterdam-New York (westbound): 1901, juli.-aug., 01-11-1901 t/m 31-12-1901*.

²⁰ For reasons of transparency and reproducibility, we have included our most recent version of the 1901 dataset in the bibliography.

started their journey to the West from Asia, and only 7 departed from Africa. In figure 1, we have visualized the exact places of departure of the European passengers.

Where some European countries only supplied a dozen or so passengers, which was the case for Bulgaria (7), Romania (26), and Italy (32) others, such as Belgium (146), Luxembourg (150), Poland (203), and Germany (328) supplied hundreds. Only in three countries, migration numbers exceeded a thousand passengers. This was the case for France (2.515), Austria (6.049), and the Netherlands (10.256) itself.

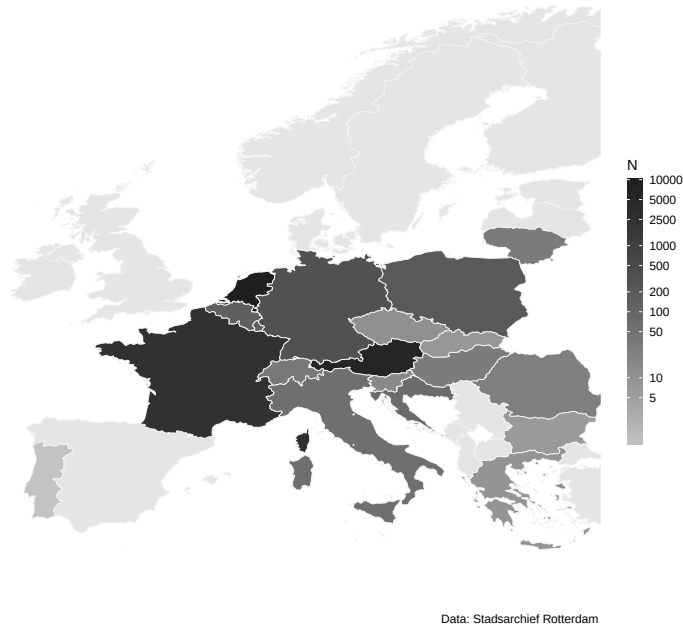
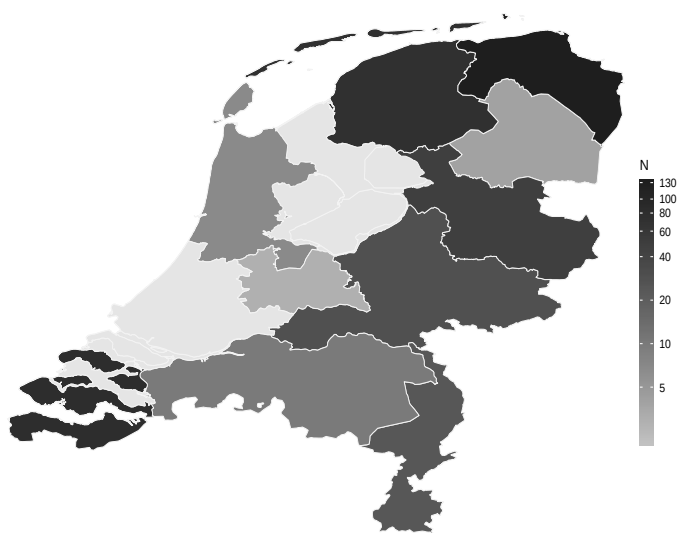


Figure 1 Travellers from Europe. Number of HAL Passengers per Country in 1901.

To explain these large numbers of French and Austrian passengers, we turn to the larger historical narratives of European history. In the Austrian case, historical knowledge of the country – then known as the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire – can help to explain this relatively high number, as the country was in constant political turmoil. Despite the economic stability this

empire provided, the political situation was apparently reason enough for the emigrants to dare the strenuous and dangerous voyage to the West.²¹ For France, the third largest provider of travelers, a political explanation can also be given. As mentioned above, France has a history with Jewish political migrants from Eastern-Europe. After arriving in the country, their asylum was denied and many of them departed for the United States.²²



Data: Stadsarchief Rotterdam

Figure 2 Travellers from the Netherlands. Number of HAL Passengers per Province in 1901.

²¹ T. F.X. Noble and others, *Western Civilization: Beyond Boundaries* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014) 702-703; D. F. Good, 'Austria-Hungary,' in *Patterns of European Industrialisation*, ed R. E. Sylla and G. Toniolo (London: Routledge, 1991); M. Schulze and N. Wolf, 'Economic nationalism and economic integration: the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late nineteenth century,' *Economic History Review* 65 (2012): 2, 652-673, here 652.

²² Szajkowski, 'How the Mass Migration to America Began,' 291-292.

