

Unfortunate Strangers: Lascars in the British Maritime World  
c. 1849-1912

By

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## Abstract

In 1903, there were 36,893 lascars sailors out of the 247,448 seamen working on British merchant ships. Lascars were non-white workers mostly recruited from Asia. As a result of changes to the British maritime industry in the second half of the nineteenth century, notably the shift from sail to steam, lascar numbers increased. Lascars became critical to the success of the British shipping fleet. They filled the gap that had formed because of the lack of British sailors to crew ships. Lascars were characterised as cheap, lazy, and dirty, as well as being regarded as poor sailors. Lascars were essentially perceived as everything the British sailor was not. Although lascars were British subjects, they were paid less than British sailors, ate inferior food, and slept in substandard accommodation. Once in British ports, after their voyages had ended lascars enjoyed fewer settlement rights, access to welfare and resources than their counterparts. As a result, lascars struggled to survive in Britain. Strategies that created a racial division of labour and hierarchy entrenched a low social status for lascars compared to that of their British counterparts.

This thesis discusses how and why some groups of non-white sailors were given the label lascar. It analyses how the label lascar became a term to represent and enforce difference. Being cheap labour, and non-white was the basis for lascar difference, but the strict regulation and control of their conditions put these men in a much more subordinate position than their British counterparts. The strict conditions and tight regulation that lascars experienced became characteristics of the label they were tagged with. Many lascars were abandoned or chose to stay in Britain where the strategies they employed to survive further enforced their difference. This thesis highlights the period 1849-1912 because of the significant increase in lascar numbers during this period. Chapter one discusses who a lascar was and the interchangeable nature of the term lascar with other labels that describe non-white maritime workers. Chapter two draws on newspaper evidence, plus the works of Gopalan Balachandran and Michael Fisher to examine the effects on lascar recruitment and employment practices that reinforced difference. Chapter 3 focuses on lascars in Britain and what strategies they employed to survive and how they reinforced difference. The majority of the discussion will focus on examples from port cities of London, Glasgow, and Dundee because lascars were a visible part of the social diversity of these cities. Between 1849 and 1912 lascars contributed significantly to the economic success of Britain's maritime industry

## List of Terms

**Articles of Agreement:** The contract between the seamen and Captain or Master of a ship that sets out wage rates and conditions of employment.

**Bhandary:** Cook.

**Cassab:** Crew member in charge of the deck stores.

**Donkeyman:** Crew member in charge of the operation and maintenance of auxiliary machinery such as generators, pumps and the "donkey" steam boiler - a boiler used to provide steam to deck machinery when the main boiler was shut down, for example when in port.

**Fireman:** A member of the engine room department responsible for shovelling coal into the boilers and maintaining the fires.

**Lascar:** A general term used to refer to all Indian seafarers, from the Persian-Urdu word lashkar.

**Paniwallah or waterman:** Crew member in charge of hoses on deck.

**Serang:** Native boatswain or chief of a lascar crew. Each department had their own Serang.

**Tindal:** Native petty officer of lascars.

**Topass:** Men engaged to do the dirtiest work on shipboard such as cleaning the lavatories.

**Trimmer/Coal Trimmer:** A member of the engine room department. His role was to ensure that the fireman had adequate supplies of coal and moved coal between the bunkers and the engine room. Prepared the coal for the fireman's use.

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Source: National Maritime Museum Greenwich, UK

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Source: Thiele/Getty Images

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## Introduction

Dangerous working conditions, inadequate food, arbitrary punishments and poor accommodation illuminate the reality of a merchant seaman's life on board British ships in the nineteenth century. Relief came for many British sailors after being discharged when they returned to their homes and families in ports such as London, Southampton and Glasgow. For sailors labelled 'lascars' who were non-white and therefore characterised as different to British seamen, the reality was not so comforting. Ahmet Khan (37) was a lascar who had never visited Britain before. In 1907 while removing hatches on the *Clan Maclean* Ahmet fell twenty-five feet and was taken to the London Royal Infirmary.<sup>1</sup> After this incident, there is no official record of Ahmet's fate. Like other lascars, he possibly became stranded in Britain, or did he return to his ship and like fellow lascars desert in resistance to cruel treatment? We can only imagine how it impacted a lascar sailor like Ahmet to stand on the dock facing an uncertain future. Frequently lascars ended up far from home, with little money, no food and no accommodation, facing a harsh future no matter which path they chose to take. Living rough, begging, going hungry, and suffering physical and racial abuse were consequences of being labelled a lascar.

Essentially the label lascar was a constructed term which signified the difference between lascars and British sailors. This thesis employs the term as a lens to describe how being a lascar reinforced difference in the British maritime world between 1849 and 1912. In order to achieve this, the thesis follows a similar direction to that of Gopalan Balachandran. Balachandran has argued that the lascar is the maritime equivalent of the coolie. He states 'the seafaring Indian Coolie (or 'lascars') was no primordial figure or reified construct, but the historical product of a project to entrench difference in the course of mobilising nominally free colonial labour for a global industry.'<sup>2</sup> Balachandran in effect exchanges the label of lascar for that of the coolie. This thesis differs as it retains the label lascar, but this does not mean the lascars did not have similarities with the coolie. Indeed they did. In contrast, this thesis takes into consideration that the definition of lascars extended beyond that of only being an Indian coolie. Lascars were a diverse,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Accident to a Lascar', *Dundee Courier*, February 5, 1907, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Making Coolies (Un)Making Workers; 'Globalising' Labour in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries', *Journal Of Historical Sociology* Vol 24, no. No.3 September 2011, p. 4.

heterogeneous group characterised by sailors of various ethnicities and occupations. Many historians have attempted to describe lascar identity, but it is hard to determine how lascars viewed themselves as there is lack of first-hand accounts from lascar sailors during the period of this study. Presupposing there was a specific lascar identity undermines the real identities of the different sailors who were lascars. Lascar was not an identity but a label that worked to categorise. This thesis examines how the label lascar was employed to characterise a group of non-white seamen in a way that reinforced their difference from British seamen.

This thesis is not about the day to day lives of lascars, nor is it a specific study of recruitment, shipboard life or lascar experiences in Britain. Instead, the focus is on the difference between lascars and British seamen. It dwells on how being non-white in the British maritime industry between 1849-1912 reinforced the difference of lascars. Such difference meant that lascars were subordinate, racially categorised, and at the lower end of the British labour force hierarchy. Lascars contributed to the success of British maritime might. Moreover, the merchant fleets would have operated less efficiently without the constant supply of lascar sailors.

There are several reasons for choosing the period 1849-1912, as the time frame for this thesis. Firstly, Lascars were becoming increasingly visible in Britain because of the large number being employed on steamships and the relaxation of the Navigation laws. Lascars were no longer just replacements for crew members on EIC ships but were becoming employed in much larger groups on privately owned steamships and for specific occupations such as in the engine room. Secondly it was in this period that lascars really became part of the international mobile working class. Thirdly Imperial coercion was influencing their lives more than before and the rise of unionism was affecting how lascars were viewed as workers. These factors until the mid-nineteenth century had not impacted on the lives of lascars.

Without access to first-hand accounts of lascars, this thesis employs British newspapers from 1849-1912 as evidence. Although newspaper reports are considered to have limitations such as owner and reporter bias they are still a valuable resource for this thesis.

The rising influence of newspapers that informed the public during this period meant they were kept up to date about lascars on a daily basis. Lascars were discussed in reports of government activity, public meetings, union activity and events of interest such as funerals and processions. Discussion regularly centred around their qualities as seamen, their origins, their rising numbers, and extracurricular activities. Three groups often informed these accounts. Firstly, shipping companies, secondly the British government and thirdly the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union (NSFU). Shipping companies valued the low cost of lascar labour and as such defended lascar employment. In contrast, the government and the NSFU discouraged the employment of lascars. The British government wished to dissuade lascars from settling in Britain, and the NSFU strived to protect the livelihoods of its seamen members. The differing perspectives of these groups represented in newspapers provide evidence of how the label lascar reinforced the difference to British seamen.

In addition to newspaper reports, this thesis explores a number of other sources. Joseph Salters' *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen years' work Among Orientals* published in 1873 was one of two Salter wrote about his work on lascars at the Strangers home for Asiatics and South Sea Islanders in London.<sup>3</sup> Salters work is useful for this thesis because it provides various ethnographic sketches of the people he met through his work.<sup>4</sup> *The Manual of Lascari-Hindustani With Technical Terms And Phrases* published in 1918 although slightly outside the time frame set in this thesis is a valuable source for etymological definitions of lascar and associated terms. *The Blight of Insubordination: the Lascar Question and the Rights and Wrongs of the British Ship Master* published in 1903 was a report prompted by the British Board of Trade to enquire into the lascar relationship with the British Merchant Service.<sup>5</sup> Authored by Captain W.H Hood, a retired ships master the report supported the arguments of ship owners for hiring lascars; Hood claimed that South Asian seamen rescued British merchant shipping from the

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years Work Among Orientals* (London, 1873).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 389-392.

<sup>5</sup> W.H Hood, 'The Blight of Insubordination. The Lascar Question and Rights and Wrongs of the British Shipmaster. Including the Mercantile Marine Committee Report' (London, 1903).

'blight of insubordination.'<sup>6</sup> In addition to the primary works, many secondary works inform this thesis especially those of Gopalan Balachandran, Michael Fisher, Rozina Visram and Ravi Ahuja.

Although this thesis does not utilise them as the information of newspaper reports was more pertinent to this thesis, it is important to note that lascars can be found in census records of the United Kingdom, from 1841 through to 1911. Records of lascars can also be found in ancestry records such as those databased by genealogy and ancestry websites.

#### LASCARS OF THE MARITIME WORLD

In 1864 Lak, a 23-year-old lascar worked on the *War Spirit*, in 1891 Moorn Gonda a 31-year-old lascar served on the *SS Chiltern*, Cassam Abajie was 15 years old when he served on the *SS Indus* in 1881, and Abdool No 1, was 32 years old in 1881 and served on the *SS Duke of Devonshire*. Lascars were a constant presence on British steamships and during the period of this study, shipping companies of the time such as Elder and Dempster, Pacific and Oriental (P & O), the City Line and the Clan Line, all employed lascars. In 1858 the British ship *Tynemouth* sailed from Hong Kong with a crew of 70 including 24 lascars. In 1899, 119 of the able seamen, firemen, trimmers, cooks and stewards on the steamship *Goorkha* that regularly sailed from Britain to South Africa were lascars. That same year the steamer *Emir* arrived in Newcastle, England, after having plied the Indian Ocean trade with over 60 lascars. Between 1892 and 1907 the number of lascars and foreign seamen on British trading vessels increased by 30,000 in comparison the increase of British seamen during the same period was only 510.

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<sup>6</sup> Ravi Ahuja, 'Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900-1960', in Rana Behal P and Marcel van der Linden (eds.) *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: University Press Cambridge, 2006), p. 116.

Lascar was the name given to non-white sailors from areas of what came to be known in the west as Southern Asia. By the middle of the nineteenth-century lascar numbers increased because of the technological and legal changes that removed strict employment restrictions.<sup>7</sup> Lascar seamen became crucial in sustaining British maritime might. The term Lascar is not in general use today, but as a historical term, it described a group of workers who although subordinated and defined as different provided commercial, physical, and cultural value to British society.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, large steam-powered ships were becoming regular visitors to Indian Ocean ports. These ports and the waters surrounding them had been until this point serviced by small sailing and steamships.<sup>8</sup> Although British shipping companies had employed lascar sailors since the seventeenth century, the large steamships that were becoming more regular visitors began increasing the employment of local labour.<sup>9</sup> These steamships were transporting passengers and cargoes across the Atlantic Oceans to the US and Europe as well as through the Indian Ocean to ports such as Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these primary transport nodes, ports such as Rangoon, Chittagong, and Aden were also departure and arrival points in expanding maritime trade and transport networks. Large numbers of lascars worked on the vessels that transversed these routes.<sup>11</sup>

For lascars who made the long journey from their homes near or far, a new journey beckoned, and they swapped one form of transport for another. From Calcutta, a lascar would sail down round and up the Indian peninsula, the lascar on a ship out of Bombay would traverse the Arabian sea up the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal into the

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<sup>7</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'Patterns of Resistance', in Anne J Kershen (ed.) *Language, Labour, and Migration*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000), p.156.

<sup>8</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945* . (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'Patterns of Resistance', p. 157

<sup>11</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup> If a sailor carried on, he might go east to Italy or west and north to France. After these ports, lascars may have sailed up to northern European ports or across the Atlantic from Gibraltar.<sup>13</sup> These were the more frequently sailed routes but equally, lascars found themselves on ships bound for Africa, then on to Ceylon and even further south to New Zealand Australia, and Fiji, or north to China and Japan.<sup>14</sup>

On ships, lascars were employed to do a variety of jobs. Lascars worked on deck, in engine rooms, in saloons, in cabins and galleys.<sup>15</sup> The environment lascars worked in was one deeply affected by race which influenced their conditions, wages and treatment. Up until the 1950s officers on British ships were almost all white, although lascar deck crews were occasionally supplemented by a British sailor.<sup>16</sup> If a racial divide was evident on deck, then it was even more pronounced below in the engine room. Engineers were all British, and the hot, sweaty, dangerous and heavy work was done by lascars and other non-white workers.

Back on deck lascars painted, scrubbed, washed, dropped and heaved anchor, kept watch tended to and stowed ropes and carried out many other day to day seamanship related activities. While in the engine room where the heat was almost unbearable with temperatures above 60 degrees celsius, lascars were pivotal in the process of feeding tons of coal into the hungry furnaces that produced the steam to propel the ship.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the deck and engine room lascars, many spent their days and nights cooking, cleaning and serving in the officer's cabins, galleys and mess rooms.

Racial dynamics infused the structure of British maritime relations in the period of this study. Employers, as well as the government, used race to maintain three imperatives,

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<sup>12</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Lynette Russell, *Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790-1870* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 54-55.

<sup>16</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

firstly the stable supply of cheap maritime labour, secondly to ensure the low costs of this labour and thirdly to maintain effective control of the lascar labour force. These three imperatives established a racial division of labour and hierarchy that emphasised lascar inadequacies. One noticeable characteristic of lascars as cut-price labour was the perception that three lascars were required to do the work of one British sailor. Lascars became synonymous with being a low-cost racially different labour force that was far below the standard set by the British sailor. Such views confirmed and reinforced the low social standing of lascars and their limited access to rights and resources in Britain.

Although this thesis has a British focus lascars worked on merchant ships from many different countries, American, Dutch, Italian, German, Indian, Danish and Norwegian just to name a few, but it was British ships that employed the largest number of lascars.<sup>18</sup> The competitiveness, economic viability and reinforcement of strategic and symbolic representations of Britain's trading superiority was sustained by a continued supply of lascar seamen.

The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P & O) was the largest employer of lascars. P & O controlled a large share of areas of British trade, it operated the bulk of opium exports to China, and acquired large mail contracts for colonial and imperial governments. Also the company regularly transported imperial and colonial officials through those networks.<sup>19</sup> The flying flag of P & O was strongly associated with the British eastern presence and came to represent British shipping superiority. As a result the lascars that worked for P & O often became the exotic showpieces that represented imperial triumph. Balachandran describes the myriad of pictures of lascars shown in on P&O ships as having a trophy like quality.<sup>20</sup> For example figure 1 below illustrates Balachandran's comments. In contrast figure 2 demonstrates the realities of the engine room for lascar sailors. Lascars also worked for other shipping companies such as Elder-Dempster and the Clan Line.

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<sup>18</sup> Mohammed Siddique Seddon, *The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain 1836-2012* (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2014), p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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Fig. 1. A well-publicised photo of lascars on the viceroy of India (c. 1930s) portraying the lascars  
Source: National Maritime Museum Greenwich, UK.

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Fig 2: Lascar stokers in the hold of a P & O steamer shovelling coal to keep the fires burning. c.1900  
Source: Thiele/Getty Images.

Because of their employment on British ships lascar footprints could be found in nearly all parts of the world. This broad reach brought them into contact with many different people. Lascars interacted with other lascars, other non-white maritime workers, employers, public officials, missionaries, trade unions, women and others. Balachandran has described Indian seafarers who he admits were described as lascars as amongst the earliest group of global workers. He describes them as ‘Prising open doors of insular societies long before multiculturalism became fashionable, they were also the earliest mass carriers of South Asian cuisines and cultures to Europe.’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*, p. 9.

The global reach of lascars often implicated them in tensions with ship-owners, masters and other seafarers, especially those who were British. In Britain lascars were in constant conflict with British maritime unions who regarded the ‘cheap coolie’ as having taken jobs belonging to British sailors.<sup>22</sup> It is evident in British newspapers that lascars were becoming objects of concern. This concern recognised their repression and their growing presence on British ships to the detriment of the British sailor.

Imperial and Colonial governments strictly regulated the employment of lascars. The regulations were an attempt to minimise lascar political and cultural contact.<sup>23</sup> Many of these bureaucratic regulations were rationalized on the basis that lascars were unreliable, untrained and inadequate.<sup>24</sup> Ironically many reports of the time suggest British sailors had the same three qualities.

#### **REGULATING LASCARS**

The increase in steamships during the late nineteenth century meant an increased demand for crews. Shipping companies themselves did not deal directly with the lascar sailors instead recruitment was delegated to agents at ports and this control was transferred to the Serang who controlled the lascars on board the ship.<sup>25</sup> The system of gang recruitment conducted by the shipping agents was only lightly regulated.<sup>26</sup> In comparison the rules that regulated engagement were far tighter and reflected the states two major concerns, Firstly to enable a continued supply of lascar labour, and secondly the ability to control these men.<sup>27</sup> Regulations set out the time period of engagement, rules for transfer, food, accommodation provisions and disciplinary procedure. These became the basis of the content of ships articles of

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<sup>22</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Circulation Through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1800-1945', in Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.) *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia 1750-1950*. (London: Anthem Press, 2006), p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Lahiri, 'Patterns of Resistance', p. 159.

