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**The East India Company, Transnational Interactions, and  
the Formation of Forced Labour Regimes, 1635-1730**

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## Introduction

### Forced Labour and the East India Company

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1694 the directors of the East India Company acknowledged complaints made by their employees in Asia about a ‘want of negro slaves’ at English plantations on western Sumatra.<sup>1</sup> Despite the delivery of two hundred slaves from Madagascar by Captain Robert Knox of the *Tonqueen Merchant* four years prior, there was still an insatiable demand for slave labour at this remote colony in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> It was widely accepted amongst Englishmen on Sumatra that ‘without a good supply of them, you could neither build nor plant considerably, nor repair or enlarge our town’.<sup>3</sup> Most scholars of the Atlantic world, including eminent historians such as David Brion Davis, Bernard Bailyn, and Philip Curtin, have either underestimated or ignored the prevalence of systems of slavery at English colonies in the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> This thesis makes a number of contributions to two historiographical traditions, pushing historical debates about both the East India Company and the origins of British slave labour systems in new directions. It will analyse the institution of slavery at East India Company settlements from 1635-1730, and explore how the Company’s relationship to forms of forced labour developed over time. Slaves and other unfree labourers, such as Asian coolies, worked in agricultural, urban, and domestic occupations in the fortified trading outposts and port towns where the Company maintained a commercial presence.<sup>5</sup> However, it was at the strategically significant South Atlantic colony of St. Helena and the isolated pepper plantation of Bencoolen on the west coast of Sumatra that slavery became particularly

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<sup>1</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 January 1694, E/3/92, f. 177.

<sup>2</sup> London to Bencoolen, 22 August 1690, E/3/92, f. 55.

<sup>3</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 January 1694, E/3/92, f. 177.

<sup>4</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, (Oxford, 2006); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours*, (Harvard, 2005); Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, (Wisconsin, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Coolies were unskilled workers from India, China, and Southeast Asia who performed menial jobs for a very small wage. The term ‘coolie’ dates back to the mid-seventeenth century, and is probably derived from the Hindi word *kūlī*, meaning ‘day labourer’, or the Urdu form of the same word, which means ‘slave’. *Oxford Dictionary of English: Third Edition*, ed. Angus Stevenson, (Oxford, 2010), p. 383.

significant during the late seventeenth century. By 1730, slaves from Madagascar, India and Southeast Asia were an important component of the colonial population and provided the cheap labour necessary to sustain English commerce at these remote settlements.

The institution of slavery at colonies owned by the East India Company emerged from transnational networks which linked slave societies in the Caribbean with those in the South Atlantic and Asia. Transfers of expertise from plantation owners and overseers on Barbados, along with the examples of the slaveholding practices used by the Dutch empire, were central to the formation of forced labour regimes at Company colonies. The Company's role in facilitating these transfers provides strong evidence for the integrated nature of English expansion during the seventeenth century, offering new global and transnational perspectives on the early history of the English colonialism. It also places under further scrutiny the historiographical tradition which separates the Atlantic world from the Indian Ocean, raising important questions over whether the division of the two oceanic spheres limits the study of European empires in historical research. By reading across archives related to the Caribbean, Africa, and the East Indies, this work contributes to the growing body of scholarship which puts the history of forced labour during the seventeenth century into a global context, and challenges the Atlantic-focused and Afrocentric narratives which have traditionally dominated slavery studies.

The movement of slaves, indentured servants, convicts and coolies around the Indian Ocean basin during the seventeenth century is less well studied than in the Atlantic. When the Portuguese first arrived in the Indian Ocean they found a sophisticated and mature system of trade and regional labour migration, and constructed their own imperial system by assuming control over important

nodes of this pre-existing network, such as Goa, Hormuz, and Macau.<sup>6</sup> To meet the labour demands of the *Estado da India*, Portuguese merchants and sailors relocated small numbers of slaves from Mozambique, the Bay of Bengal, and Southeast Asia to their burgeoning port cities, becoming in the process the first Europeans slave traders in the Indian Ocean.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the Portuguese remained content to dominate the intra-Asian maritime trade, the arrival of the Dutch at the beginning of the seventeenth century introduced a more aggressive territorial element to European colonialism in Asia. The Dutch Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) established fortified outposts and major settlements across Asia, extending and further integrating the connections between societies around the Indian Ocean.<sup>8</sup> The Dutch derived immense profit from control over the spice trade because wealthy households in seventeenth century Europe desired ever increasing amounts of nutmeg, pepper, clove and cinnamon for their purported medicinal benefits and culinary uses.<sup>9</sup> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the VOC used the labour of large numbers of slaves at settlements in southern Africa, their administrative centre for commercial operations at Batavia, and the port city of Colombo on the southwest coast of Ceylon.<sup>10</sup>

There were a number of routes to enslavement in the Indian Ocean world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Early European navigators and missionaries found a variety of indigenous forms of slavery in Asia. Anthony Reid has argued that Asian slavery was an organic extension of the existing social hierarchy, involving intricate networks of dependency and obligation between different social groups.<sup>11</sup> The role of racial divisions between masters and slaves was limited in Asian

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, New Edition, (Penguin, 1973); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850*, (Ohio, 2015), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Lucassen, 'A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595-1795', *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 66, (Fall 2004), p. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720*, (Princeton, 1985), pp. 13-15; BBC In Our Time Podcast, 'The Dutch East India Company', Thursday 3 March 2016 at 21:30.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Ekama, *Slavery in Dutch Colombo: A Social History*, Masters Research Thesis, (Leiden 2012), pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid, (Queensland, 1983), p. 8.

slavery, as enslaved men and women with foreign ethnicities were rapidly assimilated into the native culture and local lineages.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, like other slave systems of the early modern period, long-distance trade connections and persistent warfare supplied captive 'outsiders' to Asia, who were used in agricultural, urban and domestic occupations. Many of these slaves were forced to travel the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean before they reached their destination of work. Marcus Vink has argued that there were three interlocking and overlapping slave trading circuits in the Indian Ocean during the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> In the southwest Indian Ocean, Arab slave traders profited from the sale of Malagasy slaves derived from communities in eastern Africa and Madagascar.<sup>14</sup> On the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of India, cycles of famine and warfare had dislocated local communities for centuries, reducing many peasants to a state of dependency upon wealthy lords who were willing to ameliorate their suffering in exchange for labour.<sup>15</sup> The hierarchical relationship between debt and bondage which was prevalent in Asian societies meant that many individuals chose to voluntarily renounce their freedom or sell family members when faced with the choice between starvation and slavery.<sup>16</sup> In Southeast Asia, indigenous slave traders raided decentralised societies on Malaysia, the Indonesian archipelago, and New Guinea for a source of captive labourers to sell overseas.<sup>17</sup> European corporations interacted with these established slave trading networks when they arrived in the Indian Ocean at the turn of the seventeenth century.

As the English East India Company was establishing its first colonies in the South Atlantic and Asia, they decided to exploit these highly mobile sources of unfree labour, which had been an established feature of the Indian Ocean world for centuries. Throughout the seventeenth century the directors

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<sup>12</sup> *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, (Indiana, 2006), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of World History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (June 2003), p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> Reid, *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade", p. 143.

of the East India Company were preoccupied with increasing the population of their Asian settlements, which they frequently referred to as 'colonies' or 'plantations'.<sup>18</sup> One strategy for peopling English overseas plantations in the late seventeenth century was through the transportation of labourers. The Company was pioneering in its use of generous policies to encourage the voluntary immigration of Asian weavers to Bombay and Chinese planters to Bencoolen.<sup>19</sup> However, like its Portuguese and Dutch rivals, the English East India Company often resorted to coercive methods to meet the labour demands of colonial holdings in Asia.

A small number of scholars have studied the East India Company's slave trading ventures and explored how the East India Company deployed slave labour. For instance, during the twentieth century historians became interested in the Madagascar slave trade. Virginia Bever Platt published an article exploring the East India Company's role in the transportation of slaves from Madagascar to the West Indies, whilst James Armstrong's work at various international archives produced a useful guide about the available evidence relating to European participation in this illicit commerce.<sup>20</sup> In a brief article, Frenise Logan examined how the East India Company exploited slave labour on the west coast of Sumatra, but she did not emphasise that it was the example of Dutch practices that became the model for the slave system developed by the Company at Bencoolen.<sup>21</sup> The themes of labour and slavery are marginalised in two important histories of the East India Company. The significance of

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<sup>18</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 19-40.

<sup>19</sup> A 'planter' was an owner or manager of a commercial plantation who was responsible for agricultural production. The term 'planter' was used by contemporaries to describe the entrepreneurial English and Asian men who managed tropical plantations at Company colonies during the seventeenth century. However, most historians have used the term in sole reference to the white settlers and agriculturalists who expanded the English colonial presence in Ireland, North America, and the Caribbean. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Stevenson, p. 1358.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia Bever Platt, 'The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (October 1969), pp. 548-577; James Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', *Omalysy Anio*, (1983-84), pp. 211-33.

<sup>21</sup> Frenise A. Logan, 'The British East India Company and African Slavery in Benkulen, Sumatra, 1687-1792', *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 41, No. 4, (October 1956), pp. 339-348.

forced labour goes unmentioned in Kirti Chaudhuri's economic history of the East India Company, and remains peripheral to Philip Stern's more recent political study of the Company's governance in Asia.<sup>22</sup> Even more surprisingly, in *Britain's Oceanic Empire*, an edited collection published in 2012 which attempts to integrate the histories of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, there is no chapter on labour or slavery.<sup>23</sup> In marked contrast, there are a number of detailed studies exploring how forced labour contributed to the success of the Dutch empire in Asia. Marcus Vink and Kerry Ward have shown that slavery and networks of forced migration helped the Dutch East India Company to dominate commerce with the East Indies for the duration of the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

In the last two years there has been a flurry of interest around the use of slave labour by the English East India Company. The first general overview of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean was published by Richard Allen in 2015.<sup>25</sup> This book provides the quantitative data which will act as the foundation of future studies which analyse slavery in Asia, but it is not a comprehensive account of the forms of forced labour used by the British East India Company. Anna Winterbottom has been one of the first historians to begin the process of advancing historical research in this infant field. She has shown how the botanical knowledge and linguistic skills of slaves were highly prized by the East India Company, arguing in a chapter of her monograph that their expertise proved essential for sustaining English colonies in the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, a detailed study of slavery and other forms of forced labour within the worlds of the East India Company has not yet been written. This is partly because of a perception that the use of slaves by European colonisers was a distinctly Atlantic

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<sup>22</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978); Stern, *The Company-State*.

<sup>23</sup> *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550-1850*, eds. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, John G. Reid, (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Marcus Vink, "'The World's Oldest Trade'"; Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge in the Early East India Company World*, (Palgrave, 2016), pp. 163-195.

phenomenon. Historical inquiry into forms of forced labour at English settlements in the Indian Ocean has been further compounded by the wide dispersion of source material relating to slavery and labour within the extensive records of the East India Company. As a result, the sporadic references which have been made by historians to unfree workers at Company colonies are usually undeveloped, and embedded within larger works with a different focus. A good example is Kathleen Wilson, who has used St. Helena and Bencoolen as case studies to analyse family structures, gender relations, and the different forms of colonial governance used in frontier regions of the British Empire during the long eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Within this article she only briefly considers the importance of forced labour at Company colonies, but does devote a lot of attention to the significance of slavery on Jamaica. In many other histories, the importance of forced labour at seventeenth century English colonies in Asia has been thoroughly overlooked. By reconsidering the role that the global networks of overseas trading corporations played in the development of colonial labour systems, this thesis will advance the studies of forced labour and early modern colonialism.

Of greatest significance is how this study highlights the importance of transnational interactions and transoceanic connections in the formation of forced labour regimes. Richard Dunn contends that an influx of Dutch planters from Brazil and their expertise in the agricultural and industrial processes associated with sugar production into Barbados in the 1640s facilitated the emergence of plantation slavery on the island.<sup>28</sup> It has been further argued by a number of scholars that the Caribbean colonies, and particularly Barbados, provided the institutional and legal basis for the emergence of large scale slaveholding in the English Caribbean and mainland North America following the Restoration of Charles II.<sup>29</sup> In a similar manner, intercolonial commerce, transnational exchanges,

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<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Wilson, 'Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 5, (December 2011), pp. 1294-1322.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the English Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*, Second Edition, (North Carolina, 1972), p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 427-431.

migration patterns, and the transfer of expertise within the Indian Ocean basin and beyond were crucial in the development of slavery at colonies owned by the East India Company. Transnational connections with the Dutch and Portuguese shaped the development of forced labour regimes at St. Helena, Bencoolen, and Bombay. The Company's vision of deploying slave labour on extensive plantations and in skilled occupations at St. Helena and Bencoolen was informed by the examples of Barbados and Dutch Batavia. It will be shown that many of the directors and agents working for the East India Company had strong connections with Barbados and an intimate knowledge of social practices at Batavia. The personal, commercial and intellectual links which the Company created between these European colonies are the most likely explanation for why the English East India Company appropriated the laws of Barbados and emulated the Dutch success at Batavia when constructing its own labour regimes.

This thesis will also contend that the historiographical distinction between 'slave societies' and 'societies with slaves' is inappropriate for analysing forms of forced labour in the Indian Ocean. Although the ambition of exploiting the labour of thousands of African and Asian slaves on sprawling sugar and indigo plantations never came to fruition at St. Helena and Bencoolen, the centrality of the institution of slavery to daily life at these colonies belies any attempt to dismiss it as insignificant when studying the history of the East India Company. The effort to delineate and separate 'slave societies', with expansive populations of enslaved men and women, from 'societies with slaves', where slavery was supposedly peripheral to the economy, can sometimes conceal the true extent to which slavery was a firmly embedded part of social and economic life at English colonies during the early modern period. Wendy Warren has demonstrated how families living in New England, a geographic region in north eastern America usually described as 'free soil', developed extensive economic ties with the slave economies of the Caribbean and exploited African slaves in urban

environments and as agricultural labourers on smallholdings.<sup>30</sup> Like in New England, the number of slaves at colonies owned by the English East India Company was small when compared to the rapidly expanding slave systems in the Caribbean, never numbering more than 650 at St. Helena and 400 at Bencoolen during the early eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup> It will be emphasised how, despite their small numbers, the slaves at St. Helena and Bencoolen were an essential part of colonial life, and through their work and resistance shaped the distinctive social and economic policies used to administer these Company colonies. Consequently, St. Helena and Bencoolen cannot be labelled merely 'societies with slaves', but it would also be imprecise to describe them as fully developed 'slave societies'.

In addition to focussing only on slaves, the place of coolie workers and Asian weavers at Bombay will also be explored in this thesis. This topic deserves much more attention from historians, because control over the dynamic labour markets of northwest India was central to the Company's colonial project to increase the population of Bombay and make it the principal commercial entrepôt for trade in the region. Slaves, servants, coolies, and weavers were valued by the East India Company both for their labour potential and also for their role in increasing the population of nascent English colonies in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, which were situated a long distance away from military reinforcement, and therefore vulnerable to attacks from European and Asian rivals. Sometimes this was explicitly stated, such as in June 1671, when the delivery of slaves from the Cape Verde islands to St. Helena was met with relief amongst Company officials that the islanders were now in a 'better posture to defend yourselves in case you should be attacked by an enemy'.<sup>32</sup> This calls into question the historiographical tradition which separates 'colonies of exploitation', with populations of unfree natives and slaves working for the sole benefit of their European overlords,

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<sup>30</sup> Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America*, (Liveright, 2016), pp. 9-12.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, pp. 224-227.

<sup>32</sup> London to St. Helena, 23 June 1671, E/3/87, f. 228.

from forms of settler colonialism. It also shows how developing a global approach to studying forced labour requires historians to re-examine established definitions of slavery.

In his influential comparative study, the sociologist Orlando Patterson defined slavery as ‘the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonoured persons’.<sup>33</sup> Although the treatment of servants and slaves at English colonies in the Indian Ocean became more ruthless towards the end of the seventeenth century, it is not always clear that the slaves in Company colonies were constantly subjected to forms of ‘violent domination’. The records of the East India Company show that the directors appreciated how slaves and unfree labourers ensured the continued vitality of their overseas colonies, and as a result gave regular instructions specifying that Englishmen should treat slaves humanely and refrain from using severe punishment. For instance, in the 1660s and 1670s the Company emphasised that their African and East Indian workers were to be viewed ‘like men and women and not as slaves’, and by the early eighteenth century the directors pressed their employees in Asia to remember that their labourers ‘are men and women though slaves, and therefore are to be used humanely according to their circumstances and not treated as bad or worse than brutes’.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, slavery at Company colonies was not always a permanent condition. Many of the unfree migrants from Africa and India who were transported under duress to the Company’s settlements at Bombay and St. Helena were perceived as offering similar benefits to colonial society as their English counterparts, and during the 1660s and 1670s could become ‘free planters’ after conversion to Christianity. It is also difficult to discern whether the unfree labourers working at Company colonies experienced a form of ‘social death’ resulting from their dishonourable position in the social hierarchy. Slaves who were entrusted with firearms were clothed in prestigious red garments and remained vital for the survival of English settlements in the Indian Ocean, whilst

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<sup>33</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Harvard, 1982), p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> London to Bantam, 18 January 1670/71, E/3/87, f. 208; London to Bencoolen, 20 March 1712/13, E/3/98, f. 14.

enslaved artisans and unfree coolies were held in high esteem for their help in maintaining the Company's commercial operations in Asia.<sup>35</sup>

Due to the ambiguous language used in the source material, and the porous definitions of slavery and freedom in the early modern world, it will be argued in this thesis that it is more appropriate to use the term 'forced labourer' to describe those inhabitants of Company colonies who lived in an unfree condition. When specified in the archival source material, the precise term used by the East India Company to label their unfree workers will be used. These descriptors range from slave, black servant, and coolie, to much more derogatory language, such as 'Coffrey'. Gaps in the historical record mean that it remains uncertain whether the term 'black servant' was merely a seventeenth century expression used as a synonym for 'slave'. In Chapters Two and Three it will be argued that over the space of around ten years there was a move at some Company colonies away from inclusive forms of forced labour, where workers were given concessions and referred to as 'black servants', to more severe regimes, where African and Asian workers were exclusively called 'slaves' and subjected to more vicious forms of punishment. The study of forced labour at English settlements in the Indian Ocean may deepen our understanding of whether the experiences of a 'black servant' and a black 'slave' differed in any significant manner. It is important to remember that the lived realities of enslavement and servitude can sometimes be concealed by these terms, and it is difficult to assess whether the life of a waged coolie labourer working at Bombay was easier than that of a slave on Sumatra. The indistinct margins between forms of forced labour in the early modern world is demonstrated by the opinion articulated in 1715 that under the 'original constitution' of Bombay, Asian coolies had always been 'lookt upon to be a sort of slave to the Company'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> London to Fort St. David, 6 March 1694, E/3/92, f. 200-201; Bencoolen to London, 1 February 1704/05, G/35/6, f. 1.

<sup>36</sup> London to Charles Boone President of Bombay, 5th April 1715, E/3/98, ff. 294-295.

### **Outline of the Thesis**

Overseas trading companies were the driving force behind English commercial and territorial expansion during the seventeenth century. In early modern England corporations played a prominent role in municipal administration and the provision of public services, the regulation of domestic trade associations such as the City of London's livery companies, and the governance of religious organisations.<sup>37</sup> As part of a longstanding tradition which was premised upon Roman law, corporations united individuals with a common interest into a single legal entity to promote the shared aims of the collective. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, English joint-stock corporations were granted royal charters to monopolise trade with various regions of the world. For example, the charter issued by Queen Elizabeth I on the 31 December 1600, which incorporated the East India Company as a commercial and administrative body, gave the Company an expansive legal claim to total control over English trade between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. Other corporations, such as the Virginia Company and the Massachusetts Bay Company, enabled enterprising individuals to raise the capital necessary to search for profitable new opportunities abroad and establish the first permanent English settlements in North America.

The creation of overseas trading companies and the establishment of multilateral long distance trading networks facilitated greater levels of cross-cultural interaction between England and the wider world. Cross-institutional ties in the City of London and transnational connections with other European colonisers were highly influential in the creation of a seventeenth century English empire. The position of overseas trading companies as commercial and cultural intermediaries between England and other empires around the world facilitated this process of transnational interaction. Novel ideas about the management of trade, civil government and the mobilisation of forced labour

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<sup>37</sup> David Armitage, 'Wider Still and Wider: Corporate Constitutionalism Unbounded', *Itinerario*, Vol. 39, Issue 3 (December 2015), p. 502.

were shared by merchants and planters who invested in multiple corporations and operated in different geographical regions. As constituents of various trading companies and overseas ventures interacted in social spaces, such as church congregations, expertise was spread amongst members of the commercial community and the landed gentry, informing the direction of colonial policy pursued by corporate institutions.<sup>38</sup> This thesis will argue that the global networks of the East India Company facilitated transoceanic and transnational transfers of expertise, and that this knowledge proved highly influential in shaping the forced labour regimes that developed at English settlements in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. In some instances the forms of unfree labour and colonisation used by the East India Company resembled developments in the Atlantic world, whilst in other cases the English approach to colonialism in Asia was distinct and innovative.

There were sustained attempts by English merchants and colonists to introduce the plantation system to the Indian Ocean during the seventeenth century. Chapter One will begin by examining how English aspirations to introduce patterns of forced labour developed in the Caribbean to the South Atlantic and Asia were more widespread than is currently understood. The first of such experiments can be dated to the period from 1635-1650, when English interlopers of the East India Company's monopoly sought to make Madagascar the nexus of a global imperial system by establishing plantations and implementing slave labour regimes on the island. Robert Hunt's promotional pamphlet for the Assada plantation on Madagascar, *The Island of Assada* (1650), included the first written expressions of how Barbadian examples and a population of Asian and African free planters could be used to develop profitable English colonies in the Indian Ocean.<sup>39</sup> Hunt hoped that Assada (now an island called Nosy Be) could function as both a site of English plantation production and a regional centre of trade. The East India Company's initial plans for English

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<sup>38</sup> Edmond Smith, *The Networks of the East India Company in Early Modern London, c. 1599-1625*, PhD thesis, (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Robert Hunt, *The Island of Assada* (London, 1650).

settlement on Bombay had many similarities with this multifaceted vision of 'Trade and Plantation' for colonial development on Assada.<sup>40</sup> It is also striking how the Company's efforts to populate their colonies in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean with Christianised black servants and free planters from Africa and Asia during the 1660s and 1670s was reminiscent of Hunt's plans for the Assada plantation.

Colonial projects to establish Caribbean forms of plantation slavery on Madagascar failed, but when combined with the East India Company's experiences trading on the coast of West Africa from 1657 to 1668, set an important precedent for the development of English labour systems in the Indian Ocean over subsequent decades. It will also be argued in Chapter One that the forced labour of Africans at Fort Cormantine was used for Asian purposes, and that these workforces contributed to the Company's efforts to integrate the African and East Indian trades during the mid-seventeenth century. Labour policies used by the East India Company on the West African coast were shaped by local circumstances. The incidence of malaria and yellow fever prevented large numbers of English labourers from being able to live and work in Guinea. This meant that the Company was reliant upon the goodwill of neighbouring kingdoms and the labour of local Africans, who were often described as 'not serviceable, but always running away'.<sup>41</sup> The Company was also seeking to protect its monopoly over English trade with West Africa by restricting the regular interloping ventures made by independent slave traders. These circumstances led the East India Company to develop complex methods of managing labour on the West Coast of Africa. This is demonstrated by the specific instructions to only use the labour of those Africans who were 'willing to leave their countries and saile along without compulsion or inforcement'.<sup>42</sup> If these policies outlined by the Company were

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 10 June 1661, E/3/27, f. 40.

<sup>42</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 23 June 1659, E/3/85, f. 231.

used by their employees in West Africa, then this represented a unique form of unfree labour developed by the East India Company, which it is difficult to describe as slavery.

Chapter Two will explore how the East India Company attempted to implement this innovative and inclusive system of forced labour at their colonies in the South Atlantic and Asia. These labour policies were reminiscent of how Robert Hunt conceived colonial society operating at Assada, with free planters of African and Asian descent. Between 1660 and 1683, African and East Indian labourers at Company colonies were referred to as 'servants', were the subjects of an intense proselytising mission, and like indentured labourers from the British Isles working in North America and the Caribbean, were able to become free planters after a fixed period of service varying from three to seven years. In a similar manner to the policies used by the East India Company to manage workers on the Guinea coast, the Company was particularly mindful that these 'black servants' were to be treated with respect by their English masters, and voluntarily enter into their service. Consequently, they offered protections for the unfree black population, encouraged their conversion to Christianity, and curtailed the length of enslavement. It will be considered whether interactions between English labour traditions, Iberian slaveholding customs, and forms of manumission used within the Muslim world contributed to the development of the particularly distinct legal systems of forced labour used at settlements administered by the East India Company during this period.

In the second chapter it will also be argued that the East India Company's economic vision for Bombay was multifaceted, and that like Robert Hunt's aspirations for the Assada colony, the directors of the Company originally saw the Bombay functioning both as a site of English plantation and as a commercial entrepôt. Although the comprehensive programme established by the Company for the 'better planting' of Bombay had a strong Asian dimension, these early plans were also reminiscent of the language and legal strategies used to justify English attempts to settle and

populate mainland North America.<sup>43</sup> During the 1660s and 1670s the Company sought to ‘improve’, ‘plant’, and ‘people’ Bombay as an English colony in the Indian Ocean. The East India Company’s efforts to plant Bombay as a ‘Christian colony’ fell by the wayside after a number of generous policies, including free grain allotments and high wages, proved more effective in quickly populating the island.<sup>44</sup> Instead of attempting to attract Protestant settlers from the British Isles, by the late 1670s, the Company’s colonial strategies began to focus upon convincing Asian artificers and labourers to relocate from the Indian subcontinent to the nascent settlement of Bombay. The proximity of Bombay to the powerful Mughal Empire meant that concessions and financial allowances were granted to induce merchants, brokers, weavers, painters and coolies from the Indian subcontinent to settle in the colony.

The transition towards more rigorous systems of forced labour began in 1683, when the English East India Company issued directives for their employees to use the slave societies of Barbados and Dutch Batavia as a social and economic model for how the settlements at St. Helena and Sumatra could be populated with English planters and rapidly become profitable. Chapter Three will analyse how these transnational and transoceanic interactions contributed to the emergence of much harsher forced labour regimes at Company colonies, which more closely resembled patterns of enslavement in the Atlantic world, and led the East India Company to charter a number of large scale slave trading voyages to Madagascar and other locations across the Indian Ocean. When supplemented with the labourers supplied by contraband slaving networks, these shipments began to sustain a significant population of slaves at St. Helena and Bencoolen. By the late 1680s, African and East Indian slaves laboured on experimental sugar, indigo and tobacco plantations. Particular emphasis was placed on training some of these slaves to perform skilled work, such as carpentry and

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<sup>43</sup> Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, pp. 67-93; Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Oxford, 2014), pp. 66-71.

<sup>44</sup> London to Surat, 25 August 1668, E/3/87, f. 92.

bricklaying, which brought considerable benefits for the Company in the commercial environment of Asian port cities. Colonial competition and the long-established economic structure of labour markets in the Indian Ocean meant that Company officials also became increasingly reliant on armed slaves to reinforce isolated settlements, and were often forced to accommodate the demands of their labourers.