For the number one on the list, the Netherlands, it is more likely to assume that economic hardship was the main reason for departure. This category entails those who left for economic reasons and hoped to obtain a better standard of living abroad. The Dutch economy was, at the turn of the century, still lagging behind when it came to industrialization and the competition from the Belgian and German industries was fierce.²³ When we break down the places of departure of the passengers from the Netherlands per province this economic drive becomes even more apparent. As is visible in figure 2, the predominantly rural provinces, such as Groningen (136), Zeeland (81), Friesland (74), and Gelderland (29) were way bigger contributors in the number of travelers than the urban provinces such as Utrecht (3) and Noord-Holland (7).²⁴

As for their places of arrival, most of the passengers ended up in the United States, whereas only 69 people went to Canada, 55 to Cuba and 7 to other countries in Central- and South-America. The data thus confirms the historiographical stance that the HAL's passengers used this line primarily to travel to the quickly growing, industrialized United States. Based on the places of arrival of these passengers, we could argue that this choice was mainly made for economic reasons. This becomes visible when we focus on the distribution of passengers within the United States in Figure 3.

Most passengers (13.257) ended up in the industrial city of New York. The other passengers mainly chose to stay in the Northeastern part of the country as opposed to moving more land inwards. 815 passengers traveled to

²³ Erik, I. Maes, H. W. Plasmeijer a.o., 'Comparing the Development of Economics during the Twentieth Century in Belgium and the Netherlands,' *History of Political Economics* 37 (2005): 1, 61-78, here: 61-62; B. Dankbaar and E. Velzing, 'Industriebeleid in Nederland, Industrialisatie, De-Industrialisatie, Reïndustrialisatie,' https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Evert-Jan-Velzing/publication/309011396_Industriebeleid_in_Nederland_-_Industrialisatie_de-industrialisatie_reindustrialisatie/links/57fdeda008aceea8c97cab73a/Industriebeleid-in-Nederland-Industrialisatie-de-industrialisatie-reindustrialisatie.pdf (accessed on December 16, 2021) 2.

²⁴ The exact number of travelers from Zuid-Holland is unclear as 9.829 people, a very significant number, noted Rotterdam as their place of departure. These could not possibly all be native citizens of Rotterdam, thus skewing the numbers. Without Rotterdam, Zuid-Holland ends with a mere 2 travelers. This is highly unlikely, but the original numbers are not trustworthy enough to note down. This is why we have decided to leave Zuid-Holland out of this break-down.

Massachusetts, most of them (535) indicated the industrial city of Boston as their destination. The state of Pennsylvania also attracted many passengers (2.854). The same can be said of the northeastern states of New Jersey (298), New York (338), Michigan (272), Connecticut (267), and Ohio (206). Others moved more land inwards toward Illinois (755), mainly to the booming industrial city of Chicago (619). Summing up, the data indicates that most passengers traveled to areas with large industrial cities, while only a small percentage decided to leave for rural territory in the Western or Southern parts of the country.

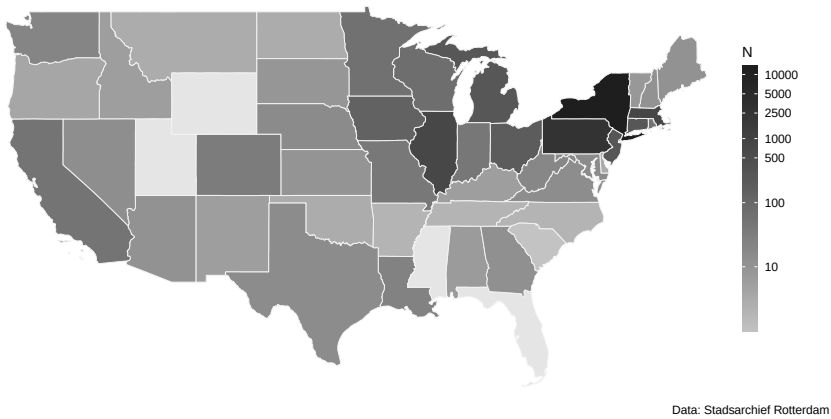


Figure 3 Travellers to the United States. Number of HAL Passengers per State in 1901.

All in all, after conducting our quantitative data analysis, it becomes apparent that the Old World pushed its residents away because of economic and/or political hardship. The New World pulled these migrants towards itself by providing ample economic opportunity in its booming industrial areas, especially on the East Coast. We have aimed to illustrate this with maps in combination with the appropriate historical contexts. However, these conclusions are deducted from data and therefore say little about personal motivations from individual travelers of the early 20th century. It is for this reason that we turn to the second method of our article.

