
Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and Other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1914

JANET J. EWALD

THE MOST FAMOUS SLAVE SEAMAN of the eighteenth-century Atlantic, Olaudah Equiano, wrote an abolitionist autobiography in 1789 that includes his experiences aboard sailing ships. Unfortunately, no freedman traveling the Indian Ocean recorded his life as eloquently as Equiano wrote of himself in the Atlantic world. Distinctly Atlantic forces not only shaped Equiano's life but gave him the skills, patronage, and audience for writing and publishing his life story. Twentieth-century scholars have followed Equiano's path, placing Africans and their descendants at the center of the Atlantic world.¹ For the Indian Ocean, different historical dynamics have produced a different historiography. Although going back probably to the seventh century, the African slave trade and slavery were not as central in creating an Indian Ocean world as they were in creating an Atlantic world.

Taabir, the Somali term for a migrant who goes abroad, translates as "crosser of the sea." Charles Gesheker, "Entrepreneurs, Livestock, and Politics: British Somaliland, 1920–1950," in *Actes du Colloque Entreprises et entrepreneurs en Afrique (XIX^e et XX^e siècles)*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1983), 267. I owe thanks for the services and support of many individuals and agencies. The American Philosophical Society and the Trent Foundation of Duke University funded research in France and in Britain, where Jane Hogan and her staff guided me through the Sudan Archives of the University of Durham. I formulated and refined my thoughts during fellowships at the Woodrow Wilson Center and the National Humanities Center. This article benefited from presentations to the conference on the Northwestern Indian Ocean, organized by the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University; the Canadian Historical Association; Middle East Studies Association; African Studies Association; and various groups at Duke University, where I am particularly grateful to the Oceans Connect initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation, for providing a supportive scholarly environment. I found invaluable insights and information, as well as great pleasure, in two port cities and their hinterlands: Aden and St. John's, Newfoundland. I thank the American Institute of Yemeni Studies for funding an unforgettable stay in Yemen. At Memorial University in St. John's, Heather Wareham and her staff made working at the Maritime History Archives a historian's dream. Professor Valerie Burton, of the Maritime Studies Research Unit, offered initial and continued support for my project. Professor Daniel Vickers, formerly of the MSRU, introduced me to the data of the *One Percent Sample* before it was ready for public distribution. Finally, I thank my mom, Charlotte Ewald, for her excellent companionship and research assistance in St. John's.

¹ A precursor to much of this scholarship is C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; rpt. edn., New York, 1989). More recent examples are Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, 1990); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2d edn. (Cambridge, 1998). Even scholarship not focusing specifically on Africans in the Atlantic world regards slavery as formative and its end as a watershed. See, for example, Alan L. Karras and J. R. McNeill, eds., *Atlantic American Societies: From Columbus through Abolition, 1492 to 1888* (London, 1992), 1–15.

Compared to the Atlantic, scholars have written little about Africans in the Indian Ocean world, or about the Indian Ocean slave trade.²

But East African men, many of them slaves and freedmen, working on ships and in ports, played vital roles in sustaining an Indian Ocean world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Especially in the late nineteenth century, they helped link that world to the Atlantic. Like Atlantic seamen, these maritime workers experienced ironies, confronting and sometimes crossing boundaries. They moved from land to sea, from one port to another, between states and continents. They traversed an often vast and open seascape, yet lived in the tightly bounded confines of ships where life was, to varying degrees, hierarchical and regimented. The boundary between slavery and freedom itself blurred. Eighteenth-century European sources compared the sailor on shipboard to a slave, yet some slaves in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds used maritime life as a route to emancipation. However self-sufficient at sea, ships and their crews ultimately depended on land; the legend of the *Flying Dutchman* offers the haunting image of a ship condemned to sea forever. Because of the intimacy of land and sea, slavery and freedom, I consider here not only slaves and freedmen but also other African and Asian migrant maritime workers, not only ships but also the dynamics on land and especially in ports that funneled men onto ships.

I address two areas of scholarship: histories focusing on the Indian Ocean and studies of slavery and emancipation. My article suggests that attention to ocean basins and maritime life yields new perspectives on global history. Histories of the Indian Ocean basin, however, generally give short shrift both to Africa and to the post-1750 era.³ I show how crossers of the sea, many from Africa, traced the contours of a post-1750 Indian Ocean world. Their journeys defined the boundaries of their particular Indian Ocean world, as well as its openings to land and to other oceans. A history of maritime labor also reveals changes and continuities around the European-defined watersheds of Indian Ocean history: the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498, the victory of the British at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

Examining slaves and freedmen in the maritime world locates slavery and freedom in the Indian Ocean within comparative scholarship, especially that of the Atlantic. Many studies of slavery in the Muslim-dominated lands bordering the northwestern Indian Ocean emphasize how slavery took shape under religious law and ideology, and in households and state institutions.⁴ The image of the slaves on the land—women, eunuchs, and office-holding men in households and state

² A glance at the bibliography of scholarship concerning worldwide slavery and slaving quickly reveals the paucity of work about the Indian Ocean—especially the northwestern Indian Ocean—relative to work on the Atlantic. Joseph C. Miller, ed., *Slavery and Slaving in World History: A Bibliography, 1900–1991* (Millwood, N.Y., 1993). In addition, a bibliographic supplement appears annually in no. 3 of *Slavery and Abolition*. Studies explicitly of the African diaspora in the northwestern Indian Ocean include Edward A. Alpers, “The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean,” *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 17 (1997): 62–82; and Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston, Ill., 1971).

³ See, for example, K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985). A recent survey of Indian Ocean history devotes only one chapter out of five to the eighteenth through twentieth centuries: Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi, 1993).

⁴ See, for example, John Ralph Willis, ed., *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, Vol. 1, *Islam and the*

structures in the Islamic world, laboring men on plantations in the Americas—has thus abetted the stereotype of the East, where unchanging values of Islam supposedly underlay slavery, as opposed to the West, where “progress” and the economics of commercial agriculture shaped slavery.⁵ Scholarship on nineteenth-century plantations in the Indian Ocean has challenged this dichotomy.⁶ Here, I argue that ships and ports, as well as plantations, lend themselves to comparative analysis. By turning our gaze from slaves who stayed put to slaves whose work made them move, we begin to cross the divide separating slavery in the Indian Ocean world from slavery in the Atlantic world.

I answer in a new way basic questions about slavery and the slave trade in the northwestern Indian Ocean, which flourished as never before in the nineteenth century. What was the demand for slave labor, at the very time when military and administrative demands for slaves had declined? What happened to men freed or escaped from bondage? I argue that economic demands from the Atlantic and political dynamics in Africa gave an initial stimulus to slave raiding. But once raiding and trading began, thriving commerce demanded slaves for port cities and ships. In those sites, slaves and freedmen labored with freeborn men. Freedmen and freeborn also worked in British ports and on steamships. This argument raises a final question. If slaves, freedmen, and freeborn performed the same jobs, if the boundaries between “slave” and “free” tended to dissolve, what difference did being a slave or an ex-slave make? My conclusion argues that slavery and its heritage were a heavy burden, even when and where slaves, freedmen, and freeborn performed much the same work.

The first section of this article examines how men worked in the Asian and African maritime world, as well as British Indian Ocean sailing ships, from about 1750 to about 1880. I establish connections with the Atlantic, showing how sailors on eighteenth-century Indian and other indigenous vessels shared aspects of maritime economy and society similar to those of the Atlantic. Another kind of link between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean arose soon after 1750 when forces from the Atlantic increasingly and directly affected the Indian Ocean world, helping stimulate two forms of labor control: in Africa and Arabia, slavery; on British vessels, special contracts for non-European seamen.

The second section of the article follows the movements of some of these slaves when, as freedmen, they entered British ports and steamships in the northwestern Indian Ocean between about 1840 and 1914. I argue that British transport, the very sinews of empire, demanded a controllable, flexible, and mobile labor force. Ex-slaves and other migrants met these demands, building ports and manning

Ideology of Enslavement (London, 1985); and various essays in Shaun Marmon, ed., *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East* (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

In this article, I do not seek so much to question the importance of ideology and law, but rather to offer a different perspective.

⁵ Frederick Cooper, “Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1981), 273–74.

⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Conn., 1977), esp. chap. 1; and Cooper, “The Problem of Slavery in African Studies,” *Journal of African History* 20 (1979): 103–25.

steamships. On steam liners plying routes between the Indian Ocean, Pacific, and Atlantic, many freedmen labored under special contracts, called Asiatic Articles. These crossers of the sea experienced fresh ironies, simultaneously crossing old boundaries but restricted by new ones.

THE CREATION OF A NORTHWESTERN Indian Ocean world relied on wind patterns. Seasonal alteration of winds carried ships across the northwestern Indian Ocean basin, rimmed by the coasts of western India, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa south to about Cape Delgado.⁷ Although a separate basin, the northwestern Indian Ocean basin touched other maritime regions. South of Cape Comorin, it flowed into the larger Indian Ocean, stretching as far as insular southeast Asia and China. The Red Sea or Persian Gulf, combined with overland routes, led to the Mediterranean and through it to the Atlantic. A direct link to the Atlantic opened with Vasco da Gama's 1498 voyage around the Cape of Good Hope to the west coast of India.

