



Black Liberators: The Role of Africans & Arabs sailors in the Royal Navy within the Indian Ocean 1841-1941.

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The study of linguistics indicates that the Swahili culture spread from the Bajuni islands along the Kenyan coast northwards and southwards, perhaps using the Mtepe sewn boats. Archaeologists suggest that this migration may have included a people who were at least partly Moslem.

Aided by the monsoon winds, various peoples have been traversing the Indian Ocean since antiquity. The intra-Asian trade had included slaves prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Africans on Arab and Indian vessels included freeman as well as slaves.

Commercial and cultural contacts across the Indian Ocean gave rise to a number of major maritime-based cultures along the Indian Ocean littoral. These included the Bajau or Sea-Gypsies of Indonesia and the Swahili from East Africa – both of which have resulted in languages (Bahasa Malay/Indonesia and Kiswahili) that have thrived under the subsequent European colonial rule to become the essential basis for national and regional identities.

There are few studies on the role of Africans in the fleets of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French or the British as well as on their role in other European navies. The use of British census records in this area of study is rare and has its restrictions. Census returns do not provide total coverage. British Census recordings at ten-year intervals, offer a demographic “window” at the start of each decade. The census returns utilised for this paper are those published in the years 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1901. Returns subsequent to that date are not available for public view.

Since the early fifteenth century Portuguese incursions into the Indian Ocean, Europeans required the maritime knowledge of the region’s indigenous mariners. Portuguese expansion in the sixteenth century relied on the charts of Arab, Moslem Gujarati and Malabar pilots. The Portuguese experienced considerable crew losses during the six to eight month journey to India and voluntary or involuntary recruitment of crew from within the Indian Ocean was essential for the return voyage. In Asia there was further loss of European men tempted into private trading prospects within the intra-Asian commerce usually on Asian-built ships under the command of Portuguese or Eurasian officers. The great carracks of the seventeenth century that travelled between Goa and Nagasaki (Japan) were entirely operated by Asian and African crews, with the exception of Portuguese officers, soldiers and gunners, as is indicated on the Namban screens painted by the Japanese. It is possible that there were some galley-slaves deployed by the Portuguese during the early part of the sixteenth century and these may not have been entirely from Africa.

The term “Sidis” or “Seedies”, derived originally from the Arabic “Seyyedi” or Lord, referred to Africans in Islamic northern India. In the early seventeenth century these Afro-Asians (Africans in Asia) Sidis (or Habshis meaning Ethiopians) were prominent in the naval fleets of the Western coast of India as slave-sailors (galley slaves), free crewmen or even commanders. Most notable of these was the Bijapur fleet and the fleets of Malik Ambar (an African) of Ahmadnagar. The British East India Company, allowed the Sidis of Janjira to use the British port of Bombay resulting in an Afro-Asian community in that city.

The Dutch, entering the intra-Asian trade in the seventeenth century, may have brought African seamen (free or enslaved) from West Africa to the Cape Colony in South Africa and then across the

Indian Ocean to Indonesia and to the Dejima Island, Japan. The Dutch also brought Moslem Malay and Javanese slaves and sailors to the Cape Colony, forming one of the most interesting port communities on the periphery of the Indian Ocean – the Cape Malays. A forgotten feature of the seventeenth century, especially in the Western Indian Ocean, was the presence of African pirates aboard ships captained by men of all nationalities, including Africans.

The English East India Company ousted the Portuguese and Dutch in the Indian Ocean by the beginning of the eighteenth century and was just as starved for crew as its predecessors. Initially they searched among the Indo-Portuguese Christian community of Calcutta and Madras. Men from these communities were known as Lascars – a term originating from the Persian and Arabic “Al-Ashkar” and converted into Lascarim by the Portuguese. The Lascar crews were even taken to London by ships such as the Boscawen

in 1757-60. On her final voyage in 1761-65, the Boscawen returned to London via Cape Town and St. Helena and out of the thirteen non-British crew paid-off in London, one had a Moslem name and a number of the others had West African names such as Babtunde or Tunday (Yoruba), Akua (Fante), and Badu (Akan). This suggests that the East India Company employed Africans on their ships sailing between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The Afro - American freemen