A number of different setbacks, ranging from domestic challenges to the Company's monopoly and invasion by the Mughal Empire and other Asian powers, could not halt the development of forced labour systems at Company colonies. Despite these impediments, the geopolitical value of St. Helena, Bencoolen, and Bombay in the competitive commercial setting of the late seventeenth century explains why these colonies were not abandoned. Attempts to use forced labour to cultivate commodities and perform artisanal work were predicated upon the belief that this would render these strategic bases more profitable in the long term. The motive which underpinned the East India Company's decision to exploit slave labour on a larger scale was to 'make the English nation as formidable as the Dutch or any other Europe nation, are, or ever were, in India'.<sup>45</sup> This could not be achieved 'only by the form and with the methods of trading merchants' but also required the 'political skill of making all fortified places repay their full charge and expenses'.<sup>46</sup> The Company argued that the Dutch were able to maintain 170 forts in the Indian Ocean because their settlements produced lucrative commodities, unlike the English factories which remained unprofitable.<sup>47</sup> To expand the English presence in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean from '2 or 3' forts the Company hoped to adopt the 'Dutch wisdom of governing in India' by encouraging English planters to produce tropical commodities grown by slave labour.<sup>48</sup> On St. Helena, for example, it was argued

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<sup>45</sup> London to Fort St. George, 26 August 1685, E/3/90, f. 293.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> London to Fort St. George, 14 January 1685/86, E/3/91, f. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.; London to Surat, 26 March 1686, E/3/91, ff. 142-143.

that 'the profitable employment of such of the Companies blacks' would mean 'that we may at length raise such a revenue upon that Island as may defray the charge of such a great garrison'.<sup>49</sup>

Chapter Four will explore how the period from 1695-1730 saw the forced labour regimes developed by the East India Company mature, increasing enough in size and importance to the point where issues arising from slave ownership, such as the threat of rebellion and maroonage, dominated political discussions. By the early eighteenth century, around fifty percent of the population of these colonies were enslaved, and almost all English families on St. Helena owned two or more slaves to work their smallholdings.<sup>50</sup> This raises questions about any attempt to characterise these Company colonies as merely 'societies with slaves', because although slavery did not dominate the local economy, it did help to structure many aspects of social life at St. Helena and Bencoolen. To provide insights into the life of slaves owned by the East India Company, the fourth chapter focuses on work, rebellion, and slave life in the early eighteenth century. There are continuous references to slaves scattered amongst the vast archives of the East India Company. Sources such as consultation records and correspondence reveal pervasive fears about black uprisings and the subversive activity of fugitive slaves, and demonstrate that many legal disputes over trade negotiations and inheritance at St. Helena were centred on the rights of slave ownership. However, the Company's repeated instructions to ameliorate the condition of the slaves at their colonies and treat them well suggest that although likenesses existed, drawing strict comparisons between Atlantic slave systems and forms of forced labour used by the East India Company is not always appropriate. Unlike at St. Helena and Bencoolen, slavery did not become an important institution at Bombay in the late seventeenth century due to the failure of initial attempts to establish an English colony based around plantation production on the island. Consequently, the Company deployed different forms of

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<sup>49</sup> London to St. Helena, 6 May 1685, E/3/90, f. 274.

<sup>50</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 13 March 1726/27. G/32/8 ff. 18-20; Bencoolen Consultation, 11 December 1708, G/35/6, f. 81.

forced labour, including a workforce of Asian coolies and weavers, to help develop the colony as a commercial entrepôt in northwest India. Efforts to provide food for Asian workers and continual disputes between the English and Portuguese over the control of interlocking labour markets in the region supports the view that unfree labour remained an important institution at Bombay into the eighteenth century.

### **Sources and Methodologies**

This study uses the surviving records of the English East India Company, held within the India Office Records at the British Library, to argue that transnational networks formed by corporations contributed to the development of forced labour systems in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Despite the vast chronicle of correspondence and consultation proceedings produced by the East India Company, which contain significant amounts of information pertinent to the histories of slavery and the Atlantic world, scholars who do not specialise in the history of Asia have been slow to recognise the utility of this body of source material. The India Office Records is an archive with a global scope, and as such it can be used to demonstrate the transoceanic dimensions of English overseas expansion. During the seventeenth century the East India Company had a commercial presence in West Africa, the South Atlantic, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. Company shipping frequented the English Caribbean, the Cape Verde Islands, Brazil, and southern Africa on their voyages to and from the East Indies, a long and arduous journey which took them through the Atlantic Ocean. At these locations, vessels working for the East India Company resupplied, took advantage of the protection offered by seasonal naval convoys back to Europe, forged transnational commercial connections, and even bought slaves. Although the correspondence between the Court of Committees in London and their employees overseas sometimes presents solely a managerial perspective, this study avoids developing an imbalanced argument by also utilising the consultation records of St. Helena, Bencoolen, and Bombay. These sources, known as the 'factory records',

capture the voices and actions of unfree labourers in much more detail than letters between leading members of the Company.

Although C. A. Bayly argued that transnational methods are most suitable for historians of the twentieth century, recent scholarship has emphasised how the process of globalisation and transnational exchange has a history that dates back to the early modern period, when European empires began to expand overseas.<sup>51</sup> Inter-imperial connections and cross-cultural interactions were important for the progression of colonial expansion, the circulation of knowledge, and the formation of global networks of trade and exchange. By studying flows of people, commodities and ideas which crossed national boundaries, these scholars have demonstrated that a transnational approach can provide new insights for historians interested in the operation of seventeenth century empires.<sup>52</sup> For example, in his study of Anglo-Dutch trade, Christian Koot explored how Dutch merchants and creditors working at the periphery of European empires provided the capital and expertise necessary for colonial development, shaping the early history of the British Atlantic world.<sup>53</sup> Catia Antunes, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, and Mark Meuwese have reinforced these conclusions by arguing that cross-cultural exchanges between people of different ethnicities, religions and societies were a defining feature of societies operating at the perimeter of European empires.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> C. A., Bayly et al., 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 5, (2006), p. 1442.

<sup>52</sup> Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, Evan Hafeli, 'Transnational Connections: Special Issue Introduction', *Early American Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2012), p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Christian Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621-1713* (New York, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Catia Antunes, & Filipa Ribeiro Da Silva, 'Cross-cultural Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic: Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in Western Africa, 1580-1674', *Itinerario*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2011); Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674* (Brill, 2012).

As a concept, transnationalism can be defined as a process that creates social, political, and economic networks which transcend the boundaries of nation states.<sup>55</sup> The presence of institutions and corporations which operate in multiple countries, along with flows of people, goods, and ideas which cross national borders, can all be described as transnational. The increasing popularity of transnationalism as a category of analysis in the social sciences was an outgrowth of the development of multicultural societies and an increasingly integrated world economy at the end of the twentieth century. Scholars have used transnational approaches to reinterpret historical questions and topics by counteracting readings of nationalism into the past. This thesis will use transnational methodologies, such as reading across multiple archives and historiographies, to re-evaluate the origins of English forced labour systems during the seventeenth century. It will contend that the migration patterns and forms of intercolonial commerce fostered by the East India Company facilitated transnational transfers of knowledge about how to manage various population groups, including slaves, at English plantations in the South Atlantic and Asia.

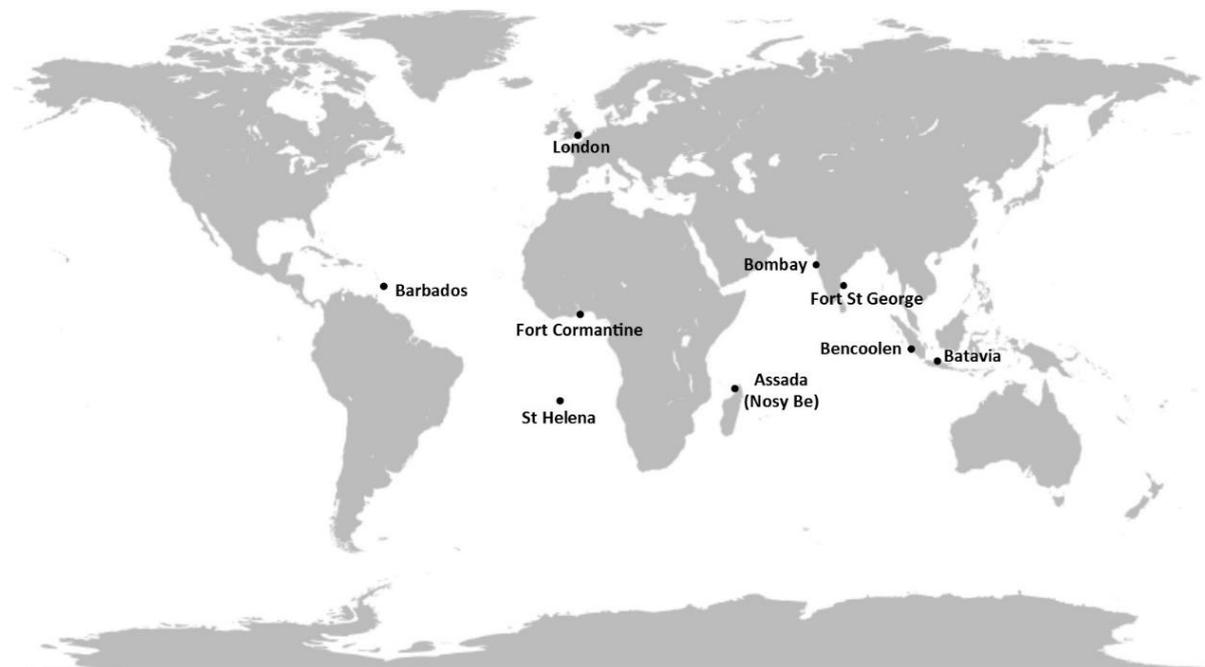


Figure 1. A map to show the different regions of the world that will be discussed in this study. It demonstrates how the East India Company operated at a global scale during the seventeenth century.

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<sup>55</sup> Patricia Calvin, 'Defining Transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 14, Issue 04, (November 2005), pp. 421-439.

## **Chapter 1. Overseas Expansion, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the East India Company, 1635-1667**

The vision of developing permanent colonies in the Indian Ocean for settlement, commerce and the production of lucrative commodities has a long and varied history. Chapter One will show how, from the 1630s to the 1660s, merchants in the City of London sought to use their considerable experience investing in overseas trading companies and financing colonial ventures in the Atlantic world to establish English plantations in the Indian Ocean, and use African labour for Asian purposes at Fort Cormantine. Although these ambitious plans were never fully realised, the place of African slave labour as a central feature of English visions for plantations on Madagascar reveals that seventeenth century colonial theorists did not exclude the Indian Ocean from their plans for settlement and the spread of plantation slavery. There are parallels between the labour systems and forms of colonisation used by the East India Company in later decades and concepts first developed by Robert Hunt in his pamphlet *The Island of Assada*. This chapter will also explore the Company's interactions with the transatlantic slave trade during their brief period trading on the Guinea coast from 1657 to 1668. It will be argued that the policies developed to combat interloping slave traders and manage an African workforce were formative for the forms of labour used by the East India Company in the 1660s and 1670s. The forced labourers used by the East India Company at Fort Cormantine were hired from amongst the local population, and it was emphasised that the small numbers of workers transported from West Africa to Company colonies in the Indian Ocean were not to be harshly exploited.

### **The Vision of Colonial Expansion and Plantation Slavery on Madagascar, 1635-1650**

In 1635, information that hostilities with the Portuguese in Asia had ceased led Sir William Courteen and a group of associates to challenge the East India Company's monopoly over commerce in the

region and to develop an assertive colonial strategy in pursuit of new Asian markets.<sup>56</sup> Independent traders were dissatisfied with the Company's reluctance to move beyond the immediate profits of trade and exchange, believing that the establishment of a territorial empire in Asia would be the best foundation for long term commercial supremacy. By the late 1630s members of the aristocracy and the landed classes, such as Prince Rupert and Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel, envisioned a settlement on Madagascar. These courtiers imagined that the island had the potential to facilitate the emergence of a global English empire because it was geographically situated in a region where lasting commercial connections between existing colonial projects in America and Asia could be formed. This imperial ideal was articulated by William Davenant in *Madagascar* (1638), a poem which depicted a dreamlike vision of Prince Rupert's colonisation of the island, and by Richard Boothby, who emphasised how 'he that is Lord of Madagascar may easily in good time be Emperour of all India'.<sup>57</sup>

The positive imagery of natural plenty and vast untapped wealth relating to Madagascar which prevailed in colonial literature inspired more practical attempts to implement this vision. Following William Courteen's abortive attempt to colonise Madagascar in 1644, which resulted in financial ruin and the death of nearly a hundred colonists at St Augustine's Bay, the merchant Maurice Thomson assumed control over his trading consortium and began planning to develop a colony at Assada, an island off the northern coast of Madagascar. Caribbean precedents shaped the plans for the establishment of this new colony. The process of planting English settlements in the Indian Ocean was informed by the extensive experience of Thomson and his associates in the Atlantic world as members of the Virginia Company, investors in West Indian plantation economies, and as early

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<sup>56</sup> Edmond Smith, "'Canaanising Madagascar': Africa in English Imperial Imagination, 1635-1650', *Itinerario*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (2015), p. 281.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin McDonald, "'The Dream of Madagascar': English Disasters and Pirate Utopias of the Early Modern Indo-Atlantic World' in Chloe Houston (ed.), *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period* (Ashgate, 2010), p. 107; Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion 1560-1660* (Oxford, 2008), p. 190.

English participants in the African slave trade.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Thomson's position as a leading member of the East India Company enabled his interloping syndicate to gain tacit support for their Madagascan scheme from Company authorities.

One colonial promoter for the Assada settlement, Robert Hunt, proposed to replicate the commercial success of the Caribbean island of Barbados on Madagascar.<sup>59</sup> Hunt argued that because Barbados and Assada both lay at thirteen degrees latitude and were of similar size, English settlers would be able to use the salubrious climate to cultivate a variety of profitable commodities from the Americas and the East Indies, such as sugar cane, indigo, cotton, tobacco, ginger, pepper, and rice. Indentured servants and an enslaved workforce would provide the labour necessary for plantation agriculture and the two hundred sugar mills he believed would soon operate on the island.<sup>60</sup> Whilst Hunt thought that the cost to transport and provision twenty English servants would total £300 at both Barbados and Assada, he also projected that the proximity of Assada to slave trading markets on the African coast guaranteed that slaves would be inexpensive.<sup>61</sup> The vast distances and risks associated with transporting African slaves across the Atlantic to the English Caribbean meant that one hundred 'negroes' cost planters on Barbados £2700, whilst at Assada the same number of enslaved labourers would cost only £100.<sup>62</sup> Black servants and free planters from across the Indian Ocean world would be encouraged to settle at Assada where they would be instructed in the practice of the Christian religion by Englishmen.<sup>63</sup> By following these guidelines, Hunt was certain that Assada would, in time, become a densely inhabited plantation and a prosperous commercial entrepôt, which could produce and re-export Atlantic and East Indian commodities to a variety of

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*, (Princeton, 2003), p. 178.

<sup>59</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*.

<sup>60</sup> Games, *The Web of Empire*, p. 210-211.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, p. 3-4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

global markets. Consequently, he believed that the English settlement at Assada would become a renowned centre of trade in the Indian Ocean, as 'Batavia is to the Dutch, and Goa to the Portugalls'.<sup>64</sup> Despite this optimism, a lack of institutional support from the East India Company, disease, and violent interactions with indigenous communities in the early 1650s quickly rendered the endeavour to establish permanent settlement and plantation slavery on Madagascar a failure.<sup>65</sup>

Certain aspects of Robert Hunt's plans for Assada, such as the use of Barbados as a model for colonial development, the vision of populating the colony with non-white planters from Africa and Asia, and the desire to establish an English form of plantation on Madagascar, were the first written expressions of a distinctly English approach to colonialism in the Indian Ocean. Many of these ideas and methods would be used by the East India Company in subsequent decades. There are a number of reasons why Robert Hunt, and the directors of the Company thirty years later, were interested in using Barbados as a social and economic model for colonial development. Alison Games and Trevor Burnard have both argued that early modern Englishmen imagined that the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean shared important climatic, demographic and geopolitical features.<sup>66</sup> For instance, Robert Hunt believed that because Assada 'lyeth Thirteene degrees in the latitutte of Barbadoes and is about that bignesse and goodnesse...whatsoever will grow upon Barbadoes is likely to grow there, [it] being all the yeare summer'.<sup>67</sup> These conceptual connections encouraged seventeenth century English merchants and colonial theorists, such as Hunt, to apply labour systems and forms of settlement already proven to be highly profitable in the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean. For example, the tropics were seen by Europeans as a source of great wealth which could be secured through piracy, trading networks, or plantation slavery. The opportunities for profit in the Caribbean and the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, "Canaanising Madagascar", pp. 292-293.

<sup>66</sup> Games, *The Web of Empire*, p. 198; Trevor Burnard, 'Placing British Settlement in the Americas in Comparative Perspective', in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds c. 1550-1850*, eds. Owen, Mancke & Reid, (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 417 & 425.

<sup>67</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, p. 2.

Indian Ocean ensured that both regions were sites of intense inter-imperial rivalry; a situation which was made even more problematic for the English, who were latecomers to the colonial struggle and therefore at a territorial and commercial disadvantage to the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch empires in both America and Asia.<sup>68</sup> High rates of mortality from tropical diseases, the threat of large non-white populations, and the belief that hot climates fostered moral degeneracy further solidified the connections between the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean in the minds of some English theorists.

Barbados was an attractive colonial model because following the introduction of Dutch expertise in the use of African slaves to cultivate and refine sugar cane in the 1640s, Barbados had become the wealthiest colony in England's maritime Empire. By the mid-seventeenth century men such as Peter Colleton and Christopher Codrington, many of whom had founded large plantations on Barbados, had their newfound dynastic wealth and power recognised by the English state through knighthoods and prestigious positions in the colonial administration.<sup>69</sup> Until this study it has not been recognised by historians that James Drax, the man widely credited with introducing integrated plantations and using Dutch techniques to expand the slave-sugar system, was a director of the East India Company.<sup>70</sup> Between June 1659 and early 1661, a period towards the end of his life, Drax worked alongside Governor Maurice Thomson to consolidate the East India Company's presence in the Atlantic world, frequently serving on committees regarding Company policy in West Africa and St. Helena (See Figure 2, Appendix).<sup>71</sup> Whilst further research in the records of the Court of Committees is needed for confirmation, it is highly probable that Drax imparted his wide breadth of experience

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<sup>68</sup> H. V. Bowen, 'Britain in the Indian Ocean region and beyond: contours, connections, and the creation of a global maritime empire', in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550-1850*, eds. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, John G. Reid, (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Hilary Beckles, *A Short History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation State* (1990), p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, 'The Sugar Industry in the Seventeenth Century: A New Perspective on the Barbadian "Sugar Revolution"', in *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz, (North Carolina, 2004), p. 300.

<sup>71</sup> London to Fort Cormantine and St. Helena, 23 June 1659, E/3/85, ff. 225-229.

on Caribbean sugar planting and managing African slaves to the other directors of the East India Company, informing the direction of Company policy towards colonisation and the use of forced labour. The Caribbean expertise of men such as Maurice Thomson and James Drax, who occupied leading positions within the East India Company during the 1650s and early 1660s, may explain why the 'rigours of the Barbados discipline' continued to be significant for English colonisers in the South Atlantic and Asia after the failure of the Assada venture in 1650.<sup>72</sup>

Another integral feature of Robert Hunt's vision for Assada was his belief that the development of an ethnically diverse colonial society would lead to a great 'scale of trade to the English'.<sup>73</sup> He argued that Batavia and Goa had become important commercial centres in the Indian Ocean partly because the Dutch and Portuguese had '20 times their number of strangers live amongst them and under their Government'.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Hunt thought that the future prosperity of Assada would be guaranteed if English colonists could fully provide 'ourselves of men from Arabia, Madagascar, Africa, and India to plant, some to be free men, others servants'.<sup>75</sup> These planters and servants from all corners of the Indian Ocean world would be quickly 'bred up in the knowledge of God' because it only took 'one English man [to] governe ten of those Nations'.<sup>76</sup> In subsequent decades, the East India Company would draw upon the same concepts to plant and populate their colonies. For example, instructions sent by the Company to St. Helena in December 1670 dictated that the 'negroes that shall be brought to you or that you have there already' were to be 'carefully instructed in the knowledge of Jesus Christ', and that English planters should 'voice by your lives and conversations give them good examples, that they may be encouraged therein, and whom they shall give a good account unto you of the knowledge of their faith and live up thereunto accordingly, that

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<sup>72</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 178.

<sup>73</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

then they be baptised and after that time to serve 7 years and noo longer and then be free planters'.<sup>77</sup> This approach to labour and English colonisation in the Indian Ocean was pioneering, and represented a strikingly different form of settlement to that which was developing concurrently in North America and the Caribbean. The possible legal origins and repercussions of these distinctive policies will be considered in Chapter Two.

Like the English colony of Bombay, which the Company would assume control over in 1669, Assada was already firmly integrated into pre-existing trading circuits which had existed in the Indian Ocean for centuries. Hunt described how one English ship en route to India 'found a small town called Antasia' within the bay of Assada, 'where the Arabians lade divers Junks of rice yearly in exchange for cullivers, knives, and India commodities'.<sup>78</sup> According to Hunt, St Augustine's Bay, a region where Englishmen had previously attempted to colonise, was inferior to the island of Assada because there was 'usually no trade with any other Nation: nor any towns, nor provisions for planting, there being but a small number of people'.<sup>79</sup> The perceived benefits that an already thriving commerce and a native population brought to English colonisation at Assada were precisely the same advantages which the East India Company saw in Bombay. These features of Bombay informed the Company's early plans to develop the island as both an English plantation and a commercial entrepôt. Colonial developments at Bombay in the late 1660s and early 1670s can be interpreted as a practical attempt to implement the English aspiration for colonies in the Indian Ocean, such as Assada, to act as sites of 'Trade and Plantation'.<sup>80</sup> This is a topic which will be analysed in further detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>77</sup> London to St. Helena, 9 December 1670, E/3/87, ff. 202-203.

<sup>78</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

### **The East India Company at Fort Cormantine, 1657-1668**

By the late 1650s former members of the Assada syndicate, such as Maurice Thomson, and others with Caribbean experience, including the eminent Barbados planter James Drax, had become directors of the East India Company, and were now looking to establish a new 'plantation' on the West African coast to secure their hold over English commerce in the Indian Ocean. The forced labour of Africans was used to sustain the Company's presence in West Africa, helping in efforts to integrate the African and East Indian trades. The East India Company was interested in gaining unrestricted access to the Gold Coast for a number of reasons. Firstly, a fortified outpost in West Africa would enable Company vessels on the long voyage to India to resupply and purchase gold and ivory, which merchants in Asia were eager to exchange for calicos and spices. It was hoped that obtaining gold in Africa would ease the political tensions generated by the large shipments of bullion out of England regularly chartered by the Company to facilitate trade in the East Indies.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, West Africa was also an important market for many of the Company's most valuable commodities, particularly Asian cotton textiles and cowrie shells, which were frequently re-exported from England for sale to African middlemen.<sup>82</sup> These strong commercial incentives for the East India Company to establish a presence on the coast of Africa convinced the directors of the Company that it would be highly profitable to integrate the West African and Asian trades.<sup>83</sup> By 1657, Governor Maurice Thomson had sent the *Marigold* to inform factors in India and on the Gold Coast that he had agreed with the now dissolved Guinea Company that the East India Company would assume control of Fort Cormantine and 'all the subfactories and plantations thereunto belonging'.<sup>84</sup> With official jurisdiction over English commerce on the Gold Coast, the Company began to conduct trading operations to their newly acquired factory.

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<sup>81</sup> Margaret Makepeace, 'English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive', *History in Africa*, Vol. 16, 1989, p. 237.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240 & 242.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>84</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 31 December 1657, E/3/85, ff. 9-11.

A variety of political, commercial and epidemiological factors interacted to produce an unforgiving commercial environment for Europeans on the Gold Coast. This local context shaped the East India Company's policy towards the transatlantic slave trade and the use of forced labour at Fort Cormantine in the mid-seventeenth century. The prevalence of debilitating tropical diseases in Guinea, such as malaria and yellow fever, stifled the Company's efforts to effectively exercise their trading monopoly and hindered the establishment of a strong English territorial presence in West Africa. There were regular complaints that the 'greate mortality' amongst Englishmen at Fort Cormantine meant that the East India Company was dangerously low on personnel to conduct trade on the Gold Coast.<sup>85</sup> Five factors, twelve carpenters and a bricklayer, were sent on the *Barbados Merchant* and the *Blackmore* in April 1660 to supplement the small contingent of English traders at Fort Cormantine.<sup>86</sup> The next year an urgent request was made insisting that the Company send a doctor from London 'for the preservation of men's lives', after four Englishmen had died in the last month alone.<sup>87</sup> The negative impact of epidemic diseases on English trade in Guinea was exacerbated by successive famines. Company servants at Fort Cormantine explained that the reason why trade had been particularly bad from 1660-1661 was because of the 'great famine that hath beene this yeare', which caused African merchants and slaves to die during their travels from the interior to the coast.<sup>88</sup>

The English, already weakened by disease and famine, struggled to compete with other European powers interested in purchasing commodities sold on the Gold Coast, and were forced to accept that local Africans dictated terms of trade in their own favour.<sup>89</sup> The continued presence of the English in West Africa was determined by the maintenance of friendly and reciprocal relationships with

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<sup>85</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 4 July 1661, E/3/27, f. 42.

<sup>86</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 12 April 1660, E/3/85, ff. 308-311.

<sup>87</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, August 1661, E/3/27, f. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 23 January 1661, E/3/27, f. 101.

<sup>89</sup> Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*, (Pennsylvania, 2013), pp. 135-136.

regional kingdoms, necessitating a policy of accommodation due to the East India Company's fragile foothold on the African coast. For instance, reports that there was a misunderstanding between the English and African merchants caused the Company to stress that 'no factor...should give any offence to the king or his people'.<sup>90</sup> The Company was unable to effectively control and manage labour at Fort Cormantine and was fully aware of the importance of maintaining amicable relationships with local rulers if they wanted to sustain their commercial presence in the region. This social and political situation forced the directors of the East India Company to use policies of accommodation and supplication that had already been proven successful in facilitating cross cultural commerce with powerful kingdoms in Asia. In West Africa, this often involved using restraint from enslaving members of the native population for the benefit of the Company's far off colonies in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean.

Serious difficulties with conducting cross-cultural commerce and managing health led the East India Company to condemn their agents and employees on the Gold Coast for assisting private merchants who broke the Company's monopoly. Interlopers regularly transported slaves out of West Africa to satisfy the constant demand for labour in the English Caribbean. The Company made it explicit to their employees that they were not to participate in the transatlantic commerce in African slaves due to the support this trade gave to interloping ventures. In December 1657, Maurice Thomson explained to factors on the Gold Coast that the East India Company intended to keep their commerce in West Africa 'exclusive to all others', so that 'wee may not bee prejudiced by soe many ships touching there as formerly'.<sup>91</sup> Lancelot Staveley, an employee of the Guinea Company for many years, wrote to the East India Company from Fort Cormantine in February 1658 to express his personal support for the Company's desire to effectively exercise their monopoly and regulate

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<sup>90</sup> Wyamba to London, 26 February 1659, E/3/25, f. 283.

<sup>91</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 31 December 1657, E/3/85, ff. 9-11.

English commerce on the Gold Coast. However, he also gave a stark warning that his longstanding experience as a merchant in the region suggested that the Company 'will be much injured by interlopers'.<sup>92</sup>

These words were prescient, for even as Lancelot Staveley was composing his letter, the unlicensed traders Captain John Staines and Mr Booth were purchasing slaves and gold from local African communities at Guinea, which they transported to Barbados in May 1658.<sup>93</sup> The illegal practices of independent slave traders from England and the American plantations threatened to dismantle the East India Company's gold trade at Fort Cormantine because they sold muskets and powder at rates below the inflated prices preferred by the Company.<sup>94</sup> Although the Court of Committees ordered their employees on the Gold Coast to obstruct and hinder interlopers, they were fully aware that 'it hath beene the custome of the English factors...to buy their goods and drive a trade and commerce' with private merchants.<sup>95</sup> Information that 100 marks of gold meant for the Company had been taken by interlopers and that their agent and Mr Faldoe was 'very instrumental in the promoting of private trade', led the Company to formally restrict English slave trading out of West Africa in 1660.<sup>96</sup> The directors of the East India Company were certain that the slave trade was the main reason why interlopers were attracted to markets on the Gold Coast, and therefore required their agent and all other factors to 'totally forebear the buying and selling of negroes'.<sup>97</sup>

Despite these injunctions against private slave traders transporting enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast to the Caribbean, the East India Company did deploy African labour at Fort Cormantine and

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<sup>92</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 16 Feb 1658, E/3/25, ff. 242-243.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.; Fort Cormantine to London, May 1658, E/3/25 f. 246, f. 248.

<sup>94</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 8 November 1659, E/3/85, ff. 253-257.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 12 April 1660 and 30 Nov 1660, E/3/85, ff. 308-311, 348-351.