If Olaudah Equiano had sailed the eighteenth-century Indian Ocean, he would have found much that was familiar. Similarities of maritime life crossed the boundaries between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, even if most sailors themselves did not. In both Indian and Atlantic oceans, a ship was a physical, social, and economic unit. Sailors worked in groups, their days and nights divided by shifts or watches. They were both wage workers and entrepreneurs. Working on ships that they did not own, Atlantic and Indian Ocean sailors were some of the first laborers to earn wages. But sailors in both oceans were also traders. Exercising customary rights to cargo space, they peddled goods from one port to another.⁸ Hierarchy characterized both Atlantic and Indian Ocean deep sea vessels. The master, who sometimes owned or co-owned the ship, exerted complete authority over passengers and crew. Certain crew members performed special jobs, such as navigating or keeping track of stores. Slaves belonged to eighteenth-century crews in both the

⁷ This region does not include Madagascar or the islands of Mauritius and Reunion; therefore, I do not consider the slave regimes that developed in Indian Ocean islands or the slave trade to those islands, except in its impact on the northwestern Indian Ocean world.

⁸ Within these broad institutional similarities, vessels and sailing in the two oceans differed in the degree of shipboard specialization, rigidity of time organization, and prevalence of various methods of payment. For Atlantic ships, see Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1962), 111–13, 133, 147–48, 154–56; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987), 77–78, 83–87, 116–19, 130–33, 209–12. For northwestern Indian Ocean ships, see Abbadié Papers, Volume 3: *Mélanges sur l'Éthiopie*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereafter, BNF), Nouvelle acquisition française 21301, 176, 193; and *Journal et Mélanges*, BNF, Nouvelle acquisition française 21300, 488; John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (London, 1829), 23; Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c. 1700–1750* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 42; A. H. J. Prins, *Sailing from Lamu: A Study of Maritime Culture in Islamic East Africa* (Assen, 1965), 211, 216–18, 242–47, 279, 289; A. Jan Qaisar, "From Port to Port: Life on Indian Ships in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800* (Calcutta, 1987), 336, 339, 343–45; R. B. Serjeant, "Hadramawt to Zanzibar: The Pilot-Poem of the Nakhudha Sa'id Ba Yayi of al-Hami," in Serjeant, *Farmers and Fishermen in Arabia: Studies in Customary Law and Practice*, G. Rex Smith, ed., (Aldershot, 1995), 122–23, 125; and R. B. Serjeant, "Maritime Customary Law off the Arabian Coasts," in Michel Mollat, ed., *Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'Océan Indien* (Paris, 1970), 201–03; Alan Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade," *Middle East Journal* 2 (1948): 403, 404, 407, 409, 411.

Atlantic and Indian oceans, especially on ships from Arabia.⁹ Unlike Indian cities, Arabian ports did not draw on a large wage-labor pool. Masters of ships thus enlisted various kinds of dependents, including debtors and slaves. By the eighteenth century, slaves manned Omani ships from the southeastern Arabian Peninsula, newly prominent in the trade between India and Arabia. On the Red Sea, slaves served with Somali, Hadhrami, and Yemeni crew members.¹⁰

As the junctures between land and sea, Atlantic and Indian Ocean ports were sites for social transformations. Landsmen became seamen, usually moving through the hands of labor brokers: in the English-speaking Atlantic, known as crimps or spirits; in the ports of India, "serangs" or "tindals." But seamen also became landsmen when sailors turned to port work between voyages. Port work was particularly important for sailors in the Indian Ocean, where the seasonality of sailing grounded them for at least two months. Like sailors, workers in Indian Ocean ports were organized by brokers who collected men for jobs and supervised them. Slaves joined sailors in the population and work of port cities.¹¹

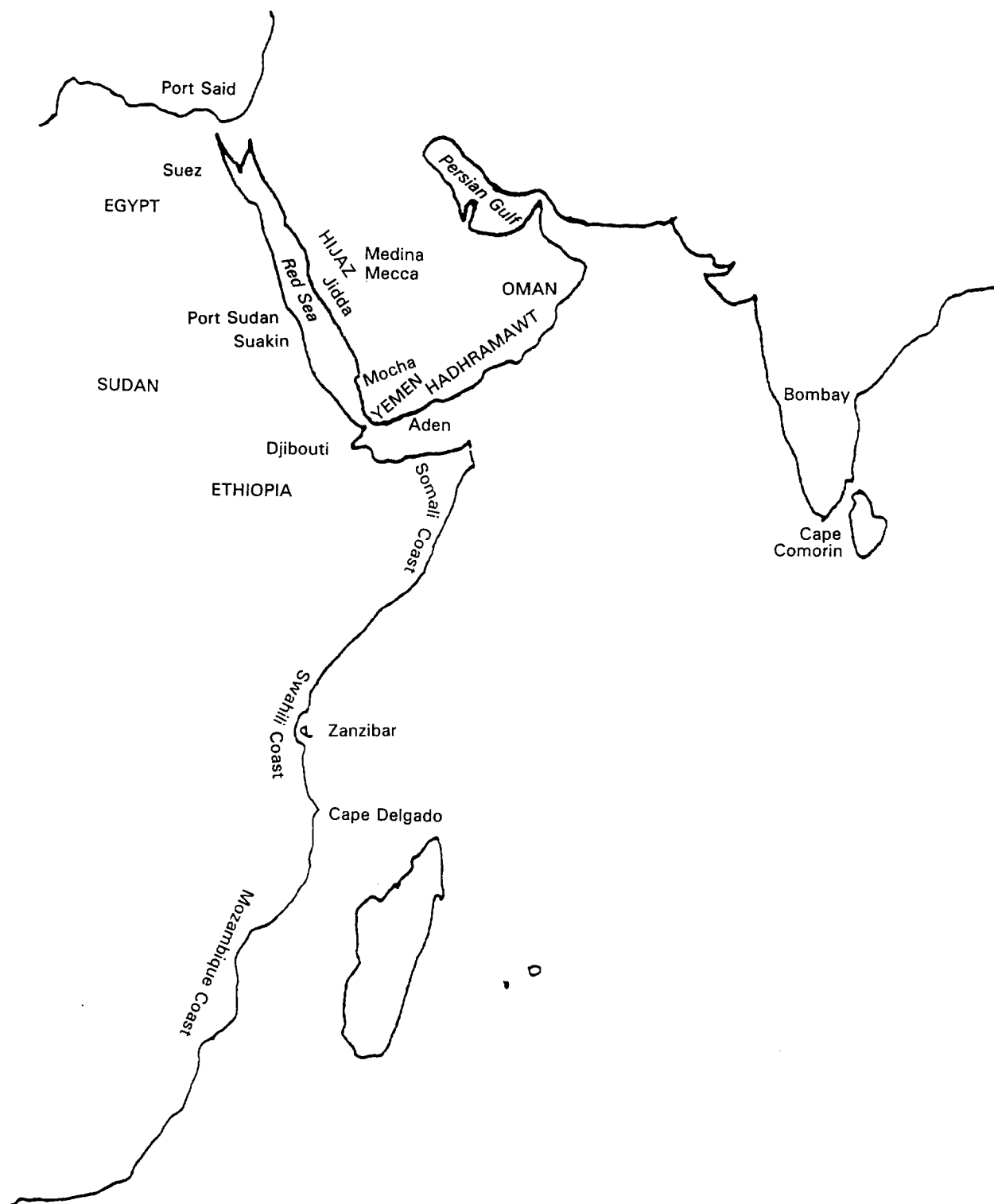
Mingling with free sailors and port workers, some Atlantic and Indian Ocean slaves loosened or broke ties to their masters.¹² Some slaves fled from the interior to port cities, where they joined local slaves, using the relative fluidity of port life and nearby transport routes to elude or escape authority. Others bought their freedom with profits made from wages or trade. Still others were manumitted by their masters, who nonetheless often retained ex-slaves as employees and clients.

⁹ Martha S. Putney, *Black Sailors: Afro-American Merchant Seamen and Whalemens prior to the Civil War* (New York, 1987), 33–38; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 11–28.

¹⁰ Prins, *Sailing from Lamu*, 213–16; Serjeant, "Maritime Customary Law," 197, 202–03; and R. B. Serjeant, "Customary Law among the Fishermen of al-Shihr," in Serjeant, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 193, 197; Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade," 407; Lewis Pelly, "Remarks on the Pearl Oyster Beds in the Persian Gulf," *Bombay Geographic Society Transactions* 18 (1866), reproduced in Anita Burdett, ed., *Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries, 1857–1962*, Vol. 1: 1857–1914 (Southampton, 1995), 8. Indebtedness often led to enslavement. See, for example, Richard Pankhurst, "An Early Somali Autobiography," *Africa* (Rome) 32 (1977): 365; N. Benjamin, "Arab Merchants of Bombay and Surat (c. 1800–1840)," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13 (1976): 85–95; Patricia Risso, *Oman and Muscat: An Early Modern History* (New York, 1986), 75 and following; Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, 160–66; and Ashin Das Gupta, "Introduction II: The Story," in Das Gupta and Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean*, 41; Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 23. Georges Malecot, "Quelques aspects de la vie maritime en mer Rouge dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle," *L'Afrique et l'Asie modernes* 164 (1990): 31.

¹¹ Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 29, 62, 68, 81–83; Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, 40–41, 43–44; Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry* 116; Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1982), 6, 107; Prins, *Sailing from Lamu*, 69–70; Serjeant, "Maritime Customary Law," 203; William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce* (London, 1813), 1: 101, 102; R. B. Serjeant, "The Ports of Aden and Shihr (Medieval Period)," in Société Jean Bodin pour l'Histoire Comparative des Institutions, *Les grandes escales, première partie, antiquité et moyen-âge* (Brussels, 1974), 213; Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 27; Mary Karasch, "From Portage to Proprietorship: African Occupations in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 377–79; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), 355–56; Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (1990): 225, 229, 233–34.

¹² The prime example from the Atlantic is Equiano. But, as Bolster reminds us, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery disguised as a sailor; *Black Jacks*, 1–2. For other references to ports and ships as routes to, and havens of, freedom, see Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 131–57; Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, 348–56; Linebaugh and Rediker, "Many-Headed Hydra," 235–36.