In 1775, the British were forced to consider how best to bolster their forces in North America. They sought to gain allies among the Native-Americans and the Afro-Americans and offered freedom to any slave who left his rebel master and joined the British forces. The first three-hundred Afro-Americans were thus enlisted in the Royal Ethiopian Regiment. The loss of the American colonies to the British in 1776 resulted in the transportation of thousands of Afro-American soldiers (and their women) to Britain. Many joined the army while others went to work in the merchant and royal navies. The independence of the United States resulted in the loss of British naval bases in North America. The availability of African labour may have been one of the considerations for the development of Halifax, Nova Scotia (opened in 1759) and Kingston, Ontario (1788- 853) as Royal Navy yards. Free Africans were crucial to the development of the Bermuda base after 1795. Despite the lack of strong evidence for this period it seems highly probable that there were some free Afro-Americans employed by the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean in the early eighteenth century. The stories of able seamen provide some hints. William Hall, born in Nova Scotia in 1827, was part of a Naval Brigade in November 1857 on HMS Shannon that helped relieve the British Residency at Lucknow, India. He was the son of a freed slave. He was the first black man to be awarded the Victoria Cross. (Hall remained in the Royal Navy rising to the position of Quartermaster and Petty Officer on HMS Peterel before retiring in 1876).

The “Prize Negroes” of South Africa

The Royal Navy was also responsible for attacking enemy ships in the Atlantic frequently encountering enslaved Africans. Unsure as to what to do with these “Prize Negroes”, the Royal Navy looked for profitable markets, one of which was Cape Town under the British rule between 1795 and 1803. Cape Town already had a community of Cape Coloureds of free and slave origin including the distinct Moslem community of Cape Malays. The new Prize Africans were often from Mozambique Island or elsewhere in Portuguese East Africa. For three years the Cape Province reverted to Dutch rule and when it returned to the British in 1806, a naval squadron was established at Simon’s Town. This Cape Station was to be responsible for the entire African Coast from Freetown in West Africa around the Cape to Somalia in the Horn of Africa including the islands of the Atlantic (St. Helena and Ascension). At the time of the Abolition of Slave Trade in 1807, there was a strong Royal Navy presence in the South Atlantic. The demand for labour in South Africa had increased (partly due to the Abolition Act itself). The capture of slave ships and their human cargo of Prize Negroes became an important source of revenue for the Royal Navy. These Africans were “liberated” at Cape Town where they were “apprenticed”. In fact these men, women and children were granted to local farmers and tradesmen and were a little better off than slaves. Some were granted to the Royal Navy. This “apprentice” system indentured the freed slaves to an employer for fourteen years. The 1807 Abolition Act initially applied to the Atlantic and only to British ships and actually served as the basis to increase the slave trade in the Indian Ocean. The first stage in the British attempts to end the Indian Ocean slave trade began in 1822 when the Moresby Treaty was signed by Captain Fairfax Moresby of the Royal Navy and Sultan Seyyid Sa’id. This Treaty forbade the sale of slaves to Christian traders and ships sailing from the Zanzibar Sultanate south of Cape Delgado, or east of a line from Diu (Gujarat) to Socotra. The East India Company’s monopoly over trade in India ended in 1814 and in China in 1833. In 1839 a British force from Bombay under Captain S. B. Haines attacked and captured Aden, an event that

was to signal a change in Britain's position in the Indian Ocean from the East India Company based commercial role to that of a quasi-total domination by the Royal Navy.