<sup>97</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 30 Nov 1660, E/3/85, ff. 348-351.

occasionally transferred labourers from Guinea to their settlements in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The work of these African labourers was used to further the Company's commercial aims in Asia. The weak position of the English in West Africa during the mid-seventeenth century when compared to nearby centralised African kingdoms meant that the Company struggled to maintain control over the labour forces necessary to provision company vessels and repair fortifications. There were regular complaints from Roger Chappell, the Company's agent at Fort Cormantine from 1659 to 1662, that there was 'a great want of slaves to serve upon the land' because the local African 'country people are not serviceable, but always running away'.<sup>98</sup> Chappell emphasised that for the continued prosperity of the English fort it was crucial for factors to be allowed to travel to Arda (Allada), a prominent slave trading kingdom in the Bight of Benin, to 'buy a quantity of good slaves and bringe [them] heere for your service'.<sup>99</sup> In 1662, the Company authorised its employees to supply Fort Cormantine with around fifty forced labourers, but with the important caveat that 'they bee all such as are willing and not forced to saile unto you and become our servants'.<sup>100</sup>

The directors of the East India Company stressed that the small numbers of labourers sent from Fort Cormantine to their other colonies, such as St. Helena and Madras, were to voluntarily enter into the service of the Company. For example, in June 1659 instructions were sent to Captain George Swanley, commander of the *Truro*, to 'procure tenn negroes, men and women, such as are lusty and of the younger sort' from the 'Coast of Guinny' and to transport them to St. Helena.<sup>101</sup> Only if Captain Swanley could find people that were 'willing to leave their countries and saile along without compulsion or inforcement' would he have permission to transfer Africans from the Gold Coast to

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<sup>98</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 10 June 1661, E/3/27, f. 40.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., f. 40; Robin Law, 'The Slave Trade in Seventeenth-Century Allada: A Revision', *African Economic History*, No. 22 1994, pp. 59-92.

<sup>100</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 11 July 1662, E/3/86, f. 74.

<sup>101</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 23 June 1659, E/3/85, f. 231.

Company colonies.<sup>102</sup> Similar instructions were sent on the Royal James and Henry in September 1660, when the Company required '10 lusty blacks' to be shipped from Fort Cormantine and 'delivered to our agent and factors at Fort St George', on the eastern coast of India.<sup>103</sup> Labourers were still being sent from Guinea to St. Helena in 1666, when the commander of the *Charles* was instructed to pick up fifteen workers.<sup>104</sup>

A revealing letter sent from Fort Cormantine to St. Helena in 1663 may offer some explanation for why the Company thought it necessary for Africans in their charge to want to voluntarily leave Guinea for service abroad. Factors on the Gold Coast explained to the Governor of St. Helena that they could not fulfil the regular requests for labourers because African men 'all [had] wives and children in the Country and will never thrive after being transported, and the sending of some away will cause all the rest to run into the Country'.<sup>105</sup> This sentiment was echoed by the Court of Committees, who recognised the necessity of sending Company vessels to Allada 'to buy a good quantitie of blacks to bee employed in our service, because your country people are not serviceable and inclinable at all tymes to runn from you'.<sup>106</sup>

This chapter has argued that English efforts to expand forms of plantation slavery into the Indian Ocean has a much longer history than has been previously understood, and that promotional literature for colonial experiments on Madagascar, such as Robert Hunt's *The Island of Assada*, helped to establish ideas about colonisation in the Indian Ocean that would be prominent in the minds of members of the East India Company in subsequent decades. It has also analysed how a number of epidemiological and commercial factors led the Company to restrict slave trading from

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 12 September 1660, E/3/85, f. 323-329.

<sup>104</sup> Fort Cormantine to London, 23 Jan 1661, E/3/27, f. 101.

<sup>105</sup> Fort Cormantine to St. Helena, March 1662/3, E/3/27, f. 195.

<sup>106</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 11 July 1662, E/3/86, f. 74.

West Africa, and instead emphasise that any African labourers who were transported to work abroad should leave without coercion. An incomplete body of source material and the ambiguous language used to describe forced labourers in the seventeenth century causes uncertainty about whether the small numbers of Africans who were moved to Company colonies in this period truly did make the voluntarily choice to enter into the service of the East India Company. It is possible that this policy reflected the Company's ideal form of practice, which the Court of Committees thought would assist in their efforts to sustain diplomatic and commercial ties with powerful West African kingdoms. Nevertheless, Robert Hunt's pamphlet and the policies develop to manage the slave trade in Guinea from 1657 to 1668 were influential when the East India Company decided to expand its use of servant labour at colonies in the South Atlantic and Asia during the 1660s and 1670s, a topic which will be explored in the next chapter. For example, the decision to forbid Company employees from using compulsion to transport labourers around the Atlantic and Indian Oceans was a precedent established during the East India Company's interactions with slavery on the Gold Coast.

In subsequent decades the Royal African Company would hold the chartered monopoly over West African trade, and deploy a workforce of white indentured servants and black slaves at its network of trading factories along the Gold Coast.<sup>107</sup> Simon Newman contends that interactions between English labour traditions and West African slavery produced a composite form of 'castle slavery' at these trading posts during the eighteenth century.<sup>108</sup> He explains how it became common practice during the late seventeenth century for the Royal African Company to transport slaves from Upper Guinea to the forts owned by the Company in Guinea. Many of these 'castle slaves' were trained in crafts such as carpentry, bricklaying, masonry, or smithing, and were ordered by the Company to help repair the fort and maintain the infrastructure of English trading operations in West Africa.

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<sup>107</sup> William Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672-1752* (North Carolina, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> Newman, *A New World of Labor*.

Particularly important for the continued success of English slave trading commerce on the Gold Coast was the role that company slaves played in the local maritime sector. The Royal African Company valued slaves that possessed nautical skills, who they forced to navigate the dangerous Atlantic surf in canoes to assist in the transportation of valuable cargoes and enable communication between English shipping and Cape Coast Castle.<sup>109</sup> The prevalence of epidemic diseases on the Gold Coast to which English soldiers had little acquired immunity also led the Company to sometimes use male castle slaves as a militia force to protect English interests against European competitors and African encroachment. In the following chapters it will be shown that contact between English forms of managing forced labour, such as the indenture system, and the slaveholding practices of other overseas empires also produced hybrid labour regimes at colonies owned by the East India Company in the South Atlantic and Asia. Newman has asserted that the slave system which emerged on Barbados was derived largely from British customs rather than cultural imports from the West African population. However, in the Indian Ocean, Portuguese, Dutch, and Muslim forms of slavery proved highly influential for the directors of the East India Company and English colonisers throughout the seventeenth century.

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-150.

## Chapter 2. Hybrid Labour Regimes and Population Management at Bombay and St. Helena, 1668-1682

The governmental concerns of early modern corporations has led Philip Stern to describe the East India Company as a 'Company-state', which along with its commercial functions aspired to control territory and govern people in Asia during the late seventeenth century.<sup>110</sup> He has argued that previous historians of the East India Company have either downplayed or ignored the Company's administration of settlements and colonies in the South Atlantic, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. Evidence relating to the constitutional structure of the East India Company and the importance of governmental interests in the formation of corporate policy emerges clearly when analysing correspondence and consultation records from the late seventeenth century. Like an early modern state, the East India Company issued various laws and ordinances to manage its overseas territories, collected taxes, and had the power to mint its own currency for circulation at English settlements in the Indian Ocean. Stern contends that two colonies in particular, Bombay and St. Helena, were 'held on crown patents almost identical in form to corporate and proprietary charters in the western Atlantic'.<sup>111</sup> However, parallels between the forms of colonisation used within the English Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean extended further than just the legal frameworks supporting overseas expansion.

In a similar manner to the abortive attempts to colonise Madagascar described in Chapter One, the East India Company's settlements at Bombay and St. Helena were styled as 'plantations' of Englishmen, a term which the Oxford English Dictionary states was synonymous with 'colony' during

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<sup>110</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Stern, 'Company, State and Empire: Governance and Regulatory Frameworks in Asia', in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550-1850*, eds. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, John G. Reid, (Cambridge, 2012), p. 141.

the Tudor and Stuart eras, and most frequently used with reference to Ireland and North America.<sup>112</sup> English adventurers quickly learned through harsh experience that the most critical means of ensuring the survival of young and vulnerable plantations was to quickly populate them with useful labourers who could clear the land and cultivate profitable commodities. Jurists, merchants and planters utilised the system of indentured servitude, which had precedents dating back to the Statute of Artificers (1563) and the Vagrancy Act (1547), to direct flows of landless peasants and semi-skilled workers from the British Isles outwards into the Atlantic to meet the labour demands of burgeoning plantations in North America and the Caribbean.<sup>113</sup> The South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean were generally beyond the remit of these migratory currents, and to satisfy the labour requirements of their own plantations the East India Company instead developed a number of innovative strategies unique to an Asian context. This chapter will analyse how concessionary policies were established by civil authorities to encourage merchants, weavers, and coolies from the Indian subcontinent to settle on the island of Bombay. It will also explore how, at St. Helena, precedents established during the period when the East India Company held control over West African commerce helped to produce a particularly lenient labour system, which populated the colony with a number of 'black servants'. There are many parallels between this light-handed form of forced labour and the practices written about in Robert Hunt's printed material. After a fixed term of service, these 'black servants' were supposed to become free planters with all the same rights as Englishmen. It will be argued that some aspects of this syncretic labour regime may have developed from components of the English indenture system, Muslim forms of bondage and dependency, and Iberian slaving customs.

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<sup>112</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Stevenson, p. 1358; *The Oxford Companion to British History*, ed. John Cannon, (Oxford, 1997), p. 755.

<sup>113</sup> William O'Reilly, 'Movements of People in the Atlantic World, 1450-1850', in Nicholas Canny & Phillip Morgan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450-c. 1850* (Oxford, 2011), p. 316-317; Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor*, pp. 29-31.

### **Servitude at English Plantations in the South Atlantic and Asia**

The transfer of Bombay Island from the royal authority of Charles II to the East India Company in March 1668 initiated a period where Company officials in London revived the possibility of expanding Atlantic colonial systems to the Indian Ocean, nearly two decades after the failed Assada venture. Like the proposed English colony on Madagascar, Bombay was conceived as a 'port for the importation and exportation of goods and persons to and from Persia, the Redd Sea and other places'.<sup>114</sup> To realise this vision of a thriving commercial entrepôt, the small garrison of soldiers already on the island were ordered to begin fortifying the settlement, planting provisions and 'to enter upon the making of manufactures, husbandry and other arts'.<sup>115</sup> In 1668 a council was established to ensure that this distant 'Christian colony' was managed in 'order and safety under a good government for the increase of all manufactures'.<sup>116</sup> In a similar manner to how Robert Hunt envisioned Assada functioning as a centre of both 'Trade and Plantation', an assembly of leading civil and military officials on the island was instructed by the Company to introduce a variety of measures to attract people from England and Asia to settle at the nascent colony, and to experiment with planting a variety of different provisions and commodities.<sup>117</sup> Despite reports that the soil was too saturated with salt water for agrarian production, John Petit would later be successful in converting a parcel of land on Bombay into sugar cane fields during his time as deputy governor of the island.<sup>118</sup> There would also be frequent instructions from the Company ordering that 'if pepper will grow there, that you doo in espetiall manner' use the local peoples as labour to 'promote the planting thereof'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> London to Surat, 27 March 1668, E/3/87, f. 75.

<sup>115</sup> London to Surat, 10 March 1668/69, E/3/87, f. 114.

<sup>116</sup> London to Surat, 25 August 1668, E/3/87, f. 92.

<sup>117</sup> Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> London to Surat, 19 March 1679/70, E/3/89, ff. 109-110.

<sup>119</sup> London to Surat, 16 Feb 1669/70, E/3/87 f. 158.

The 'peopling' of Bombay was a pressing issue for the East India Company, and it was believed that a comprehensive plan for encouraging migration into the settlement and promulgating the Protestant faith would help to stifle any subversive activities committed by the Portuguese and Asian inhabitants.<sup>120</sup> At the English trading outposts scattered across the Indian Ocean lived small resident populations of English factors who were directly employed by the East India Company. These men were paid to organise trade, resolve commercial disputes, and provide political representation for the Company in Asia. The directors in London wrote to their leading factors on the Bombay council asking for advice on 'the best way for encouraging of free Burghers in trading, building and planting there', and resolved that 'for the better planting of Bombay' as an English colony it would be necessary to discourage miscegenation by sending single English women to the island to become the wives of factors, soldiers, and other inhabitants.<sup>121</sup> Consequently, inhabitants of St. Helena who were dissatisfied with life on the island were permitted 'freely to proceed in our service for the island of Bombay'.<sup>122</sup> The transplantation of English populations and the successful establishment of small plantations where tropical commodities were successfully cultivated provides evidence that Bombay was not just seen by the Company as another port city in the Indian Ocean, but was also firmly integrated into a wider seventeenth century English colonial project to establish permanent and productive settler colonies abroad. This template for overseas development produced a lasting legacy in the Atlantic world, but had less of an overall impact in the Indian Ocean, due to the failure of English colonial projects on Madagascar and the dominance of large native populations in Asia who retained control over economic activity and social life.<sup>123</sup>

The colonial project at Bombay was part of a wider programme begun in the late 1660s to reduce the financial costs of the territories owned by the East India Company. At St. Helena, a strategically

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 159.

<sup>121</sup> London to Surat, 10 March 1668/69, E/3/87, f. 115.

<sup>122</sup> London to St. Helena, 10 Feb 1668/69, E/3/87 ff. 109-110.

<sup>123</sup> Burnard, 'Placing British Settlement in the Americas in Comparative Perspective', pp. 426-432.

important refuelling station in the South Atlantic for vessels returning from India, the Company began experimenting with the methods of colonisation and the cultivation of goods that had made other English colonies in the Atlantic world prosperous. Philip Stern has argued that St. Helena can be seen as a transoceanic island, which straddled both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.<sup>124</sup> John McAleer supports this interpretation, arguing that St. Helena was a maritime 'gateway zone' between the Atlantic world and the riches of Asia.<sup>125</sup> In 1671 Company agents at Surat were instructed to send indigo seeds to St. Helena, along with 'a person skilful in the sowing of it and bringing it to perfection'.<sup>126</sup> By 1673 the Company had diversified its efforts at St. Helena by experimenting with a variety of tropical commodities from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, including sugar cane, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, cocoa, ginger and fruit trees such as 'China oranges'.<sup>127</sup> The significance that the Company placed on these endeavours is demonstrated by the instructions to ensure that all people, including the English soldiers stationed for the defence of the island, have 'negroes' to assist in the cultivation of these goods.<sup>128</sup> Prior experience with other English plantations in the Americas suggested that the best way to make St. Helena a self-sufficient and obedient colony was to 'divide the land, negroes and cattle in some equall proportion' and to let the planters 'dispose and make sale of the produce of their labours without any molestation' from the governor.<sup>129</sup> In compliance with these rules, Robert Swallow and Henry Gargon were each allowed 'one negroe and two cowes' from the Company to help them establish their plantations.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Philip Stern, 'Politics and Ideology in the Early East India Company-State: The Case of St. Helena, 1673–1709', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, (March 2007).

<sup>125</sup> John McAleer, 'Looking East: St. Helena, the South Atlantic and Britain's Indian Ocean World', *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 2016), p. 79.

<sup>126</sup> London to Surat, 16 Feb 1669/70, E/3/87 f. 162.

<sup>127</sup> Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St. Helena, 19 December 1673, E/3/88, f. 43.

<sup>128</sup> London to St. Helena, 18 December 1674, E/3/88, f. 70.

<sup>129</sup> London to St. Helena, 10 Feb 1668/69, E/3/87 ff. 109-110.

<sup>130</sup> Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St. Helena, 1668, E/3/87 ff. 108-109

Just as certain features of the East India Company's colonial endeavours were borrowed from earlier experiences of English expansion into the Atlantic world, most notably the conceptualisation of new settlements in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean as 'plantations', initial experiments with planting tropical commodities in the 1660s and 1670s involved forms of labour management which also drew upon a variety of traditions. The East India Company's approach to labour was innovative, combining the intellectual heritage of Hunt's plans for Assada with some of the labour systems originating in England and the customs of other overseas empires encountered by the Company. The East India Company's global networks and its position as a commercial intermediary facilitated interactions with other European empires and indigenous societies on the Gold Coast and the Indian subcontinent, which may have helped to fuse these various labour regimes into a coherent policy. The forced labour systems used by the East India Company in the 1660s and 1670s were distinct from the rigorous patterns of African slavery that had come to dominate the English Caribbean, because they involved more porous definitions of slavery and freedom.

Up until the 1680s, the small numbers of enslaved labourers transported by the East India Company from Guinea, Madagascar and India were almost always referred to as black or 'negro' servants, and were accorded official privileges and immunities for their protection on the long distance voyages to Company colonies. For example, in 1668 the Governor of the East India Company William Thompson ordered that '4 young Gentues or Arracans and their wives' were to be 'sent out as servants' from the Bay of Bengal to St. Helena.<sup>131</sup> He explained that the Company was 'very desirous to make tryall of them, supposing they may bee more usefull and ingenious than those people which come from Guinea'.<sup>132</sup> Commanders of Company shipping were instructed to provide a 'fitting cabbon for their accommodation in the voyage', and it was expressly forbidden that violence 'or any act to give

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<sup>131</sup> London to St. Helena, 27 November 1668, E/3/87, f. 102.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

discontent to the natives' was to be committed when procuring these labourers, so that they would 'willingly embrace' the Company's service upon arrival at St. Helena.<sup>133</sup> By 1669, St. Helena was regularly 'supplied [with] some blacks' which the Company 'ordered to be brought from India by two in a ship'.<sup>134</sup> The provision to abstain from sending 'any persons to St. Helena against their wills' was restated in December 1676, when it emerged that an Indian man had been forcefully brought to the island from Fort St George.<sup>135</sup> Fears about the dire repercussions for the Company's trade in India if his complaint 'that wee send away the natives' should reach his King caused the Court of Committees to reiterate to factors at Fort St George the Company's slave trading policy which had become established during their time in West Africa; that it was against the Company's 'inclinations to buy any blacks and to transport them from their wives and children without their own consents'.<sup>136</sup>

High mortality rates of African labourers at Bantam, an English settlement on the western end of Java, forced the Company to transport '20 lusty negroes' on every vessel to the colony in 1672.<sup>137</sup> In Southeast Asia, these 'black servants' were to perform 'such work and labour as is fitting' within the commercial environment of an Asian port town.<sup>138</sup> In the South Atlantic, labourers were needed on St. Helena to guarantee that 'due improvement be made of the Companies owne plantacon by imployment of the Company negroes and servants in planting' a variety of commodities, especially those crops which free planters were already trialling with seeds transported to the island from across the globe, including 'sugar canes, indicoe, cotton wooll, ginger, [and] tobacco'.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> London to St. Helena, 9 March 1669, E/3/87, f. 175.

<sup>135</sup> London to Fort St. George, 15 December 1676, E/3/88, f. 180.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., f. 180

<sup>137</sup> London to Bantam, 18 January 1670/71, E/3/87, f. 208.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St. Helena, 19 December 1673, E/3/88, f. 43.

Although they worked in the plantation economy, an institution which historians have come to associate with unprecedented forms of brutality, the Company emphasised that the African and East Indian labourers sent to work on experimental plantations at St. Helena, Bantam and Bombay during the 1660s and 1670s were to be treated 'like men and women and not as slaves'.<sup>140</sup> This meant that, just like at the imagined English colony of Assada, African and Asian workers were to be 'catechised and instructed in the principles of the Christian religion' and learn from the good example of English planters.<sup>141</sup> After their baptism, black servants were required to 'serve 7 years and noo longer' before they could become 'free planters' and enjoy the same social and economic privileges as English landowners.<sup>142</sup> The Company explained how on St. Helena 'all negroes that are bond or ffree living upon our said Island that shall make profession of the Christian ffaith, and are thought fitt by the Governor and Councel and Minister to be baptized, shall within 7 years after their such public imbraceing [of] the Christian Religion be free planters, and enjoy the privilege of other planters as to land and cattle'.<sup>143</sup> A similar message was sent to Bantam in January 1670, where it was stated that all black servants in the employ of the Company should be aware 'that seaven yeares after their making confession of their Christian faith with knowledge and understanding, living answerable thereto in their lives and conversations to your sattisfaction of the reallity thereof, that then they shall be made free.'<sup>144</sup> At Bombay, forms of servitude were of even shorter duration. The one hundred black servants who were employed by the Company at Bombay in the mid-1670s were officially freed after conversion to Christianity and only three years service, thereafter becoming permanent residents of the colony with an equal social status to planters of English descent.<sup>145</sup> This lenient form of forced labour was very different to the patterns of enslavement described in

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<sup>140</sup> Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Second Edition (Oxford, 2007), pp. 40-63; London to Bantam, 18 January 1670/71, E/3/87, f. 208.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> London to St. Helena, 9 December 1670, E/3/87, f. 202.

<sup>143</sup> London to St. Helena, 15 March 1677/78, E/3/88, f. 287.

<sup>144</sup> London to Bantam, 18 January 1670/71, E/3/87, f. 208.

<sup>145</sup> London to Surat, 7 March 1676, E/3/88, f. 207.

contemporaneous accounts of Barbados and other English colonies in North America and the Caribbean.

In both the English Atlantic and the worlds of the East India Company in Asia, religious observance was an important marker of belonging in the seventeenth century, through which unfree members of colonial society were able to publicly certify their pious adherence to English cultural norms and thereby clamour for the same rights as other free planters.<sup>146</sup> Before the systematic codification of laws to manage the institution of slavery at English colonies in the Atlantic world curtailed the independence of black inhabitants, conversion to Christianity was sometimes seen by planters and slaves in North America and the Caribbean as a pretext for manumission. For instance, in 1644 Captain William Jackson landed a family of African slaves on Bermuda who had been captured from the Spanish. He required that the parents only serve 'to the end and terme of seven yeeres', whilst after a period of enslavement lasting thirty years, their young son could be freed if he was able to 'make a reasonable profession of the Christian Faith'.<sup>147</sup> However, confusion and uncertainty over the morality and practicality of converting black slaves to Christianity and then keeping them in a subjugated condition was prevalent, despite the Church of England's requirement that all colonists should endeavour to convert their slaves.<sup>148</sup> In his history of Barbados, Richard Ligon recounted a meeting with a slave who desired to be instructed in the ways of the Christian faith, because he believed that conversion would allow him to become 'endued with all those knowledges he wanted'.<sup>149</sup> The master of the slave refused to allow Ligon's request on the grounds that 'being once a Christian, he could no more account him a Slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as

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<sup>146</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, p. 42.

<sup>147</sup> Virginia Bernhard, 'Beyond the Chesapeake: The Contrasting Status of Blacks in Bermuda, 1616-1663', *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 54, No. 4, (November 1988), p. 557.

<sup>148</sup> Katharine Gerbner, 'The Ultimate Sin: Christianising Slaves in Barbados in the Seventeenth Century', *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (March 2010), p. 61.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (London, 1673), p. 50.

Slaves'.<sup>150</sup> This episode illustrates the deep-seated fears about how the authority of a master over his slave may degenerate following the widespread conversion of slaves.<sup>151</sup> Whilst there are examples in the early American colonies for how religious conversion could be a route to manumission for black slaves, it was only within the worlds of the East India Company that these customary practices were, from the outset, codified into a coherent policy.

Although there had been a general aversion to enslaving other Christians present in English culture since the Norman Conquest, the stipulation that black slaves at overseas plantations should have their liberty once they were baptised had no precedent in English law. As well as drawing upon an intellectual heritage stemming from the promotional literature published for the Assada plantation, the passage of laws which explicitly link conversion to Christianity with manumission at colonies owned by the East India Company are reminiscent of three different systems of slavery and servitude encountered by the Company during the seventeenth century. For instance, Portuguese slave codes were formulated on the Iberian Peninsula during the late medieval period, when there was a sustained period of religious conflict between Christian and Muslim powers. Once the expansionary forces forged in this military crucible were extended outwards across the Atlantic and towards Asia, Iberian slave codes were widely dispersed across the world. According to the *Siete Partidas*, a statutory code compiled in thirteenth century Spain, adopting Christianity was an important first step towards manumission, and pious slaves could be freed with the consent of their master.<sup>152</sup> In practice, conversion to Christianity did not guarantee future liberty, although forms of 'conditional manumission' premised upon Roman law were a frequent occurrence in medieval

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>151</sup> Marcus W. Jernegan, 'Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (April 1916), p. 506.

<sup>152</sup> William D. Phillips Jr., 'Manumission in Metropolitan Spain and the Canaries in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', in Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World* (South Carolina, 2009), p. 38-39; William D. Phillips Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Pennsylvania, 2014).

Portugal, where informal agreements between Christian masters and enslaved *conversos* opened a clear path towards manumission in exchange for a contracted term of service, usually lasting for nine to twelve years.<sup>153</sup>

The importance of religion in defining who was slave and free at Company colonies may have been assimilated through contact with the Portuguese empire. Company ships would have encountered Portuguese slaveholding practices during their frequent visits to Lisbon, the Cape Verde Islands, West Africa, Mozambique, Goa, and Rio de Janeiro. Because of the ‘the freedom our ships enjoy in the ports they goe to under the Portuguese government’, Portuguese vessels were permitted by the Company to visit St. Helena with the same ‘free liberty to purchase [trade goods] as our own country men’.<sup>154</sup> Bilateral commercial networks spanned the South Atlantic during the early modern period, binding together the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Brazil.<sup>155</sup> The slave traders which forged these close ties sometimes resupplied at St. Helena on their transatlantic voyages.<sup>156</sup> Many of the slaves used by the East India Company were bought from Portuguese merchants at St. Jago, one of the largest islands that makes up the Cape Verde archipelago, and the Company regularly harboured slaves who deserted Portuguese settlements in India. For instance, in the winter of 1670 Captain Thomas Harman of the *Unicorn* was given 1500 ryalls and told that on his outward bound voyage to India he was to ‘touch at St. Jago to take in 24 negroes, men and women, to be distributed amongst the inhabitants’ of St. Helena.<sup>157</sup> The slaves purchased at Portuguese colonies

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<sup>153</sup> Francois Soyer, ‘Muslim Slaves and Freedmen in Medieval Portugal’, *Al-Qantara*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (July-December 2007), p. 497.

<sup>154</sup> London to St. Helena, 7 April 1708, G/32/1, f. 110-111.

<sup>155</sup> Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>156</sup> London to St. Helena, 13 March 1718/19, E/3/99, f. 361; London to St. Helena, 13 March 1718/19, E/3/101, f. 247.

<sup>157</sup> London to St. Helena, 9 December 1670, E/3/87, ff. 202-203.

such as St. Jago were valued for their skills as agriculturalists, and there were orders sent in 1662 to set aside thirty pounds for 'a negro or two that is skillfull and knowes how to plant'.<sup>158</sup>

It is also possible that systems of slavery, bondage, and dependency used within the Muslim world shaped the 'black servant' system developed by the Company. Although much more research is needed if bold claims are to be made about the influence of the Mughal Empire and Islamic law upon the East India Company, there is some evidence to show that the inclusive labour customs used at Company colonies in some ways reflected Muslim slaveholding practices with regard to manumission. Islamic legal codes, many of which were laid out within the Qur'an and the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, acted as the foundation for the forms of slavery used within the Ottoman and Mughal Empires.<sup>159</sup> Whilst they make reference to a very different religion than the Protestant denomination of Christianity espoused by the East India Company, the content of these slave laws and the manumission practices used within Muslim societies in South Asia during the early modern period resonated strongly with the techniques used to manage black servant labourers at Company colonies. Margaret Hunt contends that enslavement within the Islamic world was often a temporary state, and could in fact be a route to upward social mobility, because after five to seven years slaves were allowed to petition Muslim courts for their freedom.<sup>160</sup> In a similar manner, Ehud Toledano argues that within the Islamic community 'manumitting slaves after a number of years, usually seven to ten, was regarded as a meritorious act'.<sup>161</sup> This sentiment can be clearly seen in fourth Surah of the Qur'an, where it is emphasised that believing slaves must be set free.<sup>162</sup> Elsewhere in the Holy Book, slaveholders were directed to provide a writ of manumission for those slaves who could

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<sup>158</sup> Instructions to Captain Samuel Higginson of the ship American, 25 September 1663, E/3/86, f. 154.

<sup>159</sup> Shahid M. Shahidullah, *Comparative Criminal Justice Systems*, (Jones & Bartlett, 2012), p. 370.

<sup>160</sup> Margaret Hunt, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (Pearson, 2010), pp. 16-18.

<sup>161</sup> Ehud Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East*, (Yale, 2007), pp. 90-91.

