

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**The Royal Navy and the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, c. 1807-1867: anti-slavery, empire and identity**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the Royal Navy's efforts to suppress the transatlantic slave trade between 1807 and the mid-1860s. The role of the West Africa squadron in detaining slave ships embarking from the West African coast was instrumental in the transformation of Britain's profile from a prolific slave trading nation to the principal emancipator of enslaved Africans. The wider framework for naval suppression encompassed international law, official policy and diplomacy, but at the operational frontline of the campaign were naval personnel. This history of suppression shifts the emphasis from political and diplomatic contexts to the experiences of naval officers tasked with the delivery of the anti-slavery message, positioning them at the heart of Britain's abolitionist campaign on the West African coast. Through officers' narratives and personal testimonies – found in letters, journals, report books and diaries – it examines the reactions, relations and encounters of these agents of change, and their contributions to the exchange of information crucial to Britain's anti-slavery efforts in West Africa.

The personal, social and cultural experiences of naval officers provide insight into attitudes towards the key themes of Britain's abolitionist mission, namely anti-slavery beliefs, burgeoning empire, and national identity. In their responsibilities to confront the human trauma of the slave trade and liberate enslaved Africans, officers engaged with humanitarian ideals and anti-slavery rhetoric. These ideas had significant impact on how they conceived their identity as Britons and the nature of their duty as naval personnel, but could be undermined by their disgust at the conditions of service on the West African coast. Officers were also at the forefront of Britain's broader anti-slavery assault on shore, intended to reform West African society to European, 'civilised' standards. In their encounters with slavery and African peoples, officers faced numerous concerns, including concepts of racial identity, paternalism and the true meanings of freedom.

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## **List of abbreviations**

### **Archives**

BL	British Library
BLARS	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service
CAC	Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
GA	Gloucestershire Archives
HHC	Hull History Centre: Hull University Archives
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NMRN	National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth
NYPL	New York Public Library
PWDRO	Plymouth and West Devon Record Office
RAI	Royal Anthropological Institute Archive, London
SALS	Somerset Archives and Local Studies
SCAUB	Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections and Archives of the University of Birmingham
SLNSW	Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
TNA	The National Archives
UIC: SLC	University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections: Sierra Leone Collection
UKHO	UK Hydrographic Office Archive, Taunton
USNA	Special Collections and Archives Department, Nimitz Library, United States Naval Academy
WL	Wellcome Library, London
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office

### **Organisations**

ADM	Admiralty
CO	Colonial Office

FO Foreign Office  
CMS Church Missionary Society

**Publications**

PP House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online  
ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*  
USM *United Service Magazine*

## Introduction

Following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the British faced new challenges of how best to implement the legislation. To enforce abolition, they turned to the authority of the Royal Navy, and a squadron of naval vessels was stationed off the West African coast to intercept and detain slave ships that continued illegally to transport captive Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. Over the next six decades, the ships of the West Africa squadron patrolled 2000 miles of West African coastline in their efforts to suppress the slave trade. The role of the squadron was instrumental in the transformation of Britain's domestic and international profile from the most prolific slave-trading nation to the principal emancipator of enslaved Africans. The wider framework for suppression of the Atlantic slave trade encompassed international law, official policy and diplomatic strategy, but at the operational frontline of the campaign were British naval personnel. This thesis explores Britain's campaign against the slave trade through the narratives and personal testimonies of the men who served on these anti-slavery patrols. The nature of the surviving material, and relative absence of seamen's accounts, makes this a study of naval officers. It spans the period from 1807 to the mid-1860s, when the demise of the transatlantic slave trades to Brazil and Cuba signalled the end of the squadron's suppression activities.

Accounts of the politics, strategy, and diplomatic efforts of naval suppression have been well covered by scholars.<sup>1</sup> While the political and diplomatic contexts of the navy's task are echoed at various points in this thesis, this study shifts emphasis to the role of naval officers in delivering abolitionist policy. These officers were not merely navigators and overseers of the naval vessels that captured slavers and released enslaved Africans found on board: 'floating policemen' as they have often been termed.<sup>2</sup> Naval suppression was one part of a broader British anti-slavery assault on the West African coast, a collection of cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1949) continues to be cited as the key text for the policies and practices of naval suppression. This and William Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slavers: The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969) are the best known accounts of the West Africa squadron. More recently, the essays in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009) analyse British efforts to eradicate slave trading by administrative, diplomatic and naval action. A useful introduction to the Royal Navy's suppression activities in the Atlantic, and later the Indian Ocean, is Robert J. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century' in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), pp. 78-91.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. ix.

moral crusades to put an end to the slave trade by reforming West African society to follow what were regarded as European, ‘civilised’, standards. Naval officers were at the forefront of this wider campaign, and their personal testimonies of service engage with the key themes of Britain’s abolitionist mission in West Africa, namely anti-slavery beliefs, burgeoning empire, and national identity.<sup>3</sup> Their role is too often overlooked. For example, the navy is mentioned only once in *The British in Africa* (1971), an account full of examples of the work of British missionaries, explorers, settlers, travellers and traders in nineteenth-century Africa, and only then to suggest that naval vessels and bases offered a ‘launching-pad’ for others to begin their travels.<sup>4</sup> Scholarship has since offered the navy a more representative place in the history of abolition and British intervention in West Africa, but officers’ accounts are invariably peripheral, used only to illustrate a particular policy or strategy. As a counterpoint to such histories, this thesis positions these men at the heart of Britain’s abolitionist campaign on the West African coast.

As David Eltis and David Richardson have stressed, ‘the campaign against the slave trade always had a strong international dimension’, and the Royal Navy’s role in suppression was no different.<sup>5</sup> After abolishing its slave trade in 1807, Britain subsequently pressured other maritime powers whose citizens were still engaged in the trade to declare against it by invoking humanitarian ideals. The navy was therefore used as an instrument of state to pursue an international agenda and diplomatic effort to confront what remained for many nations a legitimate activity.<sup>6</sup> Over the next decades, a complex network of bilateral treaties were

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<sup>3</sup> Until the Emancipation Act of 1833 which ended slavery in the British colonies, many Britons remained slave owners. Before this date, abolitionist endeavours (including the work of the navy) focused specifically on anti-slave trade activity. However, while the term ‘anti-slavery’ is more applicable to the later period, for ease this thesis uses the phrase to incorporate all abolitionist efforts in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Roy Lewis and Yvonne Foy, *The British in Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 271. Useful works for the political, diplomatic and strategic background of naval suppression are David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question 1807-1869* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); David Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Paul Michael Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); W.L. Mathieson, *Great Britain and the Slave Trade, 1839-1865* (London: Longmans, 1929).

<sup>6</sup> Recent examinations of the Royal Navy as an instrument of foreign intervention in this period include John Bew, “‘From an umpire to a competitor’: Castlereagh, Canning and the issue of international intervention in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars’, in Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim (eds), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 117-38. In the same volume, Maeve Ryan examines the military interventionist aspect of the navy’s anti-slavery role in ‘The price of legitimacy in humanitarian intervention: Britain, the right of search, and the abolition of the West African slave trade, 1807-1867’, pp. 231-56.

negotiated between Britain and other powers, granting the Royal Navy powers to search and seize ships if suspected of illegal slaving activities. British vessels were then empowered to convey the captured slave ships, known as ‘prizes’, to Admiralty courts for adjudication, usually at the British colony of Sierra Leone. Authorities there also became responsible for the resettlement of recaptives, Africans liberated from slave ships.<sup>7</sup> Treaties signed in 1817 and 1835 between Spain and Britain, and in 1826 between Brazil and Britain made slave trading illegal between Africa, Cuba and Brazil. France began enforcing suppression in its colonies from the 1830s, and in 1836 Portugal was the last nation in the Atlantic world to abolish slave trading. However, excepting the British and Dutch abolitions in 1807 and 1814, a significant delay occurred between the passing of abolitionist legislation and its enforcement on the coast.<sup>8</sup>

Britain’s naval abolitionist policy was confronted with many operational limitations. Until the late 1830s, for example, slave ships could only be condemned when found with enslaved Africans on board. Ships equipped or fitted for the slave trade could not be detained until the passing of the Equipment Act of 1839. Furthermore, questions over the legal basis of Britain’s right to search and detain vessels of other nations created diplomatic tensions and raised issues of intervention by one sovereign state in the affairs of another. For example, an agreement with the United States for the mutual right of search of vessels proved elusive, and marked the ‘limits of British power’ in Andrew Lambert’s words.<sup>9</sup> The American flag (and flags of other nations who had not yet agreed to the right of search) was often used as a cover by slave traders, who exploited the diplomatic situation in the knowledge that British vessels could not search American ships. British efforts were also hindered by accusations of dubious legality and hypocrisy by other maritime powers, in a belief that the Royal Navy’s authority was being deployed to deny their international rivals opportunities to profit from slave trading. Such claims were fuelled by the Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston’s use of a network of spies and secret-service funds to bribe Brazilian politicians, for example. Many

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<sup>7</sup> From 1817, Courts of Mixed Commission were set up by Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and other powers to adjudicate cases of suspected slave trading. These courts were empowered to release enslaved Africans and condemn slave vessels and equipment, but could not exact penalties against slave ship crews or owners. See Leslie Bethell, ‘The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century’, *The Journal of African History*, 7:1 (1966), pp. 79-93. In *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Jenny Martinez ties the work of these international Admiralty Courts to the roots of human rights law.

<sup>8</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, pp. 271, 280.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Lambert, ‘Slavery, Free Trade and Naval Strategy, 1840-1860’ in Hamilton and Salmon (eds), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire*, p. 66.

methods of suppression were deemed in breach of international law, the destruction of the property of slave traders in Brazilian waters by the Royal Navy in 1850 being one frequently cited instance.<sup>10</sup>

Partly as a result of such limitations, the West Africa squadron was never particularly effective in its aim to prevent slave ships leaving the West African coast. While nearly 200,000 Africans were released by naval patrols, this is a small share (6.2 percent) of the estimated 3.2 million Africans embarked as slaves from West Africa between 1808 and 1863.<sup>11</sup> Fundamentally, the squadron could not contend with the prolific demand for slaves from the sugar and coffee plantations of Brazil and the Spanish plantation colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico.<sup>12</sup> In effect, the eventual demise of the transatlantic trade owed more to changes in public opinion regarding the enforcement of abolition laws.<sup>13</sup> The significant blow occurred in 1862, when US President Lincoln signed a treaty for the right of search. In 1864 the last slave ship was adjudicated in Freetown and the last transatlantic slave vessel probably landed slaves in Cuba in 1867. The need for a separate West Africa squadron was over.

The ships of the West Africa squadron patrolled coastline lying roughly between Cape Verde and St Paul de Loanda. The squadron was divided geographically into five divisions and for a period between 1832 and 1840 was integrated with the Cape of Good Hope station. The number of ships that plied these waters varied. In 1818, the squadron's first Commodore, Sir George Ralph Collier, had six ships under his command; a number that remained under 10 throughout the 1820s before increasing steadily in the 1830s to 27 by 1848. It was invariably the smallest warships that were sent to the West African coast, with crews varying between 60 and 135 men.<sup>14</sup> Other vessels deployed included re-commissioned former slave ships like the *Black Joke* and *Fair Rosamund*. Steam vessels (in contrast to sail) appeared on the squadron in greater numbers in the 1830s and 1840s. At various times the West Africa squadron was joined in suppression efforts by naval forces from France and the US.<sup>15</sup> While

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 66, 69; Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 115-6; Robin Law, 'Abolition and Imperialism: International Law and the British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade' in Derek R. Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 150-74. Lord Palmerston was Foreign Secretary three times: 1830-34, 1835-41 and 1846-51.

<sup>11</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, p. 274.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 278, 280.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> [www.pdavis.nl/WestAfr.htm](http://www.pdavis.nl/WestAfr.htm) [accessed 5 February 2012]; Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, Appendix C.

<sup>15</sup> The US Africa Squadron was formalised by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

the squadron was numerically small it had a significant impact relative to its size, particularly when compared to the naval suppression activity of other nations.<sup>16</sup> Warrants to search ships suspected of illegal slaving activities were issued to British warships on all foreign stations, and there was significant suppression activity in the Americas.<sup>17</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century also witnessed an intensification of naval suppression off the Cape of Good Hope and the East African coast.<sup>18</sup>

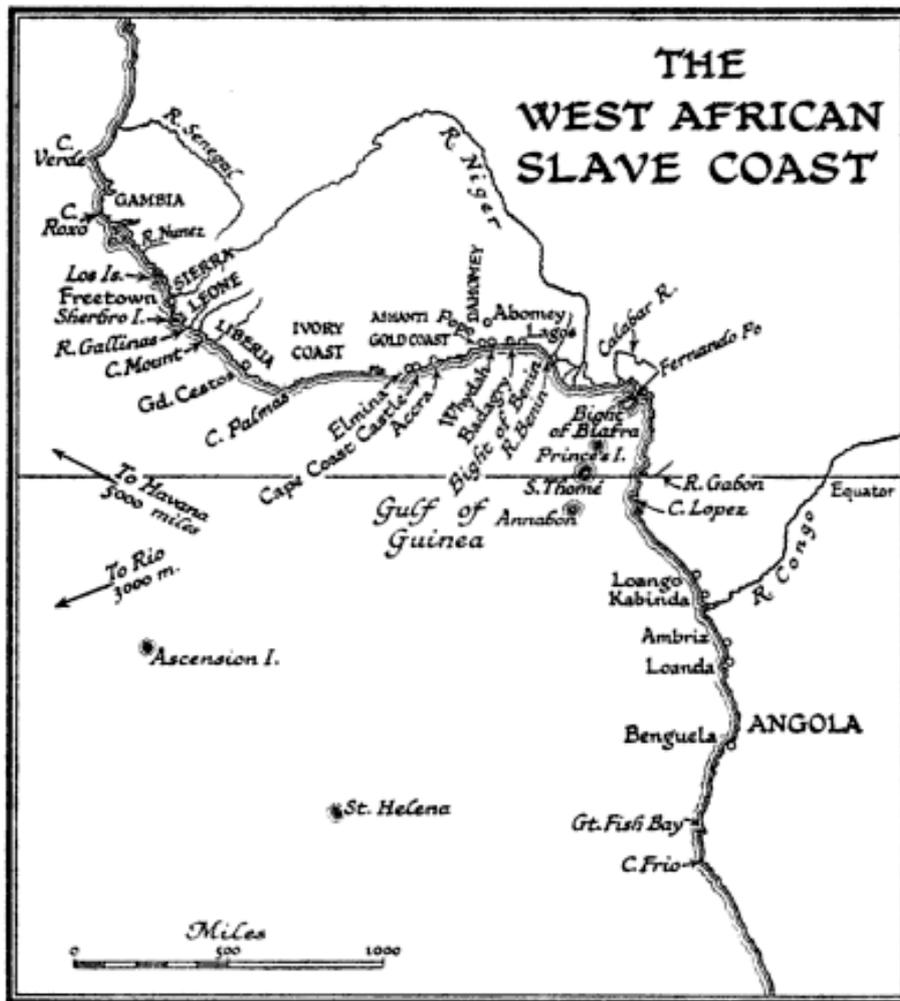


Fig. 1: Map of the West African coast, from Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 13.

University, 1896); Donald Canney, *Africa Squadron: the US Navy and the slave trade, 1842-1861* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2002). Contemporary accounts of suppression by US naval officers include Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser* (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1845).

<sup>16</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 185, p. 282. The vast majority (80 percent) of slave vessels captured under bilateral treaties were taken by ships of the Royal Navy. British ships liberated 90 percent of all recaptured slaves.

<sup>17</sup> John Beeler, 'Maritime Policing and the Pax Britannica: The Royal Navy's Anti-Slavery Patrol in the Caribbean, 1828-1848', *The Northern Mariner* 16:1 (2006), pp. 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> Lindsay Doulton, 'The Royal Navy's anti-slavery campaign in the western Indian Ocean, c. 1860-1890: race, empire and identity', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull (2010).

The Royal Navy's efforts to suppress the transatlantic slave trade sit within a wider history of Britain's anti-slavery campaign in the nineteenth century. Debates about how and why British abolition happened have continued to engage historians. The abolitionist Thomas Clarkson wrote its earliest history in 1808, presenting the Abolition Act as Christianity's greatest triumph and a boost to national self-esteem in the struggles against Napoleon during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars fought between 1793 and 1815.<sup>19</sup> Historians such as G.M. Trevelyan and Sir Reginald Coupland followed Clarkson's example in representing abolition as a victory of idealism and morality which positioned abolitionists ('the Saints') in direct opposition to depraved plantation owners and slave merchants. Britain's anti-slavery cause was regarded as an indicator of the national character, dedicated to humanitarianism and freedom.<sup>20</sup> Naval suppression fitted neatly into this narrative. In 1863, the naval historian C.D. Yonge claimed that suppression efforts 'owed their origin and their persevering resolute continuance to a pure unselfish philanthropy ... our motives are as blameless, as honourable, as our exertions have been untiring.'<sup>21</sup> Such self-congratulatory accounts disregarded the darker history of Britain's involvement in the slave trade. Marcus Wood has argued that the navy's role 'disguised the memory of the two hundred years of British domination of the slave trade'.<sup>22</sup>

To an extent, histories of the West Africa squadron echo these celebratory narratives. Christopher Lloyd's *The Navy and the Slave Trade* and William Ward's *The Royal Navy and the Slavers* are primarily naval histories which valorise the squadron's work and assume only humanitarian motives for suppression. More recent popular histories of the squadron are largely narrative accounts with similarly uncomplicated idealism.<sup>23</sup> Such representations of the squadron require further examination in light of scholarship on the economic, political and ideological forces behind Britain's abolitionist movement and the demise of the transatlantic slave trade.

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<sup>19</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (New York and London: Ithaca, 1975), pp. 447-9.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-slavery Movement* (London: T. Butterworth, 1933).

<sup>21</sup> C.D. Yonge, *History of the British Navy: from the earliest period to the present time*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1863), vol. 2, p. 500.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual representations of slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Edwards, *Royal Navy Versus the Slave Traders: Enforcing Abolition at Sea* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Maritime, 2007); Sian Rees, *Sweet Water and Bitter: The Ships that Stopped the Slave Trade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009).

Eric Williams's influential *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) offered the first challenge to moralistic interpretations of abolitionism, as he identified anti-slavery solely with shifts in Britain's economic interests. Whilst his thesis has since been thoroughly questioned, Williams's conception of economic as against moral determinants behind abolition has been influential on subsequent studies of anti-slavery which stress the variety of forces at play. Understandings of the origins, dynamics and appeal of the British anti-slavery movement have led to assertions that religion and humanitarianism, and less economic self-interest, lay at the heart of Britain's anti-slavery efforts.<sup>24</sup> The broader social and cultural contexts of British anti-slavery have been extensively explored, including its relation to popular politics, domestic and imperial reform, and religious and philanthropic movements.<sup>25</sup> However, while elements of Britain's domestic abolitionist campaign have been illuminated by much academic investigation, the Royal Navy's part in abolition remains under-studied.<sup>26</sup>

The Royal Navy's anti-slavery role in West Africa is also inseparable from histories of emerging empire and evolving British national identity.<sup>27</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain was in possession of a vast territorial empire with the dominant naval force in Europe. The abolition of the slave trade prompted a multitude of concerns about the application of British power for the good of the empire and its people. The imposition of abolition on the international stage was regarded as one way to effect change, but the British also wished to eradicate slave trading at its source in indigenous societies. This moral imperative was to be achieved, it was believed, by the superior example of British humanitarianism, encapsulated by the three tenets of the 'civilising' mission: Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation. Britain's anti-slavery mission in West Africa was thus seen as

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<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York and London: Ithaca, 1966); idem, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*; Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); idem, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery 1833-1870* (London: Longmans, 1972); James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776-1838* (London: Macmillan, 1986); David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (Routledge: London, 1991); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> A recent work which positions the anti-slavery patrols in the context of wider British debates about anti-slavery and imperial interests in the nineteenth century is Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Forthcoming, Cornell University Press).

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

dependent on the introduction of legitimate commerce (as non-slave-trade based trade was termed) and the spread of Christianity with the assistance of missionaries.<sup>28</sup> The establishment of Sierra Leone as a crown colony and the work of naval officers and other colonial officials as envoys of abolition marked a decisive attempt to stem the Atlantic slave trade and to establish British conceptions of civilised society and freedom on the West African coast. The anti-slavery mission therefore became imbued with the rhetoric of empire, the promotion of European standards of civilisation and the notion of ‘trusteeship’ for the betterment of indigenous peoples.<sup>29</sup>

Catherine Hall and others have argued that ideas of race, nation and empire were interwoven in the nineteenth century. Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* (2002) presented Britain and the empire as culturally connected, with British identity shaped by imperial influences and encounters with ‘others’.<sup>30</sup> Such interpretations of Britain’s imperial past have stressed that its relationship with empire did not flow in one direction: studies of networks of missionaries, abolitionists, explorers, colonial administrators and settlers have highlighted how abolitionism and national identity were influenced by the nature of these dialogues concerning empire, slavery, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and class.<sup>31</sup> Discussion of the navy’s suppression campaign is relatively absent from this historiography. As naval officers had influential roles in spreading Britain’s anti-slavery message on shore, this thesis argues

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<sup>28</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Joel Quirk and David Richardson, ‘Anti-Slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-historical Perspective’, *The Journal of Modern European History*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 68-92; Andrew Porter, ‘Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism’ in idem (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 198-221.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: imperial careering in the long nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Hilary M. Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). The essays in Derek Peterson’s edited volume, *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010) pursue questions relating to anti-slavery and imperialism. In ‘Abolition and Empire: West African Colonization and the Transatlantic Anti-Slavery Movement, 1822-1860’, unpublished PhD thesis, King’s College, London (2010), Bronwen Everill analyses colonial relationships in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the context of abolition and the development of anti-slavery measures.

that they were in a comparable position to other British representatives on the West African coast to offer insight into Britain's evolving relationship with slavery and empire.<sup>32</sup>

The limited assessment of naval officers' personal papers has until now inhibited a thorough investigation into the personal, social and cultural experiences of life on the anti-slavery patrols. The voices of naval officers have thus been largely excluded from broader narratives of anti-slavery and empire. The testimonies illuminated in this thesis simultaneously support and challenge some of the received views of Britain's anti-slavery cause in West Africa. They also provide insight into how naval patriotism, professionalism and notions of duty interacted with anti-slavery rhetoric and imperial impulses. As such this study adds to recent concepts of maritime history which have been re-framed to include the navy's role as a social and cultural institution, challenging the assumption that seafarers were peripheral to and insulated from British social and cultural history.<sup>33</sup> This strand of historiography has extended to the opinions and motivations of eighteenth-century slave trade seamen and their relations to the enslaved on board their vessels, whereby the horrors of the Middle Passage, the transatlantic voyage between Africa and the Americas, were exposed by the testimonies of British sailors like Alexander Falconbridge.<sup>34</sup> Other scholars have drawn on the diversity of officers' duties on board ship, and how the cultural production of topographical sketches, journals, logbooks and inventories of the seas and coastlines led to cultural encounters with other peoples.<sup>35</sup>

This thesis similarly argues for the representation of naval personnel as individuals rather than an anonymous collective. It portrays naval officers as men who engaged with

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<sup>32</sup> This study also contributes to a strand of historiography that personalises the history of Britain's relationship with empire in the use of narratives and individual stories. For example, Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London: Random House, 2002); John McAleer, "The Sharer of My Joys and Sorrows": Alison Blyth, Missionary Labours and Female Perspectives on Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica', in Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion*.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Geoff Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768-1829* (London: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Monks, 'Our man in Havana: representation and reputation in Lieutenant Philip Orsbridge's *Britannia's Triumph* (1765)', in John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley (eds) *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France, c. 1700-1830* (London: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 85-114; Luciana Martins and Felix Driver, 'John Septimus Roe and the art of navigation, c. 1815-30' in Tim Barringer and Geoff Quilley (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 53-66.

humanitarian and imperial concerns on the West African coast and influenced policy with their reflections and perceptions. It follows a comparable approach to Raymond Howell's study of the East African suppression campaign which identified a humanitarian tradition among naval officers, and their contributions to official policy. Similarly, in the nineteenth-century maritime Pacific world, Jane Samson has argued that notions of Christian piety and public duty produced an alliance of naval power and humanitarianism.<sup>36</sup> This study argues for parallel narratives on the West African coast, although with significant variations.

In doing so, it draws heavily on previously unidentified and unpublished sources from naval officers found in over twenty archive repositories in the UK and abroad. These personal testimonies of service in journals, diaries, letters and report books have never been researched as a cohesive group. These sources are complemented by a smaller proportion of material which is printed, where naval officers have added their thoughts and opinions to official reports or have published their narratives and letters from the West African coast.

Writing had multiple functions for naval personnel. Letters written home or personal diaries uncover daily experiences, but often placed emphasis on the extremes of life in West Africa when the author wanted to express discontent or stress his hardships. Some officers wrote about their experiences while conscious of opportunities for recognition and promotion; others may have written letters full of hyperbole to impress the intended recipient. Published accounts of the West Africa squadron became more frequent by the 1830s, as anti-slavery service encouraged, in Philip Curtin's words, 'leisured would-be literary talent'.<sup>37</sup> These accounts may have been sanitised or sensationalised, and were certainly produced with particular intentions in mind, the quest for fame for example. Nevertheless, all personal accounts and visual representations of life on the squadron, if understood within the contexts of their production, offer an invaluable source for the history of naval suppression and British anti-slavery.

These sources make this account of naval suppression unique in its study of how British anti-slavery policies were understood and implemented by naval officers on the West African coast. In this way, the Royal Navy's role is viewed as a series of cultural encounters,

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Howell, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Jane Samson, *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 322.

individual responses and transitory yet informative relationships. This study personalises the history of suppression to offer insight into what it meant to serve on anti-slavery patrols on the West African coast, from everyday concerns of climate, sickness, and the best methods to pursue slave ships, to more profound questions of survival, national honour, and responsibility for the lives of others. These concerns have not been examined in the Atlantic context.<sup>38</sup>

The chapters of this thesis are arranged around the relationships between naval suppression and the themes of anti-slavery, empire, and identity. Within a generation, naval personnel witnessed the shift from an economy flourishing on the profits of slavery, and a political structure largely supportive of it, to abolition and a moral condemnation of the trade the navy was once instructed to protect. Slavery and the slave trade therefore form the dominant frame of reference for officers' perceptions in West Africa, and they engaged in constant dialogue with humanitarian ideals and anti-slavery rhetoric. These ideas had significant impact on how they conceived their identity as Britons and the nature of their duty as naval personnel. Their coercive roles at sea became inseparable from their responsibilities to the civilising mission on shore. The resulting encounters with Africans on captured slave vessels and in African settlements raised questions of paternalism and racial identity, of freedom and its applicability to Africans. The insight these narratives provide challenge a number of assumptions about naval suppression and the wider British anti-slavery mission, including, for example, the existence among officers of unilateral belief in the humanitarian aims of the naval campaign, and the supposedly humane treatment of enslaved Africans by their British liberators.

The first two chapters offer an overview of naval suppression on the West African coast. They focus on the role of naval officers as agents of change in the implementation of British anti-slavery policies, their contributions to the exchange of information crucial to Britain's developing empire in West Africa, and how policy was affected by officers' perceptions and recommendations. Chapter 1 explores the early decades of naval suppression, and the development of a British abolitionist presence in Sierra Leone. Chapter 2 follows the intensification of Britain's anti-slavery mission from the 1830s, and explores the new roles and challenges faced by officers. The nature of their work centred on the advocacy of

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<sup>38</sup> See Doulton, 'Royal Navy', chapters 6 and 7, for an examination of the relationship between naval suppression and other imperialist and civilising discourses on the East African anti-slavery patrols.

legitimate trade, the negotiation of abolition treaties with African powers, roles in exploration and missionary endeavours, and the execution of increasingly offensive action on shore.

The remaining four chapters explore the personal, social and cultural experiences of officers, examining their attitudes and beliefs in relation to themes of anti-slavery, race and identity. Chapter 3 examines the nature and conditions of employment on the West Africa squadron. It assesses how morale and commitment were affected by inhospitable climate, ill-health, boredom and despondency due to the unceasing demand for slaves and increasing criticism of the squadron. Chapters 3 and 4 consider how officers understood the nature of their role on the anti-slavery patrols. In examining their motivations, whether material incentives or humanitarian ideals, these chapters question concepts of duty and professionalism, and what was expected of a naval officer in this extraordinary set of circumstances.

Chapters 4 and 5 place naval officers at the heart of the anti-slavery cause in West Africa, examining their reflections on the principles of abolitionism and on the human consequences of the slave trade witnessed on slave ships captured as prize. Chapter 4 assesses the extent of religious (and specifically evangelical) faith on board the squadron's vessels and how far officers were driven by anti-slavery beliefs. Chapter 5 focuses on officers' representations of prize voyages in word and image. It examines the ambiguities of freedom for Africans both on board prize vessels and in British ideas for their future after liberation. These chapters explore how officers identified their service with ideas of national identity and pride in the British anti-slavery mission, but also how abolitionist rhetoric lost impact when confronted with the realities of the slave trade and officers' duty of care for recaptives.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus from officers' encounters with captive Africans to those they met on shore and the role of racial identity therein. Officers' narratives of these meetings often subscribed to stereotypes about non-Europeans, but also encompass a wide variety of opinions, interactions and relationships. Chapters 4 and 6 uncover broader shifts in racial attitudes as the century progressed, affecting officers' opinions on slavery, the missionary cause, and the necessity of 'trusteeship' for indigenous peoples.

Britain's international role against the slave trade after 1807 presented a number of concerns. This is a study of one group of individuals tasked with negotiating Britain's anti-slavery mission in West Africa. It explores Britain's moral campaign through their words and

experiences, and analyses an alternative reality of despondency, indifference, and distress. Naval officers' perspectives add to an understanding of the complex nature of British anti-slavery in the early to mid-nineteenth century, offering insight into attitudes and anxieties about the institution of slavery, racial identity, and the nature of Britain's relationship with West Africa and its inhabitants.

## Chapter 1

### **The Royal Navy's new role: the first decades of Britain's anti-slavery cause**

The establishment of a British abolitionist presence on the West African coast was signified by the development of Sierra Leone as a base for the naval squadron to patrol the coast and intercept illegal slavers, and as a settlement for Africans liberated from slave ships. British involvement there also had implications for other parts of West Africa. This was a period of pilot schemes in the British anti-slavery agenda, initiated to counteract the survival of the slave trade; invariably they originated in Sierra Leone but were increasingly rolled out coastwise. The work of naval personnel in suppressing the slave trade contributed to a framework for Britain's wider anti-slavery mission in the first decades of the nineteenth century, in the establishment of settlements, the advocacy of legitimate trade, and assistance in exploration and missionary endeavours. This chapter is about British naval officers as agents of abolition in the early stages of British empire building in West Africa. Their narratives uncover the approaches, hopes and disappointments of the nascent anti-slavery mission. Distanced from metropolitan abolitionist ideals, their experiences highlight the realities of life on the West African coast, and the difficulties of implementing new anti-slavery policies.

### **Sierra Leone**

The establishment of a British colony on the West African coast was first envisaged in the 1780s as a counterpoint to slave societies of the West Indies. The abolitionist Granville Sharp wished to provide a home for Britain's poor blacks, a self-sufficient 'Province of Freedom' in which not only the slave trade but slaveholding was forbidden. The first settlement, Granville Town, failed due to disease and local hostility. However, the Clapham Sect, or Saints, an influential group of British philanthropists and social reformers who gathered in south-west London, incorporated the Sierra Leone Company in 1791, inspired by Sharp's ideas. They were attracted to the idea of a free colony as an aid to their cause to advance abolition and atone for wrongs committed by Britain against Africa in the slave trade. Their vision was for Sierra Leone and its borderlands to be transformed by legitimate trade, agriculture, and the

example of self-improvement.<sup>1</sup> Free labour and competitive trade, it was believed, would generate more profit than slave labour, and hence undermine the institution of slavery.<sup>2</sup> However, the new settlement was beset with problems. The colony was composed of varied groups of administrators, officials, traders and settlers, with a mix of vested interests and attitudes towards abolition; the arrival of self-liberated slaves from Nova Scotia and Jamaican Maroons added further tension. Mortality rates of Europeans were high, attempts to establish local agriculture and trade foundered, and the colony failed to exhibit economic progress. As a result, the British government declared Sierra Leone a crown colony in August 1807.<sup>3</sup>

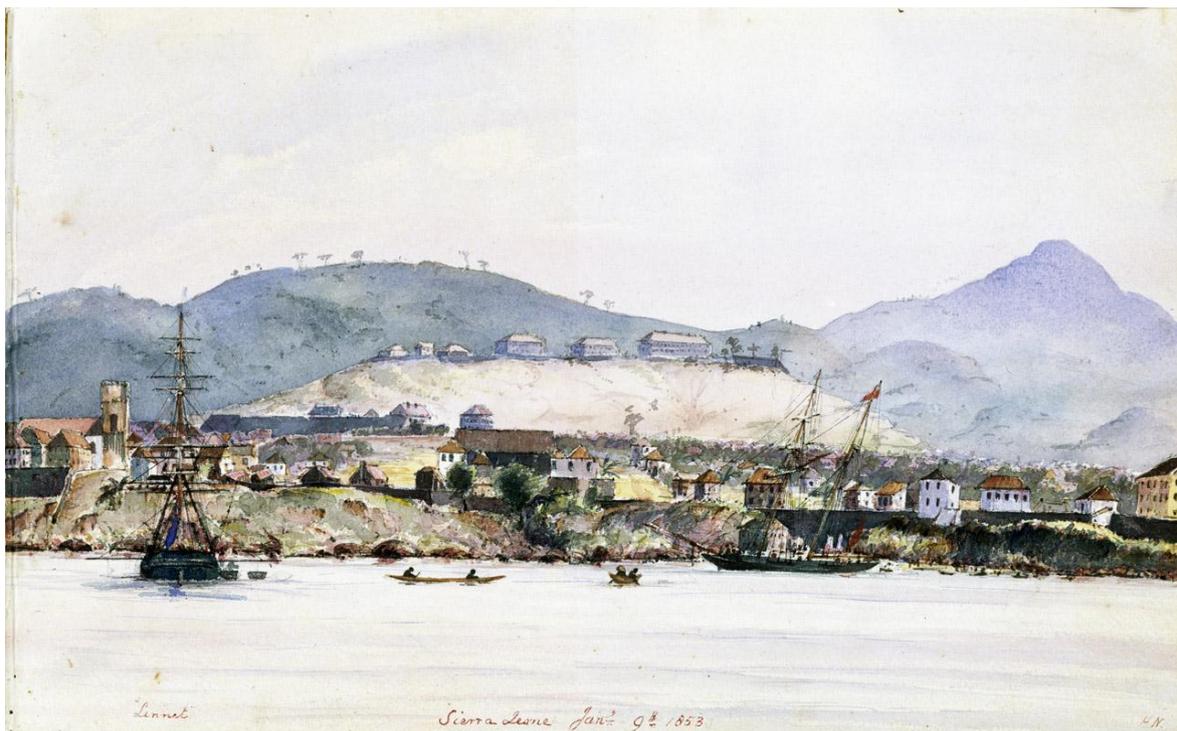


Fig. 2: 'Sierra Leone, January 9<sup>th</sup> 1853', Commander Henry Need of HMS *Linnet*, 1853 (NMM, ART/10).

<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the 'African Question', c. 1780-1820', *The English Historical Review*, 112: 446 (1997), pp. 326-7, 329; Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 91-2. For the history of Sierra Leone, see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969). This model influenced other colonisation attempts. In 1792-3, naval lieutenant Philip Beaver led a party of settlers to colonise the island of Bulama, conceived, in his words, 'as a means of gradually abolishing African slavery'. After eighteen months the scheme was abandoned and the survivors evacuated to Sierra Leone. See Philip Beaver, *African Memoranda: Relative to an attempt to establish a British settlement on the island of Bulama* (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1805).

<sup>2</sup> This argument had its origins in Adam Smith's examination of the structure of wage incentives in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). See Drescher, *Mighty Experiment*, chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Schwarz, 'Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company', in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 252; Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, pp. 94-5; Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), part II.

Post abolition, British representatives in Sierra Leone were confronted with a substantial alteration in the nature of their presence on the West African coast. While they negotiated Britain's shift from major slave traders to abolitionists, it became clear that slave dealers of other nations were reluctant to follow the British lead, and that new resources were required to check the continuing slave trade. After 1807, Sierra Leone served as the headquarters for anti-slave-trade operations and the launching point for further British abolitionist initiatives. A Vice-Admiralty Court was constituted in its capital, Freetown, for the trial and adjudication of slave ships captured as prizes, and Sierra Leone authorities became responsible for the resettlement of recaptives, the majority of whom remained in Freetown. From 1819 international anti-slave-trade courts, the Courts of Mixed Commission, were constituted there too.<sup>4</sup> Britain's maintenance of the colony was supported in humanitarian terms; Sierra Leone, it was believed, exemplified Britain's national honour and was regarded, in Allen M. Howard's words, as 'the beacon of freedom' in Britain's nineteenth-century abolition campaign.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, as Seymour Drescher has argued, the Sierra Leone Company's labour experiment may have been an economic failure, but succeeded in laying the groundwork for future British relations with the colony and its environs, highlighting the potential for British 'social engineering' overseas.<sup>6</sup> In assuming responsibility for a crown colony, Britain shifted the rationale of her presence there from commercial to state interests, leading to a new set of priorities and policies driven by idealism and the desire to make a statement of intent to European rivals.

The first colonial officials sent to enforce abolition struggled against entrenched interests and legal uncertainties. William Wilberforce's nominee for governor of the new crown colony was Thomas Perronet Thompson, a devout Christian who shared many evangelical beliefs of the Saints, especially a hatred of slavery. However, bitter arguments arose between Thompson and Zachary Macaulay, a former governor of the colony and secretary of the Sierra Leone Company, in particular over the system of apprenticeship for liberated slaves

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<sup>4</sup> Tara Helfman, 'The Court of Vice Admiralty at Sierra Leone and the Abolition of the West African Slave Trade', *The Yale Law Journal*, 115 (2006), pp. 1122-56; A.W.H. Pearsall, 'Sierra Leone and the Suppression of the Slave Trade', *Sierra Leone Studies*, 12 (1959), pp. 216, 218; Farida Shaikh, 'Judicial Diplomacy: British Officials and the Mixed Commission Courts' in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 42-64.

<sup>5</sup> Allen M. Howard, 'Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading and the British Abolition Campaign in Sierra Leone', *Slavery and Abolition*, 27:1 (2006), p. 23; Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, pp. 94, 96.

<sup>6</sup> Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 89.

favoured by Macaulay. In 1808, Africans liberated from two American slave vessels by Captain Frederick Parker of HMS *Derwent* were sold as apprentices for twenty dollars each; some were retained for public service in the colony's administration. Thompson insisted that in such cases apprenticeship was slavery under another name, and publicly 'charged all the former governors of this colony with having been volunteers in the slave trade'.<sup>7</sup> Captain Edward Henry Columbine was requested to replace Thompson as governor of Sierra Leone in 1809. Columbine wrote that his appointment 'arose from some great difference of opinion which had arisen between Mr. Thompson & the leading members of the late Sierra Leone [Company], respecting the administration of that colony'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Columbine's anti-slavery cause**

Captain Columbine was one of the first naval officers to negotiate the transformation in the Royal Navy's role from protector to persecutor of the slave trade. His initial employment was as one of three commissioners charged by the British Government with completing a survey of the West African coast from the Gambia to the Gold Coast. The others were Thomas Ludlam and William Dawes, both former governors of Sierra Leone and nominated by William Wilberforce. Columbine was selected by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Mulgrave.<sup>9</sup> His description of the terms of his appointment reveals the expanding British presence in the region, as in addition to an examination of all forts and settlements, the commission was tasked 'to devise such means ... for carrying into effect the benevolent purpose of the legislature in the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade'.<sup>10</sup> As part of this remit, the commissioners were, in Wilberforce's words, 'to establish a friendly intercourse' with African rulers and 'turn their minds ... to the new order of things'. They were also instructed to report on the 'Physical and Moral capabilities of Africa and its inhabitants'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> BLARS, W1/4144, Copy letter from George Caulker (a British official in the Secretary's office at Freetown) to Samuel Whitbread, 7 March 1809; Cassandra Pybus, "'A Less Favourable Specimen": The Abolitionist Response to Self-Emancipated Slaves in Sierra Leone, 1763-1808', in Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin and James Walvin (eds), *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament and People* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 4 February 1809, ff. 1, 3.

<sup>9</sup> The First Lord was the president of the Board of Admiralty, made up of Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. From 1806, the First Lord was always a civilian, as opposed to a naval professional, and a member of the Cabinet.

<sup>10</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 4 February 1809, ff. 1-2. The Commission was delayed until 1810 due to military action in Senegal.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, CO 267/25, William Wilberforce to Lord Castlereagh, 19 January 1809.

Columbine's appointment was presumably attributable to his hydrographical experience. He spent part of his early career on the West Indies station, and made surveys of St. John's and Antigua between 1787 and 1790. In 1802-4 he undertook hydrographical work off Trinidad.<sup>12</sup> As a commissioner, however, Columbine was under government rather than Admiralty instruction. The resulting change in priorities was made clear in a letter from Wilberforce to Lord Liverpool, informing the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies that Columbine and other commissioners had received no instructions for 'the best means of promoting civilization'. Wilberforce added: 'When I said Captain Columbine had no instructions I was substantially but not literally correct', for he had received some Admiralty guidance. This was for, however, 'a survey of the coast in a nautical way and that it is obvious is a mere nothing.'<sup>13</sup>

After Thompson's departure in 1809, Columbine was also appointed governor of Sierra Leone on a temporary basis, a post he held for 16 months until his death in 1811. He was determined not to be regarded as 'merely a stop-gap', suggesting the hasty nature of his appointment.<sup>14</sup> While not explicit about the reasons for his nomination as governor, Columbine alluded to the idea that he was the preferred choice of Wilberforce and his allies. In February 1809, Columbine dined at Wilberforce's residence in Kensington Gore and 'met with Lord Teignmouth, Mr Grant MP, William Smith MP, James Stephen MP, Lord Calthorpe & Mr Macaulay', all members of the African Institution.<sup>15</sup> The Institution had been founded in 1807 to support the British government in enforcing the new abolition laws and promoting the suppression of the slave trade. It also aimed to develop the African economy through legitimate commerce and to 'civilise' Africa through the diffusion of Christianity.<sup>16</sup> The African Institution had considerable influence over the crown colony's administration: eight former Sierra Leone Company directors sat on its committee, and the company's secretary, Zachary Macaulay, was similarly installed as secretary. 'I have no doubt,' wrote Macaulay, 'that the government will be disposed to adopt almost any plan which we may propose to them with respect to Africa, provided we will but save them the trouble of

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Terrell, 'Columbine, Edward Henry (1763–1811)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64853](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64853), accessed 9 March 2009].

<sup>13</sup> TNA, CO 267/25, William Wilberforce to Lord Liverpool, 26 December 1809.

<sup>14</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 12 February 1810, f. 20.

<sup>15</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 4 February 1809, f. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Ackerson, *The African Institution (1807-1827) and the Antislavery Movement in Great Britain* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

thinking.’<sup>17</sup> The commission on which Columbine served was suggested by the African Institution, and Columbine acknowledged that ‘His Majesty’s government in general, were very liberally disposed to attend to the requests & suggestions of the leading members of that company in all such matters as relate to the welfare of Africa’.<sup>18</sup>

Columbine certainly regarded himself as a supporter of the anti-slavery cause. His service in the West Indies brought him into close contact with slavery. In one letter he described the rescue of a slave cargo from a ship wrecked on the east coast of Trinidad. He wrote, ‘it is impossible to dismiss this narrative without reflecting on the interposition of Providence by which we were thus inabled [sic] to contribute to the deliverance of so large a number of our fellow creatures’.<sup>19</sup> However, as expected of British naval personnel in the years before abolition, Columbine also served to protect the slave-holding interests of the islanders. An engraved sword was presented to him by the merchants and inhabitants of Trinidad, ‘as a mark of the high sense they entertain of his services in protecting and defending the island in the years 1803 & 1804’.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, reflecting the shift in British society more generally, by 1810 Columbine subscribed to the views of abolitionists in his belief that complicity in the slave trade degraded Britain’s moral reputation. He expressed condemnation of the ‘atrocious traffic’, which to him represented ‘an indelible stain’ on Britain’s moral integrity. He wrote, ‘No man who is alive to the honour of his country, but must feel the Disgrace, not the Dignity, of permitting its flag to wave for so many years over a line of Slave-holes’.<sup>21</sup>

Columbine also referred to the shame brought upon the navy from its former role in protecting the slave trade. He wrote, ‘Oh! That the same flag should fly triumphant over the head of our immortal Nelson; and be prostituted to protect the Slave-dealer in his den.’ That Nelson himself had little time for abolitionist arguments is illustrative of the ideological conflicts surrounding suppression during this early period. Nelson asserted that he was ‘taught to appreciate the value of our West Indian possessions ... while I have an arm to fight in their defence, or a tongue to launch my voice against the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 105; Turner, ‘The Limits of Abolition’, p. 331.

<sup>18</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 4 February 1809, ff. 1, 3.

<sup>19</sup> UKHO, MP 46/Ac 8, pp. 376-8. I am grateful to Captain Michael Barritt for bringing this document to my attention and for information on Columbine’s service in the West Indies.

<sup>20</sup> The sword is currently held by the NMM (Accession No. WPN1254).

<sup>21</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 12 January 1810, ff. 50-2. Columbine’s emphasis.

and his hypocritical allies'.<sup>22</sup> Columbine also reprimanded the 'Liverpool Philosophers' who claimed the 'slave-trade is a nursery for seamen' (without the slave trade, the argument ran, the country would lose the skilled labour which swelled the navy when required for national defence). In an unintended signal to his own death from fever the following year, Columbine wrote, 'I suppose these muddy shores in which a fourth of the crews lay, are to be consider'd as the cradles of their nursery'.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 3: 'Free-town, Sierra Leone: taken from the anchorage', Captain Edward Columbine, c. 1810 (NMM, COM/02/51).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; Nelson quoted in Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997), pp. 545-6.

<sup>23</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 23 August 1810, f. 177. See Chapter 3 for the extreme rates of disease and mortality among naval crews on the West African coast, particularly in the early decades of suppression.

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Captain Michael Barritt for sharing photographs of Columbine's sketches with me.

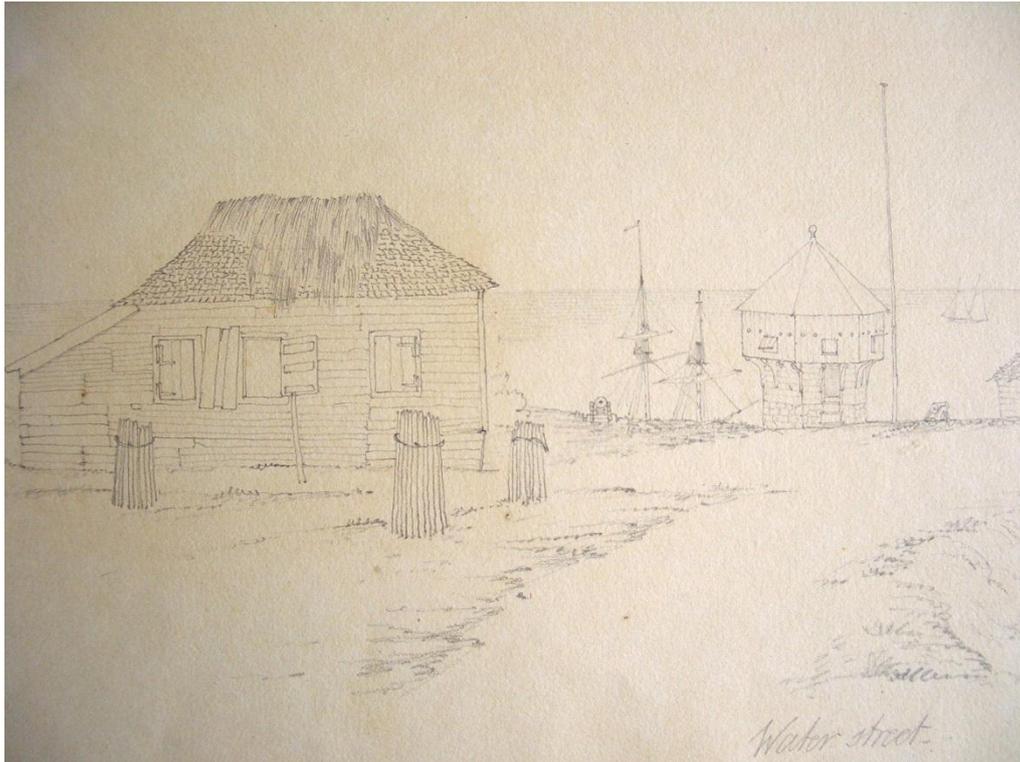


Fig. 4: 'Water Street', Captain Edward Columbine, c. 1811 (NMM, COM/02/56). The circular bundles of stakes 'are the fences of two rows of young orange trees planted during the last rains by Gov. Columbine in order to make a good public walk'.

Columbine arrived in Sierra Leone in February 1810, and his first impressions were positive. He described 'a very impressive scene ... the whole appearance of the colony is far superior to my expectations. I am agreeably surprised.'<sup>25</sup> In his role as governor Columbine was charged with fulfilling British abolitionist ambitions in Sierra Leone, which included a naval blockade of the coast to intercept slave vessels. Under instructions to change his predecessor's reforms put in place against apprenticeship, Columbine focused on regaining peace in the colony by monitoring government spending and administration. His other colonial responsibilities included the employment of officials, accountancy of the civil store, and enforcing, 'as well as I can, the whole system of British law, with all its forms and intricacies.'<sup>26</sup> From his official letters as governor, there is a sense that Columbine was overwhelmed by the role. He was disturbed by a 'mutinous spirit which prevailed here' and

<sup>25</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, [no date] February 1810, f. 18.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, CO 267/27, Edward Columbine to Lord Liverpool, 27 February 1810; CO 267/28, Columbine to Liverpool, 24 July 1810; Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, pp. 53-6.

‘repeated impertinences’ from political challengers in the colony, which included protests against ‘the legality of my Government’.<sup>27</sup>

After six months in post, blighted by family bereavement and bouts of illness, Columbine informed Lord Liverpool and the Admiralty that he wished to return to Britain, and was now keen to stress that his appointment as governor was ‘merely considered as a temporary concern’.<sup>28</sup> With his requests for a replacement apparently unforthcoming, he left the colony on his own authority in May 1811, and later died at sea.<sup>29</sup> His insecurities may have arisen from the influence of the African Institution, which permeated Columbine’s governorship. Before sailing to Sierra Leone, Columbine noted that ‘Mr Z Macaulay & his brother Alex came on board to call on me before my departure’, and letters from Columbine reveal that Macaulay exerted considerable leverage on appointments in the colony.<sup>30</sup> Wilberforce described Columbine as ‘a man of high spirit and strong professional feelings, though of a steady, resolute but rather anxious temper’. His influence is also clear. In letters to Liverpool, Wilberforce suggested measures on Columbine’s behalf, such as a nomination for the command of the militia at Sierra Leone. He also encouraged ‘expressions of appropriation and confidence with which your Lordship may honor him’. Wilberforce thanked Liverpool for listening to ‘the suggestions of my friends and myself’, in order to, ‘unite with us in promoting the civilization and improvement of that vast continent’.<sup>31</sup>

### **The beginnings of naval suppression**

Away from colonial administration, Columbine appeared more comfortable with his maritime duties. As Britain was still at war, a permanent anti-slavery squadron did not operate until after 1815, but a small naval force under Columbine’s command was employed blockading the coast around Sierra Leone. To assist in enforcing abolition he was given command of two frigates, the *Solebay* and the *Crocodile*, together with some smaller vessels. During

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<sup>27</sup> TNA, CO 267/27, Columbine to Liverpool, 13 April 1810; CO 267/28, Columbine to Liverpool, 8 September 1810. Columbine was particularly insulted by John Grant, a settler who had been refused a seat on the colony’s council.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, CO 267/28, 22 September 1810, 8 October 1810; TNA, CO 267/28, 1 November 1810. Columbine’s wife and daughter both died from fever in Sierra Leone and his young son was invalided home. On 15 October 1810, he wrote in his journal that he had ‘a heart broke down with grief’.

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 13 January 1810, f. 3; Ackerson, *The African Institution*, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, CO 267/28, William Wilberforce to Lord Liverpool, 26 June 1810. In a later letter to Columbine, Liverpool praised his ‘zeal, judgement and firmness’ (TNA, CO 267/27, 20 July 1810).

Columbine's time as governor, several slave ships were captured and condemned at the Admiralty courts.<sup>32</sup> Columbine's journals highlight the environment in which British naval representatives operated in their attempts to put an end to the slave trade. Many of the difficulties experienced in the early decades persisted and hindered the efforts of naval patrols over the next half-century. British abolitionist policies in West Africa may have been built on idealism, but the reality of life for those implementing the anti-slavery agenda meant that these policies often required reappraisal and adjustments.

Firstly, Columbine's position in Britain's abolitionist circles did not make him representative of all naval men. It was certainly not the case that the navy was overrun with committed anti-slavery supporters: differing views of the slave trade and slavery remained among naval personnel throughout the years of suppression, as Chapter 4 highlights. This was already clear in 1810. Columbine noted his offence having heard reports of a naval officer, Lieutenant Bourne, involved in selling slaves. Placed in charge of a detained brig with recaptives on board, Bourne was directed to Sierra Leone, but instead proceeded to Princes Island where the brig was condemned as unseaworthy. Columbine reported that Bourne 'sold her & the slaves to a Portuguese merchant; taking in payment bills on Rio Janeiro, 1300 dollars & a small schooner'. On hearing this account, Columbine 'naturally felt very much offended both at account of the sale of the slaves, & at Mr Bourne's very un-officer like conduct in not navigating the prize hither'. Lieutenant Bourne was guilty of 'some horrible transactions', including beatings inflicted on the surviving crewmen which 'would have been worthy of a slave-captain'.<sup>33</sup>

It was not only naval colleagues who failed to exhibit adherence to the anti-slavery cause, as Columbine found as he travelled the coast. The commissioners' report, written by Columbine shortly before his death, was intended to inform an African policy and a decision on the future of British posts.<sup>34</sup> That the Lords of the Admiralty were asked to nominate a commissioner reveals how the navy was regarded as essential for coastal affairs, responsible not only for enforcing the Abolition Act at sea, but also for producing surveys and reports which contributed to Britain's information gathering in this period. Columbine and other

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<sup>32</sup> Terrell, 'Columbine'.

<sup>33</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 10 December 1810. See Chapters 3 and 4 for the characteristics expected of naval officers in this period.

<sup>34</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 159-60.

naval officers were also tasked with tackling the new post-abolition environment in British coastal settlements, and alongside other officials, renegotiating relations in the wake of Britain's rejection of its slave trading past. Issues concerning the alleged neutrality of the settlement of the Gold Coast in 1810 are a good example of this mediation.

British slave-trade forts on the Gold Coast were formerly administered and controlled by the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, and managed by its elected African Committee. After abolition and the transfer of Sierra Leone to the Crown, the nature of British commercial interests in West Africa changed dramatically, forcing the government to reconsider the role of the African Committee. The settlement of the Gold Coast proved particularly problematic, in particular the continued assistance given to slave traders by its British settlers.<sup>35</sup> Columbine wrote that an order obtained through the Board of Trade directed naval captains 'not to meddle' with vessels under the Dutch or Danish flag trading on that part of the coast. However, Columbine noted, 'no exception was made whether they were trading in slaves or not'. He was not convinced that this omission was unintentional on the part of the African Committee, 'most of the members [of which] have been old slave-dealers'. Columbine related a dispute between Captain Parker of the *Derwent* and Governor White over the claim that Parker had found slaves in ships he had captured belonging to the Dutch or Danish forts. Governor White 'strongly objected' to this claim as contrary to neutrality agreements signed in 1796. In doing so, Columbine believed White exemplified entrenched attitudes towards British abolitionist policy:

Habit and long associations naturally influence the mind; and the gross absurdity of this opinion of Gov. White, may not by any effort be made perceptible to his reasoning faculties, nor to those of his subordinate officers on the Gold Coast, not to the African Committee, nor the Slave-dealers at Liverpool.<sup>36</sup>

Although Governor White had 'totally renounced all share in the slave trade', Columbine understood that the opinions of many of those who had long resided and had commercial interests on the West African coast were not easily altered. 'Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem, testa diu' ['the jar will long retain the odour of that with which it was once filled'], he wrote, 'and nothing but a remaining tinge of old opinions could have betrayed a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 8, 151-2; Ackerson, *The African Institution*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 9, Columbine Journals, 12 January 1810, ff. 51-2

man of his acknowledged merit & good sense into such an inconsistency'.<sup>37</sup> This part of the coast continued to occupy Columbine's attention. Before returning to Britain, Columbine requested permission to 'run down the Gold Coast' in order 'to complete my duties in a more effectual manner', revealing his dedication to his role and his initiative in wishing to obtain more information on the settlement.<sup>38</sup>

Naval abolitionist policy was also hindered by the ambiguity of the navy's legal position. In 1809, Columbine appeared confident in the navy's mission, and believed success to be mainly an issue of the number of vessels employed to intercept slavers. He wrote, 'If I had a few tenders, I would very soon put an end to this traffic'.<sup>39</sup> However, the task was made difficult by the equivocal nature of the laws under which crews were operating. The act of 1807 was far from decisive: further acts and treaties successfully discouraged British subjects and some other nations from slave trading but the main trading nations – France, Portugal, Spain and the USA – persisted in slaving ventures. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British exercised the rights they claimed as belligerents to intercept and search enemy ships; since their enemies included France, Holland and Spain, suppression of their respective slave trades also became a legitimate aim. Since both Denmark and the United States had moved to ban their citizens from slave trading, in 1803 and 1808 respectively, the Royal Navy searched these ships for slaves, although with dubious legality, particularly as the US refused to sign joint treaties providing for mutual search and seizure of slave ships. With peace in 1815, the Foreign Office was successful in inserting an anti-slavery declaration in the Congress of Vienna, which committed the represented sovereigns to putting an end to the trade, but it was largely redundant without the powers of enforcement. A series of bilateral treaties, the first in 1817, obliged each nation to allow its ships to be searched for slaves by the navy of the other. However, agreements in the early decades generally stipulated that ships could be detained and tried only if slaves were on board, and questions over the legal basis of Britain's right to search and detain vessels suspected of illegal slaving caused diplomatic tensions.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.; Jon R. Stone, *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 100.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, CO 267/28, Edward Columbine to Lord Liverpool, 21 October 1810. In 1821, the Company of Merchants was abolished and all West African possessions placed under the rule of the Sierra Leone governor (then Charles MacCarthy).

<sup>39</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 12 March 1810, ff. 62-3.

<sup>40</sup> Robert J. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century' in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), pp. 78-91; *Slavery in Diplomacy: The Foreign Office and the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians History Note, 17 (2007), pp. 4-8.

Fundamentally, slave traders remained openly defiant because of the significant increase in demand for slaves from Cuba and Brazil. Columbine related the story of Captain Austin, who had died from fever after relocating to Madeira from Boston ‘with a view ... of carrying on this detestable traffic under false colours’. Columbine wrote: ‘The temptation is too great for the generality of the mercantile world to withstand. A slave which will not cost above 18 or 20 £ here, is worth 90 £ at the Havannah’.<sup>41</sup> Some American, and indeed British, slave traders breached the new laws by sailing under the flags of other European nations, and one of the greatest problems faced by the Royal Navy was the procurement by slave vessels of false papers. Columbine discussed the condemnation of the schooner *Doris* taken in 1810:

She is an American from Charlestown ... but under fictitious Spanish papers. The supercargo (the real master) & the Spanish pretended Captain, made a particular point of swearing that the owner was a Mr William Scott, of Charlestown, but now a Spanish subject, because he resides in some part of the Spanish territory in Florida.<sup>42</sup>

Pinning down the true nationality of the owner became even more problematic when it transpired that ‘in one of the Spanish Documents which they produce, this William Scott is described as a vassal of H: Britannic Majesty, lately a merchant at Henley in Oxfordshire’.<sup>43</sup> Columbine also described the difficulties of proving vessels were intended for slaving voyages. He wrote from Sierra Leone of a detained, and empty, Spanish schooner, ‘she is sent hither for adjudication on the plea that she was going to deal in slaves’. However, regarding the hope that the vessel will be condemned, the captors ‘will find themselves sadly disappointed.’ An intercepted vessel found to be carrying manacles, or with renovations to the vessel suggestive of the intention of carrying slaves, could not be guaranteed for condemnation until the inclusion of equipment clauses into treaties from the 1830s onwards.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 23 August 1810, ff. 174-5. For the increase in the price of slaves bought in Brazil and Cuba from the transatlantic slave trade, see Eltis, *Economic Growth*, Appendix C, pp. 260-4; David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 200-3.

<sup>42</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 21 April 1810, ff. 111-12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 26 July 1810, f. 155; Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1949), p. 45.

In the decade following Columbine's governorship, a small number of vessels continued to patrol the waters around Sierra Leone. For example, several slave ships were captured by the *Amelia* under the command of Captain Frederick Irby between 1811 and 1813, and by Captain Lloyd of the sloop *Kangaroo* in 1812.<sup>45</sup> In June 1813 at Cape Mesurado, Captain Scobell of the *Thais* destroyed an extensive slave factory and rescued 230 Africans belonging to British slave traders John Bostock and Thomas Macquin. Subsequently tried and convicted under the Felony Act of 1811 (which transformed slave trading by Britons into a felony) Bostock and Macquin were sentenced to transportation.<sup>46</sup> Peace in Europe from 1815 allowed for the resources required for a permanent squadron. Captain Sir James Yeo was sent to the West African coast in that year with the *Semiramis* and *Bann*, 'to use every other means in your power to prevent a continuance of the traffic in slaves'.<sup>47</sup> However, it was not until 1818 that the West Africa station was formally established.

Sir George Ralph Collier of the *Tartar* was the squadron's first Commodore, with five other vessels under his command. While Edward Columbine's position was unique in his dual role of naval officer and colonial governor, Collier too contributed to British information gathering and policy making, submitting reports to the Admiralty on 'the general state, and condition of the forts & settlements' and 'on the continuation of Slaving'.<sup>48</sup> Collier's introduction to his 1820 report reveals the multifaceted nature of the role of British naval officers on the coast. It also makes clear Collier's initiative and willingness to engage with Britain's wider anti-slavery remit, as he acknowledged that his report 'may be thought to embrace many subjects unconnected with the duties of a naval officer'. Nevertheless, he hoped that:

... viewing the increase of our African Colonial prosperity, as the best pledge for the freedom of Africa, their Lordships will receive every communication I make, and information I offer, however trivial, as embracing these combined objects, viz. the general improvement of our western African colonies, and the completion of that desirable result, the abolition of slave trading.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slavers: The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), pp. 50-8.

<sup>46</sup> 'Eighth Report of the African Institution', *The Christian Observer* (July 1814), p. 851.

<sup>47</sup> Instructions from the Lords of the Admiralty quoted in Ward, *The Royal Navy*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>48</sup> NMM, WEL/10, George Collier, 'Report of the Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa', no folios.

<sup>49</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820', ff. 1-2.

Collier's report demonstrates how naval suppression was connected to the development of the British presence in West Africa. In order to perform his role as Commodore effectually, Collier felt 'it necessary to speak of some of the foreign colonies upon the seas and shores of western Africa within the limits of the station under my command'. In doing so, he hoped to provide crucial information on 'the now universally forbidden (by the civilized world) trade of slave carrying north of the Equinoctial [equator]'.<sup>50</sup> His insights were knowledgeable and wide-ranging. Alongside the best means for suppression, his report included detail on relationships in the settlements between consular officials, merchants, agents and others; different African peoples; and the potential for lawful enterprise and further British territories.

Like Columbine, Collier was quick to learn that official British rhetoric surrounding the moral success of abolition did not necessarily produce results in terms of suppressing slave traffic. Collier appeared confident in his assertion that the 'detestable traffic is now held in as much abhorrence throughout the British settlements in Africa, as it is by the ... most philanthropic & enlightened person in England'.<sup>51</sup> However, he reported that a British resident of the Banana Islands, Captain O'Kearney, a former officer in the West India Regiment, 'has not only disgraced himself but his country also', by becoming an agent for French slaves at the Gallinas. The persistence of slave trading and procurement of false papers also continued. The United States had 'good intention', but 'American vessels, American subjects, and American capital are unquestionably engaged in the trade, tho' under other colours and in disguise'. France, he believed, allowed and encouraged the slave trade 'almost beyond estimation or belief'. As French vessels were not allowed to be searched, 'British cruizers can only retire when they shall see her ensign'. The laws protecting the operations of slavers under the flags of other nations obstructed British efforts. Collier wrote that unless naval vessels had 'the full powers of a Belligerent, all prohibitory laws against this trade will become a mockery'.<sup>52</sup> Despite all the navy's exertions, 'the temptations are so great, and the facilities for evading actual detections so many ... that all the zeal and anxiety of officers employed to put into force the orders of Government will still be baffled'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> NMM, WEL/10, 'Report of the Forts'. See Chapter 4 for Collier's anti-slavery views.

<sup>52</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 101-2, 235-8, 241.

<sup>53</sup> NMM, WEL/10, 'Report of the Forts'.

Despite the best intentions, a fully effectual naval police force would take time and resources, and British success in suppression remained subject to the persistence of slave traders. One indication that naval methods would diversify and not be limited to cruising the coast in pursuit of slave ships was the introduction of boat service up rivers to search for slave embarkation points and apply pressure to African rulers and foreign traders engaged in slave dealing. This on-shore activity of naval officers was also increasingly bound to Britain's wider anti-slavery mission.

### **Officers as envoys of abolition**

Britain's anti-slavery cause in West Africa began as a moral crusade of ideals and policies that were conceived in Sierra Leone and increasingly rolled out along the coast. These included the encouragement of legitimate trade, increased missionary efforts, and a wave of exploration. Naval officers were among the earliest eyewitnesses to this reconfiguration of relations between Britain and West Africa in the early nineteenth century, although cultural encounters were largely confined to coastal settlements.<sup>54</sup> Their narratives highlight the beginnings of British empire building, and particularly how economic and strategic advantages for Britain became inextricable from humanitarian incentives.

British efforts towards the perceived betterment of West Africa, to raise the continent from its slave trading traditions, were based on the principles of commerce, civilisation and Christianity. These ideals gathered force as the anti-slavery movement gained momentum in the 1820s and 1830s, as the next chapter explores, but the idea that the substitution of slave trading with legitimate commerce would be the first step to save Africa had evolved since the 1790s. In 1791, the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson optimistically wrote about the economic potential of Sierra Leone, in his belief that the encouragement of 'spirited cultivation' by Africans on their own land would be the means by which 'the Civilization of this noble continent would be effected in time'.<sup>55</sup> The Sierra Leone Company planned to redeem Africa and undermine the slave trade via legitimate commerce, to enable the spread of Christianity and the introduction of 'European light, knowledge and improvement'. The Company pursued commercial penetration of the interior, formed partnerships with African traders, and

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<sup>54</sup> T.C. McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 666.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Schwarz, 'Commerce, Civilization', pp. 265-6.

increasingly exerted influence over European and Eurafrican trading communities.<sup>56</sup> The African Institution followed similar objectives. The report from its first general meeting in April 1807 noted members believed a period of social ‘development’ would spread ‘useful knowledge’ and encourage Africans to become ‘industrious’ and hardworking. As George Caulker, a British official in the Secretary’s office at Freetown, wrote in 1808, the African Institution ‘are endeavouring to diffuse in Africa the useful arts of agriculture &c [etc.] the feelings of every enlightened African can I am sure but join in admiring the goodness of Christians unseen but who they feel in all their comforts’.<sup>57</sup> These messages of moral and economic progress were also promoted by other British representatives, including naval personnel.

In recognition of the importance of African agency in the supply of slaves, naval officers negotiated with African rulers to end slave trading and encourage its replacement with legitimate trade. In an attempt to take the message of abolition into Sierra Leone’s borderlands, Edward Columbine was aided by John Kizell, a former American slave originally from the Sherbro region, who acted as a negotiator with local rulers. In August 1810, Columbine believed that a ‘well-arranged co-operation’ between Kizell and ‘young G.S. Calker at the Bananas’ would ‘put that country for a large extent into such order as to banish the slave trade for ever from it’.<sup>58</sup> Columbine wrote to the Sherbro rulers expressing ‘a sincere wish to see Africa in a better condition than it is at present’. He advocated the end of slave trading as ‘a noble endeavour to make yourselves, and your children great, and your country happy.’ In his belief that legitimate trade was the remedy, Columbine asked the rulers to allow Kizell a portion of land ‘for him to build a town, and to point out to you the proper mode of rearing those articles for trade which will supply you with all European commodities’. Columbine also reiterated how the slave trade was responsible for many of Africa’s ills:

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 253-4, 268; Andrew Porter, ‘“Commerce and Christianity”: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan’, *The Historical Journal*, 28:3 (1985), p. 606. See Bruce L. Mouser, ‘Coasters, and Conflict in the Rio Pongo from 1790 to 1808’, *The Journal of African History*, 14:1 (1973), pp. 45-64, for an example of this interaction in the River Pongo.

<sup>57</sup> BLARS, W1/4144, Copy letter from George Caulker to Samuel Whitbread, 28 July 1808; Ackerson, *The African Institution*, pp. 17-9, 25.

<sup>58</sup> *West African Sketches: Compiled from the Reports of Sir G.R. Collier, Sir Charles MacCarthy, and Other Official Sources* (London: L.B Seeley and Son, 1824), p. 110; UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 13 August 1810, f. 167.

What has the slave trade produced for any of you? Can any one of you be said to be rich? ... No. Yet all this distress, the depopulation of your country arises merely from the sale of its inhabitants! Instead of keeping the Africans to till their own soil, they are sent to till the Colonies belonging to Europe!’

Columbine offered Europe as the great moral example to African society: ‘If the inhabitants of Europe had sold each other in a like manner, do you suppose that we should have had Ships and Fleets, and Armies and riches as we now have? Certainly not.’<sup>59</sup> Similar language was used by many naval officers in their description of the British influence in West Africa throughout the period of suppression.

Kizell wrote long letters to Columbine reporting on his mission. The message he carried stressed morality and Christianity, and identified the slave trade as the root of Africa’s uncivilised condition. He chastised those who ‘had killed the poor of the land, the people that should work the land, and sold them to fill their bellies’. Describing the untapped commercial benefits of the area, for trade in coffee for example, Kizell wrote that Africans needed ‘people to bring them into order’, a role which naturally fell to Britain. ‘God’, he wrote, has roused ‘the great men of England, and to put it in their hearts to consider the human race. May the Almighty God incline them to persevere; for these men of sin would wish to keep the black people in slavery, and their minds in darkness.’<sup>60</sup> However, Kizell also reported on entrenched local attitudes and bewilderment that a slave trade with Europeans was no longer desired or permitted. Anger at British interference was also keenly felt. A British slave dealer, Crundell, told King Safer ‘that the governor was a nuisance. “He is like Buonaparte [sic], he wants to take the country away from you”’.<sup>61</sup>

British naval officers were looked to as advocates of legitimate commerce. John Tailour commanded HMS *Comus* on the West African coast in 1815 as part of one of the earliest squadrons sent there on anti-slavery duty. Tailour related his experiences with local rulers ‘up Calabar River’ in a letter to the military engineer General Sir Charles Pasley. He described how he had recommended that those who may formerly have been sold into slavery ‘might become useful to them for life by clearing away & cultivating their country, which will

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<sup>59</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 11, Columbine Papers, [no date] August 1810, ff. 103-5.