<sup>24</sup> Lahiri.

<sup>25</sup> Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*, 2004, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945* pp. 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Balachandran.

agreement. Lascars signed separate 'lascar articles' to differentiate them from British sailors.<sup>28</sup> The physical article itself was a document that listed the crew members and the wages they would receive. Balachandran describes how sailors signalled acceptance of the articles 'by either signing the document or as more often, touching the pen of the shipping office clerk who then put a cross against the sailors name.'<sup>29</sup> Consent was also often signalled by lascars if they accepted the months advance in wages they received.<sup>30</sup>

As already mentioned lascars were considered one of the first groups of global workers. Their position as such was influenced by modern industrial capitalism. The increased mobility of capital and industrial growth in the late nineteenth century also meant mobility for the workforce. In this context the price of labour was important to employers. Much of the requirement for labour was tied to the success or failure of trading markets.<sup>31</sup> But, unlike land based workplaces such as factories where capital and labour was often fixed a large amount of shipping capital was mobile with access to broad sources of labour in different parts of the world.<sup>32</sup> The ability of shipowners to hire foreign labour added these workers to the international working classes. By the 1900s one in three seamen on a British vessel was a foreigner.<sup>33</sup> The hiring of foreign labour was often from regions where men were paid low wages, Indian labour, Colonial labour, African labour and lascar labour were cheap.

The hiring of foreign and non-British and non-white labour was aided by the increase in steamships, the building of canals such as at the Suez and the relaxation of protectionist laws. The steam ship made employing lascars more predictable in that it categorised and deskilled maritime employment. Ships became more hierarchical and new jobs that lascars were deemed suitable for such as shovelling coal were deemed unskilled.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Ahuja, 'Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen', c.1900-1960, p. 117

<sup>29</sup> Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945*, pp. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945*, p.16

<sup>31</sup> Balachandran, pp. 17-19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> 'Making Coolies (Un)Making Workers: 'Globalising' Labour in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries, p. 267.

opening of canals increased the frequency of and the time voyages would take.<sup>35</sup> The relaxation of the Navigation laws removed restrictions on the number of lascars who could work on British ships. It must also be remembered that the global mobility of lascars made them a group of migrating workers that would go on to settle work and have families in many parts of the world.

The British maritime world that hired lascars was a complex one reflected in the connections between employers and foreign and non-white employees across the world. From Sylheti farmers who wished to supplement their income because their ability to survive on their own land had been usurped by British tea farmers, to port towns, metropolises and cities of the Empire the world the lascar operated in was based on regulatory frameworks that often involved coercion to enforce difference. Much of these frameworks of coercion and difference can be seen in the daily reports of British newspapers that this thesis employs.

#### **WHO WERE LASCARS?**

Describing a group such as lascars is difficult because of the fluid nature of any definition. A brief discussion will follow, but a more in-depth analysis will take place in Chapter 1. Indian sailors, Eastern sailors, and Asian sailors are familiar labels for describing lascars. What the previous descriptions reflect is the multicultural nature of the lascar crews. In 1851 the crew of the British ship *Fawn* consisted of Indians, Malays, Javanese, Chinese, and Bengals.<sup>36</sup> In essence, native sailors from a variety of different ethnicities and nations could be lascars. This definition makes it clear that lascar crews contained a diverse ethnic mix.

Shipboard occupations also defined lascars. The centre of steam power on a ship was the engine room where large furnaces fuelled by coal, generated the power to move the large

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<sup>35</sup> Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 151.

<sup>36</sup> N Harrison, *Manual of Lascari-Hindustani With Technical Terms And Phrases* (London: Imray, Laurie, Norrie and Wilson Ltd, 1918).

tonnage of a steamship. Engine rooms were hot environments to work in, and shovelling coal through the furnace openings (stokeholds) was considered an easily learnt unskilled job in comparison to the skills associated with the era of sail.<sup>37</sup> New engine room roles became regarded as suitable for lascars and perpetuated the myth that because lascars originated from areas of the world with warmer climates, they were innately suited to engine room roles.<sup>38</sup> Such myths helped entrench racial stereotypes.

#### LASCARS AS NON-WHITE SAILORS

During the period of this study lascars were considered a separate category from that of foreign seamen. A headline in the *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette* is a typical example of this distinction 'Foreign Seamen and Lascars on British Ships.'<sup>39</sup> The *Aberdeen Press* of 1902 carried a similar headline 'Employment of Foreigners and lascars on British Ships.'<sup>40</sup> In 1901 the categories and numbers of seamen were listed as follows.<sup>41</sup>

British	114,000
Colonial	5,900
European	27,000
American	4,000
Lascars	33,000

In 1907 the *Lloyds Shipping Gazette* provided more detailed evidence of the distinction between lascar and foreign seamen with its "A Census of Seamen: Britishers, Foreigners."<sup>42</sup> The Gazette listed foreign sailors as men from, Sweden, Germany,

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<sup>37</sup> R.G.W Prescott, 'Lascar Seamen on the Clyde', in *Scotland and the Sea*, T.C Smout (ed.) (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1992), p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire*, p. 45

<sup>39</sup> 'Foreign Seamen and Lascars on British Ships', *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> 'Employment of Foreigners and Lascars on British Ships', *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, January 14, 1902, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> 'Sea, Cooks, and Others', *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, May 28, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> 'A Census of Seamen: Britishers, Foreigners', *Shipping Gazette and Lloyds List*, December 14, 1907, p. 13.

Norway, United States of America, Russia, Denmark, Holland, Italy and France, but no lascars.<sup>43</sup> A captain of a mail steamer in 1895 stated that he employed foreigners and went on to list Scandinavians, Danes, and Germans.<sup>44</sup> The British government also reinforced the distinction between foreign and lascar sailors.

British legislation also reinforced the distinction between lascar and foreign seamen. The Merchant Shipping Acts of 1894 and 1906 explain the difference. The 1894 Act in section 125 listed agreements with lascars separate from stipulations on the agreements with foreign sailors.<sup>45</sup> The 1906 Merchant Shipping Act introduced a language test for sailors to prevent the engagement of seamen without sufficient knowledge of English.<sup>46</sup> This test was directed at foreigners and exempted lascars. Lascar agreements also illustrate the divide between foreign and lascar, the title of lascar agreement from the early twentieth century states ‘An agreement for Foreign-going and Home-trade Ships employing Lascars or other Native Seamen’ throughout the whole agreement there is no mention of the word foreign or foreigner.

#### **HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Academic attention on lascars has increased in recent years and studies are now more prominent than when Conrad Dixon writing before the studies of New Imperial History described lascars as the ‘forgotten seamen’ in 1980.<sup>47</sup> Gopalan Balachnadrán has written extensively on lascars in the period 1860 to 1945, his landmark book *Globalising Labour* (2012) argues that lascars were among the world's first Global workers.<sup>48</sup> He has written extensively on the lascar transformation into a global labour force in the context of their employment in the British maritime industry. In addition he has published works on lascar recruitment (1997), their social and regional origins, and experiences ashore

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<sup>43</sup> 'A Census of Seamen: Britishers, Foreigners', p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> 'Our London Letter: The Employment of Lascars on British Vessels', *Dundee Courier*, November 19, 1895, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> 'Merchant Shipping Act', § 125 (1894).

<sup>46</sup> 'Merchant Shipping Act', CH. 48 6 Edw. 7 § (1906).

<sup>47</sup> Conrad Dixon, 'Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen.' in *Working Men Who Got Wet* (Fourth conference of the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, July 24-July 26, 1980, St Johns: Maritime History Group, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980), pp. 265–77.

<sup>48</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870 - 1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 17.

(2016).<sup>49</sup> Ravi Ahuja has also done extensive work on lascars (2006, 2008, 2013) with a focus on the subordinated status of lascars in the time of imperial steam shipping.<sup>50</sup> Another authority on lascars is Michael Fisher who has written extensively on many aspects of lascars (2004, 2009, 2011, and 2014) such as recruitment subordination and their experiences in the Oriental quarter of London.<sup>51</sup> The groundbreaking work of Rozina Visram (1986) *Ayahs Lascars and Princes written in 1986* and set a benchmark for discussing lascars who had until then been lightly treated. Visram examines many aspects of lascars including conditions on board ships, recruitment, treatment and status in London, with a particular focus on parliamentary enquiries into lascar welfare.<sup>52</sup> Visram has also written more widely on Asians in Britain (2002).<sup>53</sup>

The most recent works on lascars have been in 2017 and 2018. Raminder K. Sani (2018) in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* examines how the India Office in Britain handled cases of destitute Indians such as sailors and servants who were stranded in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Sani argues that ambiguity over Imperial policy contributed to competing understandings of British responsibility over imperial

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<sup>49</sup> Gopalan; Balachandran, 'Circulation Through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1800-1945'; Gopalan Balachandran, 'Workers in the World: Indian Seafarers, c. 1870s-1940s', in Andreas Eckert (ed.) *Global Histories of Work*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 125–46); Gopalan Balachandran, 'Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880-1935', *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol 9, no. 1 (1997). pp. 1–18; 'Making Coolies (Un)Making Workers: Globalising' Labour in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries.'

<sup>50</sup> Ravi Ahuja, 'Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900-1960'; Ravi Ahuja, 'The Age of the Lascar', in Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of The South Asian Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 110–23; Ravi Ahuja, 'Networks of Subordination - Networks of the Subordinated: The Ordered Spaces of South Asian Maritime Labour in an Age of Imperialism (c. 1890 - 1947)', in Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine (eds.) *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 13–49.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*, 2004; Michael Fisher, 'Indian Ghat Serangs as Maritime Labour Recruiting Intermediaries during the Age of Sail', *Journal for Maritime Research* Vol. 16, no. 2 (2014), pp. 153-166; Michael Fisher, 'Indian Maritime Labourers', in Rana Behal P and Van Der Linden, Marcel (eds.) *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2009); Michael Fisher, 'Making London's Oriental Quarter', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) *Subalternity and Difference: Investigations from the North and the South* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 79–97.

<sup>52</sup> Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*.

subjects.<sup>54</sup> Tim Carter and Stephen E Roberts (2017) analyse infectious disease mortality in British seamen and Lascars since 1900. Carter and Roberts investigate the high mortality rate from infectious diseases in merchant seamen drawing comparisons with sailors in the British Royal Navy.<sup>55</sup> Maya Jasanoff's 2017 biography about Joseph Conrad though not strictly about lascars is of interest. Jasanoff's book describes vividly the world of late nineteenth century maritime Britain, a world Conrad a Polish Born writer who joined the British merchant navy in 1878 and serve for 20 years co-existed in with lascars.<sup>56</sup>

Also recently there has been a significant increase in the focus on lascars at sea.” Jonathan Hyslop (2009, 2014) focuses on the crews of steamships in the late nineteenth century and argues that recent historiography tends to highlight lascars only when they get close to Britain and therefore connections between other maritime cities of the world should be further examined.<sup>57</sup> Aaron Jaffer (2015) focuses on sailors and seafarers of the Indian Ocean and in particular, he examines shipboard life unrest and mutiny amongst lascars on sailing ships.<sup>58</sup>

Lascars are often discussed in the context of the Black poor of London a phrase used to describe the melting pot of immigrants that were residing in Britain. Norma Myers (1995, 1996) has studied how this ‘poorly evidenced group’<sup>59</sup> of resourceful abandoned lascars in London negotiated life on the margins of society and how they created successful

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<sup>54</sup> Raminder K Saini, “England Failed to Do Her Duty Towards Them; the India Office and Pauper Indians in the Metropole, 1857-1914.” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, no. February 2018 (2018): 1-31.

<sup>55</sup> Tim Carter and Stephen E Roberts, “Infectious Disease Mortality in British Merchant Seamen and Lascars since 1900: From Causes to Controls,” *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29 (2017): 788–815, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0843871417726746>.

<sup>56</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2017.).

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, 'Steamship Empire: Asian African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine c.1880-1945', pp. 49-67.

<sup>58</sup> Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780-1860: Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny*, vol. 12, *Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain 1780-1830* (Portland: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1996), p. 104.

survival mechanisms.<sup>60</sup> The work of Diane Robinson Dunn (2006) looks at the experiences of lascars in Britain with a particular emphasis on their religious practices and relationships with women and how lascars became marginalised by opposing class interests.<sup>61</sup> Humayun Ansari (2004) discusses the presence of Muslims in Britain from 1800.<sup>62</sup> Shompa Lahiri (2002) has analysed the encounters between missionaries and lascars in London arguing that lascars openly resist conversion as well as opposing in more clandestine ways.<sup>63</sup>

Some authors have focused on nationality and the use of legal avenues to differentiate and subordinate lascars. Marika Sherwood (1991) focuses on the aspect of nationality regarding lascars, in particular, she addresses her argument to the fact that British lawmakers strove to deny lascars their status as British subjects, and only regard them as British when it was convenient to do so.<sup>64</sup> Georgie Wemyss in her book *The Invisible Empire* (2009) illustrates the brutal treatment and racial categorisation of lascars to argue that the invisibility of lascars is a result of the “dominant political media and social policy discourses.”<sup>65</sup> Amongst her discussion of imperial racial categories and racial subordination Laura Tabili in her book “*We Ask For British Justice*.” is one of the only handfuls who discusses in detail gender amongst lascars. Tabili (1994) argues that lascars were deemed to be innately suited to the more feminine work of cooks and stewards rather than the male occupations performed by British and European sailors.<sup>66</sup>

Other authors have added to the discussion around lascars Caroline Adams and Yusef Choudrey have written about a specific geographical area that of Sylhet (now in

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<sup>60</sup> Norma Myers, 'The Black Poor of London', in Diane Frost (ed.) *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1995); Myers, *Reconstructing The Black Past: Blacks in Britain 1780-1830*, 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century*. (Manchester, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within' Muslims in Britain since 1800*. (London: C Hurst & Co, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'Contested Relations: The East India Company and Lascars in London', in. H.V Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (eds.) Woodbridge *The Worlds of the East India Company*, (Boydell Press, 2002), pp. 169–181.

<sup>64</sup> Marika Sherwood, 'Nationality and Employment Among Lascar Seamen, 1660 to 1945', *New Community A Journal of Research and Policy on Ethnic Relations*, Vol 17 (1991), pp. 229–44.

<sup>65</sup> Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), pp. 141-160.

<sup>66</sup> Laura Tabili, *'We Ask For British Justice' Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 45-49.

Bangladesh) and the employment of sailors from that district on British Steamships in the early twentieth century and both use oral testimony from retired seafarers. Studies conducted by Tony Lane and Marcus Rediker represent the more general framework of life among European crews. Lane addresses the topic of shipboard mutinies and the effect the hiring of multi-racial gangs had on instability at sea. Rediker focus is on exploring the impact of activism at sea, and he argues that sailors in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were caught between the danger of the sea and economic forces represented by the ship's captain. Lascars were part of this capitalist environment that Rediker describes.

All of the historical works mentioned above illustrate the broad selection of themes that can be called on when studying lascar sailors. This thesis draws on the already established material but does add to the historiography by using a significant amount of archived newspaper sources. Access to these sources allows us to discover more about the day to day activities of lascars that highlights the realities of their existence within the British Maritime World. The majority of the works listed in the historiography do not employ the amount of newspaper evidence this thesis has done. The recent trend of digitising historical newspapers that has taken place in the last ten years means historians have more immediate access to primary documents of the past. This thesis has taken advantage of the technological changes that help us search for terms such as 'lascars' far more methodically.

## **ORGANISATION**

This thesis is organised into three chapters. Chapter one traces the historical origins of the term lascar and the makeup of a lascar crew before relating the label lascar to other non-British, non-white groups in the British maritime world. Lascars were not the only non-white maritime workers and terms Native Coolie Asiatic Indian seamen, Seedie sailors and Kroo were all terms used to describe non-white, non-British seamen. This chapter illustrates that these terms were used interchangeably and there was often no identification of nuanced differences when sailors were being called lascars coolie or Asiatic. What newspaper reports depicted were the qualities of cheap labour, non-white and non-British all characteristics that signified the difference. Chapter two deals with how recruitment practices aided in reinforcing difference, as lascars began to be hired in

greater numbers. From the mid-nineteenth century the government and shipping companies through a recruitment system controlled by shipping agents, and the use of separate lascar articles were able to control lascar wages and conditions that kept lascars separated from their British counterparts and entrenching their difference. Chapter three follows lascars in Britain. It expands on chapter two in the sense that as a result of the conditions set out in lascar articles and the type of work lascars carried out, and treatment they received on ships lascars found themselves in Britain with no means of support, ways to get employment or to get home. This chapter addresses why lascars found themselves in Britain, and what mechanisms they used to survive and how this reflected difference in the eyes of the British public. The majority of the discussion will use examples from port cities of London, Glasgow and Southampton. All three chapters of this thesis will provide an analysis of three critical areas of lascar history that reinforced lascar status that was characterised by racial categorisation and subordination.

Without lascar seamen, the British shipping industry could not have developed into one of the most important and fastest growing industries in Britain. Yet they existed in a world where by being given the label lascar also attached to them characteristics of difference that would dictate the direction of their lives in the British world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A Slippery Category: Who was a lascar?

Lascar was only one term used to describe non-white and non-British sailors. In addition to the term lascar, Asiatic seamen, Coolie seamen, Eastern sailors, Seedies, and Kroo were also terms to describe groups of maritime workers. One of the best ways to illustrate how the label lascar was used to reinforce difference is to compare it to other descriptive terms for maritime workers of the period. This chapter will illustrate how all of these terms were used interchangeably to reinforce difference. The Chapter will begin with a discussion of who was considered a lascar and then examine the interchangeability of the term lascar with that of other non-white, non-British workers.

Defining the lascar is difficult, and the term is regarded as slippery. So, why is defining the lascar a difficult task? The answer is because the meaning of lascar is never constant. Balachandran describes lascar as carrying many meanings varying with context and usage.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall describes identity as something without an all-encompassing meaning that is always moving and evolving as a result of experience and change over time.<sup>2</sup> For example, lascar crews were not always made up of one single ethnicity or nationality, and their roles changed over time in particular during the transition from sail to steam. During the period of this study, lascars were essentially identified as cheap but essential labour, that worked in unskilled, menial and low status jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Gopalan, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', in Stuart Hall and P du Gay, (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (London: Sage, 1996), p.6.