<sup>162</sup> The Qu'ran, 4:92,

profess an intimate knowledge of Allah and demonstrate their good spiritual faith.<sup>163</sup> The particularly inclusive forms of slavery which existed in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires during the seventeenth century have led Y. Hakan Erdem to state that within the Islamic world 'slaves were continually integrated into society as full members'.<sup>164</sup> Commercial contact and diplomatic relationships with the Mughal Empire in South Asia may have been the means through which English employees of the East India Company learnt about how Muslim slave-owners used religious observance to determine when slaves deserved their personal freedom.

It can also be argued that a familiarity with traditional English customs of managing labour informed the direction of Company policy towards their black servants. Standard practice at colonial plantations managed by the East India Company appears to have been that once black servants had demonstrated their knowledge of the Christian faith through the recital of catechisms they would be considered of equal status with a free planter, and were thereafter only required to serve the Company for between three to seven years. Terms of service stipulated in the indenture contracts which brought swathes of labourers from the British Isles to the Caribbean and North America over the course of the seventeenth century were also in the range of three to seven years, and likewise most British servants voluntarily choose to enter into temporary bondage before later becoming free planters and owning land for themselves. John Donoghue has argued that indentured servitude can be described as a form of 'bond slavery' which constituted the 'first, dominant form of chattel labour in the English Atlantic'.<sup>165</sup> Whilst servants from Britain did not come to dominate the labour forces of English settlements in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, the fact that some of the legal mechanisms which underpinned the system of indentured servitude may have been adopted when the East India Company was formulating its forced labour regimes supports Donoghue's argument

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<sup>163</sup> The Qu'ran, 24:33,

<sup>164</sup> Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise 1800-1909*, (Palgrave, 1996), p. 19.

<sup>165</sup> John Donoghue, "'Out of the Land of Bondage": The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 4, (October 2010), p. 950.

that religion, class, and skin colour were all important factors in determining those who were free and unfree in the early period of English expansion.

Following the Dutch invasion of St. Helena in 1673 an African servant and his family were granted their liberty after a display of loyalty to the English inhabitants of the island. Sir Richard Munden, the captain of the relief force, paid to redeem this 'negro' from a 'Portugall to whom he was sold' whilst the island was occupied. It was also ordered that, like English planters, he should receive land and two cows 'as a reward of his service and the encouragement of faithfullness'.<sup>166</sup> This episode indicates that the policy to manumit forced labourers based upon their good conduct and to populate Company colonies with black planters, a concept first articulated in Robert Hunt's *The Island of Assada*, was put into practice. However, the fragmentary nature of the surviving source material means that there are a limited number of similar examples.

### **Asian Coolies, Weavers, and the 'Peopling' of Bombay**

Whilst efforts to populate plantations with free Englishmen and Christianised 'black servants' were a central feature of the East India Company's project for colonial development and labour management in the South Atlantic and Asia, the exploitation of ancient systems of migration amongst landless peasants and poor artisans soon became an equally important strategy used for planting a secure and stable colony at Bombay. The focus on developing Bombay as a regional centre of trade and the proximity of the island to the powerful and wealthy Mughal Empire meant that if the Company was to attract merchants, brokers, artificers and landless labourers from across India to settle on the island, the labour management techniques used by the Company in northwest India needed to be lenient. Instructions to establish moderate customs for merchants and to treat local

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<sup>166</sup> Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St. Helena, 19 December 1673, E/3/88, f. 44.

communities with 'civility and kindnesse' were introduced to 'incorage the natives that are there and invite others to come thither' and either plant commodities or weave fine cloths.<sup>167</sup> To quickly increase the value of the Company's trade to England, supplies of cotton were procured from the Indian interior and brought to Bombay to enable skilled Asian artisans to be put 'upon making of such callicoes as they are capeable off'.<sup>168</sup> These measures were relatively successful, and by July 1669 there were 55 families of weavers and one loom maker from Surat on the island, who were making quality cloths at a wage of 5 pence a day which would 'please England'.<sup>169</sup> Orders to impress money to the value of 3000 pagodas to cloth weavers from Rajapore to encourage them to settle at Bombay in the mid-1670s demonstrates how the management of population was central to the Company's plans 'to enlarge the trade of that Island'.<sup>170</sup>

Highly mobile labour systems worked against the Company's aims to retain and manage their population at Bombay in the 1660s and 1670s. This was a longstanding issue for European colonisers in northwest India. During the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese resorted to binding Indian peasants to the land to restrict their ability to abandon their homes when better economic opportunities arose elsewhere. The rural economy of the *Estado da India* was characterised by powerful Portuguese landlords who erected defensive farmsteads manned by dependents and slaves.<sup>171</sup> In 1570, the Jesuit priest Francisco Rodrigues condemned the exploitation of impoverished and landless members of the Sudra caste, who were forced to perform hard labour for the Portuguese residents of Bassein in a manner similar to slavery.<sup>172</sup> Over one hundred years later, the Portuguese still faced difficulties in managing the itinerant population groups of northwest India,

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<sup>167</sup> London to Surat, 27 March 1668, E/3/87, f. 75.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Bombay Consultations, 9 June 1669 and 22 July 1669, G/3/1, f. 28, ff. 40-41.

<sup>170</sup> London to Surat, 8 March 1675/6, E/3/88, f. 133.

<sup>171</sup> Sidh Daniel Losa Mendiratta, *The Defensive System Devices of the Northern Province of the State of India, 1521-1739* (PhD Thesis, University of Coimbra, 2012), p. 601-602.

<sup>172</sup> André Pinto de Sousa Dias Teixeira, *Bassein and its Territory: Politics and Economics, 1534-1665* (PhD Thesis, University of Coimbra, 2010), p. 263.

particularly because the presence of the English at Bombay had introduced an aggressive new competitor to the local labour market. The impact of the comprehensive English programme to 'people' Bombay on the traditional circuits of labour migration in northwest India is shown by reports from the overseer of the Basseim fortress works, who complained in 1676 about the depopulation of Portuguese villages and the surrounding land. He attributed this demographic situation to the English, who attracted the inhabitants of Basseim to reside at Bombay, going so far as to harbour fugitive slaves who had deserted Portuguese settlements.<sup>173</sup>

Landless labourers benefitted from the East India Company's efforts to attract and mobilise labour on Bombay during the 1660s and 1670s. For example, in March 1673 John Child and Godfrey Williams ordered that the 'workmen and labourers pay should be raised from 2 ½ pence a day to 3 pence' following complaints from coolies that 'rice is soo deare that they cannot live upon' such a small amount.<sup>174</sup> It was hoped that by raising the wages of labourers the Company may be able to 'winn the neighbouring people to come and live with us' and thereby 'the publique works may be the sooner finished and completed'.<sup>175</sup> In the same year, the Bombay council established even more concessionary policies to attract poor Asian peasants, which involved 'privileges and immunitys for [the] encouraging of those persons which come from the neighbouring places to inhabit on this island'.<sup>176</sup> The Company paid for the construction of ten houses 'for the encouragement of others to build houses on this island and to invite the inhabitants to live here'.<sup>177</sup> Plans for further improvements to the colony required Surat 'to send as many able workmen' as they could, particularly bricklayers

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<sup>173</sup> Mendiratta, *The Defensive System Devices*, p. 106.

<sup>174</sup> Bombay Consultation, 7 March 1673, G/3/1, ff. 18-19.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Bombay Consultation, 19 September 1673, G/3/1, f. 88.

<sup>177</sup> Bombay Consultation, 26 August 1674, G/3/1, f. 80.

and 'chinamen', because the Council hoped to produce 'double the quantity' of goods 'wee had this yeare'.<sup>178</sup>

These favourable working conditions for poor Indians in Bombay were a product of the regular interruptions to the supplies of labour and food generated by wars between the Company and foreign powers in the Indian Ocean.<sup>179</sup> It is also possible that the Company's lenient policy towards Indian labourers was intended to distinguish the new English rulers of Bombay from the previous Portuguese rulers of the island. When Alvaro Peres de Tavora, a prominent Indo-Portuguese inhabitant of Bombay, made a request to the Council on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1672 to deploy the labour of coolies to fish the waters of the neighbouring region of Mazagon, it was emphasised that he was to 'use the said coolies with kindness and not to offer those violent and tyrannical practices as his predecessors for many [years] have done'.<sup>180</sup> The Council's concern with increasing the population of the colony meant that they refused to accept Alvaro Peres' proposal to exploit their fishing stocks until he brought the coolies before them a week later to confirm that being employed by the Portuguese residents of Bombay would not cause any 'discontent' within their community.<sup>181</sup> The Directors of the Company would write soon after that the 'business of the coolies of Mazagon' was of great 'concernment' to Bombay, and that this was why they remained vigilant when Alvaro Peres petitioned for the right to use them, as the Company did not want to divest themselves 'of an royalty or privilege' over the lives and labour of their coolies.<sup>182</sup>

The new English administration of Bombay was so concerned with attracting and managing labour that this began to cause indignation amongst some of the Indian merchants who inhabited the

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<sup>178</sup> Bombay Consultation, 9 June 1669, G/3/1, f. 28.

<sup>179</sup> Bombay Consultation, 5 March 1672, G/3/1, f. 25.

<sup>180</sup> Bombay Consultation, 22 January 1672, G/3/1, f. 16.

<sup>181</sup> Bombay Consultation, 29 January 1672, G/3/1, f. 18.

<sup>182</sup> Letter to Surat, 19 March 1679/70, E/3/89, f. 111.

island. On the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1675 it was noted in a meeting of the Bombay Council that 'the Merchants of this Island' had made 'great complaints that they cannot get Labourers to doe their Business, by reason soe many are employed in the Company's service'.<sup>183</sup> The President of Surat and the Governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier, 'made a proposal to the Council of the necessity of Slaves, and how convenient they would be' for the inhabitants of Bombay. After a lengthy period of debate, the Council 'found by computation that a hundred Slaves kept at the Company's charge would be cheaper than the Coolys' that had a wage of 4 pice [pence] a day, and that the 'Company would be at noe more charge for their Victualls'. It was determined that orders should be quickly sent 'to the factors on the Malabar Coast to buy up as many familys as they can and send them up as opportunity pleases, and likewise the orders be sent to all other places where slaves are procurable'. To provide a more immediate resolution to the merchant's complaints the wages of two hundred 'strong and able labourers that are capable to be employed in the merchants business' at the customs house were raised to six pence a day.<sup>184</sup> It was hoped that this would alleviate the concerns of workers about the expensive provisions and perilous disease environment in Bombay, and encourage them to relocate to the island colony.

### **The End of the 'Black Servant' Era at Company Colonies**

By the early 1680s a series of setbacks at Bombay and St. Helena obliged the East India Company to reconsider its approach to labour management in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Successive wars with the Dutch and the Mughal Empires rendered the Company's early experiments in planting tropical commodities at St. Helena with black servant labour largely unsuccessful, and destabilising events in the English Caribbean caused the unfree residents of Company colonies to be viewed by white planters with an increasing level of unease and disdain. Moreover, the corruption which

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<sup>183</sup> Bombay Consultation, 19 July 1675, G/3/2, f. 101.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., f. 102.

thrived at the distant colony of Bombay stifled the Company's plans for the establishment of manufactories and plantations worked by Indian artisans and imported servants. These issues with colonial governance forced Company officials to begin looking towards other successful models at Dutch colonies in the Indian Ocean and English plantations in the Caribbean, precipitating the transition from labour systems loosely modelled around the indenture system and forms of 'conditional manumission' seen in the Iberian and Muslim worlds towards harsher slave labour regimes.

Intermittent supplies of labour and the disruptive actions of English planters and black servants throughout the 1670s hindered the planting of St. Helena. There were regular complaints that the Company's plantation was not 'flourishing' like those owned by free planters, and in an attempt to remedy this situation, the Council on St. Helena was instructed to ensure that 'all our black servants be constantly employed on our owne plantacion' to maximise production.<sup>185</sup> Unfortunately for the Company, neither the black servants nor the white planters were industrious workers. In 1676, reports that Indian labourers sent from Fort St George were stealing calicos from the Company's warehouse and that the English planter Francis Wrangham had been murdered whilst on a hunting trip by Robin, his slave, forced Company directors in London to rethink their light-handed approach to colonial labour management.<sup>186</sup> On the 15 July 1676, the Council declared that 'if any black shall presume to hold up his hand against his master' or any other white person he 'shall have his right hand cut off'.<sup>187</sup> One week later, Francis Wrangham's slave was condemned to be 'put to death in sight of his masters house' after admitting that he deliberately killed his master. Legal historians such as Robert Steinfeld and George William Van Cleve contend that the fundamental distinction between slavery and other forms of unfree labour can be traced back to the degree of brutality used

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<sup>185</sup> London to St. Helena, 20 May 1681, E/3/89, f. 203.

<sup>186</sup> London to St. Helena, 17 October 1676, E/3/88, f. 170; St. Helena Consultation, 15 July 1676, G/32/2, ff. 7-8.

<sup>187</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 15 July 1676, G/32/2, f. 10.

in forms of punishment.<sup>188</sup> The increasingly violent punishments that black workers were subject to in the late 1670s and early 1680s, including the threat that they would be 'severely whipped' if they broke the laws of St. Helena, suggests that the systems of forced labour used at some Company colonies were beginning to resemble the modes of enslavement that had become an established feature of the Atlantic world, and can be more reliably defined as a form of permanent and hereditary slavery.<sup>189</sup> At Bombay, Caribbean forms of labour mobilisation were not as influential as at St. Helena due to the availability of coolie labour from the Indian subcontinent and the legacy of Indo-Portuguese customs in managing this Asian workforce.

By the late 1670s, it was ordered that the Company would not provide St. Helena with any more black servants, but instead left the planters 'at libertie to supply themselves as they have opportunitie at their own charge'.<sup>190</sup> If there was a necessity for any more servants on the island, the Company would furnish the colony with 'English men and boys from home' instead.<sup>191</sup> This was put into practice in 1676, when some youths were sent to St. Helena as bound apprentices to serve the Governor and Council.<sup>192</sup> A short time later, reports that there were 'about 80 blacks already upon the Island' caused the Company to order resolutely that 'noe more blacks be bought' because it was 'dangerous to have too many black servants on the plantations lest they may mutiny and overpower the English'.<sup>193</sup> The declining white population on Barbados and the last minute discovery of a conspiracy amongst West African slaves to overthrow their English masters and establish their own form of government in May 1675 generated a climate of fear throughout the English Caribbean, and

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<sup>188</sup> Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870*, (North Carolina, 1991), pp. 31-32 & pp. 128-135; George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, And The Constitution In The Early American Republic*, (Chicago, 2010), pp. 70-71.

<sup>189</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, ff. 175-176.

<sup>190</sup> London to St. Helena, 6 April 1677, E/3/88, f. 219.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 219.

<sup>192</sup> London to St. Helena, 17 October 1676, E/3/88, f. 170.

<sup>193</sup> London to St. Helena, 24 March 1679/80, E/3/89, f. 123.

may have prompted this response from Company officials in London.<sup>194</sup> Katharine Gerbner has argued that this attempted rebellion was seen by planters Barbados as a product of Quaker efforts to instruct African slaves in the Christian faith, and was pivotal in shaping the hostile attitude towards the conversion of slaves by missionaries in the wider English empire.<sup>195</sup> In 1676 laws were passed to prevent Quakers on Barbados from bringing slaves into their meetings, due to concerns that these gatherings were a focal point for seditious plotting.<sup>196</sup> Both Bermuda and Virginia had already ratified legislation outlawing proselytising to slaves due to the uncertainty this caused over their status within colonial society.<sup>197</sup>

After this seminal event in the English Caribbean there were no more instructions to manumit baptised slaves at Company colonies in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Questions about the reliability of the imported black servants on St. Helena were exacerbated by the disobedient attitude of the English planters, particularly after three mutinous planters were sent home to England in April 1680.<sup>198</sup> The fear of slave insurrection was prevalent in the English Atlantic during this time period, and the threat of combined rebellion by both black servants and white planters on St. Helena forced the Company to respond in a similar manner to Caribbean colonists and pass a series of laws in the early 1680s for the 'better and more effectual suppressing [of] all mutinies and seditions that may be fomented amongst the inhabitants'.<sup>199</sup> In 1684 the Company would send a copy of the 'lawes and customes of Barbadoes' to St. Helena, to share information with planters on the island about the 'government, workings, diet, times of labour, and use of their negroes' in the Caribbean. At the newly settled colony of Bencoolen on the west coast of Sumatra, the Company's employees were

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<sup>194</sup> Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838* (Antilles Publications, 1984), p. 37-39.

<sup>195</sup> Gerbner, 'The Ultimate Sin: Christianising Slaves in Barbados'.

<sup>196</sup> Barbados Acts, TNA CO 30/1 f. 64 & f. 97.

<sup>197</sup> Paul Finkleman, 'United States Slave Law', in Robert L. Paquette & Mark M. Smith (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas* (Oxford, 2010), p. 429-430.

<sup>198</sup> London to St. Helena, 14 April 1680, E/3/89, f. 215.

<sup>199</sup> London to St. Helena 14 March 1681/2, E/3/89 f. 277.

instructed by the directors to adopt the forms of violent domination used to manage slaves at Batavia.

In this chapter it has been argued that the 'black servant' forced labour system used at Company colonies during the 1660s and 1670s had parallels with Robert Hunt's ideas about forms of social organisation at the proposed Assada plantation. Experiences managing an African workforce in Guinea also acted as a precedent for the lenient labour regimes used by the Company in this period. The 'black servant' regime was a hybrid institution, which may have originated out of elements of English servitude, Iberian traditions of slaveholding, and Muslim manumission practices. The East India Company's position as a commercial intermediary between England and the wider world meant that it became familiar with these labour regimes during cross-cultural interactions with other overseas empires. In the early 1680s, local circumstances such as rebellion and economic decline convinced the directors to instead see more severe and violent systems as better models for labour management at their settlements. Chapter Three will argue that by the end of the seventeenth century there had been a clear move away from the Company's inclusive vision of 'black servants' as temporary unfree workers, who could eventually become free planters and contribute to the economic and demographic vitality of colonial society. This chapter has also highlighted how initial efforts to develop Bombay as both an English plantation in the Indian Ocean and a commercial entrepôt had an important Asian dimension, as competing English, Portuguese, and Asian powers sought to control local labour markets and attract coolies and weavers from the Indian subcontinent to reside within their port towns and colonies.

### **Chapter 3. The Global Networks of the East India Company, Transnational Connections, and the Expansion of Slavery at St. Helena and Bencoolen, 1683-1694**

The period from 1683 to 1698 saw a rapid expansion in the use of forced labour at St. Helena and Bencoolen, and it was transoceanic and transnational connections with labour regimes in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia that provided the East India Company with prototypes for how to use slaves to develop profitable and secure colonial societies. The escalation of brutal violence towards forced labourers at English colonies in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean came around thirty years after the expansion of slavery in the English Caribbean. This can be explained by the fact that it was only in the 1680s that the East India Company initiated a comprehensive programme to make St. Helena and Bencoolen more profitable by establishing plantation agriculture at these colonies. To realise this ambition, from the mid-1680s the East India Company used their global networks of exchange to facilitate the sharing of slaveholding expertise over long distances. They began to use the language of 'slavery' rather than 'servitude' to describe their forced labourers, and licensed a number of slave trading voyages to Madagascar and South East Asia.

It was within a local context of rising expenses, corruption, and the threat of rebellion that Company officials began to see Barbados and Dutch Batavia as ideal models for colonial administration and labour mobilisation. The speed at which Barbados rose to a position of prosperity and prestige within the Atlantic world explains why the East India Company was keen to emulate the economic and social practices used on the island, whilst the position of Batavia as the driving force behind Dutch commercial and territorial power in the Indian Ocean offered a tantalising example for how the Company could increase their own influence in Southeast Asia. Abigail Swingen has sought to illustrate how the 'English state was intimately involved in the growth and development of slavery in

the colonies'.<sup>200</sup> This chapter will instead explore how the transoceanic and transnational networks of overseas trading corporations can help to explain the rise of forced labour regimes at English colonies in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

### **Transoceanic Links between St. Helena and Barbados**

The East India Company regarded St. Helena as a colony which could develop a thriving plantation economy and compete with the English Caribbean in the production of tropical commodities.

Barbados had been viewed as an ideal colonial model by English colonisers operating in the Indian Ocean ever since attempts were made by interlopers to establish plantation slavery on Madagascar from 1635 to 1650. The global reach of the East India Company enabled planters with Caribbean experience to migrate to Company colonies, and the support of this institutional structure is one explanation for why the Company's efforts to introduce large numbers of forced labourers to St. Helena in the late seventeenth century were more successful than the attempts of interlopers at Assada. Believing that the soil of St. Helena was fit for the production of commodities of a richer nature than cattle, potatoes, or yams, the Company ordered that '10 negroes' above sixteen years old were to be brought on every ship from Fort St George to St. Helena.<sup>201</sup> To ensure that the free planters always had a secure means of 'supplying themselves with English servants and all commodities of England and Europe as cheap or cheaper than the planters of Barbados or Jamaica', the Company decided to send 'one or two ships' to St. Helena every year with provisions and English men to assist in the development of the colony.<sup>202</sup> By financing the initial costs of establishing plantations it was hoped that, in time, 'all things will come to our Island much cheaper than they do to any plantacion in America', and that therefore the 'Company may in time gain something for the

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<sup>200</sup> Abigail Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*, (Yale, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>201</sup> London to Fort St. George, June 13 1683, E/3/90, f. 83; London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

<sup>202</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

trade of that place'.<sup>203</sup> As part of their letter to the Council at St. Helena the Company included a paper 'containing severall singular and great advantages that that Island hath above any English plantacion we know in any part of the world', which was intended to encourage the inhabitants to 'make a better improvement of that great opportunity which God almighty by his Providence' had bestowed upon the island.<sup>204</sup>

Reports from 1689 demonstrate that Company's policy towards agriculture and planting was informed by misguided climatic ideas which prevailed in early modern Europe. These theories suggested that the mountainous environment of St. Helena caused dramatic temperature variations, with the valleys being 'as hot as Barbados' whilst the peaks of the hills 'as cold as the middle parts of France'.<sup>205</sup> To exploit the supposedly fertile soil and fruitful climate which sustained English settlement in the valleys of St. Helena planters were instructed by the East India Company to cultivate lucrative goods and alter their labour management techniques. The forms of forced labour deployed by the Company on St. Helena in the 1680s bore a much closer resemblance to patterns of enslavement in the Caribbean than the system of 'black servant labour' used in prior decades. This is because the Company had begun to use Barbados and other English colonies in the Atlantic world as a model for colonial development on St. Helena. Whilst the 'Cattell, butter, cheese and poultry' already produced at St. Helena were suitable for 'West India or southern plantations', they would never make the Company 'rich or refund...any considerable of [their] disbursements'.<sup>206</sup>

Comparisons with other colonies at the same latitude as St. Helena suggested that commodities from the Atlantic Ocean such as 'indigo, coco, olive trees, wool, vineyards, Cyprus and cedar trees' would be the most profitable goods that the planters could produce until they received 'nutmeg

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 93.

<sup>205</sup> Instructions for Mr Poirior Supervisor of all the Company's Plantations, Vineyards and Cattle in the Island of St. Helena, 22 February 1688/89, E/3/92, f. 19.

<sup>206</sup> London to Surat, 7 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 177.

clove or cinnamon plants' from factors in Asia.<sup>207</sup> Spices were an especially important commodity with an 'inestimable value to this Kingdome', because 'the nature of cloves trees being to grow upon high land, such as St. Helena is, and in much about the same latitude' meant that the Company had a chance to break the Dutch monopoly on the spice trade.<sup>208</sup> Growing these crops and having 'the hands to cultivate their plantations' ensured that the 'inhabitants and free planters' on St. Helena would 'live and grow rich...as they have in Barbados, Jamaica and other worse places'.<sup>209</sup> The most pressing concern at St. Helena, however, was to produce yams and wheat before large numbers of new planters and slaves arrived.<sup>210</sup>

On the 1 August 1683 the Company wrote to Fort St George to explain how they had thoughts 'of making for the Company a large sugar plantacion with mills, sugar houses and still houses' at St. Helena, and also a 'large great indigoe plantacion'.<sup>211</sup> It was believed that there would be a good market at Persia for the sugar and indigo produced at St. Helena, and as a result, it was forbidden for 'any other sugar works or stills to be used or erected upon our said island, resolving to make sugar, rum and molasses the Companies own comodities'.<sup>212</sup> The effort to establish sugar and indigo plantations on St. Helena involved the transportation of seeds, building materials, overseers and slaves from across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. It was explained in a letter to Fort St George in February 1685 that the Company was 'everyday more resolved to prosecute the improvement of St. Helena by sugar works, indigo, cotton, saltpeter and many other wayes'.<sup>213</sup> To stimulate the plantation economy on St. Helena the Company supplied 'useful seeds and plants of India', bricks

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<sup>207</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, ff. 93-94.

<sup>208</sup> London to Bengal, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

<sup>209</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

<sup>210</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 95.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 175.

<sup>213</sup> London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

from Persia, hard wood from Bengal for use as rollers in the sugar mills, and oxen from the East Indies to drive the machines at the cane refineries.<sup>214</sup>

These works were to begin as soon as the Company could find 'proper overseers experienced in such affairs to send over'.<sup>215</sup> As early as 1673 the Company emphasised that when it came to establishing plantation agriculture on St. Helena, they were giving 'due encouragement to all the inhabitants in carrying on the said work of planting by appointing some experienced persons to instruct and advise such as are ignorant in that affair'.<sup>216</sup> The Governor and Council of St. Helena were implored 'to be very carefull in the choice of those persons you intrust with the oversight of our plantacions and negroes, and the customs of our working tools and other materials'.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, the directors used the East India Company's global networks of trade and exchange to employ private agents of empire who had Caribbean experience. For example, Thomas Howe, who was skilled in growing indigo and cotton, and Ralph Knight, who was an expert 'overseer of such negroes as you shall employe' on plantations, were vetted as candidates by the Company and transported to St. Helena.<sup>218</sup> Nathaniel Cox, an individual with experience as a slave overseer in the West Indies, was specifically instructed by the Company to carry tobacco seed from England and Madagascar to St. Helena, and even given a salary of seventy pounds per annum to establish a small tobacco plantation on the Company's land.<sup>219</sup> Cox was reportedly 'well skilled in boyling of sugar and raising a sugar plantation from the planting of the canes to the refining of the sugar'.<sup>220</sup> Lieutenant Robert Holden, who was the current Deputy Governor of St. Helena, was another person well acquainted with the 'production of indicoes, cotton, ginger and the other usual commodities of the West Indies', and was

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<sup>214</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, ff. 95-96; London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 174; London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

<sup>215</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 95.

<sup>216</sup> Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St. Helena, 19 December 1673, E/3/88, f. 43.

<sup>217</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 95.

<sup>218</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 98; London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, ff. 177-178.

<sup>219</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 178; London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684, E/3/90, f. 251.

<sup>220</sup> London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684, E/3/90, f. 251.

put in a position of power by the Company so that he could draw upon his knowledge of English colonisation in the Atlantic world to benefit the planters and increase their revenue.<sup>221</sup>

The global dimensions of the East India Company are demonstrated by evidence that valuable knowledge was also transported to St. Helena from the East Indies. In 1683 the Company wrote to Bengal to inform factors that because they were initiating an 'experiment of making Saltpetre upon our Island of St. Helena' they desired Job Charnock, at this time a senior merchant at Patna, to provide 'the best informacon you can of the manner how and the cheapest waies of making that commodity there and [to] transmit the same to our governor and councill' of St. Helena.<sup>222</sup> If possible, Charnock was to 'hire one or two men that speake a little English and know the whole process and way of making saltpetre at Pattana to goe to St. Helena and teach our people the way of it'.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, a Dutch pilot who returned to Europe on the *Herbert* showed the planters of St. Helena how to improve their agricultural productivity of their sugar cane fields by using irrigation techniques. During his brief stay on the St. Helena, the unnamed Dutchman showed a joiner named Sherwyn the method of bringing 'water from some springs upon your hills by rills through every rowe of your canes, which if you have convenience and skill to effect, there is little doubt but they will growe extraordinary large'.<sup>224</sup>

The Court of Committees of the East India Company regularly stated in their correspondence with factors in Asia that they knew from experience that successful English plantations 'cannot be effected without slaves'.<sup>225</sup> They argued that was 'utterly impossible for any Europe plantacion to

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<sup>221</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 175.