A Qualitative Analysis of HAL passengers

Our second approach to uncover the motivations behind the transatlantic journeys of HAL-passengers in the early twentieth century is by constructing a qualitative analysis. We want to explore the stories of two now-famous passengers, as they, unlike most passengers, have left behind written and visual records of their journeys. Anthony Fokker, who crossed the Atlantic on multiple occasions and eventually moved to the States indefinitely, has left behind video journals of his family's crossing. Thomas Mann has recorded his journey in his written diary. To complement these primary sources, we have consulted biographical works to contextualize their personal travel collections. This approach brings back the individual experience into our analysis.

We will turn to Anthony Fokker's story first. Although Fokker is mostly known for his adventures in the skies and his innovations in the field of aerial technology, his life was intrinsically connected to maritime travel and migration. When Anthony was just four years old, the Fokker family migrated from the former Dutch East Indies to the Dutch city of Haarlem where he would first become interested in the modern technologies that characterized the early twentieth century.²⁵ In 1910, Fokker moved from the Netherlands to Germany where he started his first enterprise in Berlin, after the completion of his studies in Mainz. It was in Berlin that Fokker began the production of aircraft on an industrial scale, while he kept improving and modernizing his initial models. The German government became interested in his work and when the First World War broke out, Fokker's factory became a crucial part of the German war machine as his planes were now being used for military purposes.²⁶

After the German defeat, Fokker fled to the Netherlands by train where he got married. As the Dutch state was rather uninterested in the invention of air travel, a disillusioned Fokker decided to leave his homeland.²⁷ On May 17, 1922, he and his wife Sophie made the journey to the United States of America. As the passenger lists of the Holland-America Line show, they voyaged on board the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, a major passenger vessel of the

²⁵ M. Dierikx, *Fokker: a Transatlantic Biography* (Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998) 1-6.

²⁶ Ibidem, 7-15; 24-47.

²⁷ P.S. Meilinger, 'Fokker: A Transatlantic Biography by Marc Dierikx,' *Technology and Culture* 39 (1998): 4, 791-792.

Holland-America Line that transported thousands of travelers to and from the United States between 1906 and 1932. They traveled in first class after buying their tickets in Amsterdam where the family had lived since Anthony and Sophie had gotten married, three years earlier.²⁸

Although the Holland-America Line is often only mentioned in light of Fokker's migration to the United States, his journey in 1922 was not the only Atlantic trip that Fokker made. In fact, Fokker had already been to the United States two years before he decided to migrate there. On the passenger lists of October 29, 1920, Fokker's name appears on the list of firstclass travelers for the first time as 'A. Fokker.' He paid 1625 guilders for himself and a fellow traveler on the *Noordam*, leaving for New York from Rotterdam as he wanted to study American air travel with his own eyes.²⁹

Between 1920 and 1927, Fokker crossed the Atlantic multiple times, often traveling by ocean liner.³⁰ He bought a ticket for the Holland-America Line on six separate occasions and there are even moving images of Fokker on board the *Nieuw Amsterdam*. Fokker was an enthusiastic private film maker, who recorded many important moments during his life. He recorded his wedding and instances of his daily life, but he also made clips of the transatlantic voyages he made in the 1920s. On the clips we see Fokker, together with his wife and friends they made on board the ship, enjoying the accommodations and luxurious privileges that came with traveling in first class. Fokker and his friends can be seen enjoying some hot coffee on the deck and together with a large group of people Anthony and Sophie can be seen playing an elaborate game on the deck called 'shuffleboard'. They are also filmed meeting the captain of the ship.³¹

In 1927, Fokker eventually became a naturalized American citizen, and the aircraft designer would work in the United States for the rest of his life.³² In relation to the question of motivation for his transatlantic endeavors, Fokker must be regarded as one of those migrants who traveled to the

²⁸ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 'Afvaart 'SS Nieuw Amsterdam' op 17-05-1922 vanaf haven Rotterdam,' 318-04 Archieven van de Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL): Passage A (inventarisnummer 954, folionummer 51).

²⁹ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 'Afvaart 'SS Noordam' op 29-10-1920 vanaf haven Rotterdam,' 318-04 Archieven van de Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL): Passage A (inventarisnummer 940, folionummer 145).

³⁰ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 'Zoekresultaten 'Fokker.'

³¹ A. Gietelink, 'Anthony Fokker, een documentaire' (14 november 2014).

³² Dierikx, *Fokker*, 108-125.

Americas with an economic motivation in mind. For an entrepreneur of Fokker's stature, the Netherlands and Europe were simply not big enough. To Anthony Fokker, New York and the United States presented the opportunity to grow larger than he had ever been. The vast economic opportunities that the country provided and the need that the country had for aerial innovation made it the ideal destination for Fokker. His story provides us with a concrete example of an economic migrant, although he cannot be equated to many of the economic migrants that departed at the beginning of the twentieth century. After all, Fokker was an economic entrepreneur who saw ample economic opportunities in the US to expand his business, while many migrants simply aimed for a better basic standard of living.