## EARLY MEANINGS

The use of sailors from the Indian Ocean region as crew members increased during the sixteenth century. The Danish were the first to employ local workers, but when the Portuguese sailed into the Indian Ocean in 1548, they named these sailors lascars.<sup>3</sup> Originally lascars were recruited for their seamanship skills. The term lascar was an adaption of the Hindi word ‘lashkar’ (Army or Camp follower).<sup>4</sup> Another word for a sailor was the Indian word ‘khalasi’ (khalasie or kulasi).<sup>5</sup> The 1918 *Manual of Lascari-Hindustani* (The Manual) brackets lascar and khalasi together under the same definition: ‘native sailor.’<sup>6</sup> Nitin Sinha's work on boatmen in early colonial Eastern India describes Khalasie differently, for example ‘The Khalasie was a generic labouring term (very much like the coolie) to describe those primarily engaged in the transportation of army equipage.’<sup>7</sup> Lascar was not exclusively a maritime term, gun lascar, and tent lascars were employed by the British army until the late nineteenth century. In 1856 a consignment of carved rosewood from Bombay was described as being made by native lascars, suggesting shore labourers were being called lascars.<sup>8</sup> Already we begin to see confusion about the term from its early origins. As lascars became more involved in the British shipping industry the confusion and ambiguities would become more profound.

## THE INTERCHANGEABLE NATURE OF THE TERM LASCAR

The term Lascar was interchangeable. Lascars were often referred to as Indian, although crews were rarely all Indian.<sup>9</sup> Sarah Glynn describes Indian sailors working on ships

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<sup>3</sup>Ahsan Jan Qaisar, *The Indian Response to European Technology and Culture (A.D 1498-1707)* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, “Workers in the World: Indian Seafarers, c. 1870s-1940s.,” in *Global Histories of Work*, ed. Andreas Eckert (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Ravi Ahuja, 'Networks of Subordination - Networks of the Subordinated: The Ordered Spaces of South Asian Maritime Labour in an Age of Imperialism (C. 1890 - 1947),' in Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine, (eds), *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> N Harrison, *Manual of Lascari-Hindustani with Technical Terms and Phrases* (London: Imray, Laurie, Norrie and Wilson Ltd, 1918). p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Nitin Sinha, 'Contract, Work, and Resistance: Boatmen in Early Colonial Eastern India, 1760s–1850s', *International Review of Social History*, Vol 59, no. S22 (2014), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> 'Foreign Miscellany', *Aberdeen Herald and General Advertiser*, August 30, 1856, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Glynn, *Class, Ethnicity and Religion in the Bengali East End: A Political History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 8.

with other ethnic sailors.<sup>10</sup> Michael Fisher's comments illustrate how the terms lascar and Indian were used interchangeably, 'officials perceived Indian seamen as generally less productive: weaker and less willing to fight an enemy than Britons. Yet the rising demand for lascars lifted their wages to 23-30 shillings during the mid eighteenth century.'<sup>11</sup> Fisher's description suggests lascar and Indian sailors are the same but he then goes on to differentiate the two, for example 'owners had to pay the additional expenses of maintenance in Britain and passage home for lascars but not Indians.'<sup>12</sup> Benjamin calls lascars native Indian seamen but later adds Chinese and Malay sailors to the list.<sup>13</sup> Balachandran is clearer when he states 'Indian seamen were described as lascars'<sup>14</sup> Suggesting lascars are Indian sailors alone unusefully narrows the definition and detracts from the multicultural nature of lascar crews.

Lascar crews were cosmopolitan in nature. As a constructed term lascar did not signify one single ethnicity. Joseph Salter described how it was common to describe Indian seamen as a 'lascar' but that the term in reality covered multiple ethnicities and nationalities, Salter's description of the lascar crew of the *Clive* provides an example 'there were Arabs, Malays, Indians and Chinese.'<sup>15</sup> The fact that lascars crews were described as a single ethnicity or nationality when they were illustrates the difficulty in identifying lascars. Other descriptions are also problematic because the term Lascar was interchangeable.

Lascar was only one catch-all label to describe non-white maritime workers. In 1901 when a Dundee reporter visited an Indian liner a number of terms dominate his description of the sailors. 'Native,' 'lascar,' 'coolie sailormen,' and 'cooliemens' all described the men the reporter found. He reported 'a dusky bearded native with a round cap' as the one who met them on the deck of the ship on a 'cold Glaswegian night in the fog-shrouded docks surrounded by twenty other ships resting in the dark water'.<sup>16</sup> He

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<sup>10</sup> 'Characteristics of the Lascar,' *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, June 1, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, 'The British and Indian Sailors (c.1790-1855)', p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>16</sup> 'Lascars in Glasgow', *Dundee Evening Post*, November 23, 1901, p. 3.

then describes the same man as a lascar who guides them below. ‘Push shouts the lascar from above.’<sup>17</sup> His description of the group of men he finds huddled around a coal-burning stove is as ‘coolie sailormen.’<sup>18</sup> The reporters use of the terms interchangeably are an example of how the British public did not discern between a lascar, a coolie or native seamen.

‘Native’ was a standard term to describe non-white members of ships crews. The term was broad in its use and often acted as an umbrella term for non-white workers. In 1851 the crew of the British ship *Fawn* consisted of Indian lascars, Malays, Javanese, Cochin Chinese, and Bengals. These men worked under the Burra -Tindall, head of the native crew next below the Serang.<sup>19</sup> The definition of the Serang was boatswain (senior deck sailor responsible for hull maintenance and related work) or headman of the lascars.<sup>20</sup> The Manual defined lascar as a native sailor. The source is silent on whether it means natives of India as Benjamin and Fischer describe, or has a broader meaning. The *South Wales Daily News* describes the employment of twenty native lascars on the steamship *Trinacria*.<sup>21</sup> The *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* describes lascars as natives of the territories of the East India Company.<sup>22</sup> In addition to ‘native’ the term ‘Asiatic’ was also used interchangeably with lascar and was often applied to the floating non-white population of the Imperial maritime world. For example ‘in common parlance, the Asiatic of the shipping quarter is a lascar, and the indefiniteness of the term lascar is remarkable, properly speaking it is only applicable to sailors from India, but in general use, it is bestowed upon all foreign seamen.’<sup>23</sup>

The term Coolie, was also used interchangeably with lascar. Both terms describe cheap, unskilled workers. The British public often identified lascars as coolies and coolies as lascars. So, are lascars and coolies the same? Is a coolie a lascar or a lascar a coolie?

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<sup>17</sup> 'Lascars in Glasgow', p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> 'Lascars in Glasgow', p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> 'Slaughter of European Crew by Malays', *North Devon Journal*, December 25, 1851, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison, *Manual of Lascari-Hindustani with Technical Terms and Phrase*, p.12.

<sup>21</sup> 'Great Storm at Bombay', *South Wales Daily News*, October 23, 1877, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> 'Lascari Seamen for Australia-Contracts May Be Made with Natives in India under Certain Conditions', *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, September 13, 1853, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> 'Oriental Life in East London', *St James Gazette*, September 27, 1897, p. 3-4.

Alternatively, should we consider the lascar as a subcategory of the coolie in a taxonomical categorisation of lascar meaning? The terms coolie and lascar were similar. Coolie like lascar was a pejorative term referring to low-status workers. Both terms are slippery and poorly defined. A report in the *Yorkshire Gazette* describes an incident ‘... he was dragged down by Ung-Hee a Chinese lascar.’<sup>24</sup> Attempting to understand lascar identity becomes difficult when the term coolie is employed to represent the lascar. For example ‘The large steamers plying between London and distant points in the East employ, of course, a large number of white men for the fore-castle, but quite a third, at all events, of the ships crews lumped together are made up coolies, principally Lascars and SeediBoys.’<sup>25</sup> British newspaper accounts of the late nineteenth century illustrate how the term lascar did not hold exclusive rights to the identification of non-white workers. The social location of the ship all of these men worked on contributed to a collective identity that viewed them as one homogenous group whether they were coolies or lascars. Coolie and lascar were interchangeable terms used to describe different groups of sailors that were racially different to white sailors.

Although lascars, Asiatics, Coolies, and Eastern sailors have been discussed so far, the term lascar did not only represent a microcosm of Asia. Sailors from Africa often slipped under the lascar umbrella. Seedies and Kroomen (sometimes referred to as Kru) were non-white workers from Africa who made similar contributions to the maritime industry, as lascars did. Seedies were mostly Muslim unskilled labourers recruited from the Swahili coast: 2, 200 Seedies entered the port of Aden between 1860 and 1875 alone.<sup>26</sup> Descriptions of Kroomen are of experienced fishermen from the Kroo or Kru tribe.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, they were described as ‘being willing to work and can be found in every part of the African coast.’<sup>28</sup> For example, ‘These Seedi Boys are native Africans who serve on board her Majesty's ships on this station to save the European portion of the crew from

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<sup>24</sup> 'Foreign', *Yorkshire Gazette*, August 5, 1848, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> 'Queer Songs of the Sea: Peculiar Ways of Malays, Lascars, Chinese Seedi-Boys and Serangs aboard Ship', *Pearson's Weekly*, March 25, 1899, p. 679.

<sup>26</sup> Alessandro Staziani, *Sailors, Slaves and Immigrants: Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 63-66.

<sup>27</sup> Diane Frost, 'Racism, Work and Unemployment: West African Seamen in Liverpool 1880s-1960s', in Diane Frost (ed.), *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1995), p. 22-24.

<sup>28</sup> 'Parliamentary Papers' 1842, p. 591.

unnecessary exposure to the sun in such work as mast-head lookouts and cleaning ships copper.<sup>29</sup> That sailors from Africa were sometimes known as lascars emphasises the broadness of the lascar category and emphasises the difficulty in defining lascars especially based on one particular ethnicity as well as diluting specific features of identity.

Cultural differences are often lost in all-encompassing descriptions of different maritime labour groups. For example in 1892 ‘200 Coolie sailors in honour of the annual Mahomedan festival paraded through Cardiff.’<sup>30</sup> The report suggests that Coolies were predominately Muslim. Humayun Ansari suggests it was not coolies but lascars who were the majority of Muslims in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Lascars practised different religions, but many ships carried all Muslim crew and a Muslim Chaplain.<sup>32</sup> If coolies as already illustrated consisted of different racial and ethnic groups then suggesting they are all of one religion is problematic. Sailors who were not Muslim would be unlikely to march in a Muslim parade. This example raises questions: based on the event they were attending were this group of sailors lascars or coolies and did it matter?. The report makes no distinction between lascar and coolie even though the cultural activity suggest the sailors have lascar attributes. Describing lascars as coolies diminishes their identity by ignoring their culture. This illustrates the all-encompassing identity based on race and difference that non-white workers had to endure. If Lascars, Coolies, Asiatics, Kroo, and Seedies had cultural differences the one thing they did have in common was the occupations they were employed in.

#### **OCCUPATIONAL SUITABILITY**

Lascars and the other myriad of non-british and non-white workers were often employed in positions that reinforced their difference and subordination. There will be a more in depth discussion of the effect of lascars occupations in chapter two. But, for now it is enough to understand that lascars during the period of this study were predominately

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<sup>29</sup> 'Capture of a Slave Dow', *Hampshire Telegraph*, July 23, 1887, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> 'Agitation in South Wales Ports', *South Wales Daily News*, August 5, 1892, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: C Hurst & Co, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> 'Characteristics of the Lascar', *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, June 1, 1893, p. 2.

employed in a ships engine room and the positions they filled reinforced understandings of their political and economic subordination. Edwin Arnold described the new environment as the ‘Hades of the furnace room’.<sup>33</sup> A perception developed that lascars were genetically suited to stoking furnaces.<sup>34</sup> Most studies of lascars evidence the view that the tropical climates that lascars came from suited them to the jobs of firemen and trimmer in the heat of the engine room.<sup>35</sup>

Steamships ushered in new roles at sea. Engineers looked after the machinery in the engine room; firemen fed the furnaces, trimmers cut the coal and then transported it to furnaces.<sup>36</sup> In addition to being hot, the engine room was dangerous. In 1894 on the ship Mahandi two firemen died in the engine-room of the ship after it had been flooded with hot water and steam from the port boiler, the temperature was so hot it was 15 minutes before the Captain, and engine room Serang could enter.<sup>37</sup> Gender was also used to reinforce the position of lascars. Lascars were deemed to have the natural abilities that suited being stewards and cooks. Tabili argues that lascars were often appointed to menial jobs such as those in the kitchen and saloon room. In addition to working as deckhands, stokers and firemen the job of steward also became the domain of lascars especially on passenger liners in the catering and housekeeping departments.<sup>38</sup> Tabili described the view of these jobs, as being dismissed as women's work.<sup>39</sup> Perceptions of lascars as more feminine than British sailors and considered weak and unreliable in emergencies were often linked to their innate suitability low skilled jobs, but their seamanship origins were not wholly forgotten.

At the beginning of this chapter, the term lascar was described as slippery. From its origins as a construct of the Portuguese, the term lascar has become difficult to define.

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<sup>33</sup> Janet J Ewald, *Bondsmen, Freedmen, and Maritime Industrial Transportation, c.1840-1900*, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Trevor Fishlock, 'Conquerors of Time: Exploration and Invention in the Age of Darling', 2012, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870-1915: Networks of British Empire*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Janet J Ewald, 'Bondsmen, Freedmen, and Maritime Industrial Transportation, c. 1840-1900', *Slavery and Abolition* 31, no. 3 (2010), pp. 451–66.

<sup>37</sup> 'Liverpool Cotton', *Official Report [No. 5,016]: The Casualty on the Mahandi (S)*, November 28, 1894, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Laura Tabili, 'A Maritime Race' Masculinity and the Racial Division of Labour in British Merchant Ships, 1900-1939'. p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Lascar crews were cosmopolitan in nature. Furthermore the interchangeable use of the term with those of other maritime groups as evidenced in British newspaper reports rather than distinguishing lascars highlights who the British public viewed as different. All of these groups were non-white and non-British and even though they had separate names or labels were often written and talked about as one homogenous group. These groups were similar in that they were often employed to do the unskilled menial jobs onboard ships. For lascars these occupations and the processes that led them to be employed in time became part of the labelling process for reinforcing difference.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Engaging the Lascar: Recruitment practices and lascar identity.**

‘These lascars did their duty like men, and in doing so have vindicated themselves in the eyes of the world. It is the fashion to depreciate the lascar, to regard him as a weakling, and sometimes as a coward, but in common fairness we have pleasure in echoing Mr Chadwick's tribute when he declared in their presence yesterday " We " hear a good deal nowadays of the inferiority " and frequent cowardice of the lascar crew in " times of danger, but the behaviour of these " men could not have been surpassed by those " of any other nationality’<sup>1</sup>

The preceding quote illustrates the ambiguity around how lascars were reported in British newspapers. This reflects the most common tensions in reports on lascars. On one hand lascars were regarded as unreliable and unwanted on the other as highly regarded. These differing views reflect the differing bias of newspaper reports as described in the introduction to this thesis. It was this bias that often informed characteristics of the label that was used to reinforce the difference of lascars to British seamen.

This chapter focuses on lascar recruitment and employment processes and how they became defined as characteristics of the lascar label. In particular, it explores some of the forces behind the recruitment of lascars as well as reasons that enabled an increase in lascar numbers from 1849-1912. Being regarded as cheap, unskilled and inadequate workers imprinted on public perception of lascars. Being cheap, unqualified and incompetent should not be considered absolutes in defining lascar identity. The agency

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Lascar Vindicated', *Lloyds List*, February 23, 1907, p. 10.

of British sailors in refusing to work and demanding higher wages influence the lack of homegrown workers.

This chapter is organised as follows. It begins with a short introduction on the early origins of lascar recruitment to sketch out how the different working contexts, for example sailing ships compared to steamships influenced lascar identity. The second section discusses the factors around why lascars were recruited and will discuss their cheapness and suitability for maritime work. It focuses on the ambiguities presented in British newspaper reports around the lack of British sailors considered a reason for hiring lascars. The third section addresses the factors that enabled a rise in lascar numbers such as the repeal of the Navigation laws and the rise of the steamship, this factor is crucial because it made the lascar more visible, and in a sense more of a threat. All sections connect recruitment to a lascar presence that was represented ambiguously in British newspapers.

Discussions of lascar recruitment reflect changes that occurred between 1849 and 1912. The increase in the number of British steamships, and the repeal of the Navigation Acts increased lascar numbers on British ships. The move from sail power to steam meant that steamship Captains relied less on the lascar for traditional skills such as navigation and ropework but more for the lascar's ability to shovel coal.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, British sailors were becoming more unionised and beginning to demand more wages.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, changes were taking place at the hubs of recruitment in Asia, Ghat Serangs the traditional recruitment intermediaries had been replaced in name by British sanctioned shipping

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<sup>2</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Friel, *Maritime History of Britain and Ireland, C. 400-2001* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), p. 277.

agents. This chapter will discuss these factors using evidence from British newspapers between 1849-1912.

Sack coats, plaid trousers, bow ties and other male fashion features visible on the streets of nineteenth-century Britain were joined in more significant numbers than before by the lascars' turban, loose robes, coloured handkerchiefs, and round caps. For example, by 1891 out of 172,773 foreign seafarers employed on British trading vessels 21,322 (12.3 percent) were lascars, and by 1906 this had risen to 19 percent.<sup>4</sup> According to Norma Myers lascars became numerically significant from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>5</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, lascars worked on British ships as seamen, stewards, cooks, stokers, and firemen. Lascars were typically employed in subordinate positions, although, there were occasional exceptions when a lascar achieved a status of authority as an engineer or ship's officer. By the late nineteenth century the maritime lascar had come a long way from replacing crew members on sailing ships.