<sup>222</sup> London to Bengal, 20 June 1683, E/3/90, f. 83; London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

<sup>223</sup> London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

<sup>224</sup> London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684, E/3/90, f. 251.

<sup>225</sup> London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

thrive between the Tropics...without [the] assistance and labour of negroes'.<sup>226</sup> The 'assistance' of the African and East Indian slaves transported to St. Helena encompassed not just their manual work, but also the additional benefits to colonial life slaves brought through their agricultural knowledge, capabilities as artificers, and linguistic skills. These proficiencies were valued highly by the East India Company due to the benefits they brought to commerce, and shaped the emergence of slavery and the direction of colonial and labour policy at some plantations owned by the Company at the close of the seventeenth century. For instance, a scarcity of slaves on St. Helena was given as the principal reason why 'the planters upon that Island [had] not yet found the way to produce any usefull or profitable commodity'.<sup>227</sup>

Therefore, in the spring of 1684 orders were sent from London to Fort St George and the Bay of Bengal to send up to 10 male and female slaves on every ship to St. Helena, along with rice to feed them on their journey.<sup>228</sup> If some of the enslaved men had prior experience in 'sugar works and saltpeter works or in planting indigo', or had been trained as 'carpenters, smiths or potters', then the Company was prepared to pay double the price for them in India.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, reports filtering through the Company's channels of communication that the 'Madagascar blacks in Barbadoes' were the most 'ingenious of any blacks in learning manuell trades such as smiths, carpenters, coopers, masons, bricklayers', encouraged the Company to license Captain Robert Knox to purchase 250 slaves at Madagascar and transport them to St. Helena in 1684 (see Figure 3, Appendix).<sup>230</sup> They also intended to buy '60 or 80 Gold Coast negroes [from] the Royal Company', the new corporate body that controlled English trade with West Africa, and then deliver them to the Council at St. Helena.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684, E/3/90, f. 251.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 159.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 180; Instructions to Captain Robert Knox of the Tonqueen Merchant, 4 April 1684, E/3/90, ff. 182-183.

<sup>231</sup> London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684, E/3/90, f. 251.

These slaves were sold on credit to the poor planters of the island, and to enable them to communicate with planters and overseers and better impart their knowledge and skills, it was preferred by the Company that they could speak either English or Portuguese.<sup>232</sup> The directors also stipulated that around half of the slaves sent to St. Helena were to be women, because it was believed that the inhabitants from Madagascar and the East Indies would 'not live contentedly without wives' also on the island.<sup>233</sup>

On the 1st August 1683 the directors of the East India Company wrote to the Governor and Council of St. Helena to revoke their previous decision which prohibited free planters from purchasing black labourers for their plantations.<sup>234</sup> Further discussion about the benefits slaves could bring to the island and evidence that 'there are in Barbados usually 50,000 blacks for 6,000 whites and yet [they] are kept in subjection without other garrison than the planters themselves' convinced the Company to revitalise their plans 'for great plantacions to be made' at St. Helena.<sup>235</sup> To secure regular access to slaves the Company sanctioned a prevalent but illegal trade which intruded upon their monopoly. Unlicensed vessels that only traded to 'Madagascar for blacks and have not been at any other place in the East Indies nor have any East India goods or merchandise' received official sanction to land on St. Helena with the same 'liberty to trade and refreshment upon the said island' as Company ships.<sup>236</sup> As well as selling captive labourers from Madagascar, known as Malagasy slaves or 'Coffreys', to the English planters these private merchants were each instructed to 'leave with the Governor for the Company one able negroe'.<sup>237</sup> The only restrictions to slaveholding on St. Helena were that all free planters who owned more than '4 negroes' had to employ one English man as an overseer for the 'watching and warding' of the plantation, and that 'as the negroes do increase upon

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.; London to Fort St. George, 29 Feb 1683/4, E/3/90, f. 154.

<sup>233</sup> Letter to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84, E/3/90, f. 160.

<sup>234</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.; London to Fort St. George, June 13 1683, E/3/90, f. 83.

<sup>236</sup> London to St. Helena, 14 March 1681/82, E/3/89, f. 277.

<sup>237</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

the island' there had to also be a corresponding growth in the garrison and soldiers for the security of the inhabitants.<sup>238</sup> The repercussions of the alarming revelations of potential slave rebellion on Barbados in 1675 were still reverberating around the English Empire in the 1680s, contributing to the decision to make martial training for all white males on St. Helena mandatory. Like was practiced on Barbados, from 1683, 'all free planters and all persons living within the said island [of St. Helena] that are able to bear arms (except the blacks) shall be duly quartered as they have been and instantly upon all alarums appear at their respective quarters in arms'.<sup>239</sup>

Slaves on St. Helena were commonly used in five occupations, which furthered the governmental and commercial aims of the Company in different ways. They performed hard agricultural labour on plantations, worked in skilled jobs, caught fish in South Atlantic waters, served their masters in the domestic sphere, and whilst the East India Company was at peace with other European nations, rapidly fortified the valleys with solid stone walls.<sup>240</sup> Planters used slaves in agricultural capacities to clear and cultivate land for the production of tropical commodities and provisions. It was also recommended to the inhabitants of St. Helena that they should set 'their negroes when they can spare them, upon the taking, salting and drying of fish in boats round the Island', for which purpose a set of useful tools and implements were sent, including 'hooks, lines, yawles, heading and splitting knives'.<sup>241</sup> This guaranteed that 'when the land [was] too dry to be dugg or wrought upon' English planters could still have work for their slave labourers.<sup>242</sup> Using slaves in the fisheries also supported the food security of St. Helena in times of drought, increased the nutritional profile of the inhabitants, and enabled the planters to drive a regular trade by provisioning ships headed to India and Barbados with salt fish. Soldiers in the garrison of St. Helena who had been apprenticed by

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<sup>238</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 91.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., f. 90.

<sup>240</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 180.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., f. 177.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., f. 177.

artificers during their youth in England were compelled to 'teach their respective trades to the most docile of your negroes'.<sup>243</sup> The Company had found by experience that it was a 'vain thing in such forreign plantations ever to expect to be fully supplied with all sorts of necessary workemen' from England until the black slaves had been brought up 'to a thorow understanding and use of all working occupations (as they have done long since in Barbadoes)'.<sup>244</sup> If the first English planters on Barbados had not trained their slaves to work in skilled occupations, the Company firmly believed that 'they could never have brought that Island to what it is, being now improved to such a height that from thence do saile above 500 ships yearly small and great'.<sup>245</sup> The directors remained confident that once St. Helena had been well 'stockt with Negroes', every acre of arable land on the island would 'be worth many more per acre than the best land of England, as it is in Barbados and other places of such like production that are thoroughly settled'.<sup>246</sup>

The East India Company's position as an intermediary between England and the wider world enabled valuable knowledge to cross oceanic basins. Patterns of intercolonial commerce and migration contributed to the formation of transoceanic networks, facilitating the circulation of Barbadian slaveholding expertise within the communication channels of the Company. The Company first came into sustained contact with Barbados when they controlled trade on the Guinea Coast, as slaving vessels travelling between West Africa and the Caribbean offered an alternative route for letters and other forms of written communication to be sent home from India to England. In a letter sent on the *Barbados Merchant* to Fort Cormantine in 1659, which was signed by James Drax, the Company explained how the required 'as often as opportunities by English shipping for the Barbadoes' an 'abstract of our estates and an account current be sent us'.<sup>247</sup> Warships belonging to the Royal Navy

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., ff. 176-177.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., ff. 176-177.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., ff. 176-177.

<sup>246</sup> London to St. Helena, August 15 1683, E/3/90, f. 108.

<sup>247</sup> London to Fort Cormantine, 8 November 1659, E/3/85, f. 253-257.

regularly escorted convoys travelling the three month journey between the Caribbean and London, providing security for English shipping from privateers lurking in Atlantic waters, and it was common for Company vessels to return from India via Barbados to take advantage of this protection. This was especially true during times of war with the Dutch and French in the late seventeenth century. When reports filtered back to London that St. Helena was occupied by Dutch forces in 1666, the Company specifically instructed that upon their return voyage all ships were to sail directly to the safety of Barbados once they entered Atlantic waters. Samuel Smith the captain of the *Charles* was told that if ‘the Island of St Hellena [was] in the possession of an enemy...then wee thinck it best that you touch at the Barbadoes and there refresh in your homeward bound voyage’.<sup>248</sup> Goods such as tanned leather were manufactured at St. Helena and transported to Barbados, whilst small numbers of slaves were also sent in the other direction. In 1687, fifteen slaves were transported from Barbados to St. Helena by the Madagascar slave trader Captain Deacon and distributed amongst the planters.<sup>249</sup> This was merely the first step in the Company’s plan to solidify commercial links with the English Caribbean, and it was hoped that slaves would soon be supplied to St. Helena on every Madagascar vessel returning from Barbados.<sup>250</sup>

The Madagascar slave trade generated some of the most important and lasting links between St. Helena and Barbados. The East India Company received reliable information ‘that divers ships that come with negroes doe touch at our Island’ for refreshment en route to the English Caribbean.<sup>251</sup> As well as their human cargo, the captains of these slave trading voyages would receive contraband goods from the East Indies at St. Helena, which they would proceed to sell for a great profit in American markets. For instance, the shipping register for Barbados reveals that in 1696 the sloop *Amity* commanded by Captain Richard Glover deposited ‘2 chests of Indian goods, 9 negro slaves and

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<sup>248</sup> Instructions to Captain Samuel Smith of the *Charles*, 28 December 1666, E/3/87, f. 25.

<sup>249</sup> London to St. Helena, 3 August 1697, E/3/91, f. 186.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 181 and f. 186.

<sup>251</sup> London to St. Helena, 16 May 1679, E/3/89, f. 69.

1 tubb of tea' on the island.<sup>252</sup> There were also larger scale slave trading ventures to the colony. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1682 the *Oxford* imported 'two hundred Madagascar negroes' to Barbados, whilst the following year the *Philip* from New York delivered 100 slaves bought on Madagascar to the colony.<sup>253</sup> At the height of this illegal commerce, the Royal African Company's head factor on Barbados, Edwyn Stede, would explain in 1681 how he was 'apprehensive the trade that is of late drove to Madagascar for negroes' due to the damage this was causing to the African Company's market share in the slave trade.<sup>254</sup> It was 'noe small quantities' of slaves being imported into Bridgetown, with up to '900 and 1000 that have been brought and sold herein about 2 months time'.<sup>255</sup> If no remedy could be found to stem this commercial crisis, the Royal African Company was concerned that very soon 'the interlopers will give a full supply of negroes to this place'.<sup>256</sup>

The African and East Indian labourers transported to St. Helena in the mid-1680s were treated with more brutality than their predecessors were in the 1670s, due to the East India Company's decision to implement many of the legal restrictions and social practices that were used by planters to control large numbers of slaves on Barbados. The Company emphasised that slaves employed on plantations at St. Helena were to be managed efficiently under the 'rigours of the Barbados discipline' by putting 'overseers over them as shall compel each of them to do a full day's work'.<sup>257</sup> To inform the planters of St. Helena how Englishmen in the West Indies extracted the maximum amount of labour from their slaves, the Company sent a copy of the 'lawes and customes of Barbadoes' which contained information relating to the 'government, workings, diet, times of labour, and use of their negroes'.<sup>258</sup> The Council of St. Helena were instructed to observe these strict rules 'as near as possible may be' to

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<sup>252</sup> Barbados Shipping Returns 1678-1704, TNA CO 33/13, f. 29.

<sup>253</sup> Barbados Shipping Returns 1678-1703, TNA CO 33/13, f. 11 & f. 16.

<sup>254</sup> Barbados to London, 9 April 1681, TNA T70/1, f. 48.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 48.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 48.

<sup>257</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 178; London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, f. 95.

<sup>258</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 178.

ensure the continued safety of the island as the slave population increased. Slaves on St. Helena were to be clothed only in the cheapest calicos available and were to reside in small cabins 'according to the manner of the plantacions in Barbados', of which 'Lieutenant Holding hath seen many'.<sup>259</sup> If caught breaking the laws of the island, they were to be 'severely whipped'.<sup>260</sup>

One example of a stringent law implemented on St. Helena during the 1680s which was derived from the legal codes of Barbados and elsewhere in the English Atlantic was that slaves were no longer 'permitted to use any firearms for the shooting of Guynea hens or upon any other pretence whatsoever'.<sup>261</sup> The free movement of black inhabitants around the island was also seen with increased suspicion. At a Consultation on St. Helena in April 1682 concerns were raised about how 'many blacks of the sayd Island doe in their travelling to and fro presume to enter into men's houses, pretending some slight occasions, such as a stick of fire or the like, when perhaps the owners are not within or not at home or none but children in the sayd house'.<sup>262</sup> After the publication of a notice on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, legal restrictions were imposed which stipulated that 'noe black man or woman doe presume to enter into any man's house' without first 'calling at some distance from the sayd house unto the owner or occupyer of the same, and obteyning leave to have admittance.' If no reply was received, then any black inhabitant that 'shall dare to adventure to enter into the sayd house or houses' would receive 'the penalty of being most severely punisht', and their master would be liable 'for any hurt or damage that the owner of the sayd house shall suffer by their sayd blacks'.<sup>263</sup> When corporal punishment was used for an unspecified crime committed by a slave in June 1686, the Company responded that they 'thought very meanly' of the Council for letting those 'blacks pass with whipping which an English man would have been condemned to dye by a jury'.<sup>264</sup> The Company

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., ff.175-176.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., ff.175-176.

<sup>261</sup> London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683, E/3/90, ff. 95-96.

<sup>262</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 10 April 1682, G/32/2, ff. 13-14.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., ff. 13-14.

<sup>264</sup> London to St. Helena, 3 August 1687, G/32/1, f. 49.

found this weakness of judgment to be even more concerning because Nathaniel Cox, who before working for the East India Company had been employed as an overseer on Colonel Codrington's plantation in the West Indies, should have appreciated more than any other man on St. Helena that 'the English could not keep the knife from their throats at Barbados if they did not punnish their theevish blacks with farr greater severity'.<sup>265</sup>

Historians such as Richard Dunn and Christopher Tomlins have argued that the legal codes first formulated on Barbados became the foundation of Anglo-American slave law in the Lower South and the Caribbean.<sup>266</sup> The evidence discussed above suggests that St. Helena can now be added to the list of English colonies which were influenced by the Barbados slave codes. This process of transoceanic exchange was facilitated by the global reach of the East India Company.

### **Transnational Connections between Bencoolen and Dutch Batavia**

In the mid-1680s, the East India Company decided to expand the models of slavery which they were attempting to establish at their South Atlantic colony of St. Helena into the Indian Ocean. High mortality rates and the constant threat of foreign invasion meant that the slave labour regimes which emerged at English settlements in Southeast Asia were modelled on the Dutch success at Batavia. Following the conquest of the English factory at Banten by Dutch forces in 1682, the English East India Company lost its foothold in the lucrative spice trade and pepper imports collapsed. In 1681 the East India Company transported 5,109,345 lbs of pepper to London. This was a profitable cargo, which was valued at £59,811.<sup>267</sup> By the end of 1683 the expulsion of English merchants from Banten had reduced the quantity of pepper exported from Asia on Company vessels by 75%, and

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., f. 49.

<sup>266</sup> Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*; Tomlins, *Freedom Bound*, pp. 427-431.

<sup>267</sup> Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, p. 529.

caused their profits from the commodity to fall to only £17,819.<sup>268</sup> To recapture their share of the pepper trade and to help strengthen the English presence in the South East Asia, the Company sent a diplomatic mission to the Aceh Sultanate to negotiate the establishment of a new factory in the region. Although the Queen of Aceh refused to allow the English to erect a fortified trading outpost in her dominion, a fortuitous invitation to reside at the nearby settlement of Pariaman from an assembly of leading *orangkaya* allowed the East India Company to dispatch a small expeditionary force of factors and infantrymen from Madras in 1685 to settle a new colony on the West Coast of Sumatra.<sup>269</sup> However, this initial plan was soon undone by the Dutch, who used the King of Bantam's claims to suzerainty over communities in west Sumatra to extend their sphere of influence over the trading post at Priaman. Without consulting the company directors, the leader of the English expedition, Ralph Ord, used his own initiative to divert efforts from Priaman and instead focus on establishing an English fort at Bencoolen, an isolated settlement in Southwest Sumatra.

An early geographical description of Bencoolen and its surrounds was sent to London by Thomas Lucas to provide Josiah Child and the other directors with more detailed information about their new colony. This report began with a thinly veiled attempt to justify the decision to settle at this location without the Company's permission, by highlighting that on this 'great island of Sumatra', there was no other place 'so probable for Europeans to live in as this of Bencoolen for its situation is in good aire'.<sup>270</sup> The first English fortification on Sumatra, known as York Fort, was a triangular structure built upon a knoll 'within less than half a muskets shot' from the mouth of the river Bencoolen.<sup>271</sup> It was hoped that close proximity to centres of pepper production in west Sumatra, such as Silibar to the south and Indrapura to the north, would allow the East India Company to

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>269</sup> Anthony Farrington, 'Bengkulu: An Anglo-Chinese Partnership', in H. V. Bowen, Margarett Lincoln & Nigel Rigby (eds.) *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Boydell, 2002), 112.

<sup>270</sup> Thomas Lucas to Josiah Child, 30 March 1687, G/35/2, ff. 105-106.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., ff. 105-106.

maintain a greater level of control over the regional spice trade. English factors at Bencoolen administered the riverine access routes which connected the pepper producing foothills of the interior with foreign markets across the sea. This was of commercial significance, because alluvial areas on the west coast of Sumatra were some of the most important regions for pepper production in Southeast Asia. Thomas Lucas was optimistic that neighbouring Sumatran communities would be 'so encouraged by the protection from your fort from the threats of the Dutch', that they would soon 'produce great quantities of pepper cheap'.<sup>272</sup>

In the early years of settlement on Sumatra the East India Company hoped to be able to attract some free planters from England to live in the new colony, as they had done at St. Helena, 'without which that place would not have been peopled as it is'.<sup>273</sup> An addendum to a letter sent to St. Helena in 1687 stipulated that to motivate the relocation of Englishmen to Sumatra officials at York Fort had decided to 'sett out to each family 40 acres of free land on the same terms that land is holden at St. Helena', and that besides land, 'all the men that goe thither shall have the aforesaid pay of soldiers during their stay there'.<sup>274</sup> These proprietary grants and financial benefits were intended to encourage 'the sons of planters of 16 or 17 years of age' at St. Helena to seek new opportunities on the west coast of Sumatra as soldiers, writers and planters.<sup>275</sup> Captain John Harding was instructed to make sure that these young men made the voluntary decision to emigrate, and only to forcefully relocate convicts who were sentenced to 'that kind of banishment for heinous offences'.<sup>276</sup> For example, the East India Company condemned the Governor and Council of St. Helena for deporting the criminal Thomas Eastings back to England in 1686, emphasising that 'the wise Dutch never bannish white men out of India', because the high mortality rates of Europeans in the Indian Ocean

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<sup>272</sup> Thomas Lucas to Josiah Child, 30 March 1687, G/35/2, ff. 105-106.

<sup>273</sup> London to Bencoolen, 23 July 1697, E/3/92 f. 298.

<sup>274</sup> Additional clause sent to St. Helena, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 94.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 94.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 94.

meant that to send home a servant 'to any part of Europe is rather a reward than a punishment'.<sup>277</sup> If the Council had been 'minded to save that rogue's life', they should have instead kept him as a convict 'with an iron collar about his neck or chained him or confined him to hard imprisonment and labour' until there was an opportunity to 'banish him to the west coast of Sumatra or some [other] place where he might work hard for his living in India'.<sup>278</sup>

The East India Company's efforts to establish plantations and free landholding on Sumatra established enduring connections between St. Helena and Bencoolen, bringing into close contact English forms of settlement and social organisation in the Atlantic world with traditions that had been present Indian Ocean for centuries. By encouraging the migration of English residents and black slaves between the colonies of St. Helena and Sumatra, the East India Company transmitted labour management techniques and spread agricultural knowledge across oceanic basins. For example, enterprising individuals with prior experience in sustaining English settlements in tropical climates, such as Nathaniel Cox, with his wealth of experience on West Indian 'sugger plantations' were ordered by the Company to relocate to Southeast Asia. Cox had lived on St. Helena for three years, but had been unsuccessful in his efforts to raise sugar cane there due to the arid soil and inconsistent climate.<sup>279</sup> This confirmed the reports of a plantation owner on St. Helena named Mr Bagly, whose time spent planting 'in many severall countryes' led him to believe that 'no West India commodities will grow well at St. Helena'.<sup>280</sup> By 1689, the Company was prepared to admit that the 'infertility of the ground' on St. Helena was the main reason for their 'changeable attempts upon sugar, cotton and indigo', not a lack of African slaves.<sup>281</sup> Seeing as Bencoolen was 'a proper country for sugar canes', the Company hoped that Nathaniel Cox may have more success on Sumatra, a

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<sup>277</sup> London to St. Helena, 3 August 1687, G/32/1, f. 50.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 50.

<sup>279</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 99.

<sup>280</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 179.

<sup>281</sup> Instructions for Mr Poirior Supervisor of all the Company's Plantations, Vineyards and Cattle in the Island of St. Helena, 22 February 1688/89, E/3/92, f. 19.

location with a tropical climate 'where he may employ his talent and his stock in making sugar'.<sup>282</sup>

The Company directors subsequently discharged him from their service on St. Helena and provided him with the opportunity to leave with Captain Harding for Bencoolen.<sup>283</sup> To embolden him to renew his efforts to establish sugar plantations for the Company's benefit, the directors offered Cox a prominent position on the council along with a generous salary of £70 per annum.<sup>284</sup>

Despite high hopes that Sumatra could become the foundation for a lasting English settler plantation in Southeast Asia, numerous reports about the mortality of company employees, soldiers and slaves meant that factors at Bencoolen could no longer conceal the truth about the public health of the colony from the Court of Committees in London. The fort was surrounded by swamps and marshes, an ideal breeding ground for mosquitos carrying deadly diseases such as malaria to which the newly arrived English had received little prior exposure.<sup>285</sup> This caused the population of the colony to decline at an alarming rate. For instance, during the month of November 1686 alone, it was reported that 23 soldiers had died.<sup>286</sup> Consultation records from the early years of English settlement on Sumatra document the hard life these environmental conditions generated at York Fort. On the morning of March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1687, four soldiers named William Garvis, John Eckland, Richard Bush and John Toldrey ran away from their posts after a local Malay man promised to show them the way to the other side of the island, where they could find a vessel to escape back to England.<sup>287</sup> The escape attempt failed; three of the rebels were caught and 'put in irons for the present', whilst John Toldrey was found drowned soon after. A month later, on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Company made the unprecedented

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<sup>282</sup> London to St. Helena, 3 August 1687, E/3/91, f. 179.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., f. 179.

<sup>284</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 99.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., f. 107, f. 108, f. 120,

<sup>286</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 30 November 1686, G/35/2, f. 10.

<sup>287</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 3 March 1686/87, G/35/2, ff.19-20.

decision to grant these prisoners clemency, because the great 'mortality of men and the many that are sick' meant that there were not enough soldiers to watch the fort at night.<sup>288</sup>

Prior experiences with English forms of plantation in the Indian Ocean, such as Bombay and Bantam, which were colonies that were 'very unhealthful at our first settlement but are now both more healthful places', reinforced the Company's resolve to improve the public health of Bencoolen and maintain a strong military and commercial presence in west Sumatra.<sup>289</sup> Despite drains on manpower and the fact that Bencoolen was regularly described by the directors as a 'bottomless pit' for their financial investments, the English plantation on Sumatra was preserved largely for geopolitical reasons. It was considered of national importance to prevent the Dutch from being able to 'ingrose the whole pepper trade of India', because the profits generated by this 'avaricious design' would make them 'masters of the European as well of the Indian Seas'.<sup>290</sup> Consequently, factors in India were ordered to 'let Bencoolen want for nothing', because 'no place in India is of such importance to this kingdom as that port and town of Bencoolen when it is well fortified and can be preserved'.<sup>291</sup>

Although the East India Company was well aware that new 'forts and colonies' planted by the English in the Indian Ocean were at first 'not a very fit subject to raise any revenue out of', they were keen to foster population growth using similar methods which had already proven to be successful at Bombay and the Dutch settlement of Padang. To raise revenues for the support of the garrison at Bencoolen whilst at the same time not 'deter[ing] any anew inhabitants from resorting to you', the Company ordered a mild tax burden to be placed on the inhabitants and moderate rents for the

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<sup>288</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 3 April 1687, G/35/2, f. 23.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 100.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 107.

<sup>291</sup> London to Fort St. George, 3 October 1690, E/3/92, f. 58.

Malays living on 'the grounds or soile' now belonging to the Company.<sup>292</sup> The Court of Committees argued that by populating the colony with planters and slaves, Bencoolen could 'grow up to be a noble settlement' for the English nation, and provide an 'everlasting security of the pepper trade'.

Fears about military assaults on English settlements in west Sumatra suggest that the Company believed that the VOC would be unwilling to accept their commercial competition in the spice trade. The Dutch Empire's centre of power in the Indian Ocean was on the neighbouring island of Java, which increased concerns that Bencoolen was 'so near Batavia we can never be able to defend that place against the Batavians in time of war'.<sup>293</sup> Elihu Yale believed that the Dutch were 'the only obstruction of our business' on Sumatra, since in their absence 'the natives bring down their pepper and provisions and trade freely with us', but when Dutch merchants appear they 'refuse it either from terror or some secret mischievous practices'.<sup>294</sup> Whilst the directors of the East India Company were gravely concerned about the subversive practices of the Dutch Empire, they also remained eager to emulate the administrative strategies which had brought the VOC so much commercial success in the Indian Ocean. The great expense spent by the Company on settling at Bencoolen could be quickly repaid by creating 'such a revenue as may recompence our charges in a short tyme, as the Dutch do most wisely in all places where they fortify'.<sup>295</sup> Because they were trading with 'so many people that know the laws and customs of Batavia', the Company thought that it was appropriate to recommend that their settlements on Sumatra adopt the commercial practices, forms of governance and labour management techniques used by the Dutch in the Indian Ocean.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> London to Bencoolen, 30 December 1687, G/35/2, ff. 126-127.

<sup>293</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 120.

<sup>294</sup> Elihu Yale to Benjamin Bloome, 8 September 1687, G/35/2, f. 80.

<sup>295</sup> London to Pariaman, 25 October 1685, G/35/2, f. 48.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 48.

There are a variety of reasons why the East India Company saw the transnational example of Batavia as an ideal colonial model for their emerging settlements in Southeast Asia. According to Leonard Blussé the municipality of Batavia was particularly prosperous in the seventeenth century because it performed three interlocking functions for the Dutch Empire.<sup>297</sup> The colony was founded in 1619 as an administrative headquarters for the VOC in Asia, but soon developed into a commercial emporium and a plural urban society which was firmly integrated into the private trading networks of diasporic Chinese merchants.<sup>298</sup> By the late seventeenth century the VOC had also become a major territorial power on Java, growing rich by collecting taxes and tribute payments from the agrarian lands within the jurisdiction of the town.<sup>299</sup> Dutch citizens, known as free burghers, were major landholders at Batavia, but often preferred to earn their fortune in the East Indies and return to the Dutch Republic to reside in a more familiar environment. Consequently, in exchange for annual rent payments, a large proportion of this fertile land was leased out to Chinese settlers who used local labour and slaves to cultivate sugar on Java.<sup>300</sup> A period of intense agricultural expansion into the hinterland of Batavia, known as the Ommelanden, began in the early 1680s and was stimulated by an influx of coolies from the Fujian coastline after the passage of an imperial edict in China which lifted prohibitions on maritime activity.<sup>301</sup> At the encouragement of the VOC, 130 milling stations owned predominantly by Chinese entrepreneurs were erected between 1680 and 1710 to refine the cane produced by the numerous sugar plantations. This commodity was either exported to consumer markets in Persia and Europe, or was distilled into arrack, a popular alcoholic drink in South Asian societies.

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<sup>297</sup> Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women, and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Foris, 1986).

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26 & 90.