<sup>60</sup> John Kizell to Governor Columbine, 30 September 1810 and [no date] December 1810, printed in *West African Sketches*, pp. 115-6, 120, 122-3, 126.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-6, 120.

produce almost whatever they will take the trouble to put into the ground.’ But Tailour described how the end of slave trading was ‘a grievous loss to them’, and noted his concerns that slave trading remained too potent a force: ‘I fear that the first slave vessel’s arrival will obliterate, at least during her stay, all remains of what I said from their minds.’<sup>62</sup>

Recommendations for non-slave based trade were imbued with a belief that both African and British manufacturers would prosper from legitimate commerce. After abolition, adjustments were made to British trading practices with West Africa: trade in goods such as ivory, cow hides, gold or beeswax was developed in return for British manufactures, like cotton cloth, liquor, guns and ammunition.<sup>63</sup> The journals of George Courtenay, Commander of HMS *Bann* in the early 1820s, highlight how the African coast was judged in terms of mercantile interest. Naval officers were expected to collect information on the economic potential of areas for development. For example, the rivers of the Bight of Biafra ‘furnish a vast field for commercial speculation, and many English ships make an annual and profitable voyage to [those rivers] for ivory, palm oil, wax and ebony’. The inhabitants of Bathurst Town in the Gambia, colonised by the British in 1816, have a ‘thriving trade for gold, ivory, bees wax, hides and mahogany’. Courtenay therefore considered the colony as ‘advantageous to the mother country, as it not only enriches its own merchants but pays annually some thousand pounds into the public treasury, and likewise takes off British manufacturers to a large amount’.<sup>64</sup>

Commodore Collier believed that successful naval suppression would encourage an increase in legitimate commerce, from which in turn ‘a profitable trade to Great Britain’ would result. In his reports to the Admiralty, he cited gold specimens of the Ahanta Country as ‘proof of the possibility of so rich a trade being thrown open one day or other to the enterprising spirit of Englishmen’.<sup>65</sup> The advocacy of legitimate trade as an end to slave trading, while also providing Britain with a source of commercial potential, had a powerful impact on the direction of Britain’s anti-slavery policy in the nineteenth century. It led to increased exploration in the West African interior and was also tied to efforts to civilise West African society.

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<sup>62</sup> NLS, MS 9879, Copy letter from John Tailour to General Sir Charles Pasley, 3 May 1815, ff. 333-5.

<sup>63</sup> Gustav Deveneaux, ‘Buxtonianism and Sierra Leone: The 1841 Timbo Expedition’, *Journal of African Studies*, 5:1 (1978), p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> UIC, SLC: Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal, no folios.

<sup>65</sup> NMM, WEL/10, ‘Report of the Forts’; NMRN, MSS 45, ‘Second Annual Report’, ff. 194-5.

## The civilising mission

Abolitionists viewed the slave trade as having destroyed African society. Their aim after 1807 was to promote the healing force of Christian faith and values among both former slaves and those who had sinned by partaking in the trade. This was to be achieved with the assistance of missionary activity. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) began work in Sierra Leone in 1804, and the Wesleyan Missionary Society had agents there from 1811. Missionaries were sent to areas where trading contacts had been established and encouraged settlers and former slaves to assist in their conversion of Africans to the evangelical faith. Inseparable from this religious enthusiasm were debates in British society about the obligation for ‘civilising’ the African continent and its people.<sup>66</sup> As Seymour Drescher has argued, ‘civilization implied a broad front of economic, civil, and cultural improvement’. Africa’s social and cultural deficiencies were linked to the institution of slavery, in turn aggravated by a history of slave trading.<sup>67</sup> The remedy, it was believed, lay in both missionary endeavours and paternalist ideas of social improvement. Sierra Leone was regarded as a testing ground for humanitarian ideas and a marker of African potential. Sir Charles MacCarthy, its governor between 1816 and 1824, persuaded the British government to join with the CMS in turning liberated Africans into, in Christopher Fyfe’s words, ‘an orderly community of self-respecting Christians, who would pass on to others the religion and European ways they had learnt’.<sup>68</sup> In 1818, Lieutenant Digby Marsh of the *Tartar* wrote that Sierra Leone ‘is in a most flourishing state’. He believed ‘just praise is due’ to the ‘Governor and Gentlemen of Sierra Leone as well as the missionaries who are appointed to introduce Christianity and civilization amongst the sable savages of Africa, for the progress they have already made.’<sup>69</sup>

*West African Sketches* (1824) was a series of essays compiled from the reports of George Collier and Charles MacCarthy, among others. The volume was intended to inform the reader about ‘the many amusing and interesting details of Western Africa’, and was part of the copious literature produced about Africa during this period. It is unclear which author penned

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<sup>66</sup> Deveneaux, ‘Buxtonianism’, p. 39; Schwarz, ‘Commerce, Civilization’, pp. 265-6; Andrew Porter, ‘“Commerce and Christianity”’, p. 599.

<sup>67</sup> Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, pp. 85, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Fyfe, ‘Four Sierra Leone Recaptives’, *The Journal of African History*, 2:1 (1961), p. 77.

<sup>69</sup> SALS, A/AOV/69, ‘Private remarks, occurrences, etc., HM ship *Tartar*, from England to the coast of Africa’, c. 1818-19, no folios.

which ‘sketch’ but the tone of the publication regarding the British role in Africa is unequivocal:

Let us but cast our eyes on the map of Africa, and rejoice in the opportunities and facilities we possess to become the favoured instruments of Heaven, in redeeming from the darkness of idolatry, and the multiplied evils of bondage, so large a portion of the human family; and by thus doing, bring into exercise the noblest energies and duties of our nature as men, as Britons, and as Christians.<sup>70</sup>

The destructive effects of the slave trade had caused ‘habits of violence and insecurity’ and a ‘dismembered’ society; these conditions were tied to the ‘moral turpitude’ of heathenism, a lack of Christianity and native ‘superstitions’. According to the authors, this dire situation would only be alleviated by British example, by ‘our genuine philanthropy’ and ‘our humanity and pity’:

The chain which bound Africa to the dust ... has been broken by British energy and perseverance; be it then our heaven-directed employ to teach her the exalted use of her liberated faculties, and to impart the boon by which she may continue to raise herself from the ruin and degradation, the misery and the crime, we have alas! so greatly contributed to bring upon her.<sup>71</sup>

Collier praised the healing influence of British paternalism in his reports. He wrote that the natives of Asante ‘live in a comparative state of happiness’ due to the protection of the British flag. They were ‘becoming more accustomed to British manners’, and he had ‘little doubt’ that continued protection would mean that ‘the fervor for their idolatrous customs ... will entirely subside’.<sup>72</sup> Collier believed that it was Britain’s obligation to encourage Christianity as a way to disperse the influence of indigenous beliefs and embed a European version of civilised society. In particular, education of the children of ‘these gross idolaters’ was, in Collier’s opinion, ‘the best way of arriving at that important desideratum, the quiet and silent introduction of Christianity into that part of Africa’. He also supported the

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<sup>70</sup> *West African Sketches*, ‘Advertisement’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5, 24.

<sup>72</sup> The Asante signed a treaty of friendship with the British in 1817, but were later to declare war in a conflict over territory. Charles MacCarthy was killed as he led an attack against them in 1824.

establishment of European and American settlements as assistants to the spread of abolition and civilisation.<sup>73</sup>

However, not all naval personnel in this early period were impressed with the potential impact of the missionary cause, highlighting that the anti-slavery movement was not popular in the years immediately following abolition. Furthermore, even after the resurgence of the anti-slavery campaign in the early 1820s, the focus on Sierra Leone as a centre to disseminate abolitionist ideals led to the colony being increasingly attacked by pro-slavery writers.<sup>74</sup> Edward Columbine, for example, was less than sanguine about the potential good of missionary activity. Paul Cuffe was a free black American, a Quaker sea captain who sailed to Sierra Leone from Massachusetts in 1811. Cuffe believed that trade aligned with the Christian faith was the key to Africa's betterment, and to spread this message planned to transport settlers from America at his own expense. In his three months at Sierra Leone, he gathered information on the colony to assist in the establishment of his American model.<sup>75</sup> Columbine was unenthused about Cuffe's chances of success, based on his own preconceptions about African peoples, and his opinions of the inhospitable climate:

... as to any effect he can produce on the savages beyond the narrow limits of this little town, it seems to me to be quite out of the question - & as to himself & his family the chance is that half of them, at least, would be dead in a couple of rainy seasons. However, be my opinions what they may, I will not venture to oppose them to such a benevolent intention ... I will never join in those flattering representations which have been made of this place, in order to delude ignorant people to it, to their ruin.<sup>76</sup>

Columbine's reflections were linked to his understanding of West African society. There was a developing awareness of Africa in Britain in the early nineteenth century, promoted in books, pamphlets, newspapers, and accounts of exploration.<sup>77</sup> Abolitionists sought to weaken

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<sup>73</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 113-5, 215-6. See Chapter 6 for an examination of naval officers' perceptions of African 'superstitions'.

<sup>74</sup> See David Lambert, 'Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation over Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), pp. 103-32, for an examination of the 'war of representation' over Sierra Leone as exemplified by the exchanges between Kenneth Macaulay, cousin of Zachary Macaulay, and James MacQueen, a geographer of Africa and spokesman for the anti-Sierra Leoneans, in 1826-7.

<sup>75</sup> Ackerson, *The African Institution*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>76</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 12, Columbine Journals, 2 March 1811.

<sup>77</sup> Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition', pp. 322-3. See Chapter 6.

the assumption that Africans were innately savage and therefore suited to nothing more than slavery. However, writing from Bance Island (the former British slave fort) Columbine was sceptical of efforts to civilise the domestic slaves of the settlement, because of what he regarded as deficiencies in the African character. ‘They are excessively indolent, insolent & even mutinous’, he wrote, ‘the produce of their labour amounts to a mere nothing’. His language echoed the Directors of the African Institution, whose discussions about Africa were based on a belief that idleness and a lack of morality among its people were a result of the slave trade: ‘Indolence is a common characteristic of all uncivilized people ... But indolence is a disease which it is the business of civilization to cure’.<sup>78</sup>

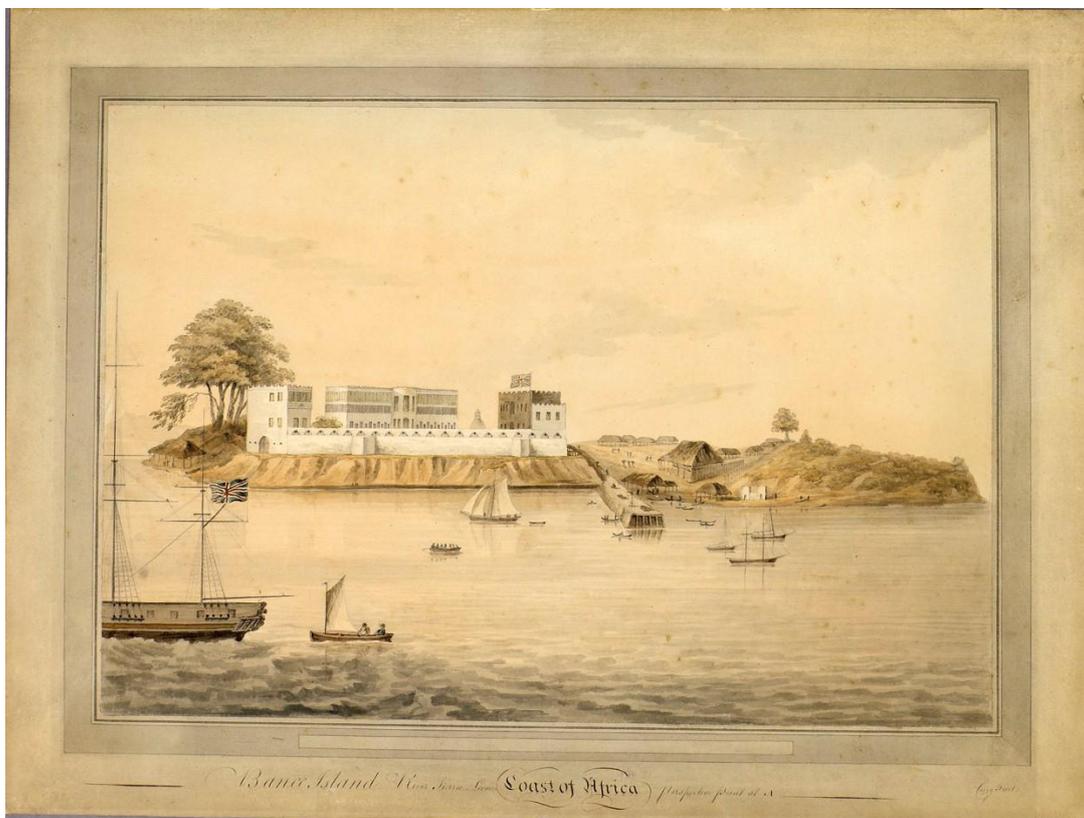


Fig. 5: ‘Bance Island, River Sierra Leone, coast of Africa’, Joseph Corry, c.1805 (NMM, ZBA2744).

Columbine, however, did not believe that Africans were capable of change and improvement. ‘People in England may talk as they please about the natural excellence of the African disposition, when unshackled by slavery’, he wrote, ‘but as far as I am able to judge, they

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Ackerson, *The African Institution*, p. 23; UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 27 February 1811. On Bance Island, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

have as strong a natural & cultivated bias to craft & rascality as any knaves I ever met with'.<sup>79</sup> His thoughts differed from those he expressed to the Sherbro rulers praising the benefits of local agriculture and legitimate trade, illuminating the difference between opinions expressed in public and private papers. Columbine also exemplified some of the racial tensions and moral ambiguities regarding concepts of slavery, servitude and freedom for African people. While he fully supported an end to the slave trade, Columbine held little faith in Africans' ability to repair their own society, and advanced the case for outside (British) rule as the only way to redress the innate problems of the African character.<sup>80</sup>

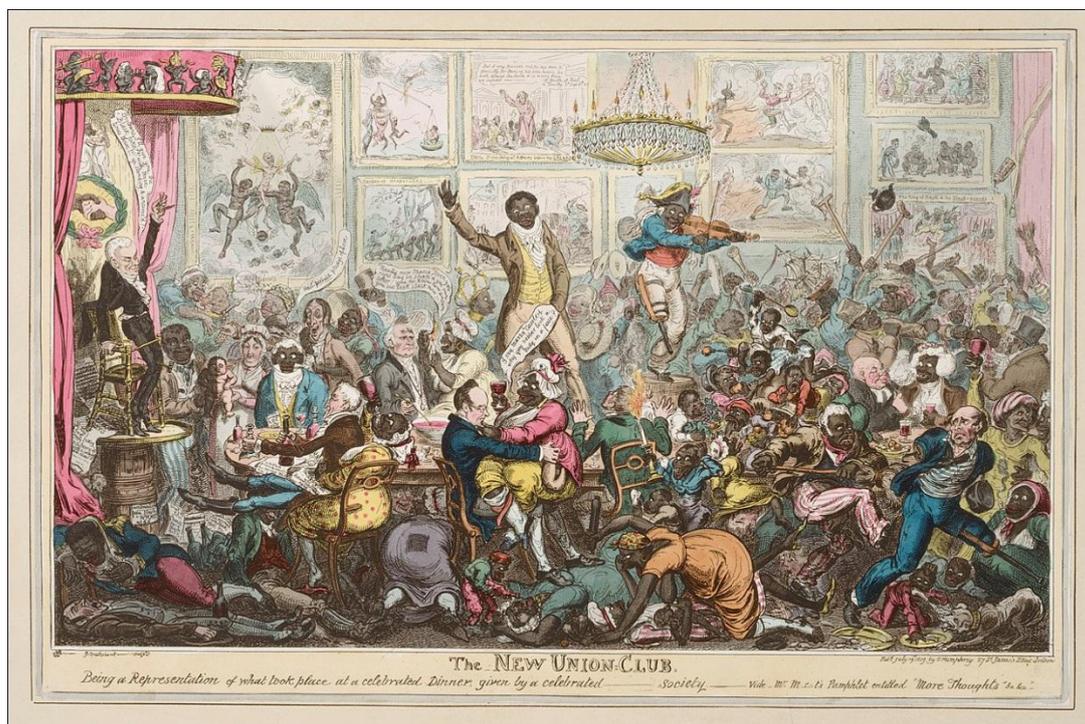


Fig. 6: 'The New Union Club', George Cruikshank, published by G. Humphrey, 1819 (NMM, ZBA2498).

Such attitudes were unsurprising considering blacks as the objects of ridicule and racial caricature in British print, literature and popular culture proliferated throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>81</sup> For example, George Cruickshank's *The New Union Club*, published in 1819, purports to show a dinner held at the African Institution. It employs many common nineteenth-century racial stereotypes, including a criticism of the

<sup>79</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 27 February 1811.

<sup>80</sup> Other officers' engagement with these ideas will be explored further in the later chapters of this thesis.

<sup>81</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 363-4; Catherine Hall, 'An Empire of God or of Man? The Macaulays, Father and Son' in Hilary M. Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008), pp. 64-83.

idea that black people could aspire to behave like Europeans.<sup>82</sup> Discussions of the African character were part of a wider dissemination of knowledge about West Africa and its peoples in the early period of naval suppression.

### **Exploration, settlements and new frontiers**

Increasing knowledge about West Africa was aided by an outpouring of geographic accounts between the 1790s and the 1830s. The Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was founded in 1788 to gather information about the commercial prospects of the African interior. One of its explorers, Mungo Park, journeyed to the Niger in 1795-97. Park published a popular narrative of his expedition, and others followed, for example Thomas Bowdich in his *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (1819). James MacQueen was a former West Indies overseer who published widely on the geography of Africa in the 1820s, with a particular interest in the course of the Niger.<sup>83</sup> This enthusiasm for information gathering and dissemination on the West African coast also engaged the Royal Navy.

The Admiralty began to recruit scientific expertise from the end of the eighteenth century to enable a worldwide interest in hydrography and exploration. The Hydrographic Department was created in 1795, and, with the coming of peace in 1815, the Admiralty began to commission coastal surveys to correct the charts of certain regions of the West African coast, for example the expedition to explore the rivers around the Bight of Biafra in 1816-17 under the command of Captain Tuckey.<sup>84</sup> Naval officers accompanied and offered support to British

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<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of *The New Union Club*, see Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, pp. 290-2.

<sup>83</sup> McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters', p. 685; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 206-7; David Lambert, "'Taken captive by the mystery of the Great River": towards an historical geography of British geography and Atlantic slavery', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (2009), pp. 44-65. MacQueen was notable in being a self-publicised expert on Africa without having visited the continent.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire', in P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 249; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 165-6. The African naval survey was carried forward by Captain David Bartholomew in the *Leven* in 1819-21, producing surveys of the Cape Verdes and the African coast as far south as Cape Roxo; Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen in the *Leven* and *Barracouta* in 1821-6; Commander T. Boteler in the *Hecla* and Lieutenant R. Owen in the *Albatross* in 1827-8; from 1833 by Commander Edward Belcher in the *Aetna*; and between 1835 and 1845 by Captain Vidal in the *Aetna* and the *Styx*. For published accounts of surveying see Captain Thomas Boteler, *Narrative of a voyage of discovery to Africa and Arabia performed by HMS Leven and Barracouta from 1821 to 1826 under the command of Capt. W.F.W. Owen* (London: Richard Bentley, 1835); Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen, *Narrative of voyages to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar performed in HM Ships 'Leven' and 'Barracouta'* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833). See also the forthcoming work by M. K. Barritt, *Pathfinders for the Fleet: The origins of the Royal Naval Surveying Service*, particularly Chapter 13 for details on Columbine's surveying career.

explorers and naturalists on expeditions. Increasingly exploration also became a vehicle for suppression and a means to assess the potential of areas to be civilised. The exploration of the continent therefore became inextricably linked with Britain's anti-slavery cause: naval officers, explorers, scientists, missionaries, legal traders and abolitionists all found themselves interested in the interior's potential.

In 1820, Scottish naval officer and explorer Hugh Clapperton was recruited by the Colonial Office, together with naval surgeon Walter Oudney and army officer Dixon Denham, to an expedition to discover the course of the Niger, with the view to open diplomatic and trading relations with Britain.<sup>85</sup> Clapperton also acted as the British government's mediator to the Sultans of Sokoto and Borno on the Niger Expedition of 1825-27. In his appointment letter from Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst, Clapperton was instructed to stress 'the very great advantages' of abolition, the 'happy results' of which would lead the African rulers 'to be ranked among the benefactors of mankind'. He was also to assert the 'mutual benefit' of suppression, including an assurance that 'all the articles of merchandize which are now brought into Africa and given in return for human beings', will in the future 'be brought by English merchants in exchange for such articles as Soudan may produce'.<sup>86</sup>

Dr Morrison was a naval surgeon and naturalist who accompanied Clapperton on the expedition. His incomplete letters of 1825 reveal how, unlike Columbine, he was optimistic about the improvement of African society via the moral influence of Christianity. Morrison was motivated by religious faith and benevolence, regardless of the risks to his life: 'if I do fail still it is an object worthy the enterprise of the good Christian'. His desire was to 'prove our humble mean by introducing moral & religious improvement to the head of poor Africa & to the hearts of its benighted inhabitants'. Morrison stressed the dual aims of their expedition – to civilise Africa and open trading links to the African interior – which for him were a source of great pride. He asserted ideas of heroism and British national honour when he claimed the mission 'is one of those that promises more benefit to the nation than those of Parry or Franklin however new & splendid'.<sup>87</sup> Both Clapperton and Morrison perished on the

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<sup>85</sup> Christopher Fyfe, 'Clapperton, Hugh (1788–1827)', *ODNB* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5433, accessed 23 September 2009]; Jamie Bruce Lockhart, *A Sailor in the Sahara: The Life and Travels in Africa of Hugh Clapperton, Commander RN* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008).

<sup>86</sup> UKHO, LP 1857/Box M760, Lord Bathurst to Hugh Clapperton, 30 July 1826.

<sup>87</sup> UKHO, LP 1857/Box M760, Incomplete letter of Dr. Morrison, c. 1825. John Franklin and Edward Parry were naval officers and Arctic explorers. Clapperton's journal was later published, as was an account of the expedition by Clapperton's servant Richard Lander: *Records of Captain Clapperton's last expedition to Africa*

expedition, but this model of exploration, negotiation and encouragement of trade and abolition continued throughout the century, with varying results.

This drive for exploration had further consequences. As David Lambert has argued, Sierra Leone and the broader West African region ‘were focal points for discussions about imperial policy’.<sup>88</sup> As a result, naval officers on the West Africa squadron were involved in debates about new territories and the potential benefits to Britain arising from further colonisation. Captain Charles Phillips’s letter to retired admiral Sir Richard Keats from HMS *Bann* at Ascension in 1822 uncovers the interlinked nature of suppression, commerce and territory in the British anti-slavery enterprise. Phillips discussed the difficulties the British faced in overcoming the slave trade in the coastal areas surrounding Sierra Leone because the ‘inhabitants of the coast ... have not found the productions of Africa sufficiently numerous to establish a commerce that can supply its place’. Phillips suggested an alternative British settlement on the island of St Thomas (Sao Tome) in the Gulf of Guinea, then in Portuguese possession. In contrast to Sierra Leone, a ‘drain from the mother country’, Phillips believed the mountains of St Thomas to have huge economic potential, ‘almost equal to the blue mountains of Jamaica’. The benefits would be twofold: the island would ‘ensure to England a rich colony’, as well as being ‘the seat from where Christianity might spring into the Western World.’ His proposal involved emancipating Africans on the island, and giving each ‘a spot of ground to cultivate, a portion of whose produce might be paid to Government, to repay the ten pounds paid for his emancipation’. As a result, ‘he could be possessor of a plantation which with industry would make him rich; at all events the mother country would have a prospect of seeing a part of the money she is laying out reimbursed.’ Liberated Africans could then return to their country ‘a rich man’ whereby ‘his example would enervate his country men’.<sup>89</sup>

How far freedom was considered applicable to liberated Africans, and what was expected in return for Britain’s ‘gift’ of freedom are ideas explored further in Chapter 5. Phillips clearly regarded the process of emancipation as resulting in a debt owed in some form to Britain. His proposals for the creation of plantations similar to those in the West Indies also had an uneasy

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*with the subsequent adventures of the author* (London: Richard Bentley, 1830); Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander, *Journal of a second expedition into the interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829).

<sup>88</sup> Lambert, ‘Sierra Leone’, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> SALS, DD/CPL/44, Captain Charles Phillips to Sir Richard Keats, 12 August 1822. Keats was Governor of Greenwich Hospital.

resonance with slavery. British influence was ever-present, over the social condition and economic potential of liberated Africans, but also over physical territory. In the aftermath of abolition, attempts to expand British territorial responsibility in West Africa had been limited and the borders of Sierra Leone were regarded as natural limits of the British presence. However, in the following decades, there was an increasing assumption that the success of abolition required an expansion of colonial borders, although proposals for the colonisation of islands like Sao Tome or Fernando Po rather than mainland settlements demonstrate British reluctance to significantly increase territory.



Fig. 7: 'Fernando Po – Africa', C. Jones, c. 1828 (NMM, PAD1916).

Commander B. Marwood Kelly of the surveying vessel *Pheasant* wrote a report on Fernando Po for the Admiralty in 1823. He believed that the establishment of a new colony depended on how likely local advantages made it able 'to repay the mother country ... for the trouble and expense which must be incurred in protecting it through its infancy'. He regarded the

island as possessing these advantages ‘most extensively’.<sup>90</sup> Kelly wrote about Fernando Po’s potential for ‘colonial produce’ and ‘its position to become the emporium and command all the commerce issuing from the numerous great rivers around it.’ Like Phillips, he made comparisons with the prosperous British West Indies, claiming that plantations there ‘would be found equally, or more productive than any of the old European Colonial Establishments in the West Indies.’ The potential for commerce was linked to suppression as after the demise of the slave trade, the inhabitants would ‘turn their minds on cultivation, or some other industrious pursuit’. The rivers of the island would facilitate ‘the labour of extending the blessings of religion, and civilization, to this long neglected, & much injured quarter of the Globe’. Kelly’s vision for Fernando Po was as an anti-slavery utopia of ‘social happiness’ to effect change across the West African continent, born of British moral instruction and indefatigable Christian faith. As such, Kelly regarded the island in an ‘eligible situation for giving effect to the laudable exertions, of ... the African Institution, who are straining every nerve to extend the blessings of civilization & Christianity to the wilds of Africa’.<sup>91</sup>

Kelly’s report revealed how naval officers’ insight and experiences informed British policy-makers. Like Commodore Collier, Kelly acknowledged that he wrote more than was expected; his remarks on the value of Fernando Po as a British colony were appended to a more traditional survey, and he admitted that he ‘embraced matter not immediately commanded by the General Printed Instructions’. Similarly, Charles Phillips wrote to Sir Richard Keats that ‘I have no right as a junior officer on the station to make known my sentiments’, but, ‘should the manner meet your approbation I shall be happy to make any further communications on this or any other subject connected with the station’. The pursuit of promotion or commendation could be at play here; however, an engagement with the interconnected objectives of both the West Africa squadron and wider anti-slavery cause are also clear. Kelly wrote that ‘as a Public Servant I am bound to render myself as useful to my country as my humble abilities will admit’.<sup>92</sup> He considered offering his perceptions as to the best ways to further the abolitionist cause as part of this role. The early decades of naval suppression generated numerous concerns requiring discussion and insight. In a time of

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<sup>90</sup> UKHO, MP 107, Commander Kelly, ‘Remarks and observations on the probable value of the island of Fernando Po as a British colony’, no folios; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 162-4. Both Phillips and Kelly subscribed to the belief that Sierra Leone was an unsuitable base for the anti-slavery mission and that alternative sites were needed. See Chapter 5, p. 153.

<sup>91</sup> UKHO, MP 107, ‘Remarks and observations’.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*; SALS, DD/CPL/44, Phillips to Keats, 12 August 1822.

uncertainties and new challenges, naval officers informed policy-makers on their opinions for the best means of suppressing the slave trade and extending the British abolitionist presence.

## **Conclusion**

As David Eltis has asserted, the ‘campaign against the slave trade was fought on two not always compatible levels. There was the physical or naval confrontation and, more important, there was the ideological struggle.’ In the years immediately following abolition, the goal for abolitionists was less the acquisition of territory but rather ‘the imposition of a conception of freedom’ on others.<sup>93</sup> No study of the place of naval suppression in the early British anti-slavery agenda in West Africa is complete without this ideological perspective. In taking on Sierra Leone as a crown colony in 1807, Britain made a statement of morality and national honour to the world, and subsequently articulated a new set of international priorities. The early administration and development of the colony created the framework from which much of the British commitment to abolition depended. Providing support and facilities for the naval attack on slave trading and a dedication to liberating the enslaved were major objectives, but so too were the desires to take abolition beyond Sierra Leone’s borders, the identification of British strategic interests, and a sense of obligation to civilise Africans and assert that Christianity and legitimate commerce would result in an improved African society. These all contributed to the burgeoning British presence in West Africa, alongside the development of the idea of ‘imperial trusteeship’ for the betterment of native societies.<sup>94</sup> This British conception of freedom would dominate British relations with West Africa throughout the century.

Naval officers were connected to all elements of this agenda. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars saw a great expansion of British imperial dominion, and the navy was regarded as an integral part of the coercive forces of the state, alongside the army and colonial militias.<sup>95</sup> In West Africa, however, the role of naval officers was more than policemen. As Christopher Bayly has argued, in the first third of the nineteenth century, the empire was only loosely controlled from the centre: colonial governments, local conditions

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<sup>93</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 102, 104

<sup>94</sup> Ralph Austen and Woodruff D. Smith, ‘Images of Africa and British Slave-Trade Abolition: The Transition to an Imperialist Ideology, 1787-1807’, *African Historical Studies*, 2:1 (1969), pp. 82-3.

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 162.

and metropolitan influences all played a part in formulating imperial policies.<sup>96</sup> Naval men were heavily involved in these processes, as sailors, envoys, and negotiators. As both governor and naval captain, Edward Columbine was positioned at the centre of the development of a British anti-slavery presence in Sierra Leone. His role was unique, but his experiences as a naval officer implementing abolitionist policy in West Africa were not. In the years following his governorship, naval officers could not regard their role on the coast as limited to detached service searching for slavers; they were heavily implicated in delivering the anti-slavery agenda on the West African coast. The next chapter will turn to how their roles diversified and developed as the century progressed.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., chapter 7.

## Chapter 2

### **An expanding presence: naval officers and the wider anti-slavery mission**

Before the 1830s, few abolitionists doubted that naval suppression would be successful, yet slave trafficking continued at near eighteenth-century levels. The British abolitionist strategy was making some headway, and had allies like France tentatively attached to the cause, but the methods pursued by naval vessels appeared ineffective.<sup>1</sup> Given impetus and confidence by the renewed vigour of anti-slavery sentiment in Britain, the nature of naval abolitionist policy altered from the 1830s. While intercepting slavers at sea remained a major objective, the limited success of that policy suggested that new methods were required to eradicate the slave trade at its source. In Andrew Lambert's words, naval policy 'had to deal with supply and demand before the scale of the trade could be reduced to a level where naval force could hope to be effective.'<sup>2</sup> As a result, naval officers were more frequently tasked with missions on shore, working alongside other groups of British representatives – colonial officials, missionaries, explorers – in the expansion of the British presence in West Africa. Wider imperial impulses for pioneering and experimentation, the increased drive for civilisation and development of legitimate commerce led to the ushering in of a new anti-slavery agenda, and the adjustment of British policies in the process. Through trade expeditions, treaties negotiated with African rulers and increasingly offensive action on shore, naval officers were agents of change in the British grand vision for West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century.

### **Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation**

Britain's broader policy towards West Africa began to shift from the late 1820s. In 1830, a Parliamentary Committee called for a reduction of commitments there as an answer to demands for financial retrenchment and the overwhelming problem of disease among Europeans on the coast. However, the following decade witnessed popular abolitionism renewed against colonial slavery. The Reform Act of 1832 shifted parliamentary opinion in response to the new electorate and the Emancipation Act of 1833 which ended slavery in the

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<sup>1</sup> David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 27, 86-7; David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), Map 182, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Lambert, 'Slavery, Free Trade and Naval Strategy, 1840-1860' in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 77-8.

British colonies proved that popular political agitation could influence national policy. Such reform gave impetus for Britain's humanitarian policy-makers to involve themselves further in colonial affairs, and added to frustrations that change was not occurring quickly enough on the coast. As a result, the abolitionist campaign moved onto the West African mainland, and the naval suppression campaign became increasingly interventionist after 1830. Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston initiated an increase in Britain's naval presence there, and expenditure on the West Africa squadron rose by 50 percent between 1829 and 1841.<sup>3</sup> This increased involvement was linked to a recurrent theme of this thesis, namely the politics of identity in the anti-slavery cause. After abolition, Britain repositioned itself from the leading slave-trading nation to the great emancipator, reinforced by the navy's role. The anti-slavery mission became imbued with the promotion of civilisation and the idea of 'trusteeship' for the betterment of non-European peoples. In the belief that the slave trade was contrary to the standards of civilised, Christian nations, the ideology of anti-slavery was politicised, and the drive to export the British example of humanitarianism became a rationale for increased intervention overseas.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1830s, completed naval surveys of the coast were multiplying and a proliferation of travel writing meant that knowledge of the African interior, or at least the coastal areas, increased by mid-century. The body of information collected by explorers, missionaries and envoys revealed a different character to the slave trade, one on which British abolitionists built their future policy: at its core was the need to address the slave trade at its source. The abolitionist Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton became the spokesman for a policy calling for a more aggressive approach to eradicating the slave trade.

Buxton believed that naval suppression had failed to render the slave trade unprofitable, and that naval force alone could not stop it. The slave trade continued unabated because British policy had targeted slave-traders and owners rather than Africans themselves. His solution was to attack the roots of slavery by substituting the slave trade with Christianity, civilisation,

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<sup>3</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 289-290, 304. Chapter 4 explores the theme of anti-slavery sentiment in naval suppression.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Hamilton, Kate Hodgson and Joel Quirk, 'Slavery, memory and identity', in idem (eds), *Slavery Memory and Identity: National Representation and Global Legacies* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 10-11; Joel Quirk and David Richardson, 'Anti-Slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-historical Perspective', *The Journal of Modern European History*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 68-92; Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 198-221.

and commerce. Buxton published his views in *The African Slave Trade* (1839) and *The Remedy* (1840), later published as one volume, and in 1839 founded the ‘Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade’, patronised by the Prince Consort and backed by the influence of Exeter Hall, the meeting place off the Strand in London for missionary and other religious organisations. His vision for the remedy of the slave trade lay in Africa. ‘It is not the partial aid, lent by a distant nation,’ he wrote, ‘but the natural and healthy exercise of her own energies, which will ensure success.’ Buxton portrayed Africans as responsive and teachable; Britain had a responsibility to lift the moral and material progress of the continent by encouraging legitimate commerce (in for example, cotton, groundnuts or palm oil) and persuading Africans that the sale of produce would prove more profitable than the sale of people.<sup>5</sup> To ameliorate ‘her wretched condition’, Buxton looked to the mission stations and schools that proliferated in the African interior from the 1840s onwards.<sup>6</sup> ‘Buxtonianism’ therefore appealed to the high moral virtues of mid-nineteenth century Britain and also to its economic self-interests: while African regeneration would be aided by British assistance and habits of industry, British manufacturers would at the same time be supplied with raw materials and increasing markets.<sup>7</sup>

The principle that the slave trade should be superseded by alternative forms of legitimate trade became commonplace by mid-century.<sup>8</sup> Commander Walter Estcourt of the *Éclair* subscribed to the official policy that suppression was not only desirable in itself but also necessary for the development of British trade and commerce with Africa. In his journal of 1845, Estcourt put forward British industry and missionary activity as the remedies to the slave trade:

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<sup>5</sup> Buxton quoted in Kristin Mann, ‘The Original Sin: British Reform and Imperial Expansion at Lagos’, in Robin Law and Silke Strickrodt (eds), *Ports of the Slave Trade: Bights of Benin and Biafra* (Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, 1999), pp. 171-2; J. Gallagher, ‘Fowell Buxton and the New African Policy, 1838-1842’, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10:1 (1950), p. 40; Gustav Deveneaux, ‘Buxtonianism and Sierra Leone: The 1841 Timbo Expedition’, *Journal of African Studies*, 5:1 (Spring 1978), p. 36; Olwyn Mary Blouet, ‘Buxton, Sir Thomas Fowell, first baronet (1786–1845)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, September 2004 [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4247, accessed 23 September 2009].

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 150; Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 119; Deveneaux, ‘Buxtonianism’, p. 37; Mann, ‘The Original Sin’, pp. 171-2.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Anstey, ‘Capitalism and Slavery: A Critique’, *The Economic History Review*, 21:2 (1968), p. 320. It has been argued that this commercial transition posed a ‘crisis of adaptation’ for African rulers by undermining their control over their income. See the collection of essays in Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

... the core [of] our effort should be to prevent the slave trade and above all to encourage the legal trade and raise the moral character of the people, and this is to be done by making settlements where ever there is an opening and making it better worth the native's while to trade in the produce of his land than in his fellow man, this must be the work of time but now there is a good opportunity to begin because the inhabitants earnestly desire to have Europeans among them and are chiefly desirous of having the English from a belief that we are the most powerful nation and the best traders.<sup>9</sup>

Permeating Estcourt's analysis for the future of the continent was his belief that Africa's revival would be impotent without British intervention. Thus legitimate commerce would 'extend morals', embed 'habits of industry' and ensure there was 'a way opened for the introduction of Christianity': all combating forces against the slave trade. In contrast, armed force would be unsuccessful against slave traders, because 'fair & judicious laws and civilisation and Xtianity [sic] can alone suppress them.' Estcourt also believed that African people wished to be lifted from their condition by European influence: missionary endeavours should therefore be directed towards the education of children, 'discountenancing the idle profligate habits of the young and overthrowing of the pagan superstitions of the Old'.<sup>10</sup>

Legitimate commerce, especially in palm oil, had for some time existed alongside the slave trade. Improvised by Liverpool merchants before 1807 and expanded after, palm oil became an important trade staple from the 1820s. Due to Britain's industrialisation and demand for tropical products (and soap in particular), palm oil imports increased from around 5000 tons in 1827 to over 30,000 tons by 1853. The trade was at the heart of the British vision for the transformation of the West African economy, and contributed to an increase in British traders, officials and consular officials on the coast. Salt, rum and other goods were also distributed according to old patterns of credit and collection.<sup>11</sup> Naval engineer John M'Kie of the *Rattler* reported on the palm oil trade in the River Bonny in 1850 which was 'wholly in

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<sup>9</sup> GA, D1571/F543, Estcourt Journals, 5 January 1845.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5 January and 26 January 1845.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3; Martin Lynn, 'The "Imperialism of free trade" and the case of West Africa, c.1830-c.1870', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 15 (1986), p. 24.

the hands of Liverpool merchants'. The influence of these traders on local peoples was clear. The 'royal residence' of the King of Duke Town, 'a neat corrugated iron structure', had been presented by the merchants, and 'contained a mixed assortment of presents he had received [...] several large mirrors, lithographs of the Queen and Royal Family'.<sup>12</sup>

One unintended consequence of the encouragement of legitimate trade was the concurrent growth of domestic slavery in West Africa. The societal division between domestic slaves and those destined for export was recognised by Lieutenant Frederick Forbes, who wrote in his account of his service on the West Africa squadron that 'nine-tenths of the population are born slaves, that is to say, the property of the remaining tenth ... Domestic slaves are not sold ... but the children thus sold, are looked upon as *bona fide* slaves, and it is in this manner that the [slave trade] markets are partly supplied'.<sup>13</sup> Paul Lovejoy has documented a growth in the use of domestic slaves during the nineteenth century, by Europeans and Africans, in part to service the increasing demand in agricultural exports such as palm oil, gum or groundnuts.<sup>14</sup> Slaves were also employed in coastal areas to produce food for the commercial and urban centres involved in overseas trade. Robin Law and others have argued that the recovery of slave prices after the initial impact of abolition might reflect the expansion in local demand for slaves, whereby it was more profitable for African slave-holders to sell their slaves on the domestic market than for export.<sup>15</sup> An unnamed officer who published an account of his time on the West African coast in 1858 suggested the same in his report of a conversation with the chief of Banagalong:

He told me that the vigilance of our cruisers in a degree prevented him from continuing it [slave trading], but that the principal reason was, that the slave dealers were not so well prepared as formerly to pay ready money for slaves, and also, that the demand for ground nuts and other produce having increased, the labour of slaves was more valuable than formerly, in their own country.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> NLS, MS 24634, M'Kie Memoirs, ff. 8-11, 17-19.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Six Months' Service in the African Blockade, from April to October, 1848, in command of H.M.S. Bonetta* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), pp. 62-3. Forbes's emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chapter 8; Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, 'The initial "crisis of adaptation": the impact of British abolition on the Atlantic slave trade in West Africa, 1808-1820' in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Law, 'Introduction', in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade*, pp. 7, 9, 17.

<sup>16</sup> 'Journal of a Naval Officer on the West Coast of Africa', *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal* (July 1858), p. 255. Officers' perceptions of the pervasiveness of domestic slavery and its impact on ideas of freedom for liberated Africans are explored in Chapter 5.

As part of their surveys of slave trading activity naval officers were involved in assessing coastal areas for the potential economic returns to Britain. In 1831, Commodore John Hayes ordered Captain Alexander Gordon to investigate settlements around Cape Coast Castle and Accra where non-British merchants operated, 'to endeavour to discover the most lucrative branch of trade carried on, and whether, or not, such trade could be made beneficial to Great Britain.' In particular, Gordon was asked to 'discover the probable quantity of Gold dust and Ivory that could be obtained at each place'. Gordon replied that 'a considerable sum might be procured'.<sup>17</sup> The promotion of legitimate trade was a constant theme in the roles of naval officers on the coast, and increasingly also took place in the West African interior.

### **Expeditions into the African interior**

West Africa was an area of burgeoning economic interests for Europe.<sup>18</sup> While reluctant to extend colonial holdings, British agents on the coast were involved in activity to protect such interests. As Palmerston asserted, the objective of the anti-slavery campaign was not only 'to rid mankind of a foul and detestable crime', but simultaneously to ensure that 'the greatest commercial benefit would accrue, not to England only, but to every civilised nation'.<sup>19</sup> A series of government-sponsored trade expeditions took place in the 1830s and 1840s, continuing the tradition of exploration in the African interior but on a significantly more ambitious scale. The majority of these expeditions were focused on the River Niger.

In 1831, Richard and John Lander were sent by the British government to explore the lower Niger (Richard Lander had accompanied Hugh Clapperton on his expedition of 1825). New explorations were also sponsored by merchants, for example the expedition to the Niger in 1832-34 mounted by the African Inland Commercial Company, in which Macgregor Laird and Thomas Stirling determined to explore the commercial opportunities of the Landers' discoveries. The expedition was not a commercial success and the group suffered from epidemics of fever and dysentery.<sup>20</sup> Laird was accompanied by Captain William Allen as

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<sup>17</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, correspondence between John Hayes and Alexander Gordon, April 1831, ff. 335-37, 367-70.

<sup>18</sup> For African-European economic relations preceding the partition of the continent, see J. D. Hargreaves, *Prelude to the Partition of West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1963) and A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longmans, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Lynn, "Imperialism", p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger 1841-1842* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 46; Frank McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness: The*

official naval observer. While the expedition had commercial rather than anti-slavery motives, abolitionist ideology permeated Allen's account of the venture. He wrote that one aim was to meet rulers engaged in the 'horrible traffic' in slaves, and 'to point out to them the advantages they will derive if, instead of wars and aggression to which it gives rise, they will substitute an innocent and legitimate commerce.' Allen's landscape view showing the *Confluence of Rivers Niger and Tchudda* was displayed at the Royal Academy and also featured in his *Picturesque Views of the River Niger*, published in 1840 in support of Buxton's 'Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade'.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Fowell Buxton's Niger Expedition of 1841 to found an agricultural and philanthropic colony on the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers was the most ambitious undertaking in the exploratory and anti-slavery cause. The government-sponsored plan reflected the new active policy in relation to West Africa, reversing the established doctrine of minimum commitments.<sup>22</sup> With support from Prince Albert and members of the Cabinet, the expedition was hugely ambitious and expensive. The government contributed £79,143 to finance it, and three specially designed steamers (*Albert*, *Wilberforce* and *Soudan*) carried a total crew of over 300 men. The expedition was led by Captain Henry Dundas Trotter, a senior naval officer who had served for four years with the West Africa squadron as commander of the *Curlew*. He was advised and assisted in his dealings with local rulers by Commander William Allen (who had previously served on Laird's expedition) and Commander Bird Allen. In addition to naval personnel, the accompanying group included missionaries, scientists, doctors and agriculturists recruited and paid for by Buxton and his colleagues. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a former slave who would become Nigeria's first African-Anglican bishop, was also on board as assistant and interpreter.<sup>23</sup>

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*European Exploration of Africa* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), pp. 27-34; Richard Lander and John Lander, *Journal of an expedition to explore the course and termination of the Niger* (London: John Murray, 1832); Macgregor Laird and R.A.K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an expedition into the interior of Africa by the River Niger*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1837).

<sup>21</sup> Jan Marsh, 'Ruskin and Turner's Slavers: Patriotic, Political and Pictorial Issues', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 2:1 (2001), p. 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> Gallagher, 'Fowell Buxton', p. 51; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 298.

<sup>23</sup> Temperley, *White Dreams*. Eleven of the participants subsequently published journals. For example, William Allen and T.R.H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger in 1841* (London: Richard Bentley, 1848); John Duncan, 'Some Account of the Last Expedition to the Niger', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 22 (1847); Reverends J.F. Schön and Samuel A. Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr Samuel Crowther, Who ... Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842).

Buxton's plans to eradicate slave-trading involved the establishment of a 'model farm' at Idah, 270 miles inland, to use as a base to make anti-slavery treaties with local rulers, and to offer economic and moral inducements to African people.<sup>24</sup> The mission was a disaster. Trotter later described the 'shattered condition of the expedition, caused by the unusual degree of sickness and mortality'. Of the 145 white men in the crew, 130 suffered from fever and 40 died.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the reality of the model farm was far from its high moral expectations. The settlers declined to work, instead hiring groups of refugees, and there were reports of them molesting the refugee women. Lieutenant William Henry Webb of the *Wilberforce* found the settlers 'indolent and lazy, not one ... willing or even disposed to manual labour'. Webb witnessed two of them armed with whips 'apparently for the purpose of urging the natives to greater exertion'.<sup>26</sup> Hearing of these circumstances, *The Times* declared: 'the Niger ANTI-Slavery Expedition has ... planted a very "model" of the most cruel and iniquitous SLAVERY, and that in a spot where such, or at least such systematic scourge-bearing slavery, was probably unknown before'.<sup>27</sup>

Philip Curtin has argued that the Niger Expedition's failure marked an end to a humanitarian era in British foreign policy and led to a discouragement of future expansion inland, and growing criticism of anti-slavery operations in particular.<sup>28</sup> Disappointment with the mission was felt by those on the squadron. In 1842, Midshipman Augustus Arkwright wrote about the 'absurd' expedition in a letter home from the schooner *Prompt*:

The latest account from the model-farm ... is any thing but satisfactory ... all the people out here knew how little use it was to attempt, and throw away such a sum of money, from the Senior Officer in the Expe. to the lowest boy: all were the worst sort for an employment of the kind. They have now found it out, when too late.<sup>29</sup>

However, the failure of the expedition did not lead to any slackening of British interest in West Africa. Its legacy was for anti-slavery to be regarded in tandem with civilisation and the

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<sup>24</sup> Temperley, *White Dreams*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> NMM, BGY/W/2, Henry Dundas Trotter to Captain Baillie Hamilton, 30 June 1847; Gallagher, 'Fowell Buxton', pp. 55-6.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Temperley, *White Dreams*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>28</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 282-317. The impact of such criticisms on the West Africa squadron are detailed in Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> DRO, D5991/10/74, Augustus Arkwright to his grandfather, 7 November 1842.

spread of Christianity as inspiration for further explorations of the ‘dark continent’.<sup>30</sup> As naval surgeon Dr McIlroy remarked in 1842 when reporting on the mission’s collapse: ‘If this country is to be colonised and Christianized, it can only be effected by means of native missionaries.’<sup>31</sup> The missionary movement expanded in the 1840s. The CMS had established Fourah Bay College in Freetown in 1827, and trained Sierra Leonean missionary teachers like Samuel Crowther, who then travelled to other parts of West Africa to establish missions and disseminate the civilising message.<sup>32</sup>

Captain Trotter maintained a correspondence with Crowther after the expedition. ‘I still have hope that a time will come that great work shall be accomplished’, Crowther wrote to Trotter in 1850, ‘and the Niger will yet become a highway to bear the messengers of the glad tidings of salvation on its waters to the interior of this continent, and be the means, in God’s providence, of effectually abolishing the Slave-trade’.<sup>33</sup> Trotter also wrote introductory remarks for a published defence of naval suppression written by an American missionary, Reverend J. Leighton Wilson. Trotter believed in the connection between anti-slavery, the British presence, and the spiritual revival of the continent: ‘the social and moral condition of a vast continent, and the diffusion of light and knowledge amongst the people of Africa are staked, to all human appearance, on the future conduct of this country in respect to the Slave Trade’.<sup>34</sup>

However, other officers remained unconvinced about the efficacy of expeditions into the African interior. Much of the criticism surrounded dangers to health, explored in Chapter 3. Commodore Charles Hotham wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1847 expressing doubts regarding an expedition to the Lagos lagoons. ‘I am satisfied we shall obtain some geographical information at an enormous cost of life’, he wrote, ‘and I consider that our gain will there end: for as for checking the slave trade, or benefiting commerce, I am skeptical enough to think we shall neither do one or the other’. Hotham did not believe that any expeditionary enterprise could end the slave trade, due to its pervasive character which was

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<sup>30</sup> T.C. McCaskie, ‘Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century’ in Porter (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 673. See Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 308-12 for details of further exploration.

<sup>31</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 20 December 1842.

<sup>32</sup> McCaskie, ‘Cultural Encounters’, pp. 669-70. Crowther established the Abeokuta mission in 1843.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Crowther to Henry Trotter, 4 July 1850, published in the *The Colonial Magazine* (December 1850), pp. 1-15.

<sup>34</sup> Captain H.D. Trotter, ‘Introduction’ to Rev. J. Leighton Wilson, *The British Squadron on the Coast of Africa* (London: James Ridgway, 1851), p. iv.

‘Hydra headed, with fascinating qualities which dazzle and eclipse legitimate dealings’.<sup>35</sup> Hotham exemplified some of the doubts over the efficacy of abolitionist policy which troubled the squadron throughout its period of operation. With the relative failure of expeditionary activity to initiate success in suppression of the slave trade, the navy’s anti-slavery role on shore was increasingly supplemented by diplomacy and the pursuit of treaties.

### **Naval officers and anti-slavery treaties**

British diplomatic efforts to suppress the slave trade off the West African coast were broadly focused on two areas. The first was the achievement of bilateral agreements with foreign powers in a framework of international law, within which naval action was sanctioned and facilitated. This was led by the Foreign Office, and administered by its Slave Trade Department.<sup>36</sup> The other strand of diplomatic efforts concentrated on agreements with African rulers to end slave trading in their territories; these anti-slave-trade treaties were also intended to guarantee the broader goals of a privileged status for British commerce, including freedom to trade and protection of British property. In the relative absence of consular officials on the coast before 1850, naval officers were tasked with such negotiations, or ‘palaver’ (see, for example, Fig. 8). By the 1860s, 107 treaties were in existence, often accompanied by subsidies to the African ruler and naval measures to ensure the treaties were upheld.<sup>37</sup> In this context officers were regarded as Britain’s agents, tasked with contributing to knowledge and spreading the messages of goodwill, abolition, commerce and civilisation. However, negotiations invariably required co-operation and adjustments in policy. As Alan Lester has argued, colonial discourses in this period ‘were made and remade, rather than simply transferred or imposed’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/8, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 5 November 1847, ff. 157-8.

<sup>36</sup> See Keith Hamilton, ‘Zealots and Helots: the slave trade department of the nineteenth-century Foreign Office’ in Hamilton and Salmon (eds), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire*, pp. 20-41.

<sup>37</sup> Lynn, “‘Imperialism’”, pp. 24-25; Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 5.

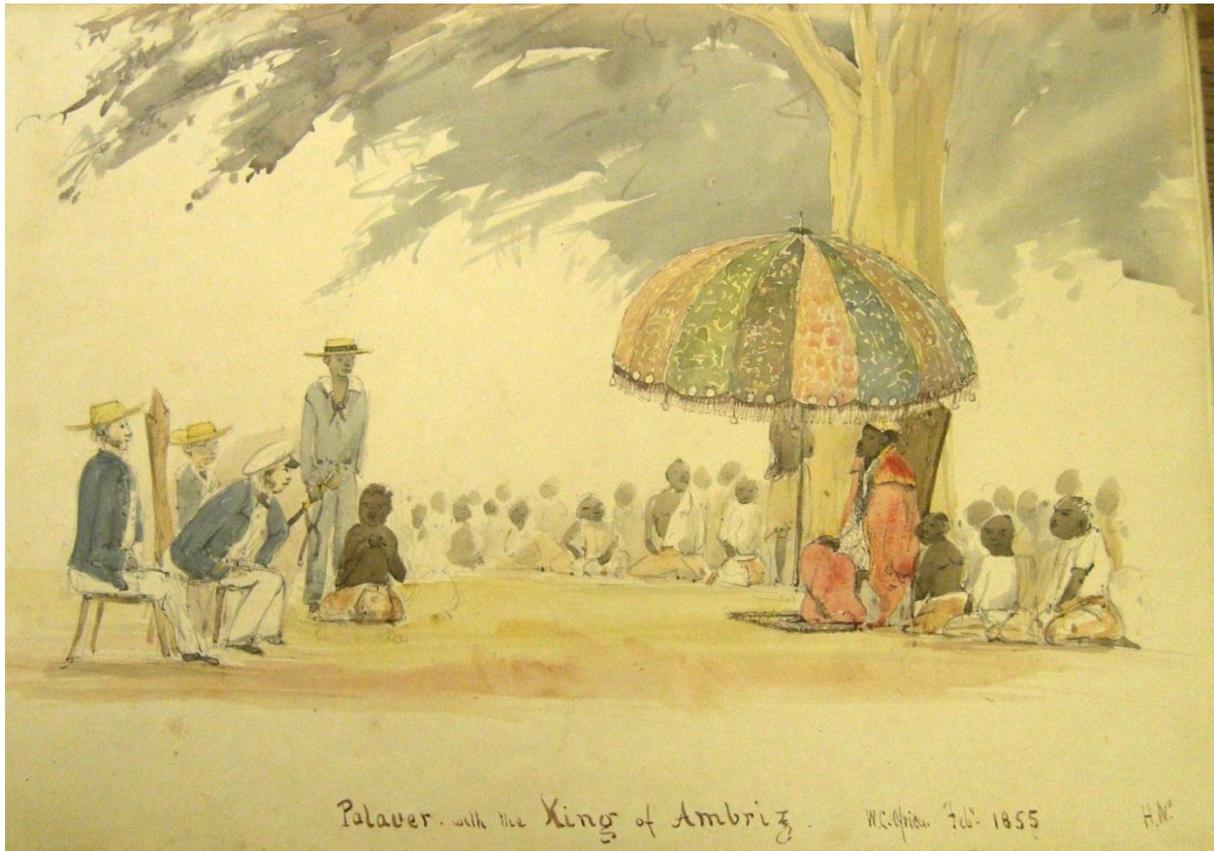


Fig. 8: 'Palaver with the King of Ambriz', Commander Henry Need of HMS *Linnet*, c. 1855 (NMM, ART/10).<sup>39</sup>

African rulers were offered, and demanded, compensation for abandoning the slave trade. For example, Captain W. Tucker of HMS *Iris* encouraged the signing of a treaty with King Pepple and the Bonny chiefs in 1841. In return, Britain agreed to deliver goods to the value of 10,000 dollars annually for five years. In 1847, King Gezo of Dahomey claimed his annual revenue from the slave trade was 300,000 dollars, and only this sum would be regarded as an adequate level of compensation.<sup>40</sup> Commander Hugh Dunlop reported on demands for compensation by the Sherbro rulers in 1848:

No sooner was the treaty signed than they requested to know what they were to receive as recompense for having done so!! When it was explained to them that if they strictly adhered to the terms of the treaty ... the sum of three hundred dollars would be distributed amongst them, they at once declared it to be much too small a

<sup>39</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1949), p. 150; Robin Law, 'An African Response to Abolition: Anglo-Dahomian Negotiations on Ending the Slave Trade, 1838-77', *Slavery and Abolition*, 16:3 (1995), p. 289.

sum to be divided amongst three kings!!! They were tolerably satisfied however when they were told that their opinion of the smallness of the sum would be made known to Queen Victoria.<sup>41</sup>

Dunlop's focus on communication between monarchs illustrates how officers' dealings with African rulers were often played out within British hierarchical society models.<sup>42</sup> In recognition of African diplomatic conventions, an often elaborate exchange of presents was also commonplace, a tradition from earlier European-African slave trade negotiations.<sup>43</sup> In Dahomey, Lieutenant Frederick Forbes remarked, 'all preliminaries are settled by presents'. Missions often had a budget for gifts offered to African rulers as part of agreements. In negotiations of 1862-63, the King of Dahomey provided Commodore Arthur Eardley Wilmot with a long list of presents that he wished for in return for a treaty, which included 'an English carriage and horses'.<sup>44</sup> Naval officers were expected to ensure a treaty by any means possible: while in the best case scenario this was achieved by diplomacy, in other cases, bribery was also involved.<sup>45</sup>

Naval officers regarded themselves as more than messengers. Commander Hugh Dunlop served on the West African coast on the *Alert* between 1847 and 1849, and was responsible for the negotiation of a number of treaties. His intentions for a 'grand palaver' with the Sherbro rulers in 1848 reveal the multifaceted role of officers in these negotiations. Alongside an agreement to ensure suppression, Dunlop sought to 'mediate a peace' between the chiefs to conclude a war which had caused 'great destruction of life & property, as well as to the great detriment of the Sierra Leone trade up the Sherbro river.'<sup>46</sup> A desire to end conflict between African peoples became a key component of the anti-slavery mission, in order to minimise the practice of rulers selling prisoners of war as slaves. In the case of the Sherbro, war was also disruptive to British trade in the rivers there. Dunlop's mission to Bendo in 1849 had similar aims, as the rulers there sold prisoners of war to the slave dealers at Gallinas. Royal Navy vessels had blockaded the River Gallinas, but their attempts were

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<sup>41</sup> USNA, MS 59, Dunlop Remark Book, 12 February 1848. Dunlop's emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> David Richardson, 'Cultures of Exchange: Atlantic Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 19 (2009), pp. 151-79.

<sup>44</sup> Lieutenant Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 1 November 1849. Printed in Tim Coates (ed.), *King Guezo of Dahomey, 1850-1852: The Abolition of the Slave Trade on the West Coast of Africa* (London: The Stationery Office, 2001), p. 17; TNA ADM 123/183, Lord John Russell to Captain Burton, 23 June 1863.

<sup>45</sup> Temperley, *White Dreams*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> USNA, MS 59, Dunlop Remark Book, 12 February 1848.

thwarted by slave dealers who established an alternative trade in goods with which to purchase slaves in the nearby Boom River. The Governor of Sierra Leone declared himself 'unable to prevent [these] slave dealers receiving what supplies they pleased from the colony'. 'Under these circumstances', Dunlop wrote, 'I resolved to take upon myself the whole responsibility of stopping this infamous trade so disgraceful to a British colony. My great hope of succeeding was by means of the chiefs of these rivers, and to them I now applied to make a Treaty with me for the suppression of the slave trade'.<sup>47</sup> According to Dunlop, he single-handedly succeeded in agreeing a treaty of peace and abolition, and as such personified the determination and initiative of some of the squadron's officers.

It was those officers, like Dunlop, who appreciated how coastal African societies worked, including the complex position of African rulers, who were successful in diplomacy. Commander Thomas Forbes was instructed to make 'treaties with all the Chiefs from Grand Popoe to Quitta' in 1852. In a letter to Commodore Henry William Bruce, he reported a conversation with a ruler whose income was generated from tax placed on slaves passing through his territory, and who wished 'it would be explained how he was to support himself'. Forbes pointed out to him:

The benefits of increasing trade ... that he had hundreds of thousands of acres of land, which by a little cultivation would produce a great quantity of palm oil and cotton, and by placing a small duty thereon, he would obtain a larger revenue than the one he at present receives through the slave trade. He appeared to be much pleased with the suggestions, and said he would call upon the English for protection in case of need.<sup>48</sup>

An extract from Commander Hunt's 1859 report of treaty negotiations with the Gallinas rulers epitomises the confidence of the British position. Hunt explained to them how they would become 'happier, richer, and more prosperous' by learning the 'arts of husbandry' and 'arts of peace':

I then addressed them on the subject of their wars and Slave Trade, pointing out to them how one caused the other, and how they both, united, caused poverty, misery, desolation, and stagnation of trade in Africa, and that it would ever remain so until

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 5 July 1849. Dunlop's emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, FO 84/893, Thomas G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, 5 February 1852, ff. 136-7.

they acted up to the spirit and letter of their Treaty; and that they need not imagine that the Chiefs would be able to pursue this course any longer, for that Great Britain had the power and the right to stop them, and was determined to use it.<sup>49</sup>

However, not all diplomatic agreements followed this ideal model. Naval officers experienced many fraught attempts at mediation, particularly with the Kings of Dahomey. Missions to Dahomey to end the exportation of slaves were pursued from the late 1830s to the 1870s, covering the reigns of King Gezo and his son and successor Glele. Both rulers were eager to promote legitimate trade in palm oil, and exports from Dahomey rapidly increased in the late 1840s. However, rather than see it as an alternative to the slave trade, the Kings wished to pursue both trades simultaneously.<sup>50</sup> As Lieutenant Frederick Forbes acknowledged in 1849:

The price of a slave ... is very high, being (in goods) from 80 to 100 dollars. Hence with many captures there is great loss; the consequence is, that each slave-merchant counteracts the chances of the losses in some degree, by embarking also in the palm-oil trade, and at this moment not one slave-merchant in Whydah but works both trades.<sup>51</sup>

Although ending slave exports and promoting legitimate trade in Dahomey were the main concerns of officers, these objectives became inseparable from the desire to end the practice of human sacrifice, principally of war captives, practiced at 'customs' ceremonies in honour of deceased kings.<sup>52</sup> Forbes accompanied British consular officials on visits to Gezo in pursuit of a treaty in 1849 and 1850. He was selected by Commodore Arthur Fanshawe as 'an officer who has now considerable experience on the African station, and acquired some knowledge of the native languages and habits'. Forbes had by this time already published one account of his service on the West Africa squadron, and possessed a genuine interest in

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<sup>49</sup> 'Reports from Vice-Admiralty Courts and from British Naval Officers Relating to the Slave Trade', *PP* 1858-59 (2569), Commander Hunt to Commodore Wise, 6 November 1858, pp. 203-5.

<sup>50</sup> Law, 'An African Response', pp. 295-6, 305; E.A. Soumanni, 'The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in Dahomey, 1818-1858', in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade*, pp. 78-92. The Kings of Dahomey also negotiated with other European powers, for example France in 1851.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 November 1849. Printed in Coates (ed.), *King Guezo*, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Law, 'An African Response', pp. 283-4.

African peoples.<sup>53</sup> Alongside the message of abolition, he was tasked with relaying Britain's broader vision which would 'see Christianity introduced into every part of Africa, and thereby to increase the civilisation, welfare and happiness of her people'. Gezo, however, stressed the intrinsic nature of the slave trade in his society: 'My people cannot in a short space of time become an agricultural people ... All my nation – all are soldiers, and the Slave Trade feeds them'.<sup>54</sup> Gezo signed a treaty in 1852, but it was judged inadequate by the British. A naval blockade to coerce Dahomey was raised that year, although a definitive agreement on ending the slave trade eluded Anglo-Dahomian diplomacy throughout the 1850s.<sup>55</sup>

These relations reveal the diplomatic difficulties and frustrations faced by naval officers. Very often African rulers did not consent to requests for treaties, and the broader British goals of protection of trade or the end to human sacrifice were rejected. They invariably had their own objectives to pursue and could manipulate British involvement for their own benefit: missionaries, for example, were welcomed in the hope that their presence would lead to increased economic opportunities. The King of Bonny was not unusual in signing a treaty yet continuing to trade in slaves. It has been argued that the eventual demise of the slave trade and shift to commercial agriculture owed more to economic self-interest than to treaties, as it was forced on African powers by the closure of the Brazilian slave market in 1850 and its subsequent impact on demand for slaves.<sup>56</sup> These limitations of naval abolitionist strategy were recognised by naval officers and conveyed to policy-makers. Captain Joseph Denman presented the following evidence to a parliamentary Select Committee in 1842:

I believe that all over Africa the natives prefer the slave trade to any other trade ... wherever the slave trade exists people never turn to legitimate traffic at all, unless the slave trade is insufficient to supply their wants ... When the slave trade no longer

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<sup>53</sup> Forbes later published *Dahomey and the Dahomans, being the journals of two missions to the King of Dahomey and residence at his capital in the years 1849 and 1850* (London, 1851). Chapter 6 explores his perceptions of African peoples.

<sup>54</sup> Commodore Fanshawe to Lieutenant Forbes, 9 September 1849; Journal of Lieutenant Forbes, 8 July 1850. Printed in Coates (ed.), *King Guezo*, pp. 15-16, 78-80.

<sup>55</sup> Law, 'An African Response', pp. 294-5, 299.

<sup>56</sup> Lynn, "'Imperialism'", pp. 20-30, 33; Robin Law, 'An African Response', p. 300.

supplies what they want they are compelled to labour and raise produce, and they are then ready enough to engage in lawful trade.<sup>57</sup>

Commander V.G. Hickley of HMS *Childers* reported to the Admiralty after visiting the Pongas and Nunez rivers in 1857. He declared treaties agreed there ‘the purest farce’, and believed that the slave trade’s survival or downfall was dependent on the self-interest of local rulers. They agreed treaties only while ‘circumstances make it worth their while ... I believe firmly that nearly every mulatto in the Rio Ponga will slave deal if he can conveniently’.<sup>58</sup> Commander George F. Burgess of the *Hecate* reported on similar limitations of agreements reached in the Bight of Benin in 1857. He believed legitimate commerce to be ‘unsecure’ because of the intrinsic role of slave trading in African society:

The older chiefs who value money are attracted to a measure to the more certain mode of making it by employing their slaves in Palm Oil making and trading, but the younger ones are disgusted with so womanish a following as the one named, and sigh for a return of the exciting pursuit of man hunting; and when that becomes worth their while, and when they can succeed in getting a market, no Treaty obligation will be at all binding on them.<sup>59</sup>

It was not only the defiance of African rulers that caused frustrations. Treaties often included clauses guaranteeing freedom of movement or particular trade policies for European traders; as a result British merchants made demands on naval officers for protection or assistance in trade disputes. In 1838, naval surgeon Robert Flockhart of the *Brisk* wrote of a clash between merchants and a local ruler in the River Pongas. With resolution of the disagreement unlikely, ‘we expect to go back again in about a month and take the Brig up the river and burn his town, it is the only way to frighten them’.<sup>60</sup>

However, the British merchants defended by the navy were not necessarily tied to the anti-slavery cause. In 1863, Commodore Arthur Eardley Wilmot informed Rear-Admiral Walker (Commander-in-Chief of the Cape of Good Hope and West Africa stations) about ‘the

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa: Captain the Honourable Joseph Denman, R.N. 22-27 June 1842’, in *Trial of Pedro de Zulueta, Jun., on a charge of slave trading* (London: C. Wood & Co., 1844), pp. 108, 123-4.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, ADM 123/176, V.G. Hickley to Commodore Wise, 4 December 1857.

<sup>59</sup> CAC, BEAM 1/8, Burgess Journal, 1857, no folios.

<sup>60</sup> NAS, GD 76/458, Flockhart Letters, 12 November 1838.

extraordinary opinion' of British merchant vessels concerning the information they were bound to provide naval officers. Wilmot claimed that in fear of repercussions from slave dealers, 'they laugh and shake their heads, turning the subject off by saying "they had rather not say a word"'. Wilmot declared this truculence 'a reproach to the British Government, and to our squadron out here, as well as a scandal to the British name, that Englishmen go against Englishmen in their efforts to suppress the slave trade'. This was particularly the case considering 'the cruizers are here as well for their protection, and to demand reparation [for outrages against them], as they are to suppress the slave trade'.<sup>61</sup>

As part of agreements with African rulers, naval officers also had an obligation to protect missionaries, and received frequent requests for assistance from British subjects.<sup>62</sup> As Samuel Crowther wrote to Captain Trotter from the Yoruba Mission in 1850: 'the movements of the ships of war are regarded by the people of Abbeokuta as their protection ... should the removal of the squadron take place, and nothing be done to supply its place, the evil consequences of it will be of the greatest magnitude'.<sup>63</sup> Relations between naval officers and missionaries could become tense when the latter believed the navy should do more to support their cause. For example, in 1851 the missionaries at Badagry wrote to British naval officers to report of insurrection there. They asked for protection being 'surrounded by many enemies'. When Captain Heath refused on the grounds of risks of disease, the missionaries replied:

The Commander of H.M. Ships of war do not generally pay so much consideration to the health of their crews, when a slaver is in the question, & surely the protection of about 15 Englishmen with a large amount of property, besides some kindred of British subjects (liberated Africans) who in case of defeat would most assuredly be again consigned to slavery, is a matter at least not less important.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, ADM 123/181, Arthur Eardley Wilmot to Rear-Admiral Walker, 9 December 1863.

<sup>62</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, pp. 238-9. Examples of the interlinked nature of their respective roles are found in the correspondence between naval officers and missionaries of the Yoruba mission of the CMS. See SCAUB, CMS Archive: CA2/05 and CA2/08.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel Crowther to Captain Trotter, 4 July 1850, *The Colonial Magazine*, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>64</sup> SCAUB, CMS Archive: CA2/05/1-11, correspondence between Captain Heath and the missionaries at Badagry, 16-19 June 1851. As will be explored in Chapter 5, recaptives became British subjects once liberated from condemned slave vessels.

The navy appears a conservative force in contrast to the missionaries who lived and worked among liberated Africans and local people. Such correspondence suggests that missionaries thought more broadly and ambitiously in terms of the anti-slavery vision, encouraging intervention in ‘native battles’ while naval officers urged caution. It also reflects the constraints on naval officers charged with anti-slavery diplomacy, whose freedom to effect change, should they wish to, was limited by their professional status and obligations to follow orders.

Zoe Laidlaw has argued that the 1830s witnessed a key transition in colonial administration. Patronage was relocated from the metropole to the colonies, and imperial administrators, a large number of whom were military veterans, operated influential personal networks.<sup>65</sup> In their diplomatic role, naval officers were expected to become familiar with local government structures, rulers and peoples, and as such worked within existing imperial networks of communication concerning anti-slavery, which included colonial government, humanitarian networks, explorers and scientists, and British merchants. They contributed to the connections of empire, providing information and insight in the formulation of imperial discourses.<sup>66</sup> By mid-century, officers were no longer only responsible for intercepting slave vessels; some faced a wide array of demands for action, information or protection from differing interests. The navy’s anti-slavery role developed into something much more wide-ranging than that first envisaged post-1807. Treaties and negotiations with African rulers were one form of this development; when these appeared to have limited influence, the navy was also called upon for a more aggressive approach to the anti-slavery cause.

### **Offensive action**

The concept of offensive naval action to target the roots of the slave trade was not new. For example, boat service up rivers to target slave trading was initiated with the squadron’s

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<sup>65</sup> Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815-45: Patronage, The Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005). Colonial networks provided a way of rewarding comrades and exerting authority. Laidlaw has calculated that a large number of senior colonial officials were military veterans, although less commonly from the navy (see pp. 21-7).