A sketch of the area for general orientation. Older European place names that were current at the time are used here.

The threat of escape, offer of payment, and prospect of continued clientage probably combined to convince some masters to free their slaves. Olaudah Equiano continued to work on ships even after he attained freedom. Other freedmen, too, turned to maritime and port life for practical and, perhaps, emotional reasons. In agrarian and commercial economies, freedmen who could not gain access to land or capital often found port and transport labor the best way of earning a living—especially if they already possessed the requisite skills. Perhaps, too, ports and ships exerted an emotional pull on men seeking to loosen or shake off the bonds of slavery. Their masters had controlled their mobility, making them move or stay. They perhaps boarded ships hoping to test or preserve newfound freedom with movement.

In spite of the familiarity of eighteenth-century Indian Ocean life to Equiano, the last part of the century marked a watershed in the history of the Indian Ocean. Since da Gama's voyage, European ships in the Indian Ocean had employed local men. But at first, the lives of these sailors probably differed relatively little from the lives of their European crewmates or from sailors on deep sea vessels commanded by Asians. Beginning during Equiano's era, however, the experiences of Asians and Africans on board British ships increasingly diverged from both their counterparts on non-European vessels and Europeans on British vessels. Often dated to the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British East India Company extended its rule over the interior of India. Shifts in power on land were reflected on the seas. Plassey represented only one battle in an era of global warfare. Both wars and the growth of commerce created a keen demand for labor on European ships, which in turn altered recruiting patterns and working conditions in Atlantic and Indian Ocean ships. The number of African-American sailors increased in the Atlantic;¹³ in the Indian Ocean, Europeans increasingly turned to African and Asian sailors. The new employers drew on already existing patterns of recruitment, relying on local serangs and tindals to collect men for European ships. British ships became probably the largest employers of Indian Ocean sailors, whom they called "lascars."

On board British sailing ships, lascars gradually found themselves in a new maritime world. They manned the ships into the Atlantic itself. They became subject to the regulations of an increasingly bureaucratic state, the interests of large-scale private shipping and government, and growing fears of a multi-racial port population. Unlike Indian Ocean states, Britain regulated maritime labor closely. Moreover, the British government responded to the color consciousness affecting Britain in the late eighteenth century. The same wave of wars and revolutions that created a maritime labor shortage in the Atlantic also stimulated a fear of the crowd in the port city, especially people of color. Some East Indians

¹³ Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry*, 115; Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 31–35, 52, 102–05, 121, 123–24, 206, 209, 282–83, 292; David J. Starkey, "War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain, 1736–1792," in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, eds., *Shipping and Trade, 1750–1950: Essays in International Maritime Economic History* (Pontrfract, 1990), 25–42; Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 26, 69; Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*, 42–44; Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700–1947* (London, 1986), 34; see also Conrad Dixon, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen," in Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, Conference, 4th, 1980, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting, eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1980), 265–81; F. J. A. Broeze, "The Muscles of Empire—Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919–1939," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 28 (1981): 43–67, esp. 45.

joined others of the "black poor" in the sponsored migration of freed people to the colony of Sierra Leone.¹⁴

The British government and East India Company developed a method of ensuring lascar labor for company ships while inhibiting the settlement of lascars in British ports. The government gave the company the authority to hire sailors recruited in Indian ports under special crew agreements, Asiatic Articles, which established terms of employment different from those of European sailors under standard articles of agreement. Asiatic Articles eventually set wages at one-fifth to one-third the wages of European sailors. Ultimately more important, unlike sailors recruited in European ports, lascars signed contracts for a given length of time—one year, eighteen months, two years—rather than for the duration of particular voyages. And British legislation enacted in 1814, 1823, and 1834 restricted the settlement of lascars in Britain. They had to return to their home port, whether with the ship of their arrival or another India-bound ship. If lascars remained in England, the East India Company assumed financial responsibility for them.¹⁵ Lascars thus became a maritime labor pool of non-European, migrant, contract workers: aliens in Britain and working under different conditions from sailors recruited in British ports.

Having originated in the conditions of the late eighteenth century, Asiatic Articles presented new benefits for nineteenth-century British shipping. Ship owners and masters regarded men under Asiatic Articles as easier to recruit and discipline than European sailors. As southern African and Australian ports and their hinterlands prospered, high wages and other opportunities both encouraged European sailors to desert their ships and made it difficult to hire replacements in ports. Men on Asiatic Articles were bound by the terms of their contract to work for stipulated periods of time. Moreover, unlike European sailors, they could not melt into the populations of white settler societies increasingly characterized by a color bar. On board ship, European officers regarded sailors on Asiatic Articles as more compliant than crewmen from Europe or—worse—the settler colonies where "Jack got to assume that he was quite as good as his master."¹⁶ Serangs and tindals removed the burden of disciplining so-called "Asiatic" crewmen from European officers, who also attributed religious strictures with preventing drunkenness—that bane of maritime discipline—among Hindu and Muslim sailors.¹⁷ In contrast to their opinions about intractable European crewmen, officers lauded non-Europeans as "obedient, satisfied with rough fare, averse to strikes, sober and hard-working."¹⁸ Men working under Asiatic Articles dominated the crews of many nineteenth-century British Indian Ocean ships. By 1855, British merchant ships employed 10,000 to 12,000 lascars. About 60 percent of these men came from the

¹⁴ Public Records Office (hereafter, PRO), Kew Gardens, England, Treasury, T1/631, record 14240, Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, May 24, 1786. I am grateful to Alexander X. Byrd for bringing this information to my attention.

¹⁵ Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), 42–44; R. M. Hughes, *The Laws Relating to Lascars and Asiatic Seamen* (London, 1855), 1–20.

¹⁶ W. Caius Crutchley, *My Life at Sea* (London, 1912), 104–06, 249–50.

¹⁷ John Bain, *Life of a Scottish Sailor; or, Forty Years' Experience of the Sea* (Nairn, 1897), 124.

¹⁸ *Graphic* of 1892, cited in Peter Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag of the P & O* (London, 1981), 115.

Indian subcontinent; the others had arrived in Indian ports from the Malay Archipelago, China, Arabia, and East Africa.¹⁹

At the same time that Asiatic Articles increasingly controlled the lives of non-European sailors, the African slave trade and regional exploitation of slaves expanded. Atlantic demands and Atlantic institutions extended into the Indian Ocean. Ships rounded the Cape of Good Hope to seek East African slaves; sugar plantations arose on the southern Indian Ocean islands. The new demands for slaves, as well as a rise in world ivory prices, pushed trade routes west and north from the Mozambique and Swahili coasts. Regional state expansion and commercialization also fueled slavery. Even as Europeans were setting the foundations of colonial empires, African and Asian powers expanded across the region. By 1840, the Omani sultans had transferred the seat of their power to the East African island of Zanzibar, which became the center for a new commercial empire. In the Horn of Africa, the Ethiopian state based in Shoa became the core of a growing empire. To the north and west, Egypt built an empire in the upper Nile valley after 1820. The conquests of the Egyptian and Ethiopian states stimulated slave raiding and trading, which merchants then sustained. The exploitation of slaves also increased within Africa. When export prices dropped, cheap slaves glutted local markets; their masters then put them to work in a variety of endeavors. Slaves became important in agriculture and other activities in the Sudanese Nile valley, Ethiopia, and the Somali coast and hinterland. Originally a trade entrepôt, Zanzibar developed as a center for plantation agriculture when landowners reacted to a temporarily depressed export market by putting their slaves to work on plantations.²⁰

Under the shadow of European global economic hegemony, growing Asian and African commerce created labor demands often met by slaves or freedmen. The same European prosperity that fueled the market for ivory raised the prices of a regional maritime export: pearls and mother of pearl, brought from ocean depths by slave divers.²¹ Revived trade demanded overland and maritime transport workers. From ports of the Swahili coast, especially Zanzibar, whose trade increased five-fold in the first half of the century, trusted slaves joined caravans linking the coast and interior.²² The use of slaves as sailors probably increased when

¹⁹ Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 19; Dixon, "Lascars," 268; William Dane Phelps, *Fore and Aft; or, Leaves from the Life of an Old Sailor* (Boston, 1871), 131, 133; Hughes, *Laws Relating to Lascars and Asiatic Seamen*, 5.

²⁰ Janet J. Ewald, "Africa: East Africa," in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (New York, 1998), 41–46; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 45.

²¹ J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. 1, *Historical*, Part 2 (Calcutta, 1915), 2220, 2252; PRO, Foreign Office (hereafter, FO) 881/3780, Memoranda by Mr. A. B. Wylde Regarding the Slave Trade in the Soudan and Its Red Sea Coast. India Office (hereafter, IO), London, Political and Secret Department (hereafter, PSD), L/P&S/9/54, Loch to Secretary of State for India, September 13, 1878, enclosing Loch to Secretary to Government, September 21, 1878; PRO, FO 84/1510, Beyts to Derby, March 5, 1878; PRO, Admiralty (hereafter, ADM) 1/6452, Corbett to Secretary of Admiralty, January 9, 1878, enclosing Powlett to Corbett, December 20, 1877; FO 84/1849, Jago to Secretary of State for Foreign Office, July 9, 1887; FO 881/3829, Malcolm to Salisbury, July 22, 1878; Renato Paoli, "Le condizioni commerciali dell'Eritrea," in Fernando Martini, et al., *L'Eritrea economica* (Novara, 1913), 181–84.

²² Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar* (London, 1987), 87–109; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 144, 187, 232; Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1995), 61–62, 70, 74–75, 87, 94, 110.

captives glutted African and Arab markets beginning in the 1830s. From then until the 1880s, slaves and freedmen often formed the majority of the crews on coastal and oceangoing ships, large and small. Off the south Arabian coast, skilled slave sailors sometimes even commanded ships belonging to their owners.²³

Burgeoning nineteenth-century cities along the rim of the western Indian Ocean absorbed workers, slave and free. The combined population of the Hijazi cities—Mecca and Medina in the interior, and their port of Jidda—doubled in the nineteenth century.²⁴ Zanzibar's population grew from perhaps 12,000 in 1835 to between 25,000 and 45,000 in 1857.²⁵ Moreover, the populations of both regions swelled seasonally: the Hijaz, during the Muslim pilgrimage, which increased after the opening of the Suez Canal; Zanzibar, during the trading season.²⁶ The needs of growing populations, labor bottlenecks during the pilgrimage and trading seasons, and ample slaves encouraged entrepreneurs to invest in slaves, whom they hired out, then took a portion of their daily pay.²⁷ Such slaves could be moved as needed from one activity to another: working in light industries, such as a flour mill; processing, packing, and carrying export goods; and, especially, constructing the new private and public buildings that sprung up in Zanzibar and the Hijazi cities.²⁸

²³ Charles Xavier Rochet d'Héricourt, *Second voyage sur les deux rives de la mer Rouge, dans le pays des Adels, et le royaume de Choa* (Paris, 1846), 19; PRO, FO 84/1849, Jago to Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, July 9, 1887; Benjamin, "Arab Merchants of Bombay and Surat," 85–95; Risso, *Oman and Muscat*, 75 and following; J. R. Wellsted, *Travels in Arabia*, 2 vols. (London, 1838), 1: 28; Captain Colomb [P. H. Colomb], *Slave-Catching in the Indian Ocean: A Record of Naval Experiences* (1873; rpt. edn., New York, 1896), 59–60, 96–99, 196, 216, 219–21; IO, Settlement of Aden Residency Records (hereafter, ARR), R20/A/17, Political Agent, Aden, to Willoughby, December 22, 1841.

²⁴ William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus, Ohio, 1984), 17.

²⁵ Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 2 vols. (1857; rpt. edn., New York, 1967), 1: 81.

²⁶ Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia*, 60–61.

²⁷ PRO, FO 84/1570, Layard to Salisbury, April 2, 1880, enclosing Zohrab to Layard, March 13, 1880. See also FO 84/1510, Beyts to Derby, February 20, 1878, enclosing deposition of Suedo, February 18, 1878.

²⁸ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs, and Learning*, J. H. Monahan, trans. (Leiden, 1931), 3, 4; PRO, FO 84/1482, Memorandum on despatch from Beyts to Derby, October 3, 1877; Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 80; Norman Robert Bennett, ed., *The Zanzibar Letters of Edward D. Ropes, Jr., 1882–1892* (Boston, 1973), 9; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 185–87; James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa* (London, 1876), 312, 330; for the nineteenth-century building boom in Zanzibar, see Abdul Sheriff, "Introduction," "An Outline History of Zanzibar Stone Town," and "Mosques, Merchants, and Landowners in Zanzibar Stone Town," and Steve Battle, "The Old Dispensary: An Apogee of Zanzibari Architecture," in Abdul Sheriff, ed., *The History and Conservation of Zanzibar Stone Town* (London, 1995), 2, 12–21, 46–66, 91–99; Bennett, *Zanzibar Letters*, 10, 14, 34; W. S. W. Ruschenberger, *Narrative of a Voyage around the World in 1835, 1836, and 1837*, 2 vols. (London, 1838), 1: 37; Joseph B. F. Osgood, *Notes of Travel; or, Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem, Mass., 1854), 30; W. F. Baldock, recorder, "The Story of Rashid Bin Hassani of the Bisa Tribe, Northern Rhodesia," in Margery Perham, ed., *Ten Africans* (London, 1936), 99; for building in the Hijaz, see Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia*, 66–68; Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 11–12, 31–32, 37–38. French reports offer particularly detailed descriptions of government building projects. See the Archives de la Ministre des Affaires Etrangères (hereafter, MAE), Paris, Correspondance Commerciale et Consulaire, Djeddah (hereafter, CCCD), Vol. 2, 1869–1874, DuBreuil to MAE, March 25, 1868; Vol. 3, 1869–1874, DuBreuil to MAE, March 6, 1869; Vol. 2, 1865–68, DuBreuil to MAE, March 26, 1867, April 14, 1867; Vol. 3, DuBreuil to MAE, March 6, 1869; Vol. 2, 1865–68, DuBreuil to MAE, March 26, 1867, April 14, 1867; Vol. 3, 1869–1874, DuBreuil to MAE, March 6, 1869; Vol. 3, 1869–1874, DuBreuil to MAE, March 6, 1869, DuBreuil to MAE, February 27, 1873; Vol. 3, 1869–1874, DuBreuil to MAE, March 6, 1869, and February 20, 1871.

On the waterfronts of Jidda and Zanzibar, slave porters and boatmen worked under and alongside Hadhrami and Yemeni men, carrying goods between ship and shore, and performing other harbor work. Freeborn workers, even those with relatively modest amounts of capital, availed themselves of inexpensive slaves to become labor supervisors. In Zanzibar by 1878, Hadhrami who had worked as porters owned their own slave porters.²⁹ The men who loaded coal and cargo onto anchored steamships were probably hired-out slaves.³⁰ The enormous increase in steamships visiting Jidda annually—from thirty-eight in 1864 to 205 in 1875—created new labor demands.³¹ Forced by reefs to anchor far beyond the harbor, steamships depended on flat-bottomed vessels (lighters) often manned in part by slaves. One boatman, for example, bought a slave whom he at first made load cargo and passengers onto vessels; he then put the slave to work loading ballast onto steamships.³² Slaves supplied most of the boatmen, as well as the porters, in the Jidda harbor as late as 1923, roughly ninety years after slavery's abolition in British colonial territories.³³

Ships and ports offered gateways to emancipation. Some slaves received manumission from their masters, who acted from a combination of economic, religious, and social motives. When demands for labor decreased, masters perhaps found it more pragmatic to free slaves rather than to continue supporting them. Moreover, Muslim masters who freed their slaves performed an act of charity in the eyes of their faith. According to Islamic values, the gift of freedom nonetheless bound slaves in clientship to their benefactors; an Arabic proverb stated, "he who frees a slave fetters a hand."³⁴ Masters particularly valued skilled and loyal ex-slaves as clients. In Mecca, if a slave working in construction became fluent in Arabic and generally displayed promise, he moved to work in the business or household of his master. Household slaves often received their freedom upon adulthood and established households of their own, with the help and tutelage of their ex-masters.³⁵ Boat owners also manumitted slaves, who sometimes continued to work for their ex-masters. One freedman commanded his master's pearl-fishing vessel; another served as a crew member. Still another freedman even became the co-owner, along with his ex-master's son, of an Indian ship trading to Jidda.³⁶

Slaves themselves sometimes seized the physical mobility of urban and maritime

²⁹ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 466–67; Norman Bennett, "William H. Hawthorne: Merchant and Consul in Zanzibar," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 99 (1963): 127; Christie, *Cholera Epidemics*, 330.

³⁰ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 467; Christie, *Cholera Epidemics*, 330, 408.

³¹ William Ochsenwald, "The Commercial History of the Hijaz Vilayet, 1840–1908," in R. B. Serjeant and R. L. Bidwell, eds., *Arabian Studies VI* (London, 1982), 70–71.

³² PRO, FO 84/1482, Deposition of Murjan, December 11, 1876, enclosed in Wylde to Derby, February 11, 1877.

³³ Jan Schmidt, *Through the Legation Window, 1876–1926: Four Essays on Dutch, Dutch-Indian and Ottoman History* (Istanbul, 1992), 71.

³⁴ R. Brunschvig, "Abd," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edn. (Leiden, 1960), 26; Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1971), 80–81; Daniel Pipes, "Mawlas: Freed Slaves and Converts in Early Islam," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, 199–227; William John Sersen, "Stereotypes and Attitudes towards Slaves in Arabic Proverbs: A Preliminary View," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, 97.

³⁵ Hurgonje, *Mekka*, 11–13.

³⁶ IO, PSD, L/P&S/9/54, Loch to Secretary of State for India, September 13, 1878, enclosing Loch to Secretary to Government, September 21, 1878; PRO, FO 195/579, Pollen to Secretary of Admiralty, June 19, 1858, enclosed in Green to Allicin, July 8, 1858.

work, translating it into social mobility. The lines between slave and free blurred among the poor of northwest Indian Ocean port cities, as a multi-ethnic group of urban wage workers emerged. Slaves mingled with other workers and sailors on jobs and in relaxation, in housing, and sometimes in jails.³⁷ Slaves learned to move in the maritime and port world. They negotiated with their masters, seeking their own jobs, distancing themselves from those masters, and sometimes even breaking servile ties altogether. In Zanzibar and other parts of the Swahili coast, slaves found work on caravans, where they not only earned wages but also engaged in their own trading endeavors. The Zanzibari slave Rashid, for example, signed up for European expeditions when the construction work for which he had been hired out by his mistress slowed. Other slaves, freedmen, and freeborn workers followed Rashid's path. By February 1878, so many men had left with caravans for the interior that the price of labor in Zanzibar had doubled over the previous eighteen months.³⁸ Other slaves probably found work on ships, where they enjoyed a degree of independence, including the opportunities to earn wages and to trade.³⁹ In the late 1880s, slave crews on Red Sea boats even made demands on their masters for certain wages and food.⁴⁰

Port and maritime slaves sought freedom in British enclaves and ships or received it through British intervention. In 1858, the British consul of Zanzibar confiscated 8,000 slaves belonging to British Indian subjects.⁴¹ Slaves sometimes escaped to British ships off Zanzibar. An officer in a private ship reported black men swimming to ships and begging to be taken to British ports in southern Africa. Other freedmen became crew members of Royal Navy ships, especially after 1870, when the Admiralty ordered that East Africans replace Sierra Leonians on Indian Ocean vessels.⁴² The British consulate in Jidda also represented freedom. One slave, Suedo, learned from Jidda's "coolies" that he could take refuge at the British consulate. Dispatched to collect wages he had earned, Suedo found himself near the consulate and seized the opportunity to take refuge there. Slaves often made such escapes when moving from one job or one place to another. A slave lighterman, Murjan, appeared at the British consulate in Jidda just after he had been put to work at a new job. Another slave made his bid for freedom just after having been sent from Suakin to Jidda. Promised by his master good wages for loading salt onto

³⁷ Wellsted, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 428; J. Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, John Seelye, ed. (1846; rpt. edn., Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 371, 396–401, 405, 425.