The Mozbeikers – Indentured freedmen

The ending of slavery in 1838 resulted in a further labour shortage in South Africa. In the Cape of Good Hope the period of indenture for freed slaves, had been gradually shortened, and by 1839 new arrivals were bound for seven years and their children were now free from indenture. In 1842 the Royal Navy was granted the right to search Portuguese vessels south of the equator. However, it was only in 1843 that a Royal Navy warship of the anti-slavery squadron based at Simon's Town ventured as far north as Zanzibar. As a result of the Anglo-Portuguese diplomatic moves, the Royal Navy ships based at Simon's Town took a more serious role in the liberation of Africans from the Portuguese East Africa. By this time, the Prize Negroes mainly from the Mozambique Channel and their descendants had already established their own settlement at Simon's Town. Others had established a small community at Papendorp (or Woodstock today) where they initially worked to carry goods from the lighters on the beach. These Mozbeikers worked so hard that their name became synonymous with "slave". The British government stipulated the registration and "marking" of newly-arrived Prize Negroes, who would now be indentured by auction. Although at first sight this appears to be a step backwards, in fact the new act called for an attempt to keep families and even ethnic groups together. Children under thirteen were obliged to work for their masters but could not be separated from their mothers and the Prize Negroes had to receive a payment from their masters. The period of indenture continued to decline in the Cape, but there was a constant flow of the Prize Negroes who provided a labour force in the 1850s. The Mozbeikers do not appear in the British census returns for the Royal Navy. In 1845 the British had reduced the slave trade further by prohibiting the same between Zanzibar and Oman. Technically the trade could only occur between the towns along the Swahili and Somali coast and Zanzibar. The Royal Navy consisted of sailing vessels and was over-stretched. Portuguese, Brazilian, French and American vessels were running a thriving business from the Mozambique Island and Quilimane, while smaller local Arab vessels fed these markets. An encounter with a slaving dhow exposed one of the first problems faced by the Royal Navy. Expecting to see slaves in shackles and chains, they instead saw many women and children. They could not question these passengers or the captains who only spoke Kiswahili or Arabic. Therefore they could not ascertain if these women and children were "legal slaves" being taken to a Zanzibari port or slaves headed for Asia. An added complication was that these dhows often traded in ivory, hides and grain, and took on "passage slaves", - those given to the Nakhoda (Captain) as payment for passage or goods transport. The Nakhoda would get his payment at the end of the voyage by selling the slave.

The Kru – Freemen of the Atlantic

When the last indentures came to an end in the 1850s, the Cape government attempted to employ freemen from the Kru people from West Africa. In the Atlantic Ocean, the Kru people of Liberia were famous as mariners. For centuries they had served aboard European and American trading ships as sailors, cooks and interpreters. Kru traditions suggest that they originated from the interior and probably reached their present territory by the sixteenth century. They belong to a group of peoples who occupy more than half the territory of present day Republic of Liberia. By the eighteenth century they were working on European ships. During the slave trade period, the Kru are said to have extracted a promise from the European traders that they should not be taken as slaves. In return, they allowed slaves from the interiors to be brought across their territory. The traditional Kru facial tattoo – a vertical line at the centre of the forehead said to represent the mast of a ship - was adopted during this period in order to be identified by the slavers. The 1861 census returns show the existence of "Kru" and possibly Prize Negroes on HMS Espoir off West Africa. There were Kru men on HMS Sharpshooter off the Congo mouth, eight of them on board HMS Persian off Mossel Bay, South Africa and twenty-one across the Indian Ocean on HMS Algerine at Hong Kong. The Royal Navy vessel, HMS Meander was the base for recording the 1861 Ascension Island census which reveals the transportation of West Africans and the employment of 118 Kru men as labourers by the Royal Navy at Ascension. The Kru proved to be good workers and later in 1861, Rear-Admiral Walker requested the Admiralty to let him use 'Kru men' on the Cape Station in South Africa. In January 1862, authorisation was received for large ships to carry ten Kru men plus one Head Kru man and a second Head Kru man, while the smaller ships were allowed six with two supervisors. Since that period, vessels ordered for the Cape of Good Hope called at Sierra Leone for the purpose of contracting Kru men. In his General Memo 24 of 1862, Walker informed the captains in the squadron, much to their

