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The Lost Child of Empire: Racialisation, Criminalisation, and The Lives of Lascars in Britain 1870-1920

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Abstract

This thesis examines the complex experiences of Lascar Sailors within the maritime world of the British Empire from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. Through five interlinked chapters, it examines how race, labour, authority, resistance, and imperial ideology intersected both aboard British ships and in the port cities of Britain. Central to this analysis is the figure of the Serang, a key intermediary between European officers and Lascar crews, whose role embodied both protection and coercion. The 1910 murder of Serang Habeed Sued by fellow Lascar Sulleyman Adam serves as a central case study for understanding tensions within colonial shipboard hierarchies.

The thesis analyses pivotal legal cases, including the 1874 trial of Captain Walters, the 1890 killing of Captain Lyall by Bhagwan Jassiwara, and the 1910 Adam case, to trace shifting modes of Lascar resistance, from legal appeals to internalised conflict. Beyond maritime spaces, the thesis interrogates racialised depictions of Lascars in Victorian Britain, particularly during the 1888 Whitechapel murders. It shows how Lascars were imagined as both victims and threats, reinforcing imperial anxieties about race, sexuality, and urban decline. This is further explored through the trope of the "shivering Lascar," a racialised symbol of vulnerability, disease, and exclusion, constructed through media, literature, and public health discourse.

The final chapter situates the 1919 Cardiff Race Riots within the longer history of port-city racial tensions, highlighting both inter-ethnic conflict and emergent solidarities among sailors of colour. By tracing this evolution from fragmentation to collective resistance, the thesis repositions dockside spaces as key sites of colonial encounter and working-class struggle. Drawing on court records, missionary reports, newspapers, and alternative archives, this study rethinks British imperial labour history by centring the lived experiences of marginalised seamen. It argues that Lascars were not peripheral figures but vital agents whose lives illuminate the emotional and structural contradictions of empire.

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Glossary:

Aft – A nautical term meaning towards the rear (stern) of the ship.

Belaying Pin – A nautical instrument traditionally used to secure lines on square-rigged ships. A solid metal or wooden bar with a curved top portion and cylindrical bottom part.

Bhandary – The ship's steward or cook, in charge of provisions and preparing meals for the lascar crew.

Cassab – The ship's butcher, responsible for slaughtering animals on board and preparing meat for the crew.

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

First Mate – The officer second in command to the master of a merchant ship.

Flogging – A punishment in which the victim is hit repeatedly with a whip or stick.

Hindoostani (as region) – An older colonial-era term for *Hindustan*, broadly referring to northern India, particularly the Indo-Gangetic plain. The boundaries of the term shifted over time, but it was commonly used by Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe large parts of the Indian subcontinent

Hindoostani (as language) – An older English spelling for *Hindustani*, a lingua franca that developed in northern India from the interaction of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and local Indic languages. It served as a common language for trade and administration during the Mughal and colonial periods and is the historical root of modern Hindi and Urdu.

Hindoo – An archaic English spelling for 'Hindu' used widely in colonial-era texts. It was often employed in a generalising or stereotypical way to refer to Indians, sometimes inaccurately applied to all South Asians regardless of religion.

Hindu – A follower of *Hinduism*, a diverse set of religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions with origins in the Indian subcontinent. The term also functions as a broad identity marker, though its modern use has been shaped by both indigenous understandings and colonial classification.

Kalasi – A sailor or deckhand, usually tasked with rigging, hauling, and other basic shipboard duties; sometimes used interchangeably with 'Lascar' but often signalling a slightly more skilled position.

Lalchi – A traditional upper garment.

Lascar – A general term for South Asian seamen employed on European ships, typically occupying the lowest deckhand roles with heavy manual labour. From the Persian-Urdu word *lashkar*.

Paniwallah – Literally 'water-man'; responsible for managing and distributing fresh water supplies to the crew.

Rope's End – A short piece of rope used for flogging, especially on ships.

Secunnie – An Indian Quartermaster.

Serang – The head of the Lascar crew, equivalent to a boatswain or foreman, responsible for overall discipline, organisation, and communication between European officers and the Indian crew.

Spar – A strong pole (usually made of wood or metal) used on ships to support sails, rigging, or other gear. In this context, Abdoolah sat down near one of these structural poles.

Strangers Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders – The home served as a repatriation centre where sailors could be sought and re-employed for return journeys to the East.

Tindal – The Serang's deputy, often supervising smaller groups of men (a 'gang') and acting as second-in-command on deck.

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

Topi – Indian cap or headdress.

Tramp Shipping – A system of maritime transport in which vessels have no fixed routes or schedules, instead operating on a charter basis and sailing wherever cargo is available, typically bulk goods such as coal, grain, or ore.

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.

Windlass – Nautical equipment used to move heavy weights.

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Introduction:

> "I am 25 years of age. I joined the 'Newby Hall' about 12 months ago. I knew the Serang before I joined the 'Newby Hall.' We both belonged to a small native state near Bombay. We were always friends. We ate together and were very friendly. I never took drink before I met the deceased. No, the Serang taught me to drink. He was two or three years older than I. On 22nd August, we went ashore and drank. Before going on shore, I and Serang and five other Lascars from other ships drank a five-shilling bottle of whisky between us. The Serang had brought it on board to treat his friends. They were all Lascars from three different ships. We drank it after we had had our meals at 6:30. We then went ashore and Serang And I had two glasses of beer each in a shop. The Serang invited me out to a drinking bout. We went into various ships and were put out of one. I do not remember coming back to the boat or what I did. I remember nothing after having been put out of the shop until I was in the Police Cell. I forget everything that happened before that." [1]

These were the words of Sulleyman Adam, a Lascar sailor whose life and trial, following a murder committed on 22 August 1910, provides a rare aperture into the intimate, hierarchical, and often violent world inhabited by South Asian seamen under British maritime rule. His statement, delivered as part of a criminal investigation in the early-twentieth century, opens this thesis not merely for its narrative poignancy, but because it encapsulates the deeply entangled personal, social, and imperial relationships that defined the Lascar experience. From recruitment in South Asia and the authority of the Serang, to the camaraderie and control aboard ships, and the fraught encounters with law, race, and representation ashore, Adam's life offers a lens through which the broader historical landscape of Lascar life may be critically re-examined.

His further testimony, recorded under interrogation and cross-examination, deepens this picture, revealing not only the haze of intoxication and loss of control, but also the racialised structure of suspicion and guilt that framed the treatment of Lascars under colonial justice:

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[1] National Record of Scotland (hereafter NRS), HH16/117, Report to the Secretary for Scotland by Lord Ardwall on the Case of Sulleyman Adam.

> **Interrogated:** "Did you stab the Serang?"
>
> **Answer:** "I do not remember doing so, but am very sorry it has been done."
>
> **Cross-examined:** "The boats from which the other Lascars came to drink were the *Trentham Hall*, a Rangoon boat, and a Clan boat, of neither of which I remember the names. The men came on board quite openly. I ate with the Serang and the company in our usual eating place. It was in the Serang's room we had the whisky. When he brought it on board he told me of it. It was then one o'clock in the day. As far as I remember, in addition to the whisky I had two pints of beer and two small portions of whisky. I have no recollection of how I got back to the ship. I do not remember Serang leaving me or of him being angry with me. I never owned the knife now shown me; I never saw it before. The pair of drawers and jacket in no.6 belonged to me (shown no.5); these are my trousers. I cannot say how they came to be stained with blood. I have no recollection of anything that was said by the Serang after my return to the ship."[2]

Adam was convicted of murder, but the jury recommended mercy due to his youth, lack of premeditation, provocation, and good character.[3] Community petitions and missionaries' testimony supported clemency, emphasising his sobriety, peaceable nature, and limited English.[4] Initially imprisoned in Scotland, Adam's mental health deteriorated from isolation, homesickness, and the harsh climate.[5] His death sentence was commuted to life penal servitude, and he was eventually transferred to India, where he was confined in a lunatic asylum. [6]

The fragmented nature of Adam's memory, shaped by alcohol, trauma, and interrogation, offers not only a glimpse into shipboard life and its codes of loyalty and violence, but also shows how colonial legal systems constructed Lascar identities through suspicion, silence, and partial testimony. His voice, simultaneously personal and politicised, becomes a critical archive, one that animates this study's exploration of the lived realities of South Asian seafarers in the imperial maritime world.

Introduction

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[2] Ibid.

[3] NRS, HH16/117, Report by Andrew Jameson on Case of Sulleyman Adam, 21 October 1910.

[4] NRS, HH16/117, Letter from Mersey Mission recommending reprieve, 27 October 1910.

[5] NRS, HH16/117, Prison Case File of Sulleyman Adam, 30 March 1911.

[6] NRS, HH16/117, Letter from the Under Secretary for Scotland to the Prison Commission regarding the transfer of convict Suleiman Adam to the Bombay Police Authorities, 1 April 1912.

In his 1980 essay, Conrad Dixon referred to Indian seafarers as the 'forgotten seamen', a phrase that has been both cited and challenged by scholars seeking to recover the histories of South Asian maritime labour.[7] While recent decades have seen a resurgence of interest in Lascars, the South Asian sailors who crewed British ships, this scholarship has largely focused on structural analyses, recruitment patterns, labour laws, maritime hierarchies, and imperial regulation. What remains less developed is a human account of Lascar life that moves beyond public discourse and institutional frameworks to include the lived, personal experiences of the men themselves.

This thesis seeks to address that gap. It uses the life of Sulleyman Adam, a Lascar whose testimony survives through a criminal trial in the early-twentieth century, as an aperture through which to re-examine the broader world of Lascar seafarers. In doing so, it offers a more holistic account, one that begins with their origins in South Asian villages, explores their relationships with Serangs and their recruitment into maritime labour, examines the dynamics of shipboard life (including violence, camaraderie, and resistance), and traces their experiences ashore in British ports such as London and Cardiff.

Unlike studies that have examined seafarers through the lens of regulation or representation alone, this thesis is centred around Lascar voices and lived experience. It draws on rare fragments of testimony like that of Sulleyman Adam, who narrated his friendship with a Serang, his first encounter with alcohol, and his disorienting plunge into a police cell. His story captures the entanglement of empire, hierarchy, masculinity, and criminalisation that structured many Lascar lives, but also opens a window into intimacy, memory, and personal agency.

In what follows, the historical conditions under which Lascar labour emerged in colonial South Asia, the mechanisms of control and solidarity on board ships, and the fraught landscapes of racial representation, violence, and community life in the imperial metropole will be outlined. But first, it is necessary to clarify terminology and contextualise the category of the 'Lascar' itself: who they were, how they were seen, and why their stories demand a thorough exploration.

Defining the Lascar

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[7] Conrad Dixon, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen," in R. Ommer and G. Panting, eds., *The Working Men Who Got Wet* (St John's, Newfoundland: Maritime History Group, 1980), 265.

The term *Lascar* refers to Indian Ocean seamen who, from the late eighteenth century, became an increasingly significant part of the British maritime workforce. As Dixon explains, the word derives from the Persian and Urdu *Lashkar*, meaning army or camp, and was initially applied to artillerymen serving at sea as 'gun-Lascars', before coming into wider use as a collective term for Indian sailors; the same linguistic root also produced the Swahili *Askari*, meaning private soldier.[8] Aaron Jaffer similarly traces the origins of the term to the Persian *Lashkar*, noting that while it came to be strongly associated with South Asian sailors, throughout the nineteenth century it functioned as a broad, racialised label for almost any non-European sailor from the Indian Ocean world.[9]

Ravi Ahuja deepens this analysis, showing that although South Asian seafarers themselves preferred terms such as *Khalasi* ('freed person') or *Jehazi* ('ship people'), colonial authorities imposed the label *Lascar* as a marker of legal and social inferiority: "If an 'unskilled' Asian labourer was not a worker but a 'coolie' and an Indian infantryman not a soldier but a 'sepoy', an Indian Ocean sailor was not a seaman but merely a 'Lascar'".[10] By the nineteenth century, the designation had become a legal category, codifying discrimination by restricting pay, accommodation, contracts, and rights, which made Lascars attractive to employers as both cheaper and more controllable than European seamen.[11] Although Lascars were not employed in large numbers on European-registered vessels before 1780, by 1914 they comprised 17.5 percent of all those serving on British-registered ships, underscoring their centrality to imperial maritime labour.[12]

Who were the Lascars?

The category of the Lascar was itself historically unstable. Although the term entered European maritime usage in the early modern period and later appeared in both British and Indian shipping law, its meaning remained fluid and context-dependent rather than fixed or self-evident. In legal usage, Lascar referred in part to seafarers employed under specific contractual arrangements known as Lascar agreements or Lascar articles.[13] The overwhelming majority of

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780–1860* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 1–2.

[10] 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 *Spaces of Disorder: The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region*, ed. Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tiné (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 14–15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Dixon, "*Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen*," 265.

[13] Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalising Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2012). 28.

Indian seafarers employed on deep-sea British vessels were contracted under these articles, which, unlike the single-voyage agreements more typical of European and American sailors, bound men to extended periods of service, often one to two years and multiple voyages, and sharply restricted their right to discharge in British ports.[14]

These contractual distinctions both defined and blurred the category. While Lascar articles marked a formal legal boundary between European and Indian seafarers, they did not produce a stable or uniform understanding of who counted as a Lascar.[15] Beyond law and contract, the term circulated far more loosely. Ashore in Britain, it was often used generically to describe Indian seafarers of all ranks and departments, while in British India it could refer equally to porters and other forms of unskilled manual labour, encouraging conflation with the figure of the 'coolie.' At sea, by contrast, Lascar possessed a narrower meaning, denoting only ordinary deck hands and excluding senior crew such as Serangs or workers in engine-room and saloon departments.[16]

The term's geographical and racial scope was similarly unstable. By the nineteenth century, 'Lascar' was used to group together seafarers from across the Indian Ocean world, including Indians, Malays, Chinese, and East Africans, revealing how a single administrative label was imposed upon a highly heterogeneous workforce.[17] Between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term also overlapped with broader imperial classifications such as 'Indian,' 'native,' and 'Asiatic,' further blurring any clear ethnic or occupational definition.[18] Its legal definition shifted repeatedly in response to political pressure, labour unrest, and racial anxieties, expanding or contracting depending on whether imperial authorities sought to restrict non-European seafarers' access to Britain or to preserve mechanisms of labour control. Rather than functioning as a neutral occupational descriptor, Lascar operated as a malleable administrative and racial category whose meanings were continually reshaped by imperial labour policy and maritime practice.[19]

The instability of the term Lascar was not merely semantic but deeply political. In the aftermath of the First World War, rising metropolitan hostility toward colonial seafarers prompted British authorities to selectively revive, stretch, or abandon earlier legal definitions of Lascar status according to circumstance. While Chinese seafarers who had served under modified Lascar agreements during the war were subsequently excluded from the category to avoid domestic opposition, Arab and Somali crews engaged at Aden were reclassified as 'Adenese Lascars' precisely in order to prevent their discharge in Britain.[20] In a striking illustration of this opportunism, Punjabi seafarers were even repatriated to Aden in 1921 on the spurious grounds that they too were 'Adenese Lascars.'[21] Such contradictions reveal that Lascar functioned less as a stable occupational descriptor than as a regulatory device, manipulated to restrict mobility, manage labour markets, and protect white seamen. Lascar agreements thus operated as the government's principal legal instrument for racialised containment, their effectiveness dependent on the continual redefinition of who could be brought within the category

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[14] Ibid., 28-29.
[15] Ibid., 29
[16] Ibid., 28-30
[17] Norma Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 13, no. 2–3 (1994): 7–21, 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1994.9974839.
[18] Balachandran, *Globalising Labour*, 30.
[19] Ibid., 33.

Lascar Map of Britain

British port cities formed a distinctive urban geography within which racialised maritime labour, including Lascars, was unevenly concentrated and locally shaped. Although there were 110 foreign trade ports in Britain in 1870, the development of steam shipping increasingly concentrated overseas trade into a small number of major ports with deep-water facilities, extensive dock systems, and strong inland transport links.[22] These included London, Liverpool, and Glasgow, all of which later experienced racial violence in 1919. As Jacqueline Jenkinson notes, ports were 'distinctive urban environments,' characterised by high population density, casualised employment, and chronic poverty rooted in irregular dock and seafaring labour.[23] Overcrowded waterfront districts, shaped by the spatial constraints of docks and the absence of speculative housing, became sites where global labour migration and local deprivation collided.

London occupied a unique position as the metropolitan hub of empire and migration. Its vast dock complex, stretching some seventy miles by the early twentieth century, handled both cargo and passenger traffic on a global scale, accounting alongside Liverpool for 58 per cent of all insured British shipping.[24] Longstanding black settlement in London dated back to the sixteenth century, concentrated particularly in East End districts such as Limehouse and Bow, close to the West India and East India docks. By the 1850s, of the approximately 10,000 to 12,000 Lascar and Chinese sailors engaged in the 'Country' trade, around half were transported to the United Kingdom each year, with Indians making up about 60 per cent of this group.[25] By 1901, approximately 37,000 Lascars were employed under Lascar agreements.[26] This figure rose to 51,000-52,000 by 1914, when they constituted roughly 17-20 per cent of British seamen.[27] Unlike other ports, London also sustained a small but significant black middle class of professionals, students, and imperial officials alongside a much larger population of poor seafarers and dock workers.[28] This social diversity distinguished London from other ports, even as it shared similar patterns of racial segregation and overcrowded housing.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 34.

[22] Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 12.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 14.

Liverpool and Glasgow represented two further, contrasting poles within Britain's port geography. Liverpool's deep-water docks positioned it at the centre of Atlantic and imperial trade, particularly with West Africa, and facilitated the early establishment of a large and settled black population. By 1911, Liverpool housed an estimated 3,000 black residents, over half of whom lived in slum conditions in central and southern districts.[29] Shipping companies such as Elder Dempster maintained permanent pools of African sailors in the city, reinforcing Liverpool's role as Britain's principal site of African maritime settlement.[30] Glasgow, by contrast, combined heavy industrial output with rapid dock expansion following the deepening of the River Clyde. By 1907, Glasgow harbour covered 206 acres, and the city supported over 1,000 steamships by 1905, second only to London and Liverpool.[31] Between 1895 and 1901, Lascars consistently constituted a substantial proportion of seamen passing through the Port of Glasgow, ranging from 25% in 1895 to 30% in 1899 and 1901 of the total workforce.[32] Their numbers increased steadily over this period, from 8,347 (25%) in 1895 to 12,620 (30%) in 1901, reflecting Glasgow's growing reliance on Lascars to sustain its merchant marine operations.[33] Admissions to the Sailors' Home rose sharply during the First World War, from 146 lascars in 1916 to 1,749 in 1917, reflecting acute labour shortages and the redirection of imperial manpower.[34] Yet Glasgow's port districts were among the poorest in Britain; as one contemporary remarked, ‘the most poverty-stricken home in Glasgow’s slums was that of a marine fireman.’[35] High mortality rates and severe overcrowding underpinned the volatility of the city’s racial and labour relations.

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[25] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (Pluto Press, 2002), 32-33.
[26] R. G. W. Prescott, "Lascar Seamen on the Clyde," in *Scotland and the Sea*, ed. T. C. Smout (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 201.
[27] Visram, *Asians in Britain, 54.*
[28] Jenkinson, *Black 1919,* 15.
[29] Ibid., 16.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 13.
[32] Prescott, *Scotland and the Sea,* 201.
[33] Ibid, 201
[34] Jenkinson, *Black 1919,* 53.

Smaller ports such as South Shields and Hull illustrate how scale did not preclude intensity. South Shields emerged as the largest coal-exporting port in north-east England and, like Cardiff, functioned as a tramp steamer hub that attracted transient and settled overseas sailors. Arab (Adenese and Somali) settlement expanded sharply during the First World War: from fewer than 100 residents in 1914 to between 300 and 600 by 1920, concentrated in boarding houses near the waterfront.[36] Hull, meanwhile, combined coal exports, fishing, and migrant trans-shipping with some of the worst housing conditions in the country, described by mid-century observers as resembling a ‘gigantic slum.’[37] By the Edwardian period, black and South Asian seafarers in Hull were sufficiently impoverished that some entered the workhouse, underscoring the precariousness of port-city life.[38]

Finally, the south Wales ports, above all Cardiff, demonstrate how imperial trade could compress global labour into highly localised urban spaces. Cardiff’s dominance of the coal export trade and its centrality to tramp shipping meant that an estimated 30,000 crews per year were taken on there before 1914.[39] This made the city a magnet for overseas sailors, while the compact geography of the docklands concentrated settlement in Butetown. By the early twentieth century, Cardiff housed Britain’s third-largest black population, after London and Liverpool, with an estimated 700 black residents in 1914, rising sharply during the war.[40] Similar, though smaller, cosmopolitan settlements developed in Newport and Barry as dock expansion reshaped once-small towns into global ports.[41] Across all these ports, success in overseas trade produced shared conditions of overcrowding, ill health, and labour insecurity, ensuring that racialised maritime workers experienced Britain not as a uniform national space, but as a series of sharply differentiated port-city worlds.[42]

Taken together, this outlines the differentiated geography of Britain’s port cities, highlighting the distinct local contexts of London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Cardiff, and other sites that recur throughout this thesis. Rather than offering a comprehensive or systematically quantified survey, it draws on a limited but influential body of secondary scholarship to trace the varying configurations of race, labour, and urban space within each port. The unevenness of the surviving evidence, particularly regarding the precise distribution of Lascars and other racialised maritime workers, means that this account is necessarily selective and indicative. Nonetheless, it establishes the spatial framework for the analysis that follows, while also indicating the value of further research into the localised composition of maritime labour across Britain's port cities.

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[35] Ibid.,12.
[36] Ibid.,18.
[37] Ibid.,14.
[38] Ibid.,17.
[39] Ibid.,15.
[40] Ibid.,17.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.,19.

Methodology

There is no record of Adam in the existing historiography, no prior scholarly mention or recovered testimony, only fragments in legal documents, court and newspaper reports, and prison files. Yet, even with these limited traces, his story gestures toward a much larger set of questions about the lives of South Asian seamen in the British Empire, about the power dynamics aboard ships, the hierarchies among colonial subjects, and the systemic violences that shaped their working and social lives. Rather than treating Adam solely as a subject of criminal history, this thesis uses his life, however fragmented, as a means of exploring the broader experience of Lascars in imperial Britain. It seeks to reconstruct not only what led him to that moment of crisis, but the wider world he moved through: a world defined by mobility, labour, violence, kinship, and resistance.

In doing so, this thesis draws methodological inspiration from the work of Saidiya Hartman and Julia Laite. Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) demonstrates how lives obscured by the archive can be re-imagined with care, refusing both erasure and overdetermination, while Laite's *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey* (2021) shows how fragmentary evidence from legal and press records can be used to reconstruct both individual experience and the broader structures of exploitation that shaped it.[43] Both works offer models for writing history that is attentive to the gaps in the archive while still committed to recovering the humanity of those who moved through it. Following their lead, this thesis aims to position Sulleyman Adam's partial and interrupted story within a much wider frame of imperial labour, race, and violence.

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[43] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (London: Profile Books, 2021).

Saidiya Hartman exemplifies the power of blending historical facts with literary imagination to illuminate the lives of real historical actors. In the case of Hartman's work in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments,* she skilfully navigates archival documents, weaving a captivating narrative that transcends the limits of official records. Hartman breaks open these archival materials to unveil the rich social upheaval that transformed the lives of black women in the twentieth century. The depth and richness of her storytelling not only reveal new aspects of black social life but also expose the limitations of historical narratives that often relegate the lives of black women to a marginal status. Drawing inspiration from Hartman, the exploration of Sulleyman Adam's life as a Lascar early-twentieth century Britain aims to bring together different characters throughout British history. Like Hartman, this work seeks to transcend the official record, revealing the intricate intersections of themes such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality in the lives of Lascars.

Julia Laite's work, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey,* provides another model for historical research. Mara Arts argues, 'The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey combines meticulous historical research with an engaging writing style to reveal new and perhaps unexpected elements to a period and topic with which the reader may be familiar'.[44] Laite's approach mirrors the intention of the study on Sulleyman Adam, as it aims to reveal the complexities and nuances of a historical figure's life and how these fit into the wider context of the Lives of Lascars at the time.

The surviving archival records, sparse and fragmented, reveal that Adam was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death (which was later repealed).[45] The incident was likely treated as yet another case of colonial criminality, rendered intelligible within existing narratives of Lascar volatility, violence, and disorder. And yet, the very opacity of Adam's life before the murder demands a pause. Who was he before this act of violence? What relationships and hierarchies shaped his journey from port to prison? What can be recovered, reconstructed, or even imagined responsibly, from the gaps?