#### **EARLY ORIGINS OF LASCAR EMPLOYMENT**

Although lascar numbers on British ships increased between 1849-1912 their presence originated on British ships in the seventeenth century. Traditionally, lascars are synonymous with the English East India Company (EIC) established in 1600 by a Royal Charter that presented the EIC with a monopoly on eastern trade. Maxine Berg, described the eastern market as changing 'the material culture of Europe bringing with it new

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<sup>4</sup> Report of the Committee appointed by The Board of Trade to inquire into certain Questions Affecting the Mercantile Marine, 1903, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Norma Myers, 'The Black Poor of London', in Diane Frost (ed.), *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1995), p. 8.

objects, colours, patterns and finishes.’<sup>6</sup> As a consequence of having to ship valuable eastern cargoes back to Britain, the EIC designed and built the famous East Indiaman class of ship, teak constructed and wall-sided. The majority of lascars employed by the EIC replaced British crew members lost through death, disease and desertion. Furthermore, lascars often worked on licensed private trade ships. Anne Bulley relates the success of the country trade to the importance of lascars as skilled seamen.<sup>7</sup> The lascar legacy would outlast that of their famous first employer.

The last vestiges of the EIC were swept away by the crashing waves of economic change in 1873 with the passing of the East India Stock Dividend Redemption Act. By the mid-nineteenth century, steamships increased the British shipping industry productivity, trade routes became more populated, the tonnage of cargoes increased, and seaborne trade and transnational contact strengthened. Christopher Lloyd describes the age of sail as ending in the 1850s even though the tonnage of cargo carried under steam did not overtake that of sail until the 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Diane Frost identifies that the rise of numerous competitive steamship companies became part of the industry.<sup>9</sup> Michael Fisher highlights this period as ‘reflecting and enabling the burgeoning of British world trade.’<sup>10</sup> Over time, British Merchant shipping dominated world trade, for example, companies such as Elder

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<sup>6</sup>Maxine Berg, ‘In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past & Present*, no. 182 (2004), p.96; Genevieve Duggan, ‘Tracing Ancient Networks: Linguistics, Hand Woven Cloths and Looms’, in Qin Dashu and Jian Yuan (eds.), *Ancient Silk Trade Routes* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company Ltd, 2015), p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Bulley, *The Bombay Country Ships: 1780-1833* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman 1200-1800: A Social Survey* (London: Associated University Press, 1968), p. 283.

<sup>9</sup> Diane Frost, ‘Racism, Work and Unemployment: West African Seamen in Liverpool 1880s-1960s’, in Diane Frost (ed.) *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 65.

Dempster, Pacific and Orient (P & O), and the Clan Line operated large fleets of steamships. These steamships required crews.

Lascars were in high demand as crew members on British ships. Steamships required larger crews and lascars could be hired at a third of the cost of British seamen. Traditionally the recruitment of lascars took place at Calcutta and Bombay, but as Balachandran describes: ‘Until the late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for Indian seamen to sign off at familiar foreign ports such as Colombo, Aden and Port Said.’<sup>11</sup> At these recruitment hubs shipping agents known as Serangs found men for employment on ships alongside and as subordinates to British sailors. Lascars often formed whole lower or upper deck crews on ships. Before discussing why lascars were recruited and what sustained the increase in numbers, it is essential to have a brief understanding of how a lascar was hired to work on a British ship.

#### **BECOMING A LASCAR**

It is hard to determine when a man became a lascar. When did the men that arrived in Bombay and Calcutta from places such as Bengal, Malabar, Goa and Gujarat receive the label lascar? Was it when he decided to become a sailor? Was it when he was recruited by a shipping agent in Bombay or Calcutta? Alternatively, was it when he stepped off the gangway onto the deck of a British ship? As already discussed in the introduction lascar was a constructed term and sailors did not receive the label until they were recruited. The men who became lascars came from diverse areas of Asia, and much of the evidence so far suggests that they came from a mixture of occupational backgrounds. Two similar

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<sup>11</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886-1945.,” *Transforming Cultures E-Journal* 3, no. 2 (November 2008), p.49.

case studies are the works of Choudry and Adams. Both authors focus on the men of the Sylhet region (now in modern-day Bangladesh). For example, both believe that many lascars had agrarian origins. Hossain agrees with this but indicates many of these Sylheti seamen also had maritime trades and were employed as boatmen that worked the inland waterways.<sup>12</sup>

Many early lascars were recruited because of their seamanship skills. An example of this were the boatmen of the inland and coastal waterways. Choudrey draws a connection between these boatmen and the discovery of tea in Sylhet (now part of Bangladesh) in the 1850s. As a result many boatmen faced adversity and struggled to survive because of new waterway agreements introduced by the British.<sup>13</sup> The takeover of communal land into private holdings by British tea magnates and the introduction of new tax and ownership structures, meant many lost their livelihoods and fell into debt.<sup>14</sup> These changes and an increase in population strengthened and enriched the British landowning class and entrenched Colonial structures.<sup>15</sup> The result of these changes was that many men left their villages in groups and headed for the docks such as those at Kiddapore in Calcutta where they waited and searched for opportunities to sign on to outgoing British ships. Sinha's specific work on boatmen interestingly does not make any connection between the boatmen who worked the rivers of India and the ports and lascar seamen.

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<sup>12</sup> Yusuf Choudrey, *The Roots and Tales of the Bangladeshi Settlers* (Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group, 1993), p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers* (London: Thap Books, 1987), pp. 13-16.

<sup>15</sup> Adams.

Laura Tabili states lascars were defined by race and occupation.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps then by using Tabili's definition, we should consider a man a lascar when he was recruited or began his employment on a British ship. The point at which a man transitioned to the role of lascar reflects the transferral of identity. For example, when a man reached Calcutta or Bombay, his identity may have been an Indian farmer, a Malaysian or Chinese trader or even a Japanese traveller. However, by the time he was signed up by a recruitment agent and ensconced in a crew of fellow non-white workers the dilution of his original identity had begun as the label of lascar was assumed.

Lascars were recruited under what most academics describe as the labour gang system. In contrast, British sailors were hired on an individual basis. Historically lascars were recruited and worked on ships in gangs. Gopalan Balachandran describes the gang system as one of control. Balachandran is referring to the roles that Ghat Serangs and Serangs played in the recruitment system. The Ghat Serang who Balachandran describes as a headman or chief, was in effect an employment agent, or broker on shore; he did not go to sea.<sup>17</sup> Equally as important, was the shipboard Serang who as well as being in charge of the lascar seamen on board assisted the Ghat Serangs in the selection of the crews. Additionally, Serangs acted as intermediaries between lascars and British officers at sea.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to these more pastoral duties, Serangs regularly took advantage of lascars. For example, in 1799 Captain Byrne reported that a Serang had defrauded his

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<sup>16</sup> Laura Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 43-45.

<sup>17</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 41-43.

<sup>18</sup> 'Returns of the Agricultural Produce of Ireland in the Year 1849', *Freemans Journal*, October 15, 1850, British Library Newspaper Archive.

lascars.<sup>19</sup> An article in the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* describes the character of Serangs as ‘a class of men similar to the kidnappers of Holland and the crimps of England, but whom they far surpass in the arts they practise against those who unfortunately fall in their way.’<sup>20</sup> Lahiri explains it was common for Serangs to demand four months advance for lascars which often created labour shortages.<sup>21</sup>

It is pertinent here before going further into a description of recruitment to explain changes to the intermediary structure that influenced recruitment practices. What is interesting about the gang recruitment system its resistance to most attempts at modification? Specifically, in 1783, Captains and ship owners petitioned the Calcutta Government to replace Ghat Serangs with a British register of lascars, because of hardships, delays and hinderances, in getting sailors. Calcutta agreed, a British Marine Register Officer replaced the ghat Serang, but the power of him over men was so reliable that it prevented the supply of men to the registry.<sup>22</sup> Failure to wrest recruitment of lascars away from ghat Serangs meant the system remained in place.

In 1859, post British colonialism, the lascar recruitment system did undergo slight modification. Before 1849 indigenous agents and intermediaries functioned under minimal regulation, this affected British ability to control the stable supply of lascars

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<sup>19</sup> *Saunders News-Letter*, August 22, 1799, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> R.B Lloyd, Exposition of the Abuses of the Present System of Lascar Impressment, *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India and Its Dependencies Vol 2*, June to December (1816), pp. 378–80.

<sup>21</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'Contested Relations: The East India Company and Lascars in London.' p.171.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Fisher, “Indian Ghat Serangs as Maritime Labour Recruiting Intermediaries during the Age of Sail,” *Journal for Maritime Research* Vol. 16, no. No. 2 (2014), p. 157.

keeping costs low and exerting effective control.<sup>23</sup> After 1859 hiring lascars were entrusted to registered brokers licensed by port authorities in Calcutta and Bombay. In reality, there was little change as most ghat Serangs crimps became brokers.<sup>24</sup>

So how did ship's captains obtain lascars? After being informed of a ship's requirements, the broker mustered Serangs before the ship's officers. The broker and ships Serang then chose other crew members. The crew received six months advanced wages.<sup>25</sup> Ships often then did not sail up till ten days later; brokers were responsible for the crew being present at the time of sailing. If sailors did not turn up then brokers were liable for the advances.<sup>26</sup> Brokers found guarantors for advances in boarding housekeepers who for doing this received a fee of one or two rupees, and some of the increases were often offset against sailor's debts.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to Serangs, there were other ranks of lascars. Tindall's were assistants to the Serang and aided in the supervision of lascars. Sukhani or quartermasters were responsible for steering the vessel. The Cassab was in charge of stores, paints and cleaning equipment. The Bhandari cooked the lascars' food. Lascars employed as deck seamen were responsible for much of the lower order work such as painting, cleaning, washing equipment and parts of the ship. Lascars worked as gangs, but within a British hierarchical structure. The Master and officer of a vessel were British with the Master

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<sup>23</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870-1945*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880-1935', *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol 9, no. 1 (1997), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945*.

<sup>26</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta', 1880-1935, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945*. pp. 58-60.

being responsible for navigation, safety and discipline, and observance of the maritime law. The Chief Officer or first mate had responsibility for general charge of the ship, apart from the engine room. The second and third mates had general duties in assisting the Master and First mate. Ships also carried some apprentices, clerks a carpenter and a wireless operator. In the engine room, the engine room Serang supervised the firemen and had overall responsibility for keeping the engines going and consumption of coal. The Engine-Room Tindalls assisted the Serang. The Cassab was in charge of engine-room stores. The following positions were equivalent to those performed by the lascars deck seamen. The donkey-man was responsible for the donkey room boiler (an auxiliary boiler), greasers oiled and greased machinery, Coal trimmers trimmed the coal, kept the fuel supplied, and other tasks connected to coal management.

#### **CHEAP SAILORS THAT FILLED A GAP**

‘Intending passengers on steamships are warned of the danger of travelling on those ships that are manned by lascars...passengers should understand that lascars are carried by some firms solely on the score of cheapness.’<sup>28</sup>

The above quote illustrates a predominant view of the time that lascars were cheap labour. This quote reflects the fear around at this period of time. A fear that lascars were stealing the livelihoods of British sailors. Views such as this accentuated the British public awareness of the difference of lascars to British seamen. This report appeared only five years before the establishment of a National Union for Seamen. The second

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<sup>28</sup> 'The Whitby Shipping Trade', *Shields Daily Gazette*, November 14, 1882, p. 4.

quote indicates some of the factors that influenced the hiring of lascars, factors caused by the agency of British seamen themselves.

The above examples illustrates two common arguments for employing lascars. Firstly, lascars were paid less than British seamen, and secondly, there was a lack of such seamen. Both reflect commercial interests with the latter acting as a justification of the former. Rozina Visram has pointed out that lascars were pulled from a ‘reservoir of cheap labour’ and therefore demanded less money. The hiring of lascars reduced the employment overheads of shipping companies. An example of this was that because lascars lived on board ships in port, they could carry out repairs whereas British seamen avoided the extra work.<sup>29</sup> The majority of newspaper reports are unequivocal in their representations of lascars as cheap labour, for instance, ‘lascars, were paid at a rate of wages which no British seamen would for a moment accept.’<sup>30</sup> Newspapers reinforced the image of lascars as cheap labour on a daily basis and connected the cut-price characteristic to lascar competencies. For example, ‘British sailors look upon the lascar as being highly dangerous. In the hour of peril, they say he is ‘shivering in fear a stricken senseless wretch who can neither comprehend nor act upon any order or discretion.’<sup>31</sup> Lascars were identified as cheap labour, and the rise in lascar numbers caused some public anxiety with lascars being viewed as interlopers who targeting the British seamans livelihood. Justifications for the employment of lascars centred on the argument that lascars were only being employed to fill the shortfall of British sailors.

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<sup>29</sup> 'The Trades Union Congress', *South Wales Daily News*, September 10, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> 'Imperial Parliament', *Glasgow Herald*, April 11, 1896, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> 'Lascar Crews', *The Globe*, July 25, 1887, p. 3.

Newspaper reports are contradictory about the scarcity of British sailors. The perception of lascars was that they were stealing the livelihoods of British seamen, but the evidence in newspapers is ambiguous. In 1901 Sir Charles Dilke M.P. stated that there was a 'reasonable fear of national danger because the number of British sailors on British ships was sadly diminishing.'<sup>32</sup> Captain Angier of the General Shipowner's society was addressing the lack of British seamen when he said that 'every company should have two apprentice boys on every steamer.'<sup>33</sup> In 1894 the First Lord of the Admiralty said 'he had received no severe complaints about the deficiency of British seamen.'<sup>34</sup> Lord Dudley said 'there was no lack of British sailors available for profitable employment and that owners deliberately employed lascar and foreign seamen because they are cheap.'<sup>35</sup> In 1860 the Duke of Somerset speaking in the House of Lords suggested 'On the wide waters of the world there was no lack of British seamen.'<sup>36</sup> Lord Somerset though did qualify his statement by suggesting that many British sailors were being employed in the service of foreign ships.<sup>37</sup> The evidence in British newspapers is confusing because it represents both sides of the debate. Nevertheless, lascars became known as the menace that deprived the British sailor of the right to work.

Views expressed in secondary literature do not provide any satisfactory solution as to whether or not a lack of British seamen forced reliance on lascars. Moreover, recent discussion tends to focus on the pre-1850 period when lascars acted as replacements for British Merchant seamen impressed into military service during times of war, a topic that

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<sup>32</sup> 'National Danger', *Gloucester Citizen*, October 27, 1900, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> 'Lack of British Seamen', *Belfast Newsletter*, 21 March 1901, p.8.

<sup>34</sup> 'Lack of British Seamen', *Dundee Courier*, June 2, 1894, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> 'Weekly Notes', *Shields Daily News*, May 23, 1898.

<sup>36</sup> 'Our Coast Defences', *Marylebone Mercury*, May 5, 1860, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> 'Our Coast Defences', p. 2.

will be discussed later in the chapter. Perhaps a comprehensive study of British seamen's records may provide proof of a lack of British seamen, but that task is beyond the scope of this thesis. The opinions of Leon Fink give some insight as to how a lack of British sailors could have been perceived; he explains that from the 1860s until the 1900s the tonnages British ships transported were increasing, which in turn intensified the demand for labour. For example, 200,000 British sailors manned British ships in 1870 alongside 18,000 foreigners and lascars and carried 5,500,000 tons of shipping. By 1904, 176,000 British seamen, 39,000 foreigners and 42,000 lascars were carrying double the 1870 tonnage.<sup>38</sup> Fink's description is evidence of one factor that gave the perception of a lack of British sailors, but the agency of British seamen also provides another reason.

The conditions and wages a British sailor often received disincentivised the life of a sailor. The romantic notions of a life at sea described by authors such as Conrad and Melville did not always attract a man to the life of Jack Tar. By the mid-nineteenth century, the working conditions of British seamen began to affect their recruitment. Specifically, British seamen suffered from inadequate food, accommodation and working conditions which often resulted in death or disability, although not to the same extent as suffered by lascars. In 1873 the Association for Improving the Conditions of British Seamen held a meeting to 'lay before the public the real grievances of the sailors, both as regards their food accommodation on board ship and general treatment to put the same before the legislature. The hall was crowded in every part, and the meeting was most enthusiastic'<sup>39</sup> 'It seems that improper food and accommodation have kept these men

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<sup>38</sup> Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalised Industry from 1812 to the Present*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 88.

<sup>39</sup> 'Our Seamen', *East London Observer*, May 10, 1873, p. 5.

away from British ships, where lascars and foreigners have taken their place.<sup>40</sup> Christopher Lloyd describes the food and conditions seamen suffered as inadequate.<sup>41</sup> Leon Fink states that until the introduction of the Merchant Shipping Act 1906 seamen experienced poor conditions. After 1906 British sailors received an extension of crew space, a much-elaborated food scale, together with the requirement for certified cooks and expansion of provisions.<sup>42</sup> Before 1906 British seamen were less willing to go to sea because of the unattractive conditions they could expect, including poor wages. Although the agency of British sailors may have had something to do with lascars being required to make up the shortfall lascars were still identified as plundering the livelihoods of British sailors.

Although having to experience poor conditions at sea, the British sailor had more money to spend ashore than a lascar. Traditionally British seamen received more wages than non-white and foreign contemporaries. Discussions around the repeal of the Navigation laws in 1848 included a proposal that British seamen should always get higher rates than other sailors because they were worth more.<sup>43</sup> British seamen are often described as being paid a regular wage rate. In 1848 a seamen's wages ranged from the 40 shillings to 50 shillings per month<sup>44</sup> In 1862, an Able seaman was earning 50 shillings.<sup>45</sup> by 1907 sailors were earning: on average 60-70 shillings per month.<sup>46</sup> Wages were dependent on

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<sup>40</sup> 'Lascars and Foreigners', *Shields Daily News*, January 23, 1902. p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman 1200-1800: A Social Survey* (London: Associated University Press, 1968), pp. 258-262.