³⁸ Baldock, "Story of Rashid," 99–106; Bennett, "William H. Hawthorne," 127. For an analysis of slaves as caravan porters, see Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 55–78, 87.

³⁹ The same Swahili word, *mafundi*, applied to slaves and free men who were artisans or specialists, including skilled porters and sailors. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 87, 89 n. 21.

⁴⁰ PRO, FO 84/1849, Jago to Secretary of State, July 9, 1887.

⁴¹ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 40.

⁴² Crutchley, *My Life at Sea*, 140; Arthur Davy, "Tindals, Seedies and Kroomen," *Simon's Town Historical Society Bulletin* 17 (1993): 157. I am very grateful to Dr. Davy for responding to my inquiry and sending me a copy of his article. For an example of a freedman joining the crew of a Royal Navy vessel, see PRO, Foreign Office Confidential 2624, July 27, 1875, Cumming to Secretary of the Admiralty, May 19, 1875; and Inclosure 4, Captain Sullivan to Cumming, May 4, 1875, rpt. in Anita P. Burdett, ed., *Persian Gulf and Red Sea Naval Reports, 1820–1960* (Slough, 1993), vol. 4, 1875–1881, 47, 56.

vessels in the Jidda harbor, the slave discovered instead that he was to be sold. He then ran away to the British consulate.⁴³

Murjan, Suedo, and other port workers and sailors moved in a distinctly Indian Ocean world. As maritime laborers had for centuries, they worked on ships and in ports where work fluctuated according to the yearly cycles of the winds and Islamic calendar. Yet after 1498 and especially after the late eighteenth century, the physical boundaries of Indian Ocean maritime workers widened. On British and other European ships, they sailed the Atlantic. At the same time, new social boundaries arose. Lascars might sail the Atlantic, but they could not settle in Britain; Asiatic Articles controlled their movements. The rise of slave raiding and trading, and the demand for slaves in nineteenth-century ports and ships, reinforced other social boundaries and hierarchies. Yet slaves like Murjan challenged those boundaries, seeking freedom through the very ports and ships that demanded their servitude. I do not know where the Murjan of Jidda went in 1876; but other Africans, many freedmen and some also named Murjan, entered British ports and British steamships, where they faced new mobility and new boundaries.

IN 1886, AN INDIA-BOUND PASSENGER on the steamship *Parramatta*, belonging to the Peninsular and Oriental Line (P & O), wrote of "that glorious British Empire of which we are here a small, moving, isolated fragment."⁴⁴ Steam liners indeed represented the British Empire in microcosm, with European passengers divided by class and crew divided by both rank and race. Order, efficiency, and punctuality relied on hierarchy, discipline, industrial engines, and the labor of imperial subjects. Probably more than one hundred of these imperial subjects worked on the *Parramatta*. Indian lascars served as the deck crew; in the engine rooms below the decks, firemen and coal trimmers cut and hauled coal, stoked and maintained engines. Many of these men were probably Africans who had been slaves before entering the engine rooms of the *Parramatta*.

The imperial and industrial regime of the *Parramatta*, however, emerged only after steamships had plied the Indian Ocean for decades. Industrial transport, labor, and time did not quickly triumph over sails, sailors, and seasonal winds. The first steamship, the British *Hugh Lindsay*, sailed from Bombay to Suez in 1829–1830. But weak engines, unwieldy construction, and expensive coal made it difficult or impossible for the *Hugh Lindsay* and its successors to sail easily against prevailing winds. As late as the early twentieth century, steamships sometimes still hoisted sails. Even after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which resulted in an enormous increase of steamship traffic, sails alone carried some ships—especially on routes to Australia and the Pacific. Sailing ships also continued on some regional routes within the Indian Ocean. The arrival of steamships even stimulated the activities of indigenous coastal vessels and lighters, propelled by sails or oars. A wide range of sailboats—oceangoing ships, vessels crossing from Africa, small

⁴³ PRO, FO 84/1510, Beyts to Derby, February 20, 1878, enclosing deposition of Suedo, February 18, 1878; and FO 84/1597, Zohrab to Granville, July 1, 1881.

⁴⁴ Edwin Arnold, on board the *Parramatta*, 1886, quoted in Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*, 70.

lighters—even frequented Aden, a port renovated for steamships, as late as the 1870s.⁴⁵

Before huge passenger liners depended on large numbers of men working engines, steamships and imperial endeavors created new labor demands on land. Steamships needed new ports and port facilities, requiring workers to construct roads, railroads, and port facilities, as well as a range of new buildings for government, commerce, housing, and a variety of services, including health and sanitation.⁴⁶ The periodic arrival of steamers necessitated the services of dock and harbor workers. Steamships did not always bring the supposed regularity of industrial time to dock work but instead intensified the irregularity of such work.⁴⁷ Steamships running on strict schedules, especially if they were carrying mail, demanded quick turnarounds in port. Stevedores, porters, and coal heavers worked feverishly for short periods; when the work ended, they sought other jobs or were forced into idleness. Controlling the ports and maritime routes that provided the networks of the British Empire led to military ventures, themselves creating flurries of work in old and new ports.⁴⁸ Intense, but often sporadic and irregular, port building and military activities called for rapidly recruiting large numbers of men who would work steadily until they finished a particular project. British employers used existing methods of recruitment and sources of labor, turning to local labor brokers and gang leaders. As middlemen who understood local conditions and languages, these men found new roles in British ports and on British ships. They drew workers from the labor markets of Indian cities, as well as from Arabia and Africa.

The most important British port of the northwestern Indian Ocean was Aden, at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Taken over as a coal depot by the British in 1839, Aden became one of the busiest ports in the world by the last half of the nineteenth century. Between 1839 and 1856, Aden's population exploded from 1,300 to 21,000.⁴⁹ The work of transforming Aden from a dilapidated town to a major steamship port fell to migrants from India, the Yemeni highlands, and Africa. From the beginning, the British looked beyond the enclave for an inexpensive and controllable work force. From 1839 through the 1850s, British authorities sponsored the migration of convict labor and free workers from India. When unskilled Indian labor eventually proved unfeasible, British officials turned

⁴⁵ John H. Wilson, *On Steam Communication between Bombay and Suez, with an Account of the Hugh Lindsay's Four Voyages* (Bombay, 1833); Major and Mrs. George Darby Griffith, *A Journey across the Desert, from Ceylon to Marseilles: Comprising Sketches of Aden, the Red Sea, Lower Egypt, Malta, Sicily, and Italy*, 2 vols. (London, 1845), 1: 9, 12–13; F. M. Hunter, *An Account of the British Settlement of Aden in Arabia* (1877; rpt edn., London, 1968), 83–84.

⁴⁶ For European port-building in other parts of the Indian Ocean, see F. J. A. Broeze, K. I. McPherson, and P. D. Reeves, "Engineering and Empire: The Making of the Modern Indian Ocean Ports," in Satish Chandra, ed., *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (New Delhi, 1987), 254–55, 256, 300–01.

⁴⁷ See, for example, E. L. Taplin, *Liverpool Dockers and Seamen, 1870–1890* (Hull, 1974), 3, 6.

⁴⁸ The Abyssinian Expedition of 1868, known as an "engineer's war," provides the best example of a military campaign creating intense activity in the ports of the western Indian Ocean. Thomas E. Marston, *Britain's Imperial Role in the Red Sea Area, 1800–1878* (Hamden, Conn., 1961), 341, 346, 353–54; Ghada Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian Rule, 1865–1885* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 85–86; D. A. Farnie, *East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History, 1854–1956* (Oxford, 1969), 78; MAE, CCCD, Vol. 2, DuBreuil to MAE, March 1, 1868.