This thesis does not aim to uncover every detail of Sulleyman Adam's biography. Rather, it uses what is known of his life and trial as a lens through which to explore the broader, complex, and understudied experiences of Lascars in the British Empire. His life, like those of thousands of other South Asian seamen who worked aboard British vessels from the sixteenth century onwards, was lived across multiple geographies, linguistic zones, and legal regimes. But unlike many studies that treat Lascars as abstract labouring bodies or racialised figures of imperial discourse, this thesis foregrounds the personal, the affective, and the intimate dimensions of Lascar life, without losing sight of the broader structural forces of empire, race, and class.

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[44] Mara Arts, "The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice," *The London Journal* 47, no. 2 (2022): 234–35, 234, https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2021.1973211.
[45] NRS, HH16/117, Letter about Reprieved Lascar, November 4, 1910.

Historiography of Lascars

Historians such as Rozina Visram, Gopalan Balachandran, Ceri Anne Fidler, and Aaron Jaffer have offered valuable insights into the public lives of Lascars, focusing on recruitment practices, the racialised architecture of maritime law, the role of unions, and imperial anxieties around Asian labour. This scholarship has been foundational in re-inserting Lascars into British imperial history and contesting their marginalisation within dominant narratives of seafaring. Yet much of this work remains framed around institutional, representational, or economic histories. The lives of Lascars, their interpersonal relationships, the affective hierarchies within shipboard communities, and their experiences of longing, violence, protest, love, or despair, remain less thoroughly explored.

The history of Lascars has gradually gained attention within the broader historiography of migration, empire, and maritime labour in Britain. Between 1870 and 1920, Lascars played a crucial yet often overlooked role in shaping Britain's imperial economy and its multicultural social fabric, especially in port cities such as London, Cardiff, and Liverpool. Early scholarship on imperial maritime labour tended to marginalise Lascars within broader narratives of empire, with sustained historiographical interest only emerging from the latter half of the twentieth century.

Initial studies of British maritime history, particularly those written before the 1970s, often relegated Lascars to the footnotes of imperial shipping histories. Works such as C. Northcote Parkinson's *Trade in the Eastern Seas* (1937) and John Hobson's earlier critiques of empire focused largely on the economic structures of imperial trade, without significant engagement with the human experiences of colonial seafarers.[46] It was not until historians began to examine the racialised hierarchies within imperial labour systems that Lascars received closer scholarly scrutiny.

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[46] See Cyril Northcote Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas, 1793–1813* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937); John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1902).

A pivotal shift came with the work of Rozina Visram, whose *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes* (1986) offered one of the first sustained accounts of South Asians in Britain, including Lascars, bringing their marginalised voices into British social history.[47] Visram's pioneering research opened a path for future historians to explore the intersection of race, class, and imperial labour in more detail. Her approach was deeply rooted in social history, foregrounding the everyday experiences of South Asian migrants rather than treating them as mere appendages of imperial structures. Visram later expanded this work in *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (2002), which offered a broader, panoramic survey of the long history of Asian presence in Britain.[48] While *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes* focused on the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, *Asians in Britain* traced connections back to the early modern period, firmly establishing South Asians as part of Britain's national story across centuries.

Visram's *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes* represents one of the earliest attempts to provide a broad social history of South Asians in Britain. Visram foregrounds the everyday lives of Lascars ashore, detailing their struggles with poverty, racial prejudice, and exclusion. She draws on a wide range of sources, including newspaper reports and charity records, to uncover the presence of Lascars in urban spaces such as boarding houses, seamen's missions, and charitable institutions. Importantly, Visram highlights how Lascars were often portrayed as destitute or vagrant by local authorities, shaping associations between South Asian seafarers and criminality in the public imagination.[49] While her pioneering work draws attention to crime and encounters with the law, these are largely framed within a broader narrative of social exclusion. This thesis builds on that foundation by directly interrogating how criminalisation itself structured the lives and experiences of Lascars in Britain.

In addition to archival research, the oral testimony collected by Caroline Adams, Yousuf Choudhury, and Bashir Maan offers an invaluable perspective on the experiences of South Asian communities in Britain, particularly during the early to mid-twentieth century. Caroline Adams's *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers* (1987) and Yousuf Choudhury's *Sons of the Empire* focus predominantly on the Sylheti Bengali community, many of whom were former Lascars or descendants of Lascars.[50] Their oral histories capture the struggles of former seamen in adapting to life in Britain, including their battles against poverty, racism, and legal discrimination. Bashir Maan's work, particularly *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Scotland* (1992), similarly draws on community memory to reveal the hardships faced by early South Asian settlers, some of whom arrived via maritime labour routes. The book traces the arrival, settlement, and development of Asian (mainly Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi) communities across Scotland, from the late-nineteenth century to the late-twentieth century.[51] While these oral histories offer rich, personal accounts of discrimination and resilience, they are more focused on family life, settlement, and work rather than on criminality or the justice system. This thesis complements these contributions by foregrounding legal records and court cases to offer a new angle on Lascars' experiences of marginalisation.

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[47] Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).
[48] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
[49] Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 47.
[50] Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain* (London: Eastside Books, 1994); Yousuf Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire: Oral History from the Bangladeshi Seamen Who Served on British Ships during the 1939–45 War* (Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group, 1995).

Michael Fisher's analysis of Lascars in *Counterflows to Colonialism* explores their recruitment, employment, and experiences in Britain during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. He traces the transition from informal, ad hoc hiring practices to the establishment of the official contract depot system (1797-1813), which sought to regulate their service in response to changing labour demands. Fisher discusses how London's docklands became a focal point for Lascar communities, particularly as growing numbers of seamen found themselves stranded or destitute. Their presence in Britain generated public debate, with particular controversy between 1813 and 1816 over their treatment by the East India Company. Fisher shows how Lascars became entangled in wider discussions about imperial responsibility, race, and labour exploitation. His work situates Lascars at the heart of early-nineteenth century imperial labour networks, while also revealing their marginal yet symbolically powerful place in British society.[52]

While Fisher emphasises the material conditions of recruitment, employment, and survival of Lascars in Britain, Marika Sherwood's work highlights the legal and ideological frameworks that defined and restricted their place within the imperial order. Together, these perspectives show how questions of labour and citizenship were deeply intertwined in shaping the lives of Indian seafarers. Sherwood's work, particularly in *New Community* and other outlets, examines how the British state manipulated the legal status of Lascars to serve its imperial and economic interests. Sherwood demonstrates that Indian seamen were often classified as 'British' when their labour was needed, especially during times of industrial expansion or war, but were otherwise excluded from the rights and protections of British citizenship. She highlights key legislative changes, such as the 1849 redefinition of British seafarers to include 'natural born British subjects', but only selectively extending this status to Asiatic sailors from East India Company territories. Sherwood argues that this fluid approach to nationality was driven by the growing demand for shipping generated by the Industrial Revolution.[53]

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[51] Bashir Maan, *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992).
[52] Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 137–77.

Sherwood's research also explores the broader context of racial discrimination faced by Lascars, including resistance from British trade unions and employers, as well as efforts to organise Indian seamen during the interwar years. While providing important insights into the structural exclusions faced by Lascars, her work tends to portray these men as passive victims of imperial policies, with less focus on their individual or collective agency. Furthermore, by centring solely on Indian seafarers, Sherwood's analysis does not fully consider how their experiences compared to those of other non-European maritime workers within Britain's imperial framework.[54]

Building on this foundation, Shompa Lahiri explored how Lascars fit into broader narratives of race, empire, and migration. Lahiri's *Indians in Britain* explores how Lascars, as part of the wider Indian population in Britain, often occupied the most precarious social positions. Seen by many in Britain as transient and marginal, they were subject to racial prejudice, exclusion from respectable spaces, and often associated with poverty or vice.[55] Their experiences reveal the sharp contrasts between elite Indian visitors and the working-class seafarers who struggled to assert belonging in an often-hostile imperial metropole.

Maritime historians such as Gopalan Balachandran offered new directions by situating Lascars within global labour histories. Balachandran's *Globalizing Labour?* (2012) provided a comparative approach, showing how the experiences of Lascars connected with global patterns of indentured and coerced labour within empire. His analysis demonstrated how Lascars were subjected to highly racialised employment practices, often bound by restrictive contracts that left them vulnerable to exploitation both at sea and on land.[56] Moreover, as Balachandran demonstrates, one of the central issues throughout this period was the fluid and contested definition of Indian seafarers, often grouped under the term 'Lascar,' a category whose meanings shifted across legal, occupational, and racial contexts.[57] This thesis builds on these foundations by further unravelling the multi-dimensional meanings of the term 'Lascars', exploring how its usage shifted across different contexts, including legal, maritime, and social settings. By tracing how the term was contested and adapted, this study demonstrates that 'Lascar' was not a fixed identity, but a flexible category shaped by imperial hierarchies, racial perceptions, and localised encounters.

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[53] Marika Sherwood, "Race, Nationality and Employment among Lascar Seamen, 1660 to 1945," *New Community: A Journal of Research and Policy on Ethnic Relations* 17 (1991): 229–44, 232.
[54] Ibid., 229–44
[55] Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880–1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 1.
[56] Balachandran, *Globalising Labour?* 2012.

A crucial historiographical development has been the growing interest in the cultural and political agency of Lascars. Scholars like Georgie Wemyss have shown how Lascars were not merely passive victims of imperial structures, but actively engaged in cultural assertion, religious practices, and political protest. This has shifted the narrative from one of victimhood to one of agency and resistance. Wemyss highlights the liminal status of Lascars, which made it difficult for them to resist the discrimination they faced. Classified under 'racially discriminatory shipping legislation which denied them employment rights won by European crew members', Lascars occupied 'enforced liminal spaces' both at sea and ashore.[58] They worked 'strictly monitored and often violently enforced four-hour shifts on board', but in Britain were left 'waiting, without employment, for returning ships'. Although subjects of the British Empire, they were prevented from legally settling or working in Britain, excluding them from the category of the British working class. As Wemyss argues, this marginal position restricted the ways Lascars could resist both legal and illegal discrimination and contributed to their erasure in mainstream narratives of British working-class history.[59]

The intersection of Lascars' histories with those of race riots, particularly the Cardiff and Liverpool disturbances of 1919, has drawn attention in more recent scholarship, notably in the works of Jacqueline Jenkinson and Laura Tabili.[60] These studies reveal how postwar economic uncertainty and entrenched racial hierarchies led to violent confrontations between white Britons and racialised colonial workers, including Lascars. Laura Tabili's *We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (1994) has been pivotal in connecting the experiences of migrant workers, including Lascars, with issues of racial exclusion and labour discrimination.[61] Tabili situates Lascars within the broader working-class experience of empire, emphasising how they were systematically excluded from both skilled labour markets and British working-class solidarity. Crucially, as noted, 'Employers' bargaining position with Lascars and other colonised workers was enhanced by British colonial governments' interest in keeping those populations unorganised and politically and economically subordinate.'[62] This structural subordination reinforced the marginalisation of Lascars, limiting their opportunities and increasing their vulnerability. While her work sheds light on the structural racism that shaped Lascar life in Britain, particularly in relation to housing, employment, and trade unionism, she does not focus directly on criminality or the policing of Lascar communities.[63] Nevertheless, her analysis of the racialised boundaries of belonging in Britain helps contextualise why Lascars were often viewed with suspicion by authorities and subjected to heightened surveillance, themes explored further in this thesis.

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[57] Ibid., 28-29.

[58] Georgie Wemyss, "Littoral Struggles, Liminal Lives: Indian Merchant Seafarers' Resistances," in *South Asian Resistances in Britain 1858–1947*, ed. Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 76-77.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Laura Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

Tabili emphasises that race in interwar Britain was not a fixed or natural characteristic, nor a personal trait independent of historical circumstances. Rather, it was shaped by struggles over wealth and power, with structural inequalities created and maintained by employers, the state, and unions, while ordinary people's participation was contingent and negotiated.[64] This piece will build on this by examining how perceptions of Lascars were similarly fluid, with different stereotypes applied at different times depending on the context. Lascars could be portrayed as vulnerable victims, criminal threats, or exotic outsiders, depending on the needs of those shaping the narrative. This flexibility is clear in moments like the Jack the Ripper panic, when anxieties about crime, immigration, and the safety of women made foreign sailors convenient targets for blame and suspicion.

Another key area of recent historiographical interest concerns the religious and cultural lives of Lascars in Britain. The work of scholars such as Humayun Ansari and Sophie Gilliat-Ray has explored how Lascars contributed to the early formation of Muslim communities in Britain, particularly in dockland areas.[65] Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in the historiography. Much of the scholarship has focused on London, Liverpool, and Cardiff, leaving other British ports underexplored. Furthermore, while studies of Lascars' working conditions and community life have expanded, their mental health experiences, encounters with the legal system, and family dynamics remain under-researched. The integration of maritime labour history with studies of gender, mental health, and criminal justice in imperial contexts offers fertile ground for further scholarly exploration.

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[61] Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*.
[62] Ibid., 46.
[63] Ibid., *78.*
[64] Ibid., 4-5.
[65] Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: The History of Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2004); Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

In summary, the historiography of Lascars in Britain from 1870 to 1920 has evolved from marginal treatment within imperial trade histories to a rich, multidimensional field intersecting with migration studies, global labour history, race relations, and cultural identity. Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasises the active roles played by Lascars in shaping Britain's imperial and domestic landscapes yet calls for further research into the lived experiences of these maritime workers remain compelling.

This thesis seeks to fill this historiographical gap by presenting a multi-dimensional, life-oriented study of Lascars, beginning at the ports of departure in British India and ending in the port cities of Britain, where many Lascars became entangled in discourses of crime, contagion, and racial fear. It follows a biographical method, but not in the conventional sense. Instead of reconstructing a linear life story, Sulleyman Adam's partial biography is used as an interpretive framework through which to understand the wider Lascar experience. In doing so, the thesis not only reclaims the humanity of a man otherwise reduced to a criminal case file but also advances a broader methodological argument: that we can read social histories through silences, fragments, and peripheral figures.

Thesis Overview

Chapter One

Chapter One sets the foundation for the thesis by examining the complex and multilayered relationship between Lascars and their Serangs in the context of British maritime history. It opens with the 1910 murder of Habeed Sued, aboard the *SS Newby Hall,* by Sulleyman Adam. This case serves as a framework for understanding the tensions that often underpinned the Lascar–Serang relationship. The detailed post-mortem, witness testimonies, and petitions for clemency reveal not only the brutality of the event but also the broader socio-cultural and hierarchical pressures that shaped interactions among colonial seafarers. The killing of Sued, who held authority over the crew and had familial ties to the accused, raises essential questions about power, coercion, and emotional bonds within shipboard life.

The chapter explores how Serangs functioned as key intermediaries between European officers and the Lascar crew, with their power stemming not only from formal authority but also from their central role in recruitment and discipline. Historians such as Rozina Visram, Michael Fischer, and Gopalan Balachandran are drawn upon to emphasise how Serangs controlled access to employment, often through a system based on village networks and informal patronage.[66] Preeti Nijhar's depiction of the Serang as both 'hero and villain' encapsulates their dual role as both protectors of their men and enforcers of order on behalf of the ship's officers.[67] In this context, the chapter traces how economic, religious, and symbolic authority coalesced to produce a figure both respected and resented.

A key part of this analysis lies in exploring the economic dimensions of the Serang's role, particularly the capacity to demand bribes or retain portions of crew wages. Scholars like Ravi Ahuja and Aaron Jaffer describe the Serang as a hybrid figure, part patron, part contractor, who could both advocate for the crew and exploit them.[68] The chapter includes testimony from Lascars who described having to surrender a significant portion of their wages in exchange for employment, highlighting how economic coercion could undermine communal or familial ties. Moreover, the chapter investigates how these power structures could be reinforced through religion, particularly Islam, which was often a shared identity between Serangs and their men. However, as the case of Sulleyman Adam demonstrates, this shared faith did not prevent the breakdown of trust or prevent violence.

Finally, Chapter One broadens the discussion by drawing from other historical cases where Serangs led or were implicated in crew resistance, mutiny, or abuse. These episodes illustrate the Serang's pivotal, and sometimes contradictory, leadership role: at times they acted as spokespeople and protectors, at other times as disciplinarians or oppressors. Examples of mutiny, smuggling, and even funeral processions reveal how the Serang occupied a uniquely complex position, simultaneously enmeshed in colonial authority and in solidarity with the subaltern crew. The chapter concludes by arguing that while the Serang was often presented as a stabilising force, they also embodied the contradictions and tensions of colonial maritime labour, making their role central to any understanding of Lascar experience at sea.

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[66] Gopalan Balachandran, "Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880–1935," *International Journal of Maritime History* 9, no. 1 (1997): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/084387149700900103; Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*, 33–34; Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 35–42.

[67] Preeti Nijhar, *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2015), 83.

[68] Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring*, 13; Ravi Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c. 1900–1960," *International Review of Social History* 51, Supplement (2006): 111–41.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two investigates the evolving experiences of Lascar seamen aboard British ships between 1874 and 1910, through a close examination of three significant legal cases: the 1874 trial of Captain Horatio Walters for the manslaughter of Lascars aboard the *Emily Augusta*; the 1890 murder of Captain Peter Lyall by Lascar sailor Bhagwan Jassiwarra; and the 1910 case of Sulleyman Adam. These case studies are used as focal points to interrogate shifting power dynamics, systems of racialised discipline, and Lascar resistance within the maritime world of the British Empire.

The chapter begins with the Walters case, a rare example of a ship's captain being prosecuted for brutality against Lascars. The case reveals the extreme vulnerability of South Asian sailors and the limited mechanisms through which they could pursue justice, often dependent on the intervention of Christian missionaries such as Joseph Salter and institutions like the Strangers' Home for Asiatics in Limehouse. Walters' trial, while ending in a manslaughter conviction, also drew significant public sympathy for the captain, especially from maritime industry circles and segments of the British press, illustrating entrenched racial and professional hierarchies.

The 1890 case of Jassiwarra marked a reversal of roles: a Lascar was now the aggressor, killing a British captain, allegedly under provocation. This incident signalled a turning point in Lascar resistance, reflecting broader shifts in maritime labour relations and the growing assertiveness of colonial seafarers. Notably, the involvement of Abdullah Quilliam, a prominent Muslim leader in Liverpool, points to a new phase of Lascar support emerging from within South Asian and Muslim communities, in contrast to earlier reliance on missionary aid.

The 1910 case of Sulleyman Adam further complicates this narrative. Rather than violence being directed toward European officers, Adam's killing of a fellow Lascar (his Serang) underscores tensions within the Lascar hierarchy itself. This case suggests that Lascar resistance had become more fragmented, shaped by internal power struggles and deteriorating working conditions aboard ships. It invites a more nuanced reading of Lascar subjectivity, one not only defined by racialised victimhood, but also by complex inter-personal and intra-ethnic dynamics.

Drawing on theoretical insights from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the chapter situates these cases within the broader history of penal modernity, exploring how disciplinary regimes aboard ships moved from corporal punishment to more bureaucratic and moralised forms of control.[69] The work of Dipesh Chakrabarty is used to draw parallels between the authoritarian structures of British shipping and colonial industrial workplaces, while Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh's concept of a 'motley crew' frames Lascars as part of a transnational, multi-ethnic working class with its own traditions of resistance.[70] However, the chapter also critiques limitations in this literature by arguing that not all resistance was unified or directed at imperial authority, and that interpersonal violence, as in Adam's case, also had roots in structural tensions.

The chapter argues against a linear narrative of progress or empowerment. Instead, it reveals how the forms and expressions of Lascar resistance shifted over time, from legalistic appeals to British justice (1874), to direct confrontation (1890), and finally to internalised conflicts reflecting deeper fractures in Lascar solidarity (1910). It also shows how Lascars' access to justice was shaped by temporal, spatial, and institutional constraints, especially the accelerating pace of steamship travel, which often left little time to seek legal redress in British ports.

Finally, the chapter critiques the limited presence of Lascars in official legal records, as highlighted by James Frey, and calls for a methodological expansion that includes newspapers, missionary reports, and non-institutional sources.[71] These alternative archives allow for a richer understanding of Lascar agency, identity, and resistance. In doing so, the chapter lays the groundwork for rethinking imperial labour histories by centring the voices and experiences of marginalised maritime workers within broader frameworks of power, violence, and justice.

Chapter Three

What became apparent during the case of Sulleyman Adam was how deeply entrenched stereotypes of the violent Lascar continued to shape judicial attitudes and public perceptions. In Adam's trial, racialised language about the Indian temperament and cultural difference was invoked to explain his alleged crime, showing how ideas circulated during the Jack the Ripper panic had a long afterlife. His case reveals that the racialised scripts forged in the late Victorian imagination did not fade with time but resurfaced in courtrooms, prisons, and public discourse well into the twentieth century.

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[69] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

[70] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

[71] James W. Frey, "Lascars, the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey: Crime on the High Seas and the London Courts, 1852–8," *Journal for Maritime Research* 16, no. 2 (2014): 196–211, https://doi.org/10.1080/21533369.2014.965432.

Chapter Three examines the racialised and marginalised experiences of Lascars in relation to the 1888 Whitechapel murders, famously attributed to Jack the Ripper. It argues that the media and public discourse of the time used the Ripper case not merely as a criminal mystery but as a vehicle for expressing and reinforcing deeper anxieties about race, immigration, sexuality, and social decline in Victorian Britain.

This chapter contextualises the growing presence of Lascars in East London, especially in Shadwell and Whitechapel, due to their employment on British-registered ships. These districts were home to some of London's most marginalised communities and would later become infamous as the site of the Ripper murders, in which five women were killed. The chapter demonstrates how Lascars were often unfairly depicted in contemporary literature and press coverage as inherently violent and morally corrupt, frequently portrayed as knife-wielding threats associated with opium dens, prostitution, and the degradation of white British women. These depictions were not merely incidental but formed part of a wider colonial narrative that saw the Lascar as both a victim of empire and a dangerous foreign presence within it.

The analysis shows that Lascars were frequently linked to the Ripper murders in popular and media speculation, despite a lack of evidence. Theories that Jack the Ripper could have been a Malay, Chinese, or Lascar sailor reflected a deep-seated racial paranoia and a tendency to associate knife crime with South Asian men. Reports regularly suggested that the brutal nature of the murders, particularly the mutilation of bodies, reflected 'Eastern' methods, reinforcing the notion of the killer as racially 'other'.[72] These racialised assumptions were echoed in fiction, newspapers, and even police investigations, revealing how the fear of the foreign was mapped onto urban crime.

The chapter also explores the gendered implications of these narratives, particularly the way Lascar interactions with white British women were conflated with prostitution and venereal disease. It challenges the dominant Victorian categorisation of such women as 'fallen' and interrogates the moral panic surrounding interracial relationships. Drawing on the work of historians such as Hallie Rubenhold and literary critiques of nineteenth-century adventure fiction, the chapter reveals how these women and the Lascars were both stripped of complexity and agency, becoming symbolic of broader fears about empire, urban poverty, and social disorder.[73]

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[72] *Dundee Courier*, "Jack the Ripper's Letters," October 6, 1888, 3.

By examining representations of Lascars in children's literature, court cases, missionary reports, and newspaper coverage, the chapter places emphasis on the persistence of the 'knife-wielding Lascar' trope as a powerful symbol of Victorian racial anxiety. It draws connections between these cultural depictions and real-world consequences, including criminalisation, social exclusion, and the denial of citizenship or legal protection. The later case of Sulleyman Adam, demonstrates how these stereotypes carried weight beyond fiction and media speculation. Adam's trial and the language used reveal the afterlife of the Ripper-era anxieties, showing how cultural narratives of the violent, foreign sailor could materially shape judicial attitudes and outcomes well into the twentieth century.

Overall, Chapter Three reframes the Whitechapel murders not simply as a gruesome historical event but as a prism through which to understand how race, class, sexuality, and imperialism intersected in the late-nineteenth century British imagination. In doing so, it contributes a critical re-reading of the Ripper case, moving beyond the fascination with the unknown killer to examine the lives and legacies of those marginalised by the dominant narratives, particularly the Lascars who lived in the shadow of both empire and crime.

Chapter Four

The case of Sulleyman Adam, provides a striking example of how vulnerability was read through racialised and climatic frameworks. Reports highlighted Adam's inability to withstand the northern climate, describing him as a 'poor creature' whose survival in Peterhead Prison's winter would be worse than death itself.[74] His case exemplifies how colonial subjects were framed as fragile bodies out of place in Britain, unsuited for its weather, prisons, and even its food. This narrative of climatic unsuitability, often reinforced through acts of refusal (such as Adam's rejection of borrowed clothing), fed into broader imperial discourses that positioned Lascars as both pitiable and pathological.[75]

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[73] Hallie Rubenhold, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* (London: Doubleday, 2019).

[74] NRS, HH16/117, Letter about Reprieved Lascar, 4 November 1910.

[75] NRS, HH16/117, Aziz Ahmad to the Governors, 26 October 1910.

Chapter Four, therefore, delves into the symbolic and material construction of the 'shivering Lascar' in British imperial discourse, exploring how colonial narratives of vulnerability, illness, and racialised difference were projected onto South Asian seafarers in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain. Building on previous chapters' explorations of violence, criminality, and sexual anxieties, this chapter shifts the focus to the medicalised and emotional framing of the Lascar body, arguing that representations of fragility, disease, and exposure served to pathologise and marginalise these essential colonial labourers.