There were a number of instances where the East India Company acted transnationally, and was brought into close and sustained contact with Batavia. These transnational interactions may have been an important medium through which ideas about the labour customs used by the Dutch in Asia were transmitted to planters at Bencoolen. The skills and knowledge of VOC factors and navigators were valued highly by the English merchants in Asia. For instance, when the Company sought to initiate a direct trade with China in the late 1690s they were given permission by the Governor General of Batavia to stop at the Dutch colony for 'fresh water and a proper pilot and linguist for Canton'.<sup>302</sup> Goods such as tea, quicksilver, ginger and arrack were regularly purchased at Batavia by Company shipping on the homeward bound voyage, and if these ships arrived too late in the season to guarantee a safe return to England, they were instructed to remain at Batavia over the winter period.<sup>303</sup> These formal commercial interactions facilitated the transmission of knowledge about Dutch practices on Batavia to Englishmen working for the East India Company. By the early eighteenth century, the Deputy Governors descriptions on how sugar cane was cultivated at Batavia were being circulated in the colony to better instruct planters in how to raise sugar in Sumatran soil.<sup>304</sup> Shortly thereafter, utensils necessary for refining the cane were bought at Batavia and transported to Bencoolen by the Company.<sup>305</sup> Furthermore, Batavia was a significant slave trading marketplace in Southeast Asia. In 1689 the Company vessels outfitted vessels from Bombay to meet the labour demands of Bencoolen by purchasing 'one hundred slaves or more of both sexes and of any casts' from Batavia and transporting them to Sumatra.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> London to the Governor General of Batavia in 1699, E/3/93, f. 80; London to the Governor General of Batavia in 1701, E/3/93, f. 208.

<sup>303</sup> Instructions for Captain Thomas Blow of the *Todington*, 29 November 1704, E/3/95, f. 146; London to Bencoolen, 19 December 1704, E/3/95, f. 172.

<sup>304</sup> Bencoolen to London, 23 October 1717, G/35/7, f. 163.

<sup>305</sup> Bencoolen to London, 30 June 1724, G/35/7, f. 365.

<sup>306</sup> London to Bombay, 14 March 1689, E/3/92, f. 42.

The example of Dutch practices at Batavia assimilated by frequent visits to the colony combined with the high mortality rates of English planters resulting from the tropical disease environment led the Company to invite a 'good stock of Chinese families' to help settle Bencoolen in the late seventeenth century.<sup>307</sup> The 'industrious Chinese' were regarded as 'excellent gardeners, planters and makers of sugar' and were believed to have already 'contributed much to the encrease and wealth of Batavia', primarily due to the land rents collected by the VOC from their Chinese tenants.<sup>308</sup> With a paid salary and an ability to trade free from prohibitive customs, the Company believed that these new Chinese colonists would be able to raise thriving sugar, pepper, indigo and cotton plantations on Sumatra.<sup>309</sup> It was believed that the Chinese were the most important 'trading men and the upholders of Batavia', and that without a settled population of Chinese residents in Bencoolen, the English could never 'expect any considerable trade' in Southeast Asia.<sup>310</sup> Consequently, the Company hoped that by attracting a population of Chinese merchants to reside with the English they could integrate Bencoolen into the traditional networks of Chinese junk traders, and profit from their longstanding commerce with Southeast Asia in opium, pepper, and sugar.<sup>311</sup> The considerable benefits that this population group could bring to the nascent English settlement on Sumatra meant that requests were made for an envoy to 'reach to Batavia to encourage the Chenesses to come here who will bring the most mony into the Honourable Companies Coffers'.<sup>312</sup>

An unexpected encounter in September 1689 brought the first Chinese settlers to Bencoolen. A Chinese prow which had recently left Batavia and was bound for the Dutch trading post at Pedang was forced back into Sillibar harbour due to contrary winds. The *nachoda*, or chief merchant, of the

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<sup>307</sup> London to Bencoolen, 19 December 1690, E/3/92, f. 61.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid; London to Bencoolen, 23 July 1697, E/3/92, f. 298.

<sup>309</sup> London to Fort St. George, 6 March 1694/95, E/3/ 92, f. 197.

<sup>310</sup> Bencoolen to Madras, 8 May 1686, in John Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra 1685-1825* (University of Malaya Press, 1965), p. 32.

<sup>311</sup> Farrington, 'Bengkulu: An Anglo-Chinese Partnership', 113.

<sup>312</sup> Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra 1685-1825*, p. 32.

vessel met with the governor of Bencoolen and informed him that he would spread the word about the encouragements to Chinese settlement given by the Company, and that in the 'next season no doubt but many will come upon his information'. Promises made to the Chinese that the mild government of the English would soon make Bencoolen more famous and profitable than Batavia seems to have had some impact, because a few days later it came to the council's attention that five Chinese merchants had abandoned the prow, and were persuaded to permanently reside at Bencoolen. A small house was built for them within the fort compound for their security, and it was expected that 'through their procurement many of their country will come and dwell here'. Indeed, a few days later seven more Chinese men came 'to inhabit and trade with us', and the growing community was granted a loan of 440 silver dollars from the Company for purchasing goods necessary for their sustenance.<sup>313</sup> By 1697, there were twelve Chinese families cultivating pepper and sugar for the East India Company at Bencoolen.<sup>314</sup> Prior experience at St. Helena had convinced Company officials that the labour of 'one slave or negro under the care and eye of a free Chinese' on plantations would be much more productive than two under the charge of English overseers employed by the company.<sup>315</sup> It was thought to be more cost-effective to 'set up some industrious Chinese' with a few acres of land, two or three black slaves and a loan of 200 dollars each.<sup>316</sup> This was because these Chinese slave owners would pay rent to the Company, and also due to the fact that a 'private undertaker' would be more willing to prevent the embezzlement of merchandise than it was 'possible for the company to do by officers at such a distance'.<sup>317</sup>

The syncretic Dutch and Asian social customs used at Batavia also had an important transnational influence on how Bencoolen was governed by the Company, particularly in relation to the practices

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<sup>313</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 26 September 1689, G/35/2, f. 247.

<sup>314</sup> London to Bencoolen, 16 April 1697, E/3/92, f. 280.

<sup>315</sup> London to Bencoolen, 23 July 1697, E/3/92, f. 298.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 298.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 298.

used to manage slaves. Ever since the establishment of English settlements on Sumatra there had been letters written to London which suggested that ‘the Mallayes [were] a lassie sort of people’ that would not work in menial jobs around the fort ‘how poor soever they are’.<sup>318</sup> In comparison to Bombay, which had been integrated into the highly mobile labour markets of northwest India for centuries, the west coast of Sumatra was a relative backwater, and coolies were reported as not ‘being procurable in this place without much trouble and loss of time’.<sup>319</sup> As a result, in October 1685, only a few months after the founding of the colony, the directors of the Company used their transnational knowledge of how the Dutch had achieved commercial success in the Indian Ocean to argue that it would be beneficial to bring ‘some Madagascar blacks’ to Bencoolen to be ‘bred-up as ship-carpenters, smiths and other handicraft trades’ in the manner that the ‘Dutch doo to their great advantage at Batavia’.<sup>320</sup> From the outset, the exploitation of forced labourers for the benefit of the English inhabitants was an integral part of the Company’s plans for their colony on Sumatra. Slaves were brought to Fort York from a variety of different locations across the Indian Ocean. There were a series of slave trading voyages chartered by the Company in the late seventeenth century to furnish the new English settlements on Sumatra with a cheap and malleable labour force. Regular statements about the necessity of slaves at Bencoolen in consultation books convinced the Company to send ‘8 or 10 blacks’ that could speak English or Portuguese from St. Helena to Sumatra in 1687.<sup>321</sup> The emphasis placed by the Company on the linguistic skills of their slaves is evidence for the importance of Portuguese as a *lingua franca* in the commercial world of the Indian Ocean during the seventeenth century. With the introduction of this new and potentially disobedient group, the Company considered it vital to grant an English resident increased wages to act as a ‘superior over the said blacks to compel them to do there duties carefully’.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> London to Bombay, 31 January 1689/90, E/3/92, f. 34.

<sup>319</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 4 November 1695, G/35/3, f. 156.

<sup>320</sup> London to Pariaman, 25 October 1685, G/35/2, f. 49.

<sup>321</sup> Additional Clause to St. Helena, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 94.

<sup>322</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 121.

By the late 1680s urgent requests were still being made for up to '2 or 300 of Madagascar negroes' to quickly construct fortifications and consolidate the English presence on the west coast of Sumatra.<sup>323</sup> The Company answered these demands in 1690 by giving Captain Knox of the Tonqueen Merchant five bills of exchange to venture to Madagascar and purchase '200 negroes' for Bencoolen, of which two thirds were to be male and one third were female.<sup>324</sup> This large number of 'negro slaves' would be sufficient 'to carry on all works to such a perfection that you need not fear any enemy whatsoever'.<sup>325</sup> At around this time the East India Company also began to use their knowledge of Dutch slave trading patterns to consider exploiting alternative supplies of slaves in the Indian Ocean. In 1690, the 'want of slaves' at Company colonies on Sumatra was satisfied by using sloops from Fort St George to conduct slave trading voyages to the 'Island of Balu and other Islands to the Eastward of Javay', which is where the Dutch were said to maintain a constant supply of labour to Batavia.<sup>326</sup> They would cost '20 shillings each slave or a less value in goods', much cheaper than the twenty pounds paid for the best Madagascan slaves.<sup>327</sup> The reason given by the Company why forced labourers were transported to Bencoolen from various locations across the Indian Ocean, particularly the 'eastern Islands, as well as from Fort St George and Madagascar', was to ensure that the slaves were of 'different casts or nations'.<sup>328</sup> By not sharing a common cultural heritage, it was hoped that these slaves were unlikely to run away or conspire against the English and become their 'masters in time'.<sup>329</sup>

Once the African and Southeast Asian labourers at Bencoolen had completed the settlement's fortifications, the Company decided to bolster the number of carpenters, bricklayers and smiths at

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<sup>323</sup> Indrapura to London, 20 September 1688, G/35/2,, f. 134.

<sup>324</sup> London to Bencoolen, 19 December 1690, E/3/92, f. 60.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., f. 60.

<sup>326</sup> London to Bencoolen, 9 May 1690, E/3/92, f. 48.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., f. 48.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., f. 48.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., f. 48.

the young colony. Training slaves in skilled trades was vital for the continued commercial viability of Bencoolen, as it offset the scarcity of English apprentices and indentured servants at this remote plantation in Southeast Asia. English artisans brought on voyages to Sumatra had been reduced to a small number from repeated epidemics, and those who remained were instructed to teach newly arrived slaves 'those manuell occupations' which help the Dutch 'repair their ships and build such structures' at Batavia.<sup>330</sup> However, for the preservation of their 'lives and healths', these skilled slaves were to be treated with 'more lenity' than those owned by the Dutch by keeping their 'belly's full of rice' and ensuring that they lived in 'a fitting compound'.<sup>331</sup> Many of these enslaved artisans were also accorded a living wage by the Company, which changed depending upon the availability of food and provisions from the indigenous Malays. By the mid-1690s it had become customary to allow male slaves two 'bamboes of rice every week', along with '30 cash per month' to buy betel nuts, tobacco, and coarse clouts for their clothing.<sup>332</sup> The most industrious and useful slaves, including the smith, the chief bricklayer, and Gongula the butler, were accorded an extra one dollar per month.<sup>333</sup> On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1695, Yoyoanco, who was employed at York Fort as a brickmaker, requested that the governor of Bencoolen grant him fifty dollars for an increased 'supply of his present neccesitys'.<sup>334</sup> The council took into consideration his good character, emphasising that he was a 'diligent and industrious young man', and decided that it would be worth encouraging him to continue practicing his trade with some extra money, expecting that he would soon resolve his current financial dilemma.<sup>335</sup> However, these charges were proving to be a burden on the Company's finances, and as a result it was agreed to use some of the Coffrey slaves to be employed in 'digging, manureing and planting some part of the green hill behind the fort'.<sup>336</sup> Once this plantation had

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., f. 48.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., f. 48.

<sup>332</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 18 July 1695, G/35/3, f. 40.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., f. 40.

<sup>334</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 15 August 1695, G/35/3 f. 67.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., f. 307.

<sup>336</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 14 November 1695, G/35/3, ff. 171-172.

come to 'perfection' and slaves could grow produce sufficient to sustain their community independently, they were 'deprived of their allowances' from the Company.<sup>337</sup>

Despite fears of the Council on Sumatra that their slaves may act as an enemy from within, the directors in London hoped that the 'Madagascar blacks' would also be able to provide 'some kind of balance in case of need against an enemy, they being as much strangers to the Sumatrans as they are to us'.<sup>338</sup> Like at Batavia, an elite group of slaves were armed by the Company with 'lances, darts and swords or other weapons of India'.<sup>339</sup> In 1687, these instructions were restated by Josiah Child, who wrote to Bencoolen to argue that in order to ease the heavy workload of the diseased white soldiers, slaves who could speak English were permitted to be given weapons and keep guard over the fort.<sup>340</sup> The English inhabitants were told to be especially wary of these armed slaves. To prevent them from becoming unruly, slaves who were employed by the Company as soldiers were forbidden from drinking arrack and brandy, and for every ten armed slaves, it was required that thirty English soldiers were present at all times to supervise them.<sup>341</sup> Fears that the mutinous behaviour of English planters at St. Helena and Bombay may be repeated at Bencoolen, and the realisation that 'the wisdom of government' in such a remote colony is to 'balance the power of the sword under several different casts and nations', eventually led Company officials to allow '20 or 30 of our Madagascar slaves...to understand the use of firearms'.<sup>342</sup>

Shortages of manpower in the American colonies meant that African slaves in the English Atlantic world were sometimes armed during times of crisis, such as during the French invasion of Jamaica in

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., ff. 171-172.

<sup>338</sup> London to Pariaman, 21 October 1685, E/3/91, f. 2-3.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., f. 2-3.

<sup>340</sup> London to Bencoolen, 3 August 1687, G/35/2, f. 99.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., f. 99.

<sup>342</sup> London to Bencoolen, 29 February 1691/92, E/3/92, f. 101.

June 1694, when in desperation at the dire military situation, Governor Sir William Beeston agreed to give weapons to 'negroes as could be trusted'.<sup>343</sup> However, deploying a contingent of armed slaves on a permanent basis like was practiced by the East India Company at Bencoolen and the Royal African Company in West Africa would have been unthinkable in the late seventeenth century Caribbean, where rigorous legal codes limiting the freedoms of slaves were beginning to circulate amongst English colonies, and fears about the potential of rebellious slaves to overthrow the minority white rule were pervasive.<sup>344</sup> It was only within the Islamic world that the use of armed slaves was the primary form of military organisation.<sup>345</sup> Therefore, the widespread use of military slavery at colonies administered by English corporations in the Indian Ocean and along the West African coast may have had its roots in practices observed within the Mughal Empire or Islamic kingdoms in Africa.

Transnational and transoceanic examples informed how the Company governed their armed slaves. To prevent enslaved soldiers at Bencoolen from leading a rebellion against the English administration, they were to be governed in the harsh 'manner of Batavia', and were to 'never have the custody of their own arms but when they are upon duty'.<sup>346</sup> By ensuring that they were 'kept in most absolute inferiority and subjection to our English soldiers', the Company hoped that training slaves to use firearms would help to protect Fort York without compromising the internal stability of the colony.<sup>347</sup> At Fort St. David, another English garrison in Asia established at the close of the seventeenth century, similar instructions to raise 'a company of cofferies' out of thirty English speaking Malagasy slaves sent from St. Helena and Mozambique may shed further light on the role

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<sup>343</sup> Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire*, pp. 164-166.

<sup>344</sup> Newman, *A New World of Labor*, p. 150.

<sup>345</sup> Christopher Brown & Philip Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, (Yale, 2006), p. 40.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 101; London to Bencoolen, 9 May 1690, E/3/92, f. 48.

<sup>347</sup> London to Bencoolen, 29 February 1691/92, E/3/92, f. 101.

and treatment of soldier slaves on Sumatra.<sup>348</sup> Because these cofferys were 'the Companyes slaves' they were given no wages and dressed in conspicuous attire, such as red caps and a red coat, to distinguish their contingent from others around the Fort.<sup>349</sup> To foster the natural increase of the community they were accorded a weekly allowance of rice and salt fish, which enhanced the nutritional profile of the produce grown out of little plots of land 'for their wives to plant potatoes upon as is done in Barbados'.<sup>350</sup> When the men were not on duty, they were permitted to either help their wives in planting or were drafted in to assist in repairing the fortifications and loading Company shipping, like the slaves at St. Helena.

By the mid-1690s the forced labour regimes that were used to foster colonial development, population growth and commercial prosperity at St. Helena and Bencoolen had been formed. Transoceanic and transnational interactions with Barbados and Batavia shaped the forms of forced labour which emerged at Company colonies. The East India Company acted transnationally, using its global networks of exchange to share information about colonisation and labour over long distances, and facilitate transfers of expertise between Barbados and St. Helena, and Batavia and Bencoolen. The Company's connections with these slave societies were sustained through commercial contact and intercolonial migration flows of planters, overseers and slaves. By the late seventeenth century, there were similarities between the systems of slavery used in the Caribbean and the forms of forced labour deployed by the East India Company at St. Helena and Bencoolen. The Company now almost exclusively referred to their black labourers at these colonies as 'slaves', and when viewed in the context of the increasingly violent levels of punishment used to manage them, it is more appropriate in the 1680s than it was earlier in the century to use the terminology of slavery to describe this African and East Indian workforce.

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<sup>348</sup> London to Fort St. David, 6 March 1694, E/3/92, f. 200.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 201.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 201.

Despite a disruptive period of warfare and political strife suffered by the East India Company at the turn of the eighteenth century, the direction of labour policy taken over the course of future decades will follow the same patterns established in the late seventeenth century. Slavery on St. Helena and Bencoolen will develop into a mature institution over the course of the eighteenth century as repeated instances of rebellion and maroonage stiffened the resolve of the Company and their planters to extract the maximum amount of labour out of the enslaved populace. At Bombay, different forms of forced labour to those used at St. Helena and Bencoolen were emerging out of the Company's efforts to develop the colony into the most important port city in northwest India. A vital component of this strategy continued to revolve around population management and the mobilisation of Asian coolies and weavers.

## Chapter 4. The Consolidation of Forced Labour Systems at Company Colonies, 1695-1730

The domestic instability of seventeenth century England was affected by corporate bodies with governmental and mercantile interests abroad.<sup>351</sup> The authority invested in corporations to govern English trade with the non-European world was granted by English monarchs and then embodied in political documents, such as charters. Just as the constitutional legitimacy of domestic governments in England were constantly contested by various factions over the course of the seventeenth century, resulting in civil strife and religious warfare, so too were the exclusive political rights of corporations to regulate international commerce disputed by self-interested individuals. Interloping merchants and their political representatives in Parliament repeatedly challenged corporate monopolies and clamoured for the decentralisation of overseas trade. During the 1690s events in England and Asia reinvigorated attempts to dismantle the East India Company's commercial monopoly over Asian waters, threatening to disrupt the use of forced labour at English plantations in the Indian Ocean. The political repercussions of the Glorious Revolution in 1688 had eroded the Company's close relationship with the Stuart Crown, whilst the issue of piracy in Asian waters caused significant disruption to English trade with India, validating the arguments of independent merchants that the Company was an ineffective body for governing English trade to the East Indies.<sup>352</sup> Interloping competitors of the East India Company exploited their moment of weakness by agitating for the creation of a rival company which could more effectively transfer the riches of Asia to London and govern English affairs in the Indian Ocean without the 'tyrannical' and 'despotic' policies used by the East India Company in recent years.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> William Pettigrew, 'Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History', *Itinerario*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, (December 2015), pp. 487-501.

<sup>352</sup> William Pettigrew and George Van-Cleve, 'Parting Companies: The Glorious Revolution, Company Power, and Imperial Mercantilism', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (2014), pp. 617-638.

<sup>353</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, p. 143.

The growing crisis of confidence in the efficacy of corporate control over overseas commerce following the Glorious Revolution and a protracted petitioning campaign led Parliament to pass legislation deregulating the East India trade in 1694. To further open this commerce up to competition, by 1698, a new East India Company was established, and subscriptions from potential investors began to pour into this rival organisation.<sup>354</sup> During its short lifespan, the New East India Company shared many of the same concerns as the Old Company regarding the planting of English settlements in Asia and managing various population groups. This is unsurprising, considering that members of the Old Company were the largest shareholders in the new corporate body. For example, the New Company launched an expedition to settle on Borneo, encourage the resident population to produce pepper for export, and divert the intra-Asian Chinese junk trade from Batavia to this English colony.<sup>355</sup>

Despite the operation of a legitimate rival organisation within the remit of its traditional zone of control, the Old Company remained resolute that they would succeed in their domestic political battle with the New Company. It was emphasised how their rights to 'propriety and possessions in India' meant that the Old Company already had a secure hold over strategically significant forts and factories in Asia from which it was possible to dictate English commerce.<sup>356</sup> Indeed, in 1708 these predictions were proved correct, as the two competing corporate bodies were merged to form a united East India Company which once again traded and governed in Asia with cohesion. After the political diversions of the previous ten years receded, efforts to reinforce the plantations of St. Helena and Bencoolen with slaves were prosecuted with renewed vigour. Moreover, concerns about how successive wars and famines had depopulated the port city of Bombay forced the directors of the Company to strengthen their commitment to improve revenues and security by attracting

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid. p. 153-157.

<sup>355</sup> London to Henry Watson Chief at Benjar Massin on the Island of Borneo, 26 September 1699, E/3/94, f. 53; London to Borneo, 23 November 1699, E/3/94, f. 64.

<sup>356</sup> London to Fort St. George, 26 August 1698, E/3/93, f. 50.

coolies, weavers and merchants to reside at the island colony. This chapter will analyse how forms of forced labour, including the institution of slavery, continued to be used at Company colonies from 1695 to 1730. The most detailed information about patterns of work and forms of resistance appears in the consultation proceedings produced during the early eighteenth century, and therefore a particular focus of this chapter will be on slave life at St. Helena and Bencoolen.

### **Population Management and Labour in Early Eighteenth Century Bombay**

The East India Company's initial vision of developing Bombay as both a site of English plantation and a commercial entrepôt had changed by the early eighteenth century. A lack of English settlers and the social and economic power held by Asian and Portuguese inhabitants on the island led the Company to focus solely on efforts to make Bombay a regional centre of trade. For instance, at the turn of the eighteenth century the 'continual oppressions of the Moors upon the English' forced the East India Company to consider moving their primary trading port in western India from Surat to Bombay.<sup>357</sup> The ability of indigenous brokers to dictate the terms of trade at Surat was predicated upon corrupt payments to clients, a fraudulent practice which was supported by the military might of the Mughal 'country government'.<sup>358</sup> If the Company could consolidate their strength on the island colony of Bombay, they hoped to be able to retain more effective control over Asian populations and minimise the negative impact an increasingly belligerent Mughal empire would have on trade.<sup>359</sup> In a letter to Sir John Gayer, the governor of Bombay, the Company wrote that they desired 'as soon as we can to make Bombay the principall residence for trade as well as power on your side of India'.<sup>360</sup> These commercial aims meant that the Company did not need to deploy slaves on plantations like at St. Helena and Bencoolen, but were instead required to relocate large numbers

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<sup>357</sup> London to Bombay, 4 June 1703, E/3/95, f. 67.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., f. 70.

<sup>359</sup> London to the Governor of Bombay, 24 September 1702, E/3/95, f. 2.

<sup>360</sup> London to General Sir John Gayer, June 8 1703, E/3/93, f. 326.

of useful people, including merchants, weavers and coolies, from the Indian subcontinent to the English island of Bombay. A flurry of dispatches were sent to the Bombay council instructing the English leadership to 'invite and encourage useful hands to settle with you' in order to raise revenues and improve the security of the colony.<sup>361</sup> Many of these letters inquired how 'merchants may not by some means be invited to come and take up their residence at Bombay', whilst others focused on the management of artisans and labourers.<sup>362</sup> Whilst the East India Company was establishing rigorous forced labour regimes at St. Helena and Bencoolen, that by the early eighteenth century had begun to resemble forms of enslavement used in the Atlantic world, local circumstances at Bombay meant that the Company used traditional Indo-Portuguese modes of labour management and innovative policies to increase voluntary migration instead.

In the early eighteenth century there were sustained attempts to encourage Asian weavers and painters from Chaul, a Portuguese fortress town in the Northern Province of the *Estado da India*, to relocate to Bombay. To advance the process of 'cultivating our Island of Bombay', particular emphasis was placed on 'increasing the Manufacturyes', and 'keeping all the handicrafts people you can invite thither fully employed'.<sup>363</sup> In 1699 the Company advised how the weavers from Chaul should be engaged in the production of fine silk fabrics and cotton calicos, the raw materials for which could be procured from Persia and Bengal.<sup>364</sup> The intention was to use the 'Choull weavers and all other [of] the Bombay inhabitants in their severall arts' to produce 'measured goods of the Portuguez or the Malabar Coast'.<sup>365</sup> Experience elsewhere in India, where the Company's trade had 'multiplied the inhabitants in 20 or 30 years from one to hundreds', proved that if you could provide regular employment for Asian men and women, then the population would quickly grow.<sup>366</sup> Similar

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<sup>361</sup> London to Bombay, 12 January 1704/5, E/3/95, f. 204

<sup>362</sup> London to Bombay, 4 June 1703, E/3/95, f. 67.

<sup>363</sup> London to Bombay, 25 April 1700, E/3/93, f. 284.

<sup>364</sup> London to Bombay, 17 March 1698/99, E/3/93, f. 80.

<sup>365</sup> London to Bombay, 11 April 1701, E/3/93, f. 214.

<sup>366</sup> London to Bombay, 17 March 1698/99, E/3/93, f. 80.

instructions were dispatched to other Company colonies in India. At Madras, a long running dispute between the right hand and left hand castes had been poorly managed by the English administration. The directors in London were shocked to learn that 'so many of the handicrafts and other useful hands' had chosen to resettle at the nearby Portuguese town of São Tomé due to unresolved tensions within the Hindu community.<sup>367</sup> The Company wrote to the Madras council in 1709 exhorting them to remedy this situation by administering justice equally and impartially, ensuring that the 'ancient privileges of both casts be preserved', and guaranteeing all inhabitants the 'free possession of their liberty and property'.<sup>368</sup>

Food provisioning and security were central features of the East India Company's pioneering policies to entice weavers to relocate to Bombay from surrounding settlements. The Company was acutely aware that having 'sufficient provisions always at hand' was the best way to 'encourage those poor labouring people to reside and continue' at Bombay.<sup>369</sup> The same was thought true of Bengal, where by 1700, a project to increase revenues at Calcutta was underway. Weavers were enticed to come and live in the town and produce fine textiles by giving them access to the Company's 'storehouses of graine for their subsistence benefit'.<sup>370</sup> However, the limited availability of fertile land on the island of Bombay made it necessary to import large stores of rice from Mangalore and timber from nearby Portuguese settlements to sustain the nascent calico industry, raising the cost of living for poor labourers by more than ½ d per day.<sup>371</sup> Economic issues with the importation of food stores were exacerbated by the continual 'overflowing of the sea at the breach', which flooded productive land on Bombay and contributed 'to the unhealthfulness of the Island'.<sup>372</sup> A particularly violent storm in the winter of 1702 flooded the low-lying salt grounds, scuppered fishing vessels, and

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<sup>367</sup> London to Fort St. George, 4 February 1708/9, E/3/96, ff. 219-220.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.* f. 220.

<sup>369</sup> London to Bombay, 25 April 1700, E/3/93, f. 284.

<sup>370</sup> London to Bengal 29 November 1700, E/3/93, f. 190.

<sup>371</sup> London to Bombay, 17 March 1698/99, E/3/93, f. 80.