<sup>42</sup> Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalised Industry from 1812 to the Present*, p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> 'Repeal of the Navigation laws,' *Durham Chronicle*, May 26, 1848, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> 'Wages', *Tamworth Herald*, January 10, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Lloyd, *The British Seaman 1200-1800. A Social Survey*, p. 271.

<sup>46</sup> 'Wages', *Tamworth Herald*, January 10, 1880, p. 3.

what job and on what route the sailor was working. The following examples illustrate the view of the wages paid to British seamen. 'Even when British seamen can be procured, the exorbitant wages they require swallow an up a good part of the freight... It is seldom that an English crew can be engaged even at this rate.'<sup>47</sup> The wage demands of British seamen influenced the employment strategies of shipping Companies who hired the cheapest sailor. There were some exceptions like the Union company who employed no foreign or non-white labour.<sup>48</sup> Wages were not the only consideration of employers for hiring their crews as will be explained later in this Chapter. Engaging lascars was a direct result of British sailors expecting and demanding a specified level of remuneration, and by the late nineteenth century, their concerns were being taken seriously.

The unionisation of British sailors in the late nineteenth century directly affected lascars. In 1887 James Havelock Wilson founded the National Amalgamated Sailors and Firemen's Union (NASFU). Havelock Wilson had seafaring in his genes. His grandfather John Wilson was a ship's captain who was often accompanied by his wife, a skilled navigator. The NASFU had its origins in seamen's welfare groups and friendly societies such as the United Seaman and Firemans Friendly Society.<sup>49</sup> Concerns over seamen's welfare, wages and loss of life at sea triggered meetings to discuss the formation of a national union.

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<sup>47</sup> "Lascars," *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, December 22, 1853, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> 'A Nice Sea Trip', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, May 2, 1887., p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> 'British Seamen for British Ships', *Morning Post*, April 1, 1886, p. 3.

At the conference of Seamen's Societies and Delegates in 1885 a proposal to form a union was put forward by the Aberdeen United Firemen and Seamen's Society.<sup>50</sup> By 1889 the NASFU was national with 45 Branches and a nominal membership of 80,000.<sup>51</sup> After encountering difficulties, the union was relaunched in 1894 as the National Sailors and Firemans Union (NSFU). Evidence shows that by 1889 the NSFU was supporting British sailor's demands for wage increases, illustrated by the claims for wage increases of Clyde seamen, firemen and dock labourers in 1890.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, the NSFU provided support for these men during the strike.<sup>53</sup> By 1893 Havelock Wilson was the Member of Parliament for Middleborough, and at the 1907 conference of the National Sailors and Firemans Union, he thanked the government for the introduction of the Merchant Shipping Act 1906 that addressed many of the Union's concerns.<sup>54</sup> Also, he made statements about lascars in the British shipping industry based on equality of conditions. His stance on lascars receiving the same accommodation standard as British seamen is interesting.<sup>55</sup>

It is ironic that Havelock Wilson campaigned on equality for lascars. Conventionally the Union he represented was against the employment of lascars. Therefore, Havelock-Wilson's pursuit of lascar equality disguises his motives. In 1906 Havelock Wilson proposed that while serving on British ships lascars should have better standards of

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<sup>50</sup> 'Aberdeen United Seamen and Firemen's Society', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, December 27, 1884, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *The Seamen- A History of the National Union of Seamen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> 'The Strike of Clyde of Seamen', January 31, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Strike of Clyde of Seamen'.

<sup>54</sup> Lorraine Coones and Alexander Varias, *Steamship Travel in the Interwar Years: Tourist Third Cabin* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2016), p. 207.

<sup>55</sup> 'Colonial Intelligence', *Wellington Journal*, November 17, 1906, p.12.

accommodation.<sup>56</sup> The hoped-for outcome of equality for lascars would be that the difference between the overheads employers paid for lascars would become the same as those for British seamen. The hoped-for consequence of this would be that if the economic value of hiring lascars over British seamen were removed, shipping owners would be more likely to instruct their Captains to employ British seamen.<sup>57</sup>

Lobbying for lascar equality enabled a campaign against lascars based on fairness that was well within the law.<sup>58</sup> The NSFU could challenge the terms of lascar employment legally as Wilson himself declared 'I have the law on my side and that is good enough for me.'<sup>59</sup> Although Havelock Wilson did not approve of lascars, the evidence of British newspapers is in some conflict with academic views of his methods. For example, Visram believes that 'Havelock Wilson and the National Sailors' and Firemans Union adopted a hostile attitude to lascar employment.<sup>60</sup> These tactics were in contrast to his more open approach towards Chinese sailors that on one occasion resulted in his being charged with having persuaded Chinese men to leave a steamship berthed at London.<sup>61</sup>

As lascar numbers grew the view of them as cheap workers stealing jobs rather than as a valuable labour force that contributed to British economic success. Equally, relevant to the presence of lascars were the factors that enabled their increase in numbers that influenced the perception of who they were.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Colonial Intelligence', *Wellington Journal*, November 17, 1906, p.12.

<sup>57</sup> Ceri-Anne Fidler, 'Lascars, c.1850-1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India'. (Cardiff University, 2011), pp. 91-94.

<sup>58</sup> 'Colonial Intelligence', *Wellington Journal*, November 17, 1906, p.12.

<sup>59</sup> Civil Services - Question from Mr. Havelock Wilson, HC Deb, 2nd March 1900, Vol. 79, CC. 1610.

<sup>60</sup> Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, p.53.

<sup>61</sup> 'Charge Against Labour Leader', *Gloucestershire Echo*, December 29, 1905, p. 1.

### THE INCREASING NUMBERS OF LASCARS IN BRITAIN

A starting point for the increased presence of foreign and lascar sailors on British ships were the Napoleonic wars with France (1803-1815). Although these events fall just outside the time period of this thesis it is an important starting point for lascar increase. For example Man Cheong argues that the Napoleonic War with France led to an abandonment of Britain's seventeenth-century Navigation Acts enabling an upsurge in the recruitment of Asiatic sailors, their emergence as a reserve labour force and their increased presence in the British metropole.<sup>62</sup> The result was a void left by the substantial numbers of seamen impressed into the Royal Navy to help fight the French. It is apparent that the British state had long viewed its merchant seamen as interchangeable with the military sailors of the Royal Navy. For example, in 1793 as a degree of future proofing, the British government suspended a stipulation that three-quarters of a British ship's crew must be British.<sup>63</sup> As a result, non-British seamen could be employed more freely. Man Cheong highlights that the resulting scarcity of seamen proceeding from a state of war gave rise to the increased use of Asian sailors as substitutes for British seamen taken by the Navy.<sup>64</sup> After the war, the conditions created by the relaxing of the Navigation Acts remained though as Wemyss correctly points out although the laws legally remained in force until 1849,<sup>65</sup> The gap in the market torn open

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<sup>62</sup> Iona Man-Cheong, 'Asiatic Sailors and the East India Company: Racialisation and Labour Practices 1803-15', *Journal for Maritime Research*, Vol 18, no. 2 (2014), pp. 167.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Fisher, "Indian Maritime Labourers," in Rana Behal P and Van Der Linden, Marcel (eds.), *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2009), p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Iona Man-Cheong, 'Asiatic' Sailors and the East India Company: Racialisation and Labour Practices 1803-15', *Journal for Maritime Research* 18, no. 2 (2014), p. 169. 169.  
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21533369.2014.971503>.

<sup>65</sup> Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 21.

by the Napoleonic wars that allowed an increase in lascar labour remained open long after the end of hostilities.

#### LEGAL OBSTACLES

The Navigation acts also enabled lascars to be hired more freely. The Navigation Acts of 1651, 1669, 1672 (the Acts) characterised protectionist legislation of the time designed to restrict colonial shipping to British ships and merchants.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, the fear of Dutch competition influenced the instigation of the first Navigation Act in 1651.<sup>67</sup> Fundamentally, the Acts privileged British ships that worked in the overseas and colonial trade. For that reason, the Acts were often a reason for settler and migrant discord. According to Hacker, Charles and Beard, the burden of mercantilism created by the Navigation Acts plays a crucial role in causing the American Revolution.<sup>68</sup> Although the Acts contained many provisions, this thesis will discuss those particular to lascars.

The Navigation Acts controlled and limited lascar movement. One condition of hiring lascars specified by the Navigation Acts was that on discharge employers must return lascars to their port of origin. The articles signed by the crew of the Sloop *Tryal* provided for the lascars to return to their port of origin in India either on a working passage or as a passenger.<sup>69</sup> Employers were responsible for maintaining lascars in Britain at the expense

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<sup>66</sup> Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1962), pp. 12-14.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Larry Sawers, 'The Navigation Acts Revisited', *The Economic History Review* 45, no. 2 (1992). p. 263.

<sup>69</sup> Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, p. 35.

of ship owners until return voyages were arranged.<sup>70</sup> However, in reality, many lascars did not return home because of the rigid application of crewing regulations

Although many employers, because of the high costs, resisted returning lascars to their port of origin, crewing stipulations of the Navigation Act also stopped lascars returning home.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Section 7 of the 1660 Act stated that ‘British registered ships importing goods from Asia must have a British Master and three-quarters British crew or that there should be one subject of her majesty to every 20 tons of ship.’<sup>72</sup> In contrast, American ships required one British sailor to every 10 tons.<sup>73</sup> This provision was designed to prevent an influx of foreign seamen into Britain. Traditionally the three-quarter provision on British ships prevented an influx of foreign seamen into Britain. Earlier in this thesis lascars were described as being important as replacement crew members, and it was for this reason that the application of the three-quarter rule was often arbitrary. Captains sailing the Indian Ocean often had no option but to hire large numbers of foreign seamen to get their ships home. Thus the three-quarter British crew stipulation was applied inconsistently.<sup>74</sup> In the recruitment hubs of Asia, the hiring of lascars was possible because of the relaxation of the laws. A lack of British seamen in Asia meant that it was challenging for the three quarter crew stipulation to be applied.<sup>75</sup> A rigid application of the law would have prevented British ships loaded with valuable goods bound for Britain from reaching their destination. As a result, the crews of EIC ships sailed for Britain with more lascars than

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<sup>70</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*. (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> The Navigation Acts were not a single codified entity

<sup>72</sup> 'Navigation Bill', *Evening Mail*, May 23, 1849, p. 7. 'First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports from The Select Committee on Navigation laws', *The Edinburgh Review* LXXXV (April 1847), p. 156.

<sup>73</sup> 'Navigation Bill', *Evening Mail*, May 23, 1849, p. 7. 'First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports from The Select Committee on Navigation laws', *The Edinburgh Review* LXXXV (April 1847), p. 156.

<sup>74</sup> Michael Fischer, 'Working across the Seas: Indian Maritime Labourers in India, Britain, and in Between, 1600-1857', *IRSH Supplement* 51, no. Supplement (2006), p. 29  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859006002604>.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 38.

allowed by law. The benefit of this for lascars is evident as it ultimately meant more employment, but any gain was countered by a more negative reality once lascars were in Britain.

Although the relaxing of the three-quarters crew requirement enabled lascars to work on British ships the rigid application of the law prevented them from leaving Britain. In Britain, the ability to hire home sailors was greater than in Asia. The effect of the strict application of the Navigation Acts in Britain helped create a surplus of stranded lascar seamen. For example, East India Company directors on regular occasions informed owners and Masters of outgoing ships of the importance of hiring all British crews.<sup>76</sup> The Navigation Acts did not stop lascars being employed, they merely restricted lascar involvement depending on what space they were in. Numerous historians suggest that the relaxation of the Navigation laws in 1849 enabled the hiring of lascars more freely. The statement is an ambiguous statement because it is unclear whether they refer to the Navigation laws as a whole or the three-quarters crew stipulation. The three quarter crew stipulation was not lifted until the passing of The Merchant Shipping Law Amendment Act 1853 as illustrated by the following text.<sup>77</sup>

‘Until lately, a British ship, to be “navigated as such,” must have had a master and three fourths, or, if in the coasting trade, the whole, of her crew British subjects (see 12 & 13 Vict. C. 29, s. 7), by which act (ss. 2,3) the coasting trade was reserved exclusively for British vessels. The former restriction was repealed by the 16 & 17 Vict. C. 131, ss. 33, 34. The latter privilege was abolished by the 17 & 18 Vict. C. 5.’ What the repeal of the Navigation laws did was repeal that part of the Act that stated “that natives of places within the limits of the East India Company’s Charter although under British dominion are not, upon the grounds of being such natives, deemed to be British seamen, by which restriction East India ships are excluded from employing lascars”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Fisher, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> Merchant Shipping Act, 1894; ‘Merchant Shipping Law Amendment Act 1853’, 131 c § (1853), p.12.

“Merchant Shipping Act, 1894” c. 131, ss. 33, 34. (1894), p.12.

<sup>78</sup> ‘The Practical Effects of the Repeal of The Navigation laws on the 1st Jan 1850,’ *Glasgow Herald*, September 14, 1849, p. 1.

Doing this meant that lascars were now British seamen and the act redefined the legal category of lascars set out in the 1823 lascar Act that deemed them non-British.<sup>79</sup> Making lascars British in effect made the three-quarter rule non-applicable to lascars thus meaning they could be hired more readily. Becoming British sailors did not mean life suddenly became easy for lascars especially considering the work they were recruited to do.

## STEAMSHIPS

Between 1849-1912 Lascars were part of a growing transnational trade network. A vital part of the machinery of the global trade was the steamship. Hyslop describes this period as the industrialisation of the sea.<sup>80</sup> Significantly by the mid-nineteenth century, the long reign of the sailing ship was declining as was the role of the artisanal seamen. For example, ‘a steamship no longer required a lonely vigil under the lee of the weather cloth in the mizzen rigging frequently casting an eye to windward for any signs of squalls and weather change, the helmsman keeping the ship close to wind without letting the topsails left.’<sup>81</sup> The skills that sailing shipmen had taken years to learn were replaced with skills that could be acquired relatively quickly and had little to do with traditional seamanship and were considered by many as far removed from the skills of the traditional sailor. The transition was not instant and often the two coexisted.

The steamship had a gradual rise. The construction of safe and efficient ships was a problematic and expensive venture. The arrival of the *Savannah*, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic by steam, illustrates the novelty of this form of transport. ‘Among the arrivals yesterday at this port we were particularly gratified and astonished by the novel

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<sup>79</sup> Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p.151.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, 'Steamship Empire: Asian African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine c.1880-1945', p. 60.

<sup>81</sup> Norman Yates, 'Around the World in Sail', *Sea Breezes* 30 (December 1960), p. 6.

sight of a steamship which came around at half-after seven p.m without the assistance of a single sheet, which displayed the power and advantage of the applications of steam to vessels.’<sup>82</sup> In 1823 there were four steamships permanently registered in the United Kingdom, and by 1860 there were 145.<sup>83</sup> More efficient propulsion mechanisms, the screw propeller, the triple expansion engine and the steam turbine helped make the steamship a more dominant form of transport by the late nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Steamships required coal as fuel which formed the basis for the new occupations in ships’ engine rooms.

The handling of coal to power the ship's engines provided the basis for the new occupations. As a result, the hiring of firemen, trimmers, stokers and engineers (roles filled in large numbers by lascars) increased. By 1871 Able and Ordinary seamen outnumbered engine room men by two to one but by 1911 seamen (26,358) were outnumbered by the coal handling firemen and trimmers (27,445).<sup>85</sup> Lascars were also employed as cooks and stewards. The Butler or head steward supervised the saloon and was in charge of staff such as cooks and bakers and general servants. The proliferation of steam increased the presence of oceangoing passenger liners, and companies such as Penninsular and Oriental (P & O) became prolific employers of lascars. In 1899, Sir Thomas Sutherland M.P chairman of P&O, commented on the employment of lascars by

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<sup>82</sup> 'List of the Ocean Steamers Employed by Great Britain,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, August 29, 1857, British Library Newspaper Archive and a Correspondence between the Commissioners of Customs and the Lords of Treasury', *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, June 24, 1819, The British Library Newspaper Archive.

<sup>83</sup> J.R.T Hughes and Stanley Reiter, 'The First 1,945 British Steamships', *Journal of the American Statistical Association* Vol, 53, no. 282 (1958) p. 364.

<sup>84</sup> "The Shipbuilding Trade: Is the Boom Declining?" *The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph*, April 13, 1899, British Library Newspaper Archive.

<sup>85</sup> Burton, p. 314

his company: ‘there are now 35,000 lascars employed on British ships and that steamers for the tropics could not be well managed without them. The P and O Company employ about twice as many lascars as British seamen and engage them upon an old family plan approved by the Indian authorities.’<sup>86</sup>

#### ARTICLES OF EMPLOYMENT

In 1897 the Peninsular and Orient Company paid lascars ‘16shillings to 18shillings a month whereas white labour was paid at the rate of £4 10shillings a month for firemen and £4 a month for seamen.’<sup>87</sup> In 1858 a lascar called Mahomet Ali as well as eating stale rice and rotten fish was sent up the mizenmast with a piece of pork in each hand, the lascar then had pork forced into his mouth, not for the first time. The eating of pork was strictly forbidden in the religion that Mahomet practised.<sup>88</sup> British sailors received salt beef biscuits tea and sugar.<sup>89</sup> The above examples illustrate differences in wages and working conditions between lascars and British sailors. These differences were set out in separate agreements or ‘ships articles’ and were an agreement between a seaman and ships master setting out the terms and conditions of the voyage. Wage scale, journey length, food rations and discipline were agreed to in writing. The articles of the *New Liverpool* stipulated that the Serang receive thirty rupees per month and lascars sixteen rupees with three months pay advanced when they shipped. The daily supply of food per man was ‘Rice, 2lb. 14drms; tamarinds, 13drms; curry sufficient for daily use; salt fish, 8oz; no spirits were allowed on board.’<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “Sir Thomas Sutherland and the Employment of Lascar Seamen,” *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, Tuesday 28 February 1899, British Library Newspaper Archive.

<sup>87</sup> “Lascars on British Ships,” *Shields Daily Gazette*, May 25, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> “Ill Treatment of Lascars,” *Glasgow Morning Journal*, December 1, 1858, p.6.