The second well-known migrant that we have investigated for the qualitative part of this article is the famous German writer Thomas Mann. During his lifetime he migrated twice and crossed the Atlantic on multiple occasions. All these travels took part in the second half of his life, as he only left Germany at the age of 58. Mann's works are still revered and studied to this day and a lot of research has been done about his peculiar life.

Mann fled Germany in 1933 on the insistence of his family, because he had been partaking in anti-Nazi rhetoric, and most importantly because of his wife's Jewish ancestry.³³ His fame made it possible for him and his family to immigrate to Switzerland without the proper paperwork in place.³⁴ Eventually a new opportunity arose, when Blanche Knopf, the wife of his American publisher, visited him in Switzerland. His translated work *The Tales of Jacob* was to be celebrated in New York and he was invited to attend the festivities.³⁵

Mann accepted and began his journey across the Atlantic by train to Paris. Afterwards he boarded the *Volendam* at Boulogne. This part of the journey is also recorded in the HAL archives.³⁶ Cut off from the world, at the *Volendam*, Mann mostly read and wrote down his thoughts about the journey, instead of working on his novel.³⁷ Among other things he wrote about the

³³ D. Prater, *Thomas Mann a Life*, 'The Hesitant *Émigré* 1933-1936', 198-258, aldaar 198-215.

³⁴ Prater, *Thomas Mann a Life*, 216.

³⁵ Ibidem, 222.

³⁶ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 'Zoekresultaten 'Thomas Mann.'

³⁷ Prater, *Thomas Mann a Life*, 224.

‘particularly low intellectual level’ of their table companions.³⁸ Luckily for him, his journey back on the *Rotterdam* was way more pleasant.³⁹ This time they chose not to travel via Boulogne, but via Rotterdam for a meet-up. The last leg of the journey was once again undertaken by train.⁴⁰

In 1938, Mann undertook his final journey with the HAL to New York.⁴¹ He had decided to stay in the United States indefinitely after the Nazi-takeover in Austria. In a reflective essay about his exile, he wrote that his flight from Germany had not made him less German. He exclaimed that: ‘My home lies in the plans that reside within me. Immersed in them, I feel all the warmth of being home . . . Where I am, there is Germany’.⁴² In the end, Mann stayed in America long after the fall of the Nazi-regime. When he eventually did return to Europe to spend his final years, he preferred Switzerland over Germany.⁴³

To conclude, Thomas Mann’s story provides us with a concrete example of a political migrant, who fled the European continent for the safety that the New World seemed to promise. Yet again, Mann’s experience as a political migrant will naturally differ from others. He was undoubtedly aided in his travels by his fame, while others – such as the many Jewish migrants – had no such privileges. Thus again, this research method has its drawbacks.

Conclusion

In this article we explored the various motivations behind transatlantic migration via the Holland-America Line during the early twentieth century. Our study started with a data analysis of the locations of departure and arrival of the passengers of the HAL at the beginning of the century. Via a quantitative data analysis, complemented by historiographical background knowledge, we found that journeys made by HAL travelers were not always structured along the Rotterdam-New York connection. Many HAL

³⁸ Prater, *Thomas Mann a Life*, 224.

³⁹ Ibidem 225; Stadsarchief Rotterdam, Afvaart ‘SS Rotterdam’ op 09-06-1934 vanaf haven New York,’ 318-04 Archieven van de Holland Amerika Lijn (HAL): Passage A (inventarisnummer 1453, folionummer 63).

⁴⁰ Prater, *Thomas Mann a Life*, 225.

⁴¹ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, ‘Zoekresultaten ‘Thomas Mann.’

⁴² H. Lehnert, E. Wessell, *Thomas Mann* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2019) 113.

⁴³ Ibidem, 113-116.

passengers traveled beyond the coastal metropole and a sizeable number of them did not come from the Netherlands but from other European countries. The regions the HAL passengers journeyed to were mostly highly industrious. This is in line with the places of departure, which consisted mostly of areas with political and/or economic turmoil. It is, therefore, tempting to draw the conclusion that transatlantic migration in the early twentieth century was mainly motivated by those with political and/or economic obstacles.

When using data on such a large scale, it is, however, easy to lose the individual human experience that characterizes the historical discipline. Therefore, we followed up our data analysis with the life stories of two well-known HAL passengers to find out more about the motivations of individual travelers. One of them, the Dutch aircraft designer Anthony Fokker, decided to move to the United States because of its economic advantages. The other, the German author Thomas Mann, made the because of the political situation in Germany and Europe.

Following this article, we argue that it could be fruitful to combine both quantitative as well as qualitative research methods when investigating modern transatlantic migration patterns. At the same time, this also brings along new challenges. Given that primary sources on these individual travel stories are often written from the perspective of privileged passengers, who are hardly capable of representing the thousands of passengers that the HAL transported annually, historians should be mindful of not losing a grassroots perspective.