The chapter begins by analysing material culture, notably the 'Lascars Only' plaque from Queen's Dock, Glasgow, a physical manifestation of racial segregation within Britain's maritime infrastructure.[76] This object serves as a point of entry into broader discussions about the policing of Lascar bodies and spaces, particularly in relation to public health. British authorities and media frequently associated Lascars with disease, prompting both symbolic and literal quarantining through segregated facilities, inadequate clothing, and medical surveillance.

Central to this chapter is the recurring image of the 'shivering Lascar', a motif that encapsulated fears around racialised physical inadequacy, contagion, and imperial fragility. Drawing on Ann Laura Stoler's concept of intimacy as a locus of colonial control, the chapter situates the Lascar's suffering not only within the material conditions of maritime labour, but also in the emotional and symbolic economy of empire.[77] Whether trembling in courtrooms, huddled in blankets after shipwrecks, or wandering barefoot through wintry British streets, Lascars were portrayed as both pitiable and pathological. These portrayals encoded imperial assumptions about their emotional and bodily inferiority, framing them as biologically unsuited to British environments and thus as perpetual outsiders.

In stark contrast to the sympathetic figure of the 'shivering Lascar', the trope of the 'Lascar plague' cast South Asian seafarers in a far more hostile light. Here, Lascars were framed as diseased bodies, carriers of infection, and vectors of social disorder. This discourse conflated their mobility with contamination, their presence in port cities with public danger, and their labour with the erosion of social norms. By invoking the metaphor of a plague, British media and colonial authorities transformed seafarers into a threat to the health of the nation, a racialised danger that legitimised exclusionary legislation and intrusive health interventions. The chapter examines this discourse in relation to epidemics such as plague, cholera, and beriberi, situating it within the wider colonial context of India's devastating late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century health crises and the draconian responses codified in acts like the 1897 Epidemic Diseases Act.

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[76] Glasgow Museums, "'Lascars Only' Cast-Iron Plaque from Queen's Dock, Glasgow (circa 1890s)," [Glasgow Museums Collection].

[77] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, with a new preface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

Through a critical reading of newspaper articles, visual media, missionary records, and literary depictions by authors such as Henry Mayhew, William Hone, and Rudyard Kipling, the chapter demonstrates how the figure of the Lascar was constructed to evoke both sympathy and suspicion. The trope of the 'Lascar plague' further exemplifies this duality, portraying Lascars as both victims of disease and potential contaminants threatening the health and moral integrity of the British nation. This discourse drew heavily on orientalist stereotypes and medical racism, with diseases like beriberi being used to justify punitive health interventions and racialised exclusions.

Importantly, the chapter does not present Lascars solely as passive victims. It incorporates insights from scholars such as Ceri-Anne Fidler and Arunima Datta to reveal how Lascars engaged in forms of everyday resistance, selling company-issued goods, manipulating employment systems, and asserting their agency within oppressive maritime hierarchies.[78] The shivering Lascar thus becomes a more complex figure: at once a product of colonial exploitation, a symbol of imperial contradiction, and a subtle agent of endurance and subversion.

The chapter concludes by interrogating the emotional politics embedded in these portrayals, drawing on Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* to examine how feelings such as pity, fear, and disgust were mobilised to delineate racial and national boundaries.[79] The emotional coding of Lascar suffering, particularly in moments of maritime disaster or legal trial, reinforced narratives of British superiority while simultaneously obscuring the structural violence that produced such suffering. Overall, Chapter Four argues that the 'shivering Lascar' functions as a potent emblem of empire's emotional contradictions: a figure through which Britain articulated both its dependence on and disavowal of colonial labour.

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[78] Ceri-Anne Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain* (PhD diss., University of Cardiff, 2011); Arunima Datta, *Waiting on Empire: A History of Indian Travelling Ayahs in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Arunima Datta, *Fleeting Agencies: A Social History of Indian Coolie Women in British Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[79] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion: Tenth Anniversary Edition*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700372.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five investigates the pre-history and socio-spatial dynamics of the 1919 Cardiff Race Riots, situating them within a broader context of colonial labour, port-city conflict, and inter-ethnic tensions. By focusing on Cardiff's multi-ethnic dockside community, particularly the Tiger Bay/Butetown area, the chapter challenges the notion that the 1919 riots were spontaneous or solely the result of post-war economic strife. Instead, it reveals a deep history of racialised conflict, resistance, and negotiation within Britain's maritime urban spaces, particularly among sailors and labourers of colour.

As in previous chapters, the case of Sulleyman Adam provides a crucial point of entry. Earlier discussed in relation to racial stereotyping, vulnerability, and legal discourse, here it is revisited to show the dynamics of subaltern violence. Adam's act of lethal violence against a fellow sailor in Glasgow illustrates how interpersonal conflict within racialised communities emerged from the volatile conditions of port-city life, marked by exclusion, economic marginalisation, and the contested spaces of diaspora. His case shows that such violence, though criminalised as 'murder' in court, cannot be disentangled from the structural hierarchies and pressures that shaped the lives of colonial seafarers. Read in this way, Adam's story prefigures the collective unrest that later erupted in Cardiff, bridging the gap between individual acts of violence and wider patterns of racialised urban conflict.

From this point of departure, the chapter reframes the 1919 riots not as isolated events, but as a culmination of tensions rooted in earlier episodes of conflict, most notably the 1916 Cardiff riots. Drawing from archival materials, including police court records and photographic evidence, the chapter traces instances of unrest between African, Caribbean, Arab, and South Asian seafarers, highlighting the complex racial and spatial politics of the docks. The analysis shows how the proximity of different ethnic groups within cramped urban spaces often produced friction, as cohabitation in boarding houses and competition for employment were compounded by entrenched racial hierarchies and imperial ideologies.

Through a 'history from below' framework inspired by scholars like E.P. Thompson, Caroline Bressey, and Peter Linebaugh, the chapter brings attention to the agency and resistance of racialised workers, especially Lascars, who frequently protested unsafe or unfair working conditions.[80] These acts of defiance, often dismissed or suppressed by legal authorities, are presented as critical moments of labour agency that prefigured the more overt collective action of 1919. The chapter reveals that from the 1890s onwards, Lascars in Cardiff repeatedly refused orders to sail to dangerous or undesirable destinations, particularly New Orleans, using legal spaces such as the Cardiff Police Court as arenas of resistance.

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[80] Caroline Bressey, "Race, Antiracism, and the Place of Blackness in the Making and Remaking of the English Working Class," in *Histories of a Radical Book: E. P. Thompson and The Making of the English Working Class*,

Importantly, Chapter Five explores simplistic narratives of Black and non-white solidarity by analysing inter-ethnic violence, especially during the 1916 riots, where Somali and Yemeni sailors clashed with West African and West Indian men. These tensions were often influenced by differences in religion, culture, and status, and the chapter suggests that port cities like Cardiff were not just sites of resistance, but also of antagonism and fragmentation within the colonial workforce. However, by 1919, a shift occurred: once-fragmented communities began to forge cross-ethnic solidarities in response to white violence and institutional racism. Evidence of joint meetings between Arab, Somali, Egyptian, and Afro-Caribbean residents during the 1919 riots signals the emergence of a shared political consciousness, rooted in mutual experiences of marginalisation.

The chapter integrates a wide array of theoretical frameworks - from spatial theory and labour geography to diaspora studies and archival criticism - to map the evolving relationships between race, labour, and urban space. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Ishan Ashutosh, David Featherstone, and Ann Laura Stoler, it emphasises the importance of reading both with and against the archive to uncover the suppressed histories of racialised seamen.[81] Photographic evidence and police documentation are analysed not just as sources, but as politically charged artifacts that shaped public and historical perceptions of racial identity.

Overall, Chapter Five offers a critical re-examination of British labour and racial history by foregrounding the experiences of sailors of colour in Cardiff's docks. It argues that these port spaces were dynamic sites of encounter, where violence, resistance, and solidarity coexisted. By tracing the evolution from internal ethnic conflict in 1916 to collective resistance in 1919,

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ed. Antoinette Burton and Stephanie Fortado (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 202–22, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789204728; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963); Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

[81] Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435632; David Featherstone and Peter Griffin, "Spatial Relations, Histories from Below and the Makings of Agency: Reflections on The Making of the English Working Class at 50," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 3 (2015): 375–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515578774; Ishan Ashutosh, "The Spaces of Diaspora's Revitalization: Transregions, Infrastructure and Urbanism," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 5 (2020): 898–918, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519868765.

the chapter illuminates how imperial labour forces engaged in, and were transformed by, urban struggles, challenging dominant narratives of working-class whiteness and national belonging in early-twentieth century Britain.

Taken together, these five chapters demonstrate that this thesis is not simply about isolated episodes of violence, stereotype, or labour dispute, but about the broader ways colonial seafarers shaped and were shaped by Britain's imperial, legal, and urban landscapes. By tracing cases that range from interpersonal conflicts aboard ship to collective unrest in the streets of Cardiff, the thesis argues that Lascars were central to the making of British working-class, racial, and imperial histories. To ground this wider argument, the thesis begins in Chapter One with the case of Adam and Sued, using it to explore the fraught relationship between Lascars and their Serangs and to establish the tensions, hierarchies, and solidarities that recur throughout the study.

Chapter One: “Do as you please, whatever is in your heart, do it.”:

“Do as you please, whatever is in your heart, do it.” These were reported to be the final words of Habeed Sued, the Serang on board the *Newby Hall*, before he was fatally stabbed by Sulleyman Adam. The post-mortem examination, conducted in Glasgow on 24 August 1910 by surgeons John McCubbin Johnston and James Devon, recorded the extent of the injuries sustained. Sued’s body bore multiple wounds consistent with a violent attack: a deep incision to the front of the chest, close to the collarbone, penetrated the chest wall and damaged the right lung; another wound was located on the back of the shoulder; and several smaller injuries were observed around the scapula. Internal examination revealed extensive haemorrhaging, with the right chest cavity filled with clotted blood. While the heart, brain, and abdominal organs showed no signs of abnormality, the injuries to the lungs and surrounding blood vessels were deemed fatal. The surgeons concluded that Sued’s death had resulted from shock and blood loss caused by these penetrating wounds.[1]

The Lascar-Serang relationship was a complex interplay of authority, respect, economic dynamics, and cultural intricacies. Serangs, as central figures in this relationship, navigated between representing Lascars to ship officers and maintaining order within the crew. While respect and authority defined their position, challenges such as conflicts and allegations of bribery underscored the delicate balance within this historical maritime dynamic.

This first chapter delves into the multifaceted nature of this association, examining the role of the Serang as a bridge between European officers and Lascar crews, the economic dynamics at play, the religious and spiritual facets, and the challenges inherent in this complex relationship. However, the case of Sulleyman Adam emphasises the often-tumultuous relationship between Lascar and Serang and serves as a point of exploration into the dynamics of this relationship. Therefore, this chapter will delve into the varied roles of a Serang and what Adam’s case shows us about the relationship between Lascars and Serang.

This chapter will look to explore this side of the Lascar and Serang relationship in a way that has often been under-researched by historians. The conflict within and between subaltern groups of sailors will be explored further using the Sulleyman Adam case by looking at the different roles of a Serang and what the Sulleyman Adam case shows us about this. This chapter will also explore other cases of significance involving the Serang to create context about the role of a Serang, using the British Newspaper Archives and the Old Bailey archives.

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[1] NRS, HH16/117, Medical Reports, I.C., Sulleyman Adam 6 Cathedral Square, Glasgow, 24th August 1910.

1. The Role of the Serang: Origins and Functions

Many historians have explored the relationship between the Serang and Lascars, emphasising the Serang's crucial role in recruitment and as an intermediary between the crew and the captain. Rozina Visram, Michael Fischer, Gopalan Balachandran and Aaron Jaffer all discussed the recruitment process in India for the crew.[2] The recruitment process of Lascars began through the intermediary of the Ghat Serang (agent-recruiter), while the Serang (boatswain) exercised discipline and control over the men both on board and on shore. Therefore, the contracts were negotiated between the Ghat Serang and the captain for a passage to Britain where the Ghat Serang received a fee from the captain for providing the labour of Lascars, Tindals and a Serang.[3]

The first key point of the relationship between Lascars and their Serang was the respect and authority of the Serang over the Lascars. Gopalan Balachandran highlights that, where a vessel had a 'regular' Serang, at least some junior officers seem to have regarded him with an attitude akin to respect.[4] Preeti Nijhar also described the Serang as the gatekeeper to Lascar employment which can be seen as a reason for why they were given this respect level.[5] Nijhar goes on to describe the role of the Serang as being the 'leader of the Lascars' delivering their requirements to the officers, but he was also responsible by the Captain for any perceived dereliction by the crew. [6] As such, Nijhar describes the Serang as both the hero and the villain, which perfectly encapsulates the dichotomy of the Serang character.[7] A key example of the authority and respect could be seen through a Serang named Doud Gouber Gash, who was described by the *British Press* as, ‘the father and protector of his men and appointed by them the receiver and distributor of their wages, and guardian of their privileges’.[8]

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[2] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 15–30; Michael H. Fisher, "Working across the Seas: Indian Maritime Labourers in India, Britain, and in Between, 1600–1857," *International Review of Social History* 51 (2006): 21–45, 26, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26405450; Gopalan Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886–1945," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, no. 2 (2008): 45–75, http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/TfC/article/view/922; Aaron Jaffer, "'Lord of the Forecastle': Serangs, Tindals, and Lascar Mutiny, c.1780–1860," *International Review of Social History* 58 (2013): 153–175, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26394642.

[3] Fisher, "Working across the Seas," 26.

[4] Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest," 48.

[5] Preeti Nijhar, *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2015), 83.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Ceri-Anne Fidler highlights the distinct status hierarchy among the maritime personnel, emphasising the symbolic and visible markers that differentiate the roles of individuals within the ship's crew. Specifically, she sheds light on the elevated status of Serangs and Tindals above Lascars, Kalasis, and lower-rated positions such as Cassab, Paniwallah, and Bhandary. For example, she argues, ‘Serangs and Tindal’s tied "a colourful riband [ribbon] of Bengal tartan" around their Topis in contrast to the plain red ribbon used by Kalasis or Lascars’. In contrast she states, lower ratings such as the Cassab, Paniwallah and Bhandary did not use a ribbon. Thus, each ranking could be identified by its uniforms. Serangs and Tindals were further differentiated 'as befitting their importance'. Thus, they wore a richly embroidered lalchi, a tartan instead of a plain rhumal and painted fanciful designs on the tops of their topis.[9]

1.b Recruitment Networks and Cultural Bonds

The communal and familial side of the Lascar and Serang relationship was also pertinent as the Serang would often recruit from their own villages and thus leading to a prior relationship with the Lascar or the families of the Lascars. Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi’s story from 1935 is an example of this, as he stated he had been granted work on the ship after the Serang had taken a vow from his uncle that he would not jump ship when he arrived in England.[10] The Serang, in this instance, acted not only as a recruiter but also as a guardian, establishing a bond that went beyond professional obligations. His employment on the ship was not solely dictated by skills but intertwined with familial bonds. The Serang, recognising the importance of trust in maintaining a cohesive crew, took a personal vow from Shah Abdul Majid's uncle, ensuring his commitment to the voyage. This practice not only showcased the Serang's strategic approach in recruiting individuals with pre-established familial ties but also the Serang's responsibility in safeguarding the commitment of his crew. In essence, the Serang's ability to select individuals from his village was not just about assembling a skilled crew; it was a strategic and responsible approach, ensuring the commitment of each crew member and protecting the Serang's reputation within the close-knit maritime community.

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[8] *British Press*, “Complaint Against East India Company,” 4 July 1823, 4.

[9] Ceri-Anne Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain* (PhD diss., University of Cardiff, 2011), 55

[10] Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain* (London: Eastside Books, 1994), 148.

The role of the Serang, therefore, extended to economic dynamics and privileges as highlighted by Ravi Ahuja who describes the personality of the Serang as ‘no doubt an ambiguous social type, combining the features of crimp and patron, of foreman and subcontractor’. The role of the Serang stretched from employer’s agent, and spokesman for the crew, a moneylender, and organiser of the village clubs and trade unions’.[11] Aaron Jaffer described the Serang as the ‘Lord of the forecastle’ under the permission of the captain, noting that Lascars served under their own petty officers. The most important of these was the Serang, whose duties corresponded to those of a boatswain. He was usually assisted by one or more Tindals, who acted as boatswain’s mates and were headed by a burra-tindal.[12] Additionally, on arrival in Britain, the captain gave his ship’s Serang the remainder of the contracted wages due to the Lascars, which the Serang then distributed, minus his fees. The Serang also conveyed wages due to deceased Lascars back to their relatives in India.[13]

Caroline Adams shows the potential for economic corruption from the Serang as she sheds light on the susceptibility to economic malpractices, pointing out that securing a position on a ship often required not only patience and cultivating a relationship with the Serang but also involvement in a time-honoured system of bribery.[14] She cited one account of a Lascar stating, ‘I found a Serang who said “I can take you, if you give me one third of your wages,” so I agreed’.[15] Sona Miah, in his account from the 1930s, also stated, ‘I got eighteen rupees a month, had to give ten rupees Ghoosh (bribe) to the Serang’.[16] This intertwining of economic corruption and familial ties in recruitment creates a complex web of challenges while also adding layers to our understanding of the power dynamics inherent in colonial maritime labour systems.

Ahuja also noted that if a Lascar declined or was unable to pay the portion of his wages expected by the Serang, it could result in highly strained relations aboard the ship. Faced with the dual imperative of meeting his own financial responsibilities and upholding his authority, the Serang could ill-afford to allow non-payment. Moreover, due to these compelling reasons, he could not permit debtors who defaulted to abandon the ship, even disregarding the need to maintain his reputation as an effective supervisor with the employers. Thus, Lascars encountered not only the formal authority of the law but also the informal power of the Serang when asserting their freedom of movement. Additionally, if they hailed from the same village as their foreman, they had to consider that he would hold their families accountable for their debts.[17]

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[11] Ravi Ahuja, “Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900–1960,” *International Review of Social History* 51, S14 (2006): 111–141, 133, doi:10.1017/S002085900600263X

[12] Jaffer “Lord of the Forecastle,” 155.

[13] Fisher, “*Working across the Seas*,” 27.

[14] Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers,* 27.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 137.

1.c Religion and the Serang: Authority and Position in the Ship's Hierarchy

The respect and authority of the Lascar also moved toward another part of the Serang's multi-faceted character, which was the religious role of the Serang. Aaron Jaffer said, 'both the captain and the Serang could play a part in the religious life of a crew. As was the case in other trades, the captain's spiritual outlook could have a significant impact on the tenor of a voyage. He could grant religious holidays, dictate what form of public worship took place, and forbid behaviour that he deemed to be immoral.'[18] In the case of Serang, Doud Gouber Gash, when asked by the *British Press* in 1823 if he and his men were followers of the Muslim faith, it was reported that he and his men severally answered that 'they were the followers of Mahomet, the only true prophet of Allah.' [19]

Religion was a central part of the relationship between Lascars and Serangs as they primarily bonded over the shared religious ideology of Islam. Haji Kona Miah explained his experiences in the 1940s: 'the Hindu people there wouldn't go to sea, so it was all Muslim people from East Pakistan'.[20] He asserted Hindus don't go to sea because they don't eat meat. The Muslims were all from Bengal and a few from Calcutta. Surat Ali, who ran the Hindustani social club in the 1930s and 1940s, also stated he was not a Muslim and nor was his name Surat Ali, but he was able to come to Britain by giving himself a Muslim name and managing to get a job on a ship. It was stated that you did not need to be a Muslim, but the Serang's were Muslim, so if you were a candidate to be in the sea service, it was best to be a Muslim.[21] Thus, religious identities were another strand or link in the chain migration process, forcing apostasy on the part of migrants who wished to make a better life abroad. An increasingly complex picture of chain migration therefore emerges that challenges the perception that it was solely based on regional affiliations.

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[17] Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment," 135.

[18] Jaffer "'Lord of the Forecastle' 159.

[19] *British Press*, "Complaint Against East India Company," 4 July 1823, 4.

[20] Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers,* 128.

[21] Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, 158.

However, as a result of the differing power dynamics discussed above, the relationship between Lascar and Serang often came with a variety of problems. This power did not remain unchallenged, and there were probably numerous instances when Lascars clashed with Serangs, who often acted in concert with ships' officers over the payment of informal commissions. Such conflicts usually remained unrecorded as most of them were resolved or suppressed informally on-board ships.[22] The Serang also had the propensity to take bribes in return for jobs and as they had the responsibility for paying Lascars. The Serang and Tindal enjoyed various privileges aboard merchantmen. Above all, they were given much higher wages than their subordinates.[23]

Another way in which Serangs led Lascars was in funeral processions. An example can be seen in the case of a seaman described as a Hindoo seaman, Bawa Golam Sahib, who was laid to rest in 1894. Bawa Golam was a Lascar crew member of a steamer trading between England and Bombay when he fell ill and passed away while at the Hamadryade Hospital ship after the vessel docked in Roath to load coal. Approximately 10 of his fellow Lascars were described as being dressed in white garments and vibrant turbans while accompanying the deceased to the gravesite.[24] The Serang of the group played a significant role in leading the funeral ceremony. The *Cardiff Times* reported that, despite the serious and melancholic nature attributed to Hindus, no visible emotion was expressed during the proceedings. Each member of the party symbolically contributed a 'handful of earth' to cover their shipmate's remains, accompanied by genuflexion, arm-waving, and petitions in 'Hindoostani'.[25]

The Serang signed the register in his native script while his companions observed, demonstrating the presence of their cultural identity within Cardiff's port environment.[26] After thanking Mr. Whitworth, the superintendent, for his support, they indicated they would return the following week, likely for another funeral. Such ceremonies, with their distinct rituals, reveal the ways in which the Lascar community maintained their traditions and expressed collective mourning in a foreign setting.[27]

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[22] Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment", 135.

[23] Jaffer, "Lord of the Forecastle", 155.

[24] *Cardiff Times*, "Hindoo Funeral at Cardiff," 19 May 1894, 6.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

In another case from 1909, the role of the Serang was instrumental in facilitating the funeral ceremony for Sharfa Catna, a Lascar fireman of the steamship *Lucius*. As a key figure among the Lascar crew, the Serang, or mate, directed the funeral proceedings under the guidance of the ship's captain, Captain Carr. From the report, we can see, the Serang played a central role in organising the burial, ensuring it took place promptly due to the ship's imminent departure for South Wales. The procession, consisting of 'ten Punjabee' mourners of the same caste as the deceased, followed the Serang, who also served as an interpreter for the Lascar crew.[28] The Serang's responsibilities included overseeing the transportation of the deceased's remains from the ship to the churchyard, where a brief Christian service was conducted by the Vicar.

Furthermore, the Serang took charge during the ceremony at the graveside, leading the mourners in the recitation of portions of the Quran and participating in the committal to the grave. The Serang's active involvement in the funeral rituals, including the use of a shroud and the arrangement of the Union Jack on the coffin, highlighted their pivotal role as a spiritual leader and organiser within the Lascar community especially in ensuring the cultural and religious observances were honoured for the deceased Lascar fireman.[29]

In another case from 1889 in Southampton, the Serang played a central role in the burial of a Lascar coal-trimmer who had died aboard the steamer *Shannon*. Acting as Chief Serang, he oversaw the funeral procession, which carried the body from the docks to the cemetery in a wagonette. The procession was accompanied by two religious leaders, who walked alongside the hearse, followed by around one hundred Lascars. The Serang, dressed in a sealskin garment that marked his authority, brought up the rear of the procession. [30]

Throughout the journey, the priests performed rituals, burning incense, while the deceased's companions sang dirges (funeral songs or laments) that were repeated collectively by the group. Onlookers in Southampton observed the procession, noting its unfamiliar character. At the cemetery, the priests conducted the burial rites, and the community engaged in a series of ritual acts that reflected their own cultural and religious traditions. The Serang's prominent role in this ceremony demonstrates both his leadership and the responsibilities he bore in guiding his fellow seamen through moments of collective mourning. [31]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] *Flintshire Observer*, "Mohamedan Funeral in Mostyn Churchyard," 1 July 1909, 5.

[29] Ibid.

[30] *Halstead Gazette*, "Burying a Lascar," 12 September 1889, 7.

2. Sulleyman Adam and Habeeb Sued:

The murder of Habeed Sued underscores the complexities and power struggles within this maritime hierarchy, where the authority of the Serang, though influential, was not immune to challenges and conflicts with the Lascar crew. Sued is described in the case files as a Serang of about 30 years of age. Lambert Whyte, a witness to the murder, suggested that Serangs had authority over Lascars, including the ability to strike them without facing resentment. He stated, ‘A man is apt to lift a knife without intending any harm. I never heard of knifing among them. A “Serang” had authority to strike them if he pleased, and when he did so, they did not seem to resent it’.[32] This reflects a hierarchical structure where the Serang holds a position of authority and power over the Lascars. The acceptance of such authority was seemingly rooted in cultural norms or the dynamics of the maritime work environment, especially amongst these subaltern groups.