<sup>89</sup> “Merchant Navy Bill,” *Aberdeen Peoples Journal*, March 24, 1906, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Cruelty to Lascar Seamen at Southampton’, *Kentish Independent*, October 26, 1850, p. 3.

Ships articles originate from the early activities of the East India Company, and in slave trade legislation The Act for the better Regulation and Government of seamen in 1729 formalised wage contracts and enabled seamen to challenge broken agreements. Legislation in 1747 established payments for the widows and orphans of sailors but it was not until 1789 that specific legislation governing diet conditions and accommodation emerged. The death of fifty percent of the crew on the slave ship *Brothers* provided the catalyst for new regulations in respect of diet and housing.<sup>91</sup> Appended to the 1789 act were specimen articles of agreement including a scale for diet and provisions? In 1792 further legislation contained schedules for diet and accommodation, that remained in future legislation.

Ships Articles provided essential safeguards for sailors. For example, in 1892 ships captain George Mclane was fined 10 shillings for failing to use articles under section 157 of the Merchants Shipping Act.<sup>92</sup> Mr Steel, the prosecution lawyer, summed up ships articles by saying “The signing of the articles is evidence of the contract between masters and seamen.”<sup>93</sup> Davis explains how in 1729 it became a legal requirement for the masters of vessels to compile a list of the crew engaging or signing on for a voyage.<sup>94</sup> Though not all ships employed sailors with ships articles, the majority did.<sup>95</sup> Signing articles became synonymous with ‘signing on’, a phrase still in use. Ships articles became

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The Grievances of Our Mercantile Seamen, a National and Crying Evil*. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Co, 1845), p.23.

<sup>92</sup> 'A Captain Fined', p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> 'A Captain Fined', p.3

<sup>94</sup> Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1962), p. 42.

<sup>95</sup> Janet Ewald, Reviews Of Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c.1879-1945 with a Response by Gopalan Balachandran*, p. 276.

equivocal when applied to non-white sailors. If ships articles protected British sailors, then, in contrast, they worked to restrict the conditions and mobility of lascars.

For lascars, ships articles enforced two things of importance that disadvantaged them but benefitted commercial and government interests. Ships articles ensured low wages and ports standards for lascars as well as limiting their ability to stay in Britain. For commercial shipping companies, classical articles ensured lascars were cheaper than British sailors.

Lascars signed separate articles to those of British sailors.<sup>96</sup> But not all of those who might be considered lascars signed them. Many African sailors were employed on standard articles designed for British seamen. By the early twentieth century, many Chinese and Arab seamen were excluded from the definition of lascar because they no longer signed lascar articles.<sup>97</sup> One of the reasons for this was Black, and Chinese seamen were employed on union mandated articles that enabled voyages of indefinite duration. In 1897 27 of the 33 crewmembers on the *SS Chittagong* were Chinese, employed on regular articles and recruited in Hong Kong for a single voyage to Bristol.<sup>98</sup> By the early twentieth century, the definition of lascar tightened. Those still considered lascars were signed on in gangs in Bombay and Calcutta, but Chinese and African sailors were being employed directly. Ships article were a critical tool for controlling lascars..

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<sup>96</sup> Tabili, 'We Ask For British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain', p. 48.

<sup>97</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Circulation Through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1800-1945.' p. 44.

<sup>98</sup> "Chinese Sailors on Strike in Bristol," *Western Daily Press*, October 30, 1897, p. 3.

Lascar articles kept lascars in a subordinate position. The stipulations of lascar articles reflect how lascars were exploited. Employers paid lascars between one third to one-fifth of white seamen, as well as providing squalid living and working conditions.<sup>99</sup> In 1897 the Peninsular and Orient Company paid lascars “16s to 18s a month whereas white labour was paid at the rate of £4 10s a month for firemen and £4 a month for seamen.”<sup>100</sup> The difference between the wages of lascar and British seamen amounted to a difference of £25,000 in operating costs for the Peninsular and Orient Company.<sup>101</sup> Indian rupees was the standard way to pay lascars with exchange rates placed them at a disadvantage.<sup>102</sup> In the late nineteenth century, 15 rupees were equal to one pound. Being paid in rupees could have extended consequences. In 1896 a lascar entered a public house in Westminster and attempted to pay for his drink with a silver rupee. The pub landlord would not accept the foreign currency as payment and threw the lascar out. The story circulated through the neighbourhood, and the lascar was abused assaulted and locked up.<sup>103</sup> It appears the only place the rupee had any respect in Britain was back on the ship. Even though British sailors earned more than lascars, both groups often resorted to ways to supplement their income. In 1881 charges were laid against 23 lascars and British engineers for smuggling tobacco on board the steamer *Branksome Hall* in 1881.<sup>104</sup> The ability to survive on low wages was challenging and made harder by the living conditions on board the ship.

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<sup>99</sup> Laura Tabili, *We Ask For British Justice* “Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 42-43.

<sup>100</sup> “Lascars on British Ships,” p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Lascars on British Ships’, *Shields Daily Gazette*, May 25, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> “British and Lascar Seamen,” *Dundee Advertiser*, January 30, 1894, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> “Lascar Fireman in Trouble,” *Shields Daily Gazette*, March 26, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> “Wholesale Smuggling by Lascar Seamen,” *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, June 17, 1881, p. 6.

Lascar articles provided lascars about half the accommodation space on board a ship to which a British seaman was entitled. Before 1914 the accommodation entitlement for seamen was 72 cubic feet, but lascars were living in as little as 36 cubic feet. Lascars themselves often became the justifications for their limited accommodation space.<sup>105</sup> In 1906 clause 58 of the Merchant Shipping Bill proposed that while lascars served in latitudes beyond 85 degrees north and 85 degrees South they should be given the same amount of accommodation space as a British sailor. The bill proposed an increase from 76 to 120 cubic feet. Unlike British seamen the 120 cubic foot stipulation was affected by geographical considerations, for example ‘when serving in tropical climes, 72 cubic feet was deemed sufficient space for each lascar.’<sup>106</sup> Member of Parliament for Westminster John Rees considered that ‘lascars were happy with this arrangement because they were more stoic than British seafarers.’<sup>107</sup> Lascars, Rees suggested could operate better than a British sailor in hotter climes so did not need as much space.<sup>108</sup> He said, “of course it would be absurd to expect Englishmen to be satisfied with the remuneration and sleeping accommodation that the Asian toiler is only too glad to get.’<sup>109</sup> Balachandran suggests lascars preferred sleeping on the deck in good weather.<sup>110</sup> There is little evidence of this in newspaper reports, and there tends to be more evidence of lascars complaining about their accommodation which may be a more likely motive

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<sup>105</sup> Ravi Ahuja, “Networks of Subordination - Networks of the Subordinated: The Ordered Spaces of South Asian Maritime Labour in an Age of Imperialism (c. 1890 - 1947),” in *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region*, ed. Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine (London: Routledge, 2009), 13–49.

<sup>106</sup> “Merchant Shipping Bill,” p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Tabs and Lascars’, *Globe*, September 23, 1895, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Tabs and Lascars’. p.1

<sup>109</sup> ‘Tabs and Lascars’, *Globe*, September 23, 1895, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c. 1870-1945.*, p. 118.

for sleeping on the deck rather than preferring that situation. The accommodation was not the only area of difference between British and lascar sailors.<sup>111</sup>

Lascar food rations were considerably cheaper, and the low cost of lascar food meant employers saved money. Lascar provisions cost less than those required to feed a British sailor. The Greenock telegraph of 1893 provides an excellent example of lascar provisions on a ship. “the messing of the crews includes saltfish, rice and pulses with ghi sugar, vegetables and condiments necessary for curry cooked in a galley set apart for their use. Tea which is much prized and often taken three times a day is also given.”<sup>112</sup> Lascar rations were often substandard in taste and appearance, ‘The only diet which the lascars had during the last three months was rice and fish. The rice was of the most inferior description, and the fish was only fit to be thrown on a dunghill being rotten full of vermin and stinking most horribly.’<sup>113</sup> It was not only what lascars ate that was distinctive but also how they ate. For example ‘They squatted in a circle on the deck eating their frugal midday meal. In the centre stood a large copper dish containing rice-nice light and cheap food but much neglected by the Britisher.’ The lascars dispensed with plates, nor did they need spoons. With the thumb and two first fingers of the right hand. It was a simple way of making dinner, but they seemed to enjoy it.’<sup>114</sup> Another example of this is ‘The Lascars always eat their food with their faces towards the West and the greatest insult a white man or ‘Giaour.’ (non –Muslim, especially a Christian) can offer them is to walk between them and the sun while they are eating and causing his shadow to fall on their food which thus they consider becomes unclean.”<sup>115</sup> The cheapness of lascar

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<sup>111</sup> ‘The Lascar Problem’, *Lloyds List*, November 16, 1906, pp 7-8.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Characteristics of the Lascar’, *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, June 1, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Cruelty to Lascars’, *Morning Chronicle*, October 25, 1850, p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> ‘A Crew of Lascars at Cardiff’, *Cardiff Times*, December 17, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The Lascars,’ *Shields Daily Gazette*, July 17, 1894, p. 3.

food had economic side effects for shipping companies, and the emphasis on the difference between lascars and British based on food once again placed the lascar at the bottom of the hierarchy. The ability to have access to good clean and culturally appropriate food became a basis for resistance and desertion, but this proved difficult.

The length of voyage specified in articles was a way of limiting lascar movement. Two-year labour contracts formed the basis of lascar articles, whereas British seamen could sign on for one year or less.<sup>116</sup> Articles also mandated the transfer of lascars from one ship to another. For example, in 1897 thirty lascars signed an agreement to “work the Janet Mitchell to England and to work that vessel or any other owned by me back to India at certain stipulated wages.”<sup>117</sup> Another limiting aspect of lascar movement was that officially they could only discharge at ports in India, but newspaper advertisements show how the practice was ignored. For example in 1904 an advertisement asked for lascars to crew a steamer from London proceeding shortly to India.<sup>118</sup> This example demonstrates lascars must have discharged and reengaged in England. For lascars, the voyage length was problematic because they were not paid until the end of the voyage. As a result, it was common for lascars to enter into wage disputes. In 1855 a group of lascars had shipped from Calcutta to Bristol but were not paid, the captain of the ship had said it was agreed would pay the lascars on their return to India as passengers, the lascars refused.<sup>119</sup> Although lascars signed ships articles of their own accord and in a sense were free labour controlling influences such as the length of voyage and withholding of wages made their

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<sup>116</sup> Laura Tabili, 'A Maritime Race? Masculinity and the Racial Division of Labour in British Merchant Ships, 1900-1939', in Margaret S Creighton and Lisa Norling (eds.), *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in The Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 181.

<sup>117</sup> “Scandalous Treatment of Lascars.”

<sup>118</sup> “Lascar Crew Wanted,” *Lloyds List*, September 29, 1904, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> “Treatment of Lascars in a Glasgow Ship,” *Glasgow Herald*, November 21 1855, p. 4.

employment a much more restrictive form of labour similar to that of indentured labourers.

Various forms of land-based indentured contracts to labour were typical throughout periods of English history. Becoming indentured provided a way for those with little wealth to acquire new skills or passage to other countries. Balachandran defines traditional indentured labour as contractual abuse and legal enforcement.<sup>120</sup> One example of indenture was the English apprenticeship system where a young man could gain specialised training while he was bound by written indentures for a fixed term (often no less than seven years), during which his Master was expected to teach him a craft.<sup>121</sup> A different form of indenture is the example of seventeenth-century white indentured labourers who left Britain for Virginia bound to labour for three, five or seven years to pay for their passage.<sup>122</sup>

A more common representation of indentured labour is the Chinese coolie, Millions of whom were sent to work various parts of the world such as Cuba where 125, 000 trafficked coolies ended up in in the late nineteenth century.<sup>123</sup> Indian experienced the same fate; an example was Mohamed Sheriff who left Calcutta for British Guiana 1870 to be bound for ten years.<sup>124</sup> Although indentured labour is considered a land-based

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<sup>120</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870 -1945*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17-20.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain 1750-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 73.

<sup>122</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800*. (London: Verso, 1997), p. 227.

<sup>123</sup> Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Labourers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.), pp 1-5.

<sup>124</sup> David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism: 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 4.

system, there is evidence of it being used in a maritime context. “In 1863 Yoynng scatters indentured as a sailor in the service of the Carron Company.<sup>125</sup> Regarded as a ‘thoroughbred sailor rearing village, Carronshore in Scotland had produced more indentured apprentice sailors in its time than any other place in Scotland.’<sup>126</sup>

Although not in the traditional sense lascars can be considered a type of indentured labour. They were often tied to long-term contracts and suffered from coercion once, at sea brought about by enforcement of conditions set out in articles such as inadequate food and accommodation. Gopal Balachandran has argued that the lascar is the maritime equivalent of the coolie but in an occupational sense not in any catch-all or racist sense.<sup>127</sup> The lascar like the coolie has features of a contractually abused, legally enforced indentured labourer, but lascars were also wage workers.<sup>128</sup> If lascars shared characteristics of indentured labour with coolies, Balachandran believes they were also similar in another sense. He considers lascars as the maritime equivalent of the coolie because they were both unskilled labour. Balachandran's definition relies on the deskilling of lascars and the roles they were considered best suited for.

Although considered innately suited to low skilled jobs, seamanship skills were still considered as significant. There is evidence of Lascars still being regarded as experienced sailors. An example of this is “Lascars have usually served as sailors before they engage with English companies and are of a more respectable class than the ordinary English

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<sup>125</sup> 'Life Drama; The Story of Yoynng Scatters', *Stirling Observer*, December 24, 1863, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> 'Reminiscences of My Aunty Kate', *Falkirk Herald*, January 13, 1886, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Gopalan Balachandran *Globalising Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping c.1870 - 1945*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

seaman.”<sup>129</sup> Further examples illustrate the view of lascars as seamen. “The majority of lascars come from seafaring families on the coast of Bengal, Burma, Ceylon or the Gulf of Cutch.”<sup>130</sup> Some lascars are still recruited from seafaring families, and they are gonna useful sailors.<sup>131</sup> These crews are fairly good seamen, and sailors”<sup>132</sup> Lascar sailors are engaged because of navigation experience.<sup>133</sup> The evidence suggests that the pedigree of the lascar was still important especially to shipping company owners who wished the supply of cheap seamen to continue. Seamanship pedigree. Identity status occupations living and working conditions were all part of lascar identity.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter is a clear example of the tensions that existed over the attributes of a lascar. Many of these ambiguities were influenced by the recruitment practices lascars were part of this chapter has illustrated how aspects of lascar recruitment influenced their identity. British newspaper reports between 1849-1912 provide insights into how lascars recruitment contexts and processes influenced lascar identity. Lascars cost less to hire than British sailors and were regarded as undermining the rights and abilities of the British sailor. This view often negated any agency of British sailors that contributed to lascars taking their place. Views of the lascars as cheap interlopers were augmented as numbers increased aided by . the ascendancy of the steamship and relaxation of protectionist legislation. The ideas of lascars as lazy and inadequate workers are often contradicted by the perception of lascars as a much better

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<sup>129</sup> 'The Case for the Lascars', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, August 8, 1887, British Library Newspaper Archive, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> 'Lascar Sailors: Picturesque Seamen from India', *Derry Journal*, March 18, 1931, British Library Newspaper Archive, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> 'Lascars as Seamen', *Shields Daily Gazette*, September 4, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> 'The Employment of Lascars and Coolies as Seamen', *Aberdeen and Press Journal*, November 21, 1892, p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> 'The Employment of Lascars and Coolies as Seamen'. p. 5.

employment option than a British sailor. Understanding who a lascar was is not as simple as describing them as a cheap labour force. The ability to analyse sources such as British newspapers illustrate that identifying lascars involves navigating the tensions of how they were perceived.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Lascars in Britain

‘In port when the dealers fail them, or the lascars are too eager for a bargain, they bear their animals to private houses, and in Glasgow, it is not uncommon thing to see a Lascar with a mongoose squatted on his shoulder or a young monkey curled up under his jacket on the search for a purchaser.’<sup>1</sup>

This chapter offers an exploration of lascar experiences in Britain and their effects on lascar identity. In particular, it explores why lascars found themselves in situations of destitution and poverty in Britain and how they negotiated these circumstances. Much of the recent literature on lascar in Britain focuses on their presence in London; as well as adding to the discussion on lascars in London, this chapter extends the discussion to include evidence from British newspapers about lascars in other parts of Britain. Lascars had a presence in such places as Glasgow, Liverpool and Southampton. Much of this chapter focuses on the agency of lascars in leaving their employment and surviving in Britain. It is apparent from Newspaper reports that lascars were much more present and in the consciousness of the British public more than historians have previously highlighted. The reason to examine lascar activity in Britain is first that new sources provide a more in-depth analysis of also live in Britain than we have previously been able to access, and secondly, it illustrates how their agency defined lascar identity.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Lascar in Glasgow', *Dundee Evening Post*, November 23, 1901, p. 5.

This chapter is organised as follows. It begins with a discussion of two particular reasons lascars chose to leave their ships for a life of destitution in Britain. Firstly the poor treatment lascars received and secondly that lascars often did not receive their wages on discharge. Section two will discuss where lascars lived and stayed once in Britain. Lascars often lived in the lowest socioeconomic areas, but other options were available, namely seamen's homes, both topics will be discussed. The third section looks at relationships and other strategies lascars employed to survive, such as their relationships with women and how lascars endeavoured to make life better for themselves. All of these factors are important to understanding how being in Britain affected lascar identity.