surprise of the approval. As the census returns for 1861 suggest, Kru men had already been in service on the station prior to this permit. The authorisation extended the allowance of ships carrying them in 1862. By 1863 every ship on the Cape station carried Kru men numbering nearly 100 on the East Coast of Africa, although the number of vessels had been reduced to three ships. In 1864 the Admiralty merged the Cape with the East Indies Command in an attempt to compensate for the low number of ships. When George Sullivan returned to the Indian Ocean in 1866 at the height of his career, he arrived as a captain in charge of HMS Pantaloon, a steam sloop. Recalling his younger days in the Indian Ocean, he was quick to acquire a reliable Zanzibari Moslem interpreter called Jumah. In 1867, Sullivan was appointed commander of HMS Daphne. He commissioned him for service on the East Indies Station. When Jumah died at Zanzibar in 1869, Sullivan made a special visit to his widow to settle the balance pay and prizemoney due to her husband. From around this time the Royal Navy began employing Zanzibaris as interpreters and crewmen. Naval commanders pursued the suppression of slave trade with varied vigour. There were never more than six or seven ships available, operating sometimes from the Cape of Good Hope Station and after 1869 also from the East Indies Station.

The Sidis –Freedmen of the Indian Ocean

There were essentially three types of freedmen employed by the Royal Navy: Africans liberated by the navy and employed directly; Africans liberated and taken by the Royal Navy to be employed in Bombay and the Seychelles; and manumitted Africans employed in the ports of East Africa. All of these men were termed “Seedies” by the Royal Navy (Spelt “Sidis” in East Africa and in India). In the nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian English usage, Sidis came to denote Moslem seamen originally from the Swahili coast, especially Zanzibar, particularly sailors and harbour workers. British census records indicate the birthplaces, names and occupations of Sidis which helps to differentiate between three groups of Sidis. Africans were given various names by crew of the ship that liberated them. Sometimes they were given the name of the ship itself; others were given a name based on something they asked for by mimicking, on a duty that they undertook on board, or even after a member of British royalty. After being deposited in Bombay by British ships, young African freedmen sometimes entered the British navy as cabin boys. At least one freed African was working at Multan in the Royal Navy in 1849. In Bombay, freed Africans joined Indian ship crews and in 1864, more than half of the (probably under reported) two thousand Africans in Bombay earned their living as sailors or in related maritime work. Younger Africans were sent to mission schools such as the one at Nasik, where they learned various skills. Between 1861 and 1872, the Royal Navy delivered 2,409 “liberated” Africans to the Seychelles. Many of these were indentured to planters, but some were employed by the Royal Navy. Sidis from the Seychelles usually bore European names and were likely to be Christians. Many Sidis were escapees or manumitted slaves. Records often show their birthplace as Zanzibar, where slaves or freedmen constituted a significant portion of the population. Sometimes they are described as born in “Africa – not known”. Frequently they are shown as born at a port known for its slave market such as Zanzibar, Kilwa, or Mozambique. Many of these men were nominally Moslem and the recurring common names of freedmen on the census returns include Mubarak (or Mabruki), Farhan, Faraj, Murjan, and Marzuq. Family names remain “unknown”. The first Sidi seaman to be known in Europe was Farhan, hired by the explorer Lt. John H. Speke in Aden in early 1855 for his expedition to Somaliland. It is not surprising that the plan announced by the Admiralty on 7th April 1870 to end the service of the Kru men on the East Coast was met with opposition from the officers of the Cape Station. This move was prompted by the difficulty in bringing the West African Kru men back and forth to the East African Station. It was therefore decided by the Admiralty that Sidis should replace Kru men. Lushington was sceptical about their abilities and estimated that it would take 12 Sidis to make up for 8 Kru men. Commodore Heath was totally opposed to the change as were most of the officiating ship commanders on the station. Support for employment of the Sidis came from other quarters, including the white explorers of the period. Some of these explorer Sidis had been sailors in the Royal Navy. Rahan for example worked with the Royal Navy in Rangoon before joining Speke in 1852. Frij who received a medal from the Royal Geographical Society travelled with Speke in 1860-63. Mabruki Majera had served on a man-of-war before working with Thomson and Johnson in the 1880’s.