<sup>66</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, ‘Introduction: Imperial Spaces, imperial subjects’ in idem (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-2. See Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) for another example of British intervention in Africa. Price examines how the British created a culture of imperial rule in Southern Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century, and how interaction between British and local peoples (the Xhosa) were central to this process.

inception, and the language of combat and war was used frequently. Commodore George Collier recommended a blockade of the River Pongas in 1820 as a way ‘of crushing, so unexpensively a large and thriving branch of the slave trade’. He added: ‘nor can any other nation take umbrage at a measure frequently adopted in times of war’.<sup>67</sup> Such action continued throughout the period of suppression, as Commander Henry Need’s watercolour sketch of the capture of the slave ship *Paulina* in the same river in 1853 shows (Fig. 9). What was different from the 1840s, however, was the increasing readiness shown by the British to turn to offensive action and the destruction of settlements of those who refused to accede to a treaty or later broke terms. This new interventionist approach towards suppression was fuelled by a renewed confidence in the British anti-slavery mission. The various treaties signed with foreign powers and African rulers had led to an expansion in what was perceived to be possible, and yet the limitations of these agreements had encouraged new ideas about the most effective ways to ensure success.



Fig. 9: ‘Capture of a Slaver, the Brigantine *Paulina*, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1853 in the Rio Ponga, W. C. of Africa’, Commander Henry Need of HMS *Linnet*, 1853 (NMM, ART/10).

<sup>67</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, ‘Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820’, f. 40.

The increase in the squadron's strength during the 1830s made possible close blockades of slave embarkation points and the targeting of slave barracoons and other inshore slaving establishments to prevent enslaved Africans leaving the West African coast. Captain Joseph Denman was an experienced officer of the West Africa squadron and a passionate advocate of the anti-slavery cause. He was an influential proponent of the policy of 'preventing the embarkation of slaves', believing that to 'this first great object the capture of vessels should be considered as entirely secondary'.<sup>68</sup> In 1840, ships under Denman's command were engaged in a blockade of the River Gallinas when Denman was instructed by the Governor of Sierra Leone to rescue two British subjects reported to be held by Manna, a local ruler. Denman secured the release of the prisoners, and also induced the King to sign a treaty whereby the slave trade was abolished throughout his territories. Denman was also authorised to destroy the barracoons, release over 800 enslaved Africans and expel all (mainly Spanish) slave traders.<sup>69</sup>

This action initially earned Denman a commendation from Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, and other officers followed his example. For example, Commander Henry James Matson initiated a large-scale attack on the factories at Cabenda and Ambriz in 1842 and liberated over 1300 captive Africans.<sup>70</sup> However, a change in government in 1841 led to the squadron's policy of blockade combined with the destruction of property being increasingly condemned. The new Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, was less inclined to assert British power to effect suppression and more concerned with principles of legality than his predecessor. In 1842, Aberdeen shifted the boundaries of discretion in relation to naval suppression when he wrote a letter to the Lords of the Admiralty, which was subsequently published, declaring that 'blockading the rivers, landing and destroying buildings and carrying off persons held in slavery in countries with which Great Britain is not at war cannot be considered as sanctioned by the law of nations'.<sup>71</sup> The news of this change in policy soon reached the African coast. Commander Matson told a Select Committee that 'the slave traders exaggerated this letter to an enormous extent ... [and] represented to those Chiefs and natives of Africa [who may have signed treaties] that there was a revolution in England for the

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 122-3. See Chapter 4 for Denman's anti-slavery views.

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 94-95; Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 120-121; Jenny Wraight, "'The Most Disagreeable Service": the West Coast of Africa Station', Chasing Freedom: Abolition 200 Conference: [www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning\\_adult\\_conferences\\_Chasingfreedom.htm](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning_adult_conferences_Chasingfreedom.htm) [accessed 26 November 2009].

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question 1807-1869* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 185.

purpose of carrying on the Slave Trade'.<sup>72</sup> The Gallinas slave traders sued Denman personally for damages and Denman was compelled to return to London. Not until 1848 was it laid down that officers could not be held personally responsible for action against property.

Denman remained deeply committed to the squadron and its tactics: he lobbied the Admiralty on the benefits of close blockade and the 'efficacy of destroying Slave Factories'. He became a principal witness in Parliamentary Committees and published pamphlets in support of the squadron in the 1840s.<sup>73</sup> He had gone beyond his official instructions in ordering the destruction of the Gallinas barracoons, although the Foreign and Colonial Secretaries and the Admiralty were fully informed of his intentions. Giving evidence before a Select Committee in 1842, he declared that the slave factories 'were not destroyed as a part of the powers with which I was invested', but in consequence 'of peculiar circumstances, which I took advantage of for the purpose'. During the blockade, 'the people upon the shore had been guilty of the most inhuman conduct towards my boats, conduct which a state of war would not justify'. As a result, Denman argued: 'Nothing of the sort had been done before, and therefore I did it under very heavy responsibility. I could not have struck out a new line without some special grounds to go upon'.<sup>74</sup>

Denman's stance was vindicated when a government commission to investigate naval suppression concluded in 1844 that tactics of inshore cruising and blockading should be pursued (although with considerations of legality adhered to) and as a result the squadron's ships almost doubled in number.<sup>75</sup> In February 1845, Commodore William Jones was ordered to the Gallinas after the local rulers were accused of injuring and selling into slavery three liberated Africans (and therefore British subjects). Jones reported to Lieutenant-Governor Fergusson of Sierra Leone that with a force of '286 men, in 18 boats', the slave barracoon was 'leveled with the ground' and three Gallinas towns were 'burnt to the ground and utterly destroyed'. The action he described as 'a salutary lesson to those who forget the respect due to our Sovereign, and a discouragement to the Slave Trade'. Jones made clear that the inhabitants had been given notice of the action 'so that I trust the Chiefs will be the only sufferers from their wicked folly'. Jones's letter demonstrates the conviction of officers in the

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Joseph Denman, *West India Interests, African Emigration and Slave Trade* (1848), pp. 24-6.

<sup>73</sup> Denman, *West India Interests*, pp. 24-6. See Chapter 3 for the criticism against the squadron and Denman's defence.

<sup>74</sup> 'Minutes of Evidence' in *Trial of Pedro de Zulueta*, pp. 127, 133.

<sup>75</sup> Bethell, *The Abolition*, p. 199.

new tactics pursued when African chiefs refused to come to terms, and the arrogance associated with Britain's naval strength. He reported on a subsequent palaver with the Gallinas rulers in which he declared: 'England had set her face against the Slave Trade, and was acting against it with a power which would be found invincible, and must prevail at last'.<sup>76</sup>

Debates in the Admiralty and parliament as to the efficacy of offensive measures continued throughout the 1840s. The evidence of passionate debate between individual officers reveals how naval personnel were actively engaged in effecting the best means for suppression. Commander Matson wrote in a published pamphlet of 1848 that the adoption of Denman's recommendation to prevent embarkation 'cannot be too strongly urged'.<sup>77</sup> Others like Commodore Charles Hotham championed off-shore cruising. Hotham's stand was informed by a belief that cruisers sailing close to shore were observed by slave dealers who then moved their captives via inland waterways to another point of embarkation.<sup>78</sup> Denman and Hotham had public disagreements about the best ways to enforce suppression; that Denman was willing to defy his Commodore exemplifies his zealous reputation. Denman condemned Hotham's poor management of the squadron, and particularly his disregard for the policy of blockade, claiming, 'with every thing to learn, he was thus left to grope his way in the dark towards the suppression of the slave trade'.<sup>79</sup> In a private letter, Hotham criticised Denman's 'ignorance' and 'fanciful theories' exhibited before a parliamentary committee on anti-slavery measures. He wrote that Denman's recommendations were 'senseless' and 'laugheable [sic]'.<sup>80</sup>

After the legal judgement of 1848 fell in Denman's favour, the force of opinion swung the same way, and blockade became acknowledged as official policy. Naval blockading of major ports of embarkation peaked in 1847 and 1848, when one in nine of the total 1575 slave vessels captured by the British navy were taken.<sup>81</sup> In 1849 Hotham declared a 'state of war' and destroyed the Gallinas barracoons for a second time, as a result of local rulers' non-

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<sup>76</sup> Commodore Jones to Lieutenant-Governor Fergusson, 7 February 1845 and 18 February 1845. Printed at [www.pdavis.nl/Jones\\_3.htm](http://www.pdavis.nl/Jones_3.htm) [accessed 21 July 2009].

<sup>77</sup> Henry James Matson, *Remarks on the Slave Trade and African Squadron*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: James Ridgeway, Piccadilly, 1848), p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Shirley Roberts, *Charles Hotham: A Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Denman, *The African Squadron and Mr Hutt's Committee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: John Mortimer, 1850), pp. 41, 44.

<sup>80</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/11, Charles Hotham to Captain Baillie Hamilton, no date [letter book c. 1847-1849].

<sup>81</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 186, pp. 284-5.

observance of earlier treaties. He also imposed an official blockade, which lasted ten months until the rulers conceded.<sup>82</sup> In 1852, Commodore Bruce informed the Admiralty Secretary of successes in the Bight of Benin, whereby 'it appeared that the mere declaration of blockade had the effect of bringing the Chiefs to the terms which HM Govt desired from them'.<sup>83</sup> The legacy of Denman's action was clear when in 1861 the official objective of the squadron as stated by the Slave Trade Department was 'to prevent the shipment of Slaves at all, not to capture them'.<sup>84</sup>

One consequence of these new hardline strategies was suspicions that Britain's 'humanitarian' operations were aimed less at the suppression of slave traffic and more for the commercial advantage of the British in the obstruction of other nations' merchant fleets. Both Brazil and Portugal feared Britain wished to seize Portugal's African settlements under the cover of abolition, and establish alternative sources for trade in sugar, coffee, cotton and other produce.<sup>85</sup> This inference was supported by comments in 1840 of George Elliot, Commander of HMS *Columbine*, in a letter to his uncle, the Earl of Minto and First Lord of the Admiralty. Elliot wrote that abolitionist policy on the coast around St Paul de Loando was equally important in deriving commercial advantage against the Portuguese as for its humanitarian motives:

If we succeed in suppressing the Portuguese slave trade on this coast, I think they will necessarily abandon their colonies ... The native blacks would however soon supply their places as members of the civilised world, and the trade in beeswax and ivory would be opened to the competition of English manufacturers.<sup>86</sup>

That such sentiments were expressed in private correspondence at such high ranks of the Admiralty suggests that they drove naval abolitionist policy to some extent. Similarly, Commodore Charles Hotham stressed the interlinked nature of treaties and British trading

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<sup>82</sup> A.W.H. Pearsall, 'Sierra Leone and the Suppression of the Slave Trade', *Sierra Leone Studies*, 12 (1959), p. 221.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, FO 84/893, Commodore Bruce to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 11 February 1852, ff. 100-2. It was not only in the Bights that British intervention became the leading anti-slavery policy. In 1860, HMS *Espoir* bombarded three villages in River Niger where attacks against the British had occurred. See Temperley, *White Dreams*, pp. 170, 173.

<sup>84</sup> Memorandum by W.H. Wyld, 7 August 1861. Printed in *Slavery in Diplomacy: The Foreign Office and the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Historians History Note 17 (2007), pp. 112-15.

<sup>85</sup> Lambert, 'Slavery, Free Trade', p. 66.

<sup>86</sup> NLS, MS 12054, George Elliot to Earl Minto, 5 January 1840, ff. 170-4.

advantage in a letter to the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1847. ‘Much time is required to gain an insight and general knowledge of African affairs’, he wrote, ‘besides the suppression of the slave trade, we have treaties to conclude and mercantile interests ... the trade of Africa is becoming too important to be neglected’.<sup>87</sup> Hotham was appointed as Commodore in large part due to his diplomatic abilities, in a desire from the Admiralty to foster good relations with the French. Hotham acknowledged that he was ‘called upon to perform diplomatic duties foreign to my profession, independent of the simple slave question.’<sup>88</sup> Hotham stressed the ‘commercial advantages’ of anti-slavery treaties in his instructions to Commander Murray in 1846, in particular as Anglo-French relations reached a delicate phase:

... the French have concluded treaties with nine Chiefs on different parts of the Coast thus sowing the seeds for future commercial advantages ... we can neutralize their schemes by a similar course of action ... should you fail in persuading the chiefs to relinquish the slave trade; then you will endeavour to see the treaty entered into with the French and demand the fulfillment of a similar one.<sup>89</sup>

British objectives in suppression had evolved by mid-century, with a character increasingly shaped by diplomatic maneuvering alongside humanitarian goals. This created scepticism about British motives from African rulers and foreign powers, and nowhere was this more pronounced than in reactions to events at Lagos in 1851.

### **Coercing Africa**

A constant problem confronted by the British was how most effectively to deal with those African rulers who persisted in supplying slaves to local dealers. The British action against Lagos in 1851 represents an example of the interaction between abolitionist ideals, commercial expansion and an increased readiness for intervention. All involved the attempt to impose social and economic change on African rulers, and in the case of Lagos, this interference developed into diplomatic and military pressure to coerce them. Positioned at the entrance of a long coastal lagoon, during the 1840s Lagos was a centre for slave trading, particularly from the kingdom of Dahomey. British policy-makers identified the towns of the

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<sup>87</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/8, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 13 February 1847, ff. 62-4.

<sup>88</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/8, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 31 August 1847, ff. 136-7; Roberts, *Charles Hotham*, pp. 62, 69.

<sup>89</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/8, Charles Hotham to Commander Murray, 25 November 1846, ff. 36-7.

lagoon as ports from which palm oil could be exported, and the gateway of a potentially profitable trade in agricultural products with the Yoruba hinterland. They believed that the navy's task would be made easier if the supply of slaves could be eradicated by the promotion of legal commerce.<sup>90</sup> As Palmerston identified to the Admiralty, the intention was to transform Lagos from 'a den of barbarism' to 'a diffusing centre of civilisation'.<sup>91</sup>

Lagos politics were complicated by a long dynastic dispute which culminated in the usurpation in 1845 of the ruler Akitoye by his nephew, and a leading slave-trader, Kosoko. While Kosoko remained in control and refused to abandon slave exports, the British regarded chances for legitimate trade in the area as poor. In exile in Badagry, Akitoye gained British support, and promised to stop the slave trade at Lagos if reinstated. In 1851, plans were formulated for British intervention in Lagos with the co-operation of palm oil traders, the settlers from Sierra Leone, and the missionaries and the chiefs of Abeokuta, who were sheltering Akitoye.<sup>92</sup> When Kosoko began attacks on the surrounding area in June 1851, there were calls for the navy to intervene to protect British subjects and property. Captain L. Jones received a plea from Obba Shoron, Commander-in-Chief at Abeokuta, for the navy 'to save our lives from the impending storm'. However, Jones's reply was unequivocal. The navy was to remain detached from 'native squabbles':

... the object of England is "peace & goodwill to all countries" ... we do not interfere with the internal arrangements of other peoples, but leave them to settle their own affair, so long as British subjects are protected & unmolested by the Government of the country in which they reside. You will therefore see that it must be by your own activity & exertion united with your allies, that your opponents are defeated.<sup>93</sup>

Shoron appealed to Britain's moral responsibility, claiming, 'the white people who live among us always say the English want to put down the slave trade – if you do not break Lagos war will never cease in the country'. Still the navy maintained a distance, exposing a conservative face in comparison to other groups on the coast. The missionary Reverend H.

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<sup>90</sup> Law, 'Introduction', in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade*, pp. 23-4; Mann, 'The Original Sin', p. 176.

<sup>91</sup> Viscount Palmerston to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 27 September 1851. Printed in Coates (ed.), *King Guezo*, p. 167.

<sup>92</sup> Mark R. Lipschutz and R. Kent Rasmussen (eds), *Dictionary of African Historical Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 11-12, 114.

<sup>93</sup> SCAUB: CMS Archive, CA2/05/1-11, Obba Shoron to Captain Jones, 3 July 1851; Captain Jones to the British residents at Badagry, 18 July 1851.

Townsend wrote angrily that ‘these wars result from the acts of Her Majesty’s cruisers, and from the efforts of Englishmen towards establishing lawful trade. And I would further remark that they are directed against the English nationally, and not the English individually’.<sup>94</sup>

Under such pressure, and with Kosoko refusing to co-operate, Palmerston sanctioned naval intervention in the dispute. In late 1851, the navy were instructed to bombard the town and Kosoko was driven into exile. Midshipman Arthur Onslow of the *Samson* was involved in the attack, alongside crews of the *Penelope*, *Bloodhound* and *Teazer*. In his journal he wrote of the ‘hard tussle’, the shelling ‘which blew up about 30 of the niggers’, and how ‘the town burnt beautifully during the night’. Onslow noted that the town was plundered: ‘there was nothing but canoes passing us laden with plunder ... All I got was a piece of county cloth, a grass handkerchief and a bag of coffee which I gave them a bottle of gin for’. This was despite Captain Jones’s assertion to Commodore Henry Bruce that it was ‘desirable to show that we did not come for pillage, but that our sole object was to stop Slave Trade.’<sup>95</sup>

Akitoye was installed as ruler in 1852, signing a treaty of abolition and guaranteeing free trade for British subjects. In contrast to the navy’s former neutral stance, an authoritative British presence in support of Akitoye was established with the backing of naval officers. Commander Arthur Eardley Wilmot reported to Commodore Bruce: ‘I made him put on his kingly robes, mount his horse, assemble all his Warriors, and ride completely round the Town; I went with him and made the people stop every ten minutes, and call out, “Hurrah for Akitoye”’.<sup>96</sup> In the following decade, Lagos residents established a new set of allegiances to British representatives, including naval officers alongside consular officials, merchants and missionaries. The navy’s presence was particularly important for security, as Palmerston reminded the King of Lagos: ‘Lagos is near the sea, and ... on the sea are the ships and cannon of England’. In 1857, Commodore John Adams informed the Admiralty Secretary that he had specifically stationed a vessel off Lagos to ‘warn the chiefs of the risk they will incur by an infraction of their treaties with us’.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> SCAUB: CMS Archive, CA2/05/1-11, Obba Shoron to Captain Jones, 1 August 1851; Rev. H. Townsend to Commander Wilmot, 5 August 1851. Printed in Coates (ed.), *King Guezo*, p. 161.

<sup>95</sup> SLNSW, MSS 2050, Onslow Journal, 31 December 1851; Captain Jones to Commodore Bruce, 29 December 1851. Printed in Coates (ed.), *King Guezo*, p. 209.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in A. G. Hopkins, ‘Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain’s Annexation of Lagos, 1861’, *The Journal of Economic History*, 40: 4 (1980), p. 780.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, FO 84/1040, Commodore Adams to the Admiralty Secretary, 17 February 1857; Palmerston quoted in Ronald Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 18;

Some naval officers involved in the action at Lagos expressed great pride in their contribution and believed in claims that they were God's instrument in expelling slave traders from the area. In 1852, Reverend Gollmer wrote to Commodore William Bruce that 'we rejoice' in the British act, 'in changing Lagos into a source from which we trust sweet waters will flow and refresh many through the blessings of Christianity'. Gollmer regarded the navy's measures as 'an effectual door opened by a gracious God not only for Lagos but central Africa also, you being the honored instrument to effect it'. Bruce expressed satisfaction with the navy's righteous status and his command of Britain's 'honored instrument'. He declared: 'I look upon "Lagos" as the child of my old age; and I will not desert it. It will – please God! – yet be established – free and flourishing'. Bruce also made clear his sense of responsibility to the area, adding 'I will make it a point to be here again about the 5 jaws, and "strike a blow" should it be necessary ... You may be assured of my best protection and support'.<sup>98</sup>

However, Bruce also regarded Lagos as an exceptional case requiring intervention. Informed of a meeting between Captain Heseltine, the Vice Consul and the Egba war chiefs in 1853, to discuss 'the very laudable object of making peace with the various native tribes at war & to open the road for trade', Bruce expressed his disapproval:

The policy I am required to follow, and which I have taken every means to make known to the officers serving under my orders, is based upon the principle of non-interference in the disputes of the natives – that is, to avoid an interference in favour of either one party or the other, which, to be effectual, would require us to resort to coercive measures. The only exception to this rule is Lagos, where we intend to uphold the authority of Akitoye.<sup>99</sup>

The navy had by this time assumed a moral and righteous character in its dealings on the West African coast, and naval officers like Bruce deliberated how best its authority could be put to use. The navy's 'moral influence', Bruce believed, 'may well be used to put a stop to wars detrimental to commerce, and calculated to retard the diffusion of Christianity and

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Robert Smith, 'The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861: An Outline', *The Journal of African History*, 15:3 (1974), pp. 393-416.

<sup>98</sup> SCAUB: CMS Archive, CA2/05/12-19, correspondence between Commodore Bruce and Rev. C. A. Gollmer, 6 January 1852, 10 November 1853. Bruce's emphasis.

<sup>99</sup> SCAUB: CMS Archive, CA2/05/12-19, correspondence between Commodore Bruce and Rev. H. Townsend, 11 January 1853, 16 February 1853.

civilisation' but in the case of Captain Heseltine, naval officers must not go 'beyond what his instructions authorized him to do'. Bruce's commentary serves as a reminder that naval officers were motivated as much by concepts of duty and professionalism as humanitarianism; in some cases, the 'right' thing to do was simply a matter of following instructions.<sup>100</sup> However, after Lagos, not all subscribed to Bruce's ideal of non-interference.

### **The impact of Lagos**

Historians have urged that British interference in West Africa, and Lagos in particular, must be regarded within the wider context of European imperialism and commercial change in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup> Motivations for British expansion hinged on humanitarian anti-slavery forces on one hand and commercial advantage on the other. Kristin Mann has argued that in the bombardment of Lagos, as in the anti-slavery movement more generally, activists and policy-makers understood morality and self-interest as interconnected elements of one broader process of imperial reform.<sup>102</sup> Such moral authority invested in self-interested interventions in African states' affairs reinforced Britain's sense of superiority in its relations with West African peoples.<sup>103</sup> African rulers certainly viewed British actions as driven by arrogance and aims of commercial expansion rather than philanthropic concern, often encouraged in this opinion by other foreign powers. The King of Dahomey, for example, wished Captain J. P. Luce and his naval colleagues to know:

... that the white men at Wydah & also here – Brazilians, Portuguese, Spanish & French, had always been endeavouring to poison his mind against the English who they represented as being a powerful & rapacious nation, who no sooner obtained a footing in any country than they dethroned its lawful King & took possession of it – for instance at Lagos.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. See Chapter 4 for an exploration of different motivations for service.

<sup>101</sup> Imperial expansion in West Africa was not only a British enterprise, as Europeans and Americans established settlements and trading posts, and displayed a new curiosity about the African interior. See J. F. Ade Ajayi and B. O. Oloruntimehin, 'West Africa in the Anti-Slave Trade Era' in John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 200-21.

<sup>102</sup> Mann, 'The Original Sin', p. 169; Hopkins, 'Property Rights', p. 781.

<sup>103</sup> Robin Law, 'Abolition and Imperialism: International Law and the British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade' in Derek R. Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 150-74.

<sup>104</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 52-4.

By 1861, following a deterioration of the political situation in the interior, Britain annexed Lagos and appointed a governor to protect its interests, a policy designed to initiate a complete suppression of the slave trade from the Bight of Benin. The official policy at Lagos remained one of co-operation and minimum intervention, with the hope that interference at the top of the political system, supported by consular officials, merchants and the navy, would ensure legitimate trade.<sup>105</sup> The wider impact of the action at Lagos, however, was that further intervention was always under consideration in the 1850s and 1860s.

In the planning of coercive measures, naval officers were looked to as sources of information and advice. For example, in 1860, Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell requested ‘careful inquiry’ from officers on the coast regarding ‘rooting out the nest of slave dealers’ established in the River Pongas. Reporting from the river, Commodore William Edmonstone declared that King Catty had broken treaty agreements, and suggested a stoppage of his annuity and ‘that the severe displeasure of the Govt. should be conveyed to him, with the distinct understanding that in the event of any recurrence of such conduct on his part, his town will be destroyed.’ Edmonstone’s recommendations were adopted as policy and Stephen Hill, the governor of Sierra Leone, wrote to the Commodore to commend his strategy. ‘I am glad to find that Her Majesty’s Government has decided that the native chiefs are to be compelled to keep their treaty engagements, leaving their punishment to your discretion’, he wrote, ‘our mild rule is misunderstood & nothing but using force or the demonstration of force can be effectual in such cases.’<sup>106</sup> Such opinions were widespread. In 1863, respecting ‘outrages’ committed against British factories in the River Congo, Commodore Wilmot wrote to Rear-Admiral Walker:

Our object in dealing with the natives of this country should be to make a great and terrible example amongst them when it becomes necessary to use force and show our power, rather than to expose our weakness by sending only a small force which can do nothing effectually, and probably be obliged to retreat with loss of life, as well a loss of reputation.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hopkins, ‘Property Rights’, p. 795.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, ADM 123/181, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 26 November 1860; Commodore Edmonstone to the Lords of the Admiralty, 7 May 1861; Stephen Hill to William Edmonstone, 25 October 1861.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, ADM 123/182, Commodore Wilmot to Rear Admiral Walker, 7 June 1863.

Discussions surrounding further intervention were particularly focused on Dahomey, in the belief that slaving would never be eradicated from the Bight of Benin without action against the kingdom. The British government was also pressured by abolitionist opinion in Britain outraged at the continuance of slave trading there.<sup>108</sup> In 1861, Arthur Eardley Wilmot argued in a letter to the Foreign Secretary in favour of a close blockade and a mission to Dahomey to persuade Glele to give up the slave trade.<sup>109</sup> Wilmot was an ambitious officer with much to contribute about the West Africa squadron and its tactics. He was the son of the colonial administrator Sir John Eardley Eardley-Wilmot, who as an MP in the 1830s and 1840s had been an active campaigner for abolition and emancipation.<sup>110</sup> Wilmot first served on the West African coast from 1850 until 1853 in the *Harlequin*, and pursued treaties with Gezo in 1852. After service elsewhere, including the Crimean War, he returned to the West African coast as Commodore from 1862 to 1866. He prided himself on his knowledge of African affairs, which he believed could inform policy. In a published letter to Palmerston to tell him the ‘truth’ about the slave trade in 1853 he wrote:

Without presumption, I may here state that few officers that have served upon this coast are so well acquainted with the slave dealers personally as myself. I have landed upon *every part* of the western coast, when it was considered dangerous and impracticable ... I have made it my business to know these people *personally*.<sup>111</sup>

Wilmot’s support for the policy of blockade was born from his experiences of negotiations with African rulers who would only “‘sign the paper’ when they find it their interest to do so – but not without, unless *force* is used, and the whole line of coast strictly *blockaded* in the rigid sense of the word.’ He believed close blockades were effectual because Africans were ‘accustomed to European luxuries and manufactures, and cannot live without them. Deprive them of these and they are powerless.’<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> FCO Historians, *Slavery in Diplomacy*, p. 109.

<sup>109</sup> David R. Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 302-03.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Chapman, ‘Wilmot, Sir John Eardley Eardley-, first baronet (1783–1847)’, *ODNB* [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52438](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52438), accessed 15 March 2012].

<sup>111</sup> Arthur Parry Eardley Wilmot, *A Letter to The Right Honorable Viscount Palmerston on the Present State of the African Slave Trade and on the Necessity of Increasing the African Squadron* (London: James Ridgway, London: James Ridgway, 1853), p. 8. Wilmot’s emphasis.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12. Wilmot’s emphasis.

Wilmot's letter of 1861 to Lord Russell, with 'Notes on the African Slave Trade' attached, was written from Plymouth, over seven years since he had last served on the West African coast, exposing the extent of his interest in the squadron's work, and perhaps too his desire to be considered for a future position there. 'Let us then try the plan – all others have as yet failed' he wrote.<sup>113</sup> Wilmot's recommendations were to become the basis for future policy, although objections were raised at first. The Head of the Slave Trade Department, William Wylde, declared that since it was 'some years since he was on the Coast', Wilmot's recommendation of a blockade would not 'in itself be sufficient or effective', instead favouring a policy of 'active measures on shore'. Neither Wylde nor Prime Minister Lord Palmerston supported Wilmot's suggestion for a mission to negotiate with the King, Palmerston declaring Glele 'a brutal savage'.<sup>114</sup>

A year later however, Wilmot was the new Commodore, and travelled to Dahomey on his own initiative to deliver messages of abolition, legitimate trade, the end to human sacrifices, and peace with Abeokuta. At the end of January 1863, he wrote to Rear-Admiral Walker that since his last communication in November the previous year, 'much has transpired that will naturally cause the liveliest interest in all quarters'. The tone of Wilmot's report regarding the mission suggests his decision to visit the King was taken without seeking approval from higher authorities. After a personal invitation and 'mature consideration', he decided to accept in order to make 'an impression on the King'. Wilmot prepared for an absence of 14 days but was away for over 50, which may explain why on his return the Commodore was instructed 'to abstain from undertaking any mission into the interior which might interfere with the execution of his more immediate duties'.<sup>115</sup>

Wilmot wrote extensive reports on the mission to Abomey, the kingdom's capital.<sup>116</sup> He was accompanied by Captain J. P. Luce and Dr Haran of the *Brisk*. In his journal of the mission, Luce wrote that the King was willing to negotiate on the basis that he was 'the most powerful King of the Blacks in Africa', and 'as the Queen was the most powerful sovereign in Europe

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<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 303.

<sup>114</sup> Memorandum by W.H. Wylde, 7 August 1861; Memorandum by Lord Palmerston, 9 August 1861. Printed in FCO Historians, *Slavery in Diplomacy*, pp. 112-6.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, ADM 123/183, Commodore Wilmot to Rear-Admiral Walker, 29 January 1863; Secretary of the Admiralty to Rear-Admiral Walker, 23 March 1863.

<sup>116</sup> 'Despatches from Commodore Wilmot respecting his visit to the King of Dahomey in December 1862 and January 1863', *PP* 1863 (3179). Officers' perceptions of Dahomey and its people on this mission are examined in Chapter 6.

she & he ought to be friends'. If the King agreed to stop the export of slaves, compensation of £3000 a year was offered.<sup>117</sup> However, a treaty was not forthcoming. To calls for abolition, the King replied that 'Dahomians did not understand these arguments, there were plenty of people in Africa to sell & to work too'. Furthermore, the King declared that human sacrifices 'had been instituted by his ancestors ... He dare not discontinue them at once, as if he did so his people would assuredly dethrone him'. Glele did not understand the British right to blockade his trade. He wished the Commodore to permit his vessels to sail uninterrupted and 'even allow the slaves sold by himself to go on their way & not interfere with the vessels shipping them'.<sup>118</sup> The mission was successful in other ways, however. Wilmot reported on the 'friendly disposition' of the King:

"From henceforth," he said, "the King of Dahomey and the Queen of England are one; you shall hold the tail of the kingdom, and I will take the head:" meaning that we should have possession of Whydah for trading purposes, and supply him with everything.<sup>119</sup>

The economic potential for Britain of these relations clearly entered the minds of policy-makers. Wilmot's decision to visit the King was later vindicated when in 1863 the explorer Richard Burton was instructed to continue 'to cultivate the friendly relations which have been established' on a return mission to Dahomey. Lord Russell asserted that 'it is only by personal intercourse with the Dahomian chief that we may hope to persuade him to give up his human sacrifices & turn his energies to the development of the resources of his country'.<sup>120</sup> On this occasion, proposals for offensive action against Dahomey appear to have been put on hold in response to the outcome of Wilmot's mission. Burton was also unable to reach terms with Glele, but Wilmot was placed in charge of implementing the subsequent blockade which lasted for the remainder of the decade, and played a large part in bringing an end to the vestiges of the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 35-6, 68-9.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 164-6. Luce's emphasis.

<sup>119</sup> Commodore Wilmot to Rear-Admiral Walker, 10 February 1863. Printed in 'Despatches from Commodore Wilmot'.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, ADM 123/183, Lord Russell to Captain Burton, 23 June 1863. See Richard Burton, *A Mission to Glele, King of Dahome* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1864).

<sup>121</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 304.



Fig. 10: A hand-sewn flag from a slave ship captured by Commodore Wilmot sent to William Wylde of the Slave Trade Department (NMM, AAA2003).

Wilmot personified the initiative and expertise of many officers of the West Africa squadron. His acquisition of a slaver's flag (Fig. 10) also suggests pride in his work. As a result of time spent travelling the interior, communicating with local peoples and implementing the squadron's objectives, tactics and strategies, naval officers became experts in their fields and informed the policy-making process. The Admiralty sent circulars and questionnaires to senior officers to obtain 'information or suggestions which may contribute, and render more effectual' efforts towards naval suppression.<sup>122</sup> Advice from officers on the coast was also sought to assist decision making. For example, in relation to the Admiralty's proposed attack against the King of Dahomey in 1860, Commodore Edmonstone suggested that Lieutenant E.

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<sup>122</sup> See TNA, ADM 7/606, 'Observations as to the most effectual mode of checking the Slave Trade', c. 1850, and replies from officers to the circular 'Best means to be adopted for the abolition of the African slave trade' in TNA, ADM 123/173.

Lodder ‘could no doubt furnish some valuable information relative to Abbeokuta, and the nature of the country as he has travelled a great deal in the interior’.<sup>123</sup> The potential of this expertise was recognised. In a Foreign Office memorandum of 1861, William Wylde suggested that a ‘conference’ of naval officers who had ‘recently returned from Africa’ would assist the government to ‘take more efficient steps’ towards suppression:

... who from the position they have held would be enabled to give practical opinions upon the means best adapted for putting a stop to the Slave Trade ... some practical measures might be suggested for rendering our efforts for the suppression of the Slave Trade considerably more effective than they now are.<sup>124</sup>

As the abolitionist mission developed and diversified, naval officers were looked to as agents of change in communicating the British anti-slavery vision. This communication was two-way, as they also fed back their experiences to the government and the Admiralty, and as such worked at the heart of British and West African relations in the mid-nineteenth century.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the expanding nature of naval abolitionist policy in West Africa, and the role of naval officers within it. From the 1830s, the British had renewed confidence in their anti-slavery mission. The experiment in establishing legitimate commerce, the pursuit of treaties with African rulers, exploration in the interior and interventionist policies on shore can be regarded as part of a wider drive towards the creation of a ‘new international order’. The navy was integral to these developments, and also the basis of power at Britain’s coastal settlements of Sierra Leone, Bathurst, the Gold Coast forts and Lagos. Abolition was the most common ideology used to justify British involvement in West Africa, but other factors were at play. A hesitancy to intervene in the internal affairs of African states was increasingly set against a desire to protect economic interests.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> TNA, ADM 123/183, Commodore Edmonstone to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 15 November 1860.

<sup>124</sup> Memorandum by W.H.Wylde, 7 August 1861. Printed in FCO Historians, *Slavery in Diplomacy*, pp. 112-15.

<sup>125</sup> A. G. Hopkins, ‘The “New International Economic Order” in the Nineteenth Century: Britain’s First Development Plan for Africa’ in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade*, pp. 240-64; Ajayi and Oloruntimehin, ‘West Africa’, p. 221. In ‘Emperors of the World: British Abolitionism and Imperialism’ in Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism*, pp. 129-49, Seymour Drescher has argued that while the suppression campaign entailed ‘imperialist’ methods of coercion, the British urged against the annexation of territory and imperialism was the ‘last thing on the minds of British policy makers’ during this period.

Naval officers were involved in these activities, as envoys, negotiators and diplomats. Their narratives highlight the reality checks and adjustments required in the operation of the anti-slavery agenda. Britain's burgeoning empire was limited by finances, communications and the number of officials on the coast. As the next chapter shows, the navy faced problems of technology, disease and mortality on shore, while physical geography and limited knowledge of the interior remained important constraints on British action.<sup>126</sup> Fundamentally, many African societies, the Kings of Dahomey being a good example, proved reluctant or unwilling to conform to the British dictate. As Andrew Porter has written, the study of British imperial activities can no longer be regarded as 'metropolitan designs imposed on inert indigenous peoples, but as alive to varied processes of interaction, adaptation, and exchange'.<sup>127</sup> Britain's naval officers were central to these processes in West Africa, and their roles as anti-slavery representatives diversified and changed in line with the evolving perception of Britain's anti-slavery mission. The following chapters will now shift focus to these officers' personal and cultural experiences of life on the West Africa squadron.

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<sup>126</sup> Lynn, "Imperialism", pp. 27-9, 35.

<sup>127</sup> Andrew Porter, 'Introduction: Britain and Empire in the Nineteenth Century', in Porter (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 4.

## Chapter 3

### Life on ‘this abominable coast’<sup>1</sup>: conditions and experiences on the West Africa squadron

Naval officers faced daily risks while serving on the West Africa squadron, arising from the extreme climate and threats of disease and violence, conditions which gave rise to the view of West Africa as a ‘horrid hole’.<sup>2</sup> Physical dangers were matched by experiences of monotony, boredom and ill-discipline, contributing to despondency and a sense of futility surrounding the efficacy of naval abolitionist policy. A structure of financial incentives in the form of opportunities for prize money and promotion existed to redress these hardships. As later chapters show, belief in the wider anti-slavery mission played a large part in officers’ understanding of their service on the West African coast. However, for some, this was undermined by the adversity of the conditions they encountered, and, in the words of Commodore Charles Hotham, ‘a general disgust at the character of the service.’<sup>3</sup> Firstly, this chapter will examine the broader context of naval service during the period of naval suppression in the Atlantic.

#### Naval service in the early to mid-nineteenth century

The officers of the anti-slavery patrols belonged to a naval service much changed in nature and purpose from the years of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Margarette Lincoln has written of an eighteenth-century naval tradition associated with prosperity and the defence of liberty; as the *Gentleman’s Magazine* noted in 1803, ‘the anchor of Great Britain’ was ‘the constitutional courage of her seamen’.<sup>4</sup> Cultural representations of the navy stressed

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<sup>1</sup> NLS, MS 12054, George Elliot to Lord Melgund, 6 January 1840, ff. 176-8.

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage to Bonny River on the West Coast of Africa in the Ship Kingston from Liverpool*, ed. Roland Jackson (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1934), 6 June 1826, p. 133. Jackson was referring to his residence in the River Bonny. He wrote to his correspondent: ‘you know not nor can possibly imagine, the dreadful scenes witnessed here – the terrors, & the horrors of a deathbed in Africa’. A manuscript copy of this journal is held in the Sierra Leone Collection at the UIC Library.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1949), p. 119. Hotham was reporting to a Parliamentary Committee in 1847.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, ‘Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 28:3 (1989), p. 224; Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British sea power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

patriotism and expressions of national identity.<sup>5</sup> The post-war years witnessed a shift from public enthusiasm for the navy to despondency, particularly after the failure to win a decisive victory against the United States in the War of 1812. Combined with peacetime reductions after 1815, the mood in naval circles was one of dejection and low morale.<sup>6</sup> Such sentiment reflected the national temper at the beginning of the regency period: of depression, chronic unemployment, and social discontent, culminating in the riots at St Peter's Field in Manchester in 1819.<sup>7</sup>

This change in fortune contributed to a different social composition of the commissioned officer class. Officers generally entered the navy directly from school through the 'interest' of family and connections, or via the Royal Naval College, reconstituted in 1806.<sup>8</sup> Fewer vacancies in the post-war years resulted in a decline in the number of lower-class entrants, and genteel standards of connections and behaviour became more common. This made the navy less democratic than in wartime although also served to raise the public status of officers; by mid-century, and reflective of a wider process in British society more generally, a good officer was regarded as both a gentleman and a Christian.<sup>9</sup> In 1840, Midshipman Astley Cooper Key joined the *Pickle* on anti-slavery patrols on the West Indies station under the command of Lieutenant Holland. His description of the Lieutenant in a letter home revealed the new standards, as he wrote that Holland was 'an excellent man ... he is a perfect gentleman, and has £2000 a year ... he is a strictly religious and steady man, and a very good

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<sup>5</sup> In 'Admirals as Heroes', Jordan and Rogers examine the roles of Admirals Edward Vernon and Horatio Nelson as popular naval heroes, and their place in the national consciousness as personifications of patriotism and stability. In *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768-1829* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), chapter 7, Geoff Quilley argues that representations of the lower-deck sailor in late-eighteenth century society played a pivotal role in the constitution of British national identity. This was paralleled by the 'aesthetic elevation of the maritime' exemplified in the monuments to naval heroes erected in St Paul's and Westminster Cathedrals after 1798. See also Holger Hoock, 'The British military pantheon in St Paul's Cathedral: the state, cultural patriotism, and the politics of national monuments, c. 1790-1820' in Richard Wrigley and Matthew Craske (eds), *Pantheons: transformations of a monumental idea* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 81-105.

<sup>6</sup> Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, chapter 8. Many popular publications written after the war offered a negative view of the navy. For example, Admiral Hawkins's pamphlet *Statement of Certain Immoral Practices in HM Ships* (1822).

<sup>7</sup> See Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Longman Pearson, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> John Winton, 'Life and Education in a Technically Evolving Navy 1815-1925' in J.R. Hill (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 251-2. Commissioned officers held their position by royal commission, usually after passing an examination. They entered the service as midshipmen.

<sup>9</sup> C. I. Hamilton, 'Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero', *The Historical Journal*, 23:2 (1980), pp. 386-7; Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition 1814-1864: A Social History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 22; Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 190.

officer and sailor'.<sup>10</sup> Captain Frederick Chamier described the shift in his memoirs. While in 1809, 'people of all sorts and all descriptions became midshipmen', by the 1830s the navy was 'fast approximating to civilization'. Midshipmen 'have become gentlemen ... their education is better attended to, and the suavity of the gentleman is now distinguished from the self-sufficient boisterous tyranny of the uneducated seaman.'<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 11: 'The Interior of a Midshipman's Birth', George Humphrey, 1821 (NMM, PAF3730).

This caricature of a Midshipman's berth reveals young gentlemen's leisure interests. Some play musical instruments or cards, while others smoke cigars or have bottles of drink. The sextant hanging on the wall points to their education in seamanship.<sup>12</sup> As Chamier alluded to, naval hierarchies became more pronounced. Stereotypes of ratings (seamen ranking lower than officers) as jovial, intemperate and uncouth Jack Tars were common in nineteenth-century literary and visual culture, although such characterisations were not necessarily legitimate.<sup>13</sup> Surgeon Richard M. Jackson wrote in 1825:

<sup>10</sup> P.H. Colomb, *Memoirs of the Admiral the Right Honorable Sir Astley Cooper Key* (London: Methuen, 1898), pp. 51-2.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Chamier, *The Life of a Sailor by a Captain in the Navy* (London: Richard Bentley, 1832), pp. 30-3.

<sup>12</sup> The depiction of a black mess servant reveals the multi-racial nature of British naval crews in this period, as explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> In *War, Nationalism and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Isaac Land stresses the diversity of voices of Jack Tar and argues for the sailor's part within the forging of British national identity. The representation of the British sailor evolved, and in the later decades of the century Jack Tar was re-

Sea faring men are generally the most illiterate of human beings ... their life is one continued scene of danger – no sooner do they arrive in Port and receive their hardly earned wages, than they engage in scenes of riot and licentiousness ... they certainly are a most heartless & callous set of beings.<sup>14</sup>

This perceived behaviour from the lower ranks had consequences for discipline on the West African coast, but the navy as a whole suffered from low morale, poor recruitment and high rates of desertion throughout the period of suppression.<sup>15</sup> Discussing recruitment for the *Thalia* in the 1830s, John Dalrymple Hay declared that the men collected were ‘of very mixed character, and many knew nothing of the Royal Navy’.<sup>16</sup> Before 1853, there was no form of continuous service in the navy; men signed up to serve on a particular ship for the period of its commission only. This system created discontent, as described by engineer John M’Kie in his memoirs: ‘however long [the commission] the men did not receive any pay beyond two months advance paid on the eve of sailing after which there was a strict guard kept to prevent any one leaving the ship lest they should desert. From the manner of entry there was always a sprinkling of doubtful characters admitted who were ever ready for any delinquency’.<sup>17</sup> As the hardships of naval life, particularly for the lower ranks, led to comparisons with slavery, there were campaigns for reform of naval recruitment and discipline throughout the century.<sup>18</sup>

The shift in fortune affected the appointments available to naval personnel, as did a change in purpose for Royal Navy fleets. The period covered by this thesis was one of relative peace; it was also a time of increasing British dominance in maritime trade, commerce and shipping.<sup>19</sup> As a result of new foreign responsibilities, the distribution of naval vessels was transformed after 1815, in particular a decrease in the home fleet. The growth of naval strength in foreign waters led to a change in appointments available to officers. For example, the Royal Navy

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cast as a symbol of respectable British manhood. See Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> E.L. Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy: A Social History of the Lower Deck 1850 to 1880* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1976), pp. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Admiral Sir John C. Dalrymple Hay, *Lines from My Log-Books* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1898), pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 43-4; Winton, ‘Life and Education’, pp. 253-4. From 1853, new ratings signed up for ten years’ continuous service.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Burroughs, ‘Sailors and Slaves: The “Poor Enslaved Tar” in Naval Reform and Nautical Melodrama’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16:3 (2011), pp. 305-22.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), chapter 6.

took a leading role in the suppression of piracy in the eastern Mediterranean, the Aegean, the West Indies, Borneo and in Chinese waters. Officers also served to protect commercial interests in Latin America. In 1848, a relatively small number of 35 warships were active in home waters. The West Africa squadron consisted of an equivalent number of warships (27) as the Mediterranean (31) and East Indies and China stations (25 each). The squadron was also aided by 10 warships on each of the West Indies and Cape stations.<sup>20</sup>

The change in purpose contributed to negative comparisons with previous generations. An unidentified officer involved in suppression wrote in 1842, ‘Ill-used, time-worn veterans! I cannot share your hardly-earned honours ... Don’t *say* that we have degenerated from the gallant tars of old ... These newfangled ways of ours have some meaning, after all’.<sup>21</sup> For many serving on the West Africa squadron, this feeling of mediocrity was heightened by its poor reputation in naval circles. On hearing of his appointment there, Midshipman Augustus Arkwright declared that ‘the coast of Africa is the worst station we have’. Similarly, Lieutenant George Kenyon wrote to his mother: ‘without doubt this is the worst station they could send us to, unless it is China’.<sup>22</sup> Lieutenant Francis Meynell did not feel that the squadron offered the level of excitement and warfare he hoped for. Whilst informing his father that his passage to Africa was delayed due to ship repairs, he wrote: ‘perhaps we may wait 3 weeks ... but I would rather do that than go to the Coast as I don’t care about it. I would rather go to Mexico where there is a bit of a war.’<sup>23</sup> This reputation was formed by a number of conditions, of which the physical dangers to health were the most widely publicised and feared.

### **Environment, health and mortality on the West Africa squadron**

Service on the West African coast was notoriously unpopular. Peter Leonard summed up the concerns and fears of many, writing as he sailed to West Africa in 1830:

Separated, as we now are, from every civilized country ... on the shores of a continent whose very name is associated in every one’s mind with disease, death, and slavery

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<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 164-5, 169-71.

<sup>21</sup> ‘The Slaver. From the note-book of an Officer employed against the slave trade’, *USM*, Part I (1842), p. 375. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> DRO, D5991/10/53, Augustus Arkwright to his mother from Portsmouth, [no date] 1841; SALS, DD/X/GRA/1, George Kenyon to his mother from Plymouth, [no date] December 1841.

<sup>23</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 28 January 1844.

... the happy homes, and the cheerful society which we have left behind us, and exchanged for intercommunity with savages, dull looks, and gloomier thoughts, and the perpetual risk, at every step, of death from a poisoned atmosphere.<sup>24</sup>

The varied topical climate was at times debilitating. Violent tropical storms in the wet season were matched by searing high temperatures at other times of the year. Naval officers regularly noted temperatures of mid to high 80s Fahrenheit: heat that surgeon Alexander Bryson described as provoking a ‘wretched state of lassitude’.<sup>25</sup> In 1842, Lieutenant Kenyon wrote from Sierra Leone:

I have not been out of the ship nor can anyone go till near sunset, the heat is near awful, the therm[ometer] in the capt’s cabin where the wind is always blowing through stands at 86 in the middle of the night, what it is in my berth I don’t know but I fancy at times we shall all be suffocated, and the only way I can get any sleep is by having 2 or 3 buckets of water thrown over me before I go to bed.<sup>26</sup>

A further source of environmental hardship was the ‘Harmattan’ wind, which occurred between December and February. Bryson noted that the wind’s ‘extreme dryness’ led to ‘the sensation of being parched’.<sup>27</sup> These climatic extremes were linked to the prevalence of disease among men of the squadron (and Europeans on the West African coast in general). In his journal Lieutenant George Courtenay quoted the infamous verse to exemplify the ‘deleteriousness of the climate’:

“To the Bight of Biafra, and Bight of Benin,”  
“Few come out, and many go in.”  
Which is true enough!<sup>28</sup>

Various ‘miasma’ theories, whereby diseases were believed to be caused by noxious air, dominated discussions as to why ships were stricken by illness. Surgeon Richard Jackson

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, in His Majesty’s Ship Dryad* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1833), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Bryson, *Report on the Climate and Principal Diseases of the African Station* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1847), pp. 197-8.

<sup>26</sup> SALS, DDX/GRA/1, George Kenyon to his mother, 12 January 1842.

<sup>27</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> UIC, SLC: Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal, no folios.

blamed the sickly nature of the ‘smokes’, described as ‘immense fogs exhaled from the marshes’, from which ‘we imbibe the poisonous vapour’.<sup>29</sup> Disease was actually spread by insects; Midshipman Cheesman Henry Binstead described how bites from mosquitoes and sand flies caused scratching and swelling, ‘until some of the men were perfectly unable to move or see’.<sup>30</sup> Yellow Fever (popularly known as Yellow Jack or Black Vomit) and Intermittent Fever (Double Tertian or Malaria) were responsible for most deaths amongst Europeans; illness was also caused by dysentery and epidemics of smallpox.<sup>31</sup> As a result, West Africa was commonly known as the ‘white man’s grave’. Philip Curtin has argued that this phrase was understood in a literal sense: that Europeans were racially incapable of surviving in the African climate. However, the cause was not climate but the disease environment and a lack of immunity to yellow fever and malaria. Curtin has argued that nineteenth-century tropical West Africa had the ‘highest morbidity and mortality rates for outsiders found anywhere in the world’.<sup>32</sup>

An average of 20 ships were employed on the West Africa squadron between 1830 and 1875, consisting of around 1,600 men, whose sickness, invaliding and mortality rates remained significantly higher than those of the Royal Navy as a whole for this period.<sup>33</sup> The Admiralty asked for a report to be written on the matter; the task was passed to Alexander Bryson, who had formerly served as a surgeon on the squadron. Bryson’s *Report on the Climate and Principal Diseases of the African Station* (1847) was based on ship pay books. Due to its restricted circulation, an *Account of the Epidemic Fevers of Sierra Leone* was published for a wider public in 1849.<sup>34</sup> Bryson calculated that the annual ratio of deaths from disease alone between 1825 and 1845 was 54.4 per 1000 men for the West Africa station; as compared with 18.1 for the West Indies, 9.8 for the home fleet and 7.7 for South America. Half of this proportional amount resulted ‘from epidemic fever alone’ but these figures gave ‘no adequate idea of the permanent loss of health, which is assumed to be great’. James Watt has since calculated that during the periods 1837-1843 and 1856-1875, there were 80,612 cases of

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<sup>29</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, p. 82.

<sup>30</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/1, Binstead Diaries, 2 March 1823.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 131-2; Sir James Watt, ‘The Health of Seamen in Anti-Slavery Squadrons’ in Andrew Lambert (ed.), *Naval History 1850 – Present* (Ashgate: Hampshire, 2007), p. 73. Eye problems were also common, as were itching diseases caused by worms.

<sup>32</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe’s Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 18; Philip D. Curtin, ‘The End of the ‘White Man’s Grave’? Nineteenth-Century Mortality in West Africa’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21:1 (1990), pp. 63-88.

<sup>33</sup> Watt, ‘Health of Seamen’, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 131-2.

disease and injury in the West Africa squadron, due to which 2739 men were invalided and 1487 died.<sup>35</sup>

Fevers spread quickly within the crowded confines of a naval ship, and epidemics on individual vessels were common occurrences. Lieutenant Courtenay wrote of being ‘attacked with fever in the most malignant shape’ while commander of HMS *Bann* in 1824. ‘My sufferings were very great’, he noted, ‘and for eighteen out of every twenty four hours I was in a state of delirium ... I was now reduced so much that my bones had forced themselves through my skin and I anxiously wished for death.’ Courtenay survived, but wrote that when the *Bann* left the ‘pestilential station’ in 1825, the vessel had lost ‘50 by death’ in three years, ‘in addition to which 51 were invalided for an European climate’.<sup>36</sup> The worst year on record was 1829, when 202 of the 792 men on the squadron died from disease and only two from other causes.<sup>37</sup> Sickness in the *Sybillie* led to the resignation of Commodore Francis Collier in 1830. He wrote to the Admiralty Secretary from St Helena: ‘We have now been here fifteen days under quarantine, fumigation, whitewashing and in short every precaution possible has been taken, and no benefit has been derived there from’. Collier feared he would lose his remaining crew ‘not so much from sickness as the low, despondency state they are in’. Collier gave up command of the squadron to Captain Alexander Gordon of the *Atholl* in order to return to England, out of ‘dire necessity’.<sup>38</sup>

According to Bryson, the greatest danger to sailors’ health involved expeditions on shore or boat service up rivers, attributed to poor nutrition, fatigue, and exposure to heavy swell and insect-infested swamps.<sup>39</sup> The rivers were home to numerous sites providing cover for slave ships to load slaves. The job of searching them was usually given to lieutenants with men under their command. The shallow waters and dangerous surf meant that the work was mainly carried out in the ships’ boats, and rowing long distances was common. In 1823, Midshipman Cheesman Henry Binstead served on anti-slavery expeditions up the

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<sup>35</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 177-8; Watt, ‘Health of Seamen’, pp. 70, 73; Mark Harrison, ‘An “Important and Truly National Subject”: The West Africa Service and the Health of the Royal Navy in the Mid Nineteenth Century’ in David Boyd Haycock and Sally Archer (eds), *Health and Medicine at Sea, 1700-1900* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> UIC, SLC: Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 137.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, Commodore Francis Collier to J. W. Croker, 28 March 1830, ff. 128-30. Ships like the *Sybillie* were unable to function with such a depleted complement; others boosted their crew numbers by employing local African seamen (see Chapter 6).

<sup>39</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 4, 178.

Casamanza, Calabar and Bonny rivers in the boats of the *Owen Glendower* (commanded by Commodore Robert Mends), and wrote diaries about his experiences. Binstead claimed the boat crews rowed up to 70 miles at a time in weather that included violent storms, fogs and high temperatures. There were more than 70 cases of fever on the boats, the men ‘being so hourly exposed to the heat and heavy night fogs & dews’.<sup>40</sup>

In July 1823, Binstead’s boat took possession of a Spanish schooner embarking slaves in the River Bonny and released 181 enslaved Africans who were subsequently taken on board the *Owen Glendower* to be conveyed to Sierra Leone. Diseases associated with the enslaved – particularly fever, dysentery, diarrhoea and itching diseases such as *craw-craw* – were easily transmitted on British cruisers or among prize crews.<sup>41</sup> As fever spread among the *Owen Glendower*’s passengers, Binstead described the ship as ‘most beastly and miserable [,] 30 seamen in the Sick List and all very seriously ill with fever also many Mids[hipmen]. Slaves dying from two to three a day what a horrid climate and scene is this.’ By the end of August, Binstead noted that ‘our mess now consists of 6 members having when we left England 27’. He described ‘a most melancholy sight ... to see so many poor fellows now laying in their hammocks of fever and little hope of their escaping a watery grave.’ Commodore Mends died at sea, while his eldest son was ‘worn down to a mere skeleton’.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Binstead was ‘heartily disgusted with this life and station’. He noted that a lack of news from home added to their emotional burden:

The miseries of this fatal climate is little known, but to those who are doom’d to serve on it. The appearance of the Ships company and officers are completely yellow, in the whole forming a most emaciated sickly countenance. We are all in the greatest state of suspense & anxiety to get letters, which we have not had since leaving our friends [,] a period of eight months.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> NMRN, 2005.76.1, Binstead Diaries, 2 March and 14 April 1823; Bryson, *Report*, pp. 38-9. Binstead described being ‘knocked up’ by rowing 190 miles up the Cazamanza River, as well as finding the sun ‘dreadfully oppressive’. Several weeks later, in the Calabar River, Binstead reported: ‘I never experienced such heavy rain in all my life’ (2005.76.2, 17 June).

<sup>41</sup> Watt, ‘Health of Seamen’, p. 73. In ‘Healing the “African body” in the age of abolition? British medicine in West Africa, circa 1800-1860’, unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University (2010), John Rankin examines British and African interactions within the context of health and medicine, particularly in the care of liberated Africans. Conditions on prize vessels for Africans and British sailors will be explored in Chapter 5.

<sup>42</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 4, 7 and 21 July, 30 August, 4 and 28 September, 1823. Midshipman Robert Mends died in December that year.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 28 September 1823.

Using the case of the *Owen Glendower* as an example, Bryson concluded: ‘the nearer boats approach the shore the greater the risk of contracting disease; this again is much increased by landing, and still more so by sleeping on shore ... such imprudences [sic] are generally followed by fever of a most virulent and dangerous character’.<sup>44</sup> Naval surgeon Dr McIlroy concurred with Bryson’s analysis. In 1842, he described the death by fever of the assistant surgeon of the *Buzzard* at Whydah as ‘a consequence of being too familiar with the shore on this dangerous coast.’<sup>45</sup> Sierra Leone was regarded as particularly unhealthy. Among many other damning terms the colony was regarded by officers as ‘a most wretched hole’, an ‘unwholesome hole’ and the ‘blackguard of all holes’.<sup>46</sup> As a result, in a letter home Augustus Arkwright of the *Pantaloön* wrote that he believed ‘keeping English sailors at Sierra Leone is next to murder’.<sup>47</sup>

Some infamous cases of fever on the squadron were publicised in the British press and contributed to a public sense of despondency surrounding suppression efforts in the 1840s. In September 1845, the *Éclair* arrived back in Britain with around two-thirds of the original crew (over 70 officers and men) dead or dying, including its captain, Walter Estcourt. The ship’s boats had previously been dispatched to the creeks of the Sherbro and Seabar rivers, where the men were exposed to ‘malarial exhalations’. After a brief stop at Sierra Leone, the ship was instructed to steam to the Gambia with the *Albert* in tow. Cases of fever abounded, including twenty-five deaths while the ship anchored at the Portuguese island of Boa Vista to take on volunteers on its return to England.<sup>48</sup> On reaching the English coast, the ship was quarantined at Stangate Creek where a further five died. Diplomatic complications ensued as the *Éclair* was charged with infecting Boa Vista with a fever epidemic. Naval officers, the press and the public also protested against the inhumanity of the quarantine, which exposed the crew to further infection. *The Times* called upon the Admiralty ‘to relieve us as speedily as possible from the national disgrace we are likely to incur by abandoning a number of our fellow creatures to destruction on board an infected vessel.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 200-3.

<sup>45</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 17 January 1842.

<sup>46</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/1, Binstead Diaries, 22 March 1823; NAS, GD 219/304/36, Murray Letters, 22 September 1847; SALS, DD/X/GRA/1, George Kenyon to his mother, 12 January 1842.

<sup>47</sup> DRO, D5991/10/72-73, Augustus Arkwright to his mother, 19 June 1842.

<sup>48</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 181-8.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1845; Harrison, ‘Important and Truly National Subject’, pp. 122-4. Publicity was also generated by the Estcourt family, most prominently Walter’s father, Thomas Grimston Bucknall Estcourt, MP for Devizes.

Shortly before his death, Captain Estcourt informed Commodore Jones of 35 deaths in his crew since leaving Sierra Leone, 'leaving 52 short of complement':

The rest of the crew are so reduced in number and physical strength from disease, that I know not where to find 20 working men ... so rapid has been the progress of this fever, that men who appeared in good health and spirits have died in 3 or 4 days in agonies with black vomit and all the other symptoms of the most malignant kind of that fever which is caught in the rivers of Africa.<sup>50</sup>

Estcourt's private journals reveal the extreme physical and emotional distress encountered by naval officers on the West African coast. His religious faith appeared to offer some comfort, but as his journal progresses, his analysis becomes more hopeless. Physically too, his handwriting worsens. He wrote about the death of the first officer on board in June 1845:

Sick improving except for Mills, he is so fully impressed that he is about to die that nothing can get the conviction out of his head ... he sank very rapidly in the afternoon and by six o'clock had lost all consciousness ... This is the first officer and his death seems to have made a very deep impression on all.<sup>51</sup>

Estcourt noted another consequence of the spread of disease, that his crew 'have become noisy inattentive drunken & quarrelsome. Something is due to the coast something to the long & fatal sickness with which we have been visited which necessary loosed [sic] the hands of discipline.' Estcourt's despair was clear when in August he wrote: 'My heart has almost sunk within me. Men sick dying dead'.<sup>52</sup>

The *Éclair* was one of several high-profile cases indicating that reform of the squadron and its practices was needed for the health of naval personnel; the high rates of fever associated with the Niger Expedition of 1841-2 was another. Most vessels on the squadron were poorly-ventilated, proverbially known as 'floating coffins' in the tropical heat. It was also claimed that steam vessels, introduced on the squadron from the 1830s, sustained infection in their engine rooms. As Mark Harrison has argued, the subject of naval medical reform was

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<sup>50</sup> GRO, D1571/F533, Walter Estcourt to Commodore Jones, 8 September 1845.

<sup>51</sup> GRO, D1571/F544, Estcourt Journals, 14-15 June 1845. See Chapter 4, p. 123, for Estcourt's religious beliefs.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 June, 8 August 1845.

forwarded by British naval surgeons in the mid-nineteenth century. Ship commanders were scorned for sending their crews up rivers; the Admiralty were blamed for the poor condition of vessels. Critics claimed it ‘most unfair to treat those as dogs, who would willingly risk their lives where the honour or welfare of their country demand them.’<sup>53</sup>

Medical reform also contributed to new treatments, moving away from the traditional practices of bloodletting and purging. Midshipman Binstead was ‘taken unwell with a headache’ in 1823: as treatment ‘the surgeon took two pound of Blood from me and applied blisters to my head.’<sup>54</sup> Some officers such as Captain Percy Grace of HMS *Cyrene* criticised this practice:

Medical gentlemen fresh from Europe, are by far too ready with the lancet in cases of fevers peculiar to the Western Coast of Africa, not considering the debilitating effects of the climate, in addition to that which arises from disease, without having it encreased [sic] by Phlebotomy. It is accorded at Sierra Leone, as it has been there proved by dear bought experience, how very pernicious this system is ... the fatal results of an ignorant and obstinate mind!!!<sup>55</sup>

It was not until the mid-1850s, when naval surgeon W.B. Baikie proved the use of quinine as preventative medicine as well as a cure, that the West African coast became a healthier place to live and work.<sup>56</sup> Philip Curtin has argued that the significant drop in mortality among Europeans on the coast was less attributable to quinine, and more to empirical measures like improving water supplies.<sup>57</sup> The high risks for health on the West African coast clearly played a major role in how naval officers perceived their service there. There were other risks too, including the threats of violence.

## **Dangers and violence**

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<sup>53</sup> The medical journal *The Lancet*, quoted in Harrison, ‘Important and Truly National Subject’, p. 114. In the same article, Harrison argues that one consequence of the failure of the Niger Expedition was agreement surrounding the need for reform between disparate interest groups, including the humanitarian lobby, sailors’ welfare campaigners, medical professionals and proponents of free trade.

<sup>54</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 16-17 September 1823.

<sup>55</sup> UKHO, MP 107, ‘Remarks made on board His Majesty’s Ship *Cyrene* by Captain Percy Grace, 1822-3’.

<sup>56</sup> Watt, ‘Health of Seamen’, pp. 73-7.

<sup>57</sup> Curtin, *Death by Migration*, pp. 159-60.

Work on the squadron was ‘frequently of a most harassing and dangerous character’.<sup>58</sup> Encounters with slaver crews angered by naval interference could be perilous, often involving long chases followed by fighting between boarding parties and crews. One infamous case which caused public outcry was the trial in July 1845 at the Exeter Assizes of ten Brazilian and Spanish crew-members from the slavers *Felicidade* and *Echo* for the murders of midshipman Thomas Palmer and nine seamen of HMS *Wasp*. At the time of their murders the British sailors were transporting the *Felicidade* to Sierra Leone for condemnation. The slaver was later re-taken by the *Star* and suspicions were raised when bloodied weapons were found.<sup>59</sup>



Fig. 12: ‘Majavel. Slaver Pirate who run the knife into Mr Palmer Midshipman HMS *Wasp*’, unknown artist, c. 1845 (NMM, ZBA2553).

<sup>58</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 11 July 1845, 14 July 1845; Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 86.

Two sketches by an unidentified artist depict, as the annotations explain, Janus Majaval, the ‘Slaver pirate who ran the knife into Mr Palmer midshipman’ (Fig. 12). The witness who testified against the slave traders (Fig. 13) was a slave named Sobrena (de Costa) from Bahia, a native of Lagos. At the time a prisoner on the *Felicidade*, he had overheard the Brazilians’ plot to kill the British sailors.<sup>60</sup> Lieutenant Francis Meynell wrote that Palmer ‘was stabbed in the back and hove over board’; Palmer and his men had shown ‘a plucky resistance as they had killed two and wounded many with their knives [sic].’ That Henry Rogers also wrote about the murders in his journal reveals the impact of the case on the squadron.<sup>61</sup>

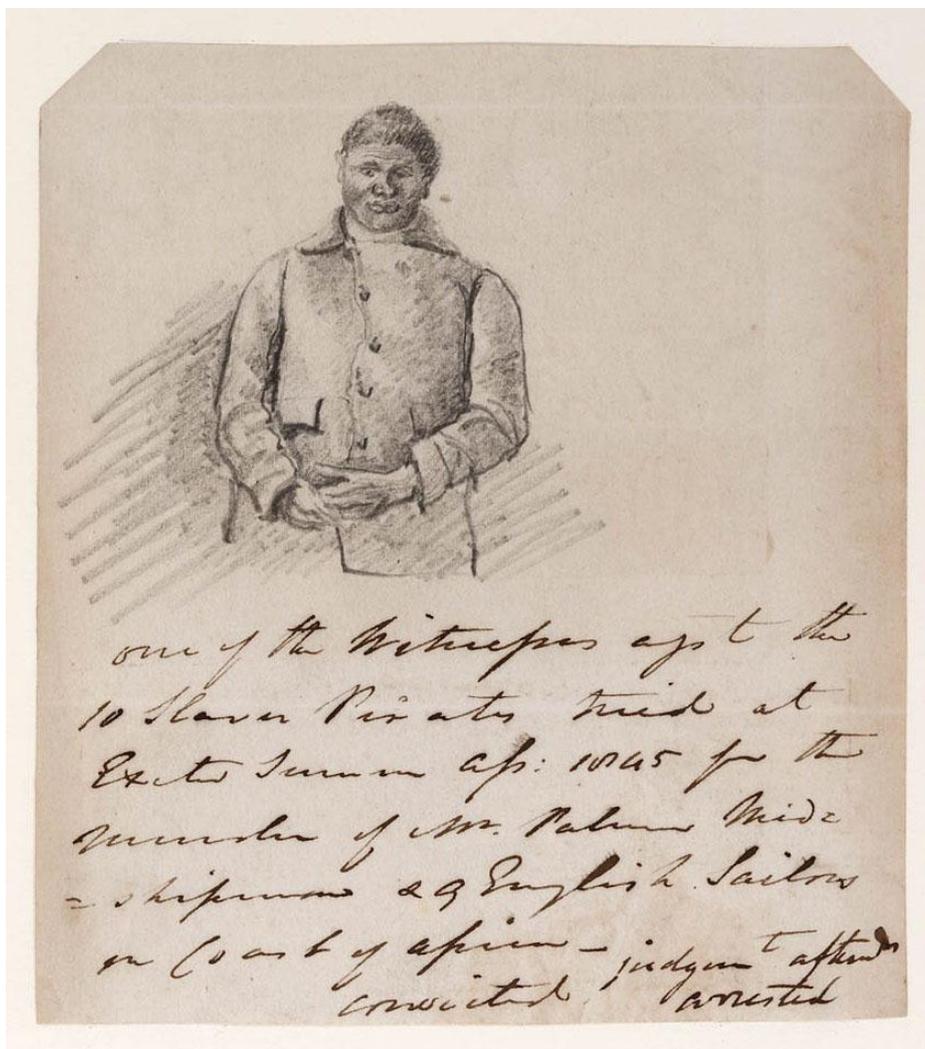


Fig. 13: ‘Witness against the 10 Slaver Pirates tried at Exeter, July 1845’, unknown artist, c. 1845 (NMM, ZBA2554).

<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, ‘The Spanish Slavers’, 14 July 1845.

<sup>61</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 2 May 1845; Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 1 March 1850.

There were other accounts of violence. Writing home from the *Black Joke* in 1830, Midshipman Edwin Hinde noted that officers refrained from wearing their uniforms when approaching slavers, and instead wore ‘dark frocs ... the same as the men’. This was to ensure that British sailors were undistinguishable because ‘the Spaniards receive a very great reward for every officer they kill’.<sup>62</sup> *The Times* reported on a ‘sanguinary affray on board a slaver’ in 1847, printing an extract from an officer’s letter that year. The *Waterwitch* and *Rapid* had captured the Brazilian brig *Romeo Primero*, subsequently given in charge to Lieutenant Mansfield and four seamen to be conveyed to St Helena. En route, the lieutenant was ‘murderously assailed from behind by one of the prisoners’ armed with an axe, and ‘received no fewer than nine wounds, more or less severe, in the head, arms, and abdomen’. The seamen overpowered the prisoners, but two of them did not survive, ‘one dying of the direct consequences of his wounds, and the second of fever induced by them’. The Brazilian prisoners were brought to trial but could not be charged of attempted murder as the vessel, under the Brazilian flag, was at that time ‘not amenable to British jurisdiction’.<sup>63</sup>

There were also dangers from encounters on shore. After a British merchant vessel was captured in the River Pongas by Thomas Curtis, a slave dealer, Commodore George Collier ordered a boat from the *Thistle* to the river to demand its release. The boat’s crew were ‘dragged on shore, stripped and exposed to a vertical sun for a considerable time’ until they were ‘shot by order of Mr Thomas Curtis’ amidst ‘the exulting cheers of many hundred persons’. Some of the bodies of those who were killed were subjected to ‘indignities of the most barbarous kind’.<sup>64</sup> Perceived risks of attacks from Africans were often imbued with fear of the ‘other’ stereotype. In 1823, Midshipman Binstead found natives of the River Bonny to be ‘desperate thieves’, who ‘attempted to kidnap our men’ and ‘wood [sic] no doubt have murdered them were they not seen’. Relations worsened to conflict. Lieutenant Courtenay related the same affray in his journal, where ‘five men made a stand ... against about three thousand of them’:

Their only weapons are wooden spears, hardened and sharpened at one end ... these spears being notched or barbed inflict very painful and serious wounds; Lieutenant

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<sup>62</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 7 September 1830.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, ‘Sanguinary Affray on Board a Slaver’, 3 December 1847.

<sup>64</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, ‘Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820’, ff. 35-8; NMRN, 1980.171/18, George Collier to J. W. Croker, 23 May 1820.

Stokes of the Owen Glendower having received one in his neck the Surgeon was obliged to make an incision on the other side and push it through.<sup>65</sup>

By the 1850s and 1860s, accounts of the murderous capabilities of Africans had reached a new sensationalist level, affected by a hardening of racial attitudes. In his journal of 1862, Captain J. P. Luce wrote that while up the Old Calabar River he saw what ‘looked like flesh’ hanging from a tree: ‘the natives of the huts had captured three enemys [sic] had killed them cut them up & eaten them ... the remains I saw were the unclean & uneaten parts.’<sup>66</sup> Such examples, particularly those which were published, did little to generate enthusiasm for work on the squadron. However, while risks of violence were part of life on the West African coast, it was not unusual for naval men to encounter combat. Indeed, the excitement of chasing slave ships in particular was for some a celebrated part of the service, particularly for more youthful officers, as shall be explored later. A more common experience of life on the anti-slavery patrols, with a more significant impact on morale, was monotony and boredom.