⁴⁹ R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839–1967* (London, 1975), 445.

to Arabs from the highlands north of Aden. These men first proved themselves as coalers of steamships and then as laborers in some public works projects. Unlike immigrant Indian labor, they were efficiently recruited and controlled by Arab brokers who also often supplied draft animals. The first labor contractors arrived shortly after 1839 from Mocha, the Red Sea port that declined as Aden rose.⁵⁰

By the late 1850s, Aden's population and work force consisted mainly of Arabs, "Seed[i]es, Somalees, and other persons who cannot correctly be described as natives of India."⁵¹ The term "seedies" derived from "sidis," originally "sayyids," referring to Africans in northern India, some of whose ancestors had served as slave-sailors and commanders. In nineteenth-century Indian English usage, seedies also came to denote men who entered the Indian Ocean world from the Swahili coast, especially Zanzibar, particularly sailors and harbor workers.⁵² Many seedies were escaped or manumitted slaves. Slaves fled to Aden, sometimes on vessels belonging to their masters. In August 1878, eleven slave pearl fishers in the Red Sea hijacked their owner's boat, itself commanded by a freedman, and headed for the port. Other slaves probably had received manumission and came to Aden seeking work. Still others entered Aden when British ships intercepted ships carrying slaves in or near the Gulf of Aden. Between 1865 and 1870 alone, the government recorded almost 2,200 freedmen as having entered Aden.⁵³ Freeborn Somalis arrived in Aden from Africa as well as Arabian ports. Drawing on their previous maritime expertise, and on the early British prohibition against Arab boats in the harbor, Somalis dominated Aden's small boat traffic. Somali boats served a particularly important role as lighters after steamships became larger in the mid-1860s. Port facilities failed to keep up with the deeper draft ships, which were forced to anchor far off-shore and depend on lighters. By the 1870s, over seven hundred Somalis holding government licenses monopolized the small boat traffic in the port.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule*, 59; for recruiting Indian and Arab labor, including debates about the relative worth of the two kinds of workers, see IO, ARR, R/20/A/4, Haines to Willoughby, n.d. [between March 17, 1839, and April 13, 1839], and October 7, 1839; R/20/A/17, Willoughby to Haines, November 11, 1841; R/20/A/30, Curtis to Haines, April 11, 1842, Curtis to Secretary to the Military Board, March 1, 1842, Cruttenden to Haines, June 25, 1842; R/20/A/30, Curtis to Secretary to Military Board, March 1, 1842; R/20/A/48, Haines to J. P. W., December 24, 1844; R/20/A/53, Haines to Escombe, June 27, 1845; R/20/A/55, Malet to Haines, July 30, 1846; R/20/A/57, Malet to Haines, July 30, October 3, November 2, and November 13, 1846, Military Board, Bombay to Haines, October 12, 1846, and Ewart to Haines, November 30, 1846; R/20/A/58, Haines to Malet, September 2 and September 9, 1846, and Haines to Grant, December 5, 1846; R/20/A/163, Coghlan to Hart, January 24, 1857, enclosing extract of a letter from the Secretary to the Medical Board, December 24, 1856, and Memorandum by Playfair, January 23, 1857, Wilkins to Coghlan, January 24, 1857; R/20/A/195, Coghlan to Young, February 19, 1859.

⁵¹ IO, ARR, R/20/A/155, Anderson to Coghlan, July 27, 1857.

⁵² Hunter, *Account of the British Settlement of Aden*, 39; Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases and of Kindred Terms*, 2d edn., ed. by William Crooke (Delhi, 1968), 806.

⁵³ IO, PSD, L/P&S/54, Loch to Secretary of State for India, September 13, 1878, enclosing Loch to Secretary to Government, September 21, 1878; Loch to Secretary of State for India, September 23, 1878; Osgood, *Notes of Travel*, 150; R. L. Playfair, *A History of Arabia Felix or Yemen* (Bombay, 1859), 15. Lidwien Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, "From Slaves to Coolies: Two Documents from the Nineteenth-Century Somali Coast," *Sudanica Africa* 3 (1992): 1-8; Harris, *African Presence in Asia*, 67.

⁵⁴ Edward A. Alpers, "The Somali Community at Aden in the Nineteenth Century," *Northeast African Studies* 8 (1986): 143-44; Griffith and Griffith, *Journey across the Desert*, 1: 21; Hunter, *Account of the British Settlement of Aden*, 35. By the end of the decade, however, Somali boatmen found

Somalis, Yemenis, and seedies performed the work that was the *raison d'être* for Aden: loading coal onto steamships. As early as the 1840s, government mail steamers employed coalers who came from the Swahili coast near Zanzibar. Keeping on schedule required a fast turnaround in port; according to one observer, the Zanzibari coalers "never cease, night or day, until they have finished their task, and the fatigue is so great, that it was calculated that one man died for every 100 ton of coals."⁵⁵ Attempting to remedy the high mortality rate, officials issued rations of alcohol to the workers. A few years later, a government official noted that escaped slaves, as well as sons of free men and slave women, worked with Yemenis from mountain villages at loading coal onto steamships. By the 1870s, a force of about nine hundred workers—identified as mostly Arab but including some Somalis—loaded and unloaded both cargo and coal at Aden.⁵⁶

As they had in Aden, in the Red Sea ports of Suakin and Port Sudan the British turned to brokers who in these cases recruited mainly Yemeni workers. A burst of activity occurred in Suakin in 1885 when ships and men converged on the port, the intended base of Anglo-Egyptian attacks against the Sudanese Mahdi and terminus for a planned railroad. British officials soon deemed migrant Egyptian labor too expensive and Somali workers too inefficient. The Briton in charge of railway construction turned to Angelo Capato, a member of the Greek diaspora of entrepreneurs and workers, who was already providing British troops with cattle from the southwest Arabian coast. Capato parlayed supplying cattle into supplying men. With the help of his Arab employee, Capato recruited three thousand Yemeni contract workers.⁵⁷ More than twenty years later, the British abandoned Suakin and began to build Port Sudan on an almost empty site. Requiring large numbers of workers, they again used a labor broker: this time, a Yemeni who recruited men from his homeland.⁵⁸

Some workers in Aden and Bombay moved from dockside to shipboard, enlisting as crewmen on sailing vessels and steamships. Shipboard life seems particularly to have attracted freedmen. In the 1850s, slaves fleeing to Aden sought to join ships' crews. By the 1870s, nearly six hundred Arabs, Somalis, and other Africans hired themselves out annually for work on steamships.⁵⁹ In Bombay, Africans joined Indians in ships' crews. In 1864, more than half of the (probably under-reported) two thousand Africans in Bombay earned their living as sailors or in related maritime work.⁶⁰ Some freedmen came to Bombay from Aden when that local labor

themselves squeezed by the various factors. The boatmen collectively petitioned the government with their grievances. See, for example, IO, ARR, R/20/A/515, Harbour Master to Political Resident, December 6, 1878, enclosing petition from Muhammad Hassan and others; Hajee Hoosain to Goodfellow, January 14, 1879, Sullivan to Kennedy, January 18, 1879, undated petition of twenty-five boat owners to Harbour Master and petition from Salih Elmee and others, June 22, 1876.

⁵⁵ Griffith and Griffith, *Journey across the Desert*, 1: 19, 21.

⁵⁶ IO, ARR, R/20/A/58, Haines to Malet, September 9, 1846; Playfair, *History of Arabia Felix*, 15; Hunter, *Account of British Settlement of Aden*, 35.

⁵⁷ Sudan Archive, University of Durham, Durham, R. Robinson Papers, 104/18/106; Sarsfield-Hall Papers, 682/14, "History of Mr. Angelo Capato."

⁵⁸ Kenneth J. Perkins, *Port Sudan: The Evolution of a Colonial City* (Boulder, Colo., 1993), 68–69, 123–30.

⁵⁹ Playfair, *History of Arabia Felix*, 15; Hunter, *Account of the British Settlement of Aden*, 36.

⁶⁰ Harris, *African Presence in Asia*, 72.

market could not absorb them, others directly from British ships on antislavery patrol. After being deposited in Bombay by British ships, young African freedmen sometimes entered the British Indian navy as cabin boys. Others were sent to mission schools, where they learned to be smiths, carpenters, shoemakers, painters—and sailors. One young mission freedman worked under an engineer aboard a vessel of the British navy, eventually returning to Bombay via Aden.⁶¹ Other freedmen perhaps were directed to maritime labor from the very ships that transported them. In the 1870s, the firm acting as agents for the British India Steam Navigation Company (BISN) in Zanzibar and India received a government contract to transport slaves freed by British vessels. The agents, who recruited labor for overland expeditions, perhaps also funneled the freedmen it carried into shipboard labor, sending them to BISN vessels or the recruiting agencies of the P & O.⁶²

Steamships put Africans and Asians to work in new settings, with new divisions in the maritime worksite and work force. Some men worked on deck, others in the engine room. The separation between deck and engine room crews, as well as the use of non-European labor, came about partly because industrialization challenged shipboard hierarchy and discipline. The newly important engineers threatened the long-held absolute authority of the sailing master. Deck officers and engineers dealt with possible conflicts of authority by making the engine room as much as possible a separate domain from the deck, with a distinct crew including a cook and storekeeper. But engineers themselves faced challenges from European workers in engine rooms. Often experienced in industrial or heavy labor but new to maritime life, these men sometimes opposed shipboard authority.⁶³ Already regarding non-Europeans as more amenable to discipline and more willing to work under harsh conditions, employers hired them for the engine room. In particular, workers who loaded coal onto steamships—freedmen, Somalis, and Yemenis—also worked with coal in engine rooms. Racial stereotypes justified the conditions of the engine room. According to one officer, the engine room was a “terrible place . . . no man with longings for decent life [*sic*] would or could remain” as a coal trimmer; as a result, engine room labor was “utterly unfit for white men.”⁶⁴

Engine room crews worked under different conditions according to whether they served on liners, which used Asiatic Articles, or tramps, which often hired under standard articles. Based originally on carrying British coal throughout the world and bringing back iron ore for British factories, tramp shipping flourished from about 1870 to World War I. Tramp steamers followed no set schedule or itinerary; their masters took them to whatever port offered freight. The irregular schedules of

⁶¹ Colomb, *Slave-Catching*, 101, 261; H. Gundert, *Biography of the Reverend Charles Isenberg* (London, 1885), 54, 71–73; IO, ARR, R/20/A/118, Southey to A. C. Lewis, March 1, 1848, Haines to Malet, December 15, 1847; R/20/142, Anderson to Coghlan, June 26, 1856; R/20/A/180, Coghlan to Anderson, March 24, 1858, Anderson to Coghlan, April 24, 1858, Coghlan to Crawford, July 9, 1858, Coghlan to Masters of *Success*, July 9, 1858, Crawford to Coghlan, August 9, 1858; R/20/A/215, Playfair to Kemp, June 12, 1860; Fred Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873 to 1907* (Boulder, Colo., 1990), 52–58; H. B. Thomas, “The Death of Dr. Livingstone: Carus Farrar’s Narrative,” *Uganda Journal* 14 (1950): 116, 120.