Whyte's mention of the accused referring to the Serang as a countryman suggests a sense of shared origin or commonality between the Lascar crew and the Serang. The term 'countryman’ implies that they may come from the same region or village. When Adam was found in his bunk with his eyes open, he claimed, ‘I sleep, Sahib; I did not do that; “Serang” is a countryman of mine’.[33] This suggests the idea of Sued recruiting or having crews composed of individuals from his own village or region. Adam claimed, ’Why should I stab him; he is my brother, my cousin,’ and also mentioned that he was asleep and did not stab the Serang.[34] The use of terms like 'brother’ and 'cousin' further emphasises a familial or close-knit connection between the accused Lascar and the Serang.

Additionally, during cross-examination, another Lascar, Sheik Esmal, revealed that the accused had been drinking, although he could not precisely gauge his level of intoxication. Both the Serang and the accused had consumed alcohol while they were together. Mahomed had never witnessed the Serang inebriated before, and he couldn't confirm whether the deceased and accused were close friends. Esmal stated, the accused didn't explicitly threaten to put the Serang out, but he did instruct him to 'Get out of this', to which the Serang replied, 'Do whatever is in your heart.'[35]

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[31] Ibid.
[32] NRS, HH16/117, Eye-Witness testimonies, 18th October 1910.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

A striking aspect of Sued's murder is the complicated relationship between Lascars and their Serangs. When the Mersey Mission submitted a petition to commute Adam's death sentence, it rested on four main arguments:

> 1. Our native missioner informs us that the deceased Serang and the man now under sentence of death came together (as friends) as our Asiatic seamen in Birkenhead on Sunday, August 7th of the present year.
>
> 2. On that occasion, the Serang (whom Mr. Seal knew previously as a very interesting man) took the other man (Sulleyman Adam) to the public house against his will, his position as Serang making it almost impossible for the other to refuse to go.
>
> 3. Lascars from the *S.S. Newby Hall* who have visited Birkenhead since the crime was committed stated that both men were under the influence of drink at the time and that the Serang was using violence against Sulleyman Adam.
>
> 4. These facts seem to point to the conclusion that the crime was not premeditated but was committed under considerable provocation and that the Serang was chiefly to blame for the quarrel which arose. May I commend this to your current consideration with a view of the mitigation of the sentence?[36]

In addition to this it was also stated, ten days before the unfortunate incident, Adam and his fellow Lascars had been at the Asiatic missions in Birkenhead. Charles Seal, an Indian and a missionary, reported that Sulleyman was a sober and well-behaved young man who abstained from alcohol. It was revealed that the Serang in charge of them had a volatile temperament and coerced the young Lascars to drink with him. Charles Seal, the missioner, had advised the Serang to set a better example for the young men.[37]

Andrew Jameson (Lord Ardwall), a Scottish barrister and judge, compiled a report on the events of that night which also shed light on the case. In it, he noted that the deceased and the accused were, to begin with, close friends. Both of them were British subjects, whereas the accused claimed that the other firemen were from an Indian Native State. Furthermore, they were both followers of the Islamic faith, which forbade the consumption of alcoholic beverages.[38] On the night of the murder, Sued, who was in a position of authority over Adam and a fellow Muslim, took him out drinking. Instead of ensuring Adam returned safely to the ship, he left him at a pub and went back without him, which Adam reportedly saw as a serious betrayal of their friendship.[39]

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[35] Ibid.

[36] NRS, HH16/117, Letter from Mersey Mission to Secretary of State, 19 October 1910.

[37] NRS, HH16/117, Letter from Mersey Mission Recommending Reprieve, 27 October 1910.

Upon Sued's return to the forecastle, where Adam was located, the accused confronted him about his behaviour. Sued simply replied, 'I came because I wanted to come'.[40] This led to some physical struggling and wrestling. However, things took a more serious turn when Adam, instead of leaving the forecastle to go to his own room, sought out the chief engineer, who had complained about Sued making noise. Following this exchange, Adam appeared to be preparing to rest when Sued returned to the forecastle and offered tea to his two assistants, or 'tyndalls', while ignoring Adam.

This action, according to Jameson, seemed to be the final straw for Adam, who felt a deep sense of betrayal and wounded friendship.[41] He twice cursed Sued and told him to leave. The deceased responded with only, "Do as you please, whatever is in your heart, do it". According to the witnesses, this final remark was not intended as a challenge but was rather a common Indian colloquialism, meaning in effect, 'Do as you wish', or in this context, 'Keep on swearing if you want'. It was immediately after these words were spoken that Adam seized his knife and fatally stabbed Sued. [42]

While the circumstances surrounding the case were not sufficient to legally justify the murder, the jury recommended mercy. The absence of premeditation, the accused's relatively young age, and the unique factors that contributed to the incident were all considered in this recommendation.[43]The case shows the role of alcohol in shaping the dynamics between Lascars and Serangs. Testimony from the *S.S. Newby Hall* revealed that both the Serang and the accused had been drinking, with the Serang resorting to violence. Alcohol thus emerges as a significant factor in escalating the conflict, particularly given its prohibition under Islam, which both men professed to follow. This religious and cultural context adds further complexity to their actions and responses. At the same time, the case underscores the fraught nature of relationships within the maritime hierarchy. The friendship between the two men illustrates the layered dynamics of authority, loyalty, and tension among Asiatic seamen. Evidence from the petition suggests that the Serang abused his position by compelling the accused to accompany him to a public house against his will, highlighting how coercion and misuse of power could operate within this structure.

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[38] NRS, HH16/117, Report by Andrew Jameson on Case of Sulleyman Adam, 21 October 1910.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

The case of Doud Gouber Gash in 1823 provides valuable insight into how some Lascars sought to reconcile the Islamic prohibition on alcohol with their experiences in Britain. When questioned about the ban on liquors and whether the violation of 'so good a law' could be reconciled with their consciences, the Serang reportedly did not like the comment and attempted to justify himself by arguing that 'the prophet could never have contemplated that any of the faithful should live in a wretched country like this, or he never would have prohibited the use of grog, which was actually a necessary of life in England.'[44]

Other members of the crew offered similarly pragmatic justifications. One asserted that 'he would drink grog wherever he should meet with it, and he would sooner turn Christian than give up the beverage or lose the inclination for it; besides, he never would believe that the prophet intended to prohibit gin in cold weather. Indeed, it appeared to this complainant that as gin was not known in the mortal days of the prophet, it was wholly excluded from the prohibited articles, and that if it were known at that distant period, the prophet would have been too wise to reject it.'[45] A third man expressed indignation at the suggestion that gin was not sanctioned by 'the religion of the East,' insisting that if the faithful chose to drink grog, 'it was of no importance to the infidel who could not suffer for the errors of the former.'[46] These statements should be understood as the personal interpretations and situational rationalisations of the Lascar sailors, rather than as representative of Islamic teachings, which maintain a consistent prohibition on intoxicants.

The case of Sulleyman Adam also invites a broader consideration of how Lascar sailors negotiated cultural and religious expectations in British port cities. Rather than simply a story of alcohol and violence, it demonstrates how moments of conflict exposed the fragile balance between friendship, authority, and faith within maritime communities. The Serang's authority could blur the lines between guidance and coercion, while the pressures of shipboard hierarchy, cultural displacement, and the temptations of port life all combined to create circumstances ripe for tension. In this sense, Adam's case, when read alongside that of Doud Gouber Gash, illustrates not only the strain alcohol placed on Islamic practice but also the wider difficulties Lascars faced in maintaining solidarity and moral order in an environment shaped by empire and dislocation.

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[44] *British Press*, "Complaint Against East India Company," 4 July 1823, 4.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

3. Cooperation and Mutual Support

Understanding the role of a Serang as the leader of Lascars is essential to grasping the dynamics within maritime hierarchies and subaltern crews. The Serang acted as both a mediator and an organiser, navigating labour disputes and representing the concerns of the crew. Their position became particularly visible during instances of mutiny or collective action, when the Serang often emerged as the focal point of leadership. These situations underscore the delicate balance the Serang maintained between guiding the crew and confronting the authority of ship officers, highlighting the nuanced responsibilities inherent in their role.

A striking example comes from 1905, when a mutiny erupted aboard the *Clan Menzies* liner. The chief fireman, serving as Serang, led roughly twenty Lascars in protest after two crew members were allegedly assaulted by an engineer. The Lascars refused to return to work, marching first to the Clan Line offices and then to the Mercantile Marine office, insisting on the engineer's removal. Police intervention briefly detained the Serang, but the crew remained steadfast until gradual negotiations led them to return to the ship. This incident illuminates the Serang's central role in mediating grievances while simultaneously orchestrating decisive collective action.[47]

Thirteen years later, in 1918, the role of the Serang took a more confrontational turn aboard the Henderson Line *Tenasserim*. The Serang, acting as chief officer, refused orders and allegedly orchestrated an assault on the captain, gathering the crew to attempt a rush on the bridge. The situation was quelled by armed gunners, and the Serang faced twelve weeks of 'rigorous' imprisonment, a harsher penalty than his subordinates, reflecting the legal system's view of the Serang as the principal instigator in mutinous actions.[48]

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[47] *Daily Record*, "Mutinous Lascars," 11 March 1905, 3.

This pattern of heightened accountability for the Serang is further illustrated in Liverpool in 1896 aboard the sailing ship *Gaekwar*. After a drunken altercation ashore, several Lascars returned to the vessel in a violent and disorderly state, attacking officers and resisting authority. While nineteen crew members received four-week sentences for disobedience, the Serang received eight weeks, again underscoring the perception of their leadership in both the uprising and subsequent legal proceedings.[49]

Not all instances were rooted in violence; some reflected the Serangs' leadership in orchestrating disciplined, visible protests to secure better treatment for their crews. One particularly striking episode, widely reported in 1907, involved forty-nine Lascars who left their steamship at the West India Dock intending, quite literally, to take their grievances to the King.[50] Complaining of 'plenty hard work, no much food', they were led by Serangs Abdroma, Gorgib Bok, and the multilingual Ibraham. The men marched in formation through Whitechapel, speaking with constables along the way and explaining their wish to see the King himself.[51]

Upon reaching the area near Buckingham Palace, a policeman realised what they were trying to do and redirected them to the India Office. There, forty-seven crew members waited on benches in St. James's Park while two Serangs went inside to present their grievances, describing their ship as 'plenty no good.' They had not been formally discharged but had left voluntarily, hoping that the King would intervene on their behalf.[52] The *Daily Mirror* reported that during the return journey to Limehouse, some of the men unknowingly passed the King without recognising him. Meanwhile, the ship's captain and officers professed bewilderment, only learning later that the dispute concerned food and work conditions, and that opinions among the Lascars were divided between wanting to return to Australia or to go home.[53]

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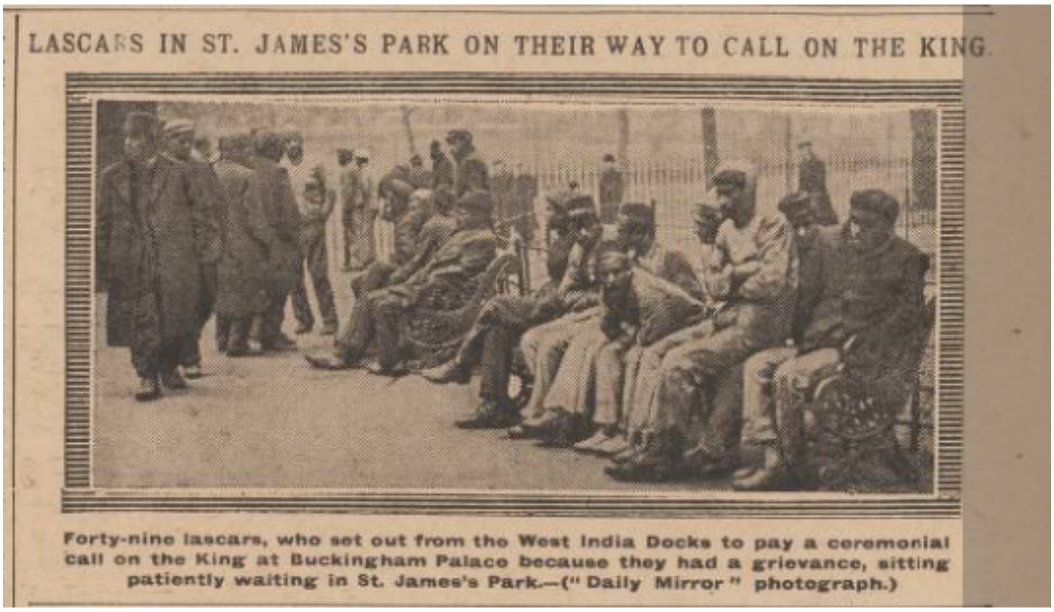
[48] *Englishman's Overland Mail*, "A Mutinous Serang," 20 December 1918, 9.
[49] *Rhos Herald*, "Serious Disturbance at Liverpool," 19 September 1896, 6.
[50] *Daily Mirror*, "Unwise Men from the East," 1 March 1907, 4
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.



LASCARS IN ST. JAMES'S PARK ON THEIR WAY TO CALL ON THE KING

Forty-nine lascars, who set out from the West India Docks to pay a ceremonial call on the King at Buckingham Palace because they had a grievance, sitting patiently waiting in St. James's Park.—(" Daily Mirror " photograph.)

Figure 1 "Lascars in St Jame's Park on their way to Call on the King", Daily Mirror, 01 March 1907, 11.[54]

At the Asiatics' Home in Limehouse, an unofficial inquiry was held by the India Office. The Lascars remained impassive, resisting all persuasion to return to the ship. Officials warned them of the legal consequences, including prison, but the Serangs stood firm. Officials warned them of the legal consequences, including prison, but one Serang, described in the press as having an 'amazing mien', calm and unflinching, serenely replied that he and his 'brothers' would be very willing to go to prison, if necessary, but would not go back on the ship. Another declared they would sooner sleep in the streets than return. Leaving the Home, the men sat in a row along the pavement outside and, even when ordered away, lingered in the dock area.[55]

When brought before Mr. Dickens at the Thames Police Court, Ibraham, described in the press as 'the linguist', presented their case in what reporters called 'picturesque but not entirely intelligible English.' He told the magistrate: 'Fine ship, plenty fine ship… but no wantee go back. Captain, he say, you lazy, you do no workee. Master, you go sea, you be captain. No? You find another ship, then we go that.'[56] This blend of irony and plain-speaking was enough to prompt action: the crew were transferred to another vessel the following day. The captain, attempting to downplay the affair, told journalists: “They’re just naughty children. As like as not, by Saturday they’ll refuse to leave the ship at all”.[57]

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[54] *Daily Mirror*, "Lascars in St. James Park on Their Way to Call on the King," 01 March 1907, 11.

[55] *Daily Mirror*, "Lascars in the Park," 28 February 1907, 5.

[56] *Daily Mirror*, "Unwise Men from the East."

In reality, the episode was anything but childish. It demonstrated the Serangs’ capacity to channel dissatisfaction into an organised public protest, to maintain order and cohesion among the men, and to keep the dispute visible in the eyes of both the press and the authorities. By securing reassignment without violence, Abdroma, Gorgib Bok, and Ibraham had shown how the Serang could operate as both an advocate and a tactician, navigating officialdom with the same authority they exercised aboard ship.

A similar episode unfolded with the crew of the *S.S. Ameer* in Dundee in 1901, where twenty-nine firemen refused to return to duty unless the chief engineer was sent ashore. What began as a dispute quickly escalated into a standoff requiring police intervention. [58] The men, described in the press as being ‘in various garbs’ and speaking in ’a strange, excited tongue’, marched into the local Post Office, alarming staff and bystanders with their animated gestures and unintelligible ’jabbering’. Constables escorted them to a place where an interpreter could establish the cause: through the Serangs, they alleged persistent ill-treatment, including assault, by the chief engineer. Their demand was firm; the engineer must leave the ship. Outside the court, the crew stood in silent formation while the captain, officers, and marine superintendent gave statements inside.[59]

In court, the first engineer, Griffith Owen, was charged with assaulting a fireman, but conflicting accounts and uncertainty over timing led to the case being dropped in favour of a formal warning. The magistrate instructed the crew to return to work, but when told, they replied they would rather face ‘severe consequences’ than sail with the engineer. The captain’s representative countered with log entries alleging threats and intimidation by the Lascars, yet the Serangs held their position.[60] In the end, a compromise was reached: the crew returned on the condition that the chief engineer remain ashore. Reported at the time as a near-mutiny, the affair shows the Serangs’ skill in defending their men’s welfare while steering them through the fine line between lawful protest and outright rebellion, managing both linguistic and procedural challenges.[61]

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[57] Ibid.

[58] *Dundee Evening Post*, “On the Verge of Mutiny,” 4 May 1901, 4.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

Earlier incidents also demonstrate the Serang's consistent role as spokesperson and negotiator. In 1896, forty-seven Lascars from the *SS Indralena* in Cardiff refused to sail due to concerns about cold weather. Two Serangs represented the crew, communicating through an interpreter to ensure their grievances were heard.[62] Similarly, in 1903 the steamship *Griqua* saw nineteen Lascars, including the Serang, refusing orders until the chief officer was removed, again emphasising the Serang's leadership in addressing the crew's dissatisfaction while balancing legal oversight.[63]

The Serang's advocacy extended beyond local disputes to challenges involving ill-treatment and systemic grievances. Fourteen Lascars from the *SS Den* articulated through their Serang complaints of physical abuse and extortion by the first officer. The Serang's detailed testimony in court underscored the crew's desire for justice and proper treatment, demonstrating how the Serang operated as both intermediary and protector of the crew's rights. [64]

Even conflicts among Lascars themselves often revolved around the Serangs' leadership. In Sunderland, 1902, roughly fifty Lascars, divided along the lines of deckhands and firemen, engaged in violent confrontation under the guidance of their respective Serangs. The dispute escalated into a half-hour melee involving knives and bludgeons, resulting in severe injuries before police intervention restored order. This episode underscores the Serangs' role not only in advocating for their group but also in mediating disputes within the broader crew.[65]

Across these examples, a consistent pattern emerges: the Serang serves as both leader and intermediary, navigating the complex interplay of authority, grievance, and loyalty. Whether directing mutinous action, advocating for improved conditions, or negotiating resolutions between the crew and officers, the Serang embodies the intricate dynamics of maritime hierarchies, embodying both the responsibilities and risks inherent in guiding the Lascars.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] *South Wales Echo*, "Mutinous Crew at Cardiff," 1 December 1896, 3.

[63] *London Evening Standard*, "Thames," 12 November 1903, 9.

[64] *Weekly Dispatch (London)*, "Lascar Complaint," 9 January 1910, 1.

[65] *Bolton Evening News*, "Pitched Battle at Sunderland," 29 August 1902, 3.

3.b.The Brave Serang:

The role of the Serang extended far beyond maintaining discipline or directing the crew; it often demanded courage, initiative, and decisive leadership in moments of extreme peril. Mohammed Nusseeb, a Lascar-Serang, exemplified this extraordinary blend of authority and bravery during a life-saving mission in the Atlantic Ocean on November 11th, 1893. When the American schooner *Frank S. Warren* found itself imperilled by a violent storm, it was Nusseeb's leadership and seamanship that enabled the rescue of the captain and crew. [66]

As chief of the Lascar crew aboard the ship *Iran*, Nusseeb navigated a small gig through tempestuous seas to reach the storm-tossed schooner. With direct approach impossible, he devised a methodical system: tying a log-line around each person on the schooner, one by one, and guiding them safely to the gig. Under his command, the crew rescued the captain, chief and second officers, steward, and five American sailors, demonstrating not only skill and courage but also the capacity to inspire coordinated action under extreme stress. In recognition of his heroic services, President Grover Cleveland awarded Nusseeb a gold medal, inscribed to commemorate his exceptional leadership in effecting the rescue. The award, presented in Bombay through the English Board of Trade, served as a formal acknowledgment of the Serang's role as both a courageous sailor and an effective leader of men. [67]

Leadership and bravery among Serangs were not confined to the high seas. Yacoob Naaib, another distinguished Serang, demonstrated similar heroism during defence rehearsal operations at Karachi in March 1911. When two soldiers from a picket fell into the water and faced imminent danger of drowning, Naaib acted without hesitation. Employing both courage and resourcefulness, he rescued both soldiers and brought them safely ashore. His decisive action, grounded in his authority and experience as a Serang, earned him the Royal Humane Society's Medal, awarded in a ceremony at the R. I. M. Dockyard before the assembled crews of all ships in port. Naaib's heroism underscores how Serangs combined authority with responsibility, often placing themselves at personal risk to safeguard the lives of others. [68]

These episodes illustrate a critical dimension of the Serang's role: far from mere enforcers of discipline, they were leaders capable of decisive action in moments of crisis. Whether navigating treacherous seas, orchestrating complex rescue operations, or taking personal initiative in life-threatening situations, Serangs like Nusseeb and Naaib embodied courage, foresight, and the moral authority that came with their position. Their actions not only saved lives but also reinforced the Serang's standing as indispensable figures of leadership and resilience aboard ship.

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[66] *Eastern Evening News*, "A Brave Lascar," 13 September 1894, 2.

[67] Ibid.

[68] *Civil & Military Gazette (Lahore)*, "A Plucky Serang," 24 December 1911, 4.

3.c. Conflict, Coercion, and Abuse of Authority

The authority of the Serang was not only central to the organisation and discipline aboard ship but could also be wielded for purposes far removed from official duty. In some cases, this authority facilitated illicit activities. A striking example comes from 1895, when Osman Baba, serving as Serang, was implicated in a smuggling operation at Wallasey Dock. Alongside two other seamen, Ahmed Ismal and Sobra Ormerod, he was caught carrying parcels containing 40 lbs of tobacco and 13½ lbs of cigars. Further searches of their vessel uncovered yet more contraband hidden in various parts of the ship. Osman Baba readily claimed ownership of the goods, stating that he had purchased them in Malta for delivery to his brother in Liverpool.[69] While his admission assumed personal responsibility, it also underscored the leverage a Serang held, both in directing crew members and in orchestrating the movement of illicit cargo. The court's judgement reflected this, imposing heavier penalties on him than on his crewmates, reinforcing the perception that a Serang bore not only command but heightened culpability. The case suggests that a Serang's leadership could extend to using Lascars as conduits for smuggling.

This ability to command could also manifest in more direct, physical forms of coercion. The hierarchical gap between Serang and ordinary Lascar seamen could breed both fear and submission, and on occasion, violent abuse. A case in 1875 from the British ship *Neva* illustrates the extremes this dynamic could reach. The vessel's Serang, Seedin, reportedly a Japanese man fluent in Malay, was accused of causing the death of a seaman named Sali while docked in Barbados. According to testimony by Lascar crewman John James, tensions had flared after Seedin allegedly insulted Sali's mother.[70] The confrontation escalated violently: James claimed Seedin knocked Sali down, kicked him, and finally pushed him overboard into the harbour. James did not immediately report the matter to the ship's officers, later alleging that Seedin had urged him to remain silent in exchange for payment upon reaching Calcutta. When the case reached the Thames Police Court, the accused, speaking through an interpreter, denied the allegations and accused James of fabricating the story, naming other crew members as witnesses in his defence. The court remanded the matter for further inquiry, but regardless of its outcome, the incident exposed the darker side of the Serang's power, where leadership could shift from discipline into violence and intimidation. [71]

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[69] *Leigh Chronicle and Weekly District Advertiser*, "Wholesale Smuggling by Lascar Seamen," 31 May 1895, 7.
[70] *Shields Daily Gazette*, "Alleged Murder at Sea," 30 September 1875, 4.

The potential for violent conflict extended beyond a single ship or incident. The case of Valadi Salim on the P. and O. steamer *Pera* offers another example of Serang involvement in aggressive confrontations among Lascars. Valadi Sallam, a 'Sidhi boy' and fireman's Serang on the *Arcadia*, was charged with the wilful murder of Dewan Ali after allegedly stabbing him with a six-inch blade, alongside thirty other Sidhi boys. When confronted, Sallam explained in broken English that he boarded the *Pera* because there was 'plenty of barbary', implying a motive rooted in dispute or conflict.[72] Witnesses, including fellow firemen Nazam Deen and Ali Patel, and officers Arthur Collin and Detective John Condon, provided detailed accounts of the stabbing, the ensuing fight among the crew, and the arrest of Sallam. Although the trial ended in a not guilty verdict, the episode underscores the capacity of Serangs to instigate or direct violent encounters, revealing a broader pattern of physical coercion in shipboard hierarchies. [73]

Beyond such incidents of coercion or illicit enterprise, the Serang's authority over Lascars could also intersect with wider currents of communication and resistance. Ali Raza and Benjamin Zachariah highlight the 1920s as a period when Lascar mobility was harnessed by organised anti-colonial networks. The underlying conditions they describe, control over hiring, work assignments, and shipboard movement, were already embedded in the Serang-Lascar relationship in earlier decades.[74] In the 1870-1920 period, these powers could shape not only smuggling operations, as in Osman Baba's case, violent discipline, as with Seedin aboard the *Neva*, or violent confrontations like Valadi Salim's stabbing, but also the discreet movement of letters, ideas, and contraband between ports. A politically sympathetic Serang could discreetly assign trusted crew to voyages or shield subversive material from detection, while one loyal to colonial authority might use the same powers to suppress dissent or inform on radicals. This dual capacity reinforced the Serang's pivotal role, not only as an enforcer of shipboard order, but as a potential broker in the hidden circuits linking maritime labour to transnational activism.