<sup>372</sup> London to Bombay, 4 June 1703, E/3/95, f. 68.

drowned numerous labourers from Worli.<sup>373</sup> This forced the overseer of the coolies Alvaro Morello, an Indo-Portuguese inhabitant of Bombay employed by the Company to manage the coolie labourers, to beseech the Company to provide financial respite for his destitute workmen, which they eventually granted by lending the coolies the sum of 150 xeraphins each.<sup>374</sup> In an attempt to render this marshy ground more productive and increase rice output, a proposal was advanced to allow some coolies access to clear and dredge the land for seven years rent free.<sup>375</sup>

Similar issues with food production also had a negative impact on the population of Madras. On the Coromandel Coast, unscrupulous merchants exploited frequent market scarcities by increasing food prices, which was to the detriment of 'poor weavers, washers, painters, and handicrafts'.<sup>376</sup> During a period of famine some years before, the 'usefull poor' and 'ingenious manufacturers' at Madras had been forced to seek protection elsewhere by selling themselves and their families into bondage under the Dutch to survive, which had caused the production of cloth commodities at Madras to stagnate.<sup>377</sup> The English administration of Fort St. George and Fort St. David were pressed to provide quantities of 'paddy and boyled rice in the cheap season of the year, to serve not only your garrison but also the whole city of Madras'.<sup>378</sup> To prevent these duplicitous actions practiced by the merchant community, the Company established a 'charitable design' of free rice allotments to the poor.<sup>379</sup>

The English and Portuguese competed for control over the regional labour markets in northwest India. Highly mobile and interlocking networks of labour migration facilitated the frequent movement of population between English colonies, Portuguese settlements and Asian port towns.

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<sup>373</sup> Bombay Consultation, 22 February 1702/03, G/3/5, f. 13.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 13.

<sup>375</sup> London to Bombay, 4 June 1703, E/3/95, f. 68.

<sup>376</sup> Instructions to President Pitt and Council at Fort St. George, 26 January 1697/98, IOR/E/3/93, f. 4.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4; London to Fort St David, 26 January 1697/8. f. 9.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4 & f. 9.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4.

This geopolitical and economic situation gave Indian peasants and skilled labourers a significant amount of power in their interactions with Europeans, and was a regular cause of diplomatic disputes between the English and Portuguese. At a meeting of the Bombay council in July 1700 it was reported that the fishing coolies who had sought refuge on the Portuguese island of Salsette when Sidy Yacut Caun besieged Bombay eleven years before were sending 'frequent applications to us to procure their liberty', after they were prevented from returning to the English by the Portuguese administration.<sup>380</sup> It was only during the political turmoil resulting from the Arab invasion of Salsette that the coolies and their families were able to escape back to Bombay unnoticed. Upon their arrival, they petitioned the Bombay Council for a grant of 1940 xeraphins to allow their community to re-establish their fishing business. Muslim coolies, known colloquially to the English as 'Marsh Mareys', who had also recently migrated from Salsette were given an allowance of 300 xeraphins to repair their boats and purchase iron harpoons for their fishery.<sup>381</sup> Concern that this loan may not be repaid within the time frame of twelve months led the Company to order their overseer Alvaro Morello to 'cause them all to bee bound one for another least any of them at any time should return to the Portugueze Country'.<sup>382</sup>

Furthermore, when William Aislable was the governor of Bombay in 1715, a diplomatic quarrel erupted after Portuguese religious leaders refused to return some of his slaves who had 'run away into the Portugeez countrey'.<sup>383</sup> The Padres claimed to have converted the slaves to Catholicism, and under Iberian slave codes, this meant that they could not return them because 'no Christian could be a slave or delivered up to be made such'. In retaliation to this affront, Aislable gave sanctuary to the numerous Portuguese slaves who fled to Bombay. These slaves were often recruited as soldiers, even though it was widely regarded that there was 'no dependence to be had of them in time of

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<sup>380</sup> Bombay Consultation, 22 July 1700, G/3/5, ff. 25-26.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 25-26.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 25-26.

<sup>383</sup> Letter to Charles Boone President of Bombay, 5 April 1715, E/3/98, f. 291.

danger' because of their 'proud false and mischievous' nature. The termination of grain and lumber shipments from Portuguese colonies to Bombay, where these provisions were desperately needed in times of scarcity, demonstrates that conflicts over the control of labour caused significant diplomatic tensions between powers in northwest India.

The status of coolies working 'in all sorts of laborious trades and business belonging to sea or shore' was also up for debate at Bombay in the early eighteenth century.<sup>384</sup> Apologists for the harsh treatment of Indian coolies claimed that according to the 'original constitution' of Bombay, these poor labourers had always been 'lookt upon to be a sort of slaves to the Company'.<sup>385</sup> This provides evidence that the distinctions between slavery and other forms of forced labour in Asia remained uncertain even during the eighteenth century. Their servile condition meant that they were 'naturally inclined to learn handicraft trades', and it was out of their community that the island had 'its best lascars and workmen about ships and other useful services'. After the coolies had been trained between the ages of twelve to sixteen they were employed by Portuguese overseers to work in the warehouses as carpenters, caulkers, and porters, or for manual labour such as loading ships, for which they were paid four xeraphins a month. This stipend was far too small to provide financial support for their families. Therefore, when not working for the Company, these coolies were forced to seek part-time employment within the Asian merchant community, where they could sometimes receive half a xeraphin per day for their subsistence. Furthermore, many of the coolies were considered to be a 'faithful trusty sort of people' because they professed the Christian faith. Catholicism was the most commonly practised religion within their community due to the longstanding Portuguese custom of converting the peasants on Bombay. However, when control over Bombay island returned to the English after Sidi Yacut Khan's devastating siege in 1689, there

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., ff. 294-295.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., ff. 294-295.

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was a concerted effort towards the promotion of 'piety and virtue in the Island' by converting the coolies to Protestantism.<sup>386</sup> Instructions were given to Richard Cobbe the English chaplain of the colony to improve his comprehension of Portuguese and other native languages so that he could better instruct those that 'shall be servants or slaves of the Company or of their agents in the Protestant religion'.<sup>387</sup>

The fact that these Christian coolies were said to do 'thrice the work of a Gentue [Hindu] Cooley' meant that the directors in London was disturbed to receive reports that whilst there were formerly one thousand poor labouring families living on Bombay, through ill-usage 'they have been forced to desert and are not now above one hundred and fifty to two hundred men and boys'.<sup>388</sup> It was resolved that if there were once again over a thousand coolies on the island they would provide a 'real inriching to the place by their usefulness...so that even the trade of the place and building of ships would find the benefit of them'.<sup>389</sup> A variety of examples of maltreatment were listed to highlight how the labouring poor on the island had been mismanaged by previous governors. Domingo de Souza, who was the current overseer, was reportedly very cruel to the coolies because he pretended to have no money to pay them. This exploitative practice seems to have been commonplace, because in 1710 Governor Nicholas Waite wrote to London to lodge similar complaints about the mismanagement of peasant labourers at Bombay. Apparently, the purser marine took from the lascars 'a tenth part of their whole monthly pay' for his own personal gain, and that the master of the works exacted the same amount from the coolies who worked on repairing the fortifications.<sup>390</sup> It seems that the final indignity came when twenty-two coolies turned up

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<sup>386</sup> London to Bombay, 27 March 1714, E/3/98, ff. 173-174; Margaret Hunt and Philip Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay, with Related Documents*, (Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 173-174.

<sup>388</sup> Letter to Charles Boone President of Bombay, 5 April 1715, E/3/98, ff. 294-295.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 294-295.

<sup>390</sup> London to Bombay, 24 March 1709/10, E/3/96, f. 366.

slightly late to their assigned job of rowing General William Phipps to a neighbouring island. He responded to their carelessness with the harsh orders to have them all 'cruelly whipt' by the *muckadum*, or native overseer.<sup>391</sup> Consequently, the coolies decided to leave Bombay with their families the next day and seek more favourable employment elsewhere.

### **Work and Resistance at St. Helena and Bencoolen in the Early Eighteenth Century**

Just as the relocation of coolies and weavers from the Indian subcontinent contributed to the Company's commercial ambitions at the port town of Bombay, the importation of hundreds of slave labourers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries strengthened the economies of St. Helena and Bencoolen. The significance of slavery to the East India Company's plans to develop St. Helena and Bencoolen as plantation economies belies any attempt to characterise these Company colonies as merely 'societies with slaves'. The labour of slaves and other unfree workers had contributed to the development of societies in the Indian Ocean world for centuries. As this thesis has shown, colonisers in the Indian Ocean during the seventeenth century adopted some of these traditions and deployed more diverse forms of forced labour than were used in the English Atlantic world, ranging from slavery and black servant labour to the use of coolies and Asian weavers. Although by comparison with the Caribbean there were only a small number of slaves at St. Helena and Bencoolen during the early eighteenth century, the exploitation of slave labour was at the centre of the East India Company's plans for these colonies. St. Helena and Bencoolen cannot be described as 'slave societies' nor 'societies with slaves'. This is because even though the number of black labourers at these colonies was small by comparison with the enslaved workforces deployed in the Caribbean, never numbering more than 650 at St. Helena and 400 at Bencoolen during the early eighteenth century, slaves at settlements owned by the East India Company did shape local economies and help to realise the Company's governmental and commercial ambitions. Viewing

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<sup>391</sup> Letter to Charles Boone President of Bombay, 5 April 1715, ff. 294-295.

forms of forced labour from a global perspective shows that this historiographical distinction is less effective for categorising labour systems in the Indian Ocean than within the Atlantic world.

The correspondence and consultation records of the East India Company reveal that a number of the social and economic problems at St. Helena and Bencoolen revolved around poor access to labour and the ineffective management of those slaves who were already present in the colonies. This demonstrates the importance of slavery to the Company during the early eighteenth century. Discussions within the Company about the disruptive impact of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-13) on English commerce and how the conflict prevented a regular supply of slave labour demonstrates how slavery had become an integral part of social and economic life at these Company colonies. The directors of the East India Company explained that they had ‘no prospect while the warr lasts to supply [St. Helena] with Madagascar negroes or those of Guiney’, but suggested that planters could instead buy some from the independent slave traders who sometimes ‘touch at St. Helena with negroes’.<sup>392</sup> Requests for fresh slaves from factors at Bencoolen were met with a similar response, and the Company refused to do ‘anything on your proposal of a supply from thence till peace makes freight and demorage cheaper’.<sup>393</sup> The only other advice the Company had was to manage the slaves already at St. Helena and Bencoolen more efficiently, by taking care ‘they earn their living and be well looked after’.<sup>394</sup> Unfortunately for the directors in London, successive governors of both St. Helena and Bencoolen were negligent in their management of both the Company’s slaves and plantations during the early eighteenth century. At St. Helena slaves were being used as personal servants for the pleasure of the governor and his retainers rather than for their intended use within agriculture and industry. Whilst Mr Hoskison was in charge he ‘affected so much pomp that he always had three or four of our blacks to wait upon him’, and the ‘plantations

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<sup>392</sup> London to St. Helena, 30 May 1712, E/3/97, f. 301; London to St. Helena, G/32/1, f. 284.

<sup>393</sup> London to Bencoolen, 6 February 1711/12, E/3/97, f. 247.

<sup>394</sup> London to St. Helena, 30 May 1712, E/3/97, f. 301.

suffer[ed] extremely by the blacks being taken off from looking after them and employed in carrying the governor's friends up and down in hammocks'.<sup>395</sup> The Company believed that these foolish actions endangered the food supply of the entire island, as 'the plantations wanted their labour' and the yams were left 'to rot and spoil'.<sup>396</sup>

Less than three months after the conclusion of peace negotiations with France and Spain, the East India Company once again felt confident enough to commission a series of large scale and risky slave trading voyages to resolve the labour shortages at St. Helena and Bencoolen. Captain Thomas Sitwell was instructed to supply 60 slaves to St. Helena, whilst in the winter of 1713 the *Mercury Sloop* delivered 43 Guinea slaves of 'the same kind [that] are often carried to the West Indies' to planters on the island.<sup>397</sup> In March 1715 five more merchant vessels were licensed to transport 'sound healthful and merchantable slaves natives of Madagascar, two thirds males one third females, none of them under sixteen or above thirty years of age' to St. Helena.<sup>398</sup> To provision Bencoolen with slaves during the war, the *Sarum* was sent to Nias, a large island just off the coast of western Sumatra, to procure 112 labourers for 90 to 100 dollars each.<sup>399</sup> Slaves from Nias were reportedly a 'very dextrous people' that 'readily take to any handicraft', and soon after their arrival several were already employed as carpenters.<sup>400</sup> Between 1713 and 1714, the *Arabella* and the *Clapham* visited Madagascar on their voyages to the East Indies and delivered a total of 346 slaves to Bencoolen.<sup>401</sup> Over subsequent years St. Helena and Bencoolen were regularly supplied with slaves, either through

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<sup>395</sup> London to St. Helena, 20 March 1712/13, E/3/98, f. 4.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4.

<sup>397</sup> London to St. Helena sent by a sloop of Mr Sitwell's, 16 October 1713, E/3/98, f. 57; London to St. Helena, 4 February 1714/15, E/3/98, f. 269; London to St. Helena, 14 March 1715/16, E/3/98, f. 427.

<sup>398</sup> London to St. Helena, 14 March 1715/16, E/3/98, ff. 428-429.

<sup>399</sup> Bencoolen to London, 1 February 1704/05, G/35/7, f. 10; London to Bencoolen, E/3/95, 3 July 1706, f. 293.

<sup>400</sup> Bencoolen to London, 1 February 1704/05, G/35/6, f. 1.

<sup>401</sup> Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, p. 34.

large scale slave trading voyages financed by the East India Company or via illicit commerce with private merchants (see Figures 4 and 5, Appendix).

As well as importing ever increasing numbers of slaves into St. Helena and Bencoolen, there were also efforts to increase production by improving the efficiency of slave management. The jobs slaves were forced to perform during the early eighteenth century furthered the Company's commercial aims, and were almost identical to those occupations used to stimulate the colonial economies of St. Helena and Bencoolen in the 1680s. Multiple governors of St. Helena emphasised that slaves were to be used 'for handicrafts, for fishing, for planting and other beneficial employments'. The most 'docile tractable and ingenious' slaves were trained under Mr Cleeve to 'do joiners and carpenters work', and some years later his protégées Will the Carpenter and Jack Grewer passed on their useful skills to other enslaved apprentices.<sup>402</sup> Slaves on St. Helena also continued to work in the maritime industry. However, the youthful demographic composition of the slave population on St. Helena, where in 1717 out of 310 slaves living on the island 117 were children under the age of twelve, presented a number of difficulties.<sup>403</sup> When the female slaves were giving birth, subject to 'feminine illness' or inclined to nurture their young children, they were ineffective in their role as plantation labourers and domestic servants.<sup>404</sup> Large numbers of enslaved dependents who were not yet old enough to be apprenticed or perform hard labour needed feeding and clothing, and were a significant drain on the Company's resources. This forced the Governor and Council to hire out black children to English planters, under whose supervision slave children were sometimes mercilessly exploited.<sup>405</sup> At Bencoolen, slaves worked under Chinese planters on sugar farms, learnt skilled trades, patrolled the garrison as soldiers, and navigated the three mile boat journey between the

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<sup>402</sup> London to St. Helena, 5 March 1713/14, E/3/98, f. 148; London to St. Helena, 22 February 1716/17, E/3/99, f. 90.

<sup>403</sup> London to St. Helena, 22 February 1716/17, E/3/99, ff. 89-90.

<sup>404</sup> London to St. Helena, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1719/20, E/3/100, f. 146.

<sup>405</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 9 January 1711/12, G/32/5, ff. 8-9.

settlement and Company shipping waiting beyond the sandbars.<sup>406</sup> Slaves were also used to 'garble' pepper, a labour intensive process which involved soaking, sieving, and then removing the seed husks to make the pepper more compact and reveal its white interior.<sup>407</sup> This improved commercial profits for the Company by reducing the costs associated with freight and because white pepper was said to fetch a greater price in European markets.<sup>408</sup>

In their letters to St. Helena and Sumatra, the directors of the East India Company expressly ordered that slaves working in these occupations should be treated humanely by the Governor, the Company's employees, and all of the free planters.<sup>409</sup> For example, in March 1714, the Company emphasised that their slaves 'ought to be well taken care of, not only on the score of humanity, but likewise for our own advantage, considering how much their labour contributes to the general benefit of the plantations [and] the buildings'.<sup>410</sup> These humanitarian instructions were very different from contemporaneous accounts of slavery in the English Caribbean, and the lack of emphasis on violent punishment and sub-human treatment in these letters once again raises questions about the indistinct boundaries between forms of forced labour in the worlds of the East India Company.

Although slaves at St. Helena and Bencoolen were kept to constant hours of labour and managed with 'proper discipline', the directors stated that they would 'not have them cruelly treated if possible...remember they are men'.<sup>411</sup> None but their immediate overseers were allowed to strike enslaved inhabitants, and even they were not permitted to abuse their authority and 'tyrannise'

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<sup>406</sup> London to Bencoolen, 14 March 1717/18, E/3/99, f. 224.

<sup>407</sup> London to Bencoolen, 10 January 1710/11, E/3/97, f. 82; London to Bencoolen, 8 July 1701, E/3/93, f. 242.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 242.

<sup>409</sup> Logan, 'The British East India Company and African Slavery in Benkulen', p. 342.

<sup>410</sup> London to St. Helena 5 March, 1713/14, E/3/98, f. 141.

<sup>411</sup> London to St. Helena, 14 March 1715/16, E/3/98, f. 427; London to Bencoolen, 14 March 1717/18, E/3/99, f. 232.

over the slave community.<sup>412</sup> Benevolent policies may have been issued because the East India Company was primarily a profit-oriented trading corporation, and its directors were concerned that their great expense in transporting slaves to their colonies would go to waste if these workers were killed or injured by brutal treatment. This would explain why enslaved men and women could have 'fitting food and lodgings that will keep out the weather and unwholesome damp's', and if they began to fall sick, factors were instructed to have someone tend to them 'before their distempers take too firm hold of them'.<sup>413</sup> Ethnographic reports in travel narratives suggested that the natives of Madagascar 'had plenty of heartening food, particularly beef, and without it they would droop and die', suggesting that the Madagascar slaves taken to St. Helena and Bencoolen would 'prove of little service unless you feed them well'.<sup>414</sup> By supplementing the diet of slaves with protein rich foods such as beef and fish, the Company hoped that their slaves would grow stronger and more productive. Alternatively, the humanitarian inclinations of the East India Company towards their slaves on St. Helena and Bencoolen may represent one lasting legacy of the older and more lenient labour traditions used by the Company in an Indian Ocean setting.

The threat of violence which underpinned slave-master power relations in all early modern slave societies meant that the paternalistic disposition and benevolent policies pursued by East India Company officials in London towards their forced labourers at St. Helena and Bencoolen sometimes bore little semblance to reality. For instance, during a voyage from St. Helena to the West Indies, Captain White reported that the Guinea slaves, 'told him of their miserable usage, and that they had little or nothing besides yams, and rejoiced exceedingly they were delivered from St. Helena'.<sup>415</sup> The transition from inclusive systems of black servant labour at Company colonies to more rigorous slave regimes was facilitated by the transnational and transoceanic connections the Company created

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<sup>412</sup> London to St. Helena, 21 March 1717/18, E/3/99, f. 247.

<sup>413</sup> London to Bencoolen, 9 January 1709/10, E/3/96, f. 284.

<sup>414</sup> London to St. Helena, 21 March 1717/18, E/3/99, f. 247.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 247.

with Barbados and Dutch Batavia. However, local factors, such as alarming revelations about potential slave rebellion and the economic damage caused by slaves repeatedly running away, ensured that these social and economic transformations would endure throughout the eighteenth century. The resistance of black men and women at St. Helena and Bencoolen, and the Company's fears about slave insurrection, is evidence for how the institution of slavery was crucial in shaping social relations and political discussions at these colonies, even though the number of slaves was relatively small.

The decision taken by the Court of Committees in the 1680s to import larger numbers of black labourers into St. Helena and Bencoolen, and then model their slave systems on Barbados and Batavia, was met by a forceful assertion of agency by enslaved members of Company colonies. Fears about resistance and rebellion at St. Helena and Bencoolen became an important political matter in 1695, a year in which plans for slave uprisings at both colonies threatened to undermine colonial stability. On Friday the 19 November 1695 a slave girl named Hannah hurried to her master Thomas Goodwin to impart some important information. She had overheard a rebellious faction of the slave population declare that they 'intended that very night to murder all the white inhabitants of this place by breaking into theare houses and cutting all theare throats'.<sup>416</sup> Thomas Goodwin and his brother in law John Goodwin quickly took action by arming themselves and working through the night with the other planters to apprehend all of the black slaves they could find. By 7 o'clock the next morning all the slaves were safely consigned to the fort, and inquiries could begin into identifying and punishing the responsible parties. After a series of court hearings, on the 16<sup>th</sup> December it was decreed that for the safety of the white inhabitants of St. Helena an example should be made of the guilty slaves. The ringleaders of the conspiracy faced severe retribution. Jack was suspended in chains alive on a hill that faced the fort and was left to starve to death, whilst Will

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<sup>416</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 2 December 1695, G/32/2.

and Randall were hanged and then publicly displayed with their bowels and head removed.<sup>417</sup> Over the course of four days the lesser offenders, such as Jone, Ruface, Roger and Civil, were flogged more than three hundred times, and were branded on their shoulders with the letter 'R' to signify their disruptive behaviour.<sup>418</sup>

In the same year, the Company's attempts to dismantle many of the customary rights enjoyed by the slave community at English colonies on Sumatra were met with violence and desertions. Beginning in July 1695, the English Council of Bencoolen began a series of protracted debates over the most efficient way to manage their growing population of slave labourers. These consultations provide strong evidence for how the examples of labour regimes on Barbados and Batavia altered the practices of the East India Company's employees in managing their slave populations, representing a marked break with the more inclusive labour traditions of earlier decades. The Council at Bencoolen agreed that Lieutenant Delgardno was the fittest man to be the Company's slave overseer; probably because of his prior experience in that occupation and his fearsome reputation amongst the slaves.<sup>419</sup> When he was previously employed as their supervisor under a previous government, Delgardno had been reprimanded and deported to Madras for causing the untimely death of the slave girl Ungalla following a severe beating. One member of the Council, Francis Bell, still maintained that Delgardno was guilty of this crime.<sup>420</sup> However, others concurred that the 'bare evidence of 4 coffrees' against him was not sufficient to condemn an English man to prison, and as such there was no 'just cause of dismissing him his employ'.<sup>421</sup> Following this decision, Lieutenant Delgardno was recalled from Madras and appointed to the position of overseer with a salary of ten dollars per month. To keep the Company's slaves in good order and discipline he was instructed to

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<sup>417</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 16 December 1695, G/32/2.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 18 July 1695, G/35/4, ff. 39-42.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., f. 42.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., ff. 39-42.

muster them at six o'clock every morning and visit them often throughout the day to ensure that they diligently performed their assigned work. If any slaves misbehaved, Delgardno had the authority to give them 'gentle correction by stripes for laziness, refractoriness, or any other petty misdemeanour'. At the end of the working day, he was instructed to lock the slaves in their compound at 8 o'clock every night before bringing the key to the Deputy Governor.<sup>422</sup>

A little over a month later, bold members of the slave community at Bencoolen gave the Company a visceral reaction to their decision to reappoint Lieutenant Delgardno as overseer. At midnight on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1695 twenty-three of the Company's slaves broke free from their gated quarters, murdered a Bugis guard at Silebar with muskets and clubs, and ran away into the jungle.<sup>423</sup> Maroonage was a common feature of slave societies in the West Indies, and in particular on Jamaica, where the mountainous regions of the interior offered refuge for bands of fugitive slaves, who harassed and raided plantations. The dense jungle and steep hills on Sumatra provided a similar environmental safe haven, and slave runaways from English settlements in Southeast Asia found protection in this wilderness, and sometimes were even integrated into Malay societies. To punish the fugitives for their treachery and return them to their service at Bencoolen, Lieutenant Delgardno led a combined force of fourteen English soldiers and the entire Bugis militia southward to intercept the deserters.<sup>424</sup> Local Malay Rajahs refused to provide the expeditionary force with necessary provisions, and therefore, after exhausting his men by tracking the runaway slaves for thirty miles, the sight of 'a large river and thick woods' in the distance forced Delgardno to call off the pursuit.<sup>425</sup> A reward of ten dollars per person was issued out for anyone on Sumatra who would bring the slaves to face English justice. Whilst the fugitives managed to find their liberty in the wilderness, reprisals for the slaves remaining at Bencoolen were immediate and severe. The fact that those who were

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., ff. 39-42.

<sup>423</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 19 August 1695, G/35/3, f. 77.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., f. 77.

<sup>425</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 20 August 1695, G/35/3, f. 80.

best fed and had the easiest workload were the chief ringleaders of the escape led the Council to suspect there still remained 'some mischievous and treacherous persons' within the slave community, and become convinced that kind usage did not make the slaves 'better affected to us nor give us any security of their stay'.<sup>426</sup> Consequently, it was ordered that every night by 9 o'clock all of the male and female slaves were to be brought into York Fort and locked up in the new brick godowns (warehouses), with a guard at the door to supervise them until they returned to work the next morning.<sup>427</sup>

During the first three decades of the eighteenth century one of the greatest threats to the East India Company's continued presence at St. Helena and on Sumatra was from within, as the slaves transported from across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean to work at Company colonies used violence as a way to articulate their grievances with the English administration. Company officials and white planters responded by passing repressive legislation to consolidate their hold over power. Intelligence filtered back to the directors in London that the planters on St. Helena were 'afraid of an insurrection because the governor calls the blacks his children and they are grown unmeasurably sawey and too good to be spoke to'.<sup>428</sup> This dangerous socio-political situation was compounded by the presence of a sizeable population of free blacks on the island, the majority of whom found freedom following their master's death. Concern that free blacks were inclined to 'corrupt' and 'tamper' with the slave community was used to justify the curtailment of their civil liberties under English law.<sup>429</sup> New legislation passed by the planter's council on St. Helena in 1725 attempted to solidify the connection between race and slavery on the Island by stating that 'none of the said free blacks shall have liberty to purchase or keep any slave whatsoever', and ordering that

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<sup>426</sup> Bencoolen Consultation, 22 August 1695, G/35/3, ff. 80-81.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., ff. 80-81.

<sup>428</sup> London to St. Helena, 31 May 1721, E/3/100, f. 336.

<sup>429</sup> London to St. Helena, 12 February 1724/25, E/3/102, f. 251.

for the future all 'enfranchised blacks shall be obliged to leave the Island by the first shipping'.<sup>430</sup> It was also becoming common practice for manumitted inhabitants of St. Helena to be returned to a form of slavery or servitude. In December 1730, Agnes, 'a free black wench', and her children by the white planter Francis Funge were returned to bondage for a term of fifteen years after Agnes threatened to leave the island, generating fears that Funge may lose 'benefit of their labour'.<sup>431</sup> Manumission appears to have been less common at Bencoolen than on St. Helena, and instead it seems that the threat of renegade slaves who had fled into the jungle preoccupied the minds of the English factors on Sumatra during the early eighteenth century.

As well as structuring colonial society and influencing political debates, the East India Company's exploitation of the labour of enslaved men and women also made contributions to economic development at St. Helena and Bencoolen, even though commerce remained the most important profit-making enterprise. The productivity and stability of St. Helena in the early eighteenth century even encouraged Governor John Roberts to revitalise attempts to develop sugar plantations worked by slaves at Sandy Bay Valley in 1709.<sup>432</sup> An injection of expertise from the Caribbean was once again the most important reason why attempts were made to implement the slave-sugar system on St. Helena, demonstrating the durability of the connections forged by the Company between Barbados and St. Helena. Whilst Governor Roberts was in the West Indies, 'he heard the planters say that they generally used to plant Indian Corn, or meaze in the ground they planted sugar canes'.<sup>433</sup> This gave the Caribbean planters a dual advantage, 'for the corn would grow up presently, and so shelter the young canes', and after the corn was ripe it could be 'served for food as well for themselves as there blacks'.<sup>434</sup> Despite the canes 'flourishing very well' when Thomas Gargen was employed as an

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<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 251.

<sup>431</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 15 December 1730, G/32/8.

<sup>432</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 20 September 1709, G/32/4, f. 33.

<sup>433</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 9 May 1710, G/32/4, f. 23.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 23.

overseer, the efforts to cultivate sugar on St. Helena remained small scale, and the sprawling plantations imagined by the Company directors in the 1680s never emerged.<sup>435</sup> This was because mild climatic conditions and a mountainous environment made the island unsuitable for plantation agriculture on a large scale.