The Zanzibaris – Freeman of the Indian Ocean

The census records indicate a new strategy to conduct the antislavery campaign further up the East African coast on the night of April 2, 1871. Three vessels were moored at Zanzibar and the fourth was among the Seychelles islands. The Royal Navy was still engaging African crew from the West Coast.

There were eight Kru men on board HMS Dryad, seven on HMS Columbine and six on HMS Nymph. In fact the Kru men continued to be part of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean at least until the First Zulu War of 1879 and the Boer revolt in 1880. Fourteen Kru men are listed on the memorial plaque of the officers and men of HMS Baodicea in Simon's Town. For the first time in the census returns we see the appearance of Zanzibari crewmen. The Nymph employed four Zanzibaris, and two of them are described by the census returns as "Kru men" although originating from the Indian Ocean. Of the other two Zanzibaris one was an interpreter. Perhaps the most revealing census return is that of HMS Nimble at Zanzibar. Out of a total crew of sixty-one, there were five "Seedy Boys", three Zanzibaris and one from the Comoro Islands. The Zanzibari called Tom Nimble is definitely a freedman. Tom's surname suggests that he was freed by HMS Nimble. Another "seedy boy" called Jack Ropeman is described as born in "Kilwa and Central Africa". He too is probably a freed slave. The Royal Navy did liberate many slaves from Eastern Africa and was in a serious dilemma regarding their future. With the increase in the price of sugar in the 1870s and a shortage of labour in Natal, the Royal Navy "freed" almost 600 Africans in Durban between 1873 and 1880. Many of these people were nominally Moslems and the Zulus called these freed East Africans Zanzibaris, while the Indians called them "Siddhis" after the Afro-Asians in India.

Zanzibari Interpreters

It had been decided that a permanent base ship be established in East Africa that could be placed under the supervision of an experienced officer. In 1874 George Sullivan returned to the Indian Ocean to take command of HMS London. He faced the problem of manpower and argued that his allowance of 18 Siddhis was insufficient. He petitioned for an increase to 33. He also expressed his preference for Kru men. Although he did not gain Kru men, his Siddhi allowance was increased. The nature of slavery in the Indian Ocean was very different to that in the Atlantic. In the Swahili culture there were varied forms of serfdom and slavery. Within Kiswahili there were two terms describing a slave: mtwana and mtumwa. The former is most akin to the term 'slave' as used in the Americas. It applies to plantation labour and can include loaning to other 'masters'. Mtumwa, which means "one who is sent or used", is usually a domestic worker in an urban area and often with a personal bonding relationship with the owner. These Watumwa often worked as sailors, fishermen, boatmen and port labourers. How does one distinguish between these two categories without a detailed interview with the potential captors and the captured? Sullivan valued the Zanzibari interpreters since his earliest days (1840's) in the Indian Ocean, an opinion not shared by everyone. In this regard, Dr. Kirk, the British Consul and Judge at the Vice-Admiralty Court in Zanzibar, observed "as a class, those who embark in our cruisers as interpreters are an illiterate and worthless set". The opinions of other Royal Navy captains were inconclusive and although most agreed in general with Kirk, they also thought the best of their own interpreters. The Royal Navy realised however that it could not function without the Zanzibari interpreters. The Foreign Office looked into the matter and formulated a plan in 1874 and there were to be three grades of interpreters. In reality the Royal Navy struggled to implement the plan because with practically no schools in East Africa the plan was a non-starter. In fact, the Royal Navy offered a wage incentive for officers to qualify in Swahili. Ten years later only twenty-five officers qualified in Kiswahili. Therefore the Zanzibari interpreter became essential to the anti-slavery campaign in Eastern Africa. The 1881 census returns are the most interesting. There were ten Royal Navy vessels in the Indian Ocean for which the census returns have been analysed. This represents the final push by the Royal Navy to eradicate slave trade in the Indian Ocean. HMS London acted as the East African base for operations and expeditions with the backing of the Royal Navy bases at Simon's Town and Bombay. The total crew of the ten Royal Navy vessels, discounting members of the Royal Marines Artillery and Royal Navy Light Infantry, was 1245. There was only one Kru man on board the vessels. However, there were 153 Arab and African men and 56 Asian Lascars (mostly Goans). The HMS London remained anchored off Zanzibar until 1893. The last recording of the slave trade was in 1899 at a location to the south of Mombasa. In this period the non-white component of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean was around 11.5%. The majority of the Africans are described as "Seedie", and over 52% have Moslem names. The use of the word "Tindal" is important for it implies a labour broker who also acts as the leader for a "gang" of seamen - in this case for a group of Siddhis. These Siddhi Tindals appear to be both Moslems and traditionalists and their "gangs" don't appear to have any specific religious attachment. However there is a strong suggestion that the Tindals are freedmen with names like Soda Water, Jack Ariel and Johns. For the first time one saw African stokers in the Royal Navy. The merchant navy had been employing African stokers for over twenty-years and their numbers increased after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The appearance of Francis from Kilwa and Jack Daphne from Zanzibar as stokers on board HMS Euryalus is all the more interesting because their names suggest that they are freedmen.