⁶² Stephanie Jones, “The Role of the Shipping Agent in Migration: A Study in Business History,” in Klaus Friedland, ed., *Maritime Aspects of Migration* (Cologne, 1989), 339; and Jones, *Two Centuries of Overseas Trading: The Origins and Growth of the Inchcape Group* (Basingstoke, 1986), 111, 113, 128–29.

⁶³ Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*, 16–17, 108, 109; Crutchley, *My Life at Sea*, 265–66.

⁶⁴ Frank T. Bullen, *Men of the Merchant Service* (New York, 1900), 317, 324, 327.

tramp steamers made it advantageous for them to hire crews for the single voyages stipulated by standard articles. Men from the Swahili coast seem to have served relatively rarely in the engine rooms of tramps; Yemeni, Egyptian, and Somali men appeared more prominently.⁶⁵ Members of the latter groups probably first entered tramps at coal ports such as Aden, Port Said, or Djibouti. Serving under standard articles, they could leave the ship at a British port. There, they joined the crews of other tramp steamers, where they worked alongside men from Europe and other parts of Africa and Asia: the British Isles and continental Europe, as well as Turkey, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, the West Indies, India, and the Philippines. The ethnically diverse crews traveled throughout the world, including North American ports, where Africans and Asians sometimes deserted with their European shipmates, attracted by the relatively high wages of American port cities.⁶⁶ As colonial subjects working under standard articles, men who claimed to be from Aden or British Somaliland exercised the right to stay in Britain. They settled where they signed on and off ship, gravitating to the western and northeastern ports that shipped coal to Aden or were home ports for tramp steamers: Cardiff, Liverpool, and South Shields. Some stayed and established schools, mosques, and businesses, especially boarding houses. Others returned to their homelands, using profits from their work to establish households. Men working under standard articles on steamships thus sustained communities in Yemen and Somalia; the steamships themselves linked diaspora communities outside the western Indian Ocean world with their homelands.⁶⁷

Steam liners employed both deck and engine room crews under Asiatic Articles. Faced with keener competition and higher technological expenses after the late 1860s, liner companies depended for their profits on efficient use of labor.⁶⁸ Rather than the total cost of wages, which Asiatic Articles did not reduce, the contracts "save[d] constant trouble" by ensuring discipline partly through the agencies of serangs and tindals.⁶⁹ In port, too, the labor force under Asiatic Articles proved efficient. Depending for their profits on adherence to strict schedules, liner companies sought to make quick turnarounds in ports. Discharging old crews and hiring new ones at the end of every voyage extended time spent in port. The contracts of Asiatic Articles for one year, eighteen months, or two years provided

⁶⁵ Maritime History Archive (hereafter, MUMHA) and the Maritime Studies Research Unit (hereafter, MSRU), Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, *Ships and Seafarers of Atlantic Canada: One Percent Sample of Crew Agreements from British Vessels*, on CD-ROM (1998). It must be noted, however, that the 1 percent sample is not statistically representative.

⁶⁶ See the example of 'Ali 'Awad, a Yemeni fireman who deserted in Charleston, South Carolina, in September 1898, recorded in MUMHA and MSRU, *One Percent Sample*, vessel 97387, voyage 17. See also Pankhurst, "Early Somali Autobiography," 375.

⁶⁷ Richard L. Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside: An Arab Community in the North-East of England during the Early Twentieth Century* (Exeter, 1995); Fred Halliday, *Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (London, 1992); Tabili, "We Ask for British Justice," *passim*; Diane Frost, ed., "Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK," special issue, *Immigrants and Minorities* 13 (July–November 1994).

⁶⁸ For greater competition and higher technological expenses of post-1860s steamshipping, see J. Forbes Munro, "Suez and the Shipowner: The Response of the MacKinnon Shipping Group to the Opening of the Canal, 1869–1884," in Fischer and Nordvik, *Shipping and Trade*, 98–99; Boyd Cable [Ernest Andrew Ewart], *A Hundred Year History of the P. & O., Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (London, 1937), 162–79.

⁶⁹ Bain, *Life of a Scottish Sailor*, 124; Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*, 115.

for a long-term, dependable labor supply.⁷⁰ Moreover, large steamship companies possessed fleets of liners; men on Asiatic Articles could be transferred from one fleet ship to another as needed. Thus, even when new crews boarded the ship, they entered en masse, often being accustomed to similar jobs on the same line or quickly instructed about the new ship. Describing how his ship took on about two hundred new crewmen in Bombay in the space of six hours, one shipmaster stated that "this precise and careful handing-over . . . [accounted for] the extraordinary efficiency of the whole operation."⁷¹ Finally, shipmasters could put seamen under Asiatic Articles to work on the docks, especially important when dock strikes threatened to throw tight shipping schedules into chaos.⁷² The controllable labor force on Asiatic Articles was thus also flexible and mobile, deployed as needed on ship or shore within the liner companies. As steam liners slowly came to dominate British Indian Ocean shipping, men serving under Asiatic Articles formed a larger proportion of the merchant marine. By 1891, the number of men under Asiatic Articles had more than doubled since 1855 to 24,037 seamen, who represented 10 percent of the British merchant marine. By 1914, their numbers had risen to 51,616 and their proportion of merchant sailors to 17.5 percent.⁷³

Taking on crewmen in Bombay, the P & O Company displayed particularly sharp divisions between almost exclusively Indian deck crews and often predominantly African engine room crews. Men from the subcontinent continued to serve as lascars under Asiatic Articles, gradually finding themselves deck hands rather than sailors as engine power replaced wind power. African seedies dominated the engine room crews. The pattern emerged by the 1850s. In March 1858, a traveler embarking on the *Pottinger* at Suez reported that the entire crew, except English quartermasters, consisted of lascars, while the firemen and stokers were African "Seedy coolies."⁷⁴ Crew agreements indicating the birthplaces of seedies, as well as their names, suggest that many African firemen and coal trimmers were freedmen.⁷⁵ Often, they are recorded as having been born in Zanzibar, where slaves or freedmen constituted a significant portion of the population.⁷⁶ Names typical of slaves recur on the crew agreements: Mubarak, Faraj, Murjan, Fairuz, Sa'ad Allah, and Marzuq.⁷⁷ Freedmen more often served as coal trimmers, who performed the

⁷⁰ Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*; Donald G. O. Baillie, *A Sea Affair, An Autobiography* (London, 1957), 243.

⁷¹ Baillie, *Sea Affair*, 243.

⁷² Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, Circular to Commanders, issued in 1876; cited in Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*, 114.

⁷³ Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 207.

⁷⁴ F. R. Kendall, quoted in Padfield, *Beneath the House Flag*, 35–36.

⁷⁵ David Howarth, *The Story of the P & O: The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (London, 1986), 82. MUMHA, Crew Agreements for the steamships *Africa* (68108), *Agra* (68002), *Almora* (68055), *Arcot* (63809), *Assam* (73581), *Assyria* (67980), *Ava* (68060), *Bartle Frere* (30634), *Bengal* (30709), *Bheemah* (80428), *China* (27199), *Ellora* (80437), *Kaisar-i-Hind* (76182), *Patna* (63826), *Peshawur* (65641), *Poonah* (45786), *Rome* (81820), *Surat* (54738), and *Umballa* (71729), covering the years between 1864 and 1897, with almost all of the agreements dating from the 1870s and 1880s; National Maritime Museum (hereafter, NMM), Woolwich Out-station, Crew Agreements for *China*, 1864, 1865, *Peshawur*, 1874–1875, *Surat*, 1885.

⁷⁶ Even if the seamen were not born in Zanzibar, a reasonable inference would be that they embarked on the Indian Ocean from Zanzibar or perhaps another port on the Swahili coast.

⁷⁷ MUMHA and NMM, Crew Agreements for the steamships listed above in n. 75; Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 111, n. 3; L. W. C. van den Berg, *Le Hadhramout et les colonies arabes dans l'archipel Indien*

heaviest and most dangerous work, than as firemen. On board the *Assam* in 1877, for example, five seedies worked with fifteen other men as firemen; eleven seedies formed the entire contingent of coal trimmers. On a voyage of the *Rome* in 1882–1883, fifteen seedies took their places among forty-five firemen; twenty-two seedies provided all but one of the coal trimmers.⁷⁸

African firemen and trimmers entered records not only when they enlisted or were discharged but also when they died. The “terrible place” of the engine room could also be a deadly place. At the beginning of the voyage, the large pile of coal lay near the entry to the bunkers. But as the voyage continued, the coal was used up and its face receded, forcing trimmers deeper into the unventilated, dust-filled bunkers.⁷⁹ A coal trimmer named “Sambo,” perhaps an African, died on the *Simla* as it sailed between Suez and India in 1862.⁸⁰ On May 4, 1864, “Ibrom Nusseib,” an African who had been a coal trimmer on board the P & O steamship *Columbian*, died of “chronic dysentery and general disability” on board the *Poonah*, which was carrying the disabled seaman from Southampton to Bombay.⁸¹ In the same year, “Mabrick (Seedie)” died on December 4, on the *Golconda*. Somewhere between Suez and India, in 1865, “Mamet Ibram,” a “seedie,” died on the *Carnatic*.⁸² Throughout the nineteenth century, coal trimmers and firemen continued to perish at their jobs: from accidents—especially falls, burns from steam and gas explosions, avalanches of coal, heat asphyxiation—and illness, including fevers and respiratory diseases, as well as the dysentery that claimed the life of Ibrom Nusseib.⁸³ Sometimes, the combination of debilitating illness and an injury proved fatal. One coal trimmer, “Khamis Surbrook” (*sic*), died of a combination of accident and illness: “chronic bronchitis and shock from burn of hand.”⁸⁴

The heritage of slavery’s displacements funneled seedies into employment under restrictive Asiatic Articles rather than the standard articles allowing Yemeni and Somali seamen more mobility at sea and in port. Tramp steamers hired under standard articles in coal ports, such as Aden, where Yemeni and Somali men maintained ties to their natal villages and also formed neighborhoods near the harbor. Labor brokers recruited crews for tramp steamers by gathering men from networks stretching into villages or in harbor neighborhoods. But seedies did not belong, or clung only tenuously, to these sites of recruitment. Uprooted from their homelands, seedies could not claim places in Yemeni and Somali villages; in ports, they were particularly vulnerable to the attempts of colonial officials to move

(Batavia, 1886), 70. Mubarak or variations of it appeared so frequently among “Swahili” at Aden that it came to refer to any Swahili. Alexandre Le Roy, *D’Aden a Zanzibar* (Tours, 1894), 106.