### **Monotony and boredom**

In the early nineteenth century the 2000 miles of West African coastline patrolled by the Royal Navy was not well-charted, nor supplied with many naval bases. Most officers of the squadron spent the majority of their days at sea: unless they were appointed to expeditions on shore, there were only occasional opportunities for visits to Sierra Leone, St Helena or Ascension Island (the latter was the headquarters of the squadron and infirmary for the sick). While the roles of officers on ships had changed little since the turn of the century – for example, they kept watch, took command of the ship’s guns and boats, or kept logs of the ship’s navigation – there was no war, and many saw little action. For Edwin Hinde and other trainee officer-volunteers on board, their education, in the form of ‘navigation’, ‘chronometers’, or ‘knotting and splicing’, was one of the few noteworthy things to report in their letters home.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 9 June 1823; UIC, SLC: Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal, no folios. Courtenay possibly exaggerated this number; Binstead claimed, ‘the natives rose upon us 500 to 20 they were’.

<sup>66</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, p. 173. See Chapter 6 for officers’ racial attitudes.

<sup>67</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 5 July 1830, 11 September 1830; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Fontana Press, 1986), chapter 2.

Royal Navy vessels often spent months patrolling the West African coast with little prospect of capturing a slaver. Bryson described service in the Bight of Benin as ‘irksome and monotonous’. He wrote of the practice in the earlier years of suppression of empty slave vessels waiting off shore until an opportunity was found to take their cargo on board. British cruisers could therefore ‘spend two, three, or four months in succession, standing “off and on the land” under easy sail’.<sup>68</sup> The situation changed with the introduction of equipment clauses into diplomatic treaties from the 1830s, which made possible the seizure of empty vessels with modifications indicating the intention of carrying slaves. The change in methods in the 1840s, when patrolling the coast was increasingly replaced by blockades of ports and embarkation points, enhanced the squadron’s success but led to fewer chases and captures, contributing to the sense of monotony. ‘I am beginning to feel more like a cat than a midshipman’, reported Midshipman Augustus Arkwright in a letter home in 1842, ‘for I so seldom am inclined to do anything but sleep and feed’. In his 1852 journal, Midshipman Arthur Onslow wrote that his days consisted of ‘Miserable dull work. There is nothing whatever to do this service is insupportable’.<sup>69</sup>

Patrol was wearing for Lieutenant Thomas Davies, on board HMS *Cygnets* and HM Brig *Spy* in 1850-52. His journal entries over a four-month period feature little more than commentary on the weather, frequently ‘heavy rain’ and ‘continual rain all day and night’. Midshipman Henry Rogers wished for ‘a trifling variation in our most monotonous life’, the nature of which in his opinion bred indifference: ‘We talk a good deal about our misfortunes and are rather depressed sometimes ... for my part my feelings have become so blunted by a sea life that I have sunk into a state of care-for-nothingness from which it would require actual or visible danger to rouse me.’<sup>70</sup> Such complaints were also found in the British press, contributing to a sense of malaise regarding the squadron. In 1846, a letter from a naval officer at the Gallinas published in *The Times* reported that everyday life involved ‘kicking about and rolling to our hearts’ content, with little variety or anxiety, except who is next in for the doctor’s list ... We now and then get a spell at the islands, which is a Godsend to us, after months of the most killing monotony.’<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> DRO, D5991/10/72-73, Augustus Arkwright to his mother, 19 June 1842; Mitchell Library, SLNSW, MSS 2050, Onslow Journal, 5 January 1852; Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 94-6.

<sup>70</sup> NMM, JOD/42, Davies Journal; Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 22 October 1850.

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, ‘Service on the Coast of Africa’, 22 May 1846.

Normally the period of service between refits was three years, and after 1850 it was reduced to two. In 1842, Captain Broadhead complained that he brought home eleven men who had not been out of the ship for three and a half years.<sup>72</sup> In these circumstances, there were suggestions that continuous months on board vessels on anti-slavery patrols led to ‘mental disorganisation’.<sup>73</sup> In his journal in 1844, Walter Estcourt wrote of his ‘melancholy low spirited feeling’, arising ‘from there being nothing to do on shore and nothing to be ... even talked about’.<sup>74</sup> The following year his analysis of service included this fraught and despairing conclusion:

Hot close damp thundering lightening raining disagreeable nervous leadenly ...  
enervating debilitating Coast of Africa. Weather either by day or night taking all  
energy from the men, all interest from our pursuits.

Estcourt later wrote that his men suffered from ‘the dull monotony of our life ... [and] from the increasing craving to quit this station’.<sup>75</sup> At the Admiralty’s request, Captain Claude Buckle wrote a report concerning Estcourt’s conduct while in command of the *Éclair*, in particular the decision, against orders, to allow his men on shore at Sierra Leone. Buckle concluded:

I believe that a depressing effect was produced on the minds of the *Éclair*’s people by an idea which they entertained on leaving England that they were only to remain a short time on the coast of Africa, for a particular service, and were then to be sent to some other Station. The circumstance also of not making a single capture until they had been five months on the station, seemed to cause them to imagine that they were in an “unlucky ship”, and thus added to the feeling of despondency. The uninteresting & monotonous nature of the service they were employed on, no doubt had its effect also.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 135.

<sup>73</sup> Phrase used by Commodore Arthur Eardley Wilmot in his evidence before a Parliamentary Committee in 1865, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> GRO, D1571/F543, Estcourt Journals, 2 December 1844.

<sup>75</sup> GRO, D1571/F544, Estcourt Journals, [no date] March 1845, 15 May 1845.

<sup>76</sup> WSRO, BUCKLE/503, Claude Buckle to Captain Baillie Hamilton, 27 April 1846.

As examined later, monotony contributed to despondency which was increasingly aired in Britain as part of a wider debate over the efficacy of the squadron. It also, it was alleged, contributed to the squadron's poor disciplinary record.

### **Ill-discipline**

Conditions on the squadron were perceived to be so disagreeable that ill-discipline followed as a direct consequence. In particular, alcohol consumption was cited as a source of trouble. Bryson claimed that seamen 'abandon themselves to the utmost intemperance in the use of spirits'. While fondness for alcohol was a common feature of naval life, Bryson regarded drunkenness as particularly excessive on the West Africa squadron, whereby 'men of sound sense, and otherwise untainted morals' were driven to drink by the 'tedious monotony of cruising'.<sup>77</sup> It was not only a seaman's pursuit. In 1828, Commander Thomas Boteler wrote in his journal that the second master of the *Hecla* had caught fever at Porto Praya after 'getting most beastly drunk' and 'having disobeyed my most routine injunctions not to sleep on shore at night'. Boteler hoped that 'his example may have a good effect upon others, and teach them what it appears my rhetorick [sic] cannot "that one night sleeping ashore in this climate is highly dangerous if not positively fatal"'.<sup>78</sup>

Commodore Charles Hotham had much correspondence with the Admiralty regarding the state of discipline on the squadron. On arrival there in 1846 to succeed Commodore Jones, he declared that the situation required 'immediate attention ... 11 cases of gross insubordination, breaches of good manners, and accusations of the gravest character were under consideration'. As a consequence, he added, 'the moral tone of the squadron was poisoned.' Like Bryson he highlighted the unique conditions of the service which led to misbehaviour:

Drunkenness is the root of all evil; but there is a cause for it and even one extenuation may be admitted. The officers are by the nature of this service doomed to great privation; serving in a pestilential climate, blockading a few leagues of coast month after month, oftentimes without a morsel of fresh provisions, dependent entirely on

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<sup>77</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 8-9, 206-10.

<sup>78</sup> NMRN, MSS 73/1, Boteler Journal, f. 24.

their own resources, the temper becomes soured, the constitution yields, and the sufferer flies to the bottle for temporary relief and excitement.<sup>79</sup>

Drunkenness was not the only charge of delinquency. In 1848 Commander George Kenyon wrote to Hotham to request the ‘discharge from the service with disgrace’ of Thomas Murphy of HMS *Cygnets*. Kenyon reported that his ‘worthless and incorrigible behaviour’ included ‘taking indecent liberties with several boys’.<sup>80</sup> Hotham wished to be granted the power of court martial in order to reform the squadron, claiming that ‘nothing can be worse than the state of discipline here ... If the Admiralty support me I will bring matters round, & have the Squadron a credit to the country’.<sup>81</sup> He also believed that as a consequence of the service’s reputation, many officers on the squadron were poor representatives of the Royal Navy:

... the great majority of my commanders are young and inexperienced and fancy that the service is to be conducted according to their notions ... The worst description of officers find their way to the coast of Africa. I see a Lieutenant Shore is appointed for general service. This man is a noted drunkard, and made water in the Protestant Church at Buenos Ayres when I commanded that station ... I can never allow that man to do duty in a sea-going ship.<sup>82</sup>

Captain E. J. Bosanquet was similarly concerned. In response to an Admiralty request for the best means to implement abolition, he acknowledged that many officers had ‘proved themselves most highly deserving’. However, as a result of service on the West African coast being ‘unpopular with the best description of officers’:

... certainly very many of an indifferent character have always been found serving in it ... should the discipline of the squadron become again as relaxed as it has been at intervals, between 1829 & 1846, it would have a very injurious influence upon the state of the navy, so many young officers receiving their impressions from it, & thus the best nursery for young officers becoming the worst.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/8, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 24 October 1846, ff. 28-9.

<sup>80</sup> SALS, DD/X/GRA/11, George Kenyon to Commodore Hotham, 5 July 1848, f. 35.

<sup>81</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/8, Charles Hotham to Captain Hamilton, 24 October 1846, f. 30.

<sup>82</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/8, Charles Hotham to Charles Adam, 18 December 1846, f. 43.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, ADM 123/173, ‘Best means to be adopted for the abolition of the African slave trade, 1850’, 11 May 1850.

The poor state of discipline on the station added to a unique set of conditions on the West Africa squadron. As a result, one frequent response to anti-slavery service was despondency, which increasingly took public form.

## **Despondency**

Alongside the disagreeable conditions of service, morale was also undermined by the perceived failures of suppression. Fundamentally, slave dealers of other nations showed no sign of ending their trade, and there was a common perception that the labours of the West Africa squadron were in vain in the face of relentless supply and demand for slaves, from Cuba and Brazil in particular.<sup>84</sup> The labyrinthine network of treaties between Britain and other powers, and ambiguities over the Royal Navy's rights of search, capture and condemnation contributed to frustrations. This was particularly the case in the perceived intransigence of the United States in regards to rights of search and the continued abuse of the American flag by slave vessels. Commodore Charles Wise wrote of the capture of the *Ellen* in the River Congo in 1858, with Africans 'cooped up and dying under close-locked hatches'. However, the 'shameful prostitution of the American flag' meant that 'she was permitted to sail, without molestation, with her rich cargo of death, disease, and misery'.<sup>85</sup>

Naval personnel also alluded to the contradictory effects of suppression, whereby slave traders were paid more for their cargos in recognition of the risks involved in evading capture. Henry Rogers wrote of a conversation with the Brazilian Captain on his prize vessel:

He would have gained about 4,000 dollars had he arrived at Brazil safely ... My friend has the same feeling that the best slave captains have viz. that if our squadron were withdrawn he would no longer command a slaver as it would not be worth his while. He looks forward to making Great Britain repay him the sums he has lost by having been taken 3 times by our cruisers.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, Commander Hugh Dunlop remarked on a discussion with a slave captain in 1848:

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<sup>84</sup> David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 85-90.

<sup>85</sup> 'Reports from Vice-Admiralty Courts and from British Naval Officers Relating to the Slave Trade', *PP* 1858-59 (2569), Commodore Wise to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 28 October 1858, pp. 199-200.

<sup>86</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 15 December 1849.

He repeatedly said to me that the very worst thing for him & those employed in the slave vessels would be for England to withdraw the men of war from the Coast, as that would at once reduce their remuneration, and that he as Captain of a Slaver instead of receiving 10:000 [sic] for a successful trip, when no risk was attached to it, would only receive about 300 or 400 dollars!<sup>87</sup>

Speculation in Britain that the squadron was ineffective and ill-managed added to despondency. In a pamphlet published in 1848, Commander Henry James Matson called the squadron ‘a mere paper blockade’ and wrote that many ships were ‘the very worst description of vessels we have in the service.’<sup>88</sup> The smallest warships, mostly sloops and ten-gun brigs, were sent to the West Africa station, and many were considered slow, dangerous, and inefficient. The ships which were successful against fast slave vessels were the re-commissioned slaver sloops or cutters like the *Black Joke* (formerly the Baltimore clipper *Henriquetta* captured by the *Sybil* in 1828), or small brigs like the *Waterwitch* (an ex-yacht).<sup>89</sup> Rear-Admiral Sir Patrick Campbell was Commander-in-Chief at the Cape of Good Hope during the period when the Cape and West Africa stations combined between 1832 and 1840. In a private letter to First Naval Lord Charles Adam from the *Thalia* in 1836, he wrote that the *Waterwitch* was ‘a splendid vessel’ and ‘sails like a witch ... A few more such as her and we would astonish the Spaniards who laugh at the gun brigs’. In a later letter he asked, ‘do not send me any more of these unfortunate gun brigs as you might as well send a cow after a slaver as one of these after the Spanish clippers we have here.’<sup>90</sup>

The public perception of the anti-slavery patrols changed in the 1840s as naval abolitionist policy was increasingly questioned. The growing costs of maintenance, treaty payments to foreign governments and running the Admiralty courts compounded misgivings, as did several publications critical of the squadron.<sup>91</sup> Disapproval peaked in 1845, when MP

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<sup>87</sup> USNA, MS 59, Dunlop Remark Book, 17 April 1848. Dunlop’s emphasis. This assertion is supported by the mid-century increase in prices paid in Brazil for slaves from the transatlantic trade. See Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 263.

<sup>88</sup> Commander Henry James Matson, *Remarks on the Slave Trade and African Squadron*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London: James Ridgeway, Piccadilly, 1848), p. 64.

<sup>89</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 92, 124.

<sup>90</sup> Papers of the Adam Family of Blair Adam, NRAS1454, Patrick Campbell to Admiral Charles Adam, 12 February and 12 June 1836. Campbell’s emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 7, 27; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 341. For example, Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African*

William Hutt led a parliamentary campaign for its total withdrawal.<sup>92</sup> In 1848, Commodore Hotham wrote that he was ‘sorry to see so strong a feeling against the squadron’, and made clear his determination to reduce expenditure in a letter to First Naval Lord Admiral Dundas: ‘I shall reduce the Coopers, send home a plumber, send home Engineers, change the kroomen and employ Africans at half the price, this alone will effect a saving of 1620£ per annum’.<sup>93</sup> Hutt and other critics claimed that conditions for the enslaved on board slave vessels had been exacerbated by the naval presence as slave traders crowded ships, made longer voyages and kept Africans in barracoons for longer while attempting to evade capture from British patrols. Naval suppression, it was alleged, proved to be ‘an enormous fallacy and an aggravation of the evil.’<sup>94</sup> These claims reached officers on the coast, adding to despondency. In 1850, Henry Rogers ‘heard that 3,000 slaves were kept in barracoons on the west coast of Africa so long that provisions failed and they were starved, at a time when our blockade of the coast was very strict.’<sup>95</sup> A Commons Committee under Hutt discussed the squadron in 1848 and 1849, and appeared to favour its withdrawal, but a Lords Committee in 1850 narrowly voted for its continuation.

Some naval officers, notably Captain Joseph Denman, published defences of the service in response to such negative public opinion.<sup>96</sup> Others, however, wrote letters to the press, usually anonymously, setting out a number of grievances regarding the anti-slavery patrols:

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*Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840) and Macgregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1837) both included criticisms of the squadron’s methods.

<sup>92</sup> David Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 211-2. Hutt’s crusade against naval abolitionist policy became tied with a number of political interests: other so-called ‘anti-coercionists’ included free traders, who among other causes wished to remove protective duties on non-slave produced sugar from the West Indies, and members of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

<sup>93</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/11, Charles Hotham to Admiral Dundas, 28 May 1848. The ‘kroomen’ were West African seamen.

<sup>94</sup> Captain William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger in 1841 under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter, R.N.*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1848), vol. 2, p. 411; David Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe 1450-1850*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 159, 169. In ‘Eyes on the Prize: Journeys in Slave Ships Taken as Prizes by the Royal Navy’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 31:1 (2010), pp. 99-115, Robert Burroughs argues that eyewitness accounts of prize voyages were used by anti-coercionists to support the argument that slaves suffered more, and to provide evidence of the shortcomings of abolitionist policies. Conditions on prize vessels for enslaved Africans will be assessed in Chapter 5.

<sup>95</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 1 March 1850. See other officers’ testimonies supporting naval surgeon T. R. H. Thomson’s assertion that suppression ‘aggravated the sufferings and discomforts of the unhappy creatures we proposed to benefit’ in his *The Brazilian Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1850), chapter 3.

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Denman, *Practical Remarks on the Slave Trade* (London: Ridgway, 1839), *West India Interests, African Emigration and Slave Trade* (No imprint, 1848) and *The African Squadron and Mr Hutt’s Committee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: John Mortimer, 1850). See also Commander Arthur Eardley Wilmot, *A Letter to The Right Honorable Viscount Palmerston on the Present State of the African Slave Trade and on the Necessity of*

We look upon the affair as complete humbug... The absurdity of blockading a coast 2,000 miles in extent must be obvious to the meanest capacity ... The loss of life and demoralizing effect to our Service are very great ... the naked fact of our exertions in favor of the African slave having increased his miseries to an awful extent, with an immense sacrifice of life, is uncontradicted by the best-informed advocates of slave measures.<sup>97</sup>

While few challenged the principles of abolitionism in the public arena, the policy of suppression was increasingly regarded as open for condemnation, particularly the loss of British sailors. The letter above appeared in print at the same time as reportage of conditions on the *Éclair*. Such cases brought the issue of high mortality before the public, during a period when criticism was beginning to be voiced against philanthropic endeavours more broadly. Some officers saw an opportunity to publicise the neglect of sailors on the West African coast. Writing to *The Times* in 1845, a naval officer wished:

... to direct the public sympathy, which has so long raged in favour of the African blacks, towards their countrymen employed in the prevention of the slave-trade on the coast of Africa, whose sufferings ... pass by unknown and unnoticed ... Could their voices reach the ears of those who so inconsiderately urge the employment, or more properly speaking the sacrifice of their countrymen on the pestiferous coast of Africa ... Pity it is that efforts prompted by such holy and noble feelings should be so fatally misdirected.<sup>98</sup>

A similar letter had appeared in 1844 from a naval officer, wishing to make a 'plea for the white victims of philanthropy on the coast of Africa'. He condemned the West African coast as 'the annual hecatombs of our fellow-countrymen, so uselessly, so wantonly, nay so mischievously, sacrificed in that deadly climate'. The author added status to his claims by highlighting that he was an eyewitness to 'the horrors of the slave ship', which in his opinion,

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*Increasing the African Squadron* (London: James Ridgway, 1853). Support also came from outside naval circles, for example from the American missionary Reverend J. Leighton Wilson in *The British Squadron on the Coast of Africa* (London: James Ridgway, 1851), the geographer Sir Henry Yule in *The African Squadron Vindicated* (London: James Ridgway, 1850) or the Reverend George Smith, *The case of our West African cruisers and West African settlements fairly considered* (London: J. Hatchard, 1848).

<sup>97</sup> *Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian*, 11 October 1845.

<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 'The African Station', 16 October 1845.

‘have been greatly increased by our meddling, and the result of our “humane policy” may be summed up in an annual loss of British life and health.’<sup>99</sup>

These published criticisms were the extreme, but by mid-century many officers expressed disillusionment with the squadron. Commander Matson defended the service, but condemned the inefficiencies and incompetence of its management:

I have not the slightest intention of casting an unworthy reflection on a service to which I am so devotedly attached; I believe the squadron on the coast of Africa, taken as a whole, would, if properly directed, do whatever man may be considered capable doing; but I believe their efforts have been cramped by proceedings over which they could have no control whatever.<sup>100</sup>

In a letter of 1848, Commodore Charles Hotham captured much of the frustration felt by officers. He despaired that ‘this blockade service has been twisted & turned by almost every Politician and naval officer each naturally thinks that if his views were adopted success would be attainable ... You can no more stop the slave trade by y[ou]r present system than you can turn the course of the Danube’. The conditions of this service were unique, and it appeared that efforts to make the squadron a success were floundering, overshadowed by persistent attacks on its existence. As Hotham wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty in the midst of Hutt’s censure, ‘I hope yr Lordship will bear in mind the great difference between the service required of this squadron & any other ... We have only just passed through the severe ordeal of two Committees of the H of C and it is very certain that any delinquency would have been joyfully seized.’<sup>101</sup> In response to this despondency and low morale, many focused on material incentives as the one positive aspect of anti-slavery service.

### **Rewards of service**

Conditions of service on the anti-slavery patrols were at best uncomfortable and tedious and at worst dangerous, pestilent and emotionally traumatic: all sapped enthusiasm for the cause.

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<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, ‘Attempts to Suppress the Slave Trade’, 29 August 1844.

<sup>100</sup> Matson, *Remarks*, p. 30. See also, for example, Matson’s letter to *The Times* arguing that ‘a preventive squadron is absolutely necessary as one of the means to suppress the slave trade’, 14 August 1849. Matson’s commitment to the anti-slavery cause is examined in Chapter 4, p. 135.

<sup>101</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/11, Charles Hotham to Captain Hamilton, 1 November 1848; Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 7 November 1848.

The majority of officers were deployed to the West African coast rather than volunteering to serve there; in recognition of the dangers, lack of apparent success and plummeting morale, what were the incentives for service? For some, as later chapters show, a commitment to abolitionism inspired their work. For others, material rewards were required as compensation for their time on the squadron. An incentive structure based around prize money and opportunities for promotion balanced the hardships they experienced, helping to explain how officers came to understand their environment and act upon their experiences.<sup>102</sup>

Prize money was one of the great inducements of naval service. Since the early eighteenth century, proclamations were issued at the beginning of each war, allowing the value of captured enemy ships to be divided among the officers and crews of the ships that took part in its capture. Under the Prize Regulations of the Act of 1807, prize money was similarly paid to those engaged in suppression. ‘Headmoney’ was paid for every slave liberated and distributed between the crew according to rank.<sup>103</sup> In 1845, Francis Meynell reported that he received more prize money after his promotion to senior lieutenant: ‘We have captured a fine brig ... as I am now an Acting Lieut. I get 10 shares instead of eight probably she will give me £85 pounds’.<sup>104</sup> The introduction of equipment clauses into treaties also made possible the seizure of empty vessels as prize. The situation whereby more prize money was available for taking full slavers was attacked by some officers like Joseph Denman for the possibility that captains may delay making a capture and thus increase the suffering of the enslaved. In 1854, the Naval Pay and Prize Act ordered that all prize bounty should be paid into a central prize account.<sup>105</sup>

In the context of redundancies and low rates of basic pay, the opportunity to earn extra money was clearly a motivating factor. In 1850, Captain George Hastings, Senior Officer of the Southern Division, wrote to Captain Eden that ‘the prize money of course, is the boon’.<sup>106</sup> The perception of ‘good’ or ‘poor’ prizes, in reference to the amount of net profit made from each capture, frequently features in narratives. In 1822, William Hall described the ‘Prize

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<sup>102</sup> Douglass C. North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. viii.

<sup>103</sup> Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1989), p. 116; Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 79-84. Prize money was similarly paid for naval action against piracy and smuggling in the nineteenth century. See Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, chapter 13.

<sup>104</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 12 October 1845.

<sup>105</sup> Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>106</sup> NMM, TRN/10, Copy letter from George Hastings to Captain Eden, 11 February 1850. See Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, chapter 12, for details of basic pay and the various inducements of naval service.

Brig *Esperanza* with 149 slaves' as a 'good prize'. Similarly, in 1841 Dr McIlroy wrote that a slaver with 450 Africans on board captured by HMS *Fantome* was a 'valuable prize'.<sup>107</sup> As such, prize vessels were regarded primarily as objects of financial worth, and little acknowledgement was made of the human cargo. Engineer John M'Kie wrote in his memoirs that the 'capture of a full slaver had a very exhilarating effect ... the chief talk being how much prize money it would bring'.<sup>108</sup> For naval surgeon Robert Flockhart, financial gain was one of the main motivations to serve on the West African coast: 'If it was not for the excitement in chasing vessels ... and making prize money this would be a dull monotonous station. We never remain at Sierra Leone any time for it is our interest to keep at sea, for two reasons, the health of the crew and our own pockets.'<sup>109</sup>

In practice, however, opportunities for accumulating large amounts of prize money were often constrained by the legalities of condemnation and the section of coast for cruising assigned to each vessel. Officers wrote about the best parts of the coast to make captures, and therefore add to the prize tally. In 1830, Edwin Hinde wrote despairingly 'we have not taken a prize these 7 months past ... However now that Captain Gordon is Commodore of the [squadron] we may expect some more, as he is at liberty to cruize [where] he likes, which is of course a very great advantage'.<sup>110</sup> Money was shared if more than one vessel was involved in a prize's capture. Writing from the Bight of Benin in 1843, McIlroy described how the *Persian* had captured a vessel 'in company with the *Spy* which accidentally came in sight and joined the chase. The *Spy* being a better sailer than the *Persian* had the merit of the capture but we no doubt will share in part of the prize money.'<sup>111</sup>

Officers received a share of the proceeds from the sale of a slaver, but only if it was condemned: as many slave vessels evaded treaty agreements and were released, a capture and conveyance to Sierra Leone could prove fruitless. Furthermore, high costs and long delays in the condemnation of vessels were common. The capturing naval vessel was expected to pay court costs; the recaptives and their associated expenses also remained the responsibility of the vessel and its crew until after adjudication. It cost one ship over £9 to maintain 253 liberated Africans from the slaver *Fanny* for one week in 1828, including the cost of 116

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<sup>107</sup> SCAUB, MS 27, Hall Journal, 1 May 1822; NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 3 October 1841.

<sup>108</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M'Kie Memoirs, ff. 67-8.

<sup>109</sup> NAS, GD 76/458, Flockhart Letters, 12 December 1838.

<sup>110</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 5 July 1830. Captain Alexander Gordon took temporary command of the station in 1830, including the Commodore's tender, the *Black Joke*.

<sup>111</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 27 January 1843.

bushels of cocoa and 20 gallons of palm oil.<sup>112</sup> These costs led to frustrations as expressed by Edwin Hinde in 1830: ‘we have captured a slave vessel but however, it is a very poor prize as the repence [sic] of condemning her will be as much as the prize money’.<sup>113</sup> George Elliot identified a further source of frustration: success for the squadron, in terms of efficient blockade, led to fewer captures and therefore less material benefit. ‘I have only made five prizes’, he wrote, ‘by keeping a strict blockade which is not a profitable line of conduct as if you do not let them out you cannot expect to catch them’.<sup>114</sup>

Lieutenant George Woollcombe wrote to his family from HMS *Bann* in 1824 to share news of his part in the capture of a Brazilian brig with 334 Africans on board: ‘my share of prize money will be 1200 pounds but as prize money is always a long time before it is paid it will be of no use at present’. Later, on his return to Britain, Woollcombe eagerly listed his financial accomplishments:

I have taken two or more [prizes] since the one in the Bann, one with 143 the other with 260 slaves on board making altogether 737 human beings I have been the means of rescuing from slavery. My share of prize money or bounty money for government gives ten pounds a head for them to the captors will be 2763. 15d my share being 3/8 of the whole [,] we also get half the proceeds of the sale of the vessel but that will scarcely pay expenses of condemnation.<sup>115</sup>

While Woollcombe noted the humanitarian element to his service, prize money was clearly the most important news to transmit home. Others lamented the lack of material success, highlighting that service on the anti-slavery patrols was regarded as paid employment like any other. Commander Alexander Murray wrote to his brother in 1847 from the *Favorite* on the Sierra Leone Division that ‘there is no prize money to be made [;] at least I have never seen a slaver’. The following year, after taking command of the Southern Division, he was more positive. ‘I may now have better luck in the way of making prizes’, he wrote, ‘but I don’t seem to have any affinity for money or I never should have been involved in a rich

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<sup>112</sup> John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>113</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 26 April 1830.

<sup>114</sup> NLS, MS 12054, NLS, MS 12054, George Elliot to Earl Minto, 5 January 1840, ff. 170-4.

<sup>115</sup> PWDRO, 710/580-2, George Woollcombe to his uncle Henry Woollcombe, [no date] April and 22 September 1824. For detail on Woollcombe’s financial difficulties, and urgency for prize money, see Sian Rees, *Sweet Water and Bitter: The Ships that Stopped the Slave Trade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009), pp. 90-2.

man's ruin.<sup>116</sup> It has been estimated that over a million pounds in prize money was paid out between 1807 and 1846, although the sums that reached individuals were relatively small.<sup>117</sup> Michael Lewis has argued that anti-slavery prize-money had 'very little inducement value', and for the ordinary rating in particular, the sums of prize money were 'puny' compared 'with the rich prizes of wartime'.<sup>118</sup>

Incentives associated with the capture of slavers also included opportunities for promotion and professional satisfaction. In 1832, Lieutenant Edward Stopford had command of the schooner *Pickle* when he wrote to his family from Maranham, Brazil. His letter highlighted the material benefits of capturing a prize in terms of gaining professional recognition:

I am rather afraid the Adm [Admiral] will not let me keep this vessel for good as he asked me one day when I was dining with him, How old are you? two & twenty sir! Upon which he said, very young, very young indeed for a schooner, they are generally commanded by old Lieuts or people with favourites as it is considered a very lucrative birth [sic] on account of the chance of prizes. If however I can manage to pick up a slaver or two of which he gets one eighth part perhaps he might not think me too young for her.<sup>119</sup>

An enthusiasm for glory and the thrill of chasing and capturing enemy vessels were common emotions for naval men; suppression took place in peacetime, but the language of war was still prevalent. As Richard Lovell Edgeworth wrote in his *Essays on Professional Education*, first published in 1808, 'no mercenary rewards can supply the place of military enthusiasm, and the love of glory.'<sup>120</sup> This was particularly the case for youthful officers on the squadron who had not experienced war. Alexander Bryson noted that 'young and ardent' officers volunteered for boat service 'in the hope of meeting with a fair opportunity of enhancing their own reputation in the service, by some spirited attack upon the ruffians who infest these seas'.<sup>121</sup> Astley Cooper Key wrote to his family from the West Indies station in 1840. As a

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<sup>116</sup> NAS, GD 219/304/36-8, Murray Letters, 22 September 1847, 5 May 1848.

<sup>117</sup> Robert J. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century' in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), pp. 80-1.

<sup>118</sup> Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p. 237.

<sup>119</sup> NMRN, 1989.222/89, Stopford Letters, 15 January 1832.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>121</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 200.

teenager soon to pass his lieutenant's exam, his letters are imbued with the adventure of the chase: 'Lots of slavers knocking about now ... so we stand in chance of an action. Would not that be splendid? If we take a prize, however large, I am to go in command of her, - think of that!'<sup>122</sup> He reported one near-miss:

If we had come up with her that night what a glorious fight we should have had! Lieutenant Holland would have been sure to have been promoted, and so would I directly I had passed. It would have been a glorious cutting-out expedition – only our ten men against at least thirty or forty on board the slaver ... How glorious! Seeing one's name in the papers for something of that sort! ... I was sharpening my sword in the most butcher-like manner all the chase.<sup>123</sup>

Key's hunting metaphors stress the element of competition, sportsmanship, and violence in anti-slavery naval action, narratives linked to demonstrations of masculinity which became more prominent as the century progressed.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, in a letter to his brother Edwin Hinde was keen to stress his 'full determination of shooting one of the Spaniards ... to be able to say that I killed a pirate in action.'<sup>125</sup> Letters written home in particular often placed emphasis on confrontation and the author's bravery, although as already seen, boredom and monotony were more common experiences.

The role of patronage and influence held sway on the West Africa station as on any other. Francis Meynell was keen to stress his desire for promotion in letters to his father in 1845, asking him to 'exert a little influence to get me confirmed to my rank of Lieutenant which at present is only acting ... I know you don't like asking favours in that quarter but these things are the custom of the service'. The following year he was successful and reported, 'I myself am now tasting the sweets of the service as the Second Lieut. of a 10 gun brig ... as we are taking plenty of prizes there is no want of change'.<sup>126</sup> George Augustus Elliot, Commander of HMS *Columbine*, was the son of Rear-Admiral George Elliot and nephew of the Second Earl

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<sup>122</sup> Colomb, *Memoirs*, p. 52. Key had a distinguished naval career and became First Naval Lord in 1879.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>124</sup> See Lindsay Doulton, 'The Royal Navy's anti-slavery campaign in the western Indian Ocean, c. 1860-1890: race, empire and identity', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull (2010), chapter 5, especially pp. 178-80.

<sup>125</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 28 May 1831.

<sup>126</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 17 August 1845, 27 March 1846. The Meynell family were wealthy landowners in Derbyshire. Francis Meynell makes a number of references to the family home 'Langley', now Meynell-Langley Hall.

of Minto, First Lord of the Admiralty between 1835 and 1841. In a particularly privileged position to ask for favour, Elliot wrote to his uncle:

...as we are all heartily tired of the Coast of Africa if you could consistently transport us to some more pleasurable and less monotonous part of the world it would be a great relief. The Pacific affords the best prospect both in an enjoyable and lucrative sense unless there is a chance of active service in any other quarter which of course would always be the most desirable object to look to. I feel that however much it might lay in your power or inclination to serve me you could not do so without knowing what my wishes were and have therefore stated them.

However, Elliot also diplomatically added: 'I can assure you that Columbine can do her duty cheerfully wherever she may be required.'<sup>127</sup> A position on the West Africa station was still preferable to unemployment; in the post-war 'slump', a lieutenant's prospects for promotion in particular were poor. Furthermore, discontent was fuelled by the backlog in promotion created by the lack of arrangements for the retirement of older officers and continued acceptance of young officer-volunteers.<sup>128</sup> After his experiences on the *Owen Glendower*, Midshipman Binstead wrote: 'my mind made up to return now to England without promotion the sight of seeing so many youngsters promoted is heart breaking'.<sup>129</sup> Commodore Hotham noted similar concerns in his letters regarding discipline. 'Officers complain that they ruin their health in vain', he wrote, 'that it is a black list station that even vacancies by death are not given'.<sup>130</sup>

In his letters of 1842, Augustus Arkwright was absorbed with the reshuffling of positions on the station's ships. He wrote from Sierra Leone that he was 'anxious to arrive at the rank of Lieutenant', but despaired of his prospects, particularly when they were so tied to the risks of service:

It is nonsense going to the coast of Africa for promotion, which is never got now, or very rarely, and when a chance does come up, the party concerned are sure to murder

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<sup>127</sup> NLS, MS 12058, George Elliot to Earl Minto, 12 August [1840?], f. 192. Elliot's emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, p. 134; Hamilton, 'Naval Hagiography', pp. 386-7; Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 190.

<sup>129</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 21 October 1823.

<sup>130</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/8, Charles Hotham to Captain Hamilton, 24 October 1846, f. 30.

about 50 ignorant Spaniards or Portuguese, or else lose their own heads, arms or legs, which promotion in the navy ... is but a poor substitute.<sup>131</sup>

Later that year, however, Arkwright appeared more optimistic. Now in command of the schooner *Prompt*, he described his time 'cruising for slavers, and boating up rivers' as 'an employment attended with every disadvantage except the chance of promotion.' He believed his prospects were directly related to the dangers he encountered. He had 'seen a great deal of life amongst savages', and in this period of peace, Arkwright perceived such action as equivalent to wartime achievements: 'all little scrapes of this kind, in these days of peace, are thought something of; and as to one's advancement in the service: which must be slow in the Navy just now'. As a result, he was 'entitled to daily and expecting a Lieutenancy.'<sup>132</sup> This positive outlook led Arkwright to offer the following broader assessment of his time on the coast:

Any person who remains a certain time on the Coast of Africa and behaves himself, ought to be rewarded in some manner ... the whole manner of living is anything but suitable. Fancy what a life it must be, when, white fellow creatures scarcely ever meet each other. And if they do happen to fall in with each other neither party knows what to say for want of a refined idea. As for society such a word is not known in Africa ... Notwithstanding, I can very well manage to put up with every thing that comes across for a time; and I think have a mind sufficiently strong to live amongst these people, without injuring the heart, my feelings, and principles, which are so directly opposite. After a little promotion is gained I hope to look forward to getting a little room on shore; where it will be possible to lead a civilized life, perhaps in Co a wife.<sup>133</sup>

Expressing what he regarded as the alien nature of life in the unrefined colony, far removed from his ideals of British middle-upper class social and cultural norms, Arkwright wished to distance himself from the inhabitants of Sierra Leone and those he met outside naval circles, 'these people' whom he regarded as irreconcilably socially, culturally and ethnically separate from himself.<sup>134</sup> Yet his analysis also revealed an even-tempered and pragmatic attitude

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<sup>131</sup> DRO, D5991/10/72-73, Augustus Arkwright to his mother, 19 June 1842.

<sup>132</sup> DRO, D5991/10/74, Augustus Arkwright to his grandfather from Sierra Leone, 7 November 1842.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Arkwright's family were wealthy Derbyshire cotton spinning mill owners. He later became MP for North Derbyshire. See [www.cromfordvillage.co.uk/arkwrights.html](http://www.cromfordvillage.co.uk/arkwrights.html) [accessed 2 April 2012]. His condescension was

towards the service which contrasted with the pessimism of others. Although in the minority, there were other positive assessments of life on the squadron.

### **Alternative accounts**

In 1829, Edwin Thomas Hinde was a teenage officer-volunteer who was to serve successively on the *Atholl*, *Black Joke* and *Fair Rosamond*. Hinde appeared content and unaffected by his experiences on the anti-slavery patrols, writing to his family in 1830, ‘people may talk of the hardships of a sea life, however I have felt none, with the exception of sometimes in the night getting a good wetting, which in this climate is very disagreeable.’<sup>135</sup> In 1830, the *Atholl* captured a French slaver with 227 slaves on board, and Hinde was sent with the second lieutenant, William Ramsay, to convey it to Sierra Leone. In contrast to the many other distressing accounts of conditions on prize vessels, Hinde appeared to enjoy the excitement of the task, writing home:

... here you may think I was unhappy but on the contrary I never lived better in my life: we lost 12 slaves who died in the passage: however the slaves are not so miserable as you would suspect; in general they are merry and after when on Deck they used to sing & dance’.<sup>136</sup>

There are disconcerting undertones in Hinde’s description of recaptives under naval authority, as later chapters explore. The practice of encouraging dancing echoes similar experiences for the enslaved on slave ships, although Hinde alludes to the idea that the Africans on board his prize danced voluntarily. That he ‘never lived better’ regardless of witnessing the deaths of 12 Africans is also an uncomfortable admission. Hinde regarded life on a prize vessel as an enjoyable interlude to the monotony experienced on the squadron. He reported taking advantage of ‘a first rate French cook, & all kind of fresh provisions’ such as ‘guava jelly and brandy fruits’ while on board.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, in 1838 naval surgeon Robert Flockhart reported on the advantages of taking slave ships: ‘We get plenty of claret out of

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not limited to the people of Sierra Leone. In a letter of 30 April 1841 he declared Portsea a ‘horrid sea port town ... I would much rather be living with the wild Indians in the centre of South America’.

<sup>135</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 26 April 1830. Hinde was rated midshipman in 1830.

<sup>136</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 23 February 1830.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

them which is a very good drink with water. As for sugars we might set up a tobacconist shop. One vessel had 150 boxes on board'.<sup>138</sup>

Other officers' perceptions were affected by improving conditions on the squadron, particularly medical advances and changes in tactics to reduce the risks of disease. In 1849, Lieutenant Frederick Forbes referred his readers to change and progress in the service, particularly the decline in expeditions up rivers, which was 'happily, done away with (on most parts where danger is to be dreaded).' Forbes declared it a mistake to consider Africa 'the deadly continent it is the fashion to describe it.' He attributed such fears to the hyperbole of critics: 'Less cant on the subject of African diseases would materially assist to stop the slave trade, and render African enterprise more genial.'<sup>139</sup> Nor was every ship afflicted by epidemics of fever. Surgeon Peter Leonard wrote that the *Dryad* returned to Britain in 1832, having 'out of a complement of three hundred men, lost only ten by disease ... during a stay of twenty months in that unhealthy region.'<sup>140</sup>

A year after his complaints about ill-discipline, Commodore Hotham wrote more positively about his experiences on the West African coast:

... so far from disliking the coast of Africa I enjoy the work & excitement and have been blessed with excellent health & spirits; there is no truer saying than that matters are always painted blacker than they really are & assuredly the proverb has not been gainsayed here. The squadron is becoming as you would wish to see them. We shift top-sail yards in nine minutes, we fire admirably & my worst vessel shifted her main topmast in one hour. There is rivalry, emulation & zeal amongst us & we shall soon be in as good order as any Mediterranean squadron ... So far from the health of the crews having suffered, I believe the sick lists never were as low.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> NAS, GD 76/458, Flockhart Letters, 12 November 1838.

<sup>139</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Six Months' Service in the African Blockade, from April to October, 1848, in command of H.M.S. Bonetta* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), p. 123; Frederick Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans, being the journals of two missions to the King of Dahomey and residence at his capital in the years 1849 and 1850* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1854), p. 31.

<sup>140</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 267.

<sup>141</sup> HHC, DDHO/10/8, Charles Hotham to Captain Baillie Hamilton, 2 April 1847, f. 85. Hamilton was Second Secretary to the Admiralty.

Hotham's favourable remarks to a senior figure in the Admiralty may have been overstated. After the recent criticism levelled at the squadron, he clearly saw no harm in extolling the good health and organisation of the station under his command, and was particularly keen to encourage comparisons with other naval stations. Nonetheless, his comments indicate that service on the West Africa squadron was not universally disliked, particularly as conditions began to improve.

## Conclusion

Alexander Bryson described service on the West Africa squadron as 'the most disagreeable, arduous and unhealthy service that falls to the lot of British officers and seamen'.<sup>142</sup> Many officers agreed with his analysis. In recognition of the high risks, poor conditions and plummeting morale, many questioned their commitment to the service and were concerned solely with financial incentives. Others went further and declared that disgust at the nature of life and work on the coast overrode all else. Captain George Hastings wrote conclusively in a letter of 1850:

I would not accept of another command to come out here, and to remain one moment longer by my own free consent if I were safe of making ten thousand pounds. It is the most disagreeable service I was ever employed on, and a year is quite sufficient in one's life.<sup>143</sup>

Similarly, others did all they could to be relieved from the station, regardless of prize money or professional advancement. Lieutenant George Kenyon accepted temporary command of the *Bonetta* in 1842. He wrote, 'on any station but this [*Bonetta*] would be a very good command. But as it is ... I think the command of the finest vessel on the station with a good prospect of making prize money is not equal to the risk of loosing [sic] health.' The following month he wrote that he was 'as anxious to get off this disgusting station as the first day I came on it'.<sup>144</sup> Such assessments were based on the extraordinary nature of anti-slavery service, which was regularly regarded in negative terms. Commander Alexander Murray

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<sup>142</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 161

<sup>143</sup> NMM, TRN/10, Hastings to Eden, 11 February 1850.

<sup>144</sup> SALS, DD/X/GRA/1, George Kenyon to his parents, 24 January and 23 February 1842. Kenyon was invalided home with fever in 1843 but returned to the West African coast in command of HMS *Cygnets* in 1847-49.

believed he was owed favour due to the hardships he had experienced. Writing to his brother with disgust that the Commodore was ‘keeping me on this dreadful coast for two rainy seasons in succession’, he declared, ‘18 months of the Sierra Leone division ought to count for ten years any where else.’<sup>145</sup> However, while the physical and material conditions of service were for many the dominant factor in their evaluation of their employment, others were driven by religious zeal and humanitarian imperatives for suppression, to which the next chapter will now turn.

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<sup>145</sup> NAS, GD 219/304/36, Murray Letters, 22 September 1847.

## Chapter 4

### **Anti-slavery and the Royal Navy: humanitarianism, morality and belief**

The *Instructions for the Guidance of Her Majesty's Naval Officers Employed in the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (1844), issued to all officers serving on anti-slavery patrols, began with the assertion: 'The Slave Trade has been denounced by all the civilized world as repugnant to every principle of justice and humanity.'<sup>1</sup> This chapter will explore how far naval officers agreed with this sentiment. In doing so, it will examine the impact of humanitarianism, religiosity, and concepts of British identity on their beliefs and how they understood the nature of their duty on the West African coast. Naval suppression was one part of a complex history of British abolitionism; as many scholars have argued, abolition was a multi-dimensional blend of religion, morality, philanthropy, politics, economics and public opinion.<sup>2</sup> This chapter places naval officers involved in suppression at the heart of anti-slavery efforts in the nineteenth century, and specifically, identifies the ways in which individuals engaged with these cornerstones of the abolitionist agenda. Christian ideals and beliefs in the humanitarian cause led some to express moral condemnation of the slave trade, as did their understanding of perceived national character. However, others were indifferent to or against the principles of abolition, particularly as attitudes regarding anti-slavery and race evolved and hardened as the century progressed.

#### **Suppression, anti-slavery and British identity**

The connections between an evolving British identity and the growth of empire have been explored in much scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Abolitionism played a key role in defining this emerging sense of Britishness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and had a significant impact on how the British regarded themselves on the world stage. Anti-slavery campaigns before 1807 and after have been characterised as the embodiment of a uniquely British

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<sup>1</sup> *Instructions for the Guidance of Her Majesty's Naval Officers Employed in the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (London: T. R. Harrison, 1844), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> For a succinct account of this argument see John Oldfield, 'Slavery and Abolition in the Atlantic World', Chasing Freedom: Abolition 200 Conference: [www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning\\_adult\\_conferences\\_Chasingfreedom.htm](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning_adult_conferences_Chasingfreedom.htm) [accessed 26 November 2009].

<sup>3</sup> For example, Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

devotion to the natural rights of freedom and moral progress.<sup>4</sup> The focus of nineteenth-century abolitionists evolved from an end to the slave trade to the ‘gradual’ emancipation of slaves in the colonies to demands for their full freedom, in a belief that Britain could lessen the sense of national guilt over the slave trade and reassert the national character as a Christian, liberty-loving nation.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, as Alan Lester has argued, abolitionists redeployed a transatlantic network of humanitarian connections in existence since the previous century, including missionaries, Quakers, evangelical men of influence, middle-class women and working-class radicals. Their goals were emancipation, and increasingly, civilisation of the empire’s subjects: ‘the essence of Britishness projected on to the wider world’.<sup>6</sup> Former British involvement in the slave trade was subsequently re-framed as a celebration of the nation’s abolitionist achievements. The anti-slavery cause became a political tool to create a widely disseminated portrayal of Britain which focused on justice, liberty and morality, in which the roles of politics and national identity were as influential as the crusade against the slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Anti-slavery, as Joel Quirk and David Richardson have asserted, placed the nation ‘in the vanguard of European civilization and at the forefront of human progress.’<sup>8</sup>

The Royal Navy played a key role in Britain’s humanitarian project. Since the eighteenth century, Britain’s maritime supremacy was regarded as an upholder of freedom and crucial to national identity. As P. J. Marshall has argued, ‘Protestantism, commerce, maritime power and freedom were seen as inextricably linked’.<sup>9</sup> In the aftermath of the upheavals of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the mood of despondency in Britain – born of economic decline, unemployment and social unrest – was given focus by an enthusiasm for abolition. Suppression activities became the focal point of action against the slave trade and distracted

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 28-9. Brown argues that the shift in opinion regarding slavery as antithetical to British liberty emerged after Britain’s defeat in the American Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Edith F. Hurwitz, *Politics and the Public Conscience: Slave Emancipation and the Abolitionist Movement in Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), pp. 41-2.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Lester, ‘British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 54 (2002), pp. 25-6.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Hamilton, Kate Hodgson and Joel Quirk, ‘Slavery, memory and identity’, in idem (eds), *Slavery Memory and Identity: National Representation and Global Legacies* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 22-3.

<sup>8</sup> Joel Quirk and David Richardson, ‘Anti-Slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-historical Perspective’, *The Journal of Modern European History*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 86-7.

<sup>9</sup> P. J. Marshall, ‘Empire and British Identity: The Maritime Dimension’ in David Cannadine (ed.), *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain’s Maritime World, c.1763 – c.1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 46.

attention from domestic affairs.<sup>10</sup> These efforts were regarded as a high moral crusade, and a fundamental feature of British abolitionist policy was to insist that other countries follow its humanitarian lead. Beliefs in British moral superiority and national honour in the anti-slavery mission on the West African coast were thus strengthened by contests with other nations who continued to trade illegally in slaves despite international treaties. For example, in published remarks, Commander John Foote asserted the un-Christian behaviour of the Brazilians, who, ‘disregarding alike the principles of religion and morality, the faith of treaties, and the execration of the whole civilised world, continue the nefarious traffic in human flesh; and in pursuit of their guilty speculations practise greater cruelties ... than the minds of Christian men can conceive’.<sup>11</sup>

The concern of this chapter, tied to these notions of British identity formulated in the anti-slavery cause, is how far abolitionist ideals inspired naval officers of the West Africa squadron. As the majority of nineteenth-century naval officers came from the middle or upper-middle classes, most were exposed to a culture of anti-slavery sentiment in popular politics, literature and the press, as part of the wider middle-class evangelical reform movement which included free trade, temperance and the reform of manners.<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that the lower ranks of the naval hierarchy were unresponsive to abolitionism. Anti-slavery was at various times a popular movement, with the involvement of all classes, and both sexes, in generating pressure for abolition and emancipation. Extra-parliamentary efforts in support of abolitionism that erupted in the late eighteenth century – such as petitioning, public meetings and membership of anti-slavery societies – continued to recur, notably in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>13</sup>

How far did similar impulses inspire naval officers? The naval mutinies of 1797 at Spithead and Nore against poor living and working conditions in the navy demonstrated that naval

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<sup>10</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 321-2, 359-60.

<sup>11</sup> ‘A Few Remarks on the Slave-Trade in the Brazils by Commander Foote R.N.’, *USM*, Part II (1845), p. 378. For a wider discussion of ideas of ‘cultural imperialism’ see Howard Temperley, ‘Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism’, in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform* (Folkestone: Wm Dawson & Sons, 1980), pp. 335-50.

<sup>12</sup> David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> John Oldfield, ‘Abolition and Emancipation’ in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), pp. 64-75; Seymour Drescher, ‘Public Opinion and the Destruction of British Colonial Slavery’ in J. Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 22-48. In ‘Religion, Urbanization and Anti-Slavery Mobilization in Britain, 1788-1833’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 14:3 (2010), pp. 263-279, Joel Quirk and David Richardson position the popular appeal of British anti-slavery within the forces of religious change and urbanisation in British society from the late eighteenth century.

personnel could be receptive to political radicalism. Indeed the grievances of the mutineers were often portrayed as those of the ‘enslaved’ who were treated inhumanely by their superiors.<sup>14</sup> However, pride in British efforts against the slave trade did not make all Britons abolitionists, and it was not the case that anti-slavery patrols were overrun with men eager to be employed on that particular service. The navy remained inherently conservative, and some officers regarded suppression as a professional duty to perform without dwelling on any humanitarian purpose. As shown in the previous chapter, employment on the West Africa squadron offered a paid wage at a time when naval jobs were increasingly scarce; a discussion of personal motivations for service must take place in awareness that few volunteered for a particular naval station. Nevertheless, many testimonies of naval suppression offer emotion, insight and conviction regarding the anti-slavery cause, often driven by religious belief.

### **Evangelicalism and the navy**

The historical links between anti-slavery and religious dissent are well-established. The eighteenth-century evangelical revival initiated by the writings of John Wesley, George Whitefield and others laid the foundation for a wide variety of non-conformist reform movements including those led by Quakers, Baptists, Unitarians and Methodists.<sup>15</sup> The new spirit of religion became active in political protest, finding particular expression in the anti-slavery crusade. The evangelical interpretation of the Bible condemned slavery as contrary to the will of God; this condemnation also had a moral dimension, as the heightened evangelical sense of providential judgement focused on the slave trade as a national sin. Abolition was therefore regarded as the only way to pay the nation’s moral debt against those who had been enslaved.<sup>16</sup>

As a religious and moral movement, evangelicalism infiltrated the institutions of Great Britain and dominated the political agenda. As Richard Blake has argued, there was a concurrent surge in evangelical sentiment in the navy by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a minority movement which promoted religious observance, morality and

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<sup>14</sup> G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Floating Republic* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), first published 1935, pp. 66, 245-8.

<sup>15</sup> Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England*, translated and edited by Bernard Semmel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975), chapter 8.

humanitarianism for the reformation of maritime society.<sup>17</sup> During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the influence of evangelical naval officers was significant enough to earn them the pejorative ‘Blue Lights’, named after night-time flares. Lower-deck seamen with Methodist convictions, ‘psalm-singers’, also established prayer and Bible-study gatherings. This evangelical belief often translated to anti-slavery sentiment. For example, Marine officer Andrew Burn published pamphlets denouncing the slave trade in 1792.<sup>18</sup>

Prominent evangelicals in the navy included Sir Charles Middleton, appointed First Lord of the Admiralty in 1805. While serving in the West Indies in 1759, Middleton was in command of the *Arundel* when the British slave ship *Swift*, vulnerable to capture from the French, joined Middleton’s fleet for protection. James Ramsay served as naval surgeon under Middleton and witnessed the human impact of a fever epidemic on the slaver. Both men had a ‘conversion’ experience and increasingly participated in the anti-slavery movement.<sup>19</sup> Ramsay left the navy in 1761 and sought ordination in the Church to enable him to work among slaves in the West Indies. Later installed as vicar on Middleton’s estate, he wrote the first statement of the abolitionist cause to be argued on first-hand evidence, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784).<sup>20</sup> Ramsay and Middleton, later Lord Barham, were key members of the influential evangelicals meeting at Barham Court: their social circle included William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and other leading abolitionists.<sup>21</sup>

These evangelical impulses reached the active ships of the navy by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lord Barham’s evangelical principles found expression in his *Regulations and Instructions Relating to His Majesty’s Service at Sea* (1806), in which for the first time a naval chaplain’s duties were outlined.<sup>22</sup> Middleton’s nephew, Admiral James Gambier, was also associated with this intersecting world of naval politics, abolition and religion. He gave support to the distribution of Bibles and to the establishment of dedicated missions and

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy 1775-1815: Blue Lights & Psalm-Singers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005), pp. 168-9; John E. Talbott, *The Pen and Ink Sailor: Charles Middleton and the King’s Navy, 1778-1813* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 129-30.

<sup>20</sup> J. Watt, ‘Ramsay, James (1733-1789)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23086, accessed 4 October 2008].

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*, pp. 341-4.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2000), p. 193.

floating chapels. In retirement, Gambier became the first president of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1812 and the British and Foreign Seaman's Friend Society and Bethel Union in 1820.<sup>23</sup> The spiritual mission at sea post-1815 was given impetus by 'Bo'sun Smith' – the Baptist minister Reverend George Charles Smith – and encouraged by junior officers such as Lieutenant the Reverend Richard Marks, who wrote his spiritual reminiscences, *The Retrospect* (1816), to convey the Christian message. By mid-century, scripture reading, study groups and prayer meetings had become a key part of maritime religious observance. Sunday service was compulsory throughout the navy and ships introduced voluntary daily prayers.<sup>24</sup>

Proof of the effectiveness of the evangelical campaign in influencing the Admiralty can be seen in some of the key appointments of senior officers on the anti-slavery patrols, those charged with driving and implementing British anti-slavery policy in West Africa. Captain Edward Columbine had sympathies with the anti-slavery movement and ties with the Saints. Captain Frederick Irby, sent to command the vessels on the West African coast in 1811, was claimed by Zachary Macaulay to be 'a man of our own choice'.<sup>25</sup> There is evidence that this evangelical abolitionist sentiment was sustained in the ships of the West Africa squadron, although religious observance on naval vessels remained far from universal.

### **Religiosity on the anti-slavery patrols**

Reconciling religious observance with the living and working conditions on an active naval ship was difficult, as the recruitment and freedom to preach of naval chaplains was in the hands of ships' captains. Clergymen could have little influence on crews unless any relevance was seen in religious worship by those in command. Officers with deep religious convictions were often dismissed as dour by the ship's company; Gambier was known as 'Dismal Jimmie' to his men. Edward Mangin was chaplain of the *Gloucester* in 1812. He perceived that 'nothing can possibly be more unsuitably or more awkwardly situated than a clergyman in a ship of war; every object around him is at variance with the sensibilities of a rational and enlightened mind'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Blake, 'Gambier, James, Baron Gambier (1756-1833)', *ODNB* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10321, accessed 4 October 2008].

<sup>24</sup> Blake, *Evangelicals*, pp. 245-7, 275, 286-91.

<sup>25</sup> Southam, *Jane Austen*, p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1989), pp. 116, 209; Blake, *Evangelicals*, p. 3; Robert Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize: Journeys in Slave Ships Taken as Prizes by the Royal Navy', *Slavery and Abolition*, 31:1 (2010), p. 105.

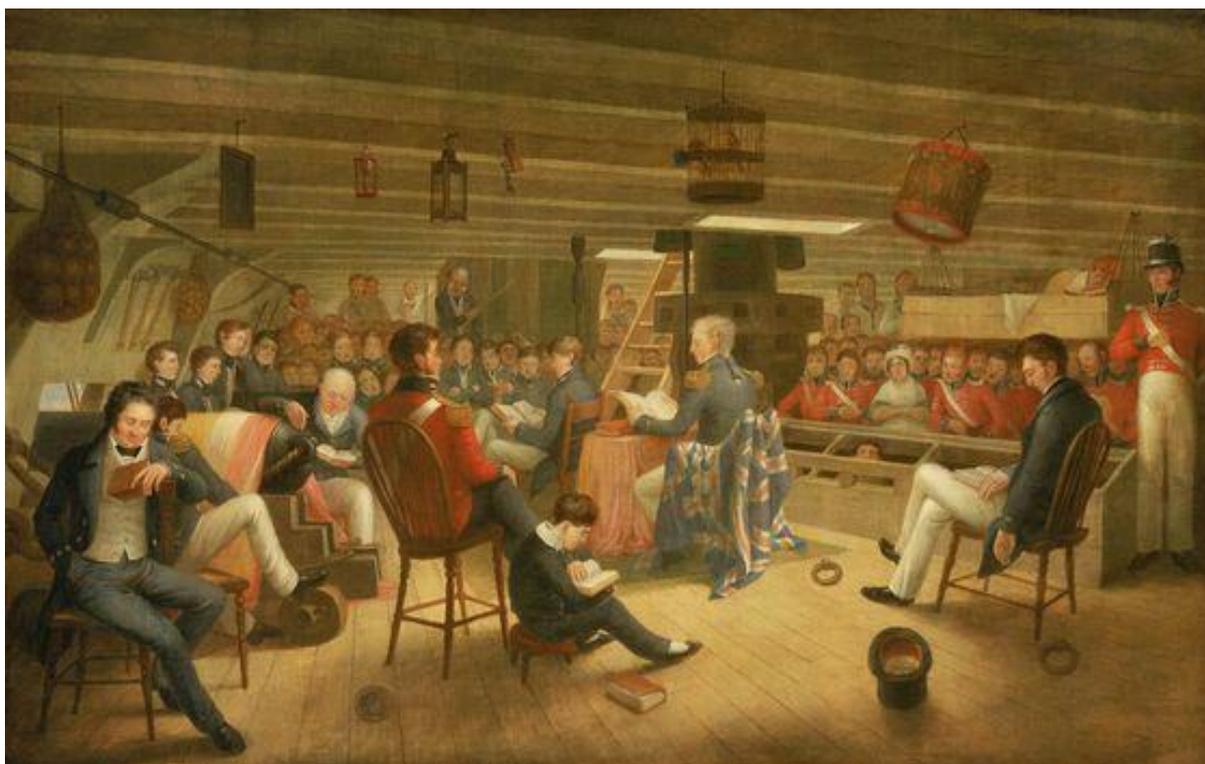


Fig. 14: 'Divine Service as it is usually performed on board a British frigate at sea', Augustus Earle, c. 1820-37 (NMM, BHC1119).

In Augustus Earle's painting, naval officers and marines are depicted in various attitudes of attention as an Admiral gives divine service on board a naval frigate. While some appear to be reading lessons from the Bible, others looked bored, or even asleep. Those serving on the West African coast held similar reservations about the impact of religion on ships' crews. In the River Bonny in 1826, naval surgeon Richard Jackson noted how 'with the English Vessels no distinction is made on a Sunday – they work on board as usual'.<sup>27</sup> Others, however, attached more importance to religious practice. Midshipman Astley Cooper Key, who served off the south-east American coast in the early 1840s, noted how he regularly read '*Plain Sermons*, reading one nearly every morning before breakfast'.<sup>28</sup> In 1849, Midshipman Henry Rogers remarked on his attendance at church on Ascension Island in his journal: 'God is very merciful and just; Noah repented or rather was a righteous man and believed his God when all the world except his own family continued in their wickedness - the subject of the evening's sermon.'<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> R. M. Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage to Bonny River on the West Coast of Africa in the Ship Kingston from Liverpool*, ed. Roland Jackson (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1934), p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> P. H. Colomb, *Memoirs of the Admiral the Right Honorable Sir Astley Cooper Key* (London: Methuen, 1898), p. 83. Key is likely referring to John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (1834-43).

<sup>29</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 23 September 1849.

The journals of Commander Walter Estcourt and Captain Claude Henry Mason Buckle reveal their deep religious belief. Estcourt was Commander of the fever-ridden *Éclair* from August 1844 until his death in 1845. His obituary in the *Nautical Magazine* described him as ‘a character of deeply earthed Christian principle.’<sup>30</sup> These beliefs are exemplified in his journal entries for his time on the squadron which reveal how he relied on his faith for comfort. His daily commentaries frequently included ‘read prayers’ or ‘read the liturgy and a sermon’, and in times of distress his religious belief was most openly revealed. Following the death of several of his crew he wrote that he urged the survivors ‘to place all their hope & all their confidence in the Almighty ... God grant that he and all may be spared’. Two months later, with disease rife on board, Estcourt’s personal interpretation of his situation contained deeply emotional religious expression:

... we are however in the hands of our Almighty Being who ... will in His own good time stay the plague of body but it is very very trying now ... very trying of our faith GOD however knows what is best for us and can bring that to pass; our present affliction may be waking in us a sincere repentance & a finer faith and will when Jesus right, but no sooner, be withdrawn; all therefore should unite in prayer to GOD, that he may be pleased to withhold the hand of the destroying angel.<sup>31</sup>

Estcourt’s faith remained undiminished. In the final journal entry before his death, he wrote, ‘therefore will I always trust in the Lord that he will in His own good time and in His own way save us out of trouble’.<sup>32</sup>

Captain Claude Buckle served on anti-slavery patrols between 1841 and 1845 in command of HMS *Growler*, and again in 1849-50 as captain of the *Centaur*. An experienced officer, he had previously served in Burma and on the South American and West Indies stations.<sup>33</sup>

Buckle and Estcourt were good friends; Estcourt wrote that he admired Buckle ‘as a zealous officer and an intelligent man and felt a sincere friendship for him as a gentleman’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Included in a collection of documents in GRO, D1571/F530.

<sup>31</sup> GRO, D1571/F544, Estcourt Journals, 25-26 April and 4 June 1845.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 September 1845.

<sup>33</sup> Biographical information provided by West Sussex Record Office.

<sup>34</sup> GRO, D1571/F544, Estcourt Journals, 18 January 1845. The first volume in the series of John Marshall’s *Royal Naval Biography* (1823) held by the Caird Library at the NMM is inscribed: ‘CHM Buckle, March 1846 ... Presented to me by Bucknall Estcourt Esq. as a memento of his son, my late lamented friend.’

Buckle's journals reveal a deeply religious man. His private reading was invariably composed of evangelical texts, including 'Scott's Bible and Commentary', and, 'one of Cooper's heart stirring sermons'. It is likely that Buckle referred to Edward Cooper's *Practical and Familiar Sermons*, first published in 1809. Writers like Thomas Scott, a founder of the CMS, condemned virtually all forms of contemporary slavery. In his *Commentary* on Exodus 21: 2-11, perhaps a passage that Buckle read on board the *Growler*, Scott wrote that slavery was 'inconsistent with the law of love'. Buckle was a great admirer: 'How truly scriptural, spiritual and practical is Scott, how opposed to the mere nominal Christian.'<sup>35</sup> Among Buckle's personal papers is an engraving of the abolitionist Granville Sharp and a handwritten copy of the inscription found on Sharp's memorial tablet at Westminster Abbey, erected by the African Institution in 1816, in which Sharp was described as 'among the foremost of the honorable band associated to deliver Africa from the rapacity of Europe.' There is also a handwritten copy of the epitaph on Sharp's tomb in Fulham churchyard.<sup>36</sup> An admiration of Granville Sharp would suggest an appreciation of Sharp's anti-slavery ideals and in a rare reflection on his employment Buckle linked the nature of his 'duty' to an idealised nature of the service: 'I must keep in the path of duty, and free the wretched African!'<sup>37</sup>

However, while Buckle was clearly influenced by evangelical ideology, his journals offer few insights into his views about the slave trade. Buckle's accounts of captured slavers contain little emotion and he was somewhat clinical in his reporting. Typical journal entries include: 'at 8PM we captured the Sherbro Schooner now called the *Erquador* with between 3 and 400 slaves on board – and have her now in tow'. In contrast to other accounts of suppression, there is little commentary on interaction with enslaved Africans. For example, he wrote that the *Growler* towed a prize through the night, 'till 8am when we stopped & put to count the number of slaves which proved to be 349'.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Buckle does not offer any of the emotional miseries that frequently appear in other officers' narratives. His reasoned and prudent journal entry for one New Year's Eve on the squadron is a good example: 'Thus closes the year 1844 in which I have had many occasions of feeling grateful for undeserved mercies and benefits conferred and for much personal prosperity [;] would that I could duly

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<sup>35</sup> WSRO, BUCKLE/470, 7 October, 14 October 1844; Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>36</sup> WSRO, BUCKLE/524. It is not clear who transcribed the memorials, although the handwriting does not resemble Buckle's as seen in his journals.

<sup>37</sup> WSRO, BUCKLE/476, 3 February 1850.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 October and 5 November 1844.

consider these things, and so profit by them.’<sup>39</sup> Buckle’s journals offer an example of the inherent difficulties in attempting to gauge attitudes from personal narratives, as the lack of a sentiment in writing does not necessarily imply a corresponding absence in an individual’s beliefs. This is not to suggest, however, that religious belief automatically equated to anti-slavery sentiment, as shall be explored later.<sup>40</sup>

Buckle scorned the religiosity of the *Growler*’s crew. One Sunday he noted that he ‘performed divine service on deck & read one of Cooper’s sermons to ship’s co.’ However, ‘I fear to very little purpose, they are very practical and scriptural and truly evangelist, not what our ignorant and polluted & thoughtless men like to hear, nor I believe the officers either.’<sup>41</sup> Yet while religion clearly held an insecure place in naval life, there were a number of naval officers, driven by humanitarianism, who expressed a commitment to suppression with benevolent and Christian purpose.

### **Abolitionists in the West Africa squadron**

Within a generation, naval personnel witnessed the shift from an economy flourishing on the profits of slavery, and a political structure in large part supportive of it, to abolition and a moral condemnation of the trade the navy were once instructed to protect. Charles R. Fox did not serve on anti-slavery patrols, but in 1811 was on board HMS *Emerald* en route to the Cape of Good Hope when he and several of the crew boarded a Portuguese brig laden with 370 slaves. Fox described how the men were in irons and ‘stowed in the most horrible way, each person not having above an inch to stir’. The Felony Act of 1811 made slave trading illegal for British subjects, but Fox’s encounter with the slaver occurred before the various treaties signed between Britain and other nations which made possible the detention of foreign ships suspected of slave trading. Fox lamented, ‘If we had been able to find one Englishman on board she would have been a very good prize but we could not’. Fox’s opinion on the slave trade was clear, as he accurately predicted the future of the navy’s role:

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 31 December 1844.

<sup>40</sup> As Catherine Hall has argued in *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 361, many evangelicals hated slavery but also hated slaves and accepted racial inequality.

<sup>41</sup> WSRO, BUCKLE/470, 6 October 1844.

I am very glad I saw a slave ship but on the first view of it, it is a very disgusting sight ... The way they get these unfortunate creatures is thus, they make one of the Kings of the Country some small presents such as beads, knives &c and in return he gives so many of his subjects as prisoners! I think the abolition ought to be extended all over the world and that every man of war should make any ship (of whatever country) a prize that had any slaves on board.<sup>42</sup>

In 1815, John Tailour wrote to General Sir Charles Pasley from the *Comus* in the River Calabar, noting that he had captured three slave vessels. Tailour was one of the first naval officers tasked with meeting African rulers to persuade them to abandon slave trading. His description of the encounter is suffused with abolitionist rhetoric and moral condemnation, but also illustrates the difficulties faced by naval officers as Britain's representatives, encouraging abolition while only a decade earlier seen to be profiting from the slave trade:

My language was new to them. I spoke of humanity. I described the miserable wretched existence these poor slaves whom they sell off their coast have to go through ... they had never met with any man who thought ill of the slave trade. Their fathers in short their grandfathers – and they knew not how many generations before them they said had been led by King George to consider the trade as then only good.

His language was punctuated with racial stereotypes, but Tailour nevertheless expressed sympathy and paternalism towards the enslaved. 'Some would have us believe that these black slaves are an insensible unfeeling race', he wrote:

I wish you had seen the effect produced on the first party which were brought on board here ... after knocking their irons off & giving each a waist cloth, I took up a pair of the shackles, showed it them all round & with indignation of countenance threw them into the sea. It had the power of an electric shock. Joy in all its forms ... in short, they showed all which can be discovered in the Human Kind of these feelings.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Papers of the Adam Family of Blair Adam, NRAS1454, Journal of Charles R. Fox, 9 August 1811.

<sup>43</sup> NLS, MS 9879, Copy letter from John Tailour to General Sir Charles William Pasley, 3 May 1815, ff. 333-5.



Fig. 15: 'Captain Sir George Ralph Collier, 1774-1824', Sir William Beechey, c. 1814 (NMM, BHC2624).

Sir George Ralph Collier had a distinguished naval career prior to his time on the West African coast as the first Commodore of the squadron, serving in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and the American War of 1812. He had earned the patronage of the Admiralty and high-profile members of society, notably Prince William of Gloucester.<sup>44</sup> Collier was a passionate abolitionist and deeply committed to the work of the squadron, evidenced by his report to the Admiralty in 1820. Declaring that British naval officers under his command worked with 'commendable zeal in the cause of humanity', Collier wrote ardently that the slave trade 'is more horrible than those who have not had the misfortune to witness it can believe, indeed no description I could give would convey a true picture of its

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Lambert, 'Collier, Sir George Ralph, baronet (1774-1824)', *ODNB* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58443, accessed 3 March 2009].

baseness & atrocity'. With similar sentiments, he concluded his report with an account of a captured slaver, in which he expressed deep humanity towards the enslaved, alongside his own emotional distress and revulsion at the persistence of the trade:

On this distressing subject, so revolting to every well regulated mind, I will add that such is the merciless treatment of the slaves by the persons engaged in the traffic that no fancy can picture the horror of the voyage – crowded together so as not to give the power to move – linked one to the other by the leg – never unfettered whilst life remains, or till the iron shall have fretted the flesh almost to the bone ... breathing an atmosphere the most putrid and pestilential possible, with little food and less water ... It is to me a matter of extreme wonder that any of these miserable people live the voyage through; many of them indeed perish on the passage, and those who remain to meet the shore, present a picture of wretchedness language cannot express.<sup>45</sup>

Collier's reports were widely read and consulted, and this concluding passage was quoted in numerous newspapers of the period, which served to generate public support for the work of the squadron.<sup>46</sup>

Collier's views on slave traders were clear, denouncing them 'beyond all question, from the captain to the cabin-boy, the vilest and most depraved class of human beings'.<sup>47</sup> In other official correspondence, Collier wrote of 'the sickening and desponding appearance of most of the wretched victims' of the Spanish slaver *Anna Maria*, taken by the *Tartar* in the Bonny River in 1821, many of whom were 'reduced to such a state as skeletons'. Collier described how the males were shackled and bound and 'several had their arms so lacerated by the tightness, or long continuance of this restraint, that the flesh was completely eaten through.' The 450 Africans were 'confined more loathsomely and more closely than hogs brought to a morning market for sale'. The experience of witnessing these conditions 'was so appalling and distressing to our feelings as to cause our wonder and astonishment to cease at the maddening act of self-destruction which had occurred to some by throwing themselves overboard'. He solemnly concluded that the 'melancholy picture this Vessel exhibited of the

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<sup>45</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820', ff. 13, 241-42.