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[71] Ibid.

[72] *Daily Mirror*, "Plenty of Barbary," 8 August 1904, 4.

[73] Valadi Sallam, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 9.0, accessed 15 February 2024), September 1904, trial of Valadi Sallam, t19040913-712.

[74] Ali Raza and Benjamin Zachariah, "To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble: The 'Lascar System,' Politics, and Agency in the 1920s," *Itinerario* 36, no. 3 (December 2012): 19–38, https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511531300003X.

3.d.Violence Against Serang

While the role of the Serang was traditionally one of leadership and authority over the Lascar crew, the relationship was far from one-sided. Instances of violence against Serangs reveal a turbulent and often volatile dynamic beneath the surface of maritime hierarchy. These incidents show that Serangs were not only enforcers of discipline but sometimes targets of rebellion and aggression from the very crews they led.

One such example occurred in 1904 at Tilbury Dock, where Sutin Mukhand, a Serang and boatswain on the P. and O. *SS Australia*, became the victim of a brutal attack. Mukhand was awakened abruptly by a noise in the night, only to find Hamed Mustang standing behind him with a knife, accompanied by Mahomed Godam wielding a stick. The attack left Mukhand with a deep wound to his head and injuries to his foot, forcing him to seek medical treatment at Tilbury Cottage Hospital. The assailants fled but were eventually apprehended and charged. This violent episode underscores the fragile nature of authority aboard ships, where power could be challenged with deadly force.[75]

Tensions between different groups of Lascars also played a role in violent confrontations involving Serangs. For instance, a clash erupted among the crews of the *SS. Vectis*, *Ophir*, and *Clan Buchanan* in Tilbury Dock, leading to the death of Alleybux Murburnek, a Serang on the Vectis. The conflict, sparked by underlying social divisions such as caste differences, escalated quickly with the use of sticks and weapons. Rashit, a Tindal on the *Ophir*, was charged with murder following an assault involving an iron bar. The violent outbreak highlighted deep-seated rivalries and antagonisms within the Lascar community, often inflamed by the pressures of life at sea and dock.[76]

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[75] *Essex Newsman*, "Midnight Scene Among Lascars," 26 September 1903, 3.

[76] *Chelmsford Chronicle*, "Fatal Fracas Among Lascars at Tilbury," 8 July 1904, 2.

The volatile nature of the Serang's authority was further illustrated in a 1915 disturbance aboard the steamship *Clan Mackinnon*. Two crew members, Enchanoolla and Abdul Mobaruckoolla, assaulted their Serang and another crewmate following a heated altercation sparked by a seemingly minor incident involving a toy wooden horse. The dispute escalated into physical violence, with Enchanoolla wielding an iron bar and inflicting serious injury on the Serang's arm. Medical reports from Borough Hospital documented the injuries, reflecting the severity of the conflict. The defendants claimed the Serang had instigated the violence by demanding excessive commissions from the crew, revealing the underlying tensions tied to authority and economic control aboard ship. Ultimately, the charges were dismissed, but the case emphasised the complexity of power relations within the crew.[77]

Perhaps the most severe example of violence against a Serang occurred during the trial of Feroz, who was convicted of manslaughter after fatally attacking Hadgee Mahomed, the Serang of the Bayard, in London's dry dock in 1886. The altercation began when Mahomed tried to compel Feroz to work despite his illness, resulting in a violent confrontation during which Feroz struck Mahomed on the head with a piece of wood, causing fatal injuries. The court heard testimonies of hair-pulling, verbal abuse, and escalating violence, painting a picture of a deeply fraught relationship between the Serang and some crew members. The sentence reflected the gravity of the crime yet also acknowledged provocation and the tensions simmering in the confined and hierarchical world of the ship. [78]

Together, these incidents reveal that the authority of the Serang was constantly contested, with violent outbursts serving as stark reminders of the precarious balance of power within Lascar crews. The Serang's role was not just one of control but also of vulnerability, as leadership could quickly be challenged by the frustrations and resistance of those they governed.

Conclusion

The killing of Habeeb Sued by Sulleyman Adam in 1910 was more than a personal tragedy; it was a rupture in the carefully maintained order of imperial shipping. As Serang, Sued was the linchpin of Lascar recruitment and discipline, the intermediary who translated the authority of

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[77] *Liverpool Echo*, "The Lascars Quarrel," 29 April 1915, 5.
[78] Feroz, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 9.0, accessed 15 February 2024), April 1886, trial of Feroz, t18860405-432.

European officers into the language, customs, and rhythms of his crew. For Adam to take the life of such a figure was to challenge not only one man's authority, but the very structure that governed Lascar labour at sea.

Placed alongside other examples of tension, grievance, and violence between Lascars and Serangs, this incident reveals the inherent instability of a role that combined solidarity with subordination, and leadership with enforcement. Serangs could be protectors, advocates, and community leaders, but they were also agents of discipline, sometimes perceived as complicit in the exploitation of their men. Adam's act, however extreme, was born out of this combustible mix of dependence, mistrust, and resentment.

The Adam and Sued case underscores that the Serang-Lascar relationship was never a static or harmonious arrangement. It was a living, contested relationship in which authority had to be constantly asserted and negotiated, and where the pressures of life at sea could push men beyond the limits of that negotiation. In the broader history of Lascar labour, such moments of rupture remind us that maritime hierarchies were not immutable. They could be, and at times were, violently overturned from below.

Chapter Two: Horatio Walters, Peter Lyall and Habeeb Sued:

On the 18th of September 1874, the *Emily Augusta* arrived in Millwall docks. Soon after its arrival, inquiries were carried out which led to the transfer of the surviving Lascars to the Strangers' Home for Asiatics in Limehouse and the subsequent arrest of Captain Horatio Walters.[1]

The narrative unfolded at the Stranger's Home in Limehouse, where Superintendent John Freeman oversaw the arrival of the entire Lascar crew from the ship *Emily Augusta*, including a severely ill man named Fugeer Ali, on the night of September 19th. Joseph Salter, a missionary, was also present.[2] The following day, Police Sergeant Alfred Hansom arrived at the Home and, with Salter's assistance, took a statement from Fugeer Ali regarding alleged abuse suffered aboard the ship. This statement, witnessed by Freeman, became a pivotal piece of evidence in a case against the ship's captain Horatio Walters which ultimately led to the imprisonment of Walters.[3]

On Saturday, the 3rd of September 1890, a Lascar named Bhagwan Jassiwarra arrived in Liverpool on the Guion steamer Nevada from New York. The Lascar had been accused of murdering Fife Captain Peter Lyall on the 11th of October 1890.[4] Once the ship returned to Liverpool, Jassiwarra was met by Abdullah Quillam (Aka William Quilliam) who was described in the *Liverpool Mercury* as 'chief of the Mohammedan Church in Liverpool'.[5]

At the Liverpool Assizes, Bhagwan Jassiwarra was initially sentenced to death for the murder of Captain Peter Lyall, master of the ship *Buckingham*. The prisoner's counsel sought to have the charge reduced to manslaughter on the grounds of provocation, arguing that Jassiwarra had been slapped two or three times. Although he was initially sent to Kirkdale Gaol to await execution, a petition, supported by a statement from a crew member of the *Buckingham*, was submitted to the Home Office.[6] The petition requested respite for the Lascar, which was granted, sparing him from the death penalty.[7]

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[1] *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*, "The Alleged Murder on the High Seas," 23 October 1874, 2.

[2] John Freeman, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 12 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters (32), t18741123-31.

[3] Alfred Hansom, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 12 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters (32), t18741123-31.

[4] *Lancashire Evening Post*, "The Atlantic Tragedy," 5 January 1891, 4.

[5] *Liverpool Mercury*, "The Murder of Captain Lyall," 5 January 1891, 6.

On the night of August 22nd, 1910, Sulleyman Adam, a Lascar aboard the *Newby Hall*, was arrested for stabbing the ship's Serang, Habeeb Sued, to death while the ship was in Queens dock in Glasgow. The details of the case emerged gradually through court documents and eyewitness testimonies. Andrew Jameson's (Lord Ardwall) report on the case established Adam's responsibility for the stabbing, presenting compelling evidence that led to a verdict of murder. Because of extenuating circumstances, the jury unanimously recommended mercy, acknowledging the difficult inter-personal dynamics between the accused and the deceased.[8]

What If?

This chapter examines the experiences of Lascars aboard British ships between 1870 and 1910, a period in which their circumstances changed significantly. Focusing on three key moments, 1874, 1890, and 1910, it uses the cases of Horatio Walters, Bhagwan Jassiwarra, and Sulleyman Adam to explore the interconnectedness of individuals across time and space, and to consider how a Lascar such as Adam, embroiled in a murder case in 1910, might have been situated in earlier contexts.

The years 1874 and 1890 stand as watershed moments in this history. In 1874, the case of Captain Horatio Walters, who murdered Lascars aboard his ship, exposed the harsh realities of colonial maritime hierarchies. By contrast, in 1890, Bhagwan Jassiwarra's conviction for the murder of Captain Peter Lyall marked a striking reversal of roles. Taken together, these cases raise broader questions about the societal, spatial, and political forces that shaped the lives of Lascars such as Sulleyman Adam, Fugeer Ali, and Bhagwan Jassiwarra, and what their experiences reveal about the wider structures of empire.

These three cases are significantly different from each other, as crime and punishment changed during this period from 1874 to 1890 to 1910. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault provides an analysis of the historical development of the modern penal system and its move from public torture of the body and public execution to incarceration and total control of criminals.[9] Foucault demonstrates the ways in which strict discipline and morals had transformed the agency of punishment from the corporeal to the spiritual.

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[6] *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, "The Day's News," 17 March 1891, 4.

[7] *London Evening Standard*, "The Provinces," 23 March 1891, 3.

[8] NRS, HH16/117, Report by Andrew Jameson on Case of Sulleyman Adam, 21 October 1910.

Foucault argues that the way European societies treat prisoners' changes over time, and by exploring this, we can see what this tells us about these societies. He starts with an instance of a prisoner being tortured in the mid-eighteenth century and juxtaposes this with a story of the regimented daily schedule for prisoners in the early-nineteenth century. Foucault argues that we may better understand the values and priorities of a society through how we treat criminals. He argues, 'the public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted'.[10] He continues, 'Its aim is not so much to re-establish as to bring into play…the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength'.[11]

Foucault is very interested in punishment as a site of investigation, as it is clear who has power and who does not. Through punishment, we can see the relationship between sovereignty and subject, ruler and ruled. Foucault's notion of the panopticon is not merely an abstract prison design; it stands as a model of how discipline permeates the everyday. Disciplinary power operates in the fibres of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.[12] Ships functioned as microcosms of this system: they were closed, total environments in which captains and officers exercised near-absolute authority over the crew, structuring time, labour, and conduct. In such settings, Lascars were subject to a disciplinary regime that resembled the panopticon, constant scrutiny and the threat of punishment meant that sailors often pre-emptively conformed, embodying the internalisation of discipline that Foucault describes. Here we see the dominant, structural power of the state (and its agencies, including ship discipline and maritime law), but when we shift focus to lived experience, we also bring into view the micro power of the individual to resist, even in contexts that appear to embody 'total' power. This interplay between domination and resistance shows how punishment and discipline were never entirely one-directional but always contested, even in highly controlled environments like ships.

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[9] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

[10] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 48.

[11] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 48–49.

[12] Maja Galič, Taco Timan, and Bartel J. Koops, "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation," *Philosophy & Technology* 30 (2017): 15-16, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-016-0219-1.

Dipesh Chakrabarty highlights the authority and exercise of managerial power in the Jute Mills of Calcutta. He claims, 'In Marx's (or Foucault's) discussion of capitalist discipline, managerial and supervisory authority is seen to operate through an articulated body of rules and legislation that have the effect of ensuring an economy in the use and exercise of managerial power. In the jute mills of Calcutta, however, there prevailed the idea that the managers should be in complete and unchallenged control of their labourers.'[13] This is similar to the treatment of Lascars aboard British ships, where captains exercised absolute authority over the crew, often ruling with an iron fist to maintain order and discipline.

Marcus Rediker highlights the struggles of life aboard ships as he stated it was 'highly graded and specialised', firmly disciplined, routinised and subject to technological innovation.[14] Rediker argued, 'seamen occupied a pivotal position in the creation of international markets and a waged working class, as well as in the worldwide concentration and organisation of capital and labour'.[15] In his analysis, seamen also appear to have developed a shared collective consciousness, reflecting an awareness of their common interests and conditions and fostering a unified desire to contest the terms of their work.[16] Rediker stated, 'but for all of its problems and risks, the seaman's work experience pointed the way to the future. Maritime workers were concentrated on the ship in much the same way that other labourers were assembled in ever larger numbers in manufactories or on plantations. They toiled under a watchful supervisory regime armed with violent disciplinary power, which was used to ensure their cooperation for the sake of profit. They rambled from port to port, selling their muscle for a monetary wage.'[17] He continued:

> Seamen were also instrumental in the formation and extension of plebeian culture. They influenced both the form and the content of plebeian protest by their militant presence in seaport crowds. They manifested and contributed to the anti-authoritarian and egalitarian traditions within early working-class culture. Perhaps more crucially still, seamen used their mobility, specifically desertion, both to better their own lot within a context of labour scarcity and to create links with other working people.[18]

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[13] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 172.

[14] Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700–1750*, 11th print ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 89.

[15] Ibid., 77.

[16] Ibid., 312.

[17] Ibid., 293.

[18] Ibid., 294.

In exploring this, it will be important to analyse the differing situations each character found themselves in and what this tells us about the changing spatial politics aboard British ships and in the docks for Lascars. The cases of 1874 and 1890 show a level of working-class resistance that is seen through the work of Linebaugh and Rediker which acknowledges the work of 'a motley crew' or 'a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, transatlantic working class…whose presence, much less agency, is rarely, if ever, acknowledged' by nation-centred historiographies.[19] David Featherstone discusses the work of Linebaugh and Rediker as he states, 'such approaches open up what counts as internationalism and positions "universals" such as multi-ethnic conceptions of humanity emerging through shared struggles and through the circulation of radical experience. Their account is also part of a challenge to the terms on which we understand the spatialities of working-class experience'.[20]

The resistance of Britain's multi-ethnic working class, often overlooked in existing historiography, is central to this chapter. One of E.P. Thompson's key contributions is the reconceptualisation of the Marxist concept of 'class consciousness', suggesting that the working class developed a sense of identity and solidarity through shared experiences and struggles. He argues against a deterministic view of history and shows the importance of understanding the working class as an active historical agent.[21] However, the cases of 1874, 1890 show a level of multi-ethnic resistance not understood by Thompson. What makes 1910 even more significant is that it explores a level of inter-conflict in the multi-ethnic working class that was not explored in the work of Linebaugh and Rediker (explored further in chapter 5). When it comes to the trial of Horatio Walters, Joseph Salter argued, 'this trial not only gave satisfaction to the oppressed who found their wrong avenged in a London court of justice, but convinced them and their fellow-countrymen that such ill-treatment, when proved, would never be tolerated or passed over with impunity'.[22] This quote is pertinent as it underscores the significance of legal victories in bolstering the morale of the oppressed and reinforcing the belief that resistance could lead to tangible justice, thereby fostering a stronger sense of solidarity and resistance within the multi-ethnic working class.

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[19] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (1990): 229, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.1990.tb00149.x

[20] David Featherstone and Philip Griffin, "Spatial Relations, Histories from Below and the Makings of Agency: Reflections on *English Working Class* at 50," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 3 (2016): 375–393, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515578774.

[21] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 10.

[22] Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work among Orientals* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1873), 151.

Why 1874, 1890 and 1910?

James W. Frey's research sheds light on the intricate relationship between Lascars and the British legal system, particularly focusing on the period between 1858 and the end of the nineteenth century. He points out a significant lack of cases involving Lascars within the Old Bailey, during this timeframe, with only one notable exception, the Horatio Walters case. This absence raises intriguing questions about the reasons behind the relative silence regarding Lascar-related incidents within the court system during this period. This chapter hopes to shed light on the barriers between Lascars and the search for justice.

However, in 1890 a pivotal event unfolded when a Lascar was accused of killing a British captain, Peter Lyall, signalling a potential shift in dynamics. This case suggests a narrative of Lascars resisting the tyranny of captains, possibly indicating a broader trend of defiance against oppressive maritime authority (see Cardiff Riot chapter). Subsequently, the late-nineteenth century witnessed a surge in mutinies and riots among Lascar crews, hinting at simmering tensions and discontent within the maritime labour force. Frey argued, ‘No such cases were brought by Lascars working for the steamship companies, partly because firms like P&O carefully monitored all employees, blacklisting anyone, Asian or European, who “caused trouble” for management’.[23] He continued to state:

> The continuous work schedule of steamers, and their short sojourns in port, also prevented Lascars from having recourse to the law, quite simply, they did not have time to see a magistrate. Thus, the Lascar cases of the 1850s represent a unique moment in maritime history, when altered patterns of seaborne trade and labour organisation, and recent British social and legal reforms, combined to bring about conditions conducive to a change in metropolitan perceptions of the plight of Asian seafarers.[24]

Moving forward to 1910, the Sulleyman Adam case emerges as a stark contrast, revealing a culture of internal strife and conflict among Lascars themselves. This case underscores the complexity of Lascar interactions within the British legal system, highlighting dynamics of intra-group conflict alongside encounters with external authorities. Frey's analysis delves into the nuances of Lascar court cases, particularly examining how institutions such as the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey navigated these complex legal matters. He cautions against relying solely on court transcripts, noting their limitations in capturing the full scope of these cases. Instead, Frey advocates for leveraging newspaper archives as a complementary resource, providing valuable insights into local perspectives, legal procedures, and key individuals involved in Lascar-related trials.[25]

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[23] James W. Frey, “Lascars, the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey: Crime on the High Seas and the London Courts, 1852–8,” *Journal for Maritime Research* 16, no. 2 (2014): 196–211, https://doi.org/10.1080/21533369.2014.965432.

[24] Ibid.

While Frey's research offers a valuable foundation, there is room for further exploration and development, particularly in expanding the scope beyond the limited number of ships studied. Newspaper archives present a rich source of information, offering glimpses into the lives and experiences of Lascars across the British Empire, especially during the turn of the nineteenth century. By delving into these archival materials, researchers can unearth forgotten narratives and shed light on the multifaceted realities of Lascar presence within the legal landscape of colonial Britain.

Frey makes an important observation about the care that must be taken when reading court archives. Although the Old Bailey printed transcripts were some of the most important documents to use when researching the history of Lascar crime, Frey notes that it is important to understand that almost all cases tried at the central criminal court had begun somewhere else. This is an important point from Frey as he highlights the omissions of key details from Old Bailey transcripts. He explains:

> When Lascar cases reached the grand jury, for example, charges against captains and masters were often dropped, while those concerning mates and other subordinates were pursued. Thus, Lascar cases presented in the Old Bailey transcripts are legal constructs, usually very different from the original case. Furthermore, although depositions taken in earlier investigations were sometimes read at the Old Bailey, these were not included in trial transcripts. The remarks of attorneys, interpreters and judges were also generally omitted, although they are important for understanding the legal process.[26]

Following this Frey highlights the importance of using newspaper articles as a means of tracing the trials of Lascars down to local levels and suggests this as a method of unearthing forgotten and untold stories of Lascars in courts. Frey argues that although there are many limitations to newspaper reports the 'accounts of the trials are invaluable because they provide information about magistrates, judges, attorneys, translators and legal procedures that are not included in official records'.[27]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

As Frey demonstrates, the scarcity of cases brought before British courts between 1858 and the late nineteenth century offers a revealing perspective on the changing experiences of Lascars aboard British ships. Georgie Wemyss argues that 'Lascars were seen as docile and content to follow the orders of their superiors'.[28] Frey, however, highlights that 'Lascars were not simply deferential, passive recipients of British justice'.[29] Jonathan Hyslop also argues for the need to move away from a victimological reading of the sailor's experience while exploring their active role in shaping their futures.[30]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Lascars increasingly challenged the authority of their captains, culminating in events such as the 1890 murder of Captain Peter Lyall. The case of Sulleyman Adam is central to this discussion but must be understood within the changing context provided by earlier cases such as Horatio Walters (1874) and Lyall (1890). While Lascars had long resisted coercion, earlier instances tended to rely on constrained, legal avenues for redress, as seen in 1874. By 1890, however, there was a clear turning point towards more direct and violent forms of opposition.

The Adam case is distinctive in that it did not centre on resistance to European officers, but on conflict within the Lascar hierarchy itself. Adam's attack on Habeeb Sued, the Serang of the Newby Hall, exposed tensions embedded in the intermediary role of Serangs, who, as discussed in Chapter One, acted both as disciplinarians on behalf of the captain and as cultural and linguistic brokers for the crew. The incident highlights strained relations between European officers and South Asian sailors, while also revealing fractures within the Lascar community, where authority and loyalty were contested.

Here, Lascar agency could be directed both 'upward' against captains and 'laterally' against Serangs, reflecting the layered hierarchies of maritime labour. Considered together, these cases do not suggest a linear progression, but rather changing forms in how opposition was expressed over time. The comparison also highlights evolving support networks: whereas in 1874 Lascars such as Fugeer Ali relied on English Christian intermediaries like Joseph Salter, by 1890 and 1910 they increasingly drew on Muslim and South Asian figures such as Abdullah Quilliam and Aziz Ahmad. This development highlights not only changing means of contesting authority, but also the growing solidarity and agency within Lascar communities.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Georgie Wemyss, "Littoral Struggles, Liminal Lives: Indian Merchant Seafarers' Resistances," in *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858–1947*, ed. Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 83.

[29] Frey, "Lascars, the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey," 196–211.

[30] Jonathan Hyslop, "Steamship Empire: Asian, African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine c.1880–1945," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44, no. 1 (2009): 51, https://doi.org/10.1177/002190960809867

1. Horatio Walters 1874

Key figures:

Horatio Walters: Captain of the Emily Augusta

Robert Shurtz: First Mate

William Cook: Second Mate

Dr Francis Corner: Surgeon

Khalee Khan: Lascar Witness/ Interpreter

Fugeer Ali: First deceased Lascar

Sheik Abdullah/Abdoolah: Second deceased Lascar

Calo: Third deceased Lascar

Peter Brown: Cook on board ship/ witness

Sheik Itwaree: Lascar Witness/interpreter

William Mattison: Young boy on board ship / witness

Abdul: Serang

Joseph Salter: Missionary from Strangers Home

John Freeman: Super-intendent of the Strangers Home

Defence: Mr Serjeant Ballantine and Mr Straight.

Prosecution: Mr Poland and Mr Beasley.

Brown and Co of Liverpool: The company that owned the Emily Augusta, the ship involved in the case against Captain Horatio Walters

Emily Augusta: The ship on which the events took place, leading to the charges against Captain Horatio Walters

Confimred Victims of Horatio Walters:

Fugeer Ali: Deceased Lascar (Old Bailey Case)

Sheik Abdullah/Abdoolah: Second Deceased Lascar (Old Bailey)

Kalu: Third Deceased Lascar (Case dropped at Old Bailey)

Other Alleged Victims as reported by Times in India:

Abdool Hamed, aged 25

Abdool Gafoor, aged 25

Janoo Neal, Secunnie, aged 25

Hingoo, aged 26, Serang

Hussein

Khoda Buksh, Tailor.

Beechoo, aged 22

Horatio Walters was a 32-year-old Irish American who was charged in 1874 with causing the death of three Indian seamen on a voyage aboard the ship *Emily Augusta* from Akyab to London. The *Emily Augusta* was an American-built ship of 1,500 tons but was under the British flag and belonged to Brown and Co of Liverpool.[31] The case of Horatio Walters is a complex and tumultuous one. He was captain of the *Emily Augusta*, charged with the murder of three Lascar sailors: Fugeer Ali, Sheikh Abdoolah and a third Lascar sailor, Kalu, which was eventually dropped.