⁷⁸ MUMHA, Crew Agreements for *Assam* (73581), voyage beginning January 1, 1877, and ending August 6, 1877, and for the *Rome* (81820), voyage beginning November 1, 1882, and ending March 17, 1883.

⁷⁹ Bullen, *Men of the Merchant Service*, 323–24.

⁸⁰ NMM, Peninsular and Oriental Nautical Reports (hereafter, PONR), 40/10, January 1862–February 1864, *Simla*.

⁸¹ MUMHA, Logbook, May 4, 1864, *Poonah* (45786).

⁸² NMM, PONR, 40/11, January, 1864–May 1866, *Golconda* and *Carnatic*.

⁸³ NMM, Peninsular and Oriental Death Book, 88/3, *Madras*, May 17, 1859, and June 29, 1866, *Peshawur*, April 25, 1874; PONR, 40/20, May 1884–July 1886, *Tasmania*; 40/22, July 1888–September 1890, *Venetia* and *Parramatta*; 40/23, October 1890–March 1893, *Britannia*, *Peshawur*, and *Gwalior*; 40/27, April 1899–September 1901, *Assaye* and *Egypt*.

⁸⁴ NMM, PONR, 40/23, October 1890–March 1893, *Kaisar-i-Hind*.

people out of harbor neighborhoods. In 1882, Aden's authorities built the new town of Shaykh Uthman, hoping to remove "vagrants" and temporary structures from the harbor and military installations. Living five miles from waterfront workplaces, the men of Shaykh Uthman could not respond quickly when the call for labor went out in the harbor. Not surprisingly, people tried to leave the new settlement and filter back into harbor neighborhoods. Seedies were less successful than migrant Yemenis or Somalis in evading British restrictions. In 1908, the self-proclaimed "strong seedies and hardworking men" of Shaykh Uthman complained that men from the Yemeni highlands had gained preferential treatment in hiring for steamships. Protesting, they invoked their status as "humble British subjects" contrasted with the "foreigners" from the highlands outside the colony. Ironically, the temporary nature of Yemeni and Somali migration to Aden enabled them to live in ephemeral housing near the harbor and escape the authorities. Because the seedies called no place but Aden home, they were particularly disadvantaged by restrictions on land that ultimately restricted their movement to tramp steamers, and thus their mobility abroad.⁸⁵

TRACING THE JOURNEYS OF CROSSERS OF THE SEA both answers questions posed at the beginning of this article and suggests new approaches to themes in world history. To whatever degree coerced or voluntary, physical and social movement shaped the lives of crossers of the sea. Even after the forced journeys taking them from their homes, slaves generally moved or stayed in a particular place or job according to the desires of their masters. The forced mobility of slave labor explains why slavery flourished in the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean and what the demand was for slaves. In the commercial economy of the northwest Indian Ocean, owners valued slaves because, as both commodities and people, they could be moved across a number of economic and social categories. Slaves were simultaneously forms of investment, members of entourages, and workers. Even people with relatively little cash could invest in slaves, whose abundance made them cheap. As workers, slaves eased labor bottlenecks in the ports and ships of the expanding, yet seasonal, commercial economy. They were easily transferred from one endeavor to another as needed. When market prices for slaves rose, their masters could transform workers into commodities and sell them at a profit. Or, when their usefulness ceased, slaves could be manumitted but still perhaps be retained as clients. The mobility of labor in the nineteenth-century northwestern Indian Ocean world helps explain what happened to ex-slaves. After the forced mobility of bondage, both economic and emotional reasons kept many ex-slave men on the move. Freedmen sought work in overland and ocean transport, including steamships. In British ports and ships, they found themselves under new forms of control, including Asiatic Articles, enforced by government officials and private employers. The British use of

⁸⁵ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule*, 189–90; Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside*, 21–23; Richard L. Lawless, "The Role of Seamen's Agents in the Migration for Employment of Arab Seafarers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Immigrants and Minorities* 13 (1994): 34–58; and Lawless, "Recruitment and Regulation: The Migration for Employment of 'Adenese' Seamen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *New Arabian Studies* 2 (1994): 74–102, esp. 87.

longstanding patterns of labor recruitment enhanced the wealth of local labor brokers. For freedmen, getting jobs depended on their access to brokers and to waterfront neighborhoods.

The flexibility and mobility of slave labor helps explain the continuity of slavery in world history, especially in the households of merchants. Slaves did domestic work; they also processed, packed, and transported commercial goods. This flexible use of slaves in part accounts for the presence of slavery in a place distant in time and space from the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean: medieval Europe. Again, we look to a port city. In thirteenth-century Ragusa, enslaved women served as domestics, packed and carried export goods during the trade season, and sometimes provided transient bachelors with temporary domestic amenities.⁸⁶ The slave women of Ragusa thus sustained both households and commerce. The slave men of northwestern Indian Ocean ports and ships performed jobs vital to trade but also provided entourages and investments for their masters. The very value of both the Mediterranean bondswomen and Indian Ocean bondsmen derived from the multiplicity and mobility of their labor potential.

Men who crossed the northwestern Indian Ocean point historians to ocean basins as a route into world history. In the pre-modern era, similarities of maritime life in both the Atlantic and Indian oceans, and possibly the Mediterranean, suggest a basis for comparing global maritime economies and cultures. By the eighteenth century, sea routes helped create a labor market that spanned the globe but was nonetheless increasingly differentiated. Ships carried first slaves, then indentured workers, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. An eighteenth-century shortage of maritime labor in the Atlantic encouraged Europeans to recruit African and Asian sailors, who eventually worked under a form of maritime indenture on steamships. Historical themes common to the Indian Ocean and Atlantic thus include slavery and its end, slow industrialization of transport, and development of new forms of labor control and struggles on both land and ship.

Although the crossers of the sea crossed boundaries, and inspire us to do so in our scholarship, they also faced stubborn old—and unexpected new—boundaries. Ultimately, the firmest line fell between slaves and freeborn. Slaves, freedmen, and freeborn indeed performed many of the same jobs; they hauled goods, built structures, and worked vessels. Yet being a slave still mattered. Notwithstanding their often successful struggles to renegotiate relationships, slaves still remained legally subject to masters who could try to sell them or move them from one job to another. Freedmen continued to be vulnerable: to re-enslavement in African and Asian ports, to yet another forced migration, perhaps to Aden or Bombay, in British hands, to recruitment in the British navy, and particularly to employment under Asiatic Articles. As the final irony, some men experienced the heaviest burdens of slavery after freedom, under British rule, and on land. Industrial capitalism and British hegemony enforced new forms of stratification and even imposed new kinds of immobility on Indian Ocean workers, especially freedmen. The crews of Asian and African sailing ships sometimes moved socially as well as physically. Ordinary sailors, including fortunate and skilled slaves, could rise through the ranks. Slaves

⁸⁶ Susan Mosher Stuard, *A State of Deference: Ragusa/Dubrovnik in the Medieval Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1992), 124, 126.

sometimes became freedmen. On steamships, however, non-European crewmen, though legally free, possessed no similar opportunities. Men below decks—where freedmen seem almost always to have worked—almost never took deck jobs. Whether above or below decks, non-Europeans on European ships did not join the ranks of the officers and engineers who commanded them. Work on a steamship thus made seamen physically more mobile than ever; they entered a maritime world that could extend from Yokohama to Melbourne to London. But it also restricted their social mobility in the maritime world as never before.

But to appreciate fully the burden of slavery's heritage, we must turn from the sea to the land. Few men wanted to live their entire lives as sailors or migrant port laborers. They hoped to settle, forming households either in their homeland or in a diaspora community. In this respect, seedies under Asiatic Articles suffered a particularly difficult and poignant plight. Unlike many non-European sailors under standard articles, they could not enter diaspora communities in Britain. Unlike Indians under Asiatic Articles, seedies were not returned to ports of their homelands by liners. The journeys of captivity had uprooted many seedies from homelands to which they could not return. The heritage of forced mobility and the hard struggle to find a place for themselves thus ultimately separated slaves and freedmen from other crossers of the sea.

A historian of Africa trained at the University of Wisconsin, **Janet J. Ewald** focused her early research on the small mountain kingdom of Taqali, located far from any ocean. Her monograph, *Soldiers, Traders, and Slaves* (1990), placed Taqali in its regional context of the greater Nile Valley. Her early articles and essays explored methodologies of fieldwork and working with oral narratives. Following the paths of northeastern Africans to the Red Sea led her from river valley to ocean basin. This article is part of a larger project examining port and maritime labor in the northwestern Indian Ocean during the transitions from slavery to emancipation, sailing to industrial transportation, and regional economic and political autonomy to European domination.