<sup>46</sup> For example, *The Morning Chronicle* (2 October 1821) and *Glasgow Herald* (19 October 1821).

<sup>47</sup> George Collier to the Lords of the Admiralty, 27 December 1821, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1821-1822*, compiled by the Foreign Office (London: J. Harrison and Son, 1829), p. 191.

depravity of those who now follow up this trade, and the misery inflicted upon the unfortunate Beings in their power, may be imagined, but cannot be described.<sup>48</sup>

Collier believed that in the three years of his command, he had ‘endeavoured to perform with zeal, and to the best of my ability, the very varied, and not unfrequently, distressing duties arising out of it’. He was notable in linking humanitarianism to his understanding of the nature of ‘publick [sic] duty’ on the West African coast. He wrote that his actions against slavers were performed with ‘no view to personal merit, for I did what humanity, and therefore my duty, only required and I am satisfied that every British Officer on the Coast of Africa would have done as much’.<sup>49</sup> Collier’s understanding of his professional duty was imbued with humanitarian imperative and a moral responsibility to release the enslaved. He highlighted similar motivations in the crew of the *Tartar*. He wrote that a fast sailing vessel was purchased, ‘at the joint expense of myself and some of the officers’, to search the rivers of the Windward Coast for slave ships. Collier attributed this willingness to share in the expenditure to:

... desire springing from the best feelings of the heart, and which had been roused in this instance into active benevolence by the dreadful scenes occasionally witnessed in the suffering misery of the unfortunate captives from the African shores. I have felt it due to the character of my officers to shew [sic] that the same philanthropic feelings, which actuate the conduct of so large a proportion of our country men are not confined to those resident on shore.<sup>50</sup>

Collier further reported that ‘the whole crew of the *Tartar* have come forward ... in the most decorous but urgent manner’ to offer their pay ‘as a security for their proportion of the expense in case of the non-condemnation of the [slave] vessel’. He concluded:

It therefore strongly proves what the misery and sufferings of the slave must be, until he may reach his point of destination, when they could produce such strong effect

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<sup>48</sup> George Collier to the Registrar of the Court of Mixed Commission, 26 March 1821; Collier to J. W. Croker, 31 March 1821, in *ibid.*, pp. 178-80, 272-3.

<sup>49</sup> George Collier to the Lords of the Admiralty, 27 December 1821, in *ibid.*, pp. 215-6.

<sup>50</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, Collier, ‘Second Annual Report’, ff. 108-11.

upon so many unlettered and uneducated minds, as the crew of a man of war may be supposed to be composed of.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the stereotypes of British seamen as uncouth and unfeeling, Collier portrayed an entire crew affected and distressed by the sufferings they had witnessed. While he believed that it was benevolence and humanitarian zeal that motivated the men under his command, as a passionate Captain, Collier himself undoubtedly inspired abolitionist sentiments among those he led. In 1820, Collier was elected an honorary Life Member of the African Institution for his work on the squadron. The Directors declared that he had ‘entitled himself to the cordial esteem and gratitude of this Institution, and of every friend of Africa, by the zeal, intelligence, and humanity which he has displayed throughout the whole period of his arduous command’.<sup>52</sup>

In 1824, three years after his time on the coast, Collier committed suicide by cutting his own throat. At the inquest into his death he was described as ‘zealous and gallant officer’ but also ‘a man of very sensitive feeling and mind’. The jury was unanimous in their verdict that Collier had suffered ‘a state of temporary derangement’. This was unofficially attributed to aspersions cast against his professional conduct in the recently published *James’s Naval History* (Collier, it was alleged, had allowed the escape of an American frigate in Porto Praya in 1815). An unidentified naval officer quoted in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* implied that his anti-slavery service may also have contributed to his unstable mental condition. The officer remarked that the ‘many and severe wounds he [Collier] received had long afflicted his bodily health, and his subsequent services on the coast of Guinea could not but prove injurious to a mind more than commonly sensitive, and to a constitution thus debilitated and weakened.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., ff. 111-2. Collier’s perceptions of his crew are in stark contrast to those of naval surgeon Peter Leonard in his *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, in His Majesty’s Ship Dryad* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1833). Leonard did not believe the crew of the *Dryad* were capable of being aware of the humanitarian importance attached to their activities. Leonard believed ‘Jack’ a thoughtless ‘animal’ whose only notion of ‘duty’ is conflict: ‘it is not to be supposed that any notions concerning the inhumanity of slave-dealing, or the boon of emancipation which he is about to confer on so many hundreds of his fellow-creatures, enter his thoughtless head . . . He is ordered – it is his duty’ (pp. 131-2).

<sup>52</sup> *The Missionary Register, for 1822* (London: C. B. Seeley, 1822), p. 319; John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (London, 1825), vol. 4, pp. 539-40.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Melancholy Suicide’, *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet & Plymouth Journal*, 3 April 1824; *The Morning Post*, 26 March 1824.

Collier's narratives provide evidence of the relationship between individual experiences on the West African coast and the development or strengthening of anti-slavery sentiment. His heartfelt views were expressed in official reportage rather than private narratives, meaning his anti-slavery beliefs reached the Admiralty. Similarly, the emotional anguish in Commodore John Hayes's flag-officer reports to the Admiralty from HMS *Dryad* in 1830-31 is striking. By then in his late fifties and a naval officer with much experience, Hayes had previously served on the Jamaica Station.<sup>54</sup> He described conditions for enslaved Africans on two French slave vessels detained by the *Black Joke* in a letter to Captain George Elliot, Secretary of the Admiralty:

... the scalding perspiration was running from one to the other, covered also with their own filth, and where it is no uncommon occurrence for women to be bringing forth children, and men dying by their side, with full in their view, living and dead bodies chained together, and the living, in addition to all their other torments, labouring under the most famishing thirst.<sup>55</sup>

Hayes denounced the 'nefarious traffic' and the 'horrible crimes, worse than murder, perpetrated on those wretched creatures'. One officer, Hayes claimed, 'found not only living men chained to dead bodies', but other cases, 'too horrible & disgusting to be described.' His compassion for the enslaved led him to plead with the Admiralty to 'reflect on what must be the sufferings of upwards of five hundred of these miserable people chained together, and crammed in between the decks of a vessel only half the tonnage of a Ten Gun Brig. Gracious God! Is this unparalleled cruelty to last for ever?'<sup>56</sup>

Hayes, like Collier, wrote with emotive and rhetorical language in his correspondence with the Admiralty, echoing the emotional Romantic sensibility characteristic of abolitionist writing.<sup>57</sup> Since the late eighteenth century, the horrors of the slave ship had been well voiced in abolitionist texts: William Wilberforce, for example, observed 'so much misery condensed

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<sup>54</sup> J. K. Laughton, 'Hayes, John (1775–1838)', rev. Roger Morriss, *ODNB* [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12758](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12758), accessed 3 March 2009].

<sup>55</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, John Hayes to George Elliot, 20 January 1831 (ff. 259-61). Hayes's emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery 1760-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

in so little room is more than the human imagination had ever before conceived'.<sup>58</sup> Naval officers contributed their own sentimental rhetoric to the public discourse surrounding abolition in the nineteenth century. George Collier's subjective and personal language fits within a wider narrative of abolition as a personal transformation and an emotional set of issues, following the experiences of Thomas Clarkson or Granville Sharp.<sup>59</sup> In adding details of their distress, there is a sense that both Collier and Hayes wrote with emotion beyond what was expected for official reportage. Perhaps this was to persuade their superiors how vital they believed the work of the squadron to be, and also to contribute to public debates. Collier claimed that he reported on the terrible conditions, 'to show how frightful the situation of the Slaves is, when in charge of the Spanish and Portuguese Slave-masters and their Crews.'<sup>60</sup> Hayes was keen to stress that men under his command were seeing things unimaginable to people in Britain. He wrote, 'these notions, where blood is spilt, I am aware are viewed in England by many (who reflect not on, or take into their consideration, the sufferings, the unspeakable sufferings, of the poor unhappy Africans,) as most horrid affairs, but when their sufferings be considered, I think it will appear in another light'.<sup>61</sup>

It is unclear whether the abolitionist beliefs of Collier and Hayes had any influence in their appointments, but a public expression of abolitionist belief appeared to be integral to the official role of Britain's senior naval representatives on the West African coast. Similarly, Commodore Robert Mends expressed revulsion against the slave trade in a report to the Admiralty in 1822, describing the 'depravity to which this slave trade debases the mind'. Like Collier, he linked anti-slavery beliefs with Christian duty: 'Wherever this baneful trade exists the civil arts of life recede, commerce disappears, and man becomes doubly ferocious

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007), p. 327. See also the narrative of Alexander Falconbridge in *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: J. Phillips, 1788) or the Reverend John Newton, who wrote the following description of a slave-hold: 'Every morning, perhaps, more instances than one are found of the living and dead fastened together.' (Quoted in David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 295).

<sup>59</sup> Clarkson's preoccupation with the slave trade began with his prize-winning essay published in 1786. He subsequently mobilised public opinion, visited slave ships in all the major slave ports, collected evidence and located witnesses about the slave trade and Africa. See John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade* (Manchester: Frank Cass, 1995), chapter 3.

<sup>60</sup> George Collier to the Lords of the Admiralty, 27 December 1821, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1821-1822*, pp. 215-6.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, John Hayes to George Elliot, 6 May 1831, ff. 418-30.

... hypocrisy itself scarcely dares to couple the name of Christian with that of its protectors.<sup>62</sup>

Joseph Denman was one of the most publicly committed abolitionists on the anti-slavery patrols. In 1833, he served as lieutenant on HMS *Curlew* off the coast of South America when it captured the Portuguese slaver *Maria de Gloria*, with 423 Africans on board. As there was no court in Brazil with jurisdiction over Portuguese ships, Denman conveyed the ship to Sierra Leone, a voyage of 46 days. The Anglo-Portuguese court there took several months to conclude that the ship was seized south of the line and therefore permitted to trade under Portuguese law, and so the vessel was returned to Rio and its owner. By this time 104 of the enslaved Africans were dead, while a further 169 died on their third Atlantic crossing. 'I was 46 days on that voyage', Denman wrote, 'and altogether 4 months on board of her, where I witnessed the most dreadful sufferings that human beings could endure.'<sup>63</sup> Subsequently Denman expressed a dedication to the anti-slavery patrols and worked to improve the tactics and organisation of the squadron. As seen in Chapter 2, Denman's destruction of slave barracoons at Gallinas (and the example his actions presented to other officers) became a contentious issue in the 1840s, and Denman was criticised for his over-zealous behaviour. Alexander Bryson declared his actions were fuelled by a 'somewhat mistaken zeal in the cause of suppression ... arising doubtlessly from the most philanthropic motives'.<sup>64</sup> In his attempts to improve the resources available to the patrols, Denman gave evidence at several parliamentary Select Committees commissioned to examine the slave trade, and was supported in his defence of the squadron by his father Lord Chief Justice Denman, himself an outspoken abolitionist.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Mends, 'Report on the state of the Slave Trade on the Western Coast of Africa', 26 June 1822, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1822-1823*, compiled by the Foreign Office (London: J. Harrison and Son, 1828), p. 534.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 92-3; Jenny Wraight, "'The Most Disagreeable Service": the West Coast of Africa Station', Chasing Freedom: Abolition 200 Conference: [www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning\\_adult\\_conferences\\_Chasingfreedom.htm](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/learning_adult_conferences_Chasingfreedom.htm) [accessed 26 November 2009]; Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize', p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Bryson, *Report on the Climate and Principal Diseases of the African Station* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1847), p. 255.

<sup>65</sup> Gareth H. Jones and Vivienne Jones, 'Denman, Thomas, first Baron Denman (1779-1854)', *ODNB* [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7495](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7495), accessed 4 October 2008]. Lord Denman claimed slavery was 'the foulest stain that ever rested on the character of the country' and in 1848 made speeches in the House of Commons which significantly contributed to the decision not to withdraw the West Africa squadron.

Denman published several pamphlets and articles in support of naval abolitionist policy, driven by a belief that the slave trade ‘was a custom manifestly unjust, unlawful, and in violation of the law of nature’.<sup>66</sup> Denman’s notion of abolitionism was intimately tied to ideas of liberty and individual freedom, as he condemned the continuance of slavery in ‘a Cuba plantation or in a Brazilian mine’ as ‘a blow aimed at the very foundation of human society; for what title to any mere external possession can hold good if the natural right to freedom is denied?’ Denman also believed in Britain’s spiritual duty to end slavery, based on considerations of religious morality and humanity:

Let those rulers whom the people have chosen, and those who have maintained their rule, casting aside all petty jealousies, prove by their acts, on this deepest and most terrible wrong of suffering humanity, that they are worthy to lead mankind in the paths of religion, justice, and humanity.

He declared the anti-slavery movement was working in the ‘great and holy principles of right’. If Britain was to withdraw anti-slavery efforts, ‘she leaves Africa to her fate, and that fate is the “EXCESS OF THE EVIL,” the Slave Trade recognized, unlimited, and perpetual’.<sup>67</sup>

The notion of the slave trade as a direct challenge to Christian principles was also propounded by Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen. Owen encountered the slave trade while serving in Java as senior officer of the Batavia squadron in 1811-12. In deploying his ships to intercept slave-carrying vessels, he claimed to have liberated 1500 slaves.<sup>68</sup> Later engaged in surveying the West African coast, Owen believed that abolition was God’s will. In 1825, on witnessing the arrival of chained slaves in Benguela, Owen was outraged by the ‘scene of human suffering produced by human agency ... a picture too terrible and disgusting to describe, yet it is true and mankind should know what manner of people they are, who call themselves men and Christians.’<sup>69</sup> Owen’s understanding of professional duty was inseparable from his sense of spiritual obligation to act in defence of the enslaved. As superintendent for the proposed new naval base on Fernando Po, Owen captured more than

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph Denman, *The African Squadron and Mr Hutt’s Committee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: John Mortimer, 1850), p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 49-50, 68, 70. Denman’s emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> E. H. Burrows, *Captain Owen of the African Survey, 1774-1857* (Rotterdam: A.A.Balkema, 1979), p. 44.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 161; Robert T. Brown, ‘Fernando Po and the Anti-Sierra Leonean Campaign: 1826-1834’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6:2 (1973), pp. 253-4.

twenty slavers, albeit with a reputation for unorthodox methods, including ignoring treaty agreements and torturing captured ships' officers. Owen's abolitionist zeal caused further controversy when he liberated captured slaves on the island without first sending them before the mixed commissions; manned his ships and administered the island with liberated slaves; and pressed into service the crews of captured slavers.<sup>70</sup>

Other abolitionists in the squadron included Captain Henry James Matson, a staunch defender of the squadron who wrote publications and newspaper articles in its support. With similarities to Collier, Denman and others, Matson made public his experiences of the slave trade to support and generate publicity for the abolitionist cause. For example, Matson's evidence of the conditions on board slave ships was used in a meeting of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in Bury St Edmunds in 1849, to outline 'the present extent and atrocities of the slave trade'. After describing overcrowding and the prevalence of disease, Matson, it was reported, 'questioned if the history of our race gave anything so terrible as this.'<sup>71</sup>

Considering the role of suppression in framing Britain's abolitionist position on the international stage, perhaps it is unsurprising that senior officers subscribed to Foreign Secretary Palmerston's belief that 'Great Britain is the main instrument in the hands of providence' for putting an end to the slave trade.<sup>72</sup> However, the emotion and moral worth of the words and actions of these officers suggests more than just following the party line. By their humanitarian ideals, they personified the close connections of military virtue and moral stature in the nineteenth-century naval 'Christian hero', to use Christopher Hamilton's phrase.<sup>73</sup> Others lower down the naval hierarchy wrote with similar condemnation of the slave trade. William Hall, master on the *Morgiana* on the West Africa squadron in 1822,

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<sup>70</sup> Brown, 'Fernando Po', pp. 258-60.

<sup>71</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post, and East Anglian*, 26 December 1849. It is not clear from the newspaper report whether Matson was present in person at the meeting, or if his evidence was read on his behalf.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Colley, *Britons*, p. 360. However, as John Oldfield notes, Palmerston's stance against the slave trade was more pragmatic (and in Britain's national interests) than passionate. 'Palmerston and Anti-Slavery' in David Brown and Miles Taylor (eds), *Palmerston Studies II* (Hartley Institute, University of Southampton, 2007).

<sup>73</sup> C. I. Hamilton, 'Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero', *The Historical Journal*, 23:2 (1980), p. 391. See also Jane Samson, 'Hero, fool or martyr? The many deaths of Commodore Goodenough', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 10:1 (2008), pp. 1-22.

wrote in his journal of his disgust at the ‘horrible [sic] dealers in human flesh’. The enslaved he described as ‘unfortunate fellow creatures’.<sup>74</sup>

The nature of anti-slavery service was out of the ordinary: on prize vessels, or when witnessing the enslaved in barracoons, naval personnel were exposed to the brutality of the slave trade, which undoubtedly had an impact on how they viewed their employment. Distressed by scenes he witnessed of enslaved Africans being embarked in the River Bonny in 1823, Midshipman Binstead wrote that ‘to see them torn from their relations and forced on board [,] to see Father and Mother fighting for their children was enough to draw pity from the coldest heart [,] to hear there [sic] cries and lamentations were such I never again hope to see’.<sup>75</sup> The published narrative of naval surgeon Richard M. Jackson illustrates the way in which officers formed and questioned their opinions based on their experiences. In 1825, at the beginning of his travels, his ‘heart soon sickened’ as he witnessed slaves being prepared for embarkation, but he made clear that ‘I have as yet seen and heard only one side of the question; I shall therefore defer any further remarks on this interesting subject’. However, after witnessing ‘this nefarious System’ at Bonny, he declared himself convinced that the slave trade was ‘odious & abominable, & that the sufferings the wretched creatures undergo who are thus made the Slaves of their fellow [sic] Men, have never been overrated by any of the popular defenders of their general manumission’.<sup>76</sup> Anti-slavery views of naval officers were clearly affected by the nature of their work and by a collision of concepts of moral and professional duty. Many also believed in the spread of the philanthropic Christian message on shore.

### **Humanitarianism and the missionary cause**

As Britain’s anti-slavery advocates, naval officers engaged with the Christian mission and its humanitarian ideals to eradicate the slave trade from African society. Abolitionists believed that Britain had an essential role to play in bringing about the improvement and civilisation of the continent. This was part of a wider force of religious enthusiasm that extended to indigenous peoples around the world, a missionary impulse that directed attention to the

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<sup>74</sup> SCAUB, MS 27, Hall Journal, no folios. Hall’s language echoes the ‘inhumanity of dealers in human flesh’ depicted in Isaac Cruikshank’s 1792 satire *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, revealing the influence of such abolitionist rhetoric in popular culture. Cruikshank referred to the notorious case of Captain John Kimber of the merchant ship *Recovery*, who murdered an enslaved African woman after she refused to dance on deck.

<sup>75</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 4 July 1823.

<sup>76</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, pp. 66, 153-4.

moral and spiritual condition of ‘the heathen’.<sup>77</sup> Emphasis was placed on the means by which Christian Europe might save non-Europeans from themselves, hence the influence of ‘imperial stewardship’.<sup>78</sup> These perceptions took British superiority for granted, and clearly had a racial subtext, as shall be examined in Chapter 6. When in 1835 MP Thomas Babington Macaulay called for an educational system in India whereby the English language would take precedence over ‘poor and rude’ Indian tongues, he was proposing that Indians be educated into civilisation. He looked forward to future relations (and the opportunities for trade) with this new generation of cultural intermediaries, ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.’<sup>79</sup>

Many naval officers praised missionary activity in West Africa as a way to reform slave-trading societies. This was particularly the case in their promotion of European standards of education. In 1842, Midshipman Augustus Arkwright wrote from Sierra Leone of his support for the ‘moral education’ provided by the missionaries in the colony:

I imagine them to be a more deserving and by far the most useful portion of our country-men out here, they appear to have done a great deal of good amongst the blacks, by spreading amongst them, correct information about religion, and getting up schools where much trouble is taken to teach the girls & boys reading & singing.<sup>80</sup>

Other officers exhibited beliefs in the Christian message propounded by abolitionists and missionary societies. Lieutenant Frederick Forbes was deeply committed to the anti-slavery cause as a humanitarian Christian mission; in his account of his expedition to Dahomey in

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<sup>77</sup> Christopher Bayly, ‘The British and indigenous peoples, 1760-1860: power, perception and identity’ in Martin Daunt and Rick Halpern (eds), *Empire and others: British encounters with indigenous peoples, 1600-1850* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 19-41; Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle class, 1792-1850: The ‘Heathen’ at Home and Overseas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 14-15; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 186-8, 301-9. For example, from the early nineteenth century, missionary activity in India focused on the degradation of Indian society and religion, condemning ‘heathen’ practices like the sati, the rite of widow-burning.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism’ in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (1999), pp. 198-221; Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, ‘Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education’, *Prose and Poetry*, selected by G. M. Young (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 721-4, 729; Catherine Hall, ‘Troubling Memories: Nineteenth Century Histories of the Slave Trade and Slavery’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 21 (2011), pp. 147-69. Thomas was the eldest son of Zachary Macaulay, but did not share his father’s evangelical beliefs, instead endorsing secular notions of civilisation.

<sup>80</sup> DRO, D5991/10/72-73, Augustus Arkwright to his mother, 19 June 1842.

1849 he declared that the ‘crusade against the slave trade is a holy one, and should not be abated one iota.’ He tied suppression of the slave trade at sea to the spread of the anti-slavery message on shore, as he asserted that slavery was ‘the offspring of ignorance’ which required ‘the light of civilisation’ to conquer it. Forbes believed that light was held by missionaries, who had planted ‘the tree of knowledge’ in African society, represented by ‘treaty, trade and the advancement of civilisation’. These ideas constituted the ‘moral course whereby to check this great evil’, which, ‘will in time crown with success the most philanthropic undertaking ever entered into in this world’.<sup>81</sup>

Commodore William Henry Bruce similarly wrote about the importance of missionary endeavours for Africa’s moral progress. In 1853, he wrote to Reverend Townsend of the CMS regarding the chiefs of Abeokuta, expressing his hope that they would observe a treaty with the British. ‘I earnestly hope to hear of their listening to the religious teaching of the missionaries, and causing their children to attend the schools regularly’, he added, ‘in order that they may gain knowledge, and become, what England expects them to be, the greatest and the happiest of all African Nations’.<sup>82</sup> Such happiness would be born from education and knowledge, but in British form, intended to foster new civilised relations between West Africa and Britain, particularly in terms of trade.

Commander Arthur Eardley Wilmot wrote a long and passionate letter to the Commander-in-Chief of the forces at Abeokuta in 1852. Writing as a representative of ‘HM the Queen’, Wilmot wished to offer the people of Abeokuta England’s protection as a nation ‘mighty everywhere, upon Her Dominions the sun never sets the whole world acknowledges her greatness.’ He therefore propounded the elevating example of the Christian faith which promoted ‘peace, friendship, kindness, charity’, and would encourage the African people to ‘do good & endeavour to benefit their fellow creatures’, including an end to ‘making slaves of others’. Wilmot expressed great confidence and pride in the British anti-slavery mission. This was especially in comparison with the Portuguese who ‘have no interest in the permanent prosperity of your country. If all of you were to die tomorrow, they would laugh & sing as usual’. On the contrary, the English had died in numbers on the coast, he wrote, in order to ‘make you & all Africa like England & the rest of the civilised world. To teach you

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<sup>81</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans, being the journals of two missions to the King of Dahomey and residence at his capital in the years 1849 and 1850* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1854), pp. 31, 90.

<sup>82</sup> SCAUB, CMS Archive, CA2/05/12-19, William Bruce to Rev. H. Townsend, 16 February 1853.

what real happiness is & to shew [sic] you how you can make your country the richest upon earth'.<sup>83</sup> Wilmot clearly articulated Britain's sense of moral responsibility to African society. He also stressed the need for continued paternalism, based on a blinkered vision that only Britain could save the African people. However, missionary activity and the anti-slavery cause were also to be viewed more cynically, as shifts in racial thought took hold in the mid-century.

### **Retreat from humanitarian ideals**

As the century progressed, racial arguments of a new group of scholars and scientists increasingly advocated the innate inferiority of non-European peoples. One outward expression of these renewed racial prejudices was a retreat from humanitarian ideals, and a rejection of philanthropic hopes for the moral and social improvement of African societies.<sup>84</sup> As Howard Temperley and others have argued, in terms of popular and financial support and the zeal of its members, the British anti-slavery movement was a weakened force by the mid-Victorian years.<sup>85</sup> Enthusiasm was diminished by the abortive Niger Expedition in 1841, while other events in the colonies appeared to justify the questioning of the humanitarian vision of the universal family of man.<sup>86</sup> This was particularly the case in attitudes towards former slaves in the British West Indies freed under the Emancipation Act of 1833. Seymour Drescher has claimed it 'beyond doubt' that the agitational power of the anti-slavery movement began to wane after apprenticeship was established in the colonies in 1834.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> SCAUB: CMS Archive, CA2/08/04, Arthur Eardley Wilmot to Obba Shoron, 3 April 1852.

<sup>84</sup> Quirk and Richardson, 'Anti-Slavery', pp. 87-8; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), chapter 15. The scientific theories behind this shift in racial ideas will be explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>85</sup> Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972).

<sup>86</sup> Catherine Hall, 'The nation within and without', in Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall (eds), *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 192-197. Disillusion with humanitarianism in the colonies has been explored in, amongst others, Andrew Bank, 'Losing faith in the civilizing mission: the premature decline of humanitarian liberalism at the Cape, 1840-60', in Daunton and Halpern (eds), *Empire and others*, pp. 364-83.

<sup>87</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 154.



Fig. 16: 'An emancipated Negro', A. Ducote, published by Thomas McLean, 1833 (NMM, ZBA2643).

This 1833 caricature depicting an ex-slave shouting 'Food!' while chasing an insect supported the belief that emancipation would lead to starvation among former slaves. In an account published in 1832, Captain Frederick Chamier (who served on anti-slavery patrols on HMS *Arethusa* in the 1820s) doubted that 'in the event of a sudden emancipation, men with minds uninformed' would 'go cheerfully and manfully to work for their own support.'<sup>88</sup> By mid-century it had become evident that the sugar colonies had continued to decline economically and that freed slaves had failed to live up to missionary expectations of self-improvement and self-discipline. Planters and their allies highlighted humanitarian naivety; it was claimed that ex-slaves were doomed through innate incapacity, indolence, and

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<sup>88</sup> Frederick Chamier, *The Life of a Sailor by a Captain in the Navy*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1832), vol. 1, pp. 268-9.

superstitions to always be ‘mastered’. Hence Thomas Carlyle in his vitriolic, and widely distributed, pro-planter pamphlet *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1849), argued, in effect, for the reintroduction of slavery in the West Indies.<sup>89</sup>

The West Indies continued to be a source of disappointment for philanthropic hopes. In 1865, the riot over vacant land in Jamaica’s Morant Bay resulted in the declaration of martial law by Governor Eyre, under which 469 blacks were executed and another 650 flogged. The revolt and the controversy caused by humanitarian attempts to have Eyre prosecuted were widely publicised and held the attention of metropolitan, middle-class Britons.<sup>90</sup> In 1866, Commander Bedford Pim, a retired naval officer, presented a paper in Eyre’s defence to the Anthropological Society of London in which he claimed that freedom and equality were the cause of black discontent in Jamaica, because in slavery, ‘a decidedly inferior race was rescued from a state of barbarism scarcely human, and compelled to take a useful position’.<sup>91</sup>

In popular culture, enthusiasm for humanitarianism gave way to apathy and renewed racial prejudices. Charles Dickens, reviewing Allen and Thomson’s *Narrative of the Niger Expedition* (1848) in *The Examiner*, attacked the aims of philanthropists like Buxton and declared the civilising mission as absurd, as his description of the negotiations at Aboh makes clear:

Obi, sitting on the quarter-deck of the *Albert*, looking slyly out from under his savage forehead and his conical cap, sees before him her Majesty’s white Commissioners from the distant blockade-country gravely propounding, at one sitting, a change in the character of his people ... the entire subversion of his whole barbarous system of trade and revenue – and the uprooting, in a word, of all his, and his nation’s, preconceived ideas, methods and customs.

Dickens’ critique was against blind philanthropy abroad when he believed more worthy subjects suffered at home. Hence in *Bleak House* (1853), Mrs Jellyby expended all her energies caring for the poor black children of the Niger while her own family lived in

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<sup>89</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, chapter 6. See Chapter 5 of this thesis for the impact of the principles of apprenticeship in the West Indies on perceptions of liberated Africans in West Africa.

<sup>90</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 57-65. This was true of other uprisings in the empire, including Cape frontier wars, the 1857 Indian Mutiny and the New Zealand wars.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English attitudes to the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), pp. 150-1.

squalor.<sup>92</sup> Like most white Victorian, male, middle-class commentators, Dickens' attitudes towards race and empire were complex, but the racism inherent in his article *The Noble Savage* (1853) and outspoken responses against the Indian Mutiny of 1857 is revealing about the popular attitudes of British society which held him in such admiration.<sup>93</sup>

Such sentiments reflected other changes in British society from mid-century, in particular the emergence of new standards of gentility and attitudes towards social status. The significance of masculinity hardened, particularly in the public schools producing naval officers, and sentiment assumed a less positive sense. Young, middle-class gentlemen increasingly wished to be perceived as virile, apathetic and racially superior, and were less inclined to tolerate the emotional appeals of an earlier generation. 'Nigger Philanthropy', as it was now called, suffered in consequence.<sup>94</sup> As the letters of Commodores Bruce and Wilmot make clear, many officers in the mid-century continued to be committed to the missionary cause, and there was a renewed surge of popularity for missionary activity in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>95</sup> However, these decades also reveal diminished faith in philanthropic endeavours by some naval officers. This was related to the beginnings of a shift towards duty as exemplified by muscular Christianity and specifically naval forms of masculinity and endurance which characterised naval officers of the later Victorian period.<sup>96</sup>

Captain J. P. Luce was Senior Officer in the Bights in 1862-63. In his journals, he wrote extensively about the African societies he encountered, but was notable for criticising missionary projects as flawed and ill-handled. He believed the missionaries at Cameroon

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger 1841-1842* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 166-7; Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), p. 175.

<sup>93</sup> Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Race, Class and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 4-5, 45, 70. In 'Troubling Memories', Catherine Hall has written of the 'liberal ambivalence' exemplified by commentators like Dickens and Thomas Babington Macaulay, whereby slavery was hated as an institution as the antithesis of freedom, yet racial inequality was accepted as a necessary foundation for a stable society (p. 158). See also the virulent racism of William Cobbett, the period's most widely read popular journalist, who wrote of the miseries of Britain's labouring poor in contrast to the perceived comfort of colonial subjects.

<sup>94</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class*, pp. 113-18; Lester, 'British Settler Discourse', p. 44; J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, 'Introduction' in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2.

<sup>95</sup> In *The Civilising Mission*, Alison Twells argues that these decades witnessed conflicting currents of continuing commitment to the missionary cause alongside increasingly popular notions of racial difference.

<sup>96</sup> In 'The Royal Navy's anti-slavery campaign in the western Indian Ocean, c. 1860-1890: race, empire and identity', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull (2010), chapters 2 and 5, Lindsay Doultou stresses the importance of the public school education system in the promotion of militarism, patriotism and Protestantism in the world view of naval officers in the later nineteenth century.

River to be ‘generally quite good & decent men’. However, ‘their self sacrifice & martyrdom to the good cause is generally speaking, Exeter Hall bosh’. For many of its critics, Exeter Hall represented philanthropic hypocrisy. Integral to his criticisms, Luce stressed the increasingly common belief in the indolence of African peoples. He wrote that missionaries ‘make but few converts’ because ‘in the nigger mind there is so much to be eradicated before the simplest truths of our religion can be received, that the case seems almost hopeless’.<sup>97</sup> African missionaries also came under fire. After visiting a settlement in the River Niger created by Bishop Samuel Crowther, Luce condemned ‘the lazy wretches’, who, ‘have not cleared away an acre of ground or sown an ounce of seed. Why should they as long as they have a lot of muffs in England who under the fond idea that these Sierra Leone angels are civilising & Christianising Africa, keep them well supplied with necessaries & luxuries’.<sup>98</sup>

Arguments that missionary activity was short-sighted were not confined to these later decades. Captain Columbine, for example, did not believe that missionary activity could transform the African people. ‘How?’ he asked in 1811, ‘by sending one European to about ten thousand of them? & gravely telling them to wear breaches? Or part with their wives?’ He added: ‘Hope is so rapid & sanguine on this head, that she totally loses sight of Experience’.<sup>99</sup> Officers subscribed to racial stereotypes throughout the period of suppression and believed that the improvement of certain African peoples was impossible due to their innate savagery. However, naval officers also appear to respond to the mid-century shifts in attitudes. For example, in contrast to Sierra Leone, a visit to ‘Boobie Town’ in the 1850s gave John M’Kie insight into the ‘primitive life’ of the inhabitants, whom he described as ‘a distinct type of negro of the lowest order ... The missionaries who have done so much for the freed slaves at the settlement [Sierra Leone] have not been able to make any impression on them’.<sup>100</sup> This retreat from humanitarian ideals by some in the squadron also helps to explain expressions of pro-slavery sentiment.

### **Pro-slavery sentiment**

Some naval personnel condemned the principles of abolition while others took such attitudes further and believed that slavery was the rightful condition for Africans. Naval surgeon

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<sup>97</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, f. 165. See Chapter 6 for Luce’s perceptions of African societies.

<sup>98</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, f. 203.

<sup>99</sup> UIC, SLC: Series III, Folder 10, Columbine Journals, 27 February 1811.

<sup>100</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 71-3.

Robert Flockhart implied that a fellow naval officer was willing to profit from the slave trade regardless of Britain's abolitionist stand. In letters from the *Brisk* in 1838, he recounted the discovery of a former Royal Navy officer who had served on the African coast now profiting from the slave trade by posing as an American Captain of a slave ship:

The American, or rather the man who calls himself Captain, for he and the colours are a mere blind (the true Captain being a Spaniard and on board) turns out to be a man of the name Graham who served for two years on this coast in the *Lynx* one of our cruisers, and who said he was an Englishman. One of our crew was in the *Lynx* with him and has sworn to it, he wants to deny it, but it won't do. He is going to stand his trial.<sup>101</sup>

This case echoes Edward Columbine's earlier complaint of one of his officers being involved in slave trading.<sup>102</sup> While it is impossible to know the number of similar occurrences, such examples are significant in revealing a disregard for abolitionism by some in the navy, whereby financial gain was more important than acting against the slave trade.

Many condemned abolitionist policies in relation to the squadron's perceived inefficacy and the death of British sailors on the West African coast, while also expressing a laissez-faire attitude in relation to British involvement in Africa. In his memoirs of the anti-slavery patrols, Henry Huntley declared the anti-slavery mission 'a melancholy failure ... because it has been fully proved that as yet the endeavour of England to extend Christianity and civilization in Africa, has only resulted in an enormous loss of life, talent and treasure.'<sup>103</sup> Such sentiments polarised naval personnel and the abolitionists who dictated their work on the coast. A naval officer wrote to *The Times* in 1846 to condemn the 'canting and ranting of the Exeter-hall gentry! Every one of those Mawworms [parasitic worms] should be sent out here to man the squadron. We should then see what would become of their egregious philanthropy'.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, in 1851 Lieutenant Gilbert Elliot of the *Sampson* held little respect for abolitionists:

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<sup>101</sup> NAS, GD 76/458, Flockhart Letters, 12 November 1838.

<sup>102</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Sir Henry Huntley, *Seven Years' Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1850), vol. 1, pp. 25-6.

<sup>104</sup> *The Times*, 'Service on the Coast of Africa', 22 May 1846.

I should like very much to freight a ship with Philanthropists and send them out to sea - to shew [sic] them what their philanthropy has ... caused their countrymen to suffer [and] what dreadful misery it has brought on those poor unfortunate savages whose condition they pretend to better.<sup>105</sup>

For Elliot, misdirected philanthropy was harmful to both the enslaved and naval personnel sent to deliver the abolitionist agenda. Humane treatment, in his eyes, did not comprise abolition or emancipation but a withdrawal of the squadron. A letter to *The Times* from a naval officer on 'the African station' in 1845 revealed similar sentiments. The author expressed a lack of faith in ideologies at the heart of the anti-slavery cause:

If our Government must, in deference to the voices of Exeter-hall meetings, and the universal outcry against slavery – if they must persist in checking it at all hazards, let them interfere effectually. How is this to be done? We cannot do it by forcing civilization on Africa; nothing but a predominant white race dwelling in the country can civilize the natives.

A hardening of attitudes relating to the perceived superiority of white races was clearly influential in the officer's comments, whereby slavery was considered a natural status for African peoples, whom he declared were 'sunk in the lowest barbarism, having little in common with humanity save some similarity in form; whose condition as human beings is undoubtedly improved by slavery'.<sup>106</sup> On board the *Bristol* off the West African coast in 1866, naval surgeon Fleetwood Buckle recounted in his journal a discussion with clergyman Reverend Pemberton, 'about the negro and his position – he quite agrees with me that he was intended for a slave & must be made to work.' Echoing Thomas Carlyle, Buckle too believed that slavery was the natural state for blacks. He aggressively asserted the indolent stereotype when he discussed the black crewmen on board: 'I will not have charge of the stinking niggers they won't work – you cannot get them to without a stick at their backs'. Buckle's opinions illustrated the debate in this period about what constituted philanthropy, liberalism

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<sup>105</sup> [www.finebooksmagazine.com/issue/200901/freedom\\_records-2.phtml](http://www.finebooksmagazine.com/issue/200901/freedom_records-2.phtml) [accessed 20 April 2012]. See Chapter 3, pp. 102-4, for similar criticisms of the squadron.

<sup>106</sup> *The Times*, 'The African Station', 16 October 1845.

and goodwill towards others when he later wrote that Reverend Pemberton was ‘really the most liberal minded clergyman I ever met with. The most charitable.’<sup>107</sup>

In his letters to his brother from HMS *Favorite* in 1847, Commander Alexander Murray wrote in support of the slave trade and advocated the benevolence of the system of slavery for the future progress of the continent:

The more I see of the whole system the more I am convinced that the attempt to stop the emigration of Africans is an error ... if ever any progress is made in our day in the civilization of Africa it will be by using slavery as an assistant therein instead blindly shutting the eyes and waging war against the social institutions of a continent which are coeval with the races in which they exist. Were I, Mr Colonial Government, I would become a slave owner myself.

In re-framing the slave trade as ‘emigration’, Murray removed the suggestion of enforced movement of Africans, and the cruelties associated with it. He continued with an attack on the views of the Exeter Hall lobby, claiming that this ‘superb coast wants nothing but human industry to make it the richest tropical region in the world ... Exeter Hall would call this slavery and so it is – but the same sort of slavery existed in England within the memory of history.’<sup>108</sup> Murray’s support for this form of ‘human industry’ appeared undiminished by any barbarities he may have witnessed on the coast. Writing two years later, after the completion of his service there, he wrote that ‘my opinions are for nothing much less than a return to the old slave system as far as Africa is concerned’.<sup>109</sup>

Murray’s views are in stark contrast with those of some of his contemporaries such as Joseph Denman or Henry Matson. Clearly, even considering the impact of abolitionism on British society, there was an endurance of eighteenth-century pro-slavery rhetoric among some naval personnel, suggesting deeper veins of conservative political views in the navy more broadly.<sup>110</sup> It is also notable that Murray included such comments in private correspondence

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<sup>107</sup> WL, MS 1395-6, Fleetwood Buckle Diaries, 8 July, 6 August and 25 October 1866. Buckle’s emphasis. To the best of the author’s knowledge, Fleetwood and Claude Buckle are unrelated.

<sup>108</sup> NAS, GD 219/304/36, Murray Letters, 22 September 1847.

<sup>109</sup> NAS, GD 219/304/39, Murray Letters, 8 May 1849.

<sup>110</sup> For example, outside the squadron, Captain Robert Fitzroy served in South American waters in the 1820s and 1830s and encountered the slave trade and slavery first-hand, particularly in Brazil, yet continued to believe in the benevolence of the slave system. See Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause: Race,*

as such sentiments would have to be disguised in public debates. This distinction between publicly and privately expressed views shows how far anti-slavery was perceived as the dominant ideology by mid-century, entrenched in the public consciousness and part of mainstream thinking. This supports the idea that there were certain opinions concerning slavery and the slave trade that naval officers were not permitted to express in public in order to avoid prejudicing their professional position. It is notable that many of those who did express pro-slavery views publicly, in letters to newspapers for example, did so anonymously.

Other naval officers held more ambiguous views. Some defended the British West Indian planters, and believed in the rightful endurance of slavery as a labour source. Lieutenant Gordon Macdonald of HMS *Childers* served on anti-slavery patrols in the West Indies in the 1820s and wrote in defence of ‘the rights of the colonies’ in his memoirs. While Macdonald opposed ‘this horrid system of slavery which is carried on to a great extent by the other powers’, he held contempt ‘for those people in England termed or known as Abolitionists who have no justice or charity on their side towards their fellow creatures and subjects the West Indians.’<sup>111</sup> The phrase ‘fellow creatures’ is used many times by other officers to describe enslaved Africans; Macdonald instead switched sympathy to the planters, presenting them as the victims of hostile actions from abolitionists.<sup>112</sup> Frederick Chamier described the ‘contentment’ which existed among the slave population of the West Indies, ‘until Fanaticism and Cant made men unhappy, who were not disposed so to be’. Contrary to much ideological thought of the period, Chamier did not believe that ‘slavery is incompatible with the moral responsibility of man’. He claimed that ‘the sacred writings are strictly at variance, because in the Old Testament slavery is mentioned in about one thousand places, and, even more, was ordained’.<sup>113</sup> These narratives address the appropriate level of freedom and liberty for former slaves, ideas explored in the following chapter.

Others revealed ambivalence towards abolition. Commander George Augustus Elliot of the *Columbine* was seemingly indifferent to the plight of the enslaved, a state of mind induced by concerns for his own hardships. In a letter to Lord Melgund, the private secretary to his uncle

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*Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), chapter 4, for Fitzroy’s disagreements with Charles Darwin over slavery during the *Beagle*’s voyage around South America.

<sup>111</sup> NYPL, Macdonald Memoirs, c. 1832, pp. 100-3.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Many in Britain were mindful of planters’ property rights and supported gradual rather than immediate emancipation, including Palmerston. See Oldfield, ‘Palmerston and Anti-Slavery’.

<sup>113</sup> Chamier, *Life of a Sailor*, pp. x, 258, 275-6.

(and First Lord of the Admiralty) the Earl of Minto, Elliot declined to offer much reflection on his experiences:

... were I to write you a detail ... of the vile state of the Portuguese colonies, the improving condition of the blacks, the arrival of the slavers, with a list of those that escape and those that are captured, it could afford you very little amusement and there is not an object within my reach which you ever have or ever will know or care about. Unless by the by you are contemplating a speech on antislavery and in that case I shall feel great pleasure in forwarding you all kinds of information relative to their state and condition previous to transportation, and the inhuman treatment they are subjected to before they reach their destination.<sup>114</sup>

The tone of the letter does not suggest that either he or Melgund were interested in fuelling anti-slavery debates. He continued:

One idea I will give as a sample of the rest which rather amused me at first. The Portuguese keep the slaves as they buy them in barracoons or sheds until they are embarked. They are chained together to prevent escape and therefore cannot work consequently they are twice a day compelled to holla for an hour without stopping by way of exercise, you can fancy the sort of row perhaps a thousand of them together and the Portuguese applying the lash if they leave off or don't holla loud enough. You can hear the poor wretches for miles off.<sup>115</sup>

A sympathetic tone can be traced here, but at the same time Elliot's amusement is revealing. While he accepted that his experiences would strengthen anti-slavery arguments, he also appeared detached from and indifferent to the distress of the captive Africans. In a later letter, Elliot described his 'strict blockade' off the Guinea coast, and concluded: 'the slave merchants are mostly ruined, the slave crews have perished from fever and the slaves have fared no better for when their owners could no longer feed them they put an end to them – but this is all unavoidable'.<sup>116</sup> Elliot gave the death of enslaved Africans the same emphasis as the ruination of slave merchants, and he appeared to care little about either. He wrote of his

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<sup>114</sup> NLS, MS 12054, George Elliot to Lord Melgund, 6 January 1840, ff. 176-8.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> NLS, MS 12054, George Elliot to Lord Melgund, [no date] March 1840, ff. 180-3.

disgust at the nature of service on ‘this abominable coast’, and suggested it strong enough to outweigh any commitment to the anti-slavery cause. ‘One or two of my chases have been rather interesting and some of the boat work has also afforded excitement’, he wrote, ‘but all other points connected with this service is disgusting enough, unless one happens to be impressed with an extraordinary degree of philanthropy’.<sup>117</sup> For Elliot, unlike many of his naval colleagues, a personal commitment to suppression required an incomprehensible level of compassion and support for the anti-slavery cause.

## Conclusion

George Elliot’s letters provide a pertinent conclusion to this chapter. While a successful ‘suppressionist’ – in enforcing blockades at Loando and Ambriz which consequently ruined the trade of slave merchants – Elliot cannot be described as an enthusiastic abolitionist. His case makes clear that a passion for anti-slavery was not a prerequisite for this service and did not necessarily make an officer any more successful in his role. In this respect, what constituted ‘zeal’ in the maritime context? While some officers believed fervently in the anti-slavery cause, others expressed an equal level of dedication to their professional duty, demonstrating the same enthusiasm for chasing slavers as they would for work on any other naval station. When Lieutenant Edmund Gabriel wrote of the ‘spirited and gallant conduct’ of a colleague and the ‘hearty spirit’ of the crews under his command who ‘justly merited ... the proud title of British sailors and marines’, it was in the context of their resisting fire and capturing an enemy vessel rather than any sense of celebration in the liberation of slaves.<sup>118</sup> Pride in captures was as likely a result of professional achievement and patriotic honour as commitment to passionate abolitionism. There were other incentives for employment on the anti-slavery patrols separate from abolitionist principles, as explored in Chapter 3, whether they co-existed with these ideals or not.

Furthermore, to what degree was subscription to the humanitarian cause required or expected? Margarett Lincoln has argued that from the eighteenth century naval officers ‘were becoming the repositories of social virtues’, with representations of officers as

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<sup>117</sup> NLS, MS 12054, 6 January 1840.

<sup>118</sup> SA, DD/X/GRA/6, Edmund Gabriel to George Kenyon, 23 July 1842. Gabriel was referring to the capture of the Brazilian barque *Ermelinda Secunda* in the River Congo with 118 Africans on board.

exemplars of British virtue and manhood.<sup>119</sup> However, it must not be assumed that all naval men were, or aspired to be, humanitarians motivated by the moral imperative to end slavery and ‘improve’ Africa. The official obligations of the navy must be remembered: protecting and expanding the empire was very much a naval responsibility in the nineteenth century, and in this context humanitarianism and idealism did not sit well with other professional qualities.<sup>120</sup> Many officers were not self-confirmed abolitionists, but invariably just performing the role for which they were appointed. Hence they could express revulsion at what they had witnessed in the slave trade, and yet support the institution of slavery.

However, the existence of anti-slavery beliefs among many of these officers is significant. For those with influence (Collier, Hayes, Wilmot and others), the written word of Commodores clearly dedicated to the cause had an impact on the Admiralty, and helped to defend the squadron in the 1840s. These officers too had a rare viewpoint on the slave trade, a frequent insight into its cruelty and brutality that few others experienced. In this respect, naval officers held a unique place in the metropolitan abolitionist movement (if they wished it). Their commentaries, reproduced in newspapers and at anti-slavery meetings, fuelled the abolitionist debate and contributed to the transfer of ideas. As such their experiences can be added to the body of nineteenth-century travel narratives which offered a source of eyewitness evidence for the development of anti-slavery culture.<sup>121</sup>

A study of the anti-slavery views of naval officers also exposes variations in opinion, particularly as the century progressed, reflecting perceptions of middle-class men in British society more widely. To early Victorians, manliness embraced qualities of chivalry and patriotic virtue, demonstrated by earnestness and integrity; terms to describe the written word of George Collier or John Hayes, for example. The concept’s transition to virility and ‘the cult of manliness’ meant that by the 1860s to be sentimental or philanthropic was no longer

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<sup>119</sup> Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, p. 4.

<sup>120</sup> See Samson, ‘Hero, fool or martyr?’, pp. 1-22, for an examination of the conflicts between idealism and professionalism in the career of Commodore Goodenough in the Pacific Islands in the later nineteenth century. See also, Jane Samson, ‘Too zealous guardians? The Royal navy and the South Pacific labour trade’ in David Killingray and David Omissi (eds), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, 1700-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 70-90. Samson argues that officers active against the South Pacific labour trade were ‘naval humanitarians’ who sought to influence public opinion in support of the Pacific islanders. However, as on the West Coast of Africa, preconceptions about naval duty connected with the enforcement of ‘British humanitarian sensibility’ were impacted by shifting realities.

<sup>121</sup> Kate Hodgson, ‘Slave trades, slavery and emancipation in nineteenth-century European travel narratives’, EURESCL: European political cultures of anti-slavery, [www.eurescl.eu/images/stories/essays\\_wp1/Slave%20trades%20slavery%20and%20emancipation%20in%20travel%20narratives.pdf](http://www.eurescl.eu/images/stories/essays_wp1/Slave%20trades%20slavery%20and%20emancipation%20in%20travel%20narratives.pdf) [accessed 27 January 2012].

considered an ideal for British men.<sup>122</sup> For the Royal Navy, as defenders of British values, the nature of duty changed accordingly, from one where professionalism converged with a spiritual responsibility that stressed inhumanity and the religious imperative to end slavery, to one of stoicism and detachment. For those charged with upholding abolition, the impact of this shift was significant on their understanding of their role. An examination of their narratives adds much to an understanding of the constantly evolving nature of British anti-slavery rhetoric in the nineteenth century. Naval officers' sense of duty and perceptions of the anti-slavery mission were also affected by the experiences of prize voyages and the ideological challenges they faced in regards to conceptions of freedom for Africans, to which the next chapter will turn.

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<sup>122</sup> Mangan and Walvin, 'Introduction', pp. 1-2; Norman Vance, *The Sinews of Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Lester, 'British Settler Discourse', p. 44.

## Chapter 5

### **‘A valuable prize’<sup>1</sup>: anti-slavery, liberation and freedom**

To witness the brutality and human trauma of the slave trade on a detained slave vessel or to be placed in charge of a prize vessel with enslaved Africans on board was extraordinary employment for naval officers. This chapter uncovers their reactions to such service, and their representations in word and image of their experiences. It explores the extent to which officers engaged with the individuals they were liberating, and in what forms they conceived the ‘freedom’ they granted. Very often these narratives do not fit neatly within the abolitionist rhetoric of glorious British liberation. The nature of conditions on board prize vessels during transportation to Admiralty courts was physically and emotionally demanding for all involved and at times comparable to another Middle Passage for recaptives, a state of affairs that naval officers could contribute to. Concepts of British liberty for Africans were also riddled with ambiguities. Officers’ narratives reveal emotions of sympathy, humanity and paternalism but also racial assumptions and anxieties regarding the realities of slavery, liberty and freedom.

#### **Conditions on prize vessels**

There are few surviving officer narratives of time on board slave vessels taken as prize by the Royal Navy, as it was the task of only a small number of nominated officers and men to form a prize crew. To be placed in charge was sought after in terms of opportunities for promotion and recognition. The nominated officer was instructed to transport the slave vessel to the nearest port at which an international Court of Mixed Commission (or from the 1840s, a Vice-Admiralty court) would establish the legality of its capture. On the West African coast that invariably meant Sierra Leone, although St Helena and Luanda (Angola) were also used from the 1840s.<sup>2</sup> If the capture was declared illegal, the ship would be returned to the original

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<sup>1</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 3 October 1841. McIlroy was referring to a slaver with 450 Africans on board detained by HMS *Fantome* near St Helena.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Bethell, ‘The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century’, *The Journal of African History*, 7:1 (1966), pp. 79-93. Between 1819 and 1871, Mixed Commission courts also sat at the Cape of Good Hope, Boa Vista (Cape Verde Islands), Rio de Janeiro, Surinam, Spanish Town (Jamaica), Havana and New York.

captain (who often stayed with the prize for this reason).<sup>3</sup> If deemed legal, the vessel was condemned or sold, and the enslaved Africans were liberated, registered, and maintained for a time at the expense of the British government.

From the naval perspective Sierra Leone was a considerable distance from the major sources of slave exportation in the Bights. Between 1819 and 1826, it took prize crews an average of 62 days to sail to Sierra Leone from the point of capture.<sup>4</sup> In 1821, Lieutenant Christopher Knight wrote to the Admiralty Secretary from the *Snapper* in the Old Calabar River:

... to call the attention of their Lordships to the very great distance from these Rivers to that Port [Sierra Leone], which cannot fail to produce a great mortality among the Slaves ... and to be a great risk to the lives and healths [sic] of our Seamen and officers who have to navigate them up, the Vessels being always in the most loathsome state imaginable; and to send medical assistance is not possible. Eight weeks is by no means to be considered a long time to perform this difficult Passage.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1820s there were moves to transfer the Mixed Commission courts to Fernando Po, regarded as a healthier and more geographically suitable location. In 1823, Commander B. Marwood Kelly of the *Pheasant* informed the Admiralty that to disembark Africans on the island would significantly reduce the duration of the majority of prize voyages and would therefore render the enslaved 'much less liable to the fatal effects of those diseases inseparable from a crowded slave room'.<sup>6</sup> Captain William Owen was sent to the island in 1827 in order to establish a settlement there, but the scheme was abandoned when the Spanish refused to sell the island to the British.<sup>7</sup>

Conditions on prize voyages were distressing for both recaptives and prize crews. A parliamentary inquiry into suppression in 1827 concluded that 'under existing circumstances,

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize: Journeys in Slave Ships Taken as Prizes by the Royal Navy', *Slavery and Abolition*, 31:1 (2010), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Robert T. Brown, 'Fernando Po and the Anti-Sierra Leonean Campaign: 1826-1834', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6:2 (1973), p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant Knight to J. W. Croker, 5 August 1821, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1821-1822*, compiled by the Foreign Office (London: J. Harrison and Son, 1829), pp. 185-6.

<sup>6</sup> UKHO, MP 107, Commander B. Marwood Kelly, 'Remarks and observations on the probable value of the island of Fernando Po as a British colony', no folios.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 'Fernando Po', pp. 249-64. Former naval officer James Holman accompanied Owen and later published his experiences on the island in *A Voyage Round the World: including travels in Africa, Asia, Australasia, America*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1834).

the officers of the navy have it not in their powers to alleviate ... the sufferings of the Negroes, which for a long time after capture, they are compelled to witness, and in which they too often largely participate'.<sup>8</sup> The well-documented crowded and pestilential conditions on a slaver at the point of embarkation could not easily be alleviated on a prize voyage. Alexander Bryson identified the illnesses which commonly afflicted those on board: 'dysentery, fever, small-pox, ophthalmia, and diarrhoea ... engendered by filth, insufficient food, and the over-crowding of many people into a small, badly-ventilated space'.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, critics of the squadron claimed that conditions actually worsened during the period of naval suppression. David Northrup has identified 'astonishingly high losses [of slaves] between capture and adjudication' due to mistreatment before embarkation and the length and trauma of prize voyages.<sup>10</sup> Considering shipboard mortality rates and passage duration, an enslaved African's experience of a prize voyage was comparable to the Middle Passage. A voyage of eight weeks to Sierra Leone was not uncommon; many Middle Passages were of equivalent length or shorter (and decreased in duration during the nineteenth century).<sup>11</sup>

Shipboard mortality rates increased as a result of suppression efforts.<sup>12</sup> In particular, naval blockades of embarkation points caused a change in the tempo in which captives were loaded onto slave vessels, leading to long periods of confinement on shore and severe cases of disease and malnourishment. Samuel Ajayi Crowther wrote that he spent four months in chains at Lagos waiting for his Portuguese owners to see an opportunity to begin embarkation.<sup>13</sup> Naval officers offered much commentary on the emaciated condition of the enslaved, even though most slave vessels were captured near the coast and had therefore not been at sea that long.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Brown, 'Fernando Po', p. 250.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Bryson, *Report on the Climate and Principal Diseases of the African Station* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1847), pp. 255-6, 259.

<sup>10</sup> David Northrup, 'African Mortality in the Suppression of the Slave Trade: The Case of the Bight of Biafra', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9:1 (1978), p. 47; See Chapter 3, pp. 102.

<sup>11</sup> Voyage lengths on the Middle Passage varied from 6 weeks to 3 months depending on regions of embarkation and disembarkation. The nineteenth-century decline in durations has been associated with improvements in oceangoing technology. See David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), Maps 123-4, pp. 160, 180-1; David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 133-5.

<sup>12</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Maps 123-4, 129-30, pp. 180-1, 186-7.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Reverend William Jowett, [no date] 1837, in Philip D. Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 310.

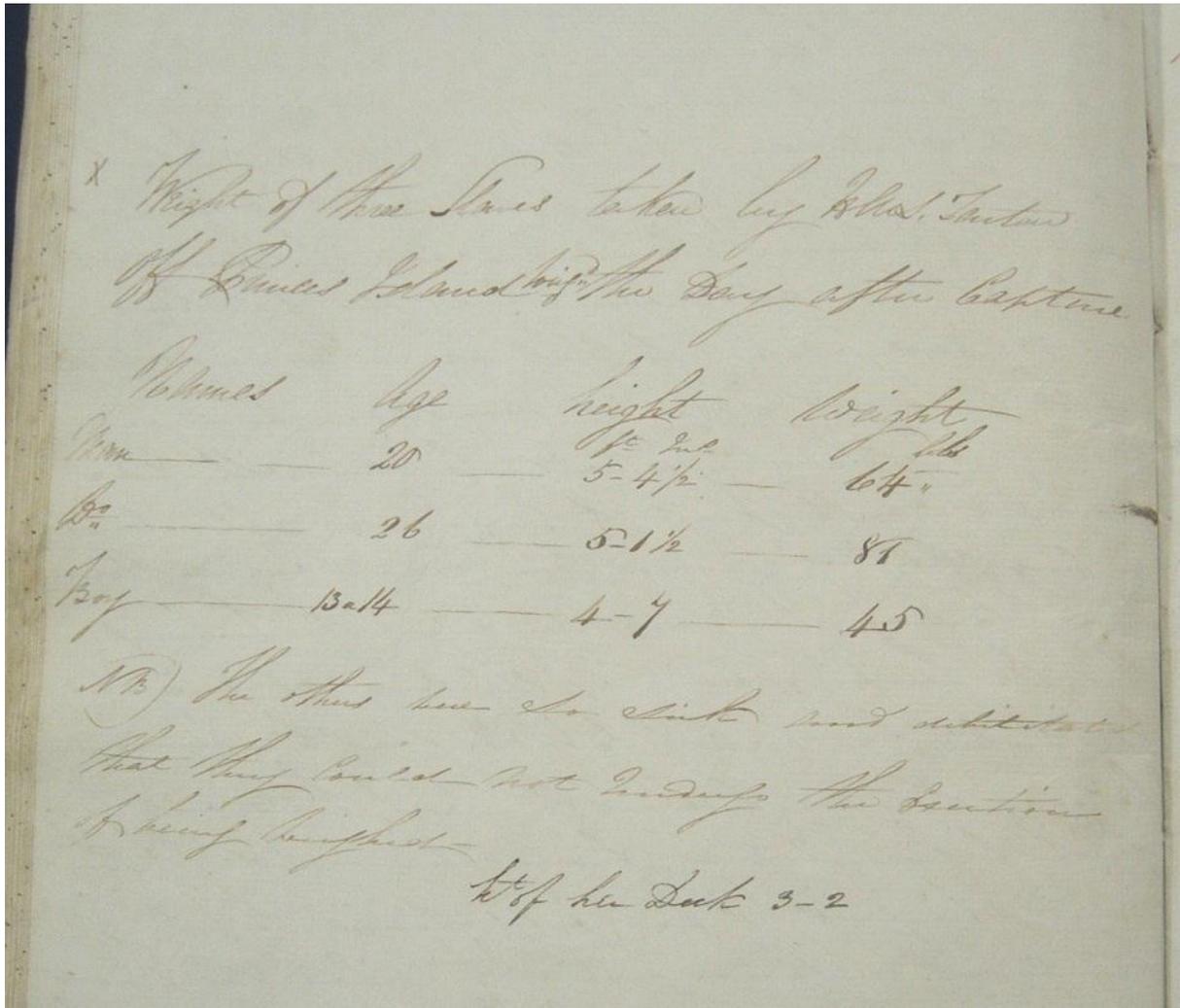


Fig. 17: Extract from Lieutenant Marsh's book of private remarks from the *Tartar*, c. 1818-19 (SALS, A/AOV/69).<sup>14</sup>

Lieutenant Digby Marsh of the *Tartar* was involved in the capture of a Portuguese slave schooner off Princes Island in March 1819. In his book of private remarks, he wrote that the Africans 'were in such a debilitated state as to require being carried to the boats'. As seen in Fig. 17, he recorded the emaciated weights of two men aged 20 and 26 as 64 lbs and 81 lbs respectively. A 14 year old boy weighed only 45 lbs. Marsh added that the other Africans from the slave schooner were 'so sick and debilitated that they could not undergo the exertion of being weighed.'<sup>15</sup> Deaths of a significant proportion of recaptives were common. For example, in 1826 the slaver *Invincible* arrived in Sierra Leone after being detained in the Cameroon estuary with only 250 survivors from the 440 slaves embarked due to disease.

<sup>14</sup> Reproduced with permission from Somerset Heritage Service (an attempt to contact the depositor was made).

<sup>15</sup> SALS, A/AOV/69, 'Private remarks, occurrences, etc., HM ship *Tartar* - from England to the coast of Africa', c. 1818-19, no folios.

Commodore George Collier reported that 46 of 266 captured on board the *Anna Maria* died during its two months' passage to Sierra Leone.<sup>16</sup>

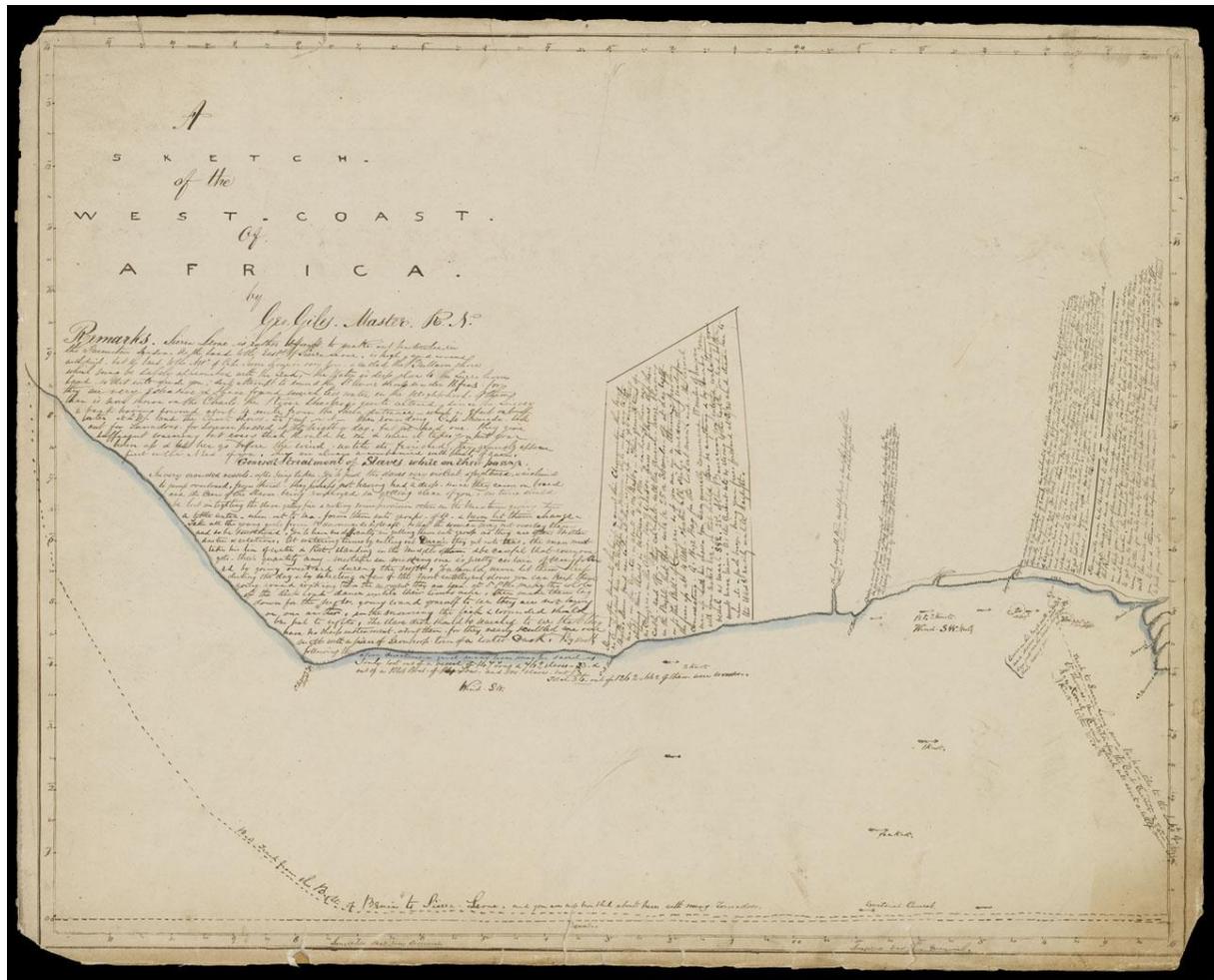


Fig. 18: 'Sketch of the west coast of Africa', George Giles, master of the *Grappler*, c. 1846-9 (NMM, MGS/42).

Poor provisions on prize voyages contributed to these problems. Prize officers were instructed to provide water as soon as possible. George Giles, master of HMS *Grappler*, drew and annotated a map of the coast (Fig. 18) which included details on the treatment of recaptives: 'after being taken, you'll find the slaves very violent and frightened, and inclined to jump overboard from thirst ... no time should be lost in lighting the slave galley fire and cooking some provisions, and in the meantime giving them a little water'.<sup>17</sup> In 1823, 181 recaptives from a Spanish schooner detained in the River Bonny were taken on board the

<sup>16</sup> Northrup, 'African Mortality', p. 57; John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 183.

<sup>17</sup> The 'violent and frightened' state of the enslaved could lead to their poor treatment by naval officers, as examined later.

*Owen Glendower* for transportation to Sierra Leone. The crew and passengers subsequently suffered an epidemic of fever, as examined in Chapter 3. Midshipman Binstead noted that declining health was exacerbated by the poor state of provisions. Three weeks into the voyage, naval personnel were surviving on 'only one meal a day being on quarter of allowance' there being 'little or no bread in the ship'.<sup>18</sup> It can be assumed that the recaptives were provided with similar rations or worse.

While a prize voyage ended at Sierra Leone, the emancipation process could not begin until the slave ship had been officially condemned; this usually took a few days, but could take weeks, during which time recaptives remained aboard the slaver.<sup>19</sup> In January 1861, naval surgeon Richard Carr McClement visited the bark *Clara Windsor*, recently arrived at Freetown after being detained by the *Espoir* near Ascension the previous month. The vessel, under American colours, was bound for Cuba from Cabenda with 840 enslaved Africans on board, including over 400 children.<sup>20</sup> McClement wrote in his diary:

It would be utterly impossible to describe the sight which presented itself to us when we first went on board;- and; it would be equally difficult for anyone who had not seen it, to comprehend the amount of misery, the suffering and, the horrors, that were contained within the wooden walls of that little craft.<sup>21</sup>

Reporting that only 616 Africans had survived the passage to Sierra Leone, McClement wrote a long and compassionate description of what he witnessed:

The majority of the slaves were on the upper deck, mostly, squatting in rows ... On the foetid, sloppy, and, sickening slave deck were to be seen the remainder, consisting of men, women, and, children, huddled together; some emaciated to skeletons; some lying sick and heedless of all around; and, some on the point of passing into another world; where; it would be hard to imagine they could suffer more than they had done in this; men and women lay promiscuously:- some lying on their faces, some on their

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<sup>18</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 24-25 July 1823; Chapter 3, pp. 87-8.

<sup>19</sup> Northrup, 'African Mortality', p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> The Voyages Database, [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), voyage 4336; 'Return of Slavers Captured by Her Majesty's Cruizers on the West Coast of Africa', *PP* 1860 (2598), p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> SCA, GB 0240 FA/67/3, McClement Diary, 7 January 1861, pp. 118-21, [www.scottishcatholicarchives.org.uk/Learning/DiaryofRichardCarrMcClement/DiaryExtracts/Empire/tabid/186/Default.aspx](http://www.scottishcatholicarchives.org.uk/Learning/DiaryofRichardCarrMcClement/DiaryExtracts/Empire/tabid/186/Default.aspx) [accessed 20 June 2011].

backs; and, the more enfeebled sat with their heads resting on the knees. All were naked and had their skins besmeared with the filth in which they lay.<sup>22</sup>

The significant number of children on board reflected the increased proportion of those younger than thirteen or fourteen years of age in the slave trade in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> McClement wrote that many suffered so severely from dysentery ‘that every bone protruded prominently under the skin ... Three or four of these little children ... looked at us with such a half-dead and woeful countenance that we were unable to endure the sight any longer’.<sup>24</sup>

Naval officer James Edward Bowly wrote to his parents from Sierra Leone in March 1863, describing conditions on a prize schooner captured by the *Brisk* off Princes Island. He wrote that the 540 Africans on board the slaver at embarkation had ‘died at a dreadful rate’, and only around 200 of the 320 liberated by the *Brisk* survived the passage to Sierra Leone:

The poor wretches had been on board the slaver 48 days ... they were in the most dreadful condition that human beings could be in. I should never have believed that anything could have been so horrible. The slave decks were not more than 5 feet 6 inches high, and how they managed to cram in 540 I cannot conceive, when there were only 200 they appeared to be stowed like potted herrings, and the stench was so awful that anyone who had stayed there 5 minutes must have fainted ... we landed the poor things, and now was the worst part to see them come up from below, labouring under every imaginable disease, and some of them mere walking skeletons, with their bones protruding through their skin. A great many were too weak to get up, and we were obliged to send the white men below to pass them up like sacks.<sup>25</sup>

Such appalling conditions were so severe that naval officers could do little to relieve them. These accounts also serve as a reminder of the hardships suffered by naval officers on prize voyages. In 1827 James Holman described how the prize officer on board the crowded slaver *Henri-Quatre*, recently arrived at Sierra Leone, was ‘confined to a small space in the after-part of the deck near the tiller. The pressure of this dense mass of human beings was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 115, pp. 159, 166. At 50 percent, the proportion of children from West Central Africa in the slave trade after 1807 was almost double the share compared with the previous century. This was possibly because faster voyages made the transportation of lower priced slaves economically feasible.

<sup>24</sup> SCA, GB 0240 FA/67/3, McClement Diary, 7 January 1861.