In 1854 a lascar named Eincaun from Madras was making his way from London to Liverpool after being discharged from hospital. Eincaun intended to return to his native country (the sources are silent as to which one), but on his way, he was abused and robbed by a man called Thompson at a lodging house in Leicester.<sup>2</sup> In 1855 a lascar named Sheik Haroo operated a profitable boarding house for lascars in Shadwell, London<sup>3</sup> Also in 1855, a group of lascars actioned a summons against Captain Hutton of the *Janet Mitchell* for maltreatment and withholding of their wages. In 1901 a group of lascars from the *S.S Ameer* marched through the streets of Dundee to protest their treatment by British officers.<sup>4</sup> In 1889 one hundred lascars from the steamer *Shannon* conveyed the body of a dead colleague through the streets of Southampton to his place of burial all the while

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<sup>2</sup> 'A Lascar Named Eincaun', *Staffordshire Sentinel and Commercial & General Advertiser*, April 29, 1854, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown', *Morning Post*, November 13, 1855, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> 'Disaffected Lascars', *Dundee Courier*, May 4, 1901, p. 5.

chanting and singing.<sup>5</sup> The examples above illustrate some of the lascars experiences in Britain. Additionally, the examples illustrate that some lascars stayed in Britain whether by choice or not. Sheik Haroo remained in Britain.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Eincaun was a victim of circumstance but had intended to return to his homeland. Other lascars may have found themselves having to survive in Britain because they chose to leave their employment because of unfair treatment. Two of the more prominent causes of lascars deserting were firstly the cruel treatment they received on ships, and secondly, many lascars were not given their wages at the end of voyages. Subsequently, lascars often decided to leave their employment rather than continue to work for nothing.

As described in the previous chapter, the loosening of trade restrictions, and the advent of steam increased the number of lascars in Britain between 1849-1912. For example, from 1891 until 1912 the number of lascars in Britain increased by 23,174.<sup>7</sup> According to Balachandran lascars employed in the early nineteenth century found themselves abandoned in Britain. In contrast he suggests lascars of the steam era often existed in Britain as a result of their agency such as desertion and willingness to take advantage of opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Joseph Salters eye witness accounts contrast with Balachandran's views, by suggesting lascars of the steam era were still being abandoned. For example he writes, 'by how is it these men are discharged at all? By the Merchant Shipping Repeal Act, a Captain is liable to the penalty of £20.00 for every lascar he leaves in England. Yes, but

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<sup>5</sup> 'Burying a Lascar', *Saturday 14 September 1889*, September 14, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown', *Morning Post*, November 13, 1855, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ceri-Anne Fidler, 'Lascars, c.1850-1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India'. (Cardiff University, 2011), p. 318.

<sup>8</sup> Gopalan Balachandran, 'Circulation Through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1800-1945', in Claude Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam Jacques (eds.) *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia 1750-1950*, ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2006), p. 92.

whose duty is it to enforce the law whoever concerns himself about it but the Captain and the suffering lascar? The captain sails off to another land and the lascar sink into the stream of Human life.’<sup>9</sup>

Lascars were not regarded as British seamen. Although many lascars originated from parts of the British Empire such as India, Burma and Malaya lascars did not receive the same benefits as British seamen. While the 1823 Merchant Shipping Act (‘Lascar Act’) that defined lascars as being non- British was not repealed until 1963, lascar status did change in 1849. The repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849 removed the following clause ‘that natives of places within the limits of the East India Companys Charter although under British dominion are not, upon the grounds of being such natives, deemed to be British seamen, by which restriction East India ships are excluded from employing lascars.’<sup>10</sup> The result being that lascars became redefined as British seamen.<sup>11</sup> Even so, the British legal frameworks that set the boundaries of British citizenship treated many lascars as aliens rather than British subjects. For example, John Chesterman states many British subjects mainly non-white ones such as Indigenous Australians and Indians were explicitly denied entitlements by a range of discriminatory laws.<sup>12</sup> The Indian Immigration Acts of 1874 and 1883 discouraged lascar labourers from settling in Britain by requiring employers to return them to India.<sup>13</sup> Clause 16 of the *1854 Act to repeal*

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years’ Work Among Orientals* (London, 1873), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> ‘The Practical Effects of the Repeal of the Navigation laws on the 1st January 1850’, *Glasgow Herald*, September 14, 1849, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p.151.

<sup>12</sup> John Chesterman, ‘Natural Born Subjects? Race and British Subject hood in Australia’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* Vol 5, no. 1 (March 2005), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> A. Martin Wainright, *The Better Class of Indians: Imperial Identity Imperial Identity and South Asians in Britain 1858-1914*. (Manchester University Press, 2008), p.105.

*certain Acts and Part of Acts relating to Merchant Shipping and to continue certain provisions in the said Acts* reinforced the rule foreign sailors be returned to their port of origin.<sup>14</sup> The Act demonstrates how legislation was designed to prevent lascars from settling in Britain. Although being colonial natural born British subjects, lascars were never really considered British sailors. This did not stop a number from remaining and settling in Britain.

Many lascars came to be in Britain because they chose to desert their ships. In addition to inadequate conditions and low wages, lascars suffered physical and mental abuse at sea. As identified by Rozina Visram, lascars were often mistreated onboard, and one form of relief was to desert.<sup>15</sup> Hence deserting was the lesser of two evils. For instance, a lascar could remain on his ship and suffer cruel and arbitrary punishments or face an uncertain life of destitution in an alien land.<sup>16</sup> Mirza Abu Talib Khan recounted how sixteen of the lascars on his ship who could not take the cruel treatment from the British officers left the ship and hid in the woods ashore.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Salter describes how one lascar was so tormented by cruel behaviour he jumped overboard.<sup>18</sup> In 1858, the Master of the *Commodore Perry* Captain John Webb was tried for cruel treatment of lascars. Based on the eyewitness evidence of the ship's Serang, tindalls and a Russian seamen, Captain Webb carried out a campaign of tyranny and cruelty. There were descriptions of lascars being flogged with ropes, thrown overboard and being left to drown.<sup>19</sup> Many lascars

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<sup>14</sup> "Act to Repeal Certain Acts and Part of Acts Relating to Merchant Shipping and to Continue Certain Provisions in the Said Acts," 17 & 18 Victoriae Cap. 120 § (1854).

<sup>15</sup> Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Rozina Visram, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work among Orientals* (London, 1873), p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> 'Alleged Ill Treatment of Lascars', *Morning Advertiser* November 26 1858, p. 2.

chose to desert their ships because of the cruel treatment they received from British officers and Captains, but lascars also suffered at the hands of their contemporaries.

Treatment from Serangs prompted lascars to desert. Although the role of the Serang as illustrated was to look after, protect, speak for and even train the sailors under their charge, they often treated lascars poorly. Salter describes how lascars were ill-fed and poorly treated by a person (a superior lascar) who had command over them.<sup>20</sup> Described as tyrants, Serangs brutally punished the lascars under their charge. For example, the *Thames Morning Chronicle* reports that ‘after the lascar's compliance, the Serang beat them.’<sup>21</sup> The following evidence shows that the response by lascars to this treatment by one of their own was to desert: ‘The prisoners were willing to go to prison rather than go back under the Serang.’<sup>22</sup> Moreover, ‘lascars would not sail with their Serang.’<sup>23</sup> Lascars also experienced fraud at the hands of their Serangs

Lascars were often left out of pocket by the actions of Serangs. Serangs controlled the crew's wages and often received bribes from sailors wanting work. Fisher describes how lascar's wages were given to the ships Serang, who was responsible for distributing them minus his fees and conveying the wages for dead lascars back to India.<sup>24</sup> The simplistic state of affairs Fisher describes did not always play out. As a consequence of the Serangs

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<sup>20</sup> Salter and Marsh -Hughes, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> 'Thames', *Morning Chronicle*, September 19 1857 p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> 'Men of Many Colours', *Chelmsford Chronicle* December 2 1898.

<sup>23</sup> 'Thames', p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Fisher, 'Indian Maritime Labourers', in *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism: Studies in Rana Behal P and Van Der Linden, Marcel (eds.), Indian Labour History*. (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2009), pp. 26-28.

control over wages, they had ample opportunity to deceive the lascars in their charge.<sup>25</sup> Some lascars never saw the wages they were owed, Salter describes how lascars in the hospital never saw their wages because by the time they were released their ship had sailed.<sup>26</sup> Although poorly treated many lascars remained in contact with their Serangs after being discharged from their ships. Fisher suggests that Serangs exacted authority over the lascars in his crew although there was no legal reason that they had to accept it in Britain.<sup>27</sup>

For many destitute lascars in London, the first port of call was where other lascars were. In London, the Oriental Quarter developed in the Lime house and Shadwell areas of London. Fisher describes London's Oriental quarter as accomodating low socioeconomic communities with a large lascar presence.<sup>28</sup> The Oriental Quarter became a place where lascars could form connections and retain a degree of fellowship, it served as an excellent base for lascars to establish themselves. Joseph Salter describes Shadwell and Limehouse as 'Satans Stronghold.'<sup>29</sup> The following passage is part of Salters description of the Oriental quarter, 'We are now fairly in the Oriental quarter; there are several houses here devoted to Asiatics, presided over by Chinese, Malays, and Indians according to the country of the Asiatic seeking companionship, how shamelessness has its premium and admirers, and honestly, truth and self-respect are trampled in the dust. Here disease and death decked in gaudy tinsel robes allure the victim to the grave.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780-1860: Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny*, vol. 12, *Worlds of The East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), p.107.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 129.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Fisher, 'Indian Maritime Labourers', p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Fisher, 'Making London's Oriental Quarter', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) *Subalternity and Difference: Investigations from the North and the South*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 79-97.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Salter, p. 26

Descriptions of overcrowding and inadequate accommodation in Londons Oriental Quarter were common in newspaper reports of the time. For example in 1855 in a room in Londons East End six lascars and two Chinamen were found ‘quite unfit for human habitation: the floors, stairs, and passages were in a filthy and dilapidated condition covered with slime, dirt, excrement and all kinds of abomination. The stench everywhere was intolerable.’<sup>31</sup> Similarly ‘in this room, one lascar was dead covered by an old rug.’<sup>32</sup> Another example is from Southampton in 1854 where police raided the Windsor Castle beer shop and found some fourteen or fifteen lascars in deplorable conditions.<sup>33</sup> Lascars swapped the poor conditions of the ship for those on land and it is difficult to say which one may have afforded them better conditions. Salter describes how for the lascar ‘sometimes the only remedy is to leave the ship sacrificing everything.’<sup>34</sup>

Although inadequate there were legal avenues for the protection of lascars. In 1854 action was provided by a provision in the *Merchant Shipping Act 1854* to prevent the exhibition of destitute lascars on the street.<sup>35</sup> The clause stated that ‘...he is liable to be convicted as an idle and disorderly person, or any other act of vagrancy, the Master or Owner of the said ship...shall incur a penalty not exceeding Thirty Pounds, unless he can show that the Person so left as aforesaid quitted the ship without the consent of the Master.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'An East-End Lodging House', *The Atlas*, February 17, 1855, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Cholera', *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, September 28, 1853.

<sup>33</sup> 'A Peep behind the Scenes', *Hampshire Advertiser*, May 13, 1854.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 150, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> 'Destitute Lascars', *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review; and Forfar and Kincardineshire Advertiser*, August 24, 1855, p.4.

<sup>36</sup> Act to repeal certain Acts and Part of Acts relating to Merchant Shipping and to continue certain provisions in the said Acts.

In the Winter of 1854-55 when upwards of 800 non-white seamen were residing on British ships or in poor accommodation; the coroner for East Middlesex held no less than 19 inquests on the bodies of lascars in the course of a few weeks. Two of them were found dead in the streets, one on the step of a door, two in their berths on board ship and one in the passage of a house. All of those the coroner examined had died from neglect or exposure to cold.<sup>37</sup> This evidence begs the question so where could be destitute and abandoned go to avoid ending up this way? The impoverished conditions lascars found themselves in, and the lack of government help would eventually come to the attention of missionaries

In 1857 the gap in welfare provisions for lascars that legislation failed to fill was addressed. The establishment in London of The Strangers Home for Asiatics (The Strangers Home) in that year provided some respite for destitute lascars. The home was an interdenominational Protestant home situated in West India Dock Road in Limehouse.<sup>38</sup> Joseph Salters described its origins ‘how many Missionary societies desired such a home but did not have the funds until a donation of £500 was received by the visiting Maharajah Duleep Sing the sovereign of the Punjaub.’<sup>39</sup> According to Visram, the home had three purposes. Firstly as a lodging house for Asian and Black sailors, secondly as a centre with the express purpose of repatriation and for the recruiting of crews as specified by the 1854 Act, thirdly it was a centre for evangelising lascars.<sup>40</sup> Martin Wainright describes those missionaries that worked for The Strangers Home as being employed to minister to the nations that Britain’s economic and military activities

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<sup>37</sup> 'The Opening of the New Sailors Home for Asiatic Seamen', *London Evening Standard*, June 4, 1857, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 61.

had brought to the heart of the Empire.<sup>41</sup> The contemporary views were that the Home would do some good. For example, ‘the institution will be particularly valuable to lascar seamen who are often discharged from ships in a state of destitution. The home will be capable of accommodating 230 inmates with apartments for the superintendent, a hospital, registry, shipping and secretary's offices.<sup>42</sup> A report in the *London Evening Standard* on the day of the opening of the home provided a good description of the daily processes:

*‘The object of the institution is to offer to Indian sailors and other Orientals who come to England, a comfortable and respectable lodging, with wholesome food, at a cost which shall render the institution of supporting. Each lodger is to pay not less than 8s. a week, for which they will be supplied with three meals a daily, medical attendance, baths washing, &c ; so that they will have no other necessary outlay, but to furnish themselves with clothing, the means of doing which on the most reasonable terms will also be provided by the establishment of a store-room at the home. In addition to those benefits, arrangements will be made to take charge of their money and other property when desired; to make remittance to their families and friends —to render them advice, and afford them information — to protect them from imposition — to procure them employment in vessels — to present to all whom can read, and desire it, a copy of the Holy Scriptures in their own language— and to provide means for instructing those who are willing to be taught in the truths of the Gospel and in the English language.’<sup>43</sup> The establishment of the Strangers home in London targeted lascars and other non-white seamen specifically, but there other established home that were willing to help lascars.*

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<sup>41</sup> Wainright, *The Better Class of Indians: Imperial Identity Imperial Identity and South Asians in Britain 1858-1914*, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> 'Home in London for Oriental Strangers', *Essex Standard* June 6 1856, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Opening of the New Sailors Home for Asiatic Seamen', p.3.

In 1835 the Glasgow Sailors Home was established. Although initially targeting British sailors, it was sympathetic to lascars. In 1895 there were 8,347 lascars in Glasgow, and in 1901 the number had risen to 12,620. J. H Muir describes his observations of Glasgow in 1901, 'Behind the steel plating of that liner the good lascar is praying to Allah and Mahomet his prophet that he may acquire enough empty marmalade jars in the smoky city to set up as Sirkar at Ratnaghari.'<sup>44</sup> Muir describes how lascars were often seen around the dock entrances on their way to the markets.<sup>45</sup> Prescott states that many lascars have stayed at the Glasgow sailors home.<sup>46</sup> Prescotts statements reflect the willingness of the Glasgow sailors home to integrate the sailing community despite the fact that the city contained a plaque with the inscription 'Lascars Only in English and Bengali above the toilet facilities in the Queens Dock area of Stobcross Quay created for lascar seamen.'<sup>47</sup> Other cities had sailors homes, for example in Bristol, Cork and the one opened in Dundee opened in 1881 but sources are silent as to whether lascars were welcome or not.<sup>48</sup> Visram describes other Christian Associations that supported lascars. Examples of these were The Asiatic Rest, London City Missions Lascar institute and St Lukes Lascar Mission.<sup>49</sup> These places provided lascars with a base to rebuild their lives, For example Mohamed Ishnael who lost his pay clothes and ships, was rehabilitated at the Asiatic Rest as well as being helped to find a way to get a return passage home.<sup>50</sup> For the

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<sup>44</sup> J.H Muir, *Glasgow in 1901* (Glasgow: William Hodge and Company, 1901), p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> J. H Muir, p. 112.

<sup>46</sup> R.G.W Prescott, 'Lascar Seamen on the Clyde', in T.C Smout (ed.) *Scotland and the Sea* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1992), p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> R.G.W Prescott, 'Lascar Seamen on the Clyde', in T.C Smout (ed.) *Scotland and the Sea* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1992), p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Dundee Sailors Home', *Dundee Courier*, December 16, 1881, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, p. 60.

<sup>50</sup> 'Middlesex Sessions', *London Daily News*, January 9, 1880, p. 3.

many lascars who were religious facilities like the ones mentioned offered lascars an opportunity to meet and practice religion.

#### WHITE GAZE

A lack of understanding combined with curiosity meant lascars were often considered novelties by the British public. The following report illustrates the public reaction “rather a novelty in cargoes has arrived at Sunderland in the shapes of 71 Lascars. The lascars sailed from London on the *Chyebassa* then transferred to the *Fuzika* for a voyage to Calcutta.”<sup>51</sup> Lascars are often described as cargoes, Sinha does describe lascars as a commodity alongside jute, textiles and tea.<sup>52</sup> A further report describes the lascar novelty factor: ‘A good deal of excitement has been caused in this district owing to the arrival of sixty lascar from Bombay to man the telegraph steamer which is about to be launched from the Aberdeen Shipbuilding –yard.’<sup>53</sup> In 1901 ‘Considerable excitement was caused in Dundee by the appearance of a band of Lascars on the streets in the centre of the city’<sup>54</sup> The lascars had arrived in Dundee on board the S.S *Ameer* from Calcutta.<sup>55</sup> Lascar misery was also of interest ‘the spectacle of several poor lascars in the busy streets yesterday shivering in their thin cotton garments while offering peacock feather fans for sale seemed to add a few degrees to the frost register.’<sup>56</sup> The lascar novelty factor seems much more apparent outside of the metropolis where lascars were left to fend for themselves.

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<sup>51</sup> 'Arrival Lascars', *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, October 3, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Nitin Sinha, “Contract, Work, and Resistance: Boatmen in Early Colonial Eastern India, 1760s–1850s,” *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 59, no. S22 (2014), p. 23 footnote 50.