When the *Emily Augusta* set sail from Akyab, the ship was manned by a crew made up of between six to ten European sailors and thirty-three Lascars.[32] It was clear that during the process of the stormy voyage, Captain Walters became increasingly dissatisfied with his Lascar crew, who were under the command of their Serang, Abdul. Roughly a month after the vessel had departed, it was alleged that Walters, assisted by the mate, Robert Shurtz, embarked upon a deliberate and 'systematic course of cruelty' towards the Lascar members of the crew. Testimony stated that Walters repeatedly flogged and beat Fugeer Ali, as well as other Lascars, using belaying pins, capstan bars, and ropes to strike them about the head and body.[33]

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[31] *Bristol Times and Mirror*, "Alleged Murder on Board Ship," 19 October 1874, 4.

[32] William Cook, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 12 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters (32) (t18741123-31).

[33] *Week's News (London)*, "Cruelty to Lascar Seamen," Saturday 28 November 1874, 13.

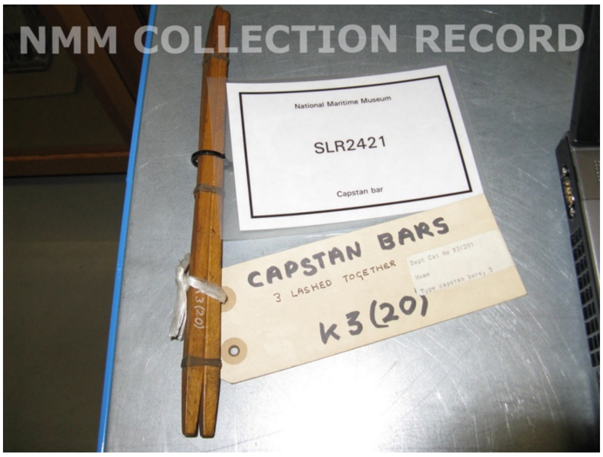
NMM COLLECTION RECORD
National Maritime Museum
SLR2421
Capstan bar
CAPSTAN BARS
3 LASHED TOGETHER
K3(20)

Figure 2 "Captstan Bar" (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London)

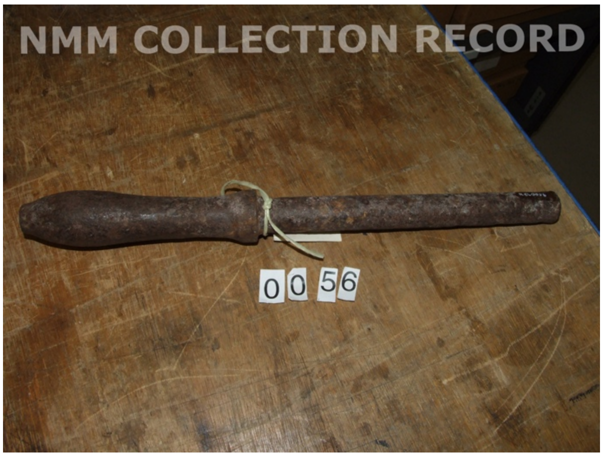
NMM COLLECTION RECORD
0056

Figure 3 "Belaying Pin." (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London)

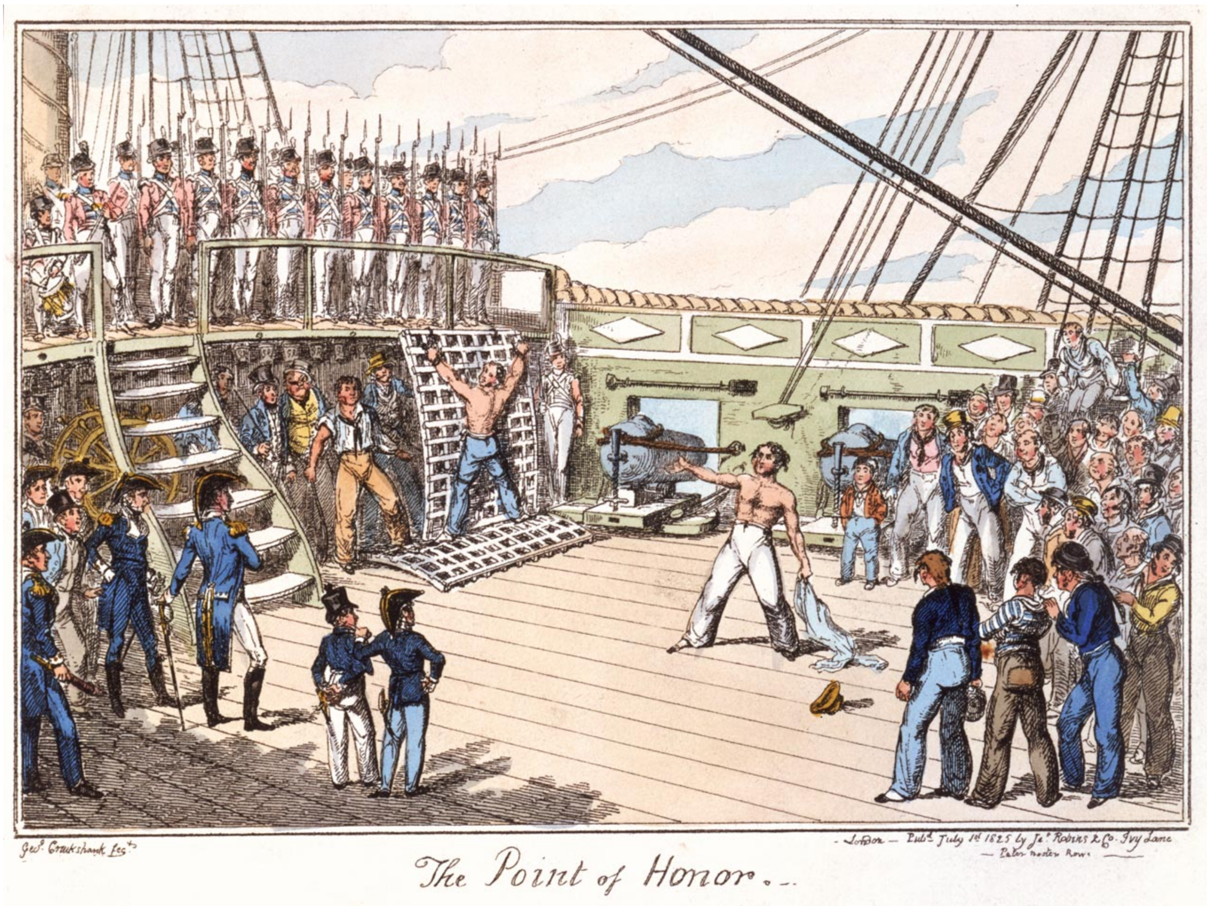
Geo. Cruikshank fect.
London — Pubd. July 1st 1825 by Js. Robins & Co. Ivy Lane
— Paternoster Row.
The Point of Honor...

Figure 4 Flogging Caricature "The Point of Honor" (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London)

The captain was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to fifteen years of penal servitude. Although there was another indictment for the murder of Kalu, it was not pursued during these proceedings. Mr. Justice Keating acknowledged the intelligence displayed by the captain throughout the case and noted that his appeal was primarily a denial of the evidence against him.[34] However, two juries had determined that his actions were illegal, and there was additional evidence that could not be ignored. The signs of violence on the men indicated they had been beaten with more than just a rope's end. The jury spent two hours deliberating and returned with a verdict of guilty for manslaughter. They recommended mercy due to the provocation the captain faced with an inefficient Lascar crew. Consequently, he was sentenced to fifteen years of penal servitude.[35]

1.a.Fugeer Ali:

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[34] *Morning Post*, "The Alleged Murder of Lascars," 28 November 1874, 3.

[35] Ibid.

> **"Statement of Fugeer Ali, a Lascar. I joined the ship Emily Augusta at Akyab, Burmah. On the voyage, about a month and a half after we left Akyab, the first mate beat me on the head with a capstan bar, about two months ago; this occurred daily; he also struck me in the belly with the belaying pin. The mate struck me on the arm with the belaying pin; this was continued all the way to London. The captain struck me on the left ear with an iron belaying pin, and when I fell down he kicked me in the loins; this occurred daily. I believe I am dying. I was a strong hearty man when I began the voyage. I have been at sea two years. I was never impudent or mutinous."[36]**

Witnesses on board the *Emily Augusta*, including fellow Lascar, Khalee Khan, testified to seeing Captain Walters physically assault Fugeer Ali multiple times during the voyage from Akyab to England. Khalee Khan recalled hearing the captain accuse Ali of being lazy and not doing his work properly, as he recalled the captain angrily asking Ali, ‘Do you want to stop all day here?’ and ‘Get on, are you going to be in one place all day?’[37] Police Seargent Alfred Hansom had stated that the captain told him ’they are a confounded lazy lot.‘[38] The assaults included hitting him with a belaying pin on the head, kicking him, and using a rope to strike him. Fugeer Ali suffered injuries to his head, nose, and ears as a result of these assaults, with Khan estimating that he saw the captain strike Fugeer Ali five or six times with the belaying pin. The assaults were described as occurring over a period of months and were witnessed by other crew members as well. Despite the captain's allegations of laziness, the witnesses maintained that Fugeer Ali and the other Lascars worked diligently.[39] The captain's actions were reported to have continued until shortly before the ship arrived in England.

Additional information from the case of Walters includes eyewitness testimonies from various crew members of the ship *Emily Augusta*. Sheik Itwaree, who worked as a cook on board, witnessed multiple instances of the captain physically assaulting Fugeer Ali. Itwaree described the captain striking Ali with a belaying pin and a broom, causing injuries such as bleeding on the head, forehead, and nose.[40] Hamed Khan, a sailor on the same ship, also testified to witnessing the captain striking Ali with a belaying pin multiple times, resulting in blood flowing from his head and holes in his head and clothes.[41] William Cook, the second mate, corroborated these accounts, stating that he saw the captain beat Ali with various objects like a belaying pin, rope's end, and his open hand, causing blood to come out of his head and making him unfit for work towards the end of the voyage.[42]

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[36] Mr. Justice Keating, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 12 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters (32), t18741123-31.

[37] Khalee Khan, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-31.

[38] Hansom, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters.

[39] Khalee Khan, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters.

[40] Sheik Itwaree, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-31.

Additionally, the statements of Fugeer Ali, taken at the Stranger's Home where he was being treated, were presented. Ali's statement detailed the physical abuse he endured from the captain and mate, including being struck on the head with a capstan bar, belaying pin, and rope, resulting in injuries and weakened health throughout the voyage. The medical testimony from Dr. Francis Corner established that Ali's injuries, including an abscess in the ear leading to erysipelas, were likely caused by external violence and contributed to his death.[43]

1.b.Sheikh Abdoolah:

"I am going to sea, but I do not think I will live."[44]

According to the testimony of a Lascar named Cudir, these were the words uttered by Sheikh Abdoolah while he was signing his articles. During the same voyage, Horatio Walters was indicted for the murder of Sheik Abdoolah on the high seas. Abdoolah was described as the most able seaman aboard the ship and a good strong man.[45] Six weeks after leaving Akyab, the captain ordered Abdoolah to take the wheel as a Secunnie, although he protested, stating that he had joined as a Tindal, not a Secunnie. Witness Robert Shurtz, who held a chief mate's certificate, testified that Abdoolah, despite being an able seaman, struggled to steer the ship because he couldn't read the English letters on the compass well. Shurtz mentioned that Abdoolah was frequently abused by the captain, who hit him with ropes, a piece of hard leather, a belaying pin, and other objects, causing injuries such as swollen arms and a severely injured head. [46]

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[41] Hamed Khan, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-31.

[42] William Cook, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-31.

[43] Francis Corner, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-31.

[44] Cudir, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 12 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters (32), t18741123-32.

[45] Robert Shurtz, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.; Peter Brown, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.

From the moment Walters ordered Abdoolah below deck and struck him, it appeared that Abdoolah's life was gradually beaten out of him. According to testimony from Shurtz, Walters repeatedly struck him on the head, legs, arms, and shoulders, leaving him weak and delirious.[47] On the day he died, Abdoolah was discovered tied to part of the ship's windlass mechanism, before being cast adrift and later pronounced dead. The captain's official log entry attributed Abdoolah's death to a disease resembling erysipelas, exacerbated by opium use. However, the crew's testimony, obtained through an interpreter, contradicted the captain's account, stating Abdoolah's deteriorating health and the captain's abusive behaviour. Shurtz also mentioned his own troubles with the crew and denied allegations of his own violence. [48]

Shurtz, testified about the conditions on board the ship and incidents involving the captain's treatment of the crew. He mentioned instances where the captain had physically abused Fugeer Ali, using a rope's end and a belaying pin, causing injuries and drawing blood. Shurtz also described the general hardship experienced by the crew due to food shortages and their weakened state by the end of the voyage. He expressed his disapproval of Sheik Abdoolah's death and the treatment he received. During cross-examination, Shurtz denied allegations of his own violence towards the crew, refuting claims of using a capstan bar or belaying pin on anyone and stating that he did not strike or mistreat Abdoolah. He clarified that he had been falsely accused and reiterated his lack of involvement in such actions.[49] Shurtz also provided a detailed account of the ship's crew and the events leading to Sheik Abdoolah's death. He noted Abdoolah's deteriorating health, swollen ears, and the captain's disregard for his condition. On the day of Abdoolah's death, Shurtz observed the captain's forceful actions to make Abdoolah work despite his weakened state. After Abdoolah's demise, Shurtz expressed concerns about the circumstances to the captain but received no substantial response. He also mentioned signing documents related to the incident under the captain's instructions, including an official log entry that Shurtz believed misrepresented the true cause of Abdoolah's death.[50]

Other European Sailors came forward during the trial to give evidence against Walters, for example, William Mattison, corroborated the mistreatment of Abdoolah, mentioning the captain beating him regularly and noticing Abdoolah's deteriorating health.[51] William Pyke, another witness, also testified about the captain's mistreatment of Abdoolah, including striking him with a belaying pin and leather piece. Pyke also mentioned Abdoolah's deteriorating health, including swollen ears and an arm, and Abdoolah's own admission of opium consumption.[52] Another witness, William Cook, who joined the ship at Bahia, stated, that he heard Abdoolah "holloa sometimes when he was struck." Cook continued to state, 'he would sing out in his own language "Babool" I think it was, which means "Father." Cook claimed he, heard the captain call to him to get up, and he would not, and the captain called him some names (one name was the "son of a b****"), and ordered him to "Lift this man up, and lash him up to that windlass a bit.'[53]

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[46] Robert Shurtz, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, t18741123-32.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

The Lascar portion of the crew also testified to torturous treatment of Abdoolah as a Lascar named Oozman stated that he heard the captain tell Abdoolah 'Get up, you son of a b****," and he kicked him to make him get up; but he did not get up for fifteen or twenty minutes, when he struck his head as he fell, the blood went up, but I did not see any blood, or anything from the beating.'[54] Khalee Khan also highlighted the inhumane treatment of Abdoolah from the captain, as he stated the captain attacked Abdoolah for going to sleep after having his breakfast. Khan stated that the captain told Abdoolah, '"Get up, get up" but he could not get up that time, and he kicked his backside. 'After the incident, Abdoolah went aft and sat down near a spar, eventually lying down as if to pass away. Khan then continued with his work in the fore rigging, observing Sheik Abdoolah's condition and prompting the chief mate to go and check on him. [55]

Following the discovery of Sheik Abdoolah's deceased body, Cook promptly reported the matter to Captain Walters. Approximately a week before reaching Ireland, he claimed to have signed a statement regarding the lost men's wages, as directed by Captain Walters, without having it read to him or reading it himself. Additionally, he claimed he signed the official log entry concerning Sheik Abdoolah's death without reviewing it, indicating, 'I did not read it before I signed it, nor was it read to me.' Despite hearing rumours about Sheik Abdoolah's opium use, he clarified, ‘I know nothing of my own knowledge of Sheik Abdoolah taking opium.’ Furthermore, he stated that he never witnessed Captain Walters administering any medication to Sheik Abdoolah. Cook further revealed that he was simply followed orders from the captain and was not able to read what he signed as he could not read. He stated, ‘I can write my name, and that is all, I swear that I cannot read writing, I did not ask to have it read to me.’[56]

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[51] William Mattison, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.
[52] William Pyke, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.
[53] William Cook, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online,* t18741123-32.
[54] Oozman, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.
[55] Khalee Khan, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, t18741123-32.

The Serang, Abdul, recounted being coerced into signing a paper by the captain, who used threats and violence, including hitting Abdul over the head with a belaying pin and holding a pistol to him, to force him to comply. Abdul stated:

> I remember going into the captain's cabin before we got to Cork…and he said I want you to sign a paper, I said, "Why should I sign a paper,” then the captain took a belaying pin and said "What! You won't sign," and he hit me over the head and made the blood run out, then he said, "Go forward and clean yourself and come into the cabin," and I went into the cabin, and he ordered me to sign a paper.[57]

Despite not understanding the contents of the paper, Abdul claimed that he signed it out of fear for his life. During cross-examination, Abdul confirmed the use of threats and violence by the captain, including the captain pointing a pistol at him and making threatening statements in Hindostanee. Abdul stated, in the cabin the captain held the pistol, and said ‘if you do not sign, I will sign you; I will kill you.’[58] The Serang, although an important intermediary responsible for managing the Lascars on the ship, did not possess full autonomy or delegated authority over them. As we have seen in Chapter One, typically, the Serang was tasked with overseeing the Lascars’ day-to-day activities and discipline but remained under the captain’s direct control. This lack of autonomous authority meant that the Serang could not independently safeguard the Lascars from mistreatment or coercion.

These testimonies collectively paint a picture of a captain who regularly abused his crew, particularly Sheik Abdoolah, leading to Abdoolah's weakened state and eventual death. The witnesses provide details of the mistreatment, Abdoolah's health decline, and the events leading up to his death. The witnesses, including Khalee Khan, Oozman, Peter Brown, and Cudir, described various instances of physical abuse and violence inflicted upon Abdoolah by the captain. They recount how Abdoolah was beaten with a belaying pin, struck with a belt, kicked, and tied up and subjected to further abuse until he became senseless and later died. The testimonies presented in the text are significant because they come from a diverse range of individuals aboard the ship, including both European and Lascar crew members. This cross-racial and cross-occupational representation highlights a broader consensus on the abusive behaviour of the captain, rather than a biased or one-sided account. By including the perspectives of the Serang, Lascars, and European sailors, the testimonies provide a more comprehensive and credible depiction of the events that led to Sheikh Abdoolah's death.

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[56] William Cook, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online,* t18741123-32.

[57] Abdul, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, accessed 22 April 2022), November 1874, trial of Horatio Walters, t18741123-32.

[58] Ibid.

The witnesses also mentioned the captain's attempt to coerce them into signing a paper, which they did out of fear for their lives. They described the captain's use of intimidation tactics, including brandishing a pistol, to force compliance. In court, the captain objected to the production of certain documents, such as an extract from the official log and the Lascar articles, but they were eventually submitted as evidence. The prosecutor also questioned Robert Shurtz about the process of verifying signatures, particularly in cases where individuals could not write, and Shurtz explained the procedure of having someone else sign on their behalf.

1.c. Evidence of Wider Claims:

Evidence of wider claims against Horatio Walters, beyond the murder cases of Fugeer Ali and Sheikh Abdoolah, reveals a troubling pattern of violence that never fully surfaced in court. This includes multiple accounts of fatal abuse towards Lascars, such as brutal beatings, forced labour under severe conditions, and deliberate neglect leading to deaths. The inability of these broader allegations to reach the judicial system shows the significant barriers Lascars faced in seeking justice. This underscores the complexities and challenges in the Lascars' pursuit of justice and their resilience in the face of pervasive oppression.

It is also important to note that this was not the only criminal case that faced Walters during his time as captain of the *Emily Augusta*. He had also confronted a mutiny on board the ship a year earlier where a number of his crew took control of the ship through the use of violence and confined Walters to his room. The main figures were chief mate John Unsworth and two other seamen who were described as foreigners.[59] This case was taken to court and the two main men accused were imprisoned for six months and twelve months respectively, however, not much is known about the fate of the rest of the crew.[60] This does serve as wider evidence of seamen resistance and the collaboration of different nationalities seeking to resist the abusive treatment of Walters. The imprisonment of the mutineers likely emboldened Walters, reinforcing his authority and control over the crew. This experience could have contributed to a sense of invulnerability, potentially explaining and contextualising his abusive actions in 1874, as he may have felt confident in suppressing dissent and maintaining dominance on the *Emily Augusta*.

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[59] *North Briton*, "The Mutiny on Board the Emily Augusta," 6 December 1873, 6.

Overall, the case presents a clear pattern of physical abuse and a culture of oppression and violence that predated the abuse inflicted upon Fugeer Ali and Sheik Abdoolah by the ship's captain and mate. However, there were additional newspaper reports that alleged that Walter's crimes were far more sinister. For example, the *Conrish Telegraph* reported that Walters had brutally ill-treated 14 other sailors.[61] *The Times of India* took this further as it recorded the names of at least ten men who died while under Walters' command. Although not all of these cases went to court, it is crucial to underscore the extent of abuse Walters was accused of, much of which never reached the Old Bailey.

The first, of course, would be Sheikh Abdoolah who died on the 5 June 1874, aged 50 years; this was one of the cases taken to trial. [62] The second was Abdool Hamed, aged 25, who is stated to have died on the 22nd of June from the effects of a wound from a knife inflicted by Walters three days previously.[63] The third was Abdool Gafoor, aged 25, who was beaten with a belaying pin, fist, and rope. Despite severe injuries to his hands and feet, Gafoor was sent on deck. Subsequent injuries including broken thigh bones and at least one broken rib resulted in his death at 8am, 16 July 1874.[64] The fourth victim was Janoo Neal, a secunnie (sailor's assistant), aged 25, who had spent ten years at sea. He was struck with an iron belaying pin, sustaining a broken wrist, head wounds, and at least one fractured rib, and eventually died from these injuries in August.[65]

The fifth was Kalu, nephew of Sheik Abdoolah, the first victim, 20 years of age, whose case was investigated, and Walters indicted for murder, but it was not tried.[66] The sixth was Hingoo, aged 26, on the 2 September, who had served once as a Serang and was knocked about with a belaying pin on the head. He also suffered a broken nose and a severe blow to the chest, which caused blood to flow from his mouth. He was sent on deck and allowed to fall into the sea, with no attempt made to save him.[67] The seventh man was Hussein, whose hand was broken by a blow from a belaying pin, leaving him incapacitated. He was then ordered to carry out painting work on a plank outside the ship. When he requested a rope for support, the captain refused, and Hussein subsequently fell into the sea and drowned, with no attempt made to save him.[68]

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[60] *Liverpool Mercury*, "Mutiny at Sea," 20 December 1873, 8.

[61] *The Cornish Telegraph*, "Committal for Murder," 11 November 1874, 3.

[62] *Times of India*, "The Case of Captain Horatio Walters," 29 December 1874, 2.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

The eighth was Khoda Buksh, who on the 3rd of September, was shipped as a tailor. He did not understand or speak English and was made steward. He was then struck, by Walters, in the face with the fist and on the head with a belaying pin, his nose and some of his ribs were broken. He later died from the injuries. [69] The ninth was Beechoo, aged 22, who died on 12 September. He fell on the deck after being kicked and struck on the head with a belaying pin. The beating continued as he was put to the pump and struck with a rope and again with a belaying pin. He then died after fainting from his punishment, although attempts were made by Walters to throw water over him.[70] The tenth was Fugeer Ali, who died after being brought on shore on 5 October.[71]

This pattern of normalised violence on the *Emily Augusta*, under Captain Walters, reveals a ship culture marked by unchecked brutality. Walters appeared to operate with impunity, his actions implicitly sanctioned by a criminal justice system and shipping authorities that failed to intervene or hold him accountable. The occurrence of seamen resistance, labelled as 'mutiny', and the subsequent punishment of those involved, underscores the oppressive environment aboard the ship.[72] It also suggests that Walters was adept at manipulating circumstances to escape consequences. For instance, during the mutiny, the ringleaders were punished while Walters faced no repercussions for his abusive behaviour. Additionally, in the 1874 case, Walters allegedly manipulated log entries to obscure the true causes of sailors' deaths, indicating a deliberate attempt to cover up his actions. This manipulation of records suggests that Walters was not only aware of how to exploit the system but may have had a history of similar conduct. The case illustrates the systemic nature of abuse in this context and raises critical questions about the prevalence of such practices in the maritime industry of the time, suggesting that if Walters could perpetrate such violence unchecked, other captains and officers might have engaged in similar practices to varying degrees.

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] *North Briton*, “The Mutiny on Board the *Emily Augusta*,” 6.; *Liverpool Mercury*, “Mutiny at Sea,” 8.

Moreover, there were numerous allegations of sailors being killed by Walters that never reached the courts, raising serious concerns about the true extent of his crimes. It was only by chance that Fugeer Ali, one of Walters' victims, was brought to the Strangers' Home, where the abuse was uncovered. This suggests that many other incidents might have gone unreported or unnoticed, leaving a potentially much larger number of victims and abuses undocumented.