<sup>25</sup> GA, D4582/6/6, James Edward Bowly to his parents, 16 March 1863.

suffocating'.<sup>26</sup> Alexander Bryson noted that prize officers were often 'worn out by excessive labour, broken rest, and exposure both by night and day upon the deck of a small vessel, probably crowded with slaves in a loathsome state of misery and disease'.<sup>27</sup>

However, these narratives also support the notion that experiences on prize vessels could constitute an alternative Middle Passage for the enslaved. This comparison must be qualified; as Emma Christopher makes clear, the fundamental difference was that the Middle Passage was intended to prepare people for sale as property, to 'alter human being to thing'.<sup>28</sup> However, while in some cases, naval officers were powerless to ease the discomfort of recaptives, in others there is evidence that naval officers contributed to these circumstances. In particular, there are valid parallels in terms of officers' treatment of recaptives under their authority and their methods of maintaining order.

### **Treatment of recaptives**

Prize voyages were by their nature challenging commissions for naval officers. One considerable problem was communication, made difficult by the number of different languages spoken by recaptives, often gathered from diverse communities and geographical areas. For example, in 1821, Commodore George Collier wrote that the recovery of the sick was made 'doubtful' by the 'prejudices the Slaves naturally have against the White Men, and the difficulty of making those who are sick or diseased understand our wishes and motives'.<sup>29</sup> It is clear, however, that officers did make attempts to communicate with those on board. In 1831, Commodore Hayes noted that recaptives from the Spanish Brig *Marinerito* relayed their wishes for water to the crew of the *Black Joke* by 'their noise, and signs'.<sup>30</sup> An extract from the log book of the *Black Joke* (Fig. 19) reveals that this communication was developed further. It notes over 20 translations into English of the 'Accose language', words and phrases used by captive Africans from Whydah and Badagry. These included practical phrases to assist in their everyday care, such as 'my belly is sick', 'I want to make water' and 'Go and wash'. Other disciplinary instructions such as 'hold your tongue' and 'silence or you'll get punished' were indicative of more difficult relations between officers and Africans. The log

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<sup>26</sup> Holman, *A Voyage*, vol. 1, 29 September 1827.

<sup>27</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 165.

<sup>29</sup> George Collier to J. W. Croker, 31 March 1821, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1821-1822*, pp. 178-80.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, John Hayes to George Elliot, 6 May 1831, ff. 418-30.

book points towards an element of preparedness on the part of naval officers, and perhaps that some form of training was given to those in charge of prize vessels. The effort and time taken to compile this list also indicates the duration of prize voyages, and the numbers of Africans released by the crew of the *Black Joke*.<sup>31</sup>

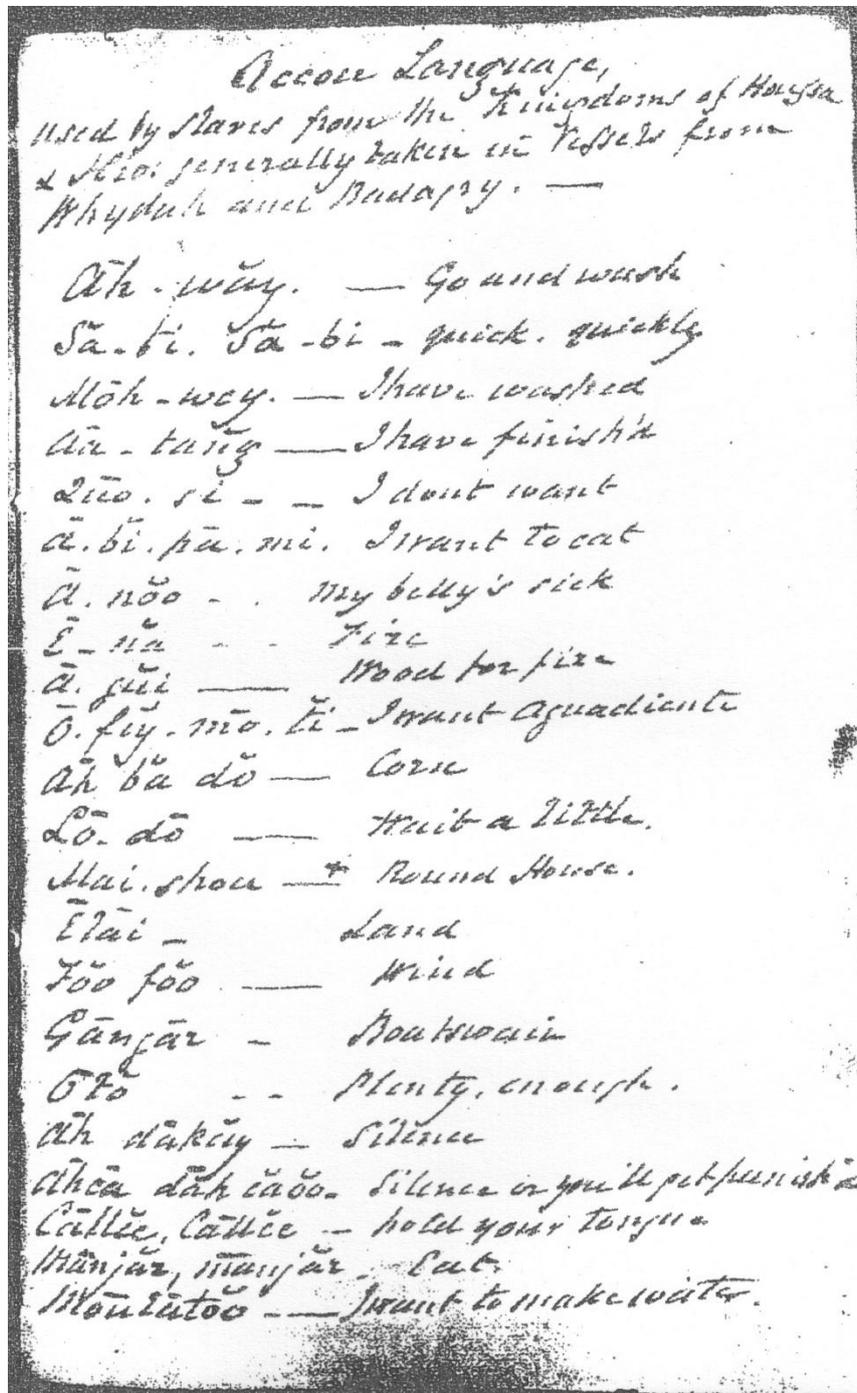


Fig. 19: Extract from the log book of the *Black Joke*, c. 1830s.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> A former slaver, the *Black Joke* was renowned for its speed and success in capturing slave vessels in the late 1820s and early 1830s. See Lloyd, *Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Michael Graham-Stewart for allowing the reproduction of this image.

The evidence of disciplinary measures suggests that some treatment of recaptives was similar to experiences on the Middle Passage, even with more supposedly sympathetic liberators. So too do the accounts of prize voyages written by Midshipman Henry Rogers and Lieutenant James Stoddart. In November 1849, Rogers, of the steamer *Pluto*, was ordered to convey the *Casco*, a Brazilian slave vessel carrying 440 recaptives, from Ambriz to St Helena, a voyage of 21 days.<sup>33</sup> A young officer in his early twenties, Rogers had previously served in China before being engaged in suppression on both the West and East African coasts between 1843 and 1850.<sup>34</sup> This was not the first prize vessel he had conveyed – he was involved in navigating the Brazilian barque *Princesa* from Madagascar to Sierra Leone in 1846 – but it was the first with a human cargo. Along with his small crew, the prize’s captain and cook remained on the ship.

In his journal, Rogers displayed sympathy for the plight of the enslaved, a consideration of their background and recognition of their emotional distress. He described how the women and children were accommodated on deck to ease crowding in the slave-hold, and that the men were brought on deck as often as possible. The demands of managing a large number of Africans complicated Rogers’s feelings towards them, however. He took advice from the slave captain who ‘helped me to manage the slaves in the kindest way’.<sup>35</sup> For example, the daily routine on board the prize vessel, and particularly the feeding regime, inevitably led him to treat and write about those under his supervision in collective terms:

At 6am our daily task commenced, the first operation was to get the slaves on deck, wash them and make them clap their hands ... At 7 we gave the slaves their water and swept the slave deck ... At 9 all the slaves were collected in groups of ten ... as soon as the “wittles was up” and all was ready for an attack on the same, the master of ceremonies (self) rattled the instrument for the purpose ... the tens made an attack on the contents of their round tins (culvinances and farinha).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 28 November 1849; [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), voyage 4023.

<sup>34</sup> Obituary in the *Western Morning News*, 27 November 1912.

<sup>35</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 28 November 1849.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 November 1849.

Rogers also encouraged the recaptives to dance in order to ‘keep their spirits up’, which was thought necessary to lessen their ‘pining for their country’.<sup>37</sup> This was also a tradition on slave vessels, whereby slave captains enforced dancing and singing in an attempt, it was believed, to break melancholy. More than a century earlier, Captain William Snelgrave wrote about his experiences in command of a slaver in *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave Trade* (1734). He described the methods he employed to maintain calm relations on board and avoid mutiny, including allowing music, singing or dancing. A belief in such techniques (perhaps informed by the *Casco*’s captain) clearly impacted Rogers’s understanding of those under his care when he wrote that he ‘made the slaves dance and sing, clapping their hands, so as to keep their blood in circulation’.<sup>38</sup>

Lieutenant James Stoddart wrote an account of his time in charge of the Portuguese slaver *Josephine* in 1836, with 360 slaves on board, which was later published. From previous experience, Stoddart was clearly unhappy with his appointment: ‘to my horror and disgust I was told to take the prize up to Sierra Leone ... although I had just returned the week before after an absence of three months in taking another prize up’.<sup>39</sup> Stoddart too consulted with the slave captain as to the best way to handle the vessel’s passengers:

I had released the slaves, of course, but my trouble was to get things in order ... I had divided my men into watches, and armed each with a small cat to keep the negroes in order ... I asked him [the Captain] about the negroes; they were Ac‘oos, a quiet, peaceable tribe, or mostly so, very healthy and easily managed by kindness.<sup>40</sup>

Stoddart claimed to be on friendly terms with the Africans, noting how he ‘talked kindly to them through an interpreter, one of my crew’. His description of relations, however, also exposed racial stereotypes:

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 28 November 1849. Accounts of slaves jumping overboard from slave vessels or other forms of suicide were common. See Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007), pp. 288-90; David Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe 1450-1850*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 165-7.

<sup>38</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 29 November 1849; Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, pp. 237-8. See Chapter 3, p. 112, for Midshipman Hinde’s description of slaves dancing aboard a prize vessel.

<sup>39</sup> ‘A Cruise in a Slaver. From the Journal of Admiral James Stoddart’, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 1480 (1939), p. 188. Two handwritten copies of Stoddart’s journals, including ‘Passages in a sea life: Cruize in the Josephine 1836’, are held by the NMM (MRF/171).

<sup>40</sup> ‘A Cruise in a Slaver’, pp. 188-9.

I amused myself feeding the children on what was left from dinner. Some half-dozen of the poor things clung to me ever afterwards, watching my wants, sleeping outside my bunk, and in the morning pulling my feet out to bathe them. I gave the little bodies grand names, one Bubble & Squeak, &c., &c. ; and in six weeks' time they spoke very fair English for negroes.<sup>41</sup>

Stoddart's narrative reveals how far emotional boundaries on a prize vessel could become blurred; the implication is that he named and 'petted' the children in a similar way to animals or domestic slaves, regarding himself as their new master.<sup>42</sup> As shall be explored later, ideas of freedom were loosely defined in this period. These relations became complicated further when the methods of maintaining order are considered.

Naval officers were ordered to manage and keep charge of prize vessels like any other ship. In some narratives, particularly those which were published, relations between officers and recaptives were depicted as harmonious and amicable. For example, an account from an unidentified officer published in the *United Service Magazine* contained the following description of the liberated Africans from the slaver *Marinerito*: 'The poor creatures took every opportunity of singing a song, testifying their thankfulness to the English, and by their willingness to obey and assist, rendered the passage to Sierra Leone easy and pleasant to the officers and men who had them in charge.'<sup>43</sup> For other naval officers, however, feelings of sympathy and duty collided, and notions of humanity appear overwhelmed by the demands of service. Lieutenant Francis Meynell hinted at the difficulties faced by those in charge of a prize vessel. In 1845, he described the 'ravenous' reaction of recaptives from the slaver *Albanez* to being provided with water as 'fearful' and 'a very unenticing specimen of the trouble the prize crew might expect going up to Sierra Leone'.<sup>44</sup>

Henry Rogers was clearly distressed by the thought of an uprising among the recaptives of the *Casco*. He suffered insomnia due to 'how easily a man might have got up taken my

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>42</sup> During Middle Passages, there are accounts of enslaved children becoming favourites of slaver captains and crew. For example, Olaudah Equiano wrote of being favourably treated in comparison to other captives because he was a young boy at the time of his transportation. See Rediker, *Slave Ship*, pp. 121-7; Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, p. 171.

<sup>43</sup> 'Capture of the Spanish Slaver, Marinerito, by the Black Joke', *USM*, Part II (1832), p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 2 May 1845.

sword, drawn and soon have killed me and given the other slaves a chance of rising'.<sup>45</sup> Such fears were not misguided, with up to one in ten slave vessels experiencing an insurrection. Newspapers gave much coverage to such uprisings, which ensured they remained in the public consciousness.<sup>46</sup> The likelihood of rebellion was linked to the ethnicity of those on board, and Rogers reassured himself that the recaptives under his authority were comprised of a variety of African peoples, which 'makes it more difficult for them to conspire'.<sup>47</sup> However, on one occasion he felt it necessary to 'proceed to punishment', due to 'a big slave having nearly throttled a small one':

I administered a small dose to him, consisting of 2 dozen, inflicted with a rope-end ... pretty severely. This must not be mistaken for cruelty, as it is a well known fact that in large communities with little intelligence, any outbreak against the laws that preserve the weak from the attacks of the strong must be punished immediately and severely. The poor slaves appear very docile, good creatures generally.<sup>48</sup>

Rogers's aggression towards recaptives echoes the subjugation of slaves by slave ship seamen.<sup>49</sup> He also revealed paternalistic and racial assumptions reflective of his time, explored in the next chapter. Also in fear of revolt, in his account of his passage in the slaver *Veloz* in 1836, James Stoddart wrote that 'cats and cutlasses' were used to suppress a rebellion of women slaves held below deck in which 'cats had to be used freely'.<sup>50</sup> However, such disciplinary action should be compared with the harsh punishments handed out to seamen, suggesting that this discipline was not necessarily based on racial motive. In 1829,

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<sup>45</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 29 November 1849.

<sup>46</sup> David Richardson, 'Shipboard Revolts, African Authority and the Atlantic Slave Trade', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 58:1 (2001), pp. 69-92; Rediker, *Slave Ship*, pp. 291-300; Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors*, pp. 184-6.

<sup>47</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 131, p. 189. For example, vessels sailing from Upper Guinea (Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Windward Coast) were more likely to experience revolt than those from other regions, particularly West Central Africa. In 1810, Captain Edward Columbine noted that captives from the Gold Coast were 'a fierce high-spirited race of men', while those from the Congo and Angola were 'a more mild & docile race; but very melancholy in their slavery' (UIC: SLC, Columbine Journals, Folder 10, ff. 136-7).

<sup>48</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 29 November 1849.

<sup>49</sup> For examples, see Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, especially chapters 8 and 9, and Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors*, chapter 5. See Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize', pp. 103-08 for the harsh treatment of liberated Africans by the prize crew of the *Progresso* slaver in East African waters in 1843.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize', p. 102, n.12. In contrast, on the *Josephine*, Stoddart wrote that his passengers were silent 'under terror of the uplifted cats', which were 'very seldom used'. This correlates with his assessment of the recaptives belonging to a 'peaceable tribe'.

for example, Midshipman Edwin Hinde wrote that as punishment for ‘mean and dirty tricks’, one member of the *Atholl*’s crew was given ‘two dozen ... with a knotted piece of rope’.<sup>51</sup>

Relations became difficult in other ways too, particularly with women and children on board. There was a long history of sexual exploitation of women captives on slaving vessels.<sup>52</sup> In July 1810, while Governor of Sierra Leone, Edward Columbine adjudicated a Vice-Admiralty court trial of a sailor belonging to the *Merced* slave ship, accused of the murder of two captives and separate rape of two African women. The *Merced* had been detained by the British schooner *George* in the River Gambia, and as she was being conveyed to Sierra Leone at the time of the alleged crimes, she had on board a number of the *George*’s crew. They were apparently helpless against the accused taking ‘two girls down to his own berth and sleeping place’.<sup>53</sup> Alexander Bryson recommended the removal of alcohol from prize vessels to prevent misconduct of sailors. ‘Should there be female slaves on board’, he wrote, ‘it is utterly impossible to prevent irregularities of another kind taking place’.<sup>54</sup> Lieutenant Gordon Macdonald conveyed a prize under Dutch colours to the island of Curacoa in the West Indies in 1823 while serving on HMS *Gloucester*. There were 140 African males and 87 females on board. He perhaps spoke for many naval personnel when he wrote that he was ‘particularly struck with the Beauty and mould of some of the delicate sex (for I cannot say fair) none of whom appeared to have exceeded 18 years of age, and some as young as ten; I never beheld more perfect forms or delicacy of feature.’<sup>55</sup>

A lack of understanding about unknown peoples often led to imputed racial character, which had an impact on officers’ treatment of recaptives. There were comparisons with animals, for example. On arrival at Sierra Leone, Stoddart wrote that the ‘the women cried, the children clung to me ... I was really sorry to part with the monkeys’.<sup>56</sup> Engineer John M’Kie discussed how a first lieutenant from the *Rattler* was sent in command of a prize vessel because he had ‘the greatest experience in the management of slaves’ and described the enslaved as ‘more like tame animals than anything else.’ Taken with his comments on the

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<sup>51</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Hinde Letters, 29 September 1829.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors*, pp. 187-92.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, CO 267/28, Vice-Admiralty Court deposition of Stephen Clark of the Royal African Corps, 20 July 1810.

<sup>54</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 210.

<sup>55</sup> NYPL, Macdonald Memoirs, c. 1832, pp. 149-52. See Chapter 6 for officers’ perceptions of African women.

<sup>56</sup> ‘A Cruise in a Slaver’, p. 194. Officers’ use of animalistic and other stereotypes in relation to Africans is explored in the next chapter.

noxious smell on board – he noted that ‘for some days everything I ate seemed to taste of that smell’ – the implication that the captives were ‘animal-like’ in some way is strengthened further.<sup>57</sup> That the lieutenant had experience of ‘management’ of slaves rather than care or protection is also revealing. Others wrote with more cruelty. Alexander Bryson claimed that due to the surgeon’s ‘utter ignorance’ of African languages, ‘there is no possible means of treating them [recaptives] otherwise than as dumb animals’. When sick, he wrote, ‘with something like the instinct peculiar to the inferior animals’, they ‘retire into some secluded corner’ where ‘they will sullenly repose crouched amongst their own filth, until death’.<sup>58</sup> Naval surgeon Peter Leonard described the ‘extreme mental debasement’ of recaptives on a prize vessel in the early 1830s, evidenced by women nursing children with ‘both breasts occupied, the one with their own offspring, the other suckling one of the numerous abominably filthy monkeys on board the schooner.’<sup>59</sup>

African experiences of prize voyages are rare. In particular, were recaptives aware of a favourable change in their circumstances? The chase and boarding of slave ships was often violent. For example, in his description of the prolonged capture of the slaver *Marguerita* by the *Black Joke* in 1831, Midshipman Edwin Hinde noted ‘shots were whistling about our ears in all directions’, resulting in one crew member killed and five wounded. Discussing the capture of the *Marinerito* by the *Black Joke* in the same year, Commodore Hayes noted the ‘fear and consternation’, which seized recaptives, ‘at witnessing the conflict between the two vessels’.<sup>60</sup>

Samuel Ajayi Crowther was aboard the Portuguese slaver *Esperanza Felix* when it was detained by the *Myrmidon*, under Commodore Mends. After a voyage of nearly two and a half months, he was liberated in Freetown in 1822.<sup>61</sup> Crowther’s account of the slaver’s capture reveals the fear and distrust inherent in such encounters. He wrote that the captives ‘found ourselves in the hands of new conquerors, whom we at first very much dreaded, they being armed with long swords.’<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Ali Eisami, sold as a slave in Porto Novo in 1818 before his ship was captured by the navy, described the naval officer who boarded his ship as

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<sup>57</sup> NLS, MS 24634, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 34-7; Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors*, p. 170.

<sup>58</sup> Bryson, *Report*, pp. 256, 258.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, in His Majesty’s Ship Dryad* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1833), pp. 106-7.

<sup>60</sup> NMM, HIN/1, Edwin Hinde to Captain Gordon, 25 May 1831; TNA, ADM 1/1, Hayes to Elliot, 6 May 1831.

<sup>61</sup> Crowther to Jowett, in Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered*, pp. 298-316.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

a ‘war-chief’, alongside other ‘war-men’ who came onto his vessel ‘sword in hand’.<sup>63</sup> The lack of communication and fear of white men perpetuated the sense of anxiety and danger. Crowther believed the English sailors to be capable of murdering the Portuguese traders, concluding that ‘parts of a hog hanging, the skin of which was white’ were body parts. Many Africans believed that white men were cannibals. In his evidence before a Select Committee on the slave trade in 1849, the former slave Augustino claimed that many Africans embarked on slave ships ‘jumped overboard, for fear they were being fattened to be eaten.’<sup>64</sup>

After initial distrust, both Crowther and Eisami had positive perceptions of the officers involved in their liberation. Eisami wrote that ‘they took off all the fetters from our feet, and threw them into the water, and they gave us clothes that we might cover our nakedness, they opened the water casks, that we drink water to the fill, and we also ate food, till we had enough.’<sup>65</sup> This symbolic removal and discarding of restraints was also described by naval officer John Tailour in 1815, as shown in Chapter 4. After taking on board enslaved Africans, he ‘took up a pair of the shackles, showed it them all round & with indignation of countenance threw them into the sea.’<sup>66</sup> However, recaptives’ experiences in this regard were varied. George McHenry, a surgeon and superintendent of the Liberated African Establishment at St Helena, described how many of those he witnessed disembarking from prize vessels remained ‘manacled in couples ... thus chained to prevent them from inflicting punishment upon their captors’.<sup>67</sup> Another African’s account exposes poor treatment by naval officers. Joseph Wright was embarked on a Portuguese slaver in 1827 and subsequently freed by the navy. His experience does not reflect well on the officers involved:

Next day the English vessel overtook us and they took charge of the slaves. We were very poor for water. We were only allowed one glass of water a day and we were allowed only breakfast, no dinner. Many of the slaves had died for want of water, and many men died for crowdedness ... One day as I sat by the fireside where they were

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<sup>63</sup> Narrative of Ali Eisami in Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered*, p. 214.

<sup>64</sup> PP, 1850 (9), pp. 162-3. Augustino gave evidence relating to his transportation on a slaver from West Africa to Brazil in 1830; David Richardson, ‘Through African Eyes: The Middle Passage and the British Slave Trade’, in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Narrative of Ali Eisami in Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered*, p. 214.

<sup>66</sup> Chapter 4, p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> George McHenry, *Visits to Slave Ships* (British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1862), no pagination.

cooking, boiling water was thrown on my head, and my head became all peeled and sore, and this pained me very much.’<sup>68</sup>

Clearly experiences of recaptives differed from ship to ship. Many naval officers exhibited feelings of sympathy and kindness, but as other chapters show, their opinions on race, humanitarianism and the anti-slavery cause more widely varied enormously, impacting their treatment of recaptives. Even well-intentioned conduct, the encouragement of dancing for example, could be inadvertently cruel. McHenry was scathing about the treatment of Africans by some prize crews. He described how:

... some jack-tar, in the exuberance of gaiety, possibly from anticipation of the pleasures awaiting him on shore, will perhaps call upon the slaves for a song. These unfortunate and degraded creatures ... accustomed to implicit submission and obedience, will then strike up with loud voices a whining monotonous string of notes, accompanied with clapping of hands, repeating the same tune many a time without the least variation.<sup>69</sup>

From the treatment they received in some instances, recaptives may not have appreciated that there had been a change in the authority of their white male captors. This situation was exacerbated by the difficulties in communication; limited provisions; the imposition of disciplinary measures and practices usually seen on slave vessels. In contrast to other idealistic representations of British liberation, elements of distrust remained for both recaptives and naval officers. In the case of some prize voyages examined here, it is difficult to see how the concept of freedom was communicated by British officers, or was understood by those they were liberating.

### **Representations of Africans on slave vessels**

Representations of enslaved and liberated Africans in naval narratives add further to this discussion of relations on board prize vessels and concepts of racial identity and freedom. A common image of Africans in the early nineteenth century was the suffering, passive and

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<sup>68</sup> ‘The Narrative of Joseph Wright’ in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp. 321, 331-2. Curtin identified Wright’s vessel as the *Velas*, captured by the *Maidstone*. Wright later became a missionary in Sierra Leone.

<sup>69</sup> McHenry, *Visits to Slave Ships*.

respectable victim of slavery. Some naval officers perpetuated this stereotype, particularly in published accounts, in line with the Romantic conception of blacks as noble children of nature, deserving of protection and grateful for their liberty.<sup>70</sup> An anonymous contributor to the *United Service Magazine* in 1842 invited the reader to ‘come and see the handy works of these blood-thirsty dealers in human flesh’:

Mark, that living skeleton! lying with his face to the deck; one little month, and that man was a Hercules; but fearful of his strength, the villains have kept him in close irons; this is the first time he has breathed the air of heaven since he embarked. Look at his lengthy frame – his sunken eyes – his lank jaws – his attenuated limbs! ... he was doubtless taken fighting hand to hand, defending his wife, his children, his home; even the rude hut in the wilds of Africa.<sup>71</sup>

Other representations, however, more faithfully represented the reality of the situations encountered by naval officers.

In March 1845, Francis Meynell was Acting Lieutenant of HM Sloop *Albatross* when the vessel captured the slaver *Albanez* off the River Congo. The felucca was captured with 200 Africans already embarked; there were also three rafts alongside, formed of water-casks, crowded with Africans for boarding.<sup>72</sup> Meynell described how he ‘never saw such a savage scrum in my life ... we embarked the poor devils on the water casks ... and gave them water they had been afloat all the day before waiting for the Brig.’<sup>73</sup> Meynell was tasked to transport the prize to Sierra Leone under Lieutenant Elliot on a voyage that lasted six weeks. Writing about his experiences to his father later that year, Meynell wrote: ‘I boarded her at the capture she had 740 slaves, 140 of whom died on her passage up to Sierra Leone. I went up in her and a most miserable business it was’. At Sierra Leone, Meynell reported that ‘500 were landed but near 30 have died since [,] it’s a very horrible business this slave trade’.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Christine Bolt, ‘Race and the Victorians’ in C.C. Eldridge (ed.), *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 127; Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual representations of slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 22-3.

<sup>71</sup> ‘The Slaver. From the note-book of an Officer employed against the slave trade’, *USM*, Part I (1842), pp. 376-78.

<sup>72</sup> The name of this slave vessel has been spelt in various ways. For consistency, I use the spelling on [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), voyage 3483. The capture of the *Albanez* was detailed in a letter from Captain R. Yorke of the *Albatross* published in the *Illustrated London News*, 10 May 1845.

<sup>73</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 2 May 1845.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May and 17 August 1845.



Fig. 20: 'Slaves above deck', Lieutenant Francis Meynell, c. 1846 (NMM, MEY/2).

Meynell's two watercolours depicting the *Albanez* are among the few visual eyewitness accounts of suppression and of individual depictions of Africans aboard slave vessels. The watercolour of Africans in hold below deck (Fig. 21) in particular captures the suffering and bodily trauma of the slave trade. The status of the liberated slaves as human cargo is self-

evident, and in Marcus Wood's words, 'fatigue, ennui, discomfort and sheer depression are the primary impressions'.<sup>75</sup> Compared to the more brutal imagery of the slave trade publicly distributed by the abolitionist movement, Meynell's painting of the slave-hold is quiet, still and melancholic; but while there is humanity in the painting it is also somewhat emotionally withdrawn. This sense of detachment leads his watercolours to appear more as observational sketches than judgements on the slave trade.<sup>76</sup>

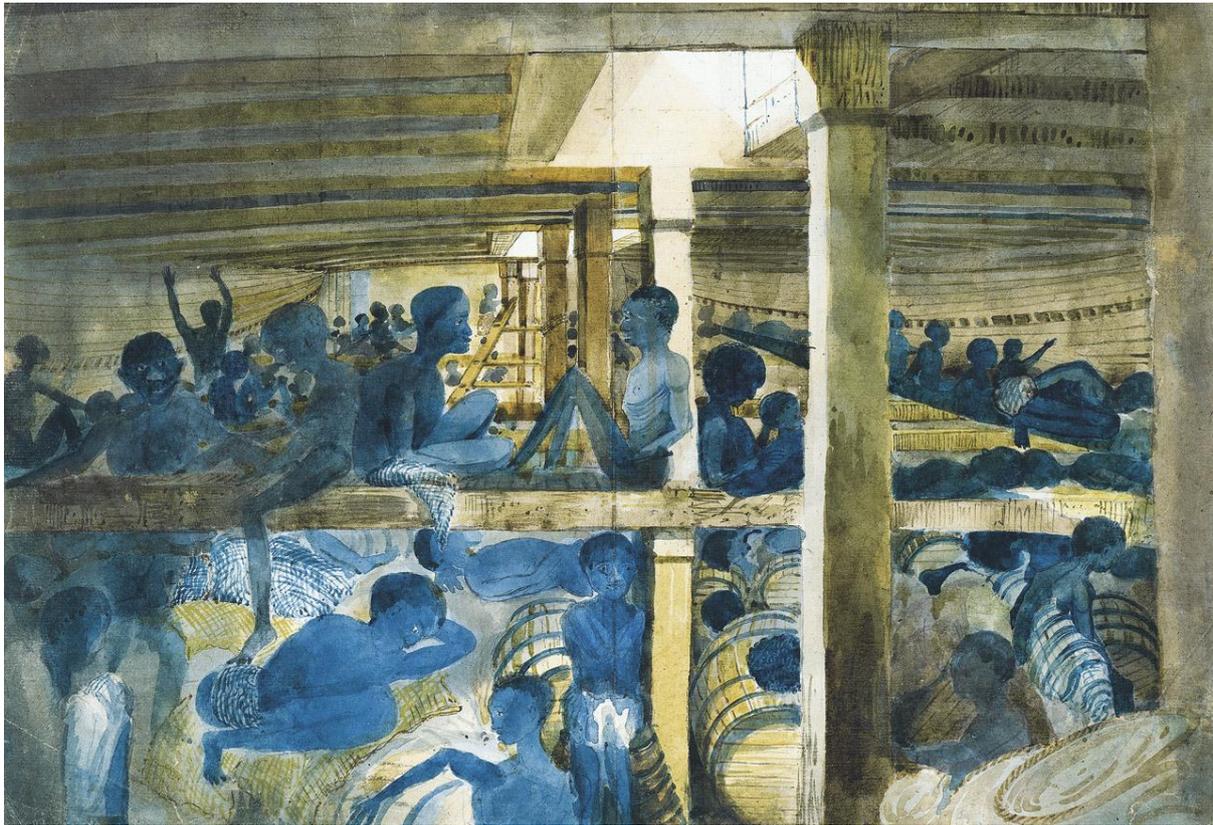


Fig. 21: 'Slaves below deck', Lieutenant Francis Meynell, c. 1846 (NMM, MEY/2).

James Smalls has written that most visualisations of the slave trade through art represented 'an inherently political act' which automatically identified the artist's views on slavery.<sup>77</sup> This was not the case with Meynell's watercolours: his work sits apart in that he was an eyewitness to the slave trade, but there is no clear perception of his views on slavery and no

<sup>75</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> As evidenced by his sketchbook and illustrated logbook (NMM, MEY/1 and MEY/2), Meynell was a prolific artist. He sketched many varied landscapes and scenes from his naval service, from China to the South Atlantic, including some sympathetic depictions of other races.

<sup>77</sup> James Smalls, 'Art and Illustration', in Seymour Drescher and Stanley Engerman (eds), *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 65, 76. Most visual representations which exposed the horrors of the slave trade were instigated by the abolitionist movement and were intended to stir sympathy in the viewer. For an overview of the visual culture of the abolition movement, see John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), chapter 6.

indication that he intended his sketch to be used for abolitionist ends.<sup>78</sup> One painting with which similarities can be found is *Nègres à fond de calle* (Negroes in the Ship's Hold) by Johann Moritz Rugendas (Fig. 22), painted for his *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil* (1827-1835). Like Meynell, Rugendas was an eyewitness, seeing the hold of a slave ship while on a scientific mission to the Brazilian interior. Rugendas's work was intended to be informative rather than declamatory, so a similarly objective approach is apparent.<sup>79</sup> The construction of both scenes is similar: Africans sit or lie beneath an opening of the hold; some sit on the beams while others lie on the floor; some look ill or emaciated and the lack of water or food is evident. One important difference, however, is that Meynell's image depicts no white presence.<sup>80</sup>

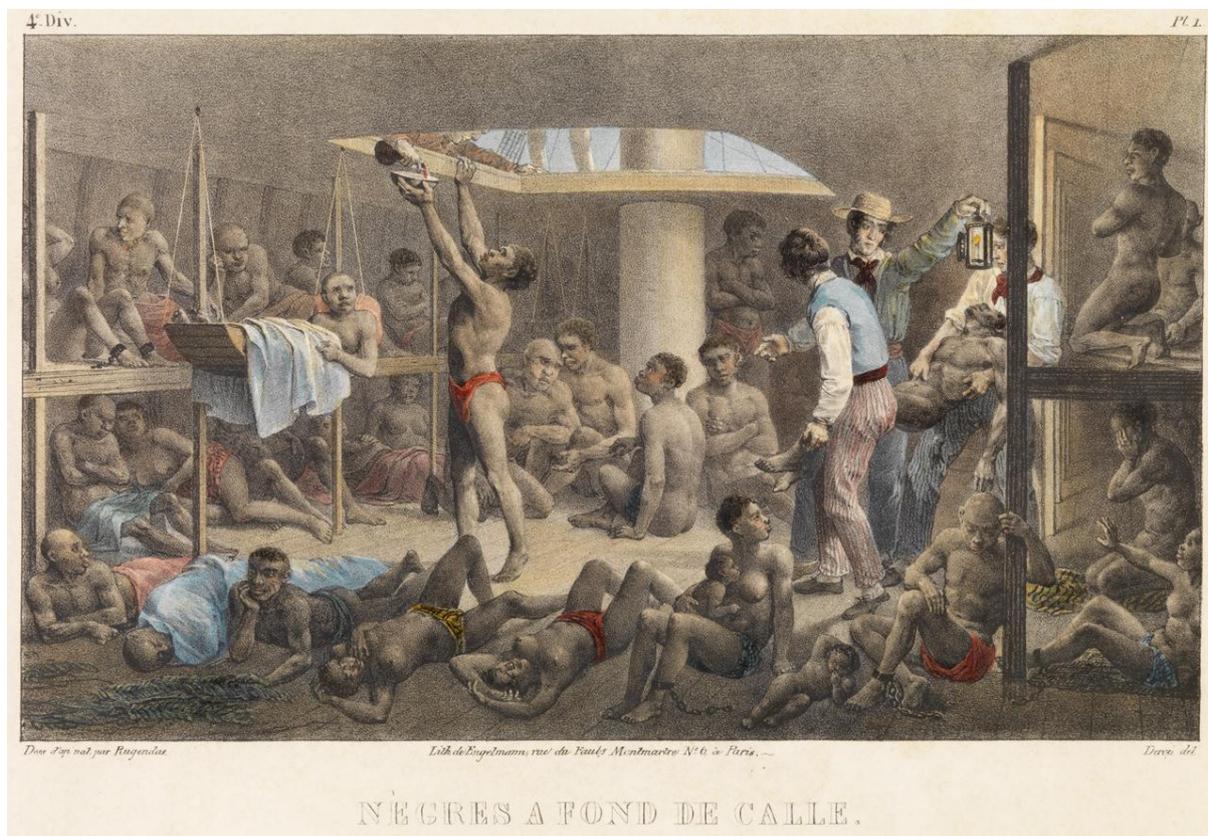


Fig. 22: 'Nègres à fond de calle' (Negroes in the Ship's Hold), Johann Moritz Rugendas, c. 1827 (NMM, ZBA2763).

<sup>78</sup> To the best of the author's knowledge, Meynell's paintings were not used in contemporary literature or propaganda. The NMM catalogue suggests they were unseen until presented to the museum in 1957 by Meynell's daughter-in-law.

<sup>79</sup> Smalls, 'Art and Illustration', p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory*, pp. 24-5.

Meynell's depiction of the recaptives is somewhat impersonal with little true suffering represented, particularly when compared, for example, with George McHenry's description of a slave-hold on a prize vessel:

[Recaptives] are to be seen in all stages of emaciation, and I may add, decomposition. Several absolutely rotten, already smell as intolerably as if they had been dead some days. The heavy acid odour from those who are still living, mingling with the intolerable stench from the dead ... rendered more overpowering by a suffocating atmosphere, ranging from 100 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps conditions on the *Albanez* were not as appalling, although the 148 African deaths during the passage to Sierra Leone suggest otherwise. The *Albanez* was also of a similar size and with a comparable number of slaves on board as the *Clara Windsor*, the conditions on board which ship Richard Carr McClement gave such a distressing testimony.<sup>82</sup> Meynell's sketch is often cited as a true representation of a slave-hold, but its veracity in this regard may be questioned. The amount of room depicted is very generous compared with other slave vessels of this period. For example, the height of the space left for the stowage of slaves on the *Minerva* slaver, on trial in 1842, was given as 'only one foot 2 inches'; even accounting for half of the slaves being accommodated on deck, 'the remainder below were squeezed to excess all the Slaves being obliged to lay flat down'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps Meynell's sketch is from memory after a visit to the hold: it is doubtful whether he could endure the 'human dungeon', in McHenry's words, long enough to complete a watercolour sketch, or why he would wish to. Read alongside later letters from HMS *Cygnets* informing his family of further prizes and financial successes, it becomes clear that Meynell measured his success in the release of enslaved Africans in monetary terms:

... we took a good prize which in 2 years time I suppose will be payable, with 560 slaves ... in the last 3 months I share in 4 prizes which will give me upwards of £150 [;] good work for a few months [,] it beats China even but it is active work for an

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<sup>81</sup> McHenry, *Visits to Slave Ships*.

<sup>82</sup> [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), voyage 3483; voyage 4336. The *Albanez* had a tonnage of 215 tons compared to the *Clara Windsor*'s 218 tons.

<sup>83</sup> Admiralty enclosures printed in Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, p. 152.

officer at any rate and he deserves all he gets ... Star has still taken more prizes than any vessel on the station. £50 or 60£ more in my pocket thank God.<sup>84</sup>

Such observations can be read in a number of ways. Meynell wrote with what appears to be limited sympathy for the enslaved, instead exposing more mercenary motives. Alternatively, perhaps the nature of his work and what he had witnessed had caused Meynell such distress that the financial recompense was the only positive news he could report back home.



Fig. 23: 'Group out of 311 slaves on board HMS Vesuvius', Commodore Charles Wise, c. 1857 (NMM, ZBA2670).

Commodore Charles Wise sketched a group from 311 captives taken on board HMS *Vesuvius* in September 1857. A slave ship, thought to be Portuguese, was driven on shore by Commander Moresby of HMS *Sappho* near Snake's Head in the River Congo. From the 1200 slaves allegedly embarked, only 311 were removed to the *Vesuvius*; over 800 were believed to have drowned, or died from exhaustion and exposure. Moresby described the scene on the grounded slaver in a letter to Rear-Admiral Grey:

<sup>84</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Meynell Letters, 12 January 1846.

On reaching the deck the sight that presented itself to my view was fearful and heartrending in the extreme. The miserable slaves escaping in numbers from the noisome hold, rending the air with their hideous yells, flinging themselves into the sea were drowned by hundreds, it being impossible for us to pick up but few, notwithstanding the noble exertions of all in the boats, who fearlessly, and regardless of their own safety, entered the surf.<sup>85</sup>

Other correspondence from Commodore Wise positioned him as staunchly abolitionist, perhaps impacted by his experiences on the squadron. In a report to the Admiralty in 1859, he described the slave trade as a ‘cruel system ... accompanied by the most terrible, most heart-rending loss of life that can well be conceived.’<sup>86</sup> His rough sketch depicts liberated Africans on deck, gathered around a large bowl of food. One slave at the forefront looks particularly emaciated with his ribs showing, and black spots reveal evidence of small pox among others. Wise depicted some of the Africans with their hands crossed, perhaps as a form of prayer or ritual, and there appears to be an African ruler in a tribal headdress and beads. Some appear to be branded on their chests.<sup>87</sup> They are naked except for loin cloths, although there is evidence that naval personnel provided them with clothing. In contrast to other more questionable behaviour exhibited by officers, Moresby noted that ‘every exertion has been made by the officers and men of this sloop to alleviate their sufferings, all vying with each other in acts of humanity, even tearing up their own clothes to cover the naked wretches’.<sup>88</sup> Similar consideration is found in the journals of Commander Charles Austen, who served on anti-slavery patrols in the West Indies in the late 1820s. After taking on board recaptives ‘who had been 4 hours in the canoes astern exposed to the pitiless pelting of the storm’, Austen recounted an act of kindness from the ship’s company. ‘I found our Johnny’s very busy rigging out the poor negroes in all the old clothes they could muster’, he wrote, ‘it was a trait which did honor to their hearts.’<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> ‘Reports from British Naval Officers Relating to the Slave Trade’, *PP* 1857-58 (2443), correspondence between Rear-Admiral Sir F. Grey, Commodore Wise and Commander Moresby, 20 and 23 September 1857, pp. 137-8.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, FO 881/824, Commodore Charles Wise, ‘Report on the Slave Trade on the West Coast of Africa’, 20 July 1859, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> I am grateful to Marcus Wood for his discussion of this and other sketches with me.

<sup>88</sup> *PP* (2443), Commander Moresby to Rear-Admiral Sir F. Grey, [no date] September 1857, p. 138.

<sup>89</sup> NMM, AUS/119, Journal of Charles John Austen, 4 September 1826.

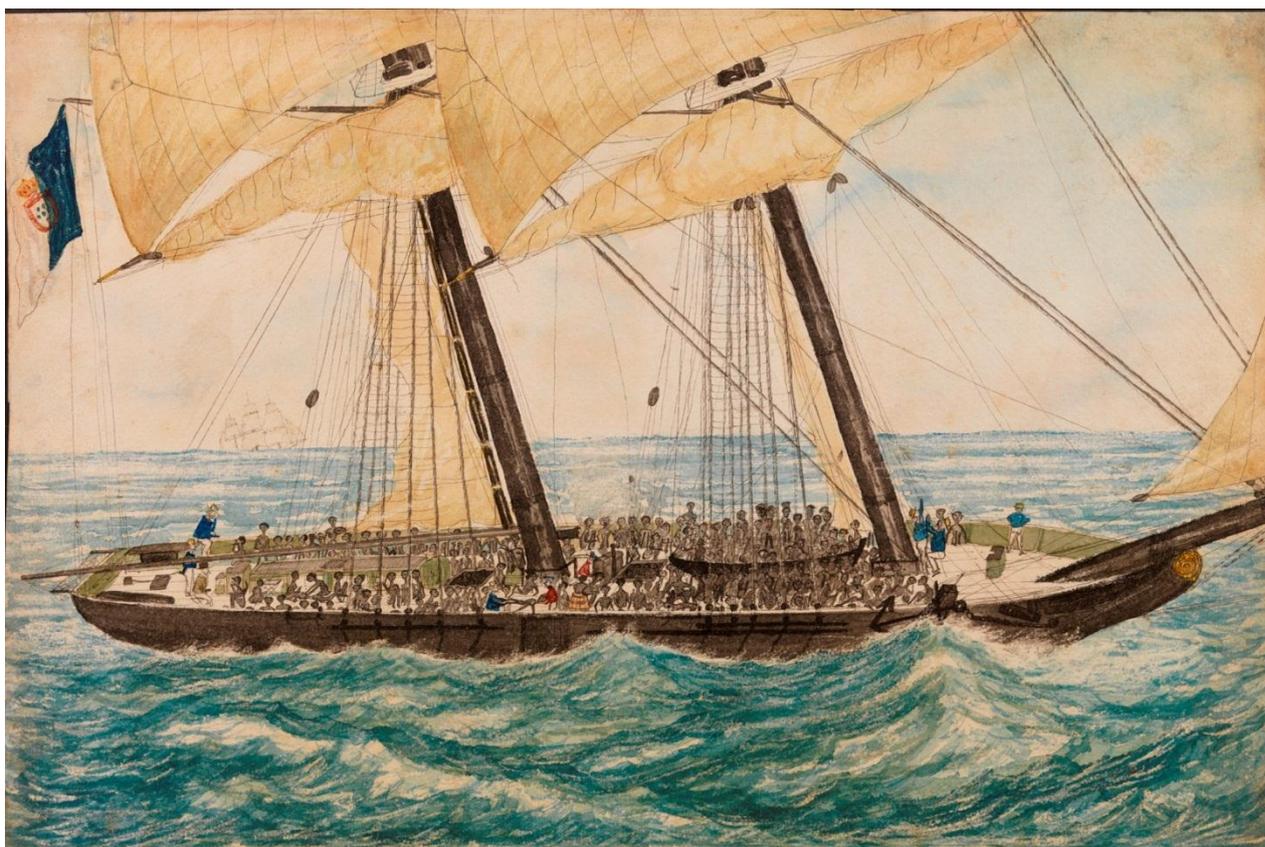


Fig. 24: The Portuguese slaver *Diligenté* captured by HM Sloop *Pearl*, Lieutenant Henry Samuel Hawker, c. 1838.<sup>90</sup>

Lieutenant Henry Samuel Hawker produced this sketch in watercolour of the Portuguese slaver *Diligenté* captured by HM Sloop *Pearl* in 1838 with 477 slaves on board. The slave vessel was taken as prize by Hawker to Nassau in Cuba. It was a low and fast sloop of the kind introduced by slave traders to evade capture from the British patrols. This sketch is from a distance (likely from the *Pearl*) and shows a large number of Africans on deck, although calculated to be only around a third of those on board, the remainder presumably in the hold.<sup>91</sup> While most of them are sitting, others are lying on the deck and appear to be sick or dying, tended to by other Africans and white men in red and blue coats, signifying British naval personnel. The sketch is revealing of malnutrition, overcrowding, and mortality, as one African body is thrown overboard. While startling images in their own right, such eyewitness representations provide insight into conditions on prize voyages and the nature of the enslavement process: for example, the emaciated condition of the enslaved before boarding, at the point of sale.

<sup>90</sup> I am grateful to Michael Graham-Stewart for allowing the reproduction of this image.

<sup>91</sup> *War, Art, Racism & Slavery* (Michael Graham-Stewart, 2009), pp. 14-19.

The sketches of Hawker, Wise and Meynell were presumably produced for private use, and in none are found either obvious anti-slavery motifs or the racial caricature found in material produced by naval officers in the later period of suppression on the East African coast.<sup>92</sup> Other naval officers produced or informed representations of slave vessels to champion the abolitionist cause in parliament, the press or other public arenas.

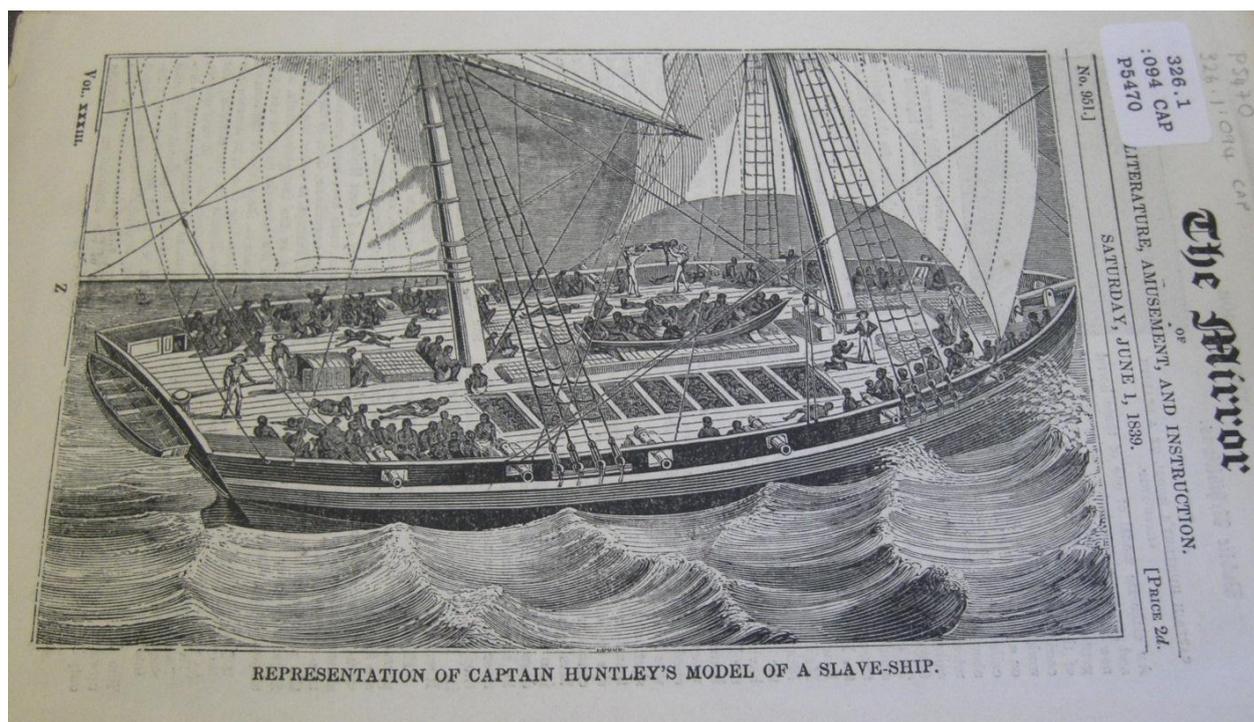


Fig. 25: ‘Captain Huntley’s Model of a Spanish Slave-Ship’, *The Mirror - of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* (1839) (NMM, PBP5470).<sup>93</sup>

As reported by *The Mirror*, Captain Henry Huntley’s model of ‘one of those horrid and pestilential receptacles – a slave ship!’ was exhibited in the late 1830s at Cosmorama on Regent Street in London. Cosmorama was a ‘street peep-show’, exhibiting ‘views of several objects worthy of the scientific and curious’.<sup>94</sup> The model, it was claimed, was ‘a perfect representation’ of the *Semiramis*, alias the *Regulo*, captured by the *Fair Rosamond* and *Black Joke* in 1831. Lieutenant Huntley was on the former vessel and provided the ‘particulars’ for the replica, used to display ‘a frightful scene of the horrors to which the African is a

<sup>92</sup> Doulton, ‘Royal Navy’, pp. 68-88. While the image of the victimised slave continued, naval officers’ representations in the later nineteenth century also reflected the shift towards a more aggressive strain of racial thinking.

<sup>93</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

<sup>94</sup> [www.victorianlondon.org/entertainment/cosmorama.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/entertainment/cosmorama.htm) [accessed 20 December 2010].

victim'.<sup>95</sup> There are strong similarities to the model of the slave ship *Brooks* of Liverpool presented to the House of Commons by William Wilberforce in the late eighteenth century as evidence in anti-slavery debates.<sup>96</sup> Other imagery connected with naval officers and used for abolitionist purposes followed the tradition of the diagrammatic representation of the *Brooks*, published in 1788, including the representation of the slaver *Vigilante* in 1823 (Fig. 26).<sup>97</sup>

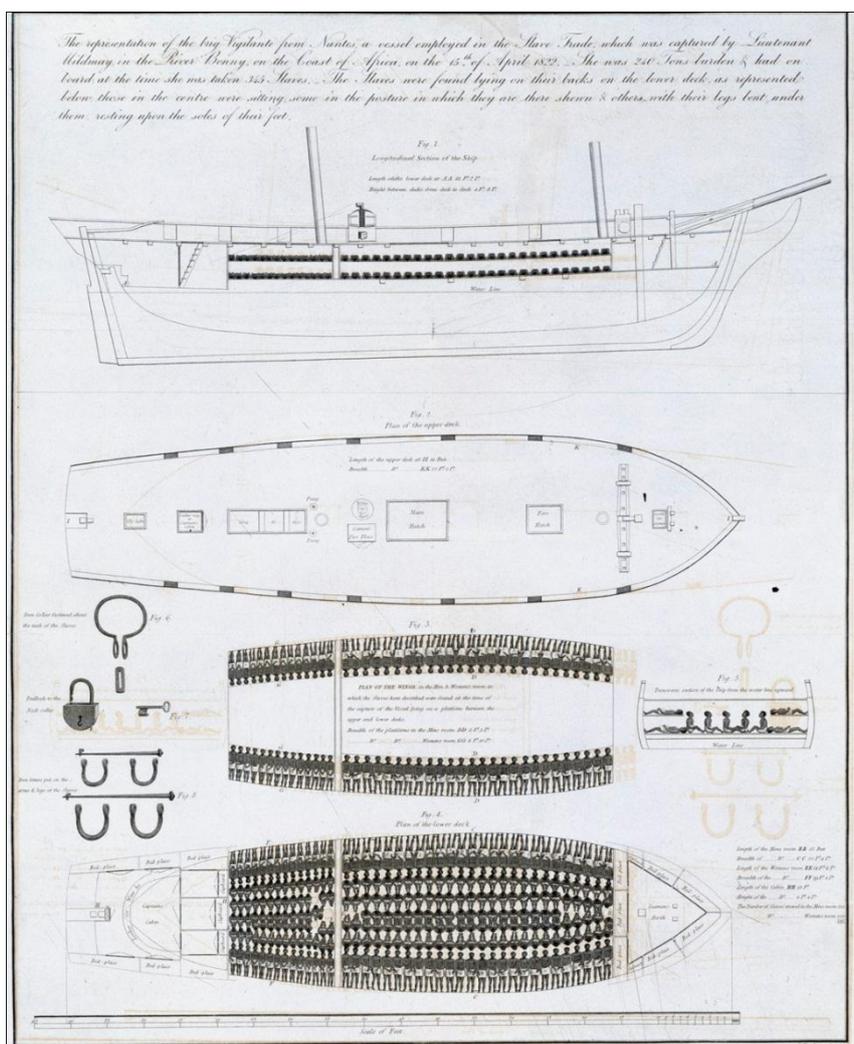


Fig. 26: 'Representation of the brig *Vigilante*', S. Croad and J. Hawksworth, 1823 (NMM, PAH7370).

<sup>95</sup> NMM, PBP5470, 'Representation of Captain Huntley's Model of a Slave Ship', *The Mirror - of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* (1 June 1839). Huntley later published his account of the anti-slavery patrols in *Seven Years' Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1850).

<sup>96</sup> Currently held by the Wilberforce House Museum, Hull.

<sup>97</sup> The *Brooks* famously depicted how slaves were packed into slave ships, but, as Marcus Wood has argued, disempowered Africans by depicting them as passive and depersonalised victims. See Wood, *Blind Memory*, chapter 2.

The print shows the plan and sections of the French slaver *Vigilante*. The vessel was captured in the River Bonny in 1822, with 345 Africans on board, by Lieutenant Mildmay (whose account inspired the depiction). The print was used by campaigners to highlight the cramped conditions and the enslaved are shown restrained in pairs by handcuffs and leg irons in an ordered, depersonalised fashion. Its similarities to the *Brooks* suggest that the British public responded to this common abolitionist imagery of ‘silent, supine, suffering’ slaves.<sup>98</sup>

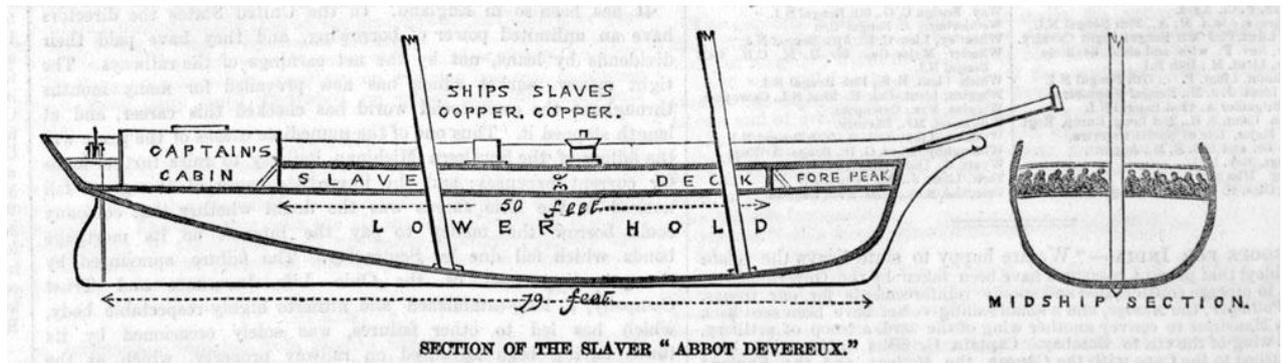


Fig. 27: Illustration from the *Illustrated London News*, 19 September 1857 (as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)).

An officer of the *Teaser* provided an eyewitness account to the *Illustrated London News* after capturing the slaver *Abbot Devereux* off Ouidah in 1857. On boarding, ‘such a scene never was witnessed’. The officer also enclosed a sketch, ‘a truthful one’, of the vessel in which some of the 235 enslaved Africans are depicted as cramped black figures (Fig. 27).<sup>99</sup> The appearance of such impersonal representations in the public arena differed widely from other more emotive depictions of prize voyages in word and image. Here the themes of British valour and honour in the capture of slave ships appeared to overshadow the representation of the enslaved. Such images fit within a spirit of national congratulation surrounding suppression, in which naval officers fully embraced their liberating role.

### Officers as liberators and their ‘gift’ of freedom

The ways in which officers understood their role in prize captures and conveyances was impacted by an undercurrent of thinking about the nature of their interactions with the

<sup>98</sup> Marcus Wood, ‘Popular Graphic Images of Slavery and Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century England’, in Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, p. 148.

<sup>99</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 19 September 1857.

enslaved, focused on their respective positions of liberator and liberated. Such relations were imbued with British national pride and expectations of gratitude from Africans. The nature of this relationship – from capture, to release, to conveyance and liberation – was constantly evolving, as Alexander Bryson referred to when he claimed that after the capture of a slave vessel, ‘the slaves in the meantime will begin to perceive in what relation they stand to their liberators’.<sup>100</sup> It was usually the British, however, who imposed their ideas of liberty onto the recaptives, via their own idealised view of the liberation process.

Naval surgeon George Maclaren served on the brig-sloop *Serpent* on the West Indies station, and was engaged in the suppression of the Spanish slave trade in the waters around Cuba. Discussing the slavers taken by his vessel between Tobago and Grenada in 1836, he wrote:

Thus in the course of eight days have three vessels been captured & 1254 human beings rescued from worse than Egyptian bondage, through the instrumentality of a single vessel – I doubt much if British naval history can afford a parallel. How deep the debt of gratitude of these sable sons of Africa to the great Being who redeemed them from slavery & brought them to a state of perfect freedom, to perform a part in the civilized world.<sup>101</sup>

Of the prize crew sent with one vessel to Sierra Leone he declared: ‘deeds of good will yet redound to their praise, & secure a legacy in the world of final retribution’. How pleasing, Maclaren wrote, to be ‘employed in so glorious a cause’.<sup>102</sup>

The spirit of national self-congratulation in the achievements of suppression was reflected in the many paintings produced of engagements between slave ships and Royal Navy vessels. Individuals were rarely depicted; focus was instead on the action of the ships and the drama of the chase. Such imagery fits with what Marcus Wood has termed the British ‘veil of self-aggrandisement’, as pride in the navy’s activities overcame national guilt over the slave trade.<sup>103</sup> The *Black Joke*’s celebrated actions, such as against the *El Amirante* in 1830 (Fig.

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<sup>100</sup> Bryson, *Report*, p. 257. The Royal Navy liberated nine out of ten of all recaptured slaves, so for the majority of the estimated nearly 200,000 Africans liberated on the West African coast between 1808 and 1867, their encounter with freedom was with the British. See Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 185, p. 282.

<sup>101</sup> CUL, Add. 9528/2/1, Maclaren Journals, 6 October 1836.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Wood, ‘Popular Graphic Images’, p. 143.

28), were historicised in paintings and prints and reproduced in newspapers, helping to maintain public interest in naval suppression.<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 28: ‘To Commodore Francis Augustus Collier ... HM Brig Black Joke ... engaging the Spanish slave brig El Almirante’, Edward Duncan, 1830 (NMM, PAH8175).

Popular fiction and children’s games were further cultural outlets offering representations of British virtue in granting freedom to slaves.<sup>105</sup> National pride was also fuelled by British theatrical dramas that celebrated the anti-slavery patrols, in which the English were portrayed as gifting liberty to African slaves. In plays such as *My Poll and my Partner Joe* (1833) the

<sup>104</sup> Robert J. Blyth, ‘Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century’ in Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, pp. 81-2. This volume includes many other paintings of naval engagements during suppression. Examples of reproductions in the popular press include ‘Her Majesty’s Steamer *Rifleman* in chase of a Brazilian slaver’ in the *Illustrated London News*, 14 December 1850. This idealisation of naval action in art had a long tradition. In the Revolutionary and Napoleonic War years, for example, representations of British naval victory exemplified heroic national character at sea. See Geoff Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768-1829* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), particularly chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>105</sup> Catherine Gallagher, ‘Floating Signifiers of Britishness in the Novels of the Anti-Slave-Trade Squadron’, in Wendy S. Jacobson (ed.), *Dickens and the Children of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 78-93; James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 174-5.

honest tar hero, Harry Halyard, is the archetypal liberator pitted against the cruel slaver Black Brandon. Harry invokes the belief that England is synonymous with freedom and justice: ‘Dance, you black angels, no more captivity, the British flag flies over your head, and the very rustling of its folds knocks every fetter from the limbs of the poor slave.’ The liberated African is portrayed as a helpless victim, dependent on the British for their freedom.<sup>106</sup>

The theme of liberation was linked to concepts of British identity, and as seen throughout this thesis, such sentiments were also found in the wider anti-slavery mission on shore.

Commander Arthur Eardley Wilmot quoted the abolitionist poet James Montgomery within his 1852 letter to the Commander-in-Chief of the forces at Abeokuta:

England feels for the woes of Africa, she longs to release her from those chains of  
bondage and misery in which she has been bound for so many years past. She wishes  
“Liberty” to be her “watchword” & all her children to be happy and free.  
Thy chains are broken, Africa be free!  
Thus saith the Island Empress of the sea  
Thus saith Britannia – oh ye winds & waves!  
Waft the glad tidings to the land of slaves.

Wilmot quotes the opening couplet of Montgomery’s poem *The West Indies*, first published in 1809 and ‘written in honour of the abolition of the African slave trade’.<sup>107</sup> Africa is personified as the pleading slave desiring British protection, and while African freedom is the key theme in Wilmot’s letter, it is the British who have the active and dominant role in ‘releasing’ her from the chains of bondage.

The theme of African freedom as dependent on British action similarly applied to individual Africans taken into British possession by naval officers. For example, after witnessing the customs of the King of Dahomey in 1863, Wilmot (now Commodore) and Captain J. P. Luce were given as ‘gifts’ from the King the lives of several of those destined for public execution.

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<sup>106</sup> Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-6. See also J. S. Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), chapter 1.

<sup>107</sup> SCAUB, CA2/08/04, Arthur Eardley Wilmot to Obba Shoron, 3 April 1852; James Montgomery, *The West Indies and Other Poems*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Longman, 1810). Another extract from the same poem features on the title-page of *West African Sketches* (1824), compiled from the reports of Commodore George Collier and others, revealing the impact of abolitionist literature on officers’ perceptions of the slave trade and Africa.

In response, the Commodore ‘shewed [sic] by his manner even more than by word the intense pleasure he felt at having been the means of this saving a human life’. In a later report to the Admiralty, Wilmot noted the King declared that the man ‘from henceforth belongs to you, to do as you like with him, to educate him, take him to England, or anything else you choose’.<sup>108</sup> Wilmot was understandably delighted to have saved a man’s life, but the transaction between himself and the King had undertones of trading in people as property: that a person’s freedom was under the control of another was the essence of slavery. Clearly naval personnel believed Africans to be better off under British protection, but concepts of ‘belonging’ persisted, and officers did not question the idea that in such cases Africans experienced little more than a change of masters. Other ‘gifts’ included two girls intended for Queen Victoria, and another girl ‘presented to the Commodore as a wife to comfort him, & to wash his clothes & cook his meals’. Captain Luce was aware of the power held by officers in his position and the significance of freedom from the King’s rule:

One of those presented to her Majesty objected to this transfer of her person – she was accordingly changed for another outside the gate without our seeing it & we heard that she was afterwards flogged, for speaking in the presence of the King & ordered to be sold for foreign slavery, so that the poor girl sadly missed her turn in the tide which would have led to liberty if not to fortune.<sup>109</sup>

The girls were left by Wilmot with the missionaries at Whydah. He was later instructed by the Foreign Office to ascertain ‘what character the girls severally bear, what progress they have made ... & also whether the state of their health is such as to warrant one of them being sent to this country.’<sup>110</sup>

In 1850, Lieutenant Frederick Forbes brought back to Britain a young African girl intended as a ‘present’ for Queen Victoria from the King of Dahomey. The act of the King giving presents of slave children to ships’ captains was part of the traditional interaction with slavers, and the girl received her name – Sally Bonetta Forbes – from the captain and his ship, again following tradition established during the slave trade. This can be regarded as part

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<sup>108</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 124-5; ‘Despatches from Commodore Wilmot respecting his visit to the King of Dahomey in December 1862 and January 1863’, *PP* 1863 (3179), p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, f. 146.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, ADM 123/183, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 27 October 1863.

of the practice of keeping young black children as ‘pets’.<sup>111</sup> When given the girl, in his words an ‘extraordinary present’, Forbes regarded his choice as to take her with him or leave her to die. Furthermore, his conviction was that ‘in consideration of the nature of the service I had performed, the government would have considered her as the property of the crown’. Forbes was aware that the girl’s future lay in the context of that which awaited her as property exchanged between monarchs. Beyond such impersonal considerations, however, Forbes thought the girl ‘a perfect genius’, who, ‘has won the affections, but with few exceptions, of all who have known her.’ Once in England, while Queen Victoria paid for her education, Sarah Forbes Bonetta (as she was christened) lived with the Forbes family in Windsor, even after Frederick Forbes’s death in 1852.<sup>112</sup>

These are not isolated examples of Africans being taken into the personal protection of naval officers.<sup>113</sup> In 1823, Midshipman Binstead noted in his diary a reunion between an African boy, one of the crew of the *Owen Glendower*, and his father in Loango. The son of the King’s Prime Minister was ‘taken from him by force’, presumably by slave traders. When the ship he was travelling on was wrecked at Princes Island, ‘this boy was taken off the Island by Sir Geo[rge] Collier former commodore and taken to England where Sir Rd [Robert] Mends took him’, and subsequently recruited him on the *Owen Glendower*. Binstead was struck by the emotion of the reunion: ‘the father appeared rejoiced beyond description [,] in consequence of which we have left his son with him with a promise to call next year if we come this way’.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Joan Anim-Addo, ‘Queen Victoria’s Black “Daughter”’ in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (ed.), *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 11-19.

<sup>112</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1854), pp. 80-1; unidentified newspaper extract ‘Royal Favourite’ on the reverse of the print ‘Officers of HM Brig Bonetta on board a hulk in Sierra Leone, Africa in ‘37’ held by the NMM. There is a sketch of ‘Sarah Forbes Bonetta: The African Captive’ facing the title-page of the 1851 edition of *Dahomey and the Dahomans*, vol. 2.

<sup>113</sup> In his *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), first published 1789, Olaudah Equiano claimed that while a slave in Virginia he was purchased by Michael Henry Pascal, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Equiano wrote that Pascal ‘meant me for a present to some of his friends in England’ (p. 64). Pascal renamed him Gustavus Vassa, took him to London and then into service in the Royal Navy. In 1762, reneging on his promise of freedom, Pascal sold Equiano to a merchant captain. Some of Equiano’s claims have, however, been challenged by historians. See Richardson, ‘Through African Eyes’, p. 42.

<sup>114</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 20 May 1823.



Fig. 29: 'African Slavery', M. Dubourg, published by Edward Orme, 1813 (NMM, ZBA2440).

The print 'African Slavery' depicts a slave in the Portuguese settlement of Benguela with an iron collar fastened around his neck. The accompanying caption reported that '[t]his miserable being was purchased & made free, by a British Naval Officer, for Sixty Dollars, who brought him to England in 1813, and had him Christened at Norwich when he was 14 years old, where he is now at School by the name of Charles Fortunatus Freeman.' The naval officer was Captain Frederick Irby of the *Amelia*, a senior officer on the earliest formation of the West Africa squadron. Irby in fact rescued three African boys, as a note attached to the baptisms register of a Norwich parish church for 1813 makes clear. The minister there wrote that the children, 'Paulo Loando, Edward Makenzie, and Charles Fortunatus Freeman' were brought from Africa 'thro[ugh] the humanity of the Hon Captain Frederic Paul Irby of

Boyland Hall, Norfolk'.<sup>115</sup> This was not the only time that Irby brought African boys to England. The baptisms register for 1813 of All Saints Church in Fawley, Hampshire, noted that a 10 year old African boy 'from Poppoe' was rescued by Irby and baptised in that parish in the name of Irby Amelia Frederic.<sup>116</sup>

While not all officers went to such extremes in their dedication to the freedom of the enslaved, many took pride in their liberating role. For example, after landing a prize vessel at Havana in 1836, George Maclaren noted that it 'is gratifying to be in the smallest degree conducive to the suppression of the brutal traffic in human flesh'.<sup>117</sup> Officers were also keen to contrast themselves with individuals of other nations who remained engaged in slave trading. An officer involved in the capture of the slaver *Marinerito* by the *Black Joke* in 1832 declared that the Africans 'expressed their gratitude in the most forcible and pleasing manner'. The author thought it significant to note that 'if the Spaniards had given them this liberty, it would have been the signal for a general massacre of their oppressors.'<sup>118</sup> However, the celebration of Britain's liberating role sits uneasily with officers' beliefs in how far freedom was applicable to Africans, particularly during a period when many Britons remained slave-holders in the Caribbean.<sup>119</sup> The implications of this, and other British practices, on ideas of liberty for Africans will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

### **After liberation: the ambiguities of freedom**

The act of releasing enslaved Africans from a slave vessel at sea did not constitute their freedom; that was not granted until the vessel was condemned at an Admiralty court. If the vessel was not condemned, the ship and its cargo were returned to the original captain; for those enslaved on board the *Maria de Gloria* in 1833, for example, this meant a return to enslavement and a third Atlantic crossing back to Brazil.<sup>120</sup> If the vessel was condemned,

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<sup>115</sup> Norfolk Record Office, Baptisms Register for the parish of St Peter's Mancroft, Norwich, 1813. [www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/education/docs/Norfolk%20and%20the%20Abolition%20of%20Slavery.pdf](http://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/education/docs/Norfolk%20and%20the%20Abolition%20of%20Slavery.pdf) [accessed 3 January 2012].

<sup>116</sup> [www.stgeorgesnews.org/2004/06f11.htm](http://www.stgeorgesnews.org/2004/06f11.htm) [accessed 15 January 2012].

<sup>117</sup> CUL, Add. 9528/2/1, Maclaren Journals, 25 January 1836.

<sup>118</sup> 'Capture of the Spanish Slaver', *USM*, Part II (1832), p. 64.