Somalis

In 1881, for the first time, the census reveals the Royal Navy employment of Somalis as interpreters. According to it, Ali Said and Ahmed Warsana were born in Somaliland. Of course there may have been other ethnic Somalis employed by the Royal Navy before this date. These men could have been employed at Aden from within the Somali community already employed by the British Merchant Navy. However, if they were illiterate and had positions as Siddhis, it is unlikely that their true ethnicity would have been recorded. On board HMS Dryad there were seventeen "Seedie Boys", seven of who are shown as born in Zanzibar, and eleven in the Arabian Peninsula (Muscat, Oman, Aden and Jeddah). Only one of these, Happy Jack, has an English name, all of the rest have Moslem names. Clearly Happy Jack is a freedman; however it is very likely that most of the others are also freedmen. These liberated Africans from East Africa and the Arabian Sea came to be known as Zanzibaris in South Africa. After the strike in 1884 resulting in labour shortage, several hundreds of these Zanzibaris were brought to South Africa and housed in stables at Hope Street, Cape Town. By 1901 the Royal Navy employed Africans from a wide variety of ethnicities and from the entire Western Indian Ocean. A good example is the 1901 census for HMS High Flyer.

This includes seamen from Zanzibar (8), Mozambique (4) and South Africa. Some of these were possibly freedmen although no data in the census returns confirms this hypothesis. However, it is most likely that the two men from "Nyassa" and the five from Seychelles were freedman. One man from the Seychelles was called "Billy" and described as a "Seedie". Others from the Seychelles have European names, such as Henry from Zanzibar, likely to be a freedman converted to Christianity. There is also one translator from Zanzibar bearing the name of "Munya Siddhi". "Baraka" from India is possibly an Afro-Asian. HMS High Flyer had an unusually large crew of 513 only 24 of who were Siddhis from Africa and the Middle East. There were also 33 Goans (mainly bandsmen and cooks) and a Singhalese on board. So even in 1901 the Royal Navy employed freed Africans some of who were formally enslaved in India and others in Eastern Africa. Additionally, judging by their names, about 46% of the "Siddhis" were Moslems. Most of them were contracted for three years, after which they settled in various parts of the British Empire. According to Dr. Marika Sherwood, the recruitment of Africans was evidently stopped altogether at an unknown date. Sherwood sites the 1906 Regulations for the Entry of Naval Cadets which clearly state that "candidates must be of pure European descent ". In 1907 slavery was abolished along the African mainland under the Sultan of Zanzibar's dominion. During the First World War, the Royal Navy was in desperate need of manpower and there is evidence that the mentioned regulations were eased or altogether shelved. The first naval war engagement actually took place in Zanzibar Harbour and there were definitely Lascars on board the British vessels. There is an interesting photograph in the collection of the National Maritime Museum (London) of Somali crewmen on board HMS Venus at Singapore in 1916. During the First World War, the census records being unavailable to public, references are rare. Dr. Ommanney of the Colonial Service, serving in Zanzibar in the late 1940's, describes meeting a man called "Bombay, a 'Siddhi boy', meaning a survivor of a large number of Arab and African ratings taken on as firemen and stokers in His Majesty's ships before and during the First World War. They were called 'Siddhi boys' because they were subjects of the Seyyid, the local term used for the Sultan. There were several of them surviving in Zanzibar when I was there". Ommanney went on to comment on their command of English, their good manners and says "All the 'Siddhi boys' drew a small pension from the Admiralty and all were immensely proud of their arduous years in the navy. To listen to old Bombay describing his service in the hot stokeholds of coal-burning ships, and speaking of the Royal Navy as though he were part of it, was a moving experience that brought a lump into the throat".