1.d. Role of Strangers House:

The role of the Strangers Home for Asiatic Seamen is a central theme of this chapter as their work is on full display during this trial. Not only were they key in facilitating accommodation for destitute Lascars in Britain, but there is also an insight into their role as middlemen between Lascars and the authorities during this period. Joseph Salter himself confessed that, 'Lascar crews have sometimes very much reason for complaint, and when in London they very naturally look to the Asiatic Home for redress'.[73] It becomes apparent then that once faced with maltreatment Lascars would line up at the Stranger's Home in order to file their grievances with their masters, a practice that can be seen as a form of legalistic resistance, as it allowed them to assert their rights within the confines of the legal system. This is how this case came to light. One year after its opening, the Strangers' Home became involved in a case against a captain in 1858. James Frey discusses the role of Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes of the Home in the case of the *Commodore Perry*, where charges were brought against the captain. Although Hughes did not serve as an interpreter, he played a significant part as an informed public observer.[74] The case of Horatio Walters underscores the importance of the Strangers' Home during this period, as it provided a means for non-English-speaking witnesses to come forward and give accounts of what they had seen, ultimately contributing to Walters' conviction. Salter himself noted that a messenger had approached the organisation to report the crime, being the only crew member aware of the missionary and, as Salter observed, 'indeed the only man in a fit condition to bring the message'.[75] He continued to state how the 'missionary received a special acknowledgement from the treasury for the part he had taken'.[76]

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[73] Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work Among Orientals* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1873), 150.

[74] Frey, "Lascars, the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey," 196–211.

The involvement of the Strangers' Home in this case reveals a striking paradox. On one hand, it demonstrates the vital role that Salter and his colleagues played in supporting Lascars; on the other, it highlights the limited avenues of support available to Lascars elsewhere in Britain when seeking justice for crimes committed against them. This raises questions about how many incidents went unreported, particularly given Salter's observation that it was only by chance that this case came to the attention of the Home. It must however be noted that Christian missionaries like Salter and Freeman also had their own ulterior, racialised, colonial motives in helping the Lascars. Humayun Ansari notes, 'by the mid-nineteenth century Christian philanthropists were perturbed that little had been done "to save the heathens in our midst" when thousands of pounds were being spent on foreign missions'.[77] He further notes that this was particularly evident as they came to realise that the Lascars possessed 'the very reverse of a favourable impression of the Christian religion'.[78] Therefore it was in the interests of Salter, Freeman and the Strangers Home to support the Lascars as it would benefit their own missionary work. In assisting Lascars in seeking redress for injustices, the Strangers Home not only showcased its charitable work to current and prospective Christian donors but also enacted 'Christian charity' in practice, thereby creating opportunities to encourage conversion among the Lascar recipients of its aid.

It is important to also note the presence of John Freeman, the super-intendent of the Strangers Home, who was prominent in this case. Although he had a pivotal role in the organisation, he seemingly gets overlooked in historical accounts due to the presence of his counter-part Salter who drew more national and international acclaim. Freeman, for many years before he accepted his position as the super-intendent, was a city missionary, part of the time in London, and the other part in Calcutta, India, so that he was acquainted with the culture and the language of many of these sailors and felt a deep interest in them. It was reported in *The Home News for India* that Freeman died in 1894 after spending thirty-three years as superintendent of the Home.[79] During his tenure, 'the object of the institution is to offer to every class of Orientals,

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[75] Joseph Salter, *The East in the West: Or Work Among the Asiatics and Africans in London* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1895). Internet resource, 127.
[76] Salter, *The East in the West*, 128.
[77] Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: The History of Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2004), 72.
[78] Ibid.
[79] *Home News for India,* "China and the Colonies," 27 April 1894, 25.

Africans, and Polynesians, who come to England, a comfortable and respectable lodging, with wholesome food at a cost which shall render the institution self-supporting'.[80] Freeman was therefore also a key member of the Strangers Home, although he did not receive the same acclaim.

Freeman was involved in multiple cases at the Strangers Home. One example was the suicide of an Asiatic, which he attended in his official capacity.[81] Separately, he acted as spokesperson for the Home in a case involving 18 Lascars who were remanded for deserting the steamship, *Vixen*.[82] In this case, Freeman noted that sixty Lascars belonging to the *Vixen* had been brought to the Home and 'left their chests in the luggage room,' highlighting the Home's role in managing Lascars' affairs.[83] Joseph Salter, who was a scripture reader in Hindustani (Hindi), acted as interpreter for the Lascars. Salter's direct involvement here may explain why he received more recognition, given his hands-on role.

In the case of Walters on the *Emily Augusta*, it is reported, when the boat docked in Liverpool, Freeman went on board. He found that the twenty 'coloured seamen' which were found there were all suffering from wounds about the head and body.[84] It appears that in his role as superintendent of the Strangers Home, Freeman was more peripatetic and responded to calls for help by travelling to places where sailors requested his help. One article noted that when the ship docked in London:

> Information of the arrival of the vessel, as well as intelligence that a large number of Lascars were on board in a frightful condition of sickness, was received at the Asiatic Seamen's Home, but as none of the seamen made their appearance there, Mr. John Freeman proceeded to the vessel, when a shocking condition of things presented itself.[85]

Freeman was therefore a key spokesperson for the organisation as he stated in an article in *The Graphic* on the Home, 'we try to save the poor, simple-minded fellows from cruel robberies and incentives to vice and waste that await them on shore. Unless they come to us, they can find nothing but the most hateful, squalid dens, in which they soon lose everything they possess, and are then flung forth destitute'.[86]

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[80] Samuel Howard Ford, *Ford's Christian Repository & Home Circle* (United States, 1886), 430–431.

[81] *Teesdale Mercury*, "Suicide of an Asiatic," 30 December 1863, 2.

[82] *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, "Mutinous Lascars," 5 May 1870, 6.

[83] Ibid.

[84] *Globe*, "Shocking Brutality at Sea," 16 October 1874, 2.

[85] *Bristol Times and Mirror*, "Alleged Murder on Board Ship," 19 October 1874, 4.

[86] *The Graphic*, "The Strangers' Home," 28 September 1889, 12.

So, while Freeman was an advocate for Lascar sailors, he was also steeped in racial stereotypes, what he seems to say above is that unless they have the guiding hand of the Strangers' Home, the sailors will easily fall into vice and drift towards squalor. They are victims, first of criminal people preying on strangers without English language and secondly, of their own weakness to resist these paths. Once more, this reflects how Freeman and Salter may have been motivated by genuine intentions to assist, while simultaneously operating within a framework of Christian proselytising, in which the public performance of benevolence and the promotion of conversion were central objectives. This assistance, while perhaps well-intentioned, compounds an infantilisation of the Asian other, framing the sailors as inherently dependent and needing guidance. The 'help' provided is double-edged, making the sailors vulnerable in other ways, such as the expectation of gratitude and the cultivation of dependency, which manipulates their agency.

In 1874, Lascars found themselves in a vulnerable position, lacking their own robust networks to support them in their pursuit of justice. Isolated from wider society and often unable to speak English, these sailors had no choice but to rely on external figures like missionaries Joseph Salter and John Freeman from the Strangers' Home. While these missionaries provided essential aid and advocacy, their support was not entirely altruistic. Driven by a desire to promote their Christian faith and secure funding from donors, the creation of the Home was led by Henry Venn, the secretary of the Church Mission Society. It also benefited from crucial financial support from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who contributed £200 and £100, respectively. The most significant donation, however, came from Duleep Singh, the last maharaja of the Sikh Empire and a new convert to Christianity.[87] Additionally it was noted that the India Office contributed an annual grant of £200 from the 'revenues of India' (Indian tax-payers) for the temporary maintenance of 'destitutes', prior to their repatriation.[88] Salter and his colleagues leveraged this assistance to advance their proselytising objectives, highlighting the precarious position of Lascars, who depended on figures whose motives were entwined with religious and colonial agendas. This situation also revealed a strategic limitation for those seeking help from missionaries: the Home's provision of aid was inevitably shaped by its own institutional goals and funding priorities.

1.e.Violence Against Lascars:

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[87] Salter, *The Asiatic in England*, 9–12.

[88] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 60.

The case discussed shed light on the intense and often desperate situations faced by Lascars aboard British ships during this period. Lascars were subjected to violence that emanated from the top down, with captains directly imposing brutality or in some cases delegating the responsibility to figures like the Serang or the Chief Mate. These instances of violence against Lascars emphasise the power dynamics and systemic mistreatment prevalent in maritime settings. Harsh conditions could push Lascars to points of desperation and resistance, as evidenced by their eventual violent forms of resistance against the oppressive treatment they endured.

Frey highlights that, in the 1850s the Lascar crews of five ships prosecuted European officers and seamen for crimes committed at sea.[89] However, the Horatio Walters' case marked the last significant instance of a captain being taken to court for violence and murder against Lascars. This raises intriguing questions about why Walters was the last. Was this the first or only time a captain was held to account? Did it serve as a warning for other captains to moderate or conceal their behaviour, or did it embolden seamen to resist more resolutely? The case of Captain Peter Lyall, in which a Lascar attempted to have a captain arrested but was unsuccessful and took matters into his own hands, provides an example of these shifting dynamics. As will be explored in more detail later, Lyall's case shows the potential impact of the Walters verdict on subsequent interactions between captains and their crews.

In the wider context of violence and discipline aboard ships, the nineteenth century saw a gradual shift in opinion toward this violence from the British public. Isaac Land showed how sailors began convincing an increasing number of the public that what happened on British ships was an insult to British manhood and therefore deserved their attention.[90] Land stated, 'starting' took place at sea, not on British soil; just as the British public opposed slavery at home but tolerated it abroad, they did not see corporal discipline on a warship as a threat to metropolitan liberty.'[91] Land continues to argue that the rhetoric surrounding the 'true British seaman' was complex and equivocal. Sailors sought the attention of a public familiar with abolitionist pamphlets and pictures by likening their situation to that of an enslaved African. At the same time, however, sailors insisted on distancing themselves from slaves and distinguishing their suffering from that of a black man under the lash.[92]

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[89] Frey, "Lascars, the Thames Police Court and the Old Bailey," 196–211.

[90] Isaac Land, "Customs of the Sea: Flogging, Empire, and the 'True British Seaman' 1770 to 1870," *Interventions* 3, no. 2 (2001): 175, https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010120059591.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., 179–180.

The concept of 'Britishness' was fluid and exclusionary, particularly in its historical treatment of Irish Catholics. However, the emergence of the 'true British seaman' emphasised the cultural and religious connections between sailors and the Protestant majority in England, Scotland, and Wales.[93] This construction of a British identity relied heavily on contrasting with non-British 'others'. Sailors sought to establish their Britishness by highlighting what they were not, particularly by opposing the specific practice of flogging the 'true British seaman' compared to non-British individuals like black slaves. They argued that British sailors experienced flogging differently due to their supposed metropolitan emotions, such as a 'British' sensitivity to pain.[94] This analogy with black slaves was not about aligning with their cause but rather asserting that subjecting white Britons to such punishment was dishonourable. Therefore, Land highlights that the Lascars were in a strange limbo as a thought process permeated that Indians should be disciplined according to Indian custom, even in London. However, the Horatio Walters case shows a key shift in public opinion toward this practice.

1.f. Media Coverage

The media coverage of the case surrounding Captain Walters and the treatment of Lascars reveals contrasting perspectives and biases. Media Outlets like the *Liverpool Shipping Telegraph, Daily Commercial Advertiser* and the *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* sympathised with Walters, justifying his actions as necessary due to the challenges of managing a predominantly Lascar crew. They argued that maintaining strict discipline was essential for the safety of the ship, suggesting that the abuse of Lascars was acceptable given the circumstances. Notably, as late as 1880, *The Liverpool Shipping Telegraph* advocated for Walters' pardon, presenting a petition signed by James Brown & Co., owners of the *Emily Augusta*, the President and Council of the Mercantile Marine Service Association, and other prominent figures.[95] They also had statements from Captain Bedford Pim, a Royal Navy officer and Member of Parliament for Gravesend.[96] Pim stated, 'I am willing and anxious to do anything in my power to procure the release of Captain Walters, as I believe him to be the victim of circumstances over which he had no control'.[97]

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[93] Ibid., 177.

[94] Ibid.

[95] *Liverpool Shipping Telegraph and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, "The Case of Horatio Walters," 31 July 1880, 4.

[96] Leslie H. Neatby, "PIM, BEDFORD CLAPPERTON TREVELYAN," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed September 2, 2025, HYPERLINK "https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pim_bedford_clapperton_trevelyan_11E.html"

There was significant support for Walters in the British public as in 1876 the question of a pardon was put forward in the house as commons by Captain Bedford Pim, as it was stated:

> it was necessary to maintain a severe discipline under such very adverse circumstances, or the ship would have been lost more than once; and, if satisfied of these facts, will the right honourable Gentleman take the case of the unfortunate man into consideration, and if convinced that justice has been fully vindicated by the penal servitude already endured by Horatio Walters, recommend him for a pardon?.[98]

The *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* claimed Walters had extenuating circumstances of no ordinary degree to plead in his favour, especially considering the 'perilous position in which the unfortunate man was placed for weeks and months'.[99] This was because he was laboured with ensuring a ship manned by predominantly Lascar sailors would have a safe and problem free voyage. The newspaper also had testimonies from Reverend F.E. Lloyd Jones, Chaplain of Newgate Prison, who stated, 'I cannot send you a testimonial as you request, as by the rules which govern prison officials, I am not permitted to do so. You have my best wishes for the success of your petition of his behalf'.[100]

Both newspapers were based in port cities with significant maritime industries. Supporting Walters, a captain, might reflect a broader alignment with the interests of shipowners and the shipping industry, which had a vested interest in maintaining discipline and order aboard ships. These industries might have been concerned about setting a precedent that could limit captains' authority and thus affect the operation and profitability of their vessels. Additionally, the newspapers mentioned petitions and support from figures within the maritime industry, such as the Mercantile Marine Service Association and Captain Bedford Pim. This indicates a possible professional solidarity within the maritime community, which might have felt that Walters' punishment was too severe given the challenges of his position.

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Hansard, "Mercantile Marine – The Case of Horatio Walters – Question," *House of Commons Debate*, vol. 231, 14 August 1876, col. 1207, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1876-08-14/debates/fe3cf9f4-2451-4969-b9cd-926327f38787/MercantileMarine%E2%80%94TheCaseOfHoratioWalters%E2%80%94Question.

[99] *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, "The Case of Horatio Walters," 21 June 1881, 2.

[100] Ibid.

On the other hand, other media outlets condemned Walters' actions as barbaric and emphasised the plight of the Lascars, criticising the unfairness of the trial and highlighting racialised violence at sea. *The Indian Statesman* questioned Walters' audacity in justifying his actions based on the alleged uncleanliness of Lascars, while the *Manchester Evening News* expressed concern for the treatment of Lascars in the British commercial navy. *The Times of India* and *Eastern Daily Press* also criticised the leniency of the sentence and highlighted the distinction between British and non-British perspectives on white violence, with the latter tending to view it as episodic rather than systemic. Overall, the media coverage reflects a complex interplay of racial biases, legal considerations, and cultural attitudes toward violence and colonial subjects.

There was also a case made by several media outlets that sympathised with the plight of the Lascars and believed that Walters actions were barbaric. One article stated:

> Lascars are duped into manning our vessels with a criminal disregard for the rights of personal freedom, and the poor creatures when they reach our shores, and are forced to endure the rigour of a pitiless climate, die in large numbers, after having lived in the extremity of bodily anguish.[101]

They highlight their belief that, ‘no difference must be made between men born and bred Britons, and the swart children of India who serve in our mercantile marine’. The *Eastern Daily Press* newspaper called out the unfair trial with the headline branding it ‘A Scandal’.[102] The article describes Walters as a man of ‘considerable education and of good manners.’ It then goes on to say, ‘he had a crew chiefly of Lascar men, no doubt, not up to the mark of English Sailors, yet not so feeble, nor so seamanlike but that the P. and O. company are very glad to make use of their services’.[103]

The language here is significant because it reveals a clear bias in favour of the English sailor, while the reciprocal prejudice against Lascars is less explicitly sustained. The argument implies that Lascars were considered capable workers, noting that if they were unfit for duty, the P&O Company would not employ them. The article went on to sardonically claim:

> There could be no denying that the men whom Walters had been accused of murdering had died under his maltreatment of them. But then they were only Lascars, and Lascars

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[101] *Manchester Evening News*, “Man’s Inhumanity,” 11 November 1874, 2.

[102] *Eastern Daily Press*, “A Scandal,” 30 November 1874, 2.

[103] Ibid.

> are troublesome people to deal with. In fact, A Lascar sailor is almost as great a provocation to a captain as a wife to a Lancashire Collier.

A further interesting comparison was that:

> Just as a planter in the Southern United States used to claim the right to wallop his own n*****. So, the jury seem to have thought that a white captain might wallop his Lascar seaman, and that very much regretting, apparently that they could not find him guilty of a common assault, they brought in a verdict of manslaughter, and strongly recommended him to mercy.[104]

This is a telling comparison made by the article as it draws comparisons between Lascars, slaves and Lancashire Collier wives. By likening the captain's treatment of his Lascar crew to the right of a planter to physically discipline enslaved people, the article suggests that such violence was an expected and accepted part of the relationship between the captain and his crew. This comparison is used to underscore the normalisation of harsh treatment toward Lascars, much like the brutal treatment of enslaved individuals was normalised in other contexts.

The comparison between Lascar sailors and the wife to a Lancashire collier is particularly revealing when read through the intersecting categories of race, gender, and class. By likening the Lascar to a working-class white woman, the analogy draws upon a deeply embedded cultural assumption that wives were legitimate objects of male discipline, thereby normalising violence as corrective rather than criminal. As Martin Wiener demonstrates, although the formal legal 'right of chastisement' was increasingly challenged from the late eighteenth century and largely rejected in courtroom discourse by the 1820s, it continued to shape social expectations, with considerable 'leeway' still afforded to husbands, particularly in non-fatal cases.[105] Even where such a right was no longer explicitly invoked, courts continued to treat a wife's behaviour, especially drunkenness or disorder, as a form of 'provocation' that could mitigate male violence, reflecting what Wiener identifies as the law's accommodation of the 'frailties of human nature.'[106]

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173–74.

[106] Ibid., 175.

Within this framework, the collier's wife signifies a familiar figure of subordinated but recognisable domestic femininity, while the Lascar is simultaneously feminised and racialised, positioned as disorderly and in need of control yet excluded from the moral economy that still afforded white women a degree of sympathy or protection. The juxtaposition thus operates through a dual logic: it relies on the normalisation of gendered violence within the household while extending that same justificatory framework to imperial and maritime contexts. In doing so, it reveals how authority at sea and in the empire drew upon the same ideological structures that underpinned domestic patriarchy, legitimising coercion across both racialised and gendered lines. Ultimately, the comparison exposes how the category of the 'working class' itself was unevenly constructed, privileging white domestic respectability while casting colonial labourers as inherently incompatible with it, and thereby reinforcing broader hierarchies of power within Victorian society.

Although the *Eastern Daily Press* was a newspaper that was founded in 1870, a few years following the US Civil War there was a record of their support toward the efforts of those who took part in the abolitionist movement. An example of this could be seen through their tribute to Thomas Garret, the veteran abolitionist, who died in 1871 as they claimed, 'his noble efforts were at last appreciated'.[107] It also explained that there could have been more victims than what was first expected:

> Walters, there is reason to believe, slew more or less deliberately more than half-a-dozen men. The slaughter was persistent and repeated. He must have known what he was doing, yet he went on doing it. Nevertheless, his victims, being not City men, but only Lascars, he has been let off with 15 years' penal servitude. "Tis a very grievous scandal."[108]

The acknowledgment that Walters knew what he was doing and yet continued his actions highlights a broader critique of the authorities' complicity, suggesting they turned a blind eye to such abuses. The use of the phrase 'but only Lascars' with a sarcastic tone underscores the differential values attributed to the sanctity of life, pointing out the stark disparities in how the lives of Lascars and others were valued. This sarcasm drives home the unsettling reality that the lives of these sailors were considered less significant, a view that permeated both the judicial system and societal attitudes of the time. Therefore, the trial opened a space for a public discussion of racialised violence at sea. What we see being played out in the media is different sides of that discussion and the comparisons being drawn with other racial and class stereotypes.

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[107] *Eastern Daily Press*, "A Veteran Abolitionist," 13 February 1871, 2.
[108] *Eastern Daily Press*, "A Scandal," 30 November 1874, 2.

One of the most damning assessments of Walters action came from the newspaper the *Indian Stateman,* which emerged in 1875 after merging with the *Friends of India* newspaper (founded 1818). It was a prominent English-language newspaper in India, originally, founded in Calcutta and became one of the most influential newspapers during the British colonial period. It questioned the 'audacity' of Captain Walters to claim he had been the 'kindest friend to his victims' while also claiming 'he urged the filthy habits of the Lascars as justification for killing them with torture: as if men covered with wounds and suffering from open abscesses could have kept themselves clean'. The newspaper also branded his sentence as 'unhappily lenient', claiming he had escaped with fifteen years of penal servitude.[109] The *Manchester Evening News* also shared a sympathetic view toward the Lascars as they stated:

> For the credit of our commercial navy it is to be hoped that the treatment which the Lascars received on board the *Emily Augusta* was of exceptional character, and yet, whilst giving expression to the aspiration, it difficult to believe that our Eastern fellow-subjects, when once shipped a Serang under the British flag, are in much better case.[110]

The *Times of India* suggested that 'the case should ought not to pass from notice without a protest against the partial failure of justice which the misplaced leniency of the jury has occasioned'.[111] The *Eastern Daily Press* highlighted that Walters was an American.[112] This was an important detail to consider as it allowed for the British press to distance themselves from the actions of an American Captain. Jordanna Bailkin argues that the most striking divergence between the Indian and British sources is that the latter tended to view episodes of white violence as episodic, atypical, the work of 'rogue' individuals.[113] This idea that it was not something regular amongst British captains could also be seen through the assertion from Joseph Salter that, 'it is gratifying to add that the captain was not an Englishman.'[114] *The*

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[109] *Indian Statesman*, "Cruelty at Sea," 5 January 1875, 3.

[110] *Manchester Evening News*, "Man's Inhumanity," 11 November 1874, 2.

[111] *Times of India*, "Captain Horatio Walters and His Lascars," 28 December 1874, 4.

[112] *Eastern Daily Press*, "A Scandal," 30 November 1874, 2.

[113] Jordanna Bailkin, "The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 2 (2006): 469, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000237.

[114] Salter, *The East in the West,* 130.

Southern Reporter described Walters as a man of uncontrolled passion implying that such behaviour was atypical among captains serving under the British naval command.[115]

Furthermore, this underscores the notion that certain sections of the media sought to reassure the public that the actions of a few rogue individuals did not reflect the character of the British people. Walters' nationality as an American becomes a convenient barrier that serves dual purposes. On one hand, it enables his prosecution and conviction, distancing the British judicial system from the harsh realities of maritime violence under its flag. On the other hand, it prevents the need for a broader reform of 'British' sea culture. This distinction allows the British press and public to treat the incident as an anomaly, a result of an outsider's actions rather than a symptom of systemic issues within the British maritime industry. Thus, Walters' nationality provides a scapegoat, obscuring the structural biases and mistreatment of Lascars prevalent in the colonial era.

The perception of violence as episodic versus systemic is deeply intertwined with the observer's cultural and national background. It would benefit British perspectives by framing such incidents as isolated, episodic occurrences, thus minimising the broader patterns of racial violence and discrimination. This view aligns with a desire to maintain a narrative of British moral and civil superiority. In contrast, non-British perspectives, particularly those from colonised populations, recognised these acts as part of a systemic pattern of racial violence, reflecting the enduring inequalities and abuses inherent in the colonial system. Analysing these differing viewpoints reveals the political and ideological underpinnings that influence how violence and injustice are perceived and interpreted across cultural lines.

Newspapers played a pivotal role in shaping public perception of Horatio Walters' crimes, often justifying his actions through selective language and framing. While some media outlets expressed condemnation, a significant number defended Walters by highlighting the challenges he faced in managing a predominantly Lascar crew. These reports often employed a rhetoric that emphasised the necessity of harsh discipline for maintaining order and safety aboard the ship, framing Walters' actions as regrettable but justified under the circumstances. Terms like 'unfortunate man’ and 'victim of circumstances' were frequently used to elicit sympathy for Walters, suggesting that his severe measures were an unavoidable response to the supposed unruliness and uncleanliness of the Lascars.[116] This reportage not only reflects but effectively sanctioned a culture where violence against Lascars was justified and even expected, underlining a systemic failure to protect marginalised groups. The support for Walters, coupled with the portrayal of Lascars as inherently difficult to manage, underscores the inherent scepticism these sailors held toward finding justice within the British legal system.

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[115] *Southern Reporter*, “*A Brutal Ship Captain,”* Thursday 03 December 1874, 3.