<sup>119</sup> The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 provided for the award of twenty million pounds to the owners of slave properties in the British colonies. Using the records of the Slave Compensation Commission, in "'Possessing slaves": ownership, compensation and metropolitan society in Britain at the time of Emancipation 1834-40', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), pp. 74-102, Nick Draper argues that large-scale slave ownership was common in British society, passed on by inheritance and marriage settlement.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 4, p. 133.

recaptives were delivered to the government in whose territory the Court of Mixed Commission sat. On the West African coast, many were liberated at St Helena, but the majority (estimated at 65,000) were emancipated in Freetown.<sup>121</sup> Liberated Africans were taken to King's Yard to be registered as British citizens and thus became the responsibility of the Liberated African Department. Registers were kept with details of their name, gender, age, height, and body marks in an effort to prevent their subsequent re-enslavement.<sup>122</sup> Relations between naval personnel and liberated Africans did not conclude with the end of a prize voyage, and officers remained involved in the fate of those they had freed, if only to collect their share of the prize money.

The theme of British self-congratulation was ever-present in the liberation process. An inscription on the gateway to the King's Yard at Freetown, erected in 1817, read: 'Royal Asylum and Hospital for the Africans rescued from slavery by British Valour and Philanthropy'.<sup>123</sup> This was commissioned by Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy, who envisioned Sierra Leone as a centre from which Christianity and civilisation would be spread throughout Africa.<sup>124</sup> The plan of apprenticeship for liberated Africans was therefore regarded as a way to assimilate and civilise, in a belief that they could not be returned to their homes or left to fend for themselves. Some liberated Africans were taken into European households in Freetown as servants, 'to any resident who would pay one pound for indentures and become responsible for the maintenance, clothing, and education of the apprentice'.<sup>125</sup> With support from the missionary societies, others were settled in villages around Freetown. They learned English and took on European names and habits, including a Christian education and involvement in missionary endeavours.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Bethell, 'The Mixed Commissions', p. 89. Over 10,000 Africans were emancipated in Havana and over 3,000 in Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>122</sup> Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, p. 193. The African Names Database, [www.slavevoyages.org/tast/resources/slaves.faces](http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/resources/slaves.faces), provides information about 67,000 liberated Africans. Suzanne Schwarz, in 'The Origins and "Disposal" of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone, c. 1808-1819' (Paper given at the EURESCL 'Enslavement, Identity and Cross-Cultural Exchange' conference held at WISE, 24-26 January 2012), details the discovery of the earliest registers, commencing in 1808, and subsequent life histories of the first cohorts of recaptives released at Freetown.

<sup>123</sup> See an image of the gateway inscription at [www.sierraleoneheritage.org/sites/monuments/kingsyard/](http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/sites/monuments/kingsyard/) [accessed 12 January 2012].

<sup>124</sup> Christopher Fyfe, 'Freed Slave Colonies in West Africa' in John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 182-3.

<sup>125</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Six Months' Service in the African Blockade, from April to October, 1848, in command of H.M.S. Bonetta* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), pp. 9-10. The Abolition Act provided that Africans unlawfully imported as slaves into British colonies were to be 'apprenticed' for not more than fourteen years.

<sup>126</sup> A small number of recaptives were also sent to settle in Bathurst in the Gambia. While the recaptives originated from across Africa, very few were repatriated. The Aku (as Yoruba people were called in Sierra Leone) were the largest recaptive group in the colony, the Ibo the next largest. John Peterson has examined how



Fig. 30: 'Kissy. Landing Slaves from prize to Spitfire', L.A. Good, c. 1860 (NMM, ZBA2721). Kissy was a village in the environs of Sierra Leone where many liberated Africans were landed.

However, idealistic rhetoric about freedom and emancipation was challenged by the realities of abolitionist policies, as liberated Africans landed at Sierra Leone remained subject to British control. Governor Thompson was one prominent critic of the early apprenticeship scheme, condemning it as slavery by another name.<sup>127</sup> Samuel Crowther wrote that after disembarkation he and his fellow recaptives were 'assured ... of our liberty and freedom'. However, when they refused to testify against the Portuguese slave owner who had captured them, 'we were compelled to go by being whipped'.<sup>128</sup> Naval officers saw nothing amiss with regarding former slaves as requiring new masters. In 1819, Commodore George Collier wrote about children in Sierra Leone who 'are removed from the loathsome holds of a slave ship,

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a Creole society evolved in Freetown in *Province of Freedom*. In 'Becoming African: Identity Formation among Liberated Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone', *Slavery and Abolition*, 27:1 (2006), pp. 1-21, David Northrup examines how recaptives preserved and adapted homeland cultures and religious practices in Sierra Leone.

<sup>127</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 16-17.

<sup>128</sup> Crowther to Reverend Jowett, in Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered*, p. 314.

and sent to a village without any other feeling than what a slave experiences on a change of masters'.<sup>129</sup>

By the 1830s, liberated Africans in Sierra Leone no longer faced long terms of apprenticeship, but were maintained at government expense for six months and allotted land and tools. They began trading in vegetable produce or fish in the Freetown streets, or earned money cutting firewood. George Bedford, engaged in surveying work on the *Raven* in the 1830s, wrote that many liberated Africans in the colony 'have thus raised themselves by industry from the most lowly condition.'<sup>130</sup> In 1834, an unidentified officer of HMS *Thalia* wrote that Sierra Leone merchants 'universally bear testimony' to their good character:

... all with whom I conversed gave them the character of hard working money making people: it not infrequently happens that one of them who has only been landed from the slave vessels a month or six weeks will return to the barracks, where the new people are placed on first landing, and deposit 10 shillings, which entitles him to a boy for an apprentice, having obtained the money by cutting wood & selling it in Freetown.<sup>131</sup>

African men were also enlisted into Britain's Royal African Corps and West India Regiments, employed in the mid-century to defend West African possessions. This had the advantage of reducing the need for British personnel in unhealthy West African environments.<sup>132</sup> Many found themselves employed on British naval vessels. For example, Samuel Davies of the *Bloodhound* steamer, described by *The Times* as 'a young negro' who 'was educated at the grammar-school at Sierra Leone', was present at the attack against Lagos in 1851.<sup>133</sup> George Bedford wrote of the 'wise and philanthropic design' whereby liberated African boys were put 'under the charge and tuition of the various artificers onboard, that they may acquire a knowledge of these trades and be enabled to make themselves useful members of Society, and to propagate their art among their countrymen'.

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<sup>129</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820', ff. 217-8.

<sup>130</sup> NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries, no folios; David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 45. See Fyfe, 'Four Sierra Leone Recaptives', for the business and trade opportunities available to liberated Africans.

<sup>131</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, 'Remark Book of His Majesty's Ship *Thalia*', 1834, ff. 595-7.

<sup>132</sup> S. C. Ukpabi, 'West Indian Troops and the Defence of British West Africa in the Nineteenth Century', *African Studies Review*, 17:1 (1974), pp. 133-50.

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 'The Capture of Lagos', 17 February 1852.

Surgeon Peter Leonard declared them ‘*infinitely more* expert and active aloft, than the white boys of the ship’.<sup>134</sup> This was not an opinion shared by all, however. Commodore John Hayes wrote that ‘two Kroomen are equal to three liberated Africans in the work they perform ... they not only do more work in the same time, but it is done better, and cheerfully done, whereas the liberated African is indolent and dissatisfied’.<sup>135</sup>

Such negative portrayals of liberated Africans were found in other narratives. Commander Henry Beamish wrote that most ‘have nothing but a mixture of ingratitude and laziness to return for British kindness & British food’.<sup>136</sup> These representations may reflect tensions surrounding the ambiguities of freedom for those landed at Sierra Leone. Engineer John M’Kie described the fate of a number of liberated Africans in his memoirs from the 1850s. The young girls were ‘mostly bought to be trained as domestics’, while the men, ‘are apprenticed for a certain number of years and taught to work before attaining their freedom’.<sup>137</sup> M’Kie clearly did not associate apprenticeship with freedom, and he thought it appropriate that Africans were ‘taught to work’ before they were considered free. Similarly, Peter Leonard discussed Africans landed at Sierra Leone in his published account:

It struck me that on landing they expected to be allowed to go wherever they pleased, and were consequently disappointed and angry when they found themselves still under control. It was impossible to gather from their looks whether any of them were keenly alive to the miseries of the situation from which they had just been released, or whether they were capable of appreciating the advantages of emancipation.<sup>138</sup>

For Leonard, the ‘advantages of emancipation’ clearly did not involve freedom from a controlling authority. The theme of British protection, paternalism and control remained dominant. One reason cited against repatriation was to prevent liberated Africans being re-sold into slavery. In 1837 Captain W. Walkhope wrote that this concern was ‘chiefly from the want of a proper superintendent with power ... similar to that of the slave protectors sent to the colonies’.<sup>139</sup> Walkhope’s reference to the British West Indies highlights the wider

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<sup>134</sup> NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries; Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 253-5. Leonard’s emphasis.

<sup>135</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, Commodore Hayes to Captain George Elliot, 9 September 1831, ff. 482-5. Officers’ perceptions of the Kru are examined in Chapter 6.

<sup>136</sup> CAC, BEAM 1/9, Beamish Journals, [no date], 1863, no folios.

<sup>137</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 67-8.

<sup>138</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 106.

<sup>139</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, Walkhope Remarks, f. 631.

Atlantic debate over apprenticeship, which had relevance for the treatment of liberated Africans in West Africa. As seen in Chapter 4, concepts of freedom for former slaves in the Caribbean were influenced by beliefs in the innate character of African peoples, idleness and promiscuity being two frequently cited examples. Freedom, it was believed, came with certain responsibilities (industry, moral standing, and so on) that required African people to undertake a period of guidance and education to understand. Similarly, liberated Africans were regarded as incapable of embracing these responsibilities of freedom without British direction. After much criticism of the system of apprenticeship in West Africa representing an alternative form of coerced labour, the system ended in 1847.<sup>140</sup>

Those disembarked outside Sierra Leone also experienced constraints on their freedom in similarly alien environments. The island of St Helena was owned by the East India Company until it became a Crown Colony in 1834. Between 1815 and 1839 it was chosen by the British as a place of exile for Napoleon. In 1839, a Vice-Admiralty court was established there, and an estimated 26,000 Africans were liberated on this isolated and largely barren settlement (see Fig. 31). Liberation meant little when around one-third of those disembarked died soon after and were buried in large institutional graveyards.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Emperors of the World: British Abolitionism and Imperialism' in Derek R. Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), p. 144; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1992). See Chapter 4, pp. 139-41 and Chapter 6, pp. 210-15.

<sup>141</sup> Andrew Pearson, Ben Jeffs, Annsophie Witkin, Helen MacQuarrie, *Infernal Traffic. Excavation of a Liberated African Graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St Helena* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2011). Archaeological investigations in 2008 identified the remains of 325 liberated African skeletons in an unmarked cemetery in Rupert's Valley, St Helena.



Fig. 31: 'View of Longwood from Hut's Gate, St Helena, Dec 14<sup>th</sup> 1853', Commander Henry Need of HMS *Linnet* (NMM, ART/10).<sup>142</sup>

One prize vessel directed to St Helena was the *Ermerlinda Segunda*, captured in the River Congo in 1842 by Lieutenant George Kenyon and the crew of the *Madagascar*. However, when the vessel was declared unseaworthy, Kenyon left the 118 recaptives at Fernando Po under the charge of Assistant Surgeon Hensman of the *Soudan*. The following is an extract from his instructions:

You will be at liberty to dispose of them as follows, the men to be hired at a fair remuneration to such persons as will lodge and feed them, the females and boys in manner of apprenticeship to those whom you may consider fit to be entrusted with them ... you will take frequent opportunities of seeing them to satisfy yourself of their health and that they are humanely treated with those persons who they are placed ... you will in no case permit corporal punishment to be inflicted upon any of the females, upon the males only such moderate correction as you may consider absolutely necessary.

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<sup>142</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

While this arrangement appeared temporary, it is unclear what happened to these recaptives. The ship was later condemned at Sierra Leone, but there is no record of Africans disembarked from the vessel at Freetown; perhaps Fernando Po was considered as good a site of liberation as any other. The needs and wishes of the recaptives were apparently not a concern for the naval officers involved.<sup>143</sup>

For many released from slave ships their new freed status proved elusive, and the nature of the liberation process was fraught with opportunities for exploitation. For example, Christopher Saunders has argued that many liberated Africans at the Cape employed as servants or free labourers were in practice regarded as slaves.<sup>144</sup> Others were left to the authority of residents in Cuba and Brazil to become unpaid workers, or 'emancipados'.<sup>145</sup> The British remained keen to stress their favourable treatment of liberated Africans as compared to others, and particularly the Brazilians, over concerns about the mistreatment of those liberated at Havana and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>146</sup> However, British post-liberation policies were increasingly criticised, in particular their labour emigration scheme.

From the 1840s, the Colonial Office supported the recruitment and transportation of liberated Africans from Sierra Leone to the British West Indies as emigrant labourers. This scheme was part of the British 'mighty experiment' to replace slave labour with free labour following the Emancipation Act of 1833.<sup>147</sup> Almost half of all Africans removed from slave vessels ended up in the British Caribbean under arrangements of apprenticeship, indenture or military service.<sup>148</sup> The emigrants also included some Kru, whose perceived industrious character led them to be considered as ideal candidates for indentured labour.<sup>149</sup> The scheme represented a

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<sup>143</sup> SALS, DD/X/GRA/6, Order given by George Kenyon to Mr Hensman, [no date] October 1842; [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), voyage 3200.

<sup>144</sup> Christopher Saunders, 'Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 18:2 (1985), pp. 223-239.

<sup>145</sup> Drescher, 'Emperors of the World', p. 144.

<sup>146</sup> Beatriz G. Mamigonian, 'In the Name of Freedom: Slave Trade Abolition, the Law and the Brazilian Branch of the African Emigration Scheme (Brazil-British West Indies, 1830s-1850s)', *Slavery and Abolition*, 30:1 (2009), pp. 41-66.

<sup>147</sup> Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>148</sup> Rosanne Adderley, "New Negroes from Africa" *Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006); Johnson U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the Politics of Liberation 1787-1861: A Study of Liberated African Emigration and British Anti-Slavery Policy* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969); Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*, Map 189, p. 289.

<sup>149</sup> Robert Burroughs, "'[T]he true sailors of Western Africa": Kru seafaring identity in British travellers' accounts of the 1830s and 1840s', *Journal of Maritime Research*, 11:1 (2009), pp. 51-67.

shift in thinking by the British government, from a responsibility to support liberated Africans' freedom to an expectation that they should contribute to the post-emancipation cause. In fact, few Africans liberated from slave vessels volunteered to undertake a second sea voyage, leading to, in David Northrup's words, 'ethically ambivalent schemes' to force new recaptives to emigrate or enlist in the military.<sup>150</sup>

Emigration of liberated Africans to the British West Indies also took place from Brazil.<sup>151</sup> An officer's account published in the *United Service Magazine* of the transportation of former slaves from Brazil to the 'British colony of Guiana' is suffused with British self-congratulation yet highlights the ideological conflicts over the meanings of freedom for those liberated from slave ships. 'How the poor creatures dread another voyage!' the author wrote:

But their fears are vain; happily for them they are no longer in the hands of the Philistines. 180 are now put into a space where 500 were crammed on leaving the Coast of Africa... the Guiana Immigration Society not only liberally provide clothing, but defray all the expenses of their transportation ... The officer who is sent with them is very particular in keeping the vessel pure and clean, and regularly ventilated ... and keeping the negroes as much on deck as possible.<sup>152</sup>

The author was keen to distance such transportation from the slave trade, and to stress how life for the emigrants as indentured servants in Guiana was very different from plantation slavery. He wrote that they are 'at liberty to change masters when they please; they are under the protection of a magistrate, responsible only to the Government; and they enjoy as much liberty in every respect as those of our own race.'<sup>153</sup>

Other naval officers regarded the practice of emigration with a more critical eye. After disembarking the recaptives from the *Casco* at St Helena in 1849, Henry Rogers wrote that 'one in particular wanted to stay with me but poor fellow he is not free and must go where he is sent. For their freedom is but nominal, they are now being prepared for emigration to our Colonies, as there are now three vessels waiting for slaves.'<sup>154</sup> Rogers did not believe that the

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<sup>150</sup> Mamigonian, 'In the Name', p. 44; Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, pp. 46-8, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Mamigonian, 'In the Name', pp. 41-66.

<sup>152</sup> 'The Slaver', *USM*, Part I (1842), pp. 379-80.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 19 December 1849. Rogers's emphasis.

process of British liberation made the enslaved ‘free’ and nor did he alter his terminology in respect to the liberated Africans, still referring to them as ‘slaves’, only this time in the context of British colonies. Indeed, the emigration process was met with criticism that participating Africans found themselves in little more than ‘a new form of the slave trade’.<sup>155</sup> Joseph Denman concurred with this opinion in a Select Committee hearing in 1842. He believed that the emigration scheme would ‘perpetuate their slavery’:

... nor could the forcible removal of these poor creatures from an asylum containing thousands of their countrymen, and possibly many of their near kindred, be rendered justifiable by any consideration whatever. I have seen a cargo of slaves, after the completion of one voyage across the Atlantic, condemned to another for their own supposed benefit; and I can bear witness to the horror of the victims, when they found themselves once more on the “middle passage”.<sup>156</sup>

Commodore Charles Hotham also expressed his dissatisfaction with the emigration scheme in letters to the Admiralty in 1848. For ‘slaves already diseased and suffering from a long voyage’, he wrote, to send them to the West Indies ‘would be to repeat all the horrors of a middle passage’.<sup>157</sup> Unlike Denman, however, Hotham wrote with more practicality than emotion, with concern that such action would reflect badly on the British:

The general opinion in the colony is unfavourable to the success of the emigration scheme ... foreigners are loud in their outcry against the proceedings; the Spanish consul (a clever intelligent man) told me that they sent away mere children who were unable to explain whether they were willing or not to go. The greatest number we can expect to get per annum is 5,000 of both sexes & is it worth while [sic] to lose our national character for philanthropy and humanity for such a pittance?<sup>158</sup>

The irony of Spanish nationals accusing the British of creating conditions akin to the slave trade was clearly not lost on Hotham. However, his priority was the preservation of Britain’s national character rather than the fate of liberated Africans.

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<sup>155</sup> Anon., *African Emigration to the British Colonies* (1847), quoted in Burroughs, ‘[T]he true sailors’, p. 58.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on West Coast of Africa: Captain the Honourable Joseph Denman, R.N. 22-27 June 1842’, in *Trial of Pedro de Zulueta, Jun., on a charge of slave trading* (London: C. Wood & Co., 1844), pp. 158-9.

<sup>157</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/11, Charles Hotham to ‘My Lord’ [Earl of Auckland], 29 August 1848.

<sup>158</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/11, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 23 March 1848.

Africans liberated from slave vessels by the Royal Navy joined a tradition of supposedly free migrants struggling to find self-determination in the Atlantic world. The stories of African-American slaves who negotiated their freedom with the British during the American War of Independence only to find themselves sent with London's poor blacks to begin the doomed colonial experiment in Sierra Leone in 1787 showed how the promise of freedom was elusive.<sup>159</sup> Seymour Drescher has argued that British abolitionist policy engendered a 'stream of unfree labor migration' in the nineteenth century.<sup>160</sup> Supposedly free migrants invariably ended up in a place not of their choosing, and coercion, rather than choice, defined their fate.

Yet naval officers were particularly keen to compare, in their eyes favourable, British conceptions of freedom with French ideas of liberty. In order to secure labour for their West African and Caribbean colonies, in the 1840s and 50s the French began purchasing the freedom of slaves and then binding them to contracts to work off the cost of their freedom. Over 20,000 African labourers were sent to the Caribbean on six-year contracts.<sup>161</sup> Naval officers regarded the French emigration scheme as no less than the slave trade in another form. John Thompson, Master of HMS *Sharpshooter*, wrote with irony in his remark book about the treatment of 'free negro emigrants' outside a French factory in Loango Bay in 1858:

... each of whom had the badge of freedom round his neck consisting of a rope ring with a loop attached to it for the purpose of stringing them together by a rod or rope. As a matter of course this might be for ornament, so might the whips that abound in the place & for the playful amount of whipping. 600 negroes were in the barracoon on this occasion with a barque in the [anchor symbol] ready to take them away ... So much for Free French Emigration. The agent gets an ounce of gold or the sum of £3.4 for every negro shipped.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005).

<sup>160</sup> Drescher, 'Emperors of the World', p. 144.

<sup>161</sup> Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, pp. 48-50. The Portuguese also used enslaved Africans on their plantations in the 1850s.

<sup>162</sup> NYPL, Thompson Journal, [no date] December 1858.



Fig. 32: 'A French Free Emigrant on his Way to the Barracoon of M. Regis', Lieutenant Henry Hand of HMS *Vesuvius*, c. 1858 (TNA FO/1040, as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)).

Lieutenant Hand's sketch depicting the conveyance of 'French Free Emigrants' to a slave barracoon in restraints was sent to Commodore Charles Wise in 1858 with an accompanying letter, the content of which Wise cited in his correspondence with the Admiralty Secretary. Wise declared that at the French factory at Loango 'the voluntary free emigrants are now guarded in the same manner as slaves': they were 'secured by ropes to the forked end of a wooden pole encircling their necks, their hands strongly bound, and thus dragged by their owners, while a third negro hastens their movements by the lash'.<sup>163</sup>

One consequence of such practices was the perceived undermining of Britain's suppression efforts. Rear-Admiral Sir F. Grey met with the French Commander-in-Chief in the River Congo in 1857, to convey the opinion that 'the purchase of slaves will be productive of much evil, and that it will add greatly to the difficulty of suppressing the Slave Trade'.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> 'Reports from Vice-Admiralty Courts and from British Naval Officers Relating to the Slave Trade', *PP* 1858-59 (2569), Commodore Wise to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 September 1858, pp. 189-90.

<sup>164</sup> *PP* (2443), Rear-Admiral Sir F. Grey to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 23 September 1857, p. 132.

Furthermore, Commander George Burgess referred to the hypocrisy of Europeans in the eyes of African rulers:

Nothing will persuade these Chiefs that paying a sum of money for a man is not slave dealing, and the spectacle they now see of England standing alone in her endeavours to put down the slave trade, and of other Nations indulging in it (or a close imitation) has the effect of detaching these men from their alliance with, and respect towards us.<sup>165</sup>

Such criticism of the French emigration scheme highlights the ambiguities surrounding the definitions of slavery and freedom for Africans, and the ways in which officers regarded the British approach to liberation as the superior one. Officers also engaged in debates as to how far freedom in its truest sense was applicable to Africans, seen in their discussions of the equivocal nature of domestic slavery in West African society. In 1823, Lieutenant George Courtenay visited St Anna de Chaves on the island of St Thomas (Sao Tome). He met with Donna Maria, a lady of the town, in whose house was ‘a young negress ... embroidering a very beautiful shawl, round her neck was an iron collar, and beside her lay coiled about forty fathoms of chain’. In his journal Courtenay expressed no surprise or disapproval of the girl’s enslavement:

I asked Donna Maria the reason of this, she told me the girl was an incorrigible runaway, that she liked her too well to confine her in prison, and therefore had attached the long chain to her, which left her at liberty to go to any part of the house she pleased. I admired the Donna’s tenderness, and took my leave.<sup>166</sup>

Naval officers accepted the existence of slavery in West African society, in Commander Burgess’s words, ‘as an institution of the Country’. He discussed the nature of domestic slavery in 1857:

... the Slaves may be said to be divided into two more or less clearly defined classes, who comprise 9/10ths of the whole population. The two classes are the domestic slave and the out-door slave, this distinction holds good especially with chiefs and large

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<sup>165</sup> CAC, BEAM 1/8, Burgess Journal, 1857, no folios.

<sup>166</sup> UIC: SLC, Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal, no folios.

slave owners. The domestic slave is well treated, and looked on more as a servant than as one we mean by slave ... but should there be a demand there would not be much scruple in parting with them to any one who would give a good price.<sup>167</sup>

Writing his journal from Cape Coast Castle in 1862, Commander Henry Beamish wrote that these distinctions caused confusion, whereby ‘Government Officials here ... give all publicity to the fact that their policy zealously upholds Domestic Slavery on the one hand, while on the other it proposes to disapprove of and to be determined to put down the export of slaves’. Beamish thought it ‘a little odd’ that ‘one must not call a slave a “slave” and yet he can not be freed.’<sup>168</sup>

In 1857, Commander V. G. Hickey, Senior Officer of the Southern Division, wrote with more acceptance of the system of domestic slavery, and clearly questioned how far freedom was appropriate for some Africans. He hoped that Britain, ‘in return for the unquestionably satisfactory results, be not quite so hard on the domestic slave system in the country’:

I firmly believe we now and then terribly clog the heel of a man who would, though employing slaves, sow the best seeds of civilization. Slavery is an ugly word in Europe, but does not mean so much in Africa; and that slave labour must be employed to eradicate slavery, I think any one seeing Africa must allow. It is too old an institution to be rough-ridden off the road.<sup>169</sup>

Slavery meant many things to nineteenth-century naval officers. While the trade in Africans as slaves was unacceptable, domestic slavery was regarded by as necessary by some. This was particularly the case if the ‘satisfactory results’ emerged as the beginnings of civilised society, closely tied to Britain’s economic interests in West Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Naval officers on the West Africa squadron engaged with ideas about freedom, its limits, and its applicability to some Africans. These concepts were bound to racial attitudes and their

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<sup>167</sup> CAC, BEAM 1/8, Burgess Journal, 1857.

<sup>168</sup> CAC, BEAM 1/9, Beamish Journal, [no date] 1862, no folios.

<sup>169</sup> *PP* (2443), Journal of Commander Hickey, [no date] June 1857, pp. 119-20.

understandings of African societies, as the next chapter explores. Encounters with slave ships and enslaved Africans were the first challenges to officers' conceptions of freedom. Their experiences on prize voyages were undoubtedly traumatic, and prompted sympathy and humanity towards the enslaved. James Stoddart's obvious distress at finding an emaciated African – 'a bundle of what I took to be rags' – hidden on deck was not unusual:

To my surprise it moved, then uncoiled, or rather unbent itself; and in a few minutes the bundle turned out to be a living skeleton, a most dreadful sight ... I came to the conclusion he must have lain there for six weeks ... The poor creature died a few minutes after. The sight of the poor fellow haunted me for years.<sup>170</sup>

However, officers' relations with enslaved Africans reveal a succession of circumstances in which nominal freedom for recaptives was subject to British rule. While supposedly liberated, many Africans experienced an alternative Middle Passage on prize voyages, and in their attempts to 'manage' the ship, officers consciously or not contributed to these conditions. While they received better provisions and sanitation under the protection of the Royal Navy, the crowded and pestilential environment continued, as did a lack of control over what happened to them next. In the majority of cases, being aboard British vessels in the Atlantic or under the charge of a British naval officer ensured their liberation, but did not make Africans 'free' when they arrived in Sierra Leone or St Helena. Recaptives were liberated in a prescribed image, a very British conception of freedom which focused more on a demonstration of national character than a consideration of Africans' needs. Few were returned to their homeland and there was little appreciation that they belonged to a diverse array of peoples. In their varied representations of prize voyages and enslaved Africans, individual naval officers often expressed compassion and kindness. However, in the wider context of British ideas of liberty for liberated Africans, ideas of control, dependency and property persisted, offering an insight into the realities of naval suppression beyond the idealism of abolitionist ideology and rhetoric.

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<sup>170</sup> 'A Cruise in a Slaver', p. 194.

## Chapter 6

### Cultural encounters: naval officers and West Africans

This chapter is concerned with cultural encounters between naval officers and West African peoples, and the role of racial attitudes and identity therein. While many who served on anti-slavery patrols saw little more of West Africa than the view from Royal Navy vessels, others spent time on shore. Some had contact with Africans in Sierra Leone, or with rulers and peoples in various West African territories as part of anti-slavery and trade missions. Officers offered commentary on the different lifestyles and religions they encountered: for example, the appearances, manners and customs of different African peoples and ideas for their 'improvement'. A recurrent theme of this thesis is how slavery and the slave trade dominated the observations of naval officers: this is clearly the case in their perceptions of Africans. A set of racial assumptions existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, fed by travel literature and historical theories on racial identity, which affirmed non-European societies as inferior to those of Europe. As Philip Curtin and others have argued, supposed knowledge and prejudices about Africans and the nature of the British relationship with them served as filters through which the observations of those working or travelling in West Africa were recorded.<sup>1</sup> As the century progressed, increasing contact with African peoples contributed to a shift in racial attitudes, fuelled by new scientific theories and the proliferation of printed material on the subject of race.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will examine the extent to which men on the anti-slavery patrols perceived West Africans through this evolution of metropolitan attitudes. Certainly, many observations subscribed to common racial prejudices, yet there were variations. Others were more considered, born of experience, interaction and affiliation.

#### Popular perceptions of Africa

Firstly, what were the contemporary influences on the attitudes of naval men that affected how they viewed Africa and its people? The English had early trading contacts with West

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<sup>1</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), especially pp. 479-80; P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1982), p. 3. Such preconceptions also affected relations between the British and 'others' in different areas of the world, particularly in Britain's developing empire.

<sup>2</sup> Shearer West, 'Introduction' in Shearer West (ed.), *The Victorians and Race* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. 2.

Africans from the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Expressions of an ethnocentrically-based dislike of the African's physical appearance were also fed by moral judgement, as blackness was associated with heathenism and bestiality. With the establishment of the slave trade, enslavement was justified with references to the older Judaic and medieval Christian association between the origins of the black man and the curse of Ham (in which Noah's grandson from Ham, Canaan, was cursed to a life of servitude).<sup>4</sup> Naval Surgeon Robert Flockhart repeated this association in a letter from Sierra Leone in 1838 when he wrote, 'There is nothing of romance out here, nor anything to make one poetical, although you see the descendants of Ham coming along side in canoes in their native purity'.<sup>5</sup> In the age of exploration and early travel writing in the seventeenth century, West Africans were portrayed as brutish and deviant. A black skin was taken as a natural sign of inferiority, alongside other excessive physical features such as thick lips or a protruding jaw.<sup>6</sup> Midshipman Henry Rogers referred to these surviving physical prejudices when he discussed enslaved Africans in his journal of 1849. He reported that 'some of the very black ones had good features and lips nearly as thin as a European'.<sup>7</sup> Implicit throughout early travel narratives was the assumption that West Africans were in an early stage of social existence, out of which they had the potential to rise but only by the imitation of European standards and behaviour.<sup>8</sup> This belief survived into the nineteenth century, and was echoed in the accounts of naval officers.

The expanding slave trade in the eighteenth century reinforced assumptions of racial superiority as West Africa was viewed by its dependency status to supply slave labour. Published travel accounts of West Africa proliferated, many written by slave traders or naval officers involved in protecting the trade. The writers often focused on shocking or titillating features of African life.<sup>9</sup> An account of the conquest of Dahomey in 1727 was written by the

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<sup>3</sup> Basil Davidson, *Africa in History* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001 edn.), pp. 171-2.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English attitudes to the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 21; Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 17. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), chapter 3, on the ancient legacy of slavery.

<sup>5</sup> NAS, GD 76/458, Flockhart Letters, 12 December 1838.

<sup>6</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 480-2, 491; David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 32; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), pp. xii, 8

<sup>7</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 30 November 1849.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, p. 37. Such perceptions were informed by Enlightenment theories of stadial history, which divided the history of societies into successive stages defined by the nature of subsistence.

<sup>9</sup> Roxann Wheeler, 'Limited Visions of Africa: Geographies of savagery and civility in early eighteenth-century narratives' in James Duncan and Derek Gregory (eds), *Writes of Passage: reading travel writing* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 14-44; Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, pp. 227-9.

slave trader William Snelgrave and published in 1734. Snelgrave filled his narrative with stories of human sacrifice and cannibalism; his justification for the slave trade lay with his claim that Africans enjoyed a better standard of living when removed from Africa. In his memoirs published in 1722, James Houston, a surgeon of the Royal African Company, wrote that the indigenous population of Sierra Leone, ‘exactly resemble their fellow creatures and natives, the Monkeys’.<sup>10</sup> In these accounts emphasis was placed on sexual appetites, polygamy, depravity and cannibalism; as Philip Curtin has argued, ‘precisely those aspects of African life that were most repellent to the West and tended to submerge the indications of a common humanity’.<sup>11</sup> Africans were categorised as ‘Negro’, ‘Black’ or ‘African’, abstract terms applied regardless of variation in language, custom or appearance.<sup>12</sup>

Eighteenth-century attitudes towards race were flexible to a degree. By mid-century several thousand black people – made up of ex-slaves, ex-seamen, servants, and musicians – lived in Scotland and England, and especially in London. Many derived a special status from their exotic appearance.<sup>13</sup> Anthony Barker has argued that before the 1770s, black people were often judged as inferior due to cultural attributes and traditional associations in Christianity rather than theories of innate racial inferiority.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the counter-discourse of the noble savage represented a significant challenge to the bestial stereotype, shaping the image of the slave in the sentimental literature of the period. Indeed, some blacks, notably Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, gained a kind of celebrity status in English society.<sup>15</sup> Yet the dominant image of blacks remained focused on depravity. Slave traders and plantation owners in particular had an interest in persistently representing black people as only suited for subservience. In his *History of Jamaica* (1774), the planter Edward Long argued that the mental and moral character of Africans made them nearer to animals than to men.<sup>16</sup> Naval Lieutenant John Matthews published letters from his voyages to the West African coast in

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<sup>10</sup> Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, pp. 231, 233.

<sup>11</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, pp. 239, 247; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>13</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 27-9. See also James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973); Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, c. 1780-1830* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Barker, *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), pp. 23-4.

<sup>15</sup> Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, pp. 34-46; Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 175-7.

<sup>16</sup> Rattansi, *Racism*, pp. 28-31; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 43-5; Nancy Stepan, *Idea of Race*, p. 29. Long was not unrepresentative of his time, as David Brion Davis has shown in *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 493-8.

1788. He wrote that, [in Africa] ‘you find a constant and almost regular gradation in the scale of understanding, till the wretched Cafre sinks nearly below the Ouran Outang’.<sup>17</sup>

The subject of race remained contested territory in the abolitionist era. The failure of the Sierra Leone experiment emphasised for many the need for paternalism. In the popular imagination, West Africa was constructed as a place of savagery. Pro-slavery supporters promoted images of bloodshed in West Africa, based on supposedly eyewitness accounts, such as Robert Norris’s *Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomey* (1789) and Archibald Dalzel’s *The History of Dahomey* (1793).<sup>18</sup> Dalzel wrote of the ‘insatiable thirst after blood’ during the customs at Abomey, and described houses ‘garnished with skulls, and stained with human gore’.<sup>19</sup> The colonial encounter in West Africa was presented as civilised European values constantly under threat from African ‘anarchy’.<sup>20</sup> However, not all travel writing on West Africa was so offensive. The Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was founded in 1788 to gain more knowledge of the commercial prospects of the African interior. The work of its explorers, and particularly Mungo Park, who journeyed to the Niger in 1795-7, can be regarded as part of a process of reimagining the African interior from the late eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Park wrote sympathetically that ‘whatever difference there is between the Negro and European, in the conformation of the nose and the colour of the skin, there is none in the genuine sympathies and characteristic feelings of our common nature’.<sup>22</sup> Works of social observation such as Thomas Bowdich’s *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (1819) continued the theme of dispassionate writing in relation to West Africa.<sup>23</sup>

Naval officers added their observations to this body of commentaries on West Africa. As David Lambert has written, from the beginning of the nineteenth century new conceptions of

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<sup>17</sup> Lieutenant John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone on the Coast of Africa; containing an account of the trade and productions of the country, and of the civil and religious customs and manners of the people* (London: B. White and Son, 1791), pp. 158-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph A. Austen and Woodruff D. Smith, ‘Images of Africa and British Slave-Trade Abolition: The Transition to an Imperialist Ideology, 1787-1807’, *African Historical Studies*, 2:1 (1969), pp. 77-9.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> Geoff Quilley, ‘The Lie of the Land: Slavery and the Aesthetics of Imperial Landscape in Eighteenth-Century British Art’ in Douglas Hamilton and Robert Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 207. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: London and New York, 1992), chapter 4, for analysis of Park’s contribution to sentimental travel writing.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Marshall and Williams, *Great Map*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent’, *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), p. 173.

exploration and geography were ‘concurrent and connected’ with histories of abolition and the anti-slavery mission. Officers contributed to an outpouring of accounts on Africa and Africans which merged topographical and ethnological description with moral debates.<sup>24</sup> While some wrote with a sympathetic interest in African life and culture, ingrained attitudes of racial difference and inferiority undoubtedly had an impact on how others viewed Africa and its people.<sup>25</sup> Such attitudes were to be expected in an era of complex and shifting metropolitan attitudes towards race.

### Naval men and West Africans

Naval officers encountered Africans in a variety of contexts. Daily duties for some on board ship included the production of topographical sketches in journals and logbooks; others, like Commander Henry Need of HMS *Linnet*, created visual representations of the landscapes and peoples he witnessed on anti-slavery service for his own personal record.

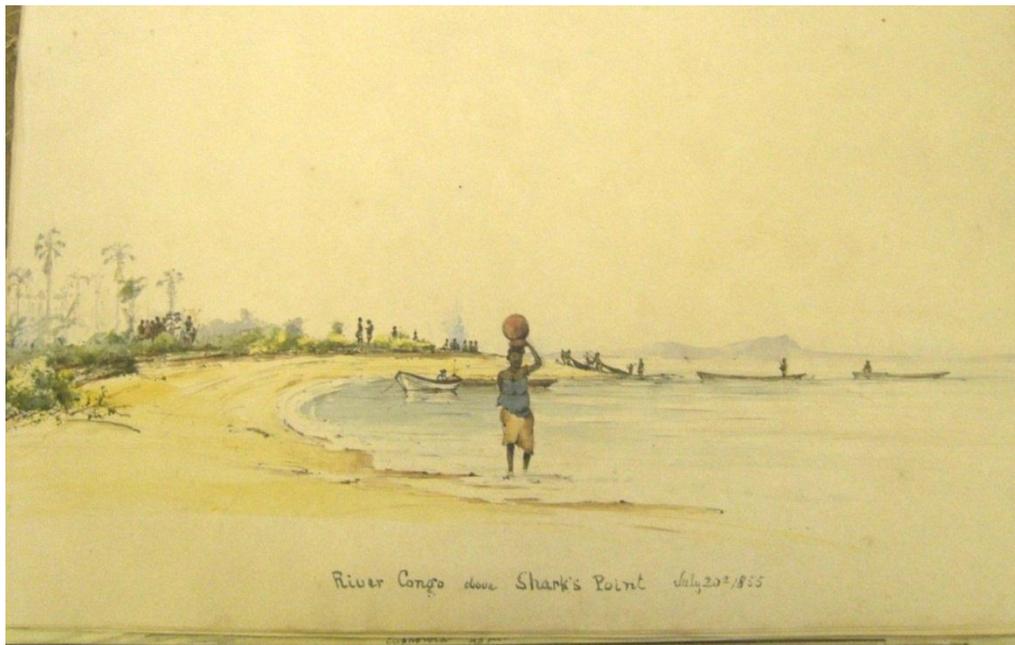


Fig. 33: ‘River Congo above Shark’s Point, July 20<sup>th</sup> 1855’, Commander Henry Need (NMM, ART/10).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> David Lambert, “‘Taken captive by the mystery of the Great River’: towards an historical geography of British geography and Atlantic slavery”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (2009), pp. 63-4.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in ‘The Royal Navy’s anti-slavery campaign in the western Indian Ocean, c. 1860-1890: race, empire and identity’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull (2010), Lindsay Doulton has explored how nineteenth-century children’s literature invariably reinforced ideas of European superiority and stereotypes of the racial ‘other’ (pp. 50-4).

<sup>26</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

Officers were certainly struck by the exotic and attractive natural geography of the continent. In his letters of 1842, naval surgeon Dr McIlroy described the scenery in the River Benin as ‘very extraordinary’, comparable ‘to some of those imaginary Fairy Islands described in the Arabian Nights’.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 34: ‘Hi Jack Hi, biggy piggy for hungry belly soldier’, Commander Henry Need, c. 1852 (NMM, ART/10).

The most frequent relations with Africans were with the Kru, West African seamen employed on naval vessels, as shall be examined later. There were also regular meetings at sea with African tradesmen to purchase food and stocks, as depicted by Commander Need (Fig. 34) and as described by Captain Harrison of the *Eden* at the island of Anna Bona in 1828:

I suppose in all we might have forty canoes about the ship trading for old clothes, with pigs, goats, sheep, fowls, cassada, plantains, bananas, pineapples, cocoa nuts, tamarinds, oranges, limes and shells. Money seemed to have no charms for them, and

<sup>27</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 20 December 1841.

they hold knives very cheap scarcely giving anything for them in comparison to old clothes which seemed their grand object.<sup>28</sup>

Officers also reported on exchanges with ‘women mammies’, who, ‘came on board seeking washing’. George Augustus Bedford of HMS *Raven* described ‘the noisy lady-laundresses who surrounded our vessels like a swarm of bees’.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 35: ‘Steward buying stock at the Banana Islands’, Commander Henry Need, c. 1852 (NMM, ART/10).

As Commander Need’s watercolour in Fig. 35 shows, there were also countless meetings between naval personnel and Africans in the coastal settlements where the former engaged in purchasing provisions or information gathering.

<sup>28</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, Harrison Journal, 16-17 November 1828, ff. 188-93.

<sup>29</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 54-6; NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries, c. 1835-38, no folios.



Fig. 36: Sketch of West African chiefs on board a naval vessel, J. T. C. Webb, c. 1850 (NMM, ZBA2685).

Anti-slavery treaties with African rulers often took place on board Royal Navy vessels, as depicted in Fig. 36, the chief distinguishable by his colourful beads and head-dress. William Petty Ashcroft described such gatherings in his published memoirs:

Sometimes we would have three or four black kings on board a day, signing Treaties ... They would come off in their state canoes, some with more than forty paddles, with tom-toms beating. Each was given a Purser's No. 2 jacket with a crown and anchor badge sewn on the left breast. They were served with a bottle of rum and biscuits.<sup>30</sup>

But not all contact was so civilised, particularly when men left their ships to pursue anti-slavery negotiations on shore. Naval officers often relied on a language of physical difference to distinguish Africans, taking the form of benign observations on dress, tribal markings, facial features and so on. Many commentaries from the earlier period of suppression also

<sup>30</sup> Ashcroft, William Petty, 'Reminiscences' serialised in *The Naval Review*, Part V, 53: 1 (1965), p. 62.

often had a barbed edge, and it was the brutal and wretched image of Africans that prevailed. The popular representations of degenerate Africans from travel literature undoubtedly influenced preconceptions, as did xenophobia and fear of the unknown. Midshipman Cheesman Henry Binstead was deployed on anti-slavery patrols up the Cazamanza River in 1823. He described ‘wild wretched natives in such a state of destitution as to scramble eagerly for the offal of a bullock which we slaughtered at their settlement’. In his journal Binstead stressed the mutual dislike between races, as he described his encounter with ‘ten savage looking natives’ who ‘told our guide that white man no good for always Roast Black Negroes and if we attempted to land at the town the Chief would murder us all’.<sup>31</sup> Encounters with local people at Fernando Po revealed similar animalistic and fear-inducing stereotypes:

... on my first seeing them was doubtful whether it was a human being from its strange colour and appearance ... in all my travels never did I expect such a horrid wild set of savages there [sic] hair was folded up in red clay and the whole of the body laid over with it, their smell was most noxious and there [sic] faces was painted with a kind of white was making in the whole a most hideous appearance.<sup>32</sup>

A number of common stereotypes about Africans are found in early commentaries, particularly the association between blackness and nakedness. In his depiction of the inhabitants of the River Bonny in 1826, naval surgeon Richard Jackson evoked the noble savage stereotype as he romanticised a more ‘natural’ and innocent age:

Congregated together the sable tribe had a singular appearance – with scarcely any clothing upon them (the infants none) they brought to my mind the description of the primeval age, “When Tyrant Custom had not fetter’d Man,  
But left him free as air to rove”.<sup>33</sup>

Jackson echoed abolitionist literature of the period, which portrayed Africans as innocent or simple savages. However, early nineteenth-century sensibilities were also affronted by

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<sup>31</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/1, Binstead Diaries, 5-6 March 1823. The belief that Europeans roasted and ate Africans was a common fear among captives on slave ships. See Chapter 5, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> NMRN, 2005.76/2, Binstead Diaries, 9 June 1823.

<sup>33</sup> R. M. Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage to Bonny River on the West Coast of Africa in the Ship Kingston from Liverpool*, ed. Roland Jackson (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1934), p. 65. Jackson appears to be acknowledging James Thomson’s poem, *Autumn* (first published in 1730), an ode to ‘ancient uncorrupted times, When tyrant custom had not shackled man, But free to follow Nature was the mode.’

African nudity, associated with excessive physicality, immodesty and promiscuity, although as Marcus Wood has argued, a sense of voyeurism may have been just as influential.<sup>34</sup> Describing the Krumen of the *Dryad*, naval surgeon Peter Leonard wrote that some were ‘*in puris naturalibus* [naked], but the ladies do not appear to be very much shocked at the indecency ... perhaps blushes are incompatible with a countenance of ebony’.<sup>35</sup> The extensive literature regarding British encounters with indigenous populations in the empire reveals that observations regarding Africans as fearful and debased applied to many non-European ‘others’.<sup>36</sup> But other stereotypes found in the observations of naval men were more particular to West Africans, and closely interlinked with the broader themes of the British anti-slavery cause.

### **The civilising mission and racial stereotypes**

The drive for civilisation of West African peoples affected the responses of naval officers to those they met. A common image of Africans in the early nineteenth century – exemplified by the famous Wedgwood medallion – was as the suffering and respectable victim of slavery; the oppressed ‘Negro’ presented as deserving of pity and protection. For British abolitionists, the existence of slavery offered a symbolic test of national virtue, expressed in ideologies of benevolent paternalism, where those of ‘superior’ feelings were seen as duty bound to help the less fortunate.<sup>37</sup> The moralising tone of *West African Sketches*, compiled from reports written by Commodore George Collier and others, set out that the African character was ‘certainly not beyond the power of habit and education to model and assimilate’. The key themes of the volume were the strength of the ‘human family’ and the capabilities of Africans for education and improvement with ‘fostering care’ from Britons.<sup>38</sup> This civilising mission was in part driven and shaped by racial stereotypes, in the desire to prevent Africa’s return to former savage and barbarous ways.

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<sup>34</sup> Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 176-7; Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 134, 136.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, in His Majesty’s Ship Dryad* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1833), p. 40. Leonard’s emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> See C. A. Bayly, ‘The British and indigenous peoples, 1760-1860: power, perception and identity’ in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (eds), *Empire and others: British encounters with indigenous peoples, 1600-1850* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 19-41, for an overview of British colonial relations with indigenous peoples during this period.

<sup>37</sup> Joel Quirk and David Richardson, ‘Anti-Slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-historical Perspective’, *The Journal of Modern European History*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 87-8.

<sup>38</sup> *West African Sketches: Compiled from the Reports of Sir G.R. Collier, Sir Charles MacCarthy, and Other Official Sources* (London: L.B Seeley and Son, 1824), pp. 3, 22. See Chapter 1 of this thesis, pp. 33-4.

Naval officers regarded missionary activity at Sierra Leone as the best example of the efficacy of British influence in ‘improving’ the population. In 1818, George Collier reported to the Admiralty on the ‘continued and increasing improvement’ of Freetown, achieved by ‘protecting the untutored and ignorant African, and giving the most patient consideration to his most minute grievances and wants’.<sup>39</sup> Collier expressed the key motivations behind the civilising mission, as shown throughout this thesis, based on paternalism and protection of Africans who were considered in a better position under British care. Similarly, officers were cautious about the potentially dangerous influence of African traditions. As an unidentified officer from HMS *Thalia* wrote in a remark book of 1834, education from missionaries was regarded as the best means to shield liberated Africans, to prevent their ‘return to barbarism’. In particular he praised the missionary schools:

Such is the desire the parents have to obtain instruction for their children, that in all the Church Missionary Schools, they pay for the school books ... I advised them most strongly to adopt this most wholesome Scotch system, which would, above all things, most tend to prevent a return to barbarism, even should the colony be at any time left entirely to its own resources.<sup>40</sup>

Naval narratives stressed the positive impact of British influence on the social development of liberated Africans, compared to the opposite effect of African cultures. Peter Leonard was sceptical about the progress of liberated Africans while they maintained relations with other indigenous peoples:

The liberated Africans have not certainly made that progress in civilization which might have been expected ... but this is not attributable to any defect of natural ability among them, but to a variety of contingent circumstances, among which not the least obvious is the continued importation of their countrymen into the colony, whose barbarous habits they have, in some measure, been weaned from.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, ‘Second Annual Report on the coast of Africa by Commodore Sir George Collier, 1820’, f. 49.

<sup>40</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, ‘Remark Book of His Majesty’s Ship *Thalia*’, 1834, ff. 595-7.

<sup>41</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 91-2.

As the century progressed, the British increasingly saw themselves as potential saviours of Africans. The motives behind Thomas Fowell Buxton's Niger expedition in 1841 were presented in philanthropic terms. However, as Christine Bolt has written, the cultural divides between Europeans and Africans could transform a sense of moral and spiritual responsibility into ideas of racial superiority.<sup>42</sup> Driven by powerful impulses of anti-slavery and Christianisation, the British passion to improve other peoples could easily be distorted into 'cultural aggression'.<sup>43</sup> As a result of their attempts to gain support for the conversion of West Africans, missionary groups produced propaganda which encouraged stereotypes based on racial difference.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, naval officers offered examples of savagery and moral inferiority in West African peoples as prohibitive for their chances of salvation without European influence. In his surveying remarks of 1832, Assistant Surgeon D. G. Miller of the *Aetna* regarded the Kanyabac people of the Rio Grande, as 'morally isolated from the rest of mankind' and therefore incapable of 'emerging from their low and barbarous condition':

Unfortunately their intellectual faculties are applied to objects which tend rather to alienate the mind from moral improvement ... love of contention & bloodshed, and a most inveterate spirit of revenge and retaliation, however trivial the cause of offence, are the principal sources of their feelings & passions.<sup>45</sup>

Those Africans regarded as 'civilised' by naval officers had usually been exposed to white culture. In 1842, Dr McIlroy wrote about the eldest son of a Loango ruler who had spent time in the United States where he 'was put to school where he learnt to read and write'. McIlroy demonstrated the cultural arrogance which was prevalent amongst travellers to West Africa when he declared that consequently, 'he was a very superior person to any of the natives in this part of the world, who are in the lowest grade of civilization'.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, naval officers also wrote in a patronising manner of the infantile nature of African peoples. Midshipman Rogers's account of his meeting with King Madora in the

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<sup>42</sup> Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 74-5; T.C. McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 673.

<sup>44</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class*, pp. 75-7.

<sup>45</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, D. G. Miller, 'Remarks on some parts of the West Coast of Africa', 1832, ff. 34-6.

<sup>46</sup> NMM, LBK/41, McIlroy Letters, 2 July 1842.

River Congo was imbued with paternalism, as he wrote, ‘the king insisted on my sitting on his stool ... while I was visiting him, I was the old man and he was the little boy’.<sup>47</sup> Engineer John M’Kie similarly invoked the childlike status of the Kru from the *Lizard* when he described their return to Sierra Leone in the 1850s. He wrote of ‘the effusive welcome given to the boys on their return by their wives and sweethearts ... their overflowing joy being like that of children ... The absence of their grinning black faces left quite a blank for a time’.<sup>48</sup>

Evidence of willful or lazy behaviour was comprehended in terms of Africans requiring guidance and a master. As Captain William Allen wrote in his published account of the Niger expedition, white races were ‘compelled to exertion’ while ‘with the negro, on the contrary, his climate superinduces a repugnance to exertion; he places his whole happiness in the idea of repose’.<sup>49</sup> Blacks were also considered as requiring guidance due to deficiencies in moral character, often regarded as greedy, impulsive and guileful. In his remark book of 1848, Commander Hugh Dunlop of the *Alert* described the King of Bumfey and his people as ‘a half civilized people whose cupidity is at all times too strong for their sense of justice & truth’. The Gallinas rulers were also perceived negatively. Dunlop wrote of their loyalties to the slave dealers, and asserted, ‘like all savages they are capricious and inconsistent’. In 1844, Captain Claude Buckle declared them ‘cunning worthless fellows’.<sup>50</sup> Drunkenness and fondness for rum was also regarded as moral weakness. In his diaries George Augustus Bedford noted that King Bili of Cape Palmas ‘was particularly partial to “Jamaica” and came down to us in full expectation of receiving a “Dash” [gift] of a bottle or two’.<sup>51</sup>

Analysis of these narratives must take into account their provenance and intended readership. Letters written home in particular often placed emphasis on the most repellent aspects of African life, for example, polygamy, cannibalism or human sacrifice, presumably to shock the recipients and stress the author’s bravery. Midshipman Augustus Arkwright wrote to his

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<sup>47</sup> Private Collection, Rogers Journal, 17 April 1850.

<sup>48</sup> NLS, MS 24634, M’Kie Memoirs, ff. 53-4. M’Kie’s emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Captain William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger in 1841 under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter, R.N.*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1848), vol. 2, p. 420; Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes*, p. 137. The tradition of ecological determinism, whereby tropical climates were said to induce laziness, had a long history in shaping how Europeans described the work ethic of Africans. This theme is particularly prominent in literature from slave plantations in the Americas. For example, see Douglas Hamilton, ‘Slave Life in the Caribbean’ in Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> USNA, MS 59, Dunlop Remark Book, 12 February 1848; TNA, ADM 123/173, ‘Best means to be adopted for the abolition of the African slave trade, 1850’, Reply of Hugh Dunlop, 17 June 1850; WSRO, BUCKLE/470, Buckle Journals, no dates [October 1844-May 1845].

<sup>51</sup> NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries.

grandfather from the schooner *Prompt* in 1842 to report on his time on the West African coast. ‘I certainly have seen a great deal of life amongst savages’, he wrote, including ‘beating off cannibals when attacked by them’.<sup>52</sup> Some of the most sensationalist, and outwardly racist, narratives were often found in published naval reminiscences of suppression. Following the tradition of contemporary travel literature, authors often wrote of their encounters with Africans for amusement or to shock. For example, F. Harrison Rankin’s *The White Man’s Grave: A Visit to Sierra Leone in 1834* was widely read in the 1830s. Rankin made fun of African culture, and his work gave an impression of Africans as an amusing but childlike people.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 37: ‘Puzzled which to choose!! or the King of Timbuctoo offering one of his daughters’, George Cruikshank, published by G. Humphrey, 1818 (NMM, PAG8631).

George Cruikshank’s caricature ‘Puzzled which to choose!!’ portrays stereotypes of Africans as savage and infantile in their most offensive form. Naval captain and novelist Frederick Marryat, a personal friend of Cruikshank, is depicted on a mission to Timbuctoo, where the

<sup>52</sup> DRO, D5991/10/74, Augustus Arkwright to his grandfather, 7 November 1842.

<sup>53</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 324.

King presents him with the choice of his daughters for marriage.<sup>54</sup> The caricature is particularly derogatory towards African women, representing them as having excessive physical features as made infamous by portrayals of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ in 1815, as explored later. They appear eager for sexual relations, and their excessive plumpness, nakedness, and promiscuous expressions contrast with the refined and polite depiction of the naval officer, and contribute to the voyeuristic tone. Such ‘miscegenetic humour’, in Marcus Wood’s words, and comic exploitation of popular racist attitudes was a recurrent theme in the work of satirists of this period, and Cruikshank in particular.<sup>55</sup>

In his published narrative of the anti-slavery patrols, naval surgeon Peter Leonard was particularly patronising and racist in his account of African peoples. He portrayed African children, ‘naked, woolly-headed sable cherubs’, in the market place of Freetown, describing how they ‘sprawl about the narrow lanes through the market, scratching up the mud, and wallowing in it like as many black suckling pigs’. Leonard was disgusted by the ‘peculiar sickly odour of black humanity, most potent and disagreeable’ in the market. He continued in an increasingly offensive tone, claiming that ‘one might imagine that he had got within the precincts of Lucifer and the damned’.<sup>56</sup> However, there were significant variations in officers’ representations of African peoples, and others wrote with more neutrality and sensitivity.

### **Positive attitudes towards Africans**

Many nineteenth-century Englishmen incorporated all Africans into the abstract category of ‘Negro’ or ‘black’. This was not necessarily the case with naval officers, many of whom took time to distinguish between different African peoples and attribute positive characteristics to them. This was particularly the case with West African seamen, notably the Kru (also known as Kroo or Krew), originating from the coast northward of Cape Palmas, who were employed

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<sup>54</sup> According to Bonhams, an original sketch by Frederick Marryat provided inspiration for this caricature. See [www.bonhams.com/auctions/17849/lot/73/](http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/17849/lot/73/) [accessed 3 April 2012].

<sup>55</sup> Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 163-5; Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, pp. 289-90.

<sup>56</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 48-51.

to assist with navigation, interpreting, transporting men between ship and shore, and other subservient positions on board.<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 38: 'The Kroomen of Sierra Leone', Lieutenant Gabriel Bray (NMM, PAJ2038).

Lieutenant Bray was on a naval voyage to West Africa in the 1770s.<sup>58</sup>

Black men had for many years played a part in Britain's maritime world, for example in the multiracial crews of British slave ships in the eighteenth century.<sup>59</sup> The number of black sailors in English port towns (see Fig. 39) was significant enough in 1816 for the African

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<sup>57</sup> Philip D. Morgan, 'Black Experiences in Britain's Maritime World', in David Cannadine (ed.), *Empire, the Sea and Global History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 111.

<sup>58</sup> For more detail on Bray's paintings, see Quilley, 'The Lie of the Land', pp. 120-5.

<sup>59</sup> Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 2. A number of works have studied the place of black men in the maritime world, notably W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Norma Myers, 'Servant, Sailor, Soldier, Taylor, Beggarman: Black Survival in White Society, 1780-1830', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 12:1 (1993), pp. 47-74; Alan Cobley, 'Black West Indian Seamen in the British Merchant Marine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, 58 (2004), pp. 259-74.

Institution to apply for provision to be made for those made destitute after being disbanded from the navy.<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 39: A caricature of Greenwich pensioners, John Thurston, c. 1800 (NMM, PAH3303), including a black pensioner in naval uniform.

The Kru had an influential role on Royal Navy vessels on the West African coast, and favourable accounts of the Kru as outstanding seafarers and personifying strength, reliability and manliness are common.<sup>61</sup> Commander James Dacres of the sloop *Nimrod* wrote in 1846 that Krumen ‘will be found of most inestimable service in watering, wooding, and all duties not requiring seamanship’. He found them ‘a hard working and well behaved set’.<sup>62</sup> George Bedford wrote that the Kru had an ‘expertness and general aptitude for the sea, together with a superior intelligence to other Coast tribes’. Due to their perceived masculinity and physical strength, the Kru were also employed in British settlements ‘performing domestic duties, and acting as body-guard to the several agents scattered about, being looked upon with dread by

<sup>60</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class*, pp. 38-44. A large number of the 158 blacks recruited for the Niger Expedition in 1841 were found in English ports.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Burroughs, “[T]he true sailors of Western Africa”: Kru seafaring identity in British travellers’ accounts of the 1830s and 1840s’, *Journal of Maritime Research*, 11:1 (2009), pp. 51-67. For example, see TNA, ADM 30/26 for the Muster Lists of Krumen serving in various ships between 1819 and 1820.

<sup>62</sup> UKHO, CRB 1846, Remark Book of James Dacres, 1845-6, f. 5.

the other natives'.<sup>63</sup> As a result, Krumen were regarded as an integral part of the ship's crew, and as John M'Kie noted, were given common pursers names such as 'Seabreeze, Tom Piston, Jack Galley, John Rudder, and such names as these representing different parts of the ship.'<sup>64</sup> Krumen were also named with royal connection such as 'King George' and 'Prince of Wales', as the list of Kru who served on the *Linnet* shows (Fig. 40).

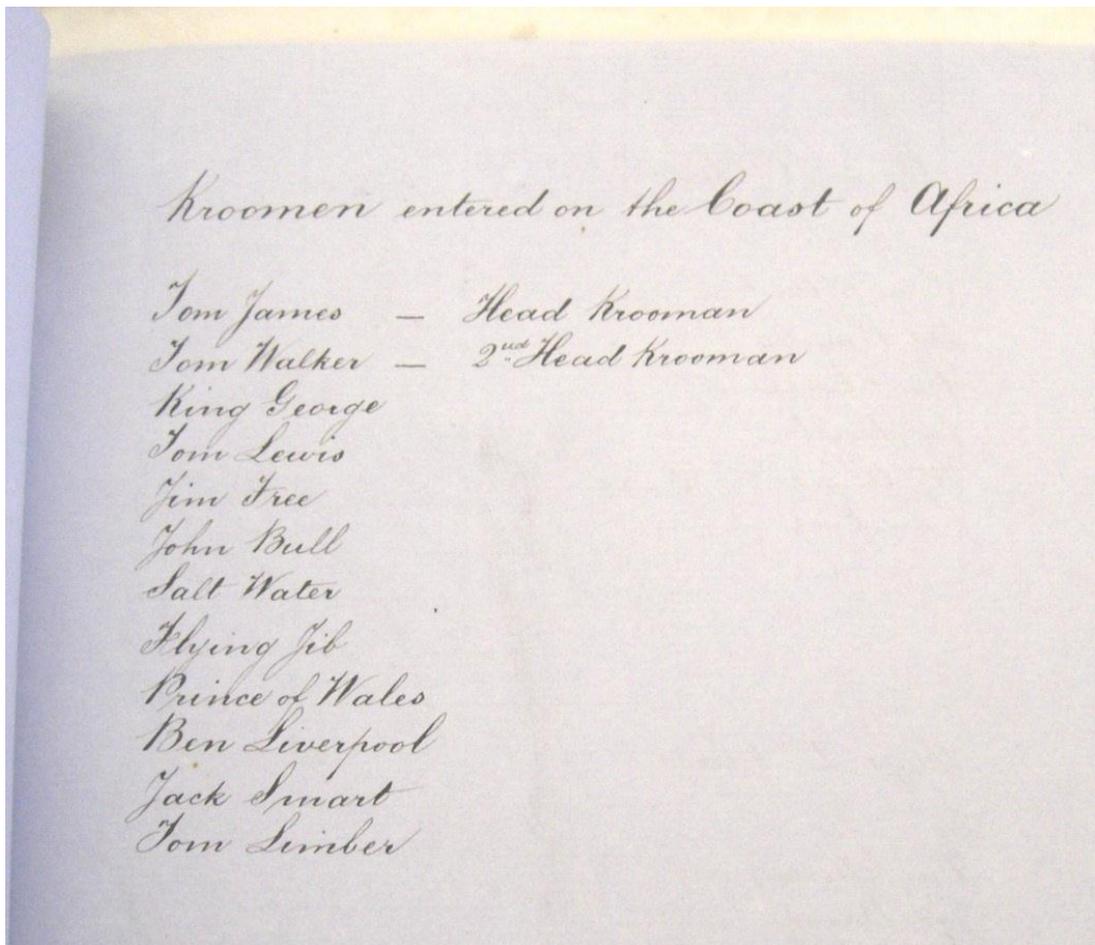


Fig. 40: List of 'Kroomen entered on the Coast of Africa' on HMS *Linnet*, c. 1852 (NMM, ART/10).

Officers' relations with the Kru earned them consideration. In 1830 Commodore Hayes learned that several Krumen at Sierra Leone were owed a proportion of the bounty awarded for captured slavers. In their defence he wrote to the Admiralty Secretary: 'it appears that those poor creatures have been used for many years to do all the deadly work of the Squadron, and there can be no doubt of their labours having saved many valuable European

<sup>63</sup> NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries.

<sup>64</sup> NLS, MS 24633, M'Kie Memoirs, ff. 54-6.

lives'.<sup>65</sup> Their service could also earn them a rating and a voyage to Britain. M'Kie noted how Tom Williams, a Kruman of the *Lizard*, was 'rated stoker and proved a very capable man', and therefore granted a passage to Spithead.<sup>66</sup>



Fig. 41: 'Ben Freeman' powder horn, c. 1812 (NMM, ZBA2465).

This engraved powder horn, used for carrying gunpowder, belonged to 'Ben Freeman', an African seaman. According to the engraving, he was 'A Sober Honest Man, has sailed in HM Ship *Thais* from Sierra Leone to Ambriz to the satisfaction of the officers'. It is not clear whether this was a self-proclaimed declaration or the opinion of the officers involved. Ben Freeman was one of four African seamen taken on board the *Thais*, active on the squadron in 1812-13. They were not, however, treated as equals and while on board received only two-thirds allowance.<sup>67</sup>

In his journal of 1828, Commander Thomas Boteler of the *Hecla* gave an account of the Kru's 'native dances' – including 'where one man, chirps like a bird, chatters like an ape, & plays a tattoo on his breast' – and expressed a willingness to learn more about their culture. Boteler also alluded to the amiable relations on board as the Kru performed 'a theatrical representation' of a bush fight for the ship's crew:

<sup>65</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, Commodore Hayes to J. W. Croker, 4 December 1830, ff. 177-80. Hayes's emphasis.

<sup>66</sup> NLS, MS 24634, M'Kie Memoirs, ff. 26-7.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton and Blyth (eds), *Representing Slavery*, p. 172. A similar inscribed keepsake belonging to a Kruman is the scrimshaw made from elephant ivory held by the National Museum of the Royal Navy. The inscription reads: 'Jim Freeman, Head Krouman of HMS Sybille Comdre [Francis] Collier 1827 ... [and] HMS Owen Glendower Sir Robert Mends Comdre 1823'. See [www.historicdockyard.co.uk/news/news197.php](http://www.historicdockyard.co.uk/news/news197.php) [accessed 12 January 2012]. Scrimshaws were traditionally created by whalers who carved or etched bones to pass the time on long voyages.

On taking a prisoner a consultation was held as to what they should do with him, when after a most safe and mature deliberation, it was determined not to give offence to their friends the English by selling him as a slave ... they sentenced him to have his throat cut, which was accordingly with all due form, gravity & dispatch immediately performed. Johnny Krooman fully understands flattery ... an English audience turned the scale.<sup>68</sup>

Boteler revealed two features of Kru conduct which earned them admiration from officers: their loyalty to the British and abstinence from slave trading. The Kru's facial tattoos distinguished them from slaves, and slave traders. Commodore George Collier wrote extensively about the Kru in his reports to the Admiralty. He 'made a point of personally visiting the Krew country', in order to gain, 'a better understanding of the country and the habits of the people'. Collier declared them 'in all respects so superior to every class of the natives of Africa', and, 'much attached to the naval service of Great Britain'.<sup>69</sup> He believed this relationship to have a beneficial impact on the Kru, whereby the belief in exposure to European culture as elevating Africans from savagery is clear:

The wealth or riches, the krew people acquire by their constant intercourse with the English, unfits them however in some degree for the savage life of their neighbours north and south and their independence has also produced a decided aversion to the general custom of selling slaves to traders ... the consequence is they are by no means so expert in many of the customs and habits of savage life.<sup>70</sup>

The alleged loyalty of the Kru and their quasi-British identification, often termed the 'Irishmen' or 'Scotchmen of Africa', seemingly secured their place on board.<sup>71</sup> However, their status as surrogate Britons was limited, in particular by the presence of the master-servant relationship. Collier wrote that the Kru were often treated in a severe way to 'insure' their services:

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<sup>68</sup> NMRN, MSS 73/1, Boteler Journal, ff. 20-2.

<sup>69</sup> NMM, WEL/10, George Collier, 'Report of the Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa', no folios; NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Report', ff. 120-1.

<sup>70</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, 'Second Annual Report', ff. 137-8.

<sup>71</sup> Burroughs, '[T]he true sailors'.

There is a particular sort of treatment, by Europeans, necessary to insure the faithful services of the krew man and harshness and severity never fail to give the people such an aversion from any particular employ, that they will sacrifice everything rather than risk for any purpose of gain, a repetition of severity or improper chastisement.<sup>72</sup>

Positive observations of African peoples also extended to encounters on shore. In several instances, officers offered affirmative sentiments with surprise, suggesting that their preconceptions of Africans were challenged by those they met. For example, in 1826 naval surgeon Richard Jackson wrote that after a dinner with King Peppel in the River Bonny, ‘I was surprised to hear so much good sense proceeding from the lips of an untutored Negro, who in the course of conversation made many pertinent remarks, evidently shewing [sic] that he possesses a shrewd intellect’. Racial prejudices are implicit but Jackson also revealed respect for the King, asserting, ‘as an absolute Sovereign over an ignorant & superstitious race, he is admirably adapted for his situation’.<sup>73</sup>

Attempts to make distinctions between different African societies was especially related to the surveying and observational roles of the nineteenth-century navy in West Africa. As Chapter 1 noted, a number of coastal surveys of West Africa were commissioned by the Admiralty in the nineteenth century. Alongside the traditional topographical aims, naval surveys also set out to increase knowledge of indigenous peoples.<sup>74</sup> As a result, although not officially ships of the anti-slavery squadron, those on surveying vessels on the West African coast frequently offered commentary on the slave trade and its suppression, and on African peoples.

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<sup>72</sup> NMRN, MSS 45, ‘Second Annual Report’, ff. 128-9.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, p. 78.

<sup>74</sup> Bayly, ‘British and indigenous peoples’, p. 32. For example see Luciana Martins and Felix Driver, ‘John Septimus Roe and the art of navigation, c. 1815-30’ in Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 53-66.



Fig. 42: 'Native of Fernando Po', Commander Henry Need, c. 1850s (NMM, ART/10).<sup>75</sup>

Commander B. Marwood Kelly of the surveying vessel *Pheasant* visited Fernando Po in 1823. The island was a popular point of reference for naval officers on the squadron; bases were leased there, and naval vessels stopped frequently for supplies. In his report to the Admiralty, Kelly described the locals of the island, called Bubi, with impartiality: 'they have not the flat nose, and thick lip of the African, but those features approach nearer to the European form ... the eye is quick and piercing, and upon the whole their countenances bespeak good humour and kindness.'<sup>76</sup> Commander Need sketched an inhabitant of the island in a similarly neutral manner in the 1850s (Fig. 42). Some of Kelly's contemporaries, however, wrote in a derogatory way about Fernando Po's inhabitants, including Midshipmen Binstead, as examined earlier, and Lieutenant George Courtenay, who declared them 'incorrigible though inexpert thieves' with 'vile stinking carcasses smeared with palm oil and

<sup>75</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

<sup>76</sup> UKHO, MP 107, 'A Survey of a Bay in the Island of Fernando Po, together with remarks on the NW Coast of that island by Commander B. Marwood Kelly', no folios.

clay'.<sup>77</sup> Their strange appearance, in officers' eyes, was attributable to a thick layer of clay that covered their bodies, and led them to be considered among the most primitive people on the coast.<sup>78</sup> Kelly's narrative provides an informative counterpoint to such views, and demonstrates the diversity of opinions in the navy at this time. In a desire to learn more about their character, Kelly gained their confidence by 'allowing them to examine the surface of the skin of my hands, legs & bosom, which they did with great curiosity & seemed to express astonishment'. He concluded:

... upon the whole I think them an extremely unoffensive, cheerful people; neither cruel, treacherous, nor revengeful ... In one respect I believe they are superior to all other Africans. Slavery, that curse of the human race, is perfectly unknown among them: every man appears to be free and independant [sic].<sup>79</sup>

In a similar way to perceptions of the Kru, Kelly looked favourably on the people of Fernando Po because of their physical features and appearance (they looked more like Europeans than other Africans) and their perceived moral standing (they did not engage in slavery), revealing the influences on naval officers' attitudes towards Africans in this earlier period of suppression.

Assistant Surgeon D. G. Miller travelled the West African coast in the surveying vessel *Aetna* between 1830 and 1832. He took care in his reports to the Admiralty to distinguish and define the different peoples he encountered. Miller's surveys had an implicit excitement in the sighting of undiscovered lands: he wrote that a 'train of peculiar, but not unpleasing sensations rush on the mind, when for the first time we visit a region which has hitherto remained unknown to all but a few untutored savages'.<sup>80</sup> He pronounced 'the aborigines up the [River] Nunez' as 'a mild inoffensive race; their countenances are open and regular, expressive of ingenuousness and benignity'.<sup>81</sup> The Foulahs, a largely Muslim people who traded in slaves and other goods from the African interior, were described by Miller with

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<sup>77</sup> UIC: SLC, Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal, no folios.