The tropical climate on the west coast of Sumatra allowed the Chinese planter See Gibb to enjoy much more success than Englishmen at St. Helena in using slaves to raise sugar cane plantations for the East India Company. The English believed that the Chinese were 'industrious and diligent...beyond all exception', emphasising how all people who had visited Dutch colonies in the Indian Ocean observed that Chinese innovation underpinned the 'great things the Dutch have effected in good part by their means at Batavia'.<sup>436</sup> It seemed a wonder to many that 'sugar plantacons ha[d] not been encouraged at this place', because 'it might produce as good and in great quantity as Java'.<sup>437</sup> In a letter sent to the directors of the company in July 1716, factors were pleased to report how 'See Gib China Man has made a great progress in sugar and arrack' by building small community six miles away from Bencoolen, where he had 'cleared a great deal of ground planted many sugar cane and sent for more China men and necessarys from Java'.<sup>438</sup> With a loan of \$11,000 to offset the cost of establishing plantations and refineries, See Gibb was able to produce 7666 gallons of arrack and 6280 peculs of sugar for the Company, some of which was sent to Madras as a sample.<sup>439</sup> Although factors at Bencoolen were optimistic that 'plantations of sugar and arrack may be perfected in 2 or 3 years', a devastating anti-British insurrection led by a combined army of Malays and the Bugis militia in 1719 burnt the Company's plantations and threatened the continued survival of the English colonies on Sumatra.<sup>440</sup> The economic consequences of this destructive

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<sup>435</sup> St. Helena Consultation, 20 September 1709, G/32/4, f. 33.

<sup>436</sup> London to Bencoolen, 15 January 1713/14, E/3/98 f. 121.

<sup>437</sup> Bencoolen to London, July 4 1710, G/35/6, f. 122.

<sup>438</sup> Bencoolen to London, 17 July 1716, G/35/7, f. 151.

<sup>439</sup> Bencoolen to London, 10 January 1718/19, G/35/7, ff. 178-179.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

uprising on the burgeoning Chinese community at Bencoolen was disastrous, and by 1731 Governor Francis Everest was forced to imprison See Gibb within Fort Marlborough due to his outstanding debts to the Company, which totalled \$6965.<sup>441</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated how the trend towards harsh and exacting forced labour systems at St. Helena and Bencoolen continued into the eighteenth century, and has argued that Company colonies in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean cannot be categorised as 'slave societies' nor 'societies with slaves'. It has also stressed how the mobilisation and control of Asian labourers was an important feature of the East India Company's plans to colonise Bombay, and that the status of coolies on the island were sometimes likened to that of a slave.

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<sup>441</sup> Bencoolen to London, 20 November 1731, G/35/7, ff. 528-529.

## Conclusions

This study has analysed how the East India Company's relationship to forms of forced labour developed over time. The case study of Bombay demonstrates that the Company used a mixture of concessionary and coercive policies to manage labour, many of which were pioneering. The East India Company's concern with populating the island and deploying Asian labour intersected during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Despite the Company's initial desire to people Bombay as an English 'plantation', the attention of the Court of Committees soon became fixed on the importance of attracting Asian coolies and weavers when they were implementing their detailed strategy to develop the island as a regional centre of trade. A reliable supply of coolie and artisanal labour was necessary to meet the commercial needs of a port town in South Asia, and disputes over the control of labour markets in northwest India became a contentious issue in diplomatic relations between the East India Company and the Portuguese empire. The East India Company's efforts to increase their revenue by transforming St. Helena and Bencoolen into sites of plantation production during the 1680s meant that very different forms of forced labour were deployed at these Company colonies than at Bombay.

Prior to 1683, the policies and labour systems used to manage unfree workers at St. Helena were lenient and inclusive. The threat that independent slave traders posed to the East India Company's monopoly over trade on the West African coast led the Court of Committees to formally restrict the transatlantic slave trade out of Fort Cormantine from 1660 to 1668. After this resolution, the labourers transported to Company colonies such as St. Helena were supposed to voluntarily enter into the service of the East India Company, and could officially be freed after conversion to Christianity and a fixed term of service. It has been argued that many features of this hybrid labour system utilised by the East India Company during the 'black servant' era were reminiscent of

Robert's Hunt's vision for the Assada plantation, and that other systems of servitude and slavery used overseas in the Iberian and Muslim worlds may have informed the direction of Company policy.

A transition towards more rigorous labour regimes began in the period from 1683 to 1694, when the directors of the East India Company made the decision to emulate the administrative techniques used to foster colonial development and manage slaves at Barbados and Batavia. The programme to expand plantation slavery at St. Helena and Bencoolen was probably precipitated by local factors, such as rising expenses and the threat of rebellion. The Company's global networks of trade and migration, which spanned the Atlantic and Indian Oceans during the late seventeenth century, facilitated transnational transfers of expertise and enabled the circulation of slaveholding knowledge. These transoceanic and transnational connections led to the emergence of slave labour systems at St. Helena and Bencoolen. Over the course of the early eighteenth century the slave labour policies pursued by the East India Company were further consolidated. The increasingly violent and brutal treatment of black labourers along with a marked growth in the slave population at St. Helena and Bencoolen generated unease about the potential for slave insurrection, a fear which was exacerbated by repeated instances of slave runaways and desertions.

Slavery and other forms of forced labour played a greater role in shaping forms of colonisation at English settlements in the Indian Ocean than has hitherto been recognised. However, it is important to appreciate that the East India Company's efforts to use African and East Indian slaves as plantation labourers and artificers in the late seventeenth century were merely experiments to try and render strategic commercial outposts in Asia more profitable. The institution of slavery had more demographic, economic and social significance in the English Atlantic world than at any of the settlements administered by the East India Company. Moreover, quantitative estimates suggest that the volume of slaves transported across the Indian Ocean by other European nations, such as the

Portuguese, Dutch and French, far outstripped the magnitude of slave trading by the East India Company during the early modern period.<sup>442</sup> Nevertheless, the history of how the labour systems used by the East India Company developed over the course of the seventeenth century does offer new insights into the early history of English colonial expansion.

New perspectives on the history of forced labour have been facilitated by archival research in the India Office Records. This has shown how overseas trading corporations were central to the development of English colonial labour regimes in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The East India Company used its position as a commercial intermediary and a transnational institution to transfer expertise from planters and overseers on Barbados across oceanic basins, and adopt the slaveholding practices used by the Dutch at Batavia. The presence of both African and East Indian unfree workforces at English settlements within the Indian Ocean world challenges the Atlantic-focused and Afrocentric narratives which have traditionally dominated the study of slavery. This narrow focus has limited our understanding of the global dimensions of English colonialism.

The study of the forced labour regimes used in Company colonies also raises questions about the historiographical division between settler colonialism and 'colonies of exploitation'. It has been argued that slaves, servants, coolies, and weavers were valued by the East India Company both for their labour potential and their role in increasing the population of nascent English colonies in Asia. Lenient and inclusive policies were a particularly important feature of Robert Hunt's vision for the Assada plantation and the labour systems used in Company colonies during the 1660s and 1670s. This suggests that a strict definition of slavery as a permanent condition which is always characterised by brutal treatment is not always appropriate when analysing the forms of forced

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<sup>442</sup> Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, p. 19.

labour used by the East India Company in the South Atlantic and Asia. Finally, the significance of slavery and forced labour to the economies of St. Helena and Bencoolen during the early eighteenth century belies any attempt to describe these Company colonies as 'societies with slaves', simply because the number of black inhabitants there was relatively small. This is another historiographical tradition produced by historians whose research focuses primarily on the slave systems used by European colonisers in the Americas, and by using the records of the East India Company to take a global approach to the history of forced labour, it has been placed under scrutiny in this thesis.

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## Appendix

Figure 2. The signature of James Drax and Maurice Thomson amongst other members of the Court of Committees of the East India Company. London to St. Helena, 23 June 1659, E/3/85, ff. 114-115.

James Drax's Letters et cetera to take especial care of their efforts on  
that they may be fit for planting, and seeing when they shall arrive with  
you.

As it is and shall be our continued care from time to time to be very mindful  
of you and especially you with all things necessary for the carrying on that war  
in which you are by us engaged, for we shall not doubt that in the managing  
thereof you will endeavor by all means possible, with the best of your care  
and industry to promote and advance the same, that so a good foundation  
being our say so, this issue and end thereof may be satisfactory unto us, and  
matter of reputation and honour to your selves, We hope it will not be long, and  
that by the arrivall of our ships, we shall receive good tydings from you, with  
an Account of your proceedings, which will be very welcome news unto us  
And for the Almighty God and keep you, and we shall remaine.

Your very loving friends

|                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| James Drax       | Maurice Thomson     |
| Rob. Fichborne   | Thomas Andrew       |
| Tho. Blugworth   | Thomas Foote        |
| Edward Pearce    | Wm Vincent          |
| Andrew Riccard   | Wm Cokayne          |
| George Smith     | Wm Loue             |
| Rich Ford        | Thomas Bretton      |
| Wm Ryder         | John Wood           |
| John Brookehoven | Thomas Chamberlaine |

Figure 3. A slave trading voyage to Madagascar. Instructions to Captain Robert Knox, 4 April 1684, E/3/90, f. 182.

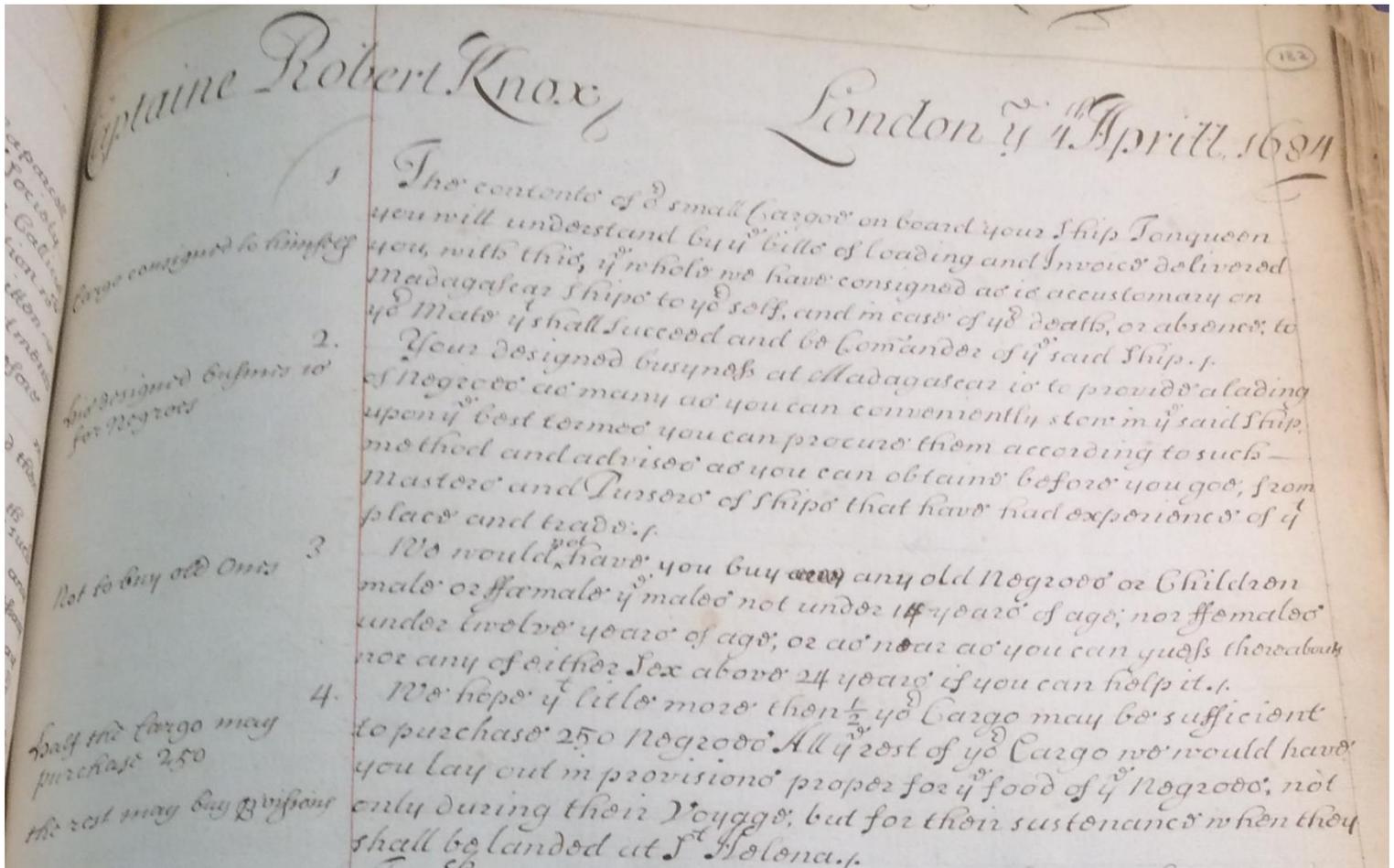


Figure 4. York Fort [Bencoolen] Account of the Company's Slaves January 1711/12. G/35/7 f. 32.

York Fort Acc<sup>ts</sup> Company's Slaves All<sup>d</sup> January 1712

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Able men Coffry</p> <p>Vynango<br/>Somultha<br/>Barromona<br/>Chetook<br/>Rywander<br/>Cumbina<br/>Rymundia<br/>Saloonna<br/>Junch<br/>Nichole<br/>Ashhurdge<br/>Hony<br/>Domingo<br/>Gang Gooa<br/>Ryarrow</p> <p>15 - Able men Naies</p> <p>Boots<br/>Koboo<br/>Jofago<br/>Thayo<br/>Chetto<br/>Sammona<br/>Lafamona<br/>Lattava<br/>Manafoo<br/>Datto<br/>Swago<br/>Adoma<br/>Mafare<br/>Swago</p> <p>14 - Able men Malabar</p> <p>Gongolo<br/>Carlton<br/>Barroon<br/>Clafio<br/>Drycommy<br/>In<sup>d</sup> Leccar<br/>Hazy Coke<br/>Done<br/>Bonfoora<br/>Kipna<br/>Cornelius<br/>Simon Sula<br/>Mocotta<br/>Dapon<br/>Martha<br/>Claife Bottava<br/>Arroon<br/>Claire<br/>Tyangado<br/>Andrew<br/>Domingo Souruk<br/>Torra<br/>Boets<br/>Kafsa<br/>Cabridare<br/>Duch<br/>Goro Drummer<br/>Mingo Datto</p> | <p>Able men Orumboro</p> <p>Mandare<br/>Chindame<br/>Paddy<br/>Lalakhing<br/>Argel<br/>Samatt<br/>Chotra</p> <p>7 - Unble men Coffry</p> <p>Anchaloo<br/>Cuzar<br/>Chomilandra<br/>Old Mahotto<br/>Good hope<br/>Old Chimmy</p> <p>6 - Unble Naies</p> <p>Sacka Jayo<br/>Chetto<br/>Ammom<br/>Rappanda<br/>Comry<br/>Jappymallo<br/>Sudava</p> <p>8 - Malabar</p> <p>Angoda<br/>Manuango</p> <p>2 - Able women Coffry</p> <p>Domjyleh<br/>Maf<br/>Zymanga<br/>Jewel<br/>Gango<br/>Doe<br/>Ampalalawa<br/>Angoladame<br/>Chindame<br/>Hooay bay<br/>Nupia<br/>Orama<br/>Hanna Combar<br/>Handisha<br/>Daffan Manngo<br/>Kille Indefia<br/>Tavay<br/>Mallymango<br/>Charavay<br/>Kilalongo<br/>Tobnary<br/>Lilambo<br/>Coloy<br/>Footo<br/>Blacco<br/>Matte<br/>Cahona<br/>Ladorry<br/>amboya<br/>Calldora</p> | <p>Cahona<br/>Cotto<br/>Cilabesa 1294<br/>Mally<br/>Bullotta<br/>Malabar Able<br/>Women</p> <p>Martha<br/>Maria<br/>Chimukilly<br/>Gunny<br/>Cripina dodo<br/>Joway<br/>Colly<br/>Madaelina<br/>Annika<br/>Jundondy<br/>Lachary</p> <p>11 - Able women<br/>Orumboro</p> <p>Sara<br/>Martolla<br/>Jinkalch</p> <p>3 - Unble women<br/>Coffry</p> <p>Barofa<br/>Mahetta<br/>Foot<br/>Lambitch<br/>Old fool<br/>Rumpe<br/>Honnorta<br/>Chehe<br/>Chotomfobar</p> <p>10 - Unble naies<br/>women</p> <p>Cotte<br/>Kahar<br/>Malabar unble<br/>women</p> <p>Ocha<br/>Grassa<br/>Anthonia</p> <p>4 - Amboyna<br/>Children 43</p> |
|--|--|---|

able women Naies

Figure 5 (3 pages long). A List of the Honourable Company's Blacks [at St. Helena] with Names, Ages, Employments & Qualifications taken this 13<sup>th</sup> day of March 1726/27. G/32/8 ff. 18-20.

*List of the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Comp<sup>y</sup> Blacks with Names, Ages, Employments & Qualifications taken this 13<sup>th</sup> day of March 1726/27 as has Past in Review before the Worship<sup>ful</sup> the Gov<sup>r</sup> & Coun<sup>ty</sup> Goods Each Employed for the last two years as undermentioned Viz:*

| Men Slaves Empl <sup>d</sup> at New Plantation |      |             |                     | Names      | Ages | Employment | Qualifications      |
|--|------|-------------|---------------------|------------|------|------------|---------------------|
| Names  | Ages | Employments | Qualifications      | Adam       | 26   | Labourer   | Good for nothing    |
| Need   | 32   | Overseer    | Very Good           | Harry      | 26   | Do         | Sickly              |
| Dick   | 31   | Stone layer | Good                | Mula       | 27   | Do         | Good                |
| Simon  | 24   | Do          | Do                  | Sambo      | 36   | Do         | Do but Labour       |
| Cremona  | 31   | Do          | Do                  | Leo        | 27   | Do         | Good                |
| Black Wall                                     | 35   | Sawyer      | Do                  | Davis      | 27   | Do         | Do                  |
| Allice   | 29   | Labourer    | Do                  | Towerhill  | 27   | Do         | Do                  |
| Blackbeath                                     | 29   | Do          | Indifferent         | Jn: figura | 36   | Do         | Do                  |
| Moses  | 29   | Do          | Good for little     | Mahomet    | 35   | Do         | Indiff <sup>t</sup> |
| Dick   | 33   | Do          | Do                  | Frank      | 36   | Do         | Good                |
| James  | 26   | Do          | Do                  | Joseph     | 36   | Do         | Do                  |
| Jupiter  | 24   | Do          | Indiff <sup>t</sup> | Matthieu   | 25   | Do         | Do                  |
| Carlsford                                      | 11   |             |                     | Carlsford  | 23   |            |                     |

| Men Slaves Impl. at Mas Plantation    |      |                              |                 | Men Slaves Impl. at Grand Plantation |      |                     |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|------|---------------------|------------------|
| Names                                 | Ages | Employment                   | Qualifications  | Names                                | Ages | Employment          | Qualifications   |
| Mathias                               | 23   | Labourer                     | Good            | Joe                                  | 32   | Over 32             |                  |
| Benjamin                              | 41   | do                           | do              | Barrow                               | 17   | Green Bay           | Indiffer.        |
| Dickie                                | 26   | do                           | do              | Cato                                 | 40   | lab. in Plant.      | Good for nothing |
| Thompson                              | 36   | do                           | do              | Mudag Dick                           | 24   | looks after cattle  | Indiffer.        |
| Jack Cook                             | 26   | Fishes Water                 | do              | Bethad Jack                          | 28   | assist. to garden   | do               |
| Will                                  | 31   | Labourer                     | do              | Peter                                | 38   | looks after sailing | do               |
| Edwin                                 | 31   | do                           | Co. 18 Rotten   |                                      | 34   | Milkman             | Good             |
| Joshua                                | 27   | do                           | Very Indiff.    | Men slaves at Perkins                |      |                     |                  |
| Benjamin                              | 30   | Teaches Master               | do              | Will                                 | 29   | Lab. in Plant.      | Good             |
| Ben                                   | 22   | Attends Dock                 | Good            | Will Benjamin                        | 26   | do                  | do               |
| Cato                                  | 33   | do                           | do              | Hector                               | 31   | do                  | do               |
| Men Slaves Impl. at the Wood. viz.    |      |                              |                 | Tam                                  | 22   | do                  | Indiffer.        |
| Stephen                               | 36   | Shoemaker                    | Very Good       | Peter                                | 36   | do                  | Good             |
| Cato                                  | 30   | Labourer                     | Good            | Singleton                            | 30   | do                  | do               |
| Compy                                 | 30   | do                           | Indiff.         | Oray                                 | 38   | do                  | Indiff.          |
| Dick                                  | 26   | do                           | Indiff.         | Augustus                             | 36   | do                  | Good             |
| Jeremy                                | 37   | do                           | Sickly          | Men slaves Impl. at Limekiln         |      |                     |                  |
| Sammy                                 | 25   | do                           | Good            | Jack Byale                           | 28   |                     | Good             |
| Noah                                  | 29   | do                           | Indiff.         | Simon                                | 31   |                     | do               |
| James                                 | 24   | do                           | Good            | Clouce                               | 29   |                     | do               |
| One Man slave at the Halls.           |      |                              |                 | Blake                                | 26   |                     | do               |
| Harry                                 | 23   | Looks after Cattle & pasture | Good            | Mingo                                | 41   |                     | do               |
|                                       |      |                              |                 | Will                                 | 19   |                     | do               |
|                                       |      |                              |                 | Lewis                                | 28   |                     | do               |
| Men slaves Impl. at Grand Plantation. |      |                              |                 |                                      | 7    |                     |                  |
| Marky                                 | 35   | Tanner                       | Very Good       | Men slaves Impl. at Handicraft.      |      |                     |                  |
| Ben                                   | 33   | Gardner                      | do              | Jack                                 | 31   | Carpenter           | Very Good        |
| Jack                                  | 32   | Butcher                      | do              | Dick                                 | 15   | Assisting           | Indiffer.        |
| Sam                                   | 32   | do                           | Good            | Boston                               | 38   | Taylor              | Good             |
| Charles                               | 24   | Overseer                     | do              | Aboulla                              | 32   | do                  | Indiff.          |
| Harry Ramee                           | 24   | Works in Sp. Plant.          | do              | Daniel                               | 26   | do                  | do & Lame        |
| Hannibal                              | 36   | do                           | do              | Alley                                | 35   | Smith               | Good             |
| Dick Price                            | 34   | do                           | do              | Dublin                               | 32   | do                  | do               |
| Sam More                              | 17   | do                           | do              |                                      | 7    |                     |                  |
| Toney                                 | 24   | Hofler                       | Good for little | Slaves belong to Fishing Boats       |      |                     |                  |
| Limehouse                             | 24   | assist. to garden            | Indiff.         | Tom                                  | 26   |                     | Good             |
| George                                | 22   | Labo. in Plant.              | Good            | Toney                                | 26   |                     | do               |
| Harry Green                           | 20   | do                           | Indiff.         | Martin                               | 28   |                     | do               |
| Tyronius                              | 22   | do                           | Good            | Daniel                               | 24   |                     | do               |
| Benjamin                              | 24   | do                           | do              | Mordue                               | 50   |                     | do               |
| Esau                                  | 22   | do                           | Sickly          | Corydon                              | 26   |                     | sickly           |
| Taney                                 | 24   | do                           | Indiff.         | Leander                              | 31   |                     | Good             |
| Taffey                                | 28   | Tanner                       | Sickly          | Scipio                               | 31   |                     | do               |
| Lewis                                 | 30   | Attends Wat. faucet          | Indiff.         | Mark                                 | 26   |                     | do               |
| Frank                                 | 33   | looks after past.            | Good            |                                      | 9    |                     |                  |
| Daniel                                | 36   | Lab. in Plant.               | Very Indiff.    |                                      |      |                     |                  |
| Mackey                                | 31   | Milkman                      | Indiff.         |                                      |      |                     |                  |

20.

| Slaves Empl. in the Garden.          |      |                    |                 | Women Slaves Empl. at the Plantation. |       |                     |                  |
|--------------------------------------|------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|------------------|
| Names.                               | ages | Employment.        | Qualifications. | Names.                                | ages  | Employment.         | Qualifications.  |
| Benjamin                             | 46   | Head Gardn.        | Very Good       | Margale                               | 30    | Works in Plant.     | Indiff.          |
| Harry                                | 27   | D.                 | Good            | Grace                                 | 28    | D.                  | D.               |
| Chatham                              | 26   | D.                 | D.              | Nanny                                 | 28    | D.                  | D. & Lamer       |
| Monroe                               | 30   | D.                 | D.              | Rebecca                               | 26    | Tether Wood         | Good             |
| Men Slaves in the House.             |      |                    |                 | Lugh Robin                            | 32    | D.                  | Good for nothing |
| Balla.                               | 30   | Patton in          | Very Good       | Isabella                              | 26    | Works in Plant.     | Indiff.          |
| Jamsey                               | 25   | the                | Indiff.         | Sarah Ramo                            | 22    | D.                  | D.               |
| Mercury                              | 29   | Kitchen            | D.              | Mary Steppay                          | 28    | D.                  | Good for nothing |
| Isaac Casar                          | 32   | Cauters            | Very Good       | Phil                                  | 26    | 17                  | D.               |
| Long Casar                           | 24   |                    | Good            | Women at Perkins:                     |       |                     |                  |
| Naurac                               | 55   |                    | Very Good       | Ellen                                 | 28    | Raise Coultry       | Indiff.          |
| Women Slaves in the House.           |      |                    |                 | Jamsey                                | 26    | Works in Plant.     | Good.            |
| Grace Willin                         | 35   | Mends Lin          | Very Good.      | Mary                                  | 28    | D.                  | D.               |
| Grace                                | 30   | Breadingst         | D.              | Superannuated.                        |       |                     |                  |
| Betty Tom                            | 24   | Clean the          | Good            | Will                                  |       |                     |                  |
| Sarah                                | 22   | House.             | D.              | Antonio                               |       |                     |                  |
| Jingo                                | 25   | fulcrum Wench      | D.              | Balla                                 |       |                     |                  |
| Women Empl. in making Vmoids (Corks) |      |                    |                 | Tommy Myers                           | 4     | Broken Backed       |                  |
| Mercy                                | 26   |                    | Very Good       | Loran                                 |       |                     |                  |
| Mercy Boma                           | 26   |                    | Good            | Toney                                 | 6     | Men Superannuated   |                  |
| Sarah                                | 26   |                    | Almost blind    | Mercy                                 |       |                     |                  |
| Betty Myers                          | 31   |                    | Indifferent     | Casemire                              |       |                     |                  |
| Women Empl. at Grand Plantation.     |      |                    |                 | Welchey                               |       |                     |                  |
| Betty Ben.                           | 31   | Wash. Wom.         | Good            | Old Sarah                             | 4     | Women Superannuated |                  |
| Labor                                | 36   | Dairy Maid         | Very good       | Boys. ages. Girls ages                |       |                     |                  |
| Shoek Mary                           | 25   | Wash. Wom.         | Good            | Frank                                 | 6     | Mercy               | 9                |
| Old Mary                             | 51   | D.                 | D.              | Stepney                               | 4     | Margaret            | 5                |
| Moll Guer                            | 28   | D.                 | D.              | Timothy                               | 9     | Betty               | 7                |
| Sarah Willey                         | 28   | D.                 | D.              | Gabriel                               | 8     | Betty Guer          | 12               |
| Ulen Teo                             | 28   | Works in Plant.    | Indiff.         | Jack Vert                             | 10    | Margaret            | 8                |
| Mice                                 | 26   | looks off Coultry. | D.              | Harry                                 | 2     | Betty               | 6                |
| Agnes                                | 24   | assist. to dairy   | D.              | Jack Luding                           | 10    | Margaret            | A                |
| Ding                                 | 26   | looks off poultry  | D.              | Neca                                  | 3     | Betty               | 3                |
| Margaret                             | 26   | Wash. Wom.         | Good            | Charles                               | 1 1/2 | Jammy               | 1 1/2            |
| Betty Tim                            | 34   | D.                 | D.              | Will                                  | 3     | Margaret            | 13               |
| Bridgett                             | 30   | Tether Wood        | Indiff.         | Tom                                   | 1     | Mary                | A                |
| Margalena                            | 28   | D.                 | D.              | George                                | 5     | Betty               | 7                |
| Sarah Dan                            | 22   | Works in Plant.    | D.              | Jack                                  | 2     | Bridgett            | 4                |
| Bels                                 | 30   | D.                 | D.              | Mgrice                                | 5     | Margaret            | 3                |
| Catherine                            | 38   | Washer for         | D.              | Can. Doss. 1A                         |       | Can. Doss. 1A       |                  |
| Can. Doss. 17                        |      | servants.          |                 |                                       |       |                     |                  |