[116] *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, “The Case of Horatio Walters,” 21 June 1881, 2.

1.g. The Effect of Violence on Lascars:

On British merchant ships, especially steamers, the living conditions for Lascars were extremely cramped and uncomfortable. Legal entitlements to accommodation space were minimal, with only one cubic meter before 1914 and an increase to two cubic meters afterwards.[117] This limited space extended to the workplaces, such as engine rooms, where seafarers faced heat, airlessness, and long hours. Ship owners often preferred Indian Lascars for engine room duties due to their perceived ability to endure scorching temperatures below deck. However, these harsh conditions led to shorter shifts for Asian crews compared to other departments. Accounts from Indian steamship workers rarely discussed onboard conditions, focusing instead on personal journeys, wartime experiences, or immigration stories. Official records, aside from occasional reports, shed little light on these conditions.[118] Ravi Ahuja highlights that suicides among Lascars, often from the engine room crew, were alarmingly frequent, with reports citing a strong sense of confinement and desperation among the crew. The suicides typically involved leaping into the sea, reflecting a sense of hopelessness and confinement experienced by these seafarers.[119]

The case of Lascar suicides had become so serious that in 1908 it was debated in Parliament, with the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen examining the reported deaths of seamen in 1907 to verify claims of fifty-eight Lascar firemen and trimmers committing suicide that year. The examination revealed that only seventeen cases of suicide were confirmed, five were suspected, and twenty-two individuals had disappeared. This totalled forty-four possible suicides among Lascars, not fifty-eight as previously stated, however, the lack of certainty about the other deaths suggests a lax culture of care. Despite this, the situation was considered serious, prompting efforts to thoroughly investigate and address the underlying conditions leading to frequent suicides among Lascars.[120]

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[117] Ravi Ahuja, “Capital at Sea, Shaitan Below Decks? A Note on Global Narratives, Narrow Spaces, and the Limits of Experience,” *History of the Present* 2, no. 1 (2012): 78–85, 78. https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0078.

[118] Ibid., 79.

[119] Ibid.

The mental conditions of Lascars working aboard ships can be taken further as Ahuja highlights the case of Sona Miah, who, in 1930, was reported to have purposefully injured himself by burning his eyes with caustic when he believed he saw a shaitan, a devil in the shape of the *SS Gandhara's* Bada Sahib, Chief Engineer. Ahuja further observed Calcutta's British shipping master offering a cultural explanation of the incident, noting that, 'it is not an uncommon occurrence for Lascar seamen employed in Engine-rooms and bunkers, which are not too well lighted at times, to be terribly put out and to complain to their superior officers of the presence of a Shaitan (devil) in these parts of the vessels, and at times they have been known to leave their work and rush to the deck above'.[121] In the case of Horatio Walters this is particularly significant as newspaper reports highlighted, that the *Emily Augusta* was in the control of Captain Day, following Horatio Walter, and was bound from London to New Orleans. However, when in London, the crew mutinied in the down and when they were brought before the magistrates, it was said that their reason for refusing to work was that the ghosts of the murdered Lascars haunted the ship.[122] Similarly, in this newspaper report, the crew's refusal to work, attributing their actions to the haunting presence of murdered Lascars, reflects a shared belief among sailors in supernatural forces influencing life at sea.

The memory of violence that occurred on a ship can be understood as the lingering presence of real, tangible fear in the everyday reality of being aboard. This violence serves as a constant reminder of the potential for future harm. By attributing these fears to the supernatural, it diminishes the very real resistance and agency of the seamen who were understandably afraid of further violence. Their fear was entirely rational. Thus, while the notion of ghosts aboard the ship might be perceived as supernatural, it also represents a very real and haunting aspect of their lived experiences.

These insights into the mental well-being of Lascars and the conditions they worked under combined with the violence inflicted on them by their superiors, we can begin to understand the level of resistance and violence carried out in response. Ceri-Anne Fidler, argued, ‘the threat of violence to enforce discipline and respect for European superiors on shipboard is apparent in reports of the trial’. She continued:

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[120] Hansard, "Suicides of Lascars," *House of Commons Debate*, vol. 198, 17 December 1908, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1908-12-17/debates/432f2217-7e02-4e70-b4b8-91ce3dfceea6/SuicidesOfLascars.

[121] Ravi Ahuja, "Capital at Sea, Shaitan Below Decks? A Note on Global Narratives, Narrow Spaces, and the Limits of Experience," *History of the Present* 2, no. 1 (2012): 80, https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0078.

[122] *Thanet Advertiser*, "A Big Vessel in the Harbour," 31 October 1874, 4.

> The use of such aggressive behaviour to enforce discipline being the preserve of the European crew would have reinforced power relations on shipboard. Descriptions of the Captain's actions illustrate the public nature of humiliation intended by these acts. They served to ‘teach a lesson' not only to the offending Lascar but to the entire Indian crew and hoped to produce a docile, submissive and respectful crew.[123]

Jaffer describes the brutal treatment suffered by non-European crews, particularly Lascars, at the hands of British captains. He highlights that Lascars were subjected to physical violence such as beatings, kicks, punches, and assaults with various objects like umbrellas and belaying pins. This harsh treatment was used as punishment for mistakes, to enforce discipline, or simply out of anger. The severity of the abuse often led to injuries and even fatalities among the Lascar sailors. Despite the lack of detailed records on how Lascars responded to such treatment, there is a widespread perception that they were seen as easily controlled and submissive, further enabling the continuation of brutal disciplinary practices. Practices like 'starting', using a rope to beat sailors into working, persisted longer among Lascars than European sailors, highlighting the unequal and oppressive treatment faced by non-European crew members.[124] Rediker highlighted how sailors used the courtroom and the gallows as public stages to challenge authority, turning trials and executions into opportunities to denounce abusive captains and protest the harsh conditions of maritime labour. In doing so, they sought to shift the spectacle of punishment into a platform for resistance and critique.[125]

Gopalan Balachandran, highlights, the challenges faced by seamen, especially Indian seamen, in expressing resistance or protesting working conditions. Various factors, including legal constraints and the threat of criminal charges, limited their ability to engage in industrial action like strikes or protests.[126] Maritime laws heavily regulated merchant navies, giving authorities powers to suppress strikes through repression, fines, and imprisonment for disobedience or mutiny. Racial tensions and conflicts in the maritime labour market further exacerbated the challenges for Indian crews in voicing their grievances and protesting unfavourable conditions.[127] Balachandran discusses the challenging conditions faced by British sailors, particularly those in the Eastern, African, and Pacific trades during the late-nineteenth century. These sailors endured low wages, poor working conditions, and limited avenues for effective protest. This situation led to a state of demoralisation and decline among the sailors, as noted by sympathetic contemporary observers.[128]

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[123] Ceri-Anne Fidler, *Lascars, c. 1850–1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cardiff, 2011, 57.

[124] Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 36.*

[125] Marcus Rediker, “The Pirate and the Gallows: An Atlantic Theatre of Terror and Resistance,” in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 239–240.

[126] Gopalan Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886–1945,” *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, no. 2 (2008): 47–49.

Additionally, Balachandran highlights that Indian seamen faced even worse conditions than their British counterparts. The hierarchical and authoritarian structure on board ships, which Balachandran compared to that of colonial plantations, deprived Indian seamen of a voice and lawful avenues for addressing their grievances. The authorities, including the state, shipowners, and masters, were entrenched in denying Indian seamen any form of reasoned representation or lawful exit from their challenging work environments.[129] This can be seen through the Walters' case, as it was through chance that the case was taken to court. Without the support of the Strangers' Home, Lascars may not have had the opportunity for legal representation, underscoring the significant obstacles they faced.

Balachandran emphasises the strategic considerations and context-specific dynamics of maritime labour protests among Indian seamen. One crucial aspect highlighted is the careful selection of the authority to challenge and the location of their actions. Indian seamen tended to avoid direct confrontation with the ship's master at sea, recognising that the master represented not just his own authority but also that of the ship's owners and the state. However, once the ship reached a 'home port', where the master's powers diminished, Indian seamen found a more conducive environment for expressing their grievances.[130] Unlike European seamen, who were perceived to have a reputation for mutiny at sea, Indian seamen strategically awaited the opportunity provided by the dispersal of power at home ports, where they could manoeuvre more freely and make their protests known (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5). This nuanced approach reflects the complex strategies employed by Indian seamen to navigate the power dynamics and limitations within the maritime labour context.[131]

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

The culture of violence that pervaded British merchant ships was followed by culture of resistance among Lascars in the ports of Britain. This resistance was a response to the harsh treatment they received from their superiors and the deplorable conditions they worked under, leading to an increased number of protests during the turn of the century. However, this culture of violence also had a darker side, as it sometimes drove Lascars to turn to violence themselves. Instances such as the murder of Captain Peter Lyall by a Lascar and Habeeb Sued being murdered by Sulleyman Adam serve as examples of this phenomenon. The intense working conditions that these men were under coupled by the inevitable violence they would face as a means of discipline could be seen as contributing factors as to why Lascars found themselves in a position where murder may have seemed to be the answer.

1.h. The Indian Body:

Linked to the idea of there being a culture of violence is the portrayal of the Indian body in court. There is much discourse about the body of Indians as Jordanna Bailkin has argued: 'The Indian body was viewed as a source of knowledge that could potentially remedy the weakness of evidence in colonial courts.'[132] Bailkin contends that 'coroners' investigations in interracial homicide cases in British India began to focus on pathologies of the Indian spleen. Physical fighting would rarely rupture a healthy spleen. But when the spleen was diseased from malarial fever (as was common in Bengal and Assam), even a slight blow, produced by a light kick, an open hand, or even a simple push could 'accidentally' cause rupture, haemorrhage, and death. That is, according to medico-legal scholars under the Raj, persons with enlarged spleens could be killed by violence that would otherwise be 'exceedingly trivial'.[133] This idea that the Indian body was therefore inherently weaker than a body of their European counterparts can be seen in the case of Horatio Walters.

The impact that the Indian body had in this case was that it allowed for the defence of Walters to reduce his sentence. Bailkin suggested:

> Medical jurisprudential debates about the status of evidence in India were key in illustrating that white violence, even when deadly, was not to be judged as murder. By depicting the Indian body as a highly valuable, yet fragile source of judicial

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[132] Bailkin, *The Boot and the Spleen*, 477.
[133] Ibid.

> information, British medico-legal scholars helped to decriminalise white violence against indigenes.[134]

Elizabeth Kolsky has also highlighted the idea that 'Englishmen ought to refrain from striking natives much on the same principle that would restrain them from aiming a blow at a cripple'.[135] This again reinforced the idea that the body of a Lascar was fragile and must be treated differently. This could therefore go some way to explain how Walters was charged with manslaughter as opposed to murder.

To develop this idea further, attention could be directed to the examination of Fugeer Ali's body. It was claimed that the state of his liver would have accounted for the death, as witnesses said, if there had been nothing else. It was also claimed that the death of a man suffering from a diseased liver would be accelerated by blows, by pain, shock, fear, or anything which could undermine his powers.[136] It was decided that the immediate cause of death was erysipelas which was caused by blows by the captain. However, it was agreed between both Pathologist, Dr. Corner, and Dr. Aubin, who had been called to testify for the defence, agreed that the deceased was also suffering from multiple underlying illnesses. The diseases of the liver and lungs alone provided ample explanation for death, even in the absence of any injury, had this not been already known.[137]

The Indian body being weak was seen throughout the case as Mr. Aubin, who also attended the post-mortem, was asked if the injury to the head was sufficient to account for death. He then replied, 'no, the small wound I saw could not, in an ordinary healthy person have been sufficient to cause death'. It is important to therefore note that these injuries would not have killed an ordinary person, but an Indian sailor was not the same.[138] It was decided that the cause of death was erysipelas which was caused by an abscess in the head which was caused by blows from the captain. It was also claimed that 'the liver was universally diseased. It was what is called a nutmeg liver and was contracted.' The report noted that 'the spleen was very much enlarged. The cavity of the belly contained a quantity of clear serum, a little tinted from the disease of the liver.'[139] The liver disease was presumed to have resulted from spirit drinking. It was therefore decided that in this diseased state it would accelerate death. Dr Corner stated, ‘No doubt, in his weak and diseased condition, the effect would be to produce earliest death. A blow on the head would of course produce shock and loss of blood, and that must be attended with greater weakness, and promote earlier death. It would accelerate death.’ Another point brought up in the case was the state of the liver as it was stated ‘if I had found nothing else, it alone would have accounted for death’.[140]

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[134] Ibid., 476.

[135] Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 136.

[136] *Evening Mail*, "Outrage on the High Seas," 26 October 1874, 7

[137] Ibid.

[138] *Times of India*, "The Outrage Upon a Lascar Crew," 19 November 1874, 3.

[139] Ibid.

In contrast to the murder trial of Ali, no coroner’s report was produced for the death of Sheik Abdoolah, whom Walters’ defence claimed had died as a result of his ‘fatal habit’ of opium consumption, once again invoking racial and orientalist stereotypes.[141]

Another key factor that may have contributed to Walters receiving a lighter sentence was the jury’s suggestion that his actions had been provoked. Bailkin argued, ‘If the accused committed the fatal act under grave provocation, then the charge was reduced. “Provocation” was not limited to the threat of physical force but included such acts as failing to work in a speedy manner and using insulting language’.[142] This was true in the case of Walters as it was expressed in court: ‘a verdict of manslaughter, but considering the position in which the captain found himself placed, with such an utterly inefficient Lascar crew they thought he was placed in circumstances of great provocation, and, therefore, recommended him to mercy’.[143] This could be taken further as it was also argued that:

> [the] defence set up for the prisoner was that he had to deal with a lazy, bad crew and he was compelled to use a certain amount of violence to preserve discipline and insure the safety of his vessel, and that his punishment he inflicted had been very much exaggerated by the Lascar witnesses. [144]

This again reinforced the idea that provocation played a key role in allowing for Walters to be charged with manslaughter.

2. 1890: "If the captain strikes me again, I will kill him."

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[140] Ibid.

[141] *Daily Telegraph & Courier* (London), “Horatio Walters,” 28 November 1874, 5.

[142] Bailkin, *The Boot and the Spleen*, 476.

[143] *Globe*, “The Alleged Murders at Sea,” 27 November 1874, 4.

[144] *Edinburgh Evening News*, “Charge of Murder Against a Ship Captain,” 26 November 1874, 3.

Peter Lyall Characters:

Captain Peter Lyall: The captain of the British ship Buckingham who was murdered by Bhagwan Jassiwarra.

Bhagwan Jassiwarra: A Lascar cook from Calcutta and the primary suspect in the murder of Captain Lyall.

Mrs. Margaret Lyall: The widow of Captain Peter Lyall.

Mate John W. Christie: The chief mate of the Buckingham who was involved in the ship's operations and responses after the murder.

Abdullah Quilliam: A solicitor from Liverpool who represented Bhagwan Jassiwarra during his trial.

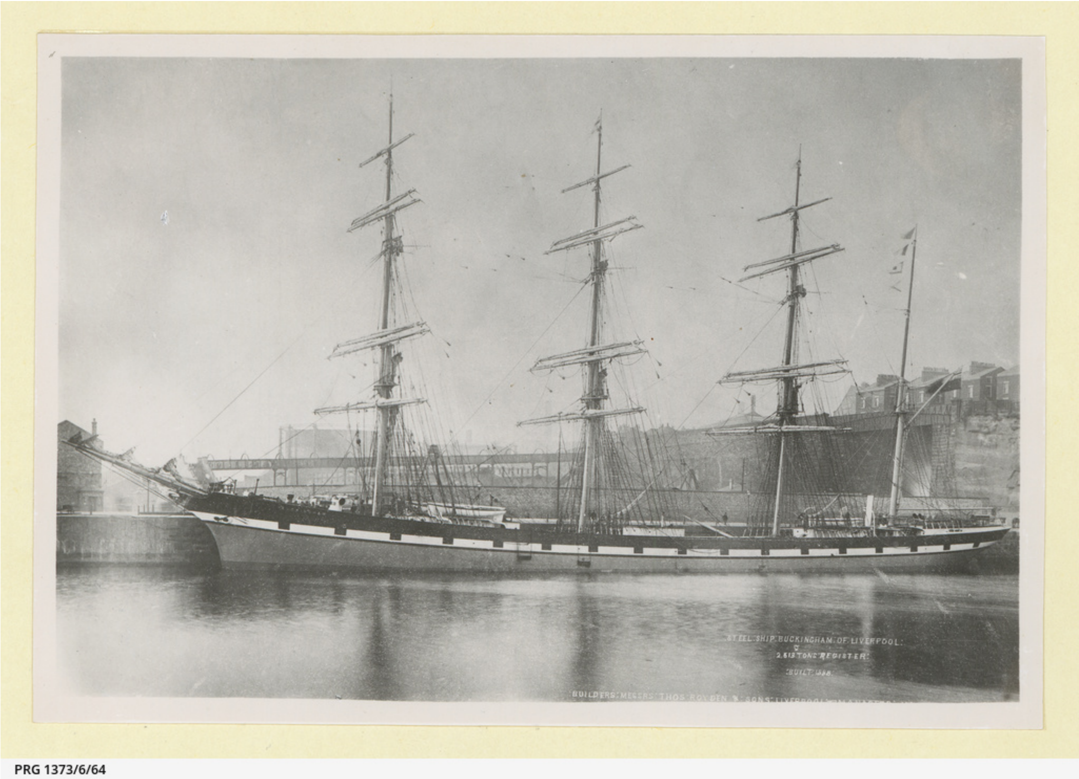
STEEL SHIP BUCKINGHAM OF LIVERPOOL.
2.513 TONS REGISTER.
BUILT 1888.
BUILDERS MESSRS THOS ROYDEN & SONS LIVERPOOL
PRG 1373/6/64

Figure 5 The Four-Masted Steel Barque 'Buckingham' in an unidentified harbour, circa 1889 (State Library of South Australia, PRG 1373/6/64).

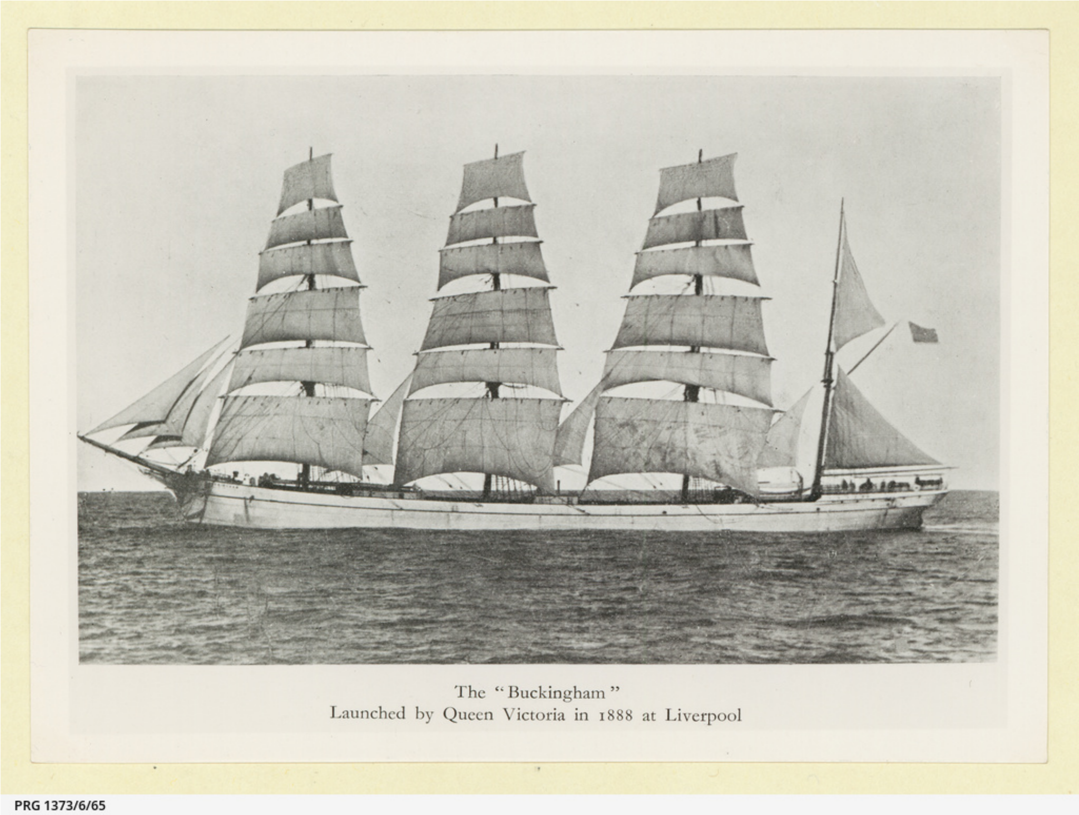

Figure 6 The Four-masted steel barque 'Buckingham,' approximately 1895. (A.D. Edwardes Collection. State Library of South Australia)

The murder of Captain Peter Lyall aboard the *Buckingham* during its voyage from Dundee to New York sent shockwaves through both the ship and the courts that later examined the case. At its centre was Bhagwan Jassiwarra (also known as Bhagwan Dhaas in some accounts), a Lascar cook who soon emerged as the prime suspect. The episode is reconstructed through a patchwork of testimonies and reports, each shedding light on the circumstances leading to the killing and the judicial process that followed. [145] Jassiwarra is described as a Hindoo Lascar, indicating his South Asian descent, specifically from Calcutta. He is mentioned as being around 29 years old, suggesting a relatively young age at the time of the incident.[146]

Captain Lyall had recently married Margaret Reed in Brooklyn, shortly before the *Buckingham* departed from New York for Calcutta. Jassiwarra had joined the vessel as a cook during its previous voyage. During the return journey to Dundee, tensions arose, with reports describing his insubordination and a subsequent flogging ordered by Lyall. On arrival in Dundee, he was dismissed from service, though the ship's owners insisted that he be repatriated to Calcutta. This forced Lyall, 'reluctantly', to take him back on board. According to one report, Jassiwarra 'never forgot the flogging', and the decision to reinstate him was presented as having 'sealed (Lyall's) own death warrant'.[147]

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[145] *Dundee Advertiser*, "The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime," 19 December 1890, 5.
[146] *Dundee Courier*, "Terrible Tragedy at Sea," 10 December 1890, 3.

The *Dundee Courier* highlighted, Jassiwarra initially joined the ship as a stowaway while it was in the Hooghly on its way to Dundee. Despite being discovered later, the captain appointed him as an assistant cook. However, complications arose regarding Jassiwarra's status as a foreign sailor, leading to a dispute when the crew was discharged in Dundee. Jassiwarra requested his pay, but the captain, fearing that Jassiwarra might disappear, reportedly refused to give it to him.[148] This refusal led to Jassiwarra displaying considerable temper and stubbornness. Despite being paid off, Jassiwarra remained connected to the ship, staying on harbour pay and continuing to live aboard. Tensions between Jassiwarra and Captain Lyall escalated, leading to Jassiwarra lodging a charge of assault against the captain, which resulted in a court case.[149] Captain Lyall pleaded guilty to the charge, and although Jassiwarra had run away or could not be found, a fine was imposed on Captain Lyall. Afterward, Jassiwarra rejoined the vessel for its voyage to New York, this time under the name Bhagwan instead of 'Jessawarah'. Reports also reveal conflicts between the captain and the Dock Labourers' Union regarding the employment of non-Union men for ballasting.[150]

Tensions escalated during the voyage, with Jassiwarra displaying defiance and threatening behaviour. Witnesses recalled him sharpening a knife and making statements like 'I will work no more,' and 'you men witness the captain struck me two times.' He reportedly even went as far as stating, 'if the captain strikes me again, I will kill him.' On October 11th, a complaint was made about Jassiwarra's refusal to cook breakfast, citing lack of coal and water. This led to a confrontation with Captain Lyall, who intervened after the crew reported the issue. The situation worsened as Jassiwarra refused duty, prompting the captain to take him to the storeroom. Moments later, the steward discovered Captain Lyall's body with severe head wounds, lying in a pool of blood. Jassiwarra was found crouching nearby. Witnesses reported Jassiwarra's indifferent confession to the murder, claiming that the captain tried to strike him, and he retaliated in self-defence. He claimed, the captain took the knife to kill him, and he took the knife from the captain and killed him 'On the passage to New York prisoner volunteered to the boatswain the statement: - “Me killed the captain; do everyone good.”’ Partial evidence bearing out this statement was given.[151]

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[147] *Dundee Advertiser*, "The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime," 5.
[148] *Dundee Courier*, "Terrible Tragedy at Sea," 3.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

After the ship's arrival in New York, Jassiwarra was arrested and taken into custody by the Brooklyn police authorities. A *New York Herald* reporter, writing the following day, stated that despite the denial of Mrs. Lyall, the wife of the murdered commander of the ship *Buckingham*, who insisted that her husband never flogged Jassiwarra, evidence had reportedly been secured indicating that the Lascar had been beaten several times. The reporter, however, stated there was no evidence that Captain Lyall was cruel