In fact the role of the Moslem Siddhis from the Swahili coast was rapidly replaced by the figure of the Somali stoker – often recruited from Aden or Berbera. The Royal Navy term of "Seedie" changed to "Somali" on May 14, 1934 at the Court of Buckingham Palace because most recruits were now from Somaliland. The Royal Navy's East Indies Station command ended in 1958. Responsibility for the area was passed to the Commander in Chief, Middle East, at Aden.

Conclusion

African seamen in the form of the Habshis and Siddhis were a force to be reckoned with by both Asian and European powers until the eighteenth century. The decline of these African naval forces coincides with a rise in African slavery – especially in the Western basin of the Indian Ocean. Much of this human trade was conducted in Arab, European or Indian shipping. The decline of the influence of the East India Company was coupled with the rise of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean. The British

Census returns imply that the Royal Navy's employment of Black and Asian seamen in the Indian Ocean increased through the second half of the nineteenth century from around 5% of the total crew in 1861 to a high of around 11.55% in the 1880s, a rise that coincides with the increased Royal Navy presence and actions in the Indian Ocean resulting from their anti-slavery campaign. Bearing in mind the involvement of the Royal Navy in various punitive expeditions, (e.g. Witu, Juba and Zanzibar) it is likely that its employment of Africans and Arabs exceeded 12% in the 1890s. The examined records attest the rise and fall of particular Black and Asian seamen within the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean. Various means of employment such as indenture, contract and possibly press-gang, are recorded. Initially the freemen of the Atlantic comprising of a few Afro Americans and the Kru were employed. This was followed by the employment of freedmen in the form of the Prize Negroes possibly both from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, though those from the Mozambique Channel seem to have held on to their heritage as Mozbeikers. In the 1870s the Royal Navy began to employ freedmen from the Indian Ocean in the form of the Siddhis, over half of whom were at least nominally Moslem. It also employed Moslem freemen in the form Zanzibari and Somali interpreters. With the end of Oceanic slave trading in East Africa around the end of the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy began to emulate the Merchant Navy by employing Somalis. It appears that both freedmen and freeborn performed the same jobs. Landlubbers became seamen, thanks to the liberation by the Royal Navy. Indian Ocean ports witnessed social transformations where seamen became landsmen.

Freemen and women employed by the Royal Navy were important sources of labour at places like Ascension Island. The latter's antislavery campaign included the "liberation" of women as well as men and gave rise to communities of Prize Negroes within pre-existing trading ports such as Cape Town and Simon's Town , Aden, Bombay, Karachi and possibly in Sri Lanka where Prize Negroes (or Mozbeikers) became important pools of labour. In some cases the Royal Navy actually aided the creation of new communities such as Ascension Island and the Seychelles , the Bombay Africans of Freretown and Rabai , and the Moslem Zanzibaris of Cape Town and Durban. In East Africa, the freed slave settlements were important foci in the anti-slavery campaign and in the spread of the Kiswahili language. In the steam age, the Royal Navy encouraged the formation of free African Moslem settlements beyond the Indian Ocean – often at ports where the Merchant Navy was already active in employing Africans. Chief among these ports were the coal ports such as Cardiff, Newport, South Shields and Liverpool.

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