<sup>78</sup> Robert T. Brown, 'Fernando Po and the Anti-Sierra Leonean Campaign: 1826-1834', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6:2 (1973), p. 255. See James Holman, *A Voyage Round the World: including travels in Africa, Asia, Australasia, America*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1834), vol. 1, chapter 9, for his representations of the people of Fernando Po.

<sup>79</sup> UKHO, MP 107, Kelly, 'A Survey of a Bay'.

<sup>80</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, Miller, 'Remarks', f. 2.

<sup>81</sup> TNA, ADM 105/92, D. G. Miller, 'Remarks on some parts of the West Coast of Africa, in 1830 & 1831', ff. 16-18.

respect as ‘intrepid, cool, and indefatigable, and at the same time acute and ingenious’.<sup>82</sup> Such a positive portrayal was repeated by Captain Belcher of the same vessel. He declared the Foulahs ‘a shrewd intelligent people’ who were said to ‘possess great bravery and perseverance, and to be inured to hard labour’.<sup>83</sup> In a similar way to the Kru, the Foulahs were admired for masculine characteristics of strength, bravery and intelligence, and although slave traders, were respected for their hard-working nature.

Prejudices against African peoples clearly exist in Miller’s reports, as his description of the Kanyabac people already examined makes clear. However, as the following extract about members of the same community reveals, Miller’s willingness to engage with different peoples and their individual characteristics is telling of a more open-minded approach to West African travel:

Demiong & Antonio ventured to come on board in one of our boats. When shown over the ship, they seemed totally at a loss what to think: almost everything was incomprehensible & therefore, as has often been remarked of other savages, did not excite that interest and surprise which minds a little more enlightened would have betrayed. Yet they were not idle spectators. They saw much, though little that they could associate with their ideas of utility, and elaborate and elegant works of art often excited less wonder than coarse and common objects.<sup>84</sup>

Many encounters between officers and Africans were little more than observational: fear, prejudice or indifference prevented meaningful interaction. Other officers appeared genuinely attentive towards the African cultures they encountered, and while common racial assumptions proliferated, an eagerness to learn is evident. This interest may explain the material culture collected and brought home from the West African coast, although other motives, to sell the items for example, may also have been at play. Lieutenant William Bent of the *Vengeance* collected a number of African items during his time on anti-slavery patrols at Lagos, including gourd drinking vessels and a wooden staff.<sup>85</sup> An enthusiasm to learn

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., f. 15. See Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 156, n.15, for the confusion over the terminology of these people.

<sup>83</sup> Captain Belcher, ‘Extracts from Observations on Various Points of the West Coast of Africa, Surveyed by His Majesty’s Ship Aetna in 1830-32’, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 2 (1832), p. 283.

<sup>84</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, Miller, ‘Remarks’, f. 21.

<sup>85</sup> These items are currently held by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery in Exeter. Some are mentioned in Len Pole, *Iwa L’Ewa: Yoruba and Benin Collections in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum* (Exeter Museums, 1999). I am grateful to Tony Eccles for providing information on these collections. Instances

about different cultures is also clear in the officers who made attempts to communicate and study local languages. George Augustus Bedford, on surveying work on the *Raven* in the 1830s, described how in the River Gallinas he ‘became such good friends with the natives that I sent the boat off, and accompanied them to their huts’. Bedford took time to learn local words from the ‘village school master’: ‘I did much in this way by figuring the shape of objects, such as the moon, stars &c upon the ground, or in my book’. He included in his diaries ‘a list of native words, spelt so as to represent the sounds as close as I could imitate them, with their English meaning attached’.<sup>86</sup>

The 1840s witnessed a new wave of published accounts of exploration in West Africa, many written by military or medical men.<sup>87</sup> In his published narratives of anti-slavery service, Lieutenant Frederick Forbes was notable for offering little judgement in his accounts of West Africa and its peoples; his tone was largely neutral, and he wrote about African religions and beliefs with genuine interest and curiosity, rather than in explicitly racist terms.<sup>88</sup> As shall be examined shortly in relation to his anti-slavery mission to Dahomey, Forbes offered an insight into African societies which was unusual among his naval colleagues, including his rediscovery of the vocabulary of the ‘Vahie’ or Vei language at Bohmar, near Liberia. As Forbes believed he had made a ‘discovery of such importance to the civilization of Africa’, it is likely that he sought fame and notability for his linguistic discoveries.<sup>89</sup> In 1849 Forbes wrote to the Secretary of the British Museum to acquaint him with ‘an alphabetical arrangement of the characters of a phonetic African language discovered by me a few months since and acknowledged by all in Sierra Leone & Liberia to be a novelty’.<sup>90</sup> His memoirs were certainly read by others on the squadron: in 1862 Captain J. P. Luce noted that the

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of African material culture collected and transported home by naval officers is an under-researched area; many African objects currently found in British collections may have arrived in the country in a similar way.

<sup>86</sup> NMRN, MSS 151, Bedford Diaries. Assistant Surgeon Miller similarly included vocabulary from the peoples of the River Nunez and Grande in his ‘Remarks’ (UKHO), ff. 39-40. These attempts to facilitate conversations and exchange knowledge were part of a wider tradition in West Africa in this period which included the work of missionaries. For example, Samuel Crowther translated the Bible into the Yoruba language, and compiled a Yoruba-English dictionary.

<sup>87</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 320-1. As detailed in chapters 1 and 2, much exploration focused on the River Niger.

<sup>88</sup> Forbes had previously published *Five Years in China; from 1842 to 1847* (1848), an account of his service there.

<sup>89</sup> Lieutenant F. E. Forbes, ‘Despatch communicating the discovery of a Native Written Character at Bohmar, on the Western Coast of Africa, near Liberia, accompanied by a Vocabulary of the Vahie or Vei Tongue’, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 20 (1850) pp. 89-113. The title-page of the 1851 edition of *Dahomey and the Dahomans* identified the author as ‘Discoverer of the Vahie Phonetic’.

<sup>90</sup> BL, Add 17817, Frederick Forbes to the Secretary of the British Museum, [no date] January 1849.

explorer Richard Burton had given him a copy of *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (1851) to read.<sup>91</sup>

Naval officers continued to offer dispassionate or sympathetic considerations of Africans into the late 1840s. Notably, Commander Henry James Matson defended African peoples against popular stereotypes:

An African chief is not, as is generally supposed in this country, a kind of “King of the Cannibal Islands”, delighting in human sacrifices, and all that sort of thing; he is, generally speaking, a humane, shrewd and intelligent man. I have visited King Boy in the Nun, King Peppel in the Bonny, Duke Ephraim in the Old Calabar and the Chief of Benin, whose name I forget; and I could but admire, in most cases, the propriety of their conduct.<sup>92</sup>

He wrote of repeated visits to the rulers of the Congo and Cabenda, ‘who always received me with kindness, honour, and the excess of hospitality’. Describing a dinner with one King, Matson remarked that ‘we sat down like men, and not like monkeys’.<sup>93</sup> Commander John Tudor of the *Firefly* had been engaged in suppression for two years when he reported his favourable observations of the African character to the Admiralty in 1850:

I should say that they are fully as quick, and intelligent as any Europeans I have ever met with, and I do not hesitate to say Sir that should at the Great Industrial Meeting of 1857 specimens of mankind be exhibited the sons of Africa for quickness, intelligence and all the better feelings of the heart would in no way be behind the sons of Europe.<sup>94</sup>

The West Africans that Tudor had met clearly influenced his views. His opinion that Europeans and Africans were equal in some respects was clearly enlightened and generous, although the assumption that Africans might be ‘exhibited’ serves as a reminder of the

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<sup>91</sup> RAI, Luce Journals, vol. 3, f. 207.

<sup>92</sup> Commander Henry James Matson, *Remarks on the Slave Trade and African Squadron*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: James Ridgeway, 1848), p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, ADM 123/173, ‘Best means’, Reply of John Tudor, 12 July 1850.

hierarchy of nations and races in this period.<sup>95</sup> What this collection of positive reporting makes apparent is that while many naval men subscribed to common stereotypes about Africans, observations were also affected by the reality of their experiences on shore. In particular, cultural exchanges between naval officers and African peoples were influenced by two practices and ways of life regarded as irrefutably ‘African’: the devotion to ‘superstition’ and the honouring of ‘customs’.

### **Superstitions and Customs**

It was a commonly held opinion that native Africans were, in the words of one naval officer, ‘slaves to the grossest superstitions’.<sup>96</sup> This tied with the Enlightenment belief that humankind had progressed from barbarism in part due to freedom from superstitious forms of religion. A superstitious society was seen to lack morality and humanity: a ‘kingdom of darkness’, in Thomas Fowell Buxton’s words.<sup>97</sup> To an extent, naval accounts reflected the messages of the missionary cause, in which ‘humanity and pity must be strongly excited’ by the ‘distress and moral turpitude which superstition and its concomitants occasion’.<sup>98</sup> Opinions were also affected by first-hand observations, which led attitudes to vary from the interested and the inquiring to the disgusted.

Naval officers regarded worship of idols, or ‘fetishes’, as a curiosity, but also as an example of stupidity and barbarism. In 1824, George Courtenay condemned the veneration of the alligator at Dix Cove by the local population, ‘so much so that a mother would rejoice to see her child devoured by one of these voracious animals’. He wrote of ‘another curiosity’ at the same place:

... a white negro, a most disgusting looking object ... supported entirely by the people, who believe in his divinity; such superstition is deplorable, but I imagine will exist for ever; it was so three hundred years ago, when first the Gold Coast was

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<sup>95</sup> Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011) examines the popularity and profitability of the public exhibition of foreign peoples in the nineteenth century.

<sup>96</sup> NMM, AGC/N/33, Cornelius T.A. Noddall, Master of HMS *Wolverine*, ‘A short account of the presentation of a gold medal from Queen Victoria to a native chief ...’, f. 14.

<sup>97</sup> Rattansi, *Racism*, p. 24-5. Buxton quoted in Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans’, pp. 173-4.

<sup>98</sup> *West African Sketches*, p. 24.

colonized, and so I imagine it will continue; so very great is the stupidity & brutality of the negroes.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, at Bonny, Courtenay wrote with dismay that an annual sacrifice of ‘the finest young woman that can be found’ was made to a venerated shark.<sup>100</sup> Naval officers denounced the ritual of human sacrifice as an example of immorality; Courtenay also appeared shocked at the lack of family or community ties that could lead to such victimisation. Nineteenth-century missionary propaganda stressed the polarising cultural barriers between Christianity and indigenous ‘heathen’ religions which encouraged cruelty and domination. Examples commonly cited from other areas of the world included polygamy among Native Americans, the killing of twins in Nigeria, Chinese foot-binding or cannibalism in New Guinea.<sup>101</sup> From his observations of ‘Pagan rites’ at Bonny in 1826, Richard Jackson believed in the potential of missionary activity ‘to dispel those abominations & enlighten the minds of the natives to a sense of their moral degradation’.<sup>102</sup> Others had less faith in Africans’ willingness to forsake their beliefs. For example, the religious customs of the Kru did not appeal to naval officers in the same way as their seafaring skills. In 1818, George Collier regarded their beliefs as an obstacle to moral improvement because as a people they were ‘bigoted to their superstitions beyond description’.<sup>103</sup> As Howard Temperley has noted, British travellers in West Africa rarely made attempts to understand African cultures, and to an extent naval officers can be included in this generalisation. Unlike travellers in earlier periods who were dependent on local people for protection, most officers had no need to acknowledge the place of religious deities in African life.<sup>104</sup> There was certainly no comparison with common naval superstitions, such as the ritual initiation where newcomers were baptised by Father Neptune on ‘crossing the line’ (the Tropic of Cancer or the equator).<sup>105</sup>

One officer who expressed a more curious and objective interest in the veneration of fetishes was Captain J. P. Luce. As Senior Officer in the Bights in 1862, Luce was asked to

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<sup>99</sup> UIC: SLC, Series V, Folder 16, Courtenay Journal.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Hugh McLeod, ‘Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945’ in Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 47; Bayly, ‘British and indigenous peoples’, p. 33.

<sup>102</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, pp. 90, 153.

<sup>103</sup> NMM, WEL/10, ‘Report on the Forts’.

<sup>104</sup> Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger 1841-1842* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 81-2; Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 501-2.

<sup>105</sup> These ceremonies frequently made appearances in log books, such as HMS *Arrogant* in 1859: ‘7.30 Neptune hailed the ship and the usual ceremonies were performed’ (NMM, HRD 2/3, 12 December 1859).

accompany Commodore Arthur Eardley Wilmot to Abomey to deliver demands of abolition of the slave trade and human sacrifice to the King of Dahomey. In his journal of the mission, Luce engaged in long descriptive passages on the nature of the religious curiosities he witnessed. He described fetish houses, 'about the size of a dogs house containing a lump of mud shaped into something like a human figure with a few broken pots & a fowls feather or two stuck about'. He also remarked on 'personal fetishes' such as the 'couple of ugly wooden dolls heads' which one soldier carried.<sup>106</sup> En route to Abomey he came across a resting place 'devoted to fetish' where:

... we observed about 20 priests & priestesses – they were bare to the waist but had handsome fetish country cloths from waist to knee. There were a few small flags about the trees & a couple of small mats with sacrificed cocks hanging against them. The priests and priestesses four abreast were dancing & singing round the place.

While clearly baffled by such practices, Luce offered few judgments, instead viewing the ceremonies with interest. He also attempted analysis of their place in African life. He wrote that 'some of the fetish figures here are rather indelicate which strikes me as singular because the people are remarkably decent in their personal appearance & habits'.<sup>107</sup>

Integral to their perceptions of superstitious societies were naval officers' encounters with the practice of customs – religious celebrations given by an African ruler for his subjects – which often involved the practice of human sacrifice. Anti-slavery treaties increasingly included stipulations for the abolition of human sacrifice, regarded as 'fostered by the ignorance and superstition of the "fetish" priests'.<sup>108</sup> Naval missions to negotiate treaties often involved long stays in African settlements. Two naval officers – Forbes and Luce – described the annual customs of Dahomey, witnessed on their respective missions.

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<sup>106</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 13, 20, 188.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., ff. 46-8, 169.

<sup>108</sup> 'Despatches from Commodore Wilmot respecting his visit to the King of Dahomey in December 1862 and January 1863', *PP* 1863 (3179), p. 11.



Fig. 43: Gezo, King of Dahomey (as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)).<sup>109</sup>

Frederick Forbes visited the King of Dahomey in 1850; this portrayal of the King features in Forbes's published account of the mission. In his correspondence with Commodore Arthur Fanshawe, he wrote of the annual customs financed by the King's 'slave-hunt' in a neighbouring country. Forbes condemned this tradition, whereby 'old age is decapitated to ornament the Palace, strength and youth sold to enrich the Brazils, their proceeds wasted at the horrible and ridiculous Customs'.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Frontispiece to Frederick Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1851), vol. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Frederick Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 November 1849; Journal of Frederick Forbes, 25 May 1850. Printed in Tim Coates (ed.), *King Guezo of Dahomey, 1850-1852: The Abolition of the Slave Trade on the West Coast of Africa* (London: The Stationery Office, 2001), pp. 35, 53.



Fig. 44: ‘The platform of the Ah-Toh’ (as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)).<sup>111</sup>

This illustration from Forbes’s narrative depicts the ceremony of human sacrifices, including the presentation of fetish objects such as an alligator. There is no doubt of Forbes’s disgust at the proceedings as he declared ‘what follows is almost too revolting to be recorded’:

... the mob now armed with clubs and branches, yelled furiously, calling upon the King to “feed them – they were hungry” ... a demoniac yelling caused us to look back. The King was showing the immolations to his people ... a descent of twelve feet stunned the victim, and before animation could return, the head was off; the body, beaten by the mob, was dragged by the heels to a pit at a little distance, and there left a prey to wolves and vultures.

Forbes’s description of the display of ‘six newly-cut-off human heads ... the blood still oozing’ in the King’s Palace, as a demonstration of the King’s authority, echoed the travel writing of Archibald Dalziel and others of the previous century.<sup>112</sup> Forbes was later to publish his journal as an introduction to *Dahomey and the Dahomans*. Such shocking content may be regarded as further evidence of his intentions in publication to gain fame and respect. Indeed,

<sup>111</sup> Illustration from Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (1851), vol. 2, facing p. 44.

<sup>112</sup> Journal of Lieutenant Forbes, 30 May 1850, 31 May 1850. Printed in Coates, *King Guezo*, pp. 60, 64-6.

Forbes wrote that his account of the customs ‘affords the first description ever given to the world’.<sup>113</sup> However, it is clear that Forbes’s writing on other aspects of African life was fair and sympathetic, and witnessing such brutal violence against seemingly innocent people would provoke condemnation. Forbes certainly wrestled with the paradox of disgust at the exhibition of savagery sitting uncomfortably with his respect for other elements of West African societies. Discussing the Dahomans, he wrote:

Many of their customs are strangely at variance with the horrors of others. The forms and ceremonies of polite society contrast oddly with the sacrifices of their unoffending prisoners of war. The faithfulness of memory displayed by the troubadours and the high officers proves the Dahomans to be capable of receiving education.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, while Forbes joined the majority of Europeans in believing all African societies to be ‘barbarous’, he was unusual in offering insight into other influences for ‘immoral’ behaviour, rather than relying solely on the innate character of African peoples:

Most travellers are forcibly struck with the rapid improvement in morality, which, in barbarous equally with civilised countries, characterises the interior of the country as compared with its seaports ... the habits of seafaring men of all nations and classes in the main tend to demoralise the society into which for a time chance throws them ... idolatrous though they be, and barbarous in the extreme, the people of the interior are generally far more moral than the semi-civilised and nominally Christianised inhabitants of the sea coasts.<sup>115</sup>

Like Forbes, Captain Luce wrote with disgust of the human sacrifices he witnessed as part of the King of Dahomey’s customs in 1862-63, although also with a fascinated interest in the sensationalism of the event. In his private journals, he remarked how ‘no one appeared to take the slightest notice’ of the display of decapitated heads.<sup>116</sup> While Commodore Wilmot was ‘made fierce’ in explaining to their hosts that it was ‘feelings of humanity ... that made

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<sup>113</sup> Frederick Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1854), p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. This was also an argument of eighteenth-century abolitionists who asserted that the slave trade had degraded coastal society (Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 255).

<sup>116</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 94-5.

such spectacles distasteful to the English', Luce however appeared captivated by the events. He described how he and Doctor Haran (also accompanying the mission), 'nerved ourselves to look steadily & calmly at all that might happen'. Luce watched as a victim had his head removed, 'sawed, hewed & hacked' with 'dreadful clumsiness'. He made an additional note in the journal's margin, describing this as 'butcher's work' and 'horrible'. Luce then recorded the 'savage mutilations' as 'two other savages rushed in & cut pieces off the buttock & hips & heart – the hands were also hacked off & with the pieces, were stuck on sticks & carried about in triumph'. Enthralled by the violence and unruliness of the King, his warriors and the excitement of the crowd, Luce portrayed the scene as 'very wild & striking'.<sup>117</sup>

Luce also wrote with a degree of affection for the Africans he stayed with, supporting the idea that those officers who spent time on shore were more inclined to view Africans sympathetically. In a long and detailed account of his trip, Luce detailed the stops on the journey, the many processions and displays witnessed and presents given and received. He also revealed respect for his hosts. When invited he and the Commodore 'performed a very respectable war dance', for which the 'applause was tremendous'. Luce and Wilmot held athletic races with the Dahomans, and a 'leaping match' with 'a long muscular well-made nigger' who 'certainly jumped very neatly'. Luce recorded how 'all this caused a good laugh', dispelling the notion that all encounters with Africans were based on fear and stereotype.<sup>118</sup> Commodore Wilmot reported that 'at all the villages where we slept, comfortable quarters had been provided, and water furnished. Nothing could exceed the civility of every one'. In setting out his intentions behind the mission, Wilmot tied notions of British identity and moral character to ideas of racial tolerance and sympathy:

My policy was to be friendly with every one, and endeavour to show the character and disposition of an Englishman towards the nations of this country – that we could treat them with forbearance, and have some sympathy with a black man!<sup>119</sup>

However, the existence of human sacrifices remained incompatible with British ideals. Wilmot acknowledged that in a country where 'war, war, war is alone thought of', such customs were too powerful to be surrendered.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., ff. 110, 120-9.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., ff. 38-9, 87-8.

<sup>119</sup> Wilmot, 'Despatches', pp. 2, 4-5.

As the accounts of Forbes, Luce and Wilmot make clear, racial attitudes of naval officers towards West Africans were rarely overtly racist or liberal for their time, but often existed in a space somewhere in between, as realities of their experiences in the interior intertwined with the popular vision of Africa they may have had before leaving Britain. From the mid-century, however, such perceptions were increasingly influenced by a more racist and derogatory body of thinking which encouraged different ideas about race, and new stereotypes about African peoples.

### **Changing racial attitudes and new stereotypes**

Encounters between naval officers and African societies were increasingly affected by changes in popular racial attitudes from the mid-century onwards. The subject of race remained contested territory, but some naval personnel were influenced by racial arguments of a new group of scholars and scientists which advocated the innate inferiority of black peoples. Before the end of the eighteenth century, there was little speculation about the biology behind racial differences. While there were efforts by natural scientists to classify living things, including human races, there was an overriding belief in monogenism: the idea, with roots in Christian theology, that all humans belonged to a single biological species. Humans were united by their common humanity; the differences between peoples were explained by conditions such as culture and climate.<sup>121</sup> However, by the mid-nineteenth century this consensus was gradually abandoned in favour of beliefs in immutable racial difference, supported by the development of new scientific and evolutionary understandings of race.<sup>122</sup>

For example, scientists increasingly brought typological orientation to their studies: the theory that every individual belonged to a certain type. Fashionable in the 1820s and 1830s, phrenology popularised the belief that skull shape provided an indication of racial temperament, intelligence and character. From this emerged the idea that behaviour was

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>121</sup> Natural scientists attempted classifications of nature and arrangements of order, rank and precedence: see the work of, for example, Carl Linnaeus, detailed in Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 37; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>122</sup> See Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes*, chapter 1, for the rise of the scientific method of racial theory.

determined by the different organs of the brain, which differed between races.<sup>123</sup> In 1827, James Holman believed that the local population of Fernando Po possessed foreheads ‘generally round, sufficiently elevated to give phrenological indications of a fair portion of intellect’.<sup>124</sup> Assistant Surgeon Miller was clearly influenced by such theories when he wrote commentary on thirty Krumen on HMS *Aetna* in 1830. He found them, ‘superior to the natives in intelligence and moral influence’. This assertion was supported by the Kru’s ‘cerebral developments’ which ‘indicated considerable mental endowments’:

Benevolence, Veneration, Firmness, & Cautiousness were conspicuous: Imagination, with 2 or 3 exceptions, was deficient: Philoprogenitiveness was, in general, rather large. The Kroomen are divested of those Slavish fears which the natives feel, and approach strangers with freedom and confidence.<sup>125</sup>

By mid-century, racial science had evolved to promote polygenism: the belief that certain human groups were intrinsically morally and physically inferior to others. This shift included new pessimism about the unchangeability of racial ‘natures’.<sup>126</sup> It was exemplified by the work of the Scottish anatomist Dr Robert Knox, who in 1850 declared the importance of racial heritage, claiming ‘race or hereditary descent is everything; it stamps the man.’<sup>127</sup> By the 1860s, the scientific community also looked to anthropological and evolutionary explanations of racial makeup, notably Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). Darwin regarded species as continually adapting by natural selection; the implication was that humans were part of the process of evolution and therefore had animal ancestry. Darwin was a staunch abolitionist, but the so-called ‘lower’ races were seen to fill the gap between animals and humans.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 31-43; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. 21-7, 45-6. The relationship between physiognomy, particularly skull shape, and the racial aesthetic was widely discussed among eighteenth-century scholars: see Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, especially pp. 92-123 and chapter 4. See Doulton, ‘Royal Navy’, pp. 60-4 for examples of racial ‘typing’ in the later period of suppression in the western Indian Ocean.

<sup>124</sup> Holman, *A Voyage*, vol. 1, 31 October 1827.

<sup>125</sup> TNA, ADM 105/92, Miller, ‘Remarks’, ff. 6-7.

<sup>126</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘Introduction: Britain and Empire in the Nineteenth Century’ in Porter (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 23-4; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. ix, 1-2, 6, 45-6.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. 3-4; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 377-9.

<sup>128</sup> See Desmond and Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause* for an examination of how Darwin’s humanitarian roots drove his work on human ancestry.

While the scientific discussion of race involved only a minority of scholars, the broader theories of immutable racial difference had an impact on the attitudes of British society. Racial arguments which advocated the innate inferiority of black peoples were seen to explain the ‘failure’ of emancipation, and to encourage the rejection of philanthropic hopes for the moral and social improvement of African peoples, as explored in Chapter 4. Commentators like Thomas Carlyle could now turn to scientific theory to support claims that Africans were predestined to be slaves.<sup>129</sup> New knowledge of Africa appeared to support these sciences, which in turn strengthened the stereotypes voiced by explorers and missionaries reporting from West Africa. Theories of innate racial characteristics were based on physical markers such as skin colour, head shape, hair type or facial features. These led mid-Victorians to assign to African societies a primitive status, at the low end of the racial hierarchy. This new popular attitude of Africa was used to justify imperialism, reinforced by the myth of the ‘Dark Continent’.<sup>130</sup> The image of childlike innocence of Africans requiring protection remained, but a new severity in thinking excluded them from the potential for development. By the 1860s, the paternalism and trusteeship of Europeans towards Africans had become, in Douglas Lorimer’s words, ‘a perpetual guardianship over ageless children’.<sup>131</sup>

This hardening of racial attitudes filtered into the cultural perceptions of those on the West Africa squadron during the final decades of its operation. In the 1850s and 1860s, a reaction against the sentiment of the civilising mission led to a more derogatory stereotype of African people.<sup>132</sup> Surgeon Richard Carr McClement visited the village of Sharks Point in the River Congo in 1858. In his diary he firmly placed the natives at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, incapable of moral improvement. ‘At first sight one is struck with the impression that human beings could not be reduced to such a degraded scale’, he wrote. ‘If they are a specimen of

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 140-1.

<sup>130</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, chapter 6; Rattansi, *Racism*, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class*, p. 148. For an overview of the new pessimism surrounding non-European capacity see Andrew Porter, ‘Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism’ in Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 198-221.

<sup>132</sup> Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 12. However, Philip Curtin has argued that the change in racial attitudes on the West African coast was slow in comparison with the more rapid rise of racism at home (Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 383). Scientific racism had a greater impact on those serving in the Indian Ocean in later decades. See Doulton, ‘Royal Navy’, especially pp. 88-96.

their “benighted” country people I doubt whether civilisation will ever make great progress amongst them’.<sup>133</sup>

Other stereotypes increasingly intertwined Victorian racial and class prejudices, encouraging the identification of blacks with the lower social orders and a servile status. The imposition of ‘middle-class’ cultures of respectability led to stereotypes about ‘savages’ being employed to demonise the working classes. The immigrant poor, particularly the Irish, were often portrayed as having bestial features. Both blacks and the lower classes were perceived as irrational, superstitious, childlike or excessively sexual.<sup>134</sup> As most nineteenth-century naval officers came from the middle or upper-middle classes, it is safe to assume similar attitudes. The unsympathetic description of a ‘wretched’ village in the River Pongas in 1858 by an officer of the West Africa squadron could as easily refer to a poverty-stricken British community: ‘descriptions of African villages are unnecessary ... They all resemble one another in the quantity of naked children that run about, the number of men that lounge about, and the hard-worked, miserable women that straggle in the streets’.<sup>135</sup>

Popular culture of the mid-nineteenth century reinforced existing stereotypes and created new ones. In theatre, by the late 1840s the comic Jim Crow role for black actors was pervasive, reinforcing the image of blacks as irresponsible, carefree and indolent.<sup>136</sup> The same officer subscribed to such stereotypes while ostensibly praising the Foulahs of the Gambia. He wrote: ‘The idea conveyed by pictures of Negroes, or by meeting some woolly-headed, blubber-lipped black in the streets of Liverpool, or lounging about the London Docks, is quite dispelled on meeting these people’. The author’s racism did not extend to the Foulahs, whose exoticism affected his racial judgement in a positive sense, as he described the ‘graceful gait, winning address, and dignified etiquette observed by the tall, intelligent-looking native from the far, mysterious interior of Africa’.<sup>137</sup> In Britain, the philanthropic image of blacks in print

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<sup>133</sup> SCA, GB 0240 FA/67/3, McClement Diary, 16 October 1858, [www.scottishcatholicarchives.org.uk/Learning/DiaryofRichardCarrMcClement/DiaryExtracts/Landscape/tabid/157/Default.aspx](http://www.scottishcatholicarchives.org.uk/Learning/DiaryofRichardCarrMcClement/DiaryExtracts/Landscape/tabid/157/Default.aspx) [accessed 12 March 2010].

<sup>134</sup> Tim Barringer, ‘Images of otherness and the visual production of difference: race and labour in illustrated texts, 1850-1865’ in West (ed.), *The Victorians*, pp. 34-53; Christine Bolt, ‘Race and the Victorians’ in C.C. Eldridge (ed.), *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 140, 142; McLeod, ‘Protestantism’, p. 47.

<sup>135</sup> ‘Journal of a Naval Officer on the West Coast of Africa’, *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal*, July 1858, p. 250.

<sup>136</sup> Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 4-5, 130, 187.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Journal of a Naval Officer’, pp. 257, 260.

changed from an object of pity to a figure of fun. A proliferation of cheap sensational fiction reinforced popular racial stereotypes, such as the comic figure of Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>138</sup> Negro minstrels were also popular in the second half of the century, presenting a comic derogatory stereotype with exaggerated features and farcical songs and dances.<sup>139</sup> Such portrayals emerged in naval narratives. Engineer John M'Kie claimed that during a visit by the King of Bonny to the *Rattler* in 1850, it was 'difficult to keep a staid countenance ... [he was] wearing an ill fitting dress suit and high hat which gave him the identical appearance of a Christy Minstrel, these together with his assumed deportment made him very ludicrous'. He mockingly wrote that the King 'thought by coming in the style he did would impress us with his high state of civilisation whereas it only exposed him to derision'.<sup>140</sup>

Stereotypes were also influenced by a new wave of exploration of the African continent which commenced in the late 1850s. The search for the sources of the White Nile – expeditions were led by Richard Burton, John Speke, James Grant, Samuel White Baker, David Livingstone and Henry Stanley – raised popular interest and explorers' accounts were best-sellers.<sup>141</sup> Africans were portrayed as objects of curiosity, invariably requiring a master. David Livingstone believed that Africa could not 'raise itself' without 'contact with superior races'.<sup>142</sup> Other explorers believed the continent as a whole was beyond salvation. In his 1866 account, Samuel Baker alleged that the African 'will assuredly relapse into an idle and savage state, unless specifically governed and forced by industry'. Similarly, Richard Burton believed abolitionist philanthropy was misguided because Africans were irredeemably inferior, characterised by 'stagnation of mind, indolence of body, moral deficiency, superstition, and childish passion'.<sup>143</sup>

Captain J. P. Luce met Richard Burton in 1862. Burton was then Consul to Fernando Po and was given passage on the packet *Macgregor Laird* at the same time as Luce was travelling to take command of the *Brisk* in the Southern Bights. Luce thought Burton 'very clever &

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<sup>138</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory*, chapter 4.

<sup>139</sup> Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Lorimer, *Colour, Class*, pp. 82-91.

<sup>140</sup> NLS, MS 24634, M'Kie Memoirs, ff. 12-13, 16-18.

<sup>141</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 179-81. For example, Samuel White Baker, *The Albert N'yanza, Great Basin of the Nile, and Exploration of the Nile Sources*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1866); Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1860).

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 181.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans', pp. 179, 181; Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 183; Dane Keith Kennedy, 'Cultural Encounters: Burton, Speke, and African Exploration', *Empire Online*, [www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/essays/content/Kennedy.aspx](http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/essays/content/Kennedy.aspx) [accessed 2 March 2009].

entertaining ... his descriptions of what he has seen & done & what he proposes to do keep one either roaring with laughter, or staring with amazement at the manner of man he must be'. He was certainly impressed with the nature of Burton's travel, work and ambitions, frequently mentioning conversations between them. He declared Burton 'full of projects', such as a 'trip to the top of the Cameroon Mountain, of his hoping to establish a sanatorium there, of his hoped for expedition to the Niger'. If successful, Luce believed 'he will be a benefactor to the African trade & people'.<sup>144</sup>

A reading of Luce's journals suggests that he wished to be regarded as an explorer and traveller like Burton. It is not clear whether Luce intended his handwritten journals to be published, but he certainly gave the impression of enjoying African travel, as seen in his Dahomey narrative. In Alatha, en route to Abomey, he wrote: 'We dined at 4pm. Oh! The hardships of African travel. Excellent soup ... meats, bread, biscuit, plantains & jams for eatables, champagne [sic], sherry, beer & brandy for drinkables!' Earlier that year, sailing for Lagos from Accra, he noted: 'I half blush as I record the fact of passing by another place without landing to expose its wonders'.<sup>145</sup> Many naval officers were familiar with the contemporary literature produced about Africa. It is a fair assumption that they drew on the themes and observations of what they read in their own commentaries.<sup>146</sup> As seen in Chapter 4, Luce exhibited little faith in missionary enterprise, and yet he believed that Burton could be a 'benefactor' to the African people. His admiration for Burton suggests a sharing of sentiments and values; perhaps Luce believed he too was adding to the body of European knowledge about Africa. However, Luce's account is less one of geographical discovery or observation, and more focused on personal experience and adventure, a travelogue, thus echoing the sentimental travel writing of earlier decades.<sup>147</sup> While his perceptions were often fair and sympathetic towards the Africans he met, they were also imbued with paternalism and a condescending approach. For example, he wrote about a demonstration of war dances in the village square at Alatha:

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<sup>144</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, ff. 164, 176, 208. In 1863, Richard Burton was asked by the Foreign Office to undertake an anti-slavery mission to Dahomey, following Commodore Wilmot's promise to make a return visit to the King. See Chapter 2, p. 76.

<sup>145</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 14-16; vol. 3, f. 160.

<sup>146</sup> For example, Captain Claude Buckle's daily reading included 'Schon and Crowther's journal of the Niger expedition', 'Pritchett's African fever' and 'The Friend of the Africans', the journal published 1841-45 (WSRO, BUCKLE/470).

<sup>147</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 75.

The many rows of nigger heads occupying the two sides of the cleared space, the fine trees, rising up & throwing their shadows over us, the grotesque dances & their wild music, formed a pleasant subject of contemplation over an after dinner ajar ... we then went for a short walk round the village, followed by the everlasting crowd of small boys & girls who clapped & laughed as merrily ... We had the chiefs in for a few minutes & gave them some grog.<sup>148</sup>

Racial superiority, increasingly taken for granted from mid-century, encouraged hostile assertions of difference, as expressed by some naval men. Naval surgeon Fleetwood Buckle served on the *Bristol* on the West Africa squadron in the 1860s. He was sensationalist, stressing a brutal and savage stereotype of Africans in his journals. He wrote of the threat of violence to Europeans ‘off Kabenda’, describing how the ‘worst cruelties are practiced here. They caught a Portuguese they disliked, cut off his penis made him eat it, tied him to a tree cut off finger after finger then toes then hands & feet & peeled skin off his neck & lastly danced round him cutting him to bits with tomahawks’.<sup>149</sup> As seen in Chapter 4, Buckle believed that slavery was the natural state for black people, the ‘stinking niggers’ who ‘must be made to work.’<sup>150</sup> Buckle’s comments are in stark contrast to some of the more dispassionate and sympathetic narratives written earlier in the century, particularly of West African seamen who assisted the squadron. His journals help to exemplify the new imperialism of the final decades of the century, leading to the ‘scramble for Africa’, and representations of Africa focusing on barbarism, cannibalism, slavery, and racial subordination.<sup>151</sup>

## **African women**

One final avenue for examination in the encounters of naval officers and Africans is their attitudes towards African women. As social class played a part in racial classification in British society, the same was true of gender.<sup>152</sup> It was often claimed that a woman’s inferior

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<sup>148</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 18-19.

<sup>149</sup> WL, MS 1397, Fleetwood Buckle Diaries, 29 September 1867.

<sup>150</sup> WL, MS 1395-6, Fleetwood Buckle Diaries, 8 July and 6 August 1866. Buckle’s emphasis.

<sup>151</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, pp. 185-8. See Doulton, ‘Royal Navy’, pp. 106-14, for racist portrayals of African crew members on anti-slavery patrols in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>152</sup> Historians have linked the ways in which domination and subordination crossed gender, race and class. For example, Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London:

intellect was a result of their biology and deficient brain structure, with similarities to those of lower classes and races. The separation of women in the domestic sphere and men as household heads was regarded as essential for the maintenance of social order, and so British middle-class women were characterised by virtuousness and submissiveness.<sup>153</sup> In contrast, Asian and African women were seen as savage yet simultaneously exotic, and were often romanticised by early nineteenth-century explorers and travellers (the majority of whom were men) because of their exotic beauty. While the domestic ideal of the western woman was integral to the civilising mission, the perception of the sexualised savage was also exciting, representing, in Joanna de Groot's words, 'the blending of conquest and enjoyment, of power and pleasure, of desire and domination'.<sup>154</sup> Naval officers often positively distinguished African women from men, perhaps in awareness of the black woman's alleged unbridled, animal-like sexuality, as exemplified by the exhibition, and sexual objectification, of Sara Bartman, the 'Hottentot Venus', in 1815.<sup>155</sup>

Naval narratives of encounters with African women are full of appreciative comments of their exotic beauty. However, race remained an important qualification in their descriptions, and those women thought of most favourably often conformed to western standards of beauty. For example, in 1826, naval surgeon Richard Jackson wrote of the women of the Cameroons River: 'their heads & necks would bear a comparison (remove but their sable complexion) with many of our English Beauties, having high & commanding foreheads, sparkling & expressive eyes, lips not overthick, and teeth that would rival the pearl in whiteness'.<sup>156</sup> For Jackson, thick lips and dark skin were signs which detracted from physical beauty, although he remained charmed by the females' exoticism. In 1858 an unidentified naval officer wrote of 'Mrs Lightburne' of Falengia in a similar vein. 'Her colour, although very dark, had a depth and richness that cannot be understood by those who have never seen

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Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>153</sup> Joanna de Groot, 'Sex and Race: The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century' in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (eds), *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary studies of gender in the nineteenth century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 93-7; Catherine Hall, 'Going a-Trolloping: imperial man travels the Empire' in Clare Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 191-2.

<sup>154</sup> See de Groot, 'Sex and Race', pp. 89-128, quoted p. 111; Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. 218-19.

<sup>155</sup> Yvette Abrahams, 'Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century Britain' in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 227. See Sander L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature' in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds), *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 171-97, for the portrayal of Sara Bartman and the 'Other' as sexualised female.

<sup>156</sup> Jackson, *Journal of a Voyage*, p. 109.

an African beauty', he wrote, 'her hands and feet would be a study for the most imaginative sculptor'.<sup>157</sup> Commander Henry Need of the *Linnet* made a number of sketches of the women he met on the West African coast like 'Lily of Loango', and appeared to be similarly enamoured.

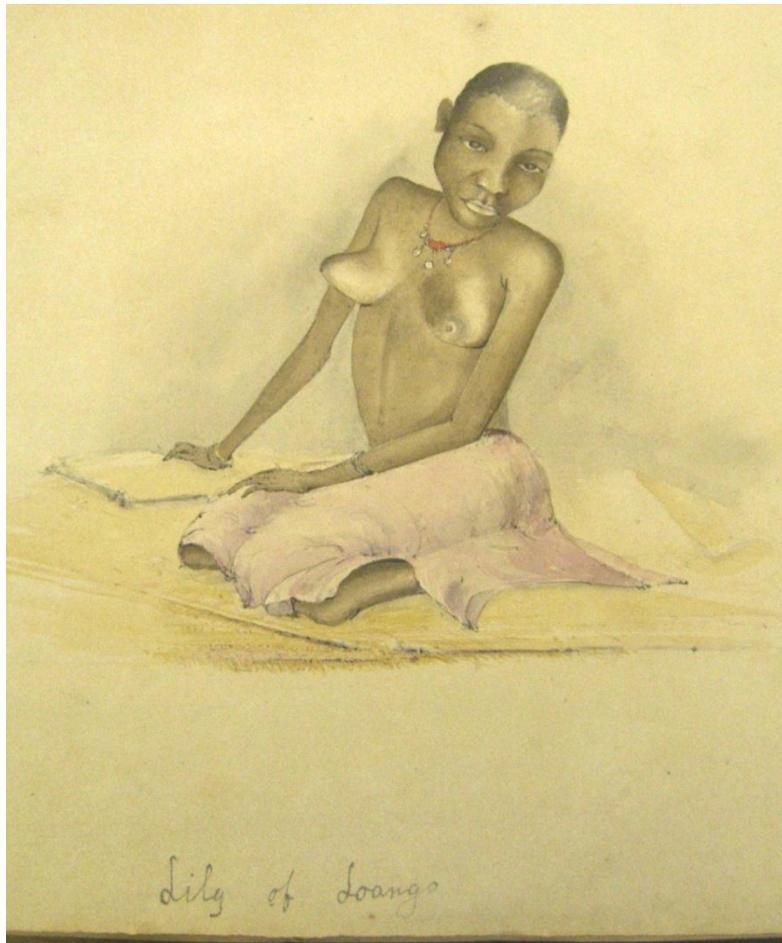


Fig. 45: 'Lily of Loango', Commander Henry Need, c. 1850s (NMM, ART/10).<sup>158</sup>

Such appreciative sentiments explain the occurrence of multiracial relations on shore. Naval men spent years away from their wives and families while serving at sea, and if inclined, sexual relations occurred when possible: the popular image of Jack Tar as a sexual troublemaker had a long history.<sup>159</sup> This was alluded to by Lieutenant Francis Meynell, writing to his father from St Helena in 1846: 'Many of our officers loose [sic] their hearts

<sup>157</sup> 'Journal of a Naval Officer', p. 257.

<sup>158</sup> Photograph taken by the author.

<sup>159</sup> Margarett Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 32.

here but I recollect your advice about the dark eyed ladies of Cadiz'.<sup>160</sup> In 1836, an officer of the *Thalia* wrote of forbidden relations between the women of Fernando Po and European visitors, to ensure 'the chastity of the women'. Adultery was punished with the amputation of a hand, and 'two women were observed by our watering party to have lost a hand each'.<sup>161</sup> Also on Fernando Po in 1827, James Holman observed relations between a female islander and British sailor on board a British boat. The woman 'began to ingratiate herself into the favour of an honest tar, who, nothing loath, seated her near him, with an arm around her neck.'<sup>162</sup>



Fig. 46: 'Officers of HM Brig Bonetta on board a hulk in Sierra Leone, Africa in '37', unknown artist, c. 1837 (NMM, ZBA4579).

This sketch was probably drawn by a crew-member of the *Bonetta*, and a number of his colleagues are named and appear on the *Bonetta*'s Muster Roll. The hulk referred to was probably the *Conflict*, allegedly used as a floating brothel for crews of British vessels visiting Sierra Leone during this period.<sup>163</sup> That it was a place for frivolities is signified by the smoking and drinking. The pose of the African woman depicted suggests she is a prostitute,

<sup>160</sup> NMM, MEY/5, Francis Meynell to his father, 12 January 1846.

<sup>161</sup> UKHO, MP 90/Ca6, Remark Book of HM Sloop *Thalia*, 1836, ff. 652-4.

<sup>162</sup> Holman, *A Voyage*, 24 November 1827.

<sup>163</sup> <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/531534.html> [accessed 5 May 2012].

and her interlinked arms with the sailor identified as ‘Robertson’ implies sexual relations. Surgeon Fleetwood Buckle referred to the sexually transmitted diseases present among his ship’s company in 1866, describing how he ‘examined them for syphilis, caught about 30 all slight cases – excoriation & gonorrhoea’.<sup>164</sup>

It is impossible to know how many sexual interactions took place, as notions of respectability would have prevented most officers from writing about such encounters. However, in his journals of 1862-63 Captain Luce showed little restraint in his frequent referrals to his affections for African women. In Accra he found the women ‘pretty’ and ‘becoming’; while in Bathurst he reported on ‘excellent figures & handsome faces’. At Fernando Po, Luce declared ‘the women are really worth seeing’, with ‘exquisite figures’ and ‘a quiet gentle manner which quite edified us’. Luce described the tattoos of these women, ‘from the breast to the navel’, and claimed that they ‘did not at all mind my tracing these quaint cuts with my finger, or my admiring their beautifully small hands & brilliant white teeth’.<sup>165</sup> While describing the beauty of the coastline, Luce breaks from his narrative and quotes at length a section of the poem ‘Locksley Hall’ by Lord Alfred Tennyson, first published in 1842. Luce wrote that amidst ‘mellow moons & happy skies’ and ‘knots of Paradise’:

Barely comes the trader, rarely floats a European flag.

...

There the passions cramped no longer, shall have scope & breathing space,  
I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.  
Iron jointed, supple-sinewed, they shall dive & then shall run,  
Catch the wild goat by the hair, & hurl their lances in the sun,  
Whistle back the parrots call, & leap the rainbows of the nooks  
Not with blinded eye sight pouring over miserable books.<sup>166</sup>

As seen throughout this chapter, Captain Luce enjoyed the explorative and adventurous elements of anti-slavery service. Here his enjoyment of the wild and untamed nature of West Africa and its people extended to his perceptions of African women. The escapism of this verse is telling: Luce longed for his ‘passions cramped no longer’, and his favoured outlet for

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<sup>164</sup> WL, MS 1395, Fleetwood Buckle Diaries, 12 June and 15 July 1866.

<sup>165</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, ff. 150, 177, 209-10.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., f. 188.

such release was in the perceived wildness and romanticised savagery of an African woman. Thousands of miles from the domestic constraints of home, Luce was clearly attracted to the lack of civilisation, and sexual freedom, of Tennyson's utopian vision.

Luce was married, mentioning how he 'sent home a long letter to the wife', but his sexual frustrations are clear in a number of journal passages from his mission to Dahomey. Commodore Wilmot was asked if he wished to 'receive the personal attentions' of one of the King's daughters during his stay at Abomey. The offer was declined but, in Luce's opinion, 'the good St Anthony never had to withstand more seductive temptations'. Later, three princesses paid the officers a 'long visit', during which Wilmot 'called them our wives, whereupon the one he chose for himself sat down on his knee'. On a further visit, the princesses 'recognised their husbands ... They sat a long time, smoked a little, drank a little, & quietly accepted the trifles [gifts] we gave them'.<sup>167</sup> Whether sexual relations took place is ambiguous, but Luce and Wilmot clearly enjoyed the company of these women in intimate surroundings.

Luce showed particular affection for the Amazons, female warriors of Dahomey (see Fig. 47), whom he described as 'strapping young wenches', again evoking the sexualised savage stereotype. Luce wrote with both racial and gendered prejudice in his descriptions of the warriors, but although deeply patronising and insulting, there is genuine affection in his commentary. While the Amazons 'tried to look fierce ... there was no mistaking their sex & as a whole they were certainly as fine & (after their colour) as pretty a collection of able-bodied, clean-limbed, light, strapping, jolly girls as one could wish to see'.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 3, f. 153; vol. 4, ff. 63, 77-8, 105-6.

<sup>168</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, ff. 51, 134-5.



Fig. 47: 'She-Dong-Hong-Beh: An Amazon in the Dahoman Army' (as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)).<sup>169</sup>

After one of the warriors injured her hand, she was tended to by Luce and Doctor Haran. Luce wrote of the present (an earthenware basin) sent to them both to express her gratitude:

I shall value it more than a china one from a shop. It will be a pleasing reminder of that woman, however low in the scale of humanity, however deeply sunk in barbarism, tho' diverted from her proper sphere & following a bloody & cruel career, can be soft & gentle, kind & grateful, a woman still.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Illustration from Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans* (1851), vol. 1, facing p. 23.

<sup>170</sup> RAI, MS 280, Luce Journals, vol. 4, f. 113.

Although Luce subscribed to common stereotypes of barbarism, he recognised the woman's generous and kindhearted character, and regarded her as a representative of her gender regardless of her situation. Of course not all officers were so appreciative of the African women they met. In 1840, for example, Cornelius Noddall wrote that in the eyes of King Denny each of his seven wives 'may have been considered a "Venus" and most loveable', but in his opinion, "'de gustibus non disputandum" [there's no accounting for taste]'.<sup>171</sup> For others, African women were looked on favourably, certainly with prejudice but without the vicious racism which dictated the views of other observers of the period. In Catherine Hall's words, the opportunity for Englishmen to travel the empire 'with impunity' offered 'forms of authority which they might not be able to achieve at home, visions of "native" sexuality'.<sup>172</sup> Luce's narrative in particular was imbued with a sense of independence and excitement; his encounters with African women exemplify his conceptions of freedom and adventure.

## Conclusion

The period of naval suppression in the Atlantic witnessed complex changes in metropolitan racial attitudes, affected by slavery, abolition, emancipation and the development of scientific racism. These changes were in part reflected in the outlooks of naval officers towards the Africans they met. Few had a distinct idea of different African peoples beyond the catch-all term of 'African'. Perceptions differed according to the observer, made clear by the number of descriptive terms used by naval officers to portray West Africans which included: black, negro, native, fellow, savage, animal, cannibal, nigger, darkies, monkey, creature and specimen. 'Fellow' or 'black' asserted that Africans were no more or less human than any other; 'animal' or 'specimen' suggested an entirely separate species.<sup>173</sup> Generalisations are difficult, but the assumption of British superiority is clear in the majority of naval commentaries. In addition the widely held belief that West Africans required guidance meant that paternalistic overtones were common. The shift in attitudes from mid-century is also

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<sup>171</sup> NMM, AGC/N/33, Noddall, 'A short account', ff. 12-14.

<sup>172</sup> Hall, 'Going a-Trolloping', p. 180.

<sup>173</sup> For example, both discussing African rulers in the early 1850s, Midshipman Henry Rogers wrote that the King at Sharks Point was a 'fellow who called himself King Jem' (31 July 1850); Midshipman Arthur Onslow described the King at Anna Bona as 'a most extraordinary looking animal' (no date, 1851-52).

apparent, as the tendency towards more benign observational reporting in earlier decades was increasingly replaced by the application of fixed stereotypes.<sup>174</sup>

However, it has not been the intention of this chapter to suggest that the opinions of naval men simply reflected those of British society more generally. The paradox of a sailor's identity was that he was of necessity excluded from society when sent out to sea; as Nicholas Rodger has written, 'the seaman remained to his contemporaries profoundly strange'.<sup>175</sup> There were also class and racial differences within the naval hierarchy and at some point in their careers many sailors had been part of a multilingual and ethnically mixed lower-deck community.<sup>176</sup> Compared to most Britons, those serving in the Royal Navy were exposed to an array of cultures and the West African Coast was by no means the only site of cultural exchange in the nineteenth century.<sup>177</sup> As a result, their opinions about African peoples were varied and complex. Some popular racial attitudes would have been felt keenly by naval officers; others may have been expressing nothing more than the stark nature of difference encountered on the West African coast. Relations with West Africans were imbued with exoticism, danger and curiosity; race and colour suggested difference but xenophobia and fear of the unknown undoubtedly also played a part in perceptions. Naval officers involved on anti-slavery service saw and experienced too much blindly to follow popular prejudices of British society.

Ideas of race, nation and empire were interlinked in this period.<sup>178</sup> While knowledge of Africa increased through the accounts of travellers, missionaries and explorers, the popular image

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<sup>174</sup> Richard Price discusses this shift in relation to encounters with the Xhosa of southern Africa in *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>175</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>176</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 154-5.

<sup>177</sup> For example, Captain Henry Keppel and others fought against the pirates and slave raiders of Borneo in the 1840s (see Peter Padfield, *Rule Britannia: The Victorian and Edwardian Navy* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 99-107). In *The Rattlesnake: A Voyage of Discovery to the Coral Sea* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), Jordan Goodman explores encounters between men of the surveying vessel *Rattlesnake* and the indigenous peoples of the New Guinea coast in the 1840s. Examples of accounts of late-eighteenth century encounters between naval men and indigenous peoples include Anne Salmond, *Bligh: William Bligh in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers: The True History of the Meeting of the British First Fleet and the Aboriginal Australians, 1788* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003).

<sup>178</sup> Catherine Hall, 'Introduction: thinking the postcolonial, thinking the empire' in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of empire: Colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 2, 19; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

remained influenced by ‘cultural chauvinism’, and a desire to impose British ideals of civilisation and Christian culture.<sup>179</sup> This chapter has shown that to an extent the reality of naval encounters with Africans differed to those found in popular literature. While the legacy of slavery was pervasive, there are enough positive and considered accounts of African peoples amongst naval narratives to challenge Nancy Stepan’s assertion that in the British mind of the nineteenth century, the African ‘was still mentally, morally and physically a slave.’<sup>180</sup> However, while the encounters of naval officers and West Africans involved significant dialogue, interaction, and attempts at understanding, this communication was always limited. Naval narratives occupy a unique position in the culture of European contact with West Africa in this period. Many British representatives – missionaries, merchants, traders, officials, administrators – were colonisers in the traditional sense, and engaged in colonial relations with a sense of permanence and the need to create settlements.<sup>181</sup> Men of the anti-slavery patrols do not fit within this category: they were British agents of empire, but their engagement with ‘others’ was temporary and transient. This helps to explain the variations in these narratives, with officers regarding themselves as travellers, explorers and mediators, or no more than servicemen trying to get a job done, all offering a fleeting but revealing commentary on those they met on the exotic and dangerous West African coast.

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<sup>179</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp. xii, 341-2, 479; McCaskie, ‘Cultural Encounters’, p. 672.

<sup>180</sup> Stepan, *Idea of Race*, p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> Hall, ‘Introduction’, p. 16; see p. 5 for a succinct explanation of the term ‘colonialism’.

## Conclusion

This thesis has shown that naval officers engaged in suppression of the slave trade on the West African coast were expected to fulfil an array of responsibilities. Those of law enforcement, capture and coercion are important but relatively well-known. There were other roles that dominated officers' experiences of anti-slavery service: as humanitarians, Christians, negotiators, explorers, facilitators, innovators, guardians, liberators. While their individual experiences varied enormously, as a collective their time on the West African coast was as instrumental and significant as any other group of British anti-slavery representatives in the early to mid-nineteenth century. One route to conclude this survey of officers' attitudes and beliefs surrounding ideas of anti-slavery, empire and identity is to evaluate their predominant experiences, their commitment to the abolitionist cause, and their understanding of the nature of their duty on the West African coast.

A universal element of naval duty was born of patriotism and pride in one's work. As Michael Lewis has asserted, the overriding motivations of naval personnel were: 'Predilection, the inborn love of such a life, Patriotism, the inborn love of Country, and Ambition, the urge to better oneself'.<sup>1</sup> The nineteenth-century British naval officer was expected to set an example for society to follow: the navy, it was believed, provided 'the tone of moral feeling and conduct to a large proportion of our population'.<sup>2</sup> Professionalism and attachment to 'manly, seamanlike' notions of duty are therefore constantly cited in officers' narratives.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, anti-slavery service was no different to any other naval commission, in that the desire to do the best job possible, to impress superiors and advance one's career outweighed all else. Before his return to England in the *Sybil*, with his crew much depleted by sickness, Commodore Francis Collier wrote to the Admiralty: 'It becomes a proud satisfaction for me to add that in 32 months this ship and tender have captured 6,575 slaves and that the Squadron since I have had the honor of being entrusted with the command have captured 11,914.'<sup>4</sup> Collier's calculation of his success in numerical terms depersonalises the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition 1814-1864: A Social History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British sea power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 194, quoting a retired naval surgeon in a pamphlet published in 1824.

<sup>3</sup> Phrase used by Henry Dundas Trotter to describe Lieutenant Webb's 1843 despatch to the Admiralty regarding the Niger Expedition (NMM, BGY/W/2).

<sup>4</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, Incomplete letter from Francis Collier, no date [c. 1830], ff. 475-8.

Africans liberated under his command, but he was stressing his achievements directly in relation to the task he was given: to intercept slave ships and release the enslaved.

This form of professional zeal was in some ways unconnected with the day-to-day nature of naval action against the slave trade. In a letter home, Midshipman Augustus Arkwright wrote about his understanding of the nature of duty in these terms: 'Our country has the first demand for our services, and private convenience, or happiness, must ever give way to the public good. Duty, is the great business of a sea officer ... all private considerations, must give way to it, however painful'.<sup>5</sup> Arkwright pragmatically separated professionalism and duty from 'private considerations' and personal experiences. However, life on the West African coast was so unlike any other commission as to make Arkwright's detachment of professional from personal motivations impossible for many. The extraordinary nature of anti-slavery service meant that on occasion understandings of professional duty converged with an individual's spiritual obligation and religious imperative to end the slave trade. Commodore John Hayes believed that conflicts with slavers 'operate in an extraordinary way to keep alive that Warlike Spirit in the officers and men'.<sup>6</sup> Commodore George Collier's reports and correspondence exemplify these complex relations between naval professionalism and moral values, whereby his passionate abolitionist beliefs dominated his official reportage and the manner in which he discharged his duty as Commodore.

Many officers were driven by beliefs in the anti-slavery cause. Post 1807, abolitionism evolved from a social and political crusade to state policy. Britain's military institutions may have had a non-political status, but naval officers could not ignore the principled implications of their new position, facilitating humanitarian intervention on the international stage. Through its suppression efforts, Britain, declared Commodore Charles Hotham, had earned a 'national character for philanthropy and humanity'.<sup>7</sup> Many naval officers personified this character. They were affected by the human trauma and dislocation of what they witnessed in the slave trade, experiences which transcended their normal workload. Since the late eighteenth century, the horrors of the Middle Passage and the sufferings of 'fellow creatures' on slave ships had been well-voiced in abolitionist texts. Naval officers like George Collier or Joseph Denman contributed their own testimonies to these public discourses surrounding

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<sup>5</sup> DRO, D5991/10/54, Augustus Arkwright to his mother from Bathurst, 21 March 1842.

<sup>6</sup> TNA, ADM 1/1, John Hayes to Captain George Elliot, 6 May 1831, ff. 418-30.

<sup>7</sup> HHC, DDHO 10/11, Charles Hotham to the Earl of Auckland, 23 March 1848.

abolition. As military men trained to witness the brutalities of war and to an extent hardened to inhumanity, the profound emotion in their narratives of their encounters with the slave trade is striking. Their sense of high moral purpose was in contrast to later writing, however, influenced by shifting racial attitudes and Victorian concepts of masculinity, whereby sentiment assumed a less positive sense.

However, not all officers were, or aspired to be, humanitarians motivated by the moral imperative to end the slave trade. Other narratives from the frontline of suppression present an alternative reality: one of indifference, self-interest and concerns for survival. Conditions of service were frequently tedious, pestilent, dangerous and traumatic. With plummeting morale on the squadron many questioned their commitment to the anti-slavery cause, and were concerned solely with material rewards. A normalised incentive structure based around prize money existed to facilitate extraordinary work. Unlike missionaries, for example, who had an element of choice in their actions and unquestioned moral commitment to the anti-slavery mission, naval officers were military men paid to confront the slave trade and therefore required compensation for the risks they faced. Some men asserted that disgust at the nature of life and work on the West African coast overrode all else. Such disillusionment led to cases of officers orchestrating abolitionist policy while also indifferent towards it, and at times publicly and privately in opposition to both naval abolitionist policy and fundamental beliefs at the heart of the anti-slavery mission.

The men examined in this study who engaged most profoundly with the dynamics of the anti-slavery cause were invariably those who were assigned tasks on shore. Suppression of the slave trade took different forms, at sea in the interception of slavers, but also on land, in attempts to eradicate slave trading from African societies by transforming the beliefs and practices of African peoples. Britain's maritime supremacy had an impact on notions of empire and identity in West Africa. It might have seemed that 'the Royal Navy had gained an empire and lost a role' after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, but the humanitarian cause provided many new responsibilities for naval personnel.<sup>8</sup> However, humanitarianism in this context had many faces. Anti-slavery was perceived as a standard for civilised nations, and as

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<sup>8</sup> N. A. M. Rodger quoted in Jane Samson, 'Too zealous guardians? The Royal navy and the South Pacific labour trade' in David Killingray and David Omissi (eds), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, 1700-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 71. This was not only the case in West Africa as Samson's *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 7-41, makes clear.

its prime proponent, Britain believed it had a duty to fight the moral crusade to save non-Europeans from slavery. Naval officers absorbed these principles in their dealings with West African societies. Thus Commander Arthur Eardley Wilmot wrote in his published defence of the squadron in 1853:

England alone is determined to maintain the principles she has so long professed to the world, and not to flinch in the setting forth of her strength and power, until this glorious object shall have been accomplished. We stand alone, the Champions of this Exalted Cause. If Africa is ever to be free and happy, England must be the Apostle of that freedom.<sup>9</sup>

The anti-slavery message regarding the necessity of superior British influence to teach Africans, in Wilmot's words, 'how you can make your country the richest upon earth' was a constant throughout the period of naval suppression. Captain Columbine's letter to the rulers at Sherbro in 1810 extolled the same faith in the British enterprise as Wilmot's letter to the Commander-in-Chief at Abeokuta over forty years later.<sup>10</sup> In its broader context this message took British superiority for granted, and also led to coercion and pressure, increasingly regarded as justification for increased naval intervention and imperial expansion, as seen at Lagos. Negotiations with African rulers represented another mode of exerting imperial power, to achieve abolition and end those cultural practices like human sacrifice deemed unacceptable by the British. However, the officers tasked with the navigation of these relationships with African peoples were often confronted with the obstinacy of African rulers and the ambiguities of societies based on war and enslavement.

These relationships were part of naval officers' involvement in wider personal, trade and religious networks of communication concerning anti-slavery in West Africa, which included colonial government, missionaries, explorers, and British merchants. In this context, for the duration of their service on the coast officers had 'imperial careers', in David Lambert and Alan Lester's words.<sup>11</sup> They spent time with local people, and articulated informed and

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur Parry Eardley Wilmot, *A Letter to The Right Honorable Viscount Palmerston on the Present State of the African Slave Trade and on the Necessity of Increasing the African Squadron* (London: James Ridgway, London; James Ridgway, 1853), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 30-1 and Chapter 4, pp. 138-9.

<sup>11</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Introduction: Imperial Spaces, imperial subjects' in idem (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-2.

considered reflections on the societies in which they spent time, perceptions which were fed back to British policy-makers. As such their narratives also bear witness to the flow of publications and correspondence between West Africa and Britain, the formal and informal networks through which information was exchanged.<sup>12</sup> As many scholars have identified, the ways in which empire was envisaged involved more than a projection of metropolitan values, and naval officers played their part in the interaction between different cultures. On one hand this was part of officers' official responsibilities; in attempts to create 'an imperial knowledge system', British agents were armed with information about how to interact with and influence local peoples.<sup>13</sup> On the other, as Captain Luce's long journals exemplify, cultural encounters were also bound to personal experiences. His narratives reflect the impact of travel literature and the emergence of biographical writing in the nineteenth century, the practice of subjectively exploring one's own experiences and engaging with different landscapes and peoples.<sup>14</sup>

However, the value of these knowledge systems in informing official policy could be undermined by experience, and naval officers were looked to for remedies and recommendations. Some officers offered insight into the nature of the anti-slavery mission in West Africa which appeared to elude many policy-makers. For example, Captain H. B. Young of the *Hydra* identified the following fundamental limitations of abolitionist policy in a report to the Admiralty in 1850:

It seems to me indeed somewhat strange that we should be striving to force upon a reluctant people, even so benevolent a project, without at the same time endeavouring to make them comprehend its advantages and benevolent character. At present the natives perceive the English to be a nation both wise and powerful, but they cannot apprehend the motive, which really gives rise on our part to such violent and incessant attacks on the slave trade.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially chapter 7.

<sup>14</sup> Regina Gagnier, *Subjectivities: a history of self-representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> TNA, ADM 123/173, 'Best means to be adopted for the abolition of the African slave trade, 1850', Reply of Captain H.B. Young, 11 July 1850.

Young advocated a shift in British thinking. The promotion of ‘good will towards this benighted race’ was not helped by the practice of ‘compelling them ... to reform such of their customs as we have set a mark upon’.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Commander Henry James Matson believed that the foundations of British influence in West Africa should be ‘an empire of opinion’ rather than ‘an empire of bayonets’. Matson linked these considerations to the perceived ‘prestige’ attached to the national character, based on philanthropy and benevolence rather than intimidation and force. He hoped that ‘future generations in that country [West Africa] have reason to bless, and not to curse the name of Britain.’<sup>17</sup>

However, not all naval officers were so reasoned and concerned in their opinions relating to the governance of other peoples. Other ideas about national character and the proper use of British power were bound up with perceptions of racial identity and how far freedom was regarded as applicable to some non-Europeans. As Alan Lester has argued, the discourses of Britishness overseas encompassed objectives of ‘freeing’, ‘protecting’ and ‘civilising’ the empire’s subjects to a uniquely British standard.<sup>18</sup> By their nature, these dialogues raised important questions about race. The moral imperative of the anti-slavery cause to convert African societies and eradicate slave trading was to a large extent based on racially defined understandings of ‘others’. Abolitionism therefore introduced moral arguments into discussions of empire, whereby British, African, and other identities were defined and contested.<sup>19</sup>

Complexities surrounding naval officers’ racial attitudes abounded. The belief that Africans were not capable of moral improvement without humanitarian intervention was propounded even by the most sympathetic naval officers, George Collier among them. Anti-slavery views did not necessarily affect how officers perceived African peoples, and racial and cultural theories of paternalism and trusteeship about Africans requiring protection gained strength as the century progressed. Many commentators like Captain Columbine deplored the slave trade but believed in racial inequality, and beliefs in racial tolerance did not necessarily extend from sympathies with the plight of the enslaved. With the publication of his journals, naval

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Commander Henry James Matson, *Remarks on the Slave Trade and African Squadron*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: James Ridgeway, Piccadilly, 1848), p. 67

<sup>18</sup> Alan Lester, ‘British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 54 (2002), pp. 25-6.

<sup>19</sup> Derek R. Peterson, ‘Introduction’ in idem (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), p. 31.

surgeon Peter Leonard hoped to encourage ‘the abolition of a trade so revolting to every feeling of humanity’, yet he also wrote about the Africans he met with vehement racism.<sup>20</sup>

The opinions of Captain J. P. Luce are another example of the variance and changes in racial attitudes during the century; he expressed an interest in African society and people and yet believed that the innate character of African people made missionary attempts futile.

There were two main sites of racial encounters – on board prize vessels and on shore. In contrast to interactions on shore, to an extent prize vessels remained British ‘territory’. The capture of a slave vessel was another context in which the navy became a symbol of British national character and dedication to liberty, and officers celebrated this role. However, some of their encounters with enslaved Africans provide an alternative to this celebratory narrative and offer insight into both racial attitudes in the navy and the place of racial identity in the British anti-slavery movement. Officers’ treatment of recaptives was often influenced by preconceptions and prejudices; emotions of sympathy and compassion were matched by indifference and self-interest. Racial attitudes played a part in officers’ consideration of those released under their authority. In 1848, Lieutenant George Kenyon wrote that he was ‘heartly [sic] tired of the Bights & the Coast altogether & wish I had done with nigger driving.’<sup>21</sup> Kenyon was a successful officer in relation to suppression of the slave trade, but his comparative use of the contemporary phrase relating to plantation owners’ management of their slaves says much about his beliefs in the anti-slavery cause, and the treatment that those who may have come under his command could expect.

As conditions of the Middle Passage persisted, so too did discourses of servitude and control in the liberation process. British apprenticeship and emigration schemes revealed the ambiguities of freedom for those supposedly granted freedom by the navy, and notions of debt and obligation continued to frame relations. When Captain Heath received a request for help from the liberated Africans at Badagry, in fear that they would ‘again fall into the hands of the slave dealers, from the iron-grasp of which our Queen has graciously delivered us’, he

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, in His Majesty’s Ship Dryad* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1833), preface.

<sup>21</sup> SRO, DD/X/GRA/11, George Kenyon to an unidentified recipient from the *Cygnets* in the Bight of Benin, 12 December 1848. The letter was probably intended for Commodore Hotham, as Kenyon began: ‘My dear Sir, At last I am able to send you another prize ...’. Kenyon had been on the coast since 1842. His phrase compares to ‘nigger hunting’, used by an anonymous officer in a published letter from 1845 to describe service ‘on the most miserable station in the wide world’ (*Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian*, 11 October 1845).

counseled against naval interference. Heath added that he hoped, ‘you will be able to repay the debt of gratitude you owe England by protecting the missionaries & merchants’.<sup>22</sup>

While this thesis has argued for naval officers’ engagement with the themes of anti-slavery, empire and identity, many narratives were also written with a sense of detachment and transience. Like any other naval commission, the anti-slavery patrols represented a temporary set of conditions, and officers’ experiences of suppression were to an extent formed of a series of transitional moments: at port, searching rivers, conveying a prize vessel or negotiating a treaty in the African interior. The constant conditions of anti-slavery service were usually regarded negatively, such as long periods at sea, the threat of disease, the inhospitable climate, or frustrations with methods and tactics. Compared with other Europeans in West Africa, many officers maintained a distance from attempts to achieve ‘a continent explored, explained and domesticated to British ideals of Christian culture’.<sup>23</sup> It was certainly not expected of them. Naval officers were temporarily deployed in this anti-slavery environment, and could just as easily be posted to another station.

However, this transience also gave officers a degree of independence in thought regarding their accounts of West Africa and the slave trade, which perhaps explains the variations found within the narratives taken as a whole. Outside of their professional obligations, they had no agenda to follow, and those who expressed beliefs in the abolitionist cause were not required to do so. Yet the humanitarian project was inseparable from the agency of naval officers because its success or failure depended on their actions. They were seeing and experiencing the horrors of the slave trade, reflections that fuelled anti-slavery arguments and contributed to the transfer of ideas in a transatlantic context of missionaries, abolitionists and travellers. Their narratives were inevitably shaped by their travels, by those they encountered, and by their interpretations of humanitarian discourse. For many this engagement was temporary, but it makes their insights no less valuable. Others, like Joseph Denman for example, seized the opportunity to contribute to change.

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<sup>22</sup> SCAUB, CMS Archive, CA2/05/1-11, correspondence between ‘The liberated African subjects at Badagry’ and Captain Heath, 23-24 July 1851.

<sup>23</sup> T.C. McCaskie, ‘Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century’ in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 686.

Slavery remained a profoundly contested concept in the nineteenth century. The sites of naval suppression – naval vessels, slave ships, Sierra Leone, African settlements – can be regarded as further spaces in which the ‘war of representation’ over slavery and the slave trade were fought, a contest which took place in the press, in publications and paintings.<sup>24</sup> Naval officers added significant and unique contributions to these debates and dialogues regarding, for example, the virtues of the anti-slavery cause, the duty of care to the enslaved and the appropriate form of freedom for Africans. They therefore deserve a prominent place in the cast of actors in the West African anti-slavery mission, albeit that their role invariably took a professional and military form. Debates surrounding the enslaved were further influenced by instances of disease, high mortality and poor conditions on the squadron, to the extent where officers’ anxieties for their own welfare and security often outweighed humanitarian concern for African lives. An examination of naval narratives adds much to an understanding of the complexities of the British anti-slavery mission in West Africa in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Opinions and ideas about slavery, empire and identity were varied and constantly evolving. Officers’ experiences reveal pride in the British cause, emotions of sympathy and humanity, but also anxieties and racial tensions regarding the ambiguities of freedom, and their own struggles for survival on the West African coast.

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<sup>24</sup> David Lambert, ‘Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation over Slavery’, *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), pp. 103-4. See also Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 106-8. Similarly, in *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768-1829* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), Geoff Quilley argues for ‘fluid, contested and conflicted’ relationships between empire and nation, expressed in the visual imagery of the sea (p. 3).

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