<sup>53</sup> 'Disaffected Lascars', *Dundee Courier*, May 4 1901, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> 'Disaffected Lascars', *Dundee Courier*, May 4 1901, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> 'Disaffected Lascars', *Dundee Courier*, May 4 1901, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> 'Agony', *Glasgow Evening Post*, January 4, 1893, p. 4.

Without a means to survive some lascars attempted to change their situation. Lascars resorted to legal and illegal activities, but all reflect the willingness and agency of lascars to change their situation. In 1881 three lascar seamen Alamed Ismal, Osman Baba, and Sobra Ormerod from the steamer *Clan Ronald* were charged with smuggling 40lbs of tobacco and 13 1/4 lbs, of cigars into Liverpool.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, lascars tried other means of making money. For instance, in 1892 on a Glasgow street ‘three small lightly clad Lascars were selling sticks on the pavement when a burley policeman appeared and ordered them to move on.’ The development of the incident also so give some insight into the public reaction. There are many further examples of lascars in various parts of Britain for example lascars in Glasgow in 1900 were “selling or trying to sell mats and carpet as well as corals, trinkets and native curios.”<sup>58</sup> There is a report from Hull in 1887 of lascars in the streets offering for sale bottles of currie powder, and such like stuff.<sup>59</sup> Animals were not off limits and Lascars were described as making a profitable trade in animals.; they were known to bring animals such as sheep for their consumption as well as animals such as snakes, monkeys and mongoose to sell for a profit once in Britain.<sup>60</sup>

#### **LASCARS AND BRITISH WOMEN**

Lascar interaction with British women was common. There has been little attention given until now to this subject, apart from passing mentions of lascar involvement with British women. Visram, Fisher, and Robinson Dunn have discussed sexual encounters and

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<sup>57</sup> 'Wholesale Smuggling by Lascar Seamen', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, June 17, 1881, p.7.

<sup>58</sup> 'Bubonic Plague in Glasgow', *Glasgow Herald*. 9: August 31, 1900; "Lascars in Glasgow", p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> 'Poor Hawkers: An Alleged Hardship', *Hull Daily Mail*, August 10, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> 'Lascars in Glasgow', p.3.

marriage between lascars and British Women.<sup>61</sup> Although important these discussions are brief and lack detail. The following account of Mary Ann Brown gives us a deeper insight into a relationship between a lascar and a British woman. Described in 1855 as ‘a rather good-looking woman aged 35,’<sup>62</sup> Mary Ann Brown at the time of the account she was under arrest for stealing £32.00 in Bank of England notes and gold belonging to a lascar named Sheik Haroo.<sup>63</sup> Mary had been living with Haroo for three months, and in her words, she was a ‘good wife and Haroo was very fond of her.’<sup>64</sup> Throughout the account, Mary Ann referred to Haroo as her husband.<sup>65</sup> Sheik Haroo operated a lodging house in Bluegate- fields Shadwell where he boarded and lodged many lascars.<sup>66</sup> Haroo's business was profitable, and he often entrusted large sums of money to Mary.<sup>67</sup> Although not officially married it is evident on what sort of terms Haroo and Mary had lived together, and at the end of her court appearance Mary and Haroo went home together, and she later attended as a witness for him in a case in which he was a defendant.<sup>68</sup> The reason for Mary and Haroo's relationship is unclear, it may have been for love or intimacy it may not. Haroo's wealth may have been attractive to Mary or Mary's status as British attractive to Haroo. For Haroo the latter would have been of no advantage to him, Robinson-Dunn discusses how English national identity became linked with contemporary gender politics.<sup>69</sup> Dunn suggests that the position of a female in society was determined by the

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<sup>61</sup> Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780-1860: Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny*, p. 60.

<sup>62</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> 'Mary Ann Brown,' *Morning Post*, 13 November 1855 p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century*. (Manchester, 2006), p. 159.

men in her life, as such the Anglicisation of lascars was not possible but women could be orientalised by lascars.<sup>70</sup>

Another way lascars interacted with women was through their lodgings. A result of living in the squalid conditions in places such as the Oriental quarter was that lascars mixed with a variety of people. Many of these women acquired close knowledge of the language and habits of lascars. Mrs Muhammed, Chinese Emma, Lascar Sally, Canton Kitty, and Calcutta Louise were all names attributed to women who associated with lascars. Salter describes how many acted interpreters for lascars in court.<sup>71</sup> Many of these women began their association with lascars by working at “houses with less than Christian intentions.”<sup>72</sup> One report describes these girls as a trap to catch the Easterns and relieve them of their money.<sup>73</sup> Lascar Sally was known to run rooms for Asiatics to smoke opium and she is thought to be the original opium smoker in Dickens unfinished novel of *Edwin Drood*.<sup>74</sup> Lascar Lizzie, Calcutta Loo and Singapore Sal were also names of women who used to associate with lascars. Singapore Sal's real name was Sarah Gaunt, and on her deathbed in a London infirmary ward, she confessed to having been privy to no fewer than seventeen murders of seamen all perpetrated in the one public house which she had been in the habit of using for more than twenty years.<sup>75</sup> The association of lascars with women such as Lascar Sal and Calcutta Loo illustrate the connections lascars developed within British society albeit often in lower socio-economic circles.

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<sup>70</sup> Robinson-Dunn, p. 159.

<sup>71</sup> Salter and Marsh -Hughes, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals*, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> 'Oriental Life in East London', *St James Gazette*, September 27 1897, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> 'Oriental Life in East London', *St James Gazette*, September 27 1897, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> 'An Opium Eater', *Dublin Daily Express*, October 9 1877; 'Death of Lascar Sal the Opium Smoker,' *Illustrated Police News*, November 21 1874, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Charles McNaught, "Roundabout Old East London", *East London Observer*, October 17 1916, p. 7.

Although lascars crews were male, there is evidence of women accompanying lascars on their journeys to Britain. In 1852 the crew of the *Lady Montague* left Camsing moon a small Chinese village between Hong Kong and Whampoa, much of the crew was made up of lascars. The Captain of the *Lady Montague* was prone to getting drunk, and one eyewitness report describes him flogging two lascar women wearing only cotton covering for a petty offence.<sup>76</sup> In 1853 after a violent incident on board the *Queen of Teign*. David Fairford, a North Country seamen, stated that one of the Serangs had his wife on board, but she was now dead.<sup>77</sup> It is clear that lascar sailors did in some form have female contact at sea. There been little study of this facet of lascar lives and is important that this be investigated more to highlight the important influences on lascar lives

#### **FUNERALS**

Many lascars had no say in why they remained in Britain. Lascar Funerals often attracted considerable public attention. Lascars were often dressed in traditional costume and carrying out unfamiliar religious rituals. In Glasgow, in 1878 the funeral of a lascar from the P & O ship *Khedive* attracted considerable attention.<sup>78</sup> In 1889 the unusual sight of a lascar funeral took place in Southampton for one of the coal trimmers on the steamer *Shannon* “The cries and lamentations on board the vessel were great all night. The native priest’s burnt incense, and the friends and comrades of the deceased sang melancholy

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<sup>76</sup> 'A Calamitous Voyage-The Lady Montague', *Sligo Champion*, August 2, 1852, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> 'The Cholera', *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, September 28 1853, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> 'A Lascars Funeral', *Glasgow Herald*, December 30, 1878, p. 4.

dirges. The body of the dead man was conveyed from the docks to the cemetery, a distance of about two miles, the procession was followed by 100 lascars.”<sup>79</sup>

As well practising elements of their culture lascars also took an interest in aspects of British culture. In 1894 two lascars fought each other the relative merits of the Clan Macpherson and the Clan MacArthur. “The Macphersons had a strong partner in Kesna while Gorrassie championed the cause of the MacArthurs with almost Celtic Fervour.”<sup>80</sup> Another interesting mention is of one lascar who stated he had “been to the exhibition early in the season and the Indian Theatre, they had much better snake-charming and juggling in India, however, he liked the exhibition.”<sup>81</sup> The lascar does not state what exhibition but at this period in Glasgow the Glasgow International Exhibition at the Kelvingrove Park was taking place was taking place.<sup>82</sup>

Fisher describes how “once ashore in Britain, locals in a labour gang often continued their shipboard camaraderie,”<sup>83</sup> but historians are silent on instances of tension between lascars. This example of lascars killing lascars is especially interesting because previous studies have always focused on lascar camaraderies and anti-British resistance. Fishers comments reflect this ‘lascars bonded aboard due to shared working and living conditions, and marine culture’<sup>84</sup> In 1858 Edward M’Gormin witnessed a Burra Tindall

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<sup>79</sup> 'Burying a Lascar', *Cornish Times* 14 September 1889, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> 'Lascar Clan Champions', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, December 29, 1894, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> 'Lascars in Glasgow', *Dundee Evening Post*, November 23, 1901, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Giles Waterfield, *The Peoples Galleries* (Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> Michael Fischer, 'Working across the Seas: Indian Maritime Labourers in India, Britain, and in Between, 1600-1857', *IRSH Supplement* 51, Supplement (2006): 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859006002604>, p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Fisher, “Indian Ghat Serangs as Maritime Labour Recruiting Intermediaries during the Age of Sail,” *Journal for Maritime Research* Vol. 16, no. No. 2 (2014): 153-166.

beat a Serang 9hsi superior) and took his silver call (Boatswains whistle).<sup>85</sup> Further evidence of lascars tension is evident ashore. In 1914 the lascars of the steamships *Caledonia* and *Morae* were involved in an organised wrestling match at Tilbury dock. The wrestling match developed into a violent brawl, resulting in the murder of Ran Fackerham by fellow lascars Goolan Akbar (fireman) and Kacker Nazen (a greaser 30 years old).<sup>86</sup> In 1903 Dena Mahomed was murdered by Achmet Gool Cader (a native of central India, who spoke Hindustani), both were crew members on-board the Beira a steamer moored in the river Tyne.<sup>87</sup> An interesting aspect to this account is that the last sighting of the two men before the murder was in the officer's mess, considering both were firemen their presence in part of the ship strictly the domain of British officers presents more questions that the author is unable to answer. The examples are silent on some of the nuanced causes of the tension, whether it be religion or personality differences but what is clear is that lascars often fought amongst themselves and not only and always against British superiors. Historians must be wary when portraying lascars as a unified group connected by solidarity not to neglect discussion of the friction that could exist between lascars.

This chapter has illustrated how lascar experiences in Britain have formed part of their identity. Lascars in Britain once they had left their ships whether through their agency or that of others often found themselves in destitute situations. Part of their survival was finding a place to stay many lascars gravitated towards the lower socio economic areas, but lascars could also avail of more evangelistic and missionary-run institutions. It is

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<sup>85</sup> 'Lambeth', *Morning Advertiser*, December 13, 1858, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> 'A Lascar Contest,' *Birmingham Mail*, March 16, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> 'The Fatal Quarrel Between Lascars', *Shields Daily Gazette*, September 25, 1903, p. 3.

apparent from newspaper reports that lascars acted to make their lives better by trying to make extra money. The agency of lascars in first choosing to leave their employment and secondly adapt survival techniques is a significant factor in their identity understanding who lascars were.

## Conclusion

By the early twentieth century lascars had worked in the British maritime industry for over 200 years. Lascars had always been regarded as different. But it was the period between 1849 and 1912 that lascars experienced a more intense focus on their difference. Being labelled a lascar established clear parameters of when a lascar worked, where he worked, how he worked, for how much he worked for, where he could live and work ashore, and where he could travel. All of these considerations were far less restrictive for British sailors than lascars. For those who were given the label lascar, their lives became one defined by coercion, uncertainty, physical and racial abuse and poverty.

This thesis has explored the lascar sailor in the British maritime world between 1849 and 1912. It has examined how the constructed label given to lascars reinforced their difference to British sailors. The thesis has examined three aspects of the lascars presence in the British maritime industry. Firstly, lascar connections to other maritime groups, secondly lascar recruitment processes and finally lascar experiences in Britain. This thesis has established that the characteristics of being cut-price and non-white labour was not exclusive to the label lascar. Other labels used to describe lascars such as Coolie and Asiatic were interchangeable with lascar. This illustrates the focus on difference rather than individual or specific distinctions. It has also illustrated that when the label lascar was used in a more nuanced fashion it was to control. The processes employed to control lascars were factors in enforcing difference. From the time lascars received that label they were highly regulated. Once in Britain the places lascars lived and the activities they were involved in further distanced them from how most of the British public conducted their day to day life.

A sailor was not born a lascar, the term was constructed in the seventeenth century to describe a sailor employed on European ships. Originally lascars may have been sailors from India but by the mid nineteenth century lascar crews were multinational in nature. Indian, Chinese, Malay, Burmese, Japanese and many others were classed as lascars. Lascars were considered no different to other non-white groups working in the British maritime world. The interchangeable nature of the term lascar reinforces their difference based on being non-white and cheap labour.

Working in the British maritime industry between 1849 and 1912 affected lascars more profoundly than any preceding period. No longer were lascars employed to only replace sailors as had been normal on EIC ships, lascars were now forming whole portions of deck and engine room crews. Prior to 1849, the use of lascars was limited by the application of laws that regulated the number of non-British seamen on a ship. The strict application of these laws in foreign ports contrasted with the liberal use of them outside of Britain contributed to an increase in lascar numbers. The increase in lascars after the relaxation of these laws coincided with the ascendancy of the steamship. The steamship introduced a new workforce defined by where sailors worked on the ship. The ships engine room would become synonymous with the lascar. Stoking furnaces, carrying and trimming coal in sweltering heat overseen by British engineers and officers was deemed suited to the lascar.

Being excluded from occupations such as engineer, and officer placed lascars at the bottom of the white British dominated hierarchy and British sailors held the positions of

power. This hierarchy extended to differences in employment processes and conditions. The difference between lascars was obvious in the signing of separate articles of agreement. Lascar articles as well as the occupations lascars were employed to do distinguished lascars from their white British counterparts. Lascars were paid less, ate less and had less accommodation space, these all signified lascar difference. If these factors limited lascar freedoms then they were further curtailed by the longer journey length compared to British sailors and by being forced to transfer ships. Controlling factors such as these worked hand in hand with attempts by British authorities to limit lascar visibility in Britain.

Being a British subject did not make lascars any different from those who were not. Although the stipulation of the 1823 lascar act had been removed after 1849, lascars were still not treated as British seamen although they were British subjects. Provisions in ships articles and legal constraints on employers meant that lascars were prevented from settling in Britain. The control of lascars by legislation and regulation in a sense this worked against the authorities as many lascars deserted their ships because of poor treatment and unpaid wages. As lascars left their ships because of conditions that reinforced their difference lascar agency to survive in Britain would further reinforce that difference.

Living in Britain for lascars could mean a life of destitution and poverty. The lack of resources available to lascars made it difficult for them to live. Many chose the company of other lascars and lived in poverty in areas such as the oriental quarter of London. By the mid-1850s lascars were beginning to attract the attention of missionary societies and

by 1857 homes such as the Strangers Home for Asiatics were providing accommodation, food, access to the Christian faith and the ability to get home or at least back to sea. Although far from home lascars continued traditional activities such as funeral and religious processions, these became events of curiosity for the British public and only acted to reinforce difference, often resulting in physical altercations.

Although the newspaper reports in this thesis provide differing views on lascars depending on who was reporting, they also present in depth evidence of how lascars were different. The reports tell us that lascars were perceived to have certain characteristics that combined to give substance to the label lascar. Reports tell us lascars were cheap employees and therefore stealing the livelihoods of British seamen. In addition, it was suggested that lascars were lazy and inadequate workers. Reports also tell us lascars were criminals and consorted with the lower classes of British society. But just as importantly as informing us on how lascars were labelled, these reports also inform us as to why lascars were in the positions they found themselves in.

In addition to being hired as cheap labour, technological and legal changes also influenced their employment. British seamen were becoming more unionised thus less men were choosing to go to sea. In a sense lascars were even considered different because many reports suggest they were better and more reliable than the British sailor. Lascars were being forced to desert because of poor treatment and with no welfare facilities were forced to survive as best they could. It was because of the enforcement of conditions to control lascars that often continued to perpetuate and reinforce their difference. Reports

of lascars and their experiences demonstrate contradictions and ambiguities with how they were viewed, but what is not in doubt is their value to the British maritime industry.

Men like Ahmet who came to Britain on a steamship may have left no trace for us to follow but this does not mean their contribution to the British maritime industry should be forgotten. Although existing in a world enforced by difference, lascars have along legacy that began with their role as one the world's first global workforces, a tradition that continues in the maritime workforces of today.

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**Table One: Number of Lascars Employed 1891-1912**

Taken from information in Fidler, Ceri-Anne. 'Lascars, c.1850-1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India.' PhD, Cardiff University, 2011.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Sailors</b>	<b>Foreigners</b>	<b>Lascars</b>
1891	240480	30267	24035
1892	241735	30899	25399
1893	240974	29519	24497
1894	240458	31050	26175
1895	240486	32335	28077
1896	220046	32754	29999
1897	218801	33613	31484
1898	220058	34987	32265
1899	221755	35731	33805
1900	225138	36534	36023
1901	225981	37174	37431
1902	230670	39315	39177
1903	233940	39828	41021
1904	235031	39101	42682
1905	238204	38993	43483
1906	243330	37826	44367
1907	247263	86780	44604
1908	243703	34032	44152
1909	241781	31173	42960
1910	243033	29522	43934
1911	247273	29892	45452
1912	251836	30027	47211

**Table Two: British wages compared with lascars**

From the report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Trade to inquire into certain questions affecting the Mercantile Marine 1903.

European Rating	Wages	Native rating	Wages Maximim
Boatswain	£5-6 10s	Serang (deck)	£2 6s
Boatswains Mate	£ 5	Tindel	£2 1s
Quartermaster	£4 10s	Seacunny	£1 13s
Able Seaman	£4	Lascar	£1 13s
Ordinary Seaman	£1-3	Topass	£1 1s
Forecastle Cook	£4	Bhandary	£1 6s
Donkeyman	£5-10	Serang (Firemans)	£2 6s
Greaser	£5	Paniwalla	£1 14s
Leading Fireman	£5	Tindel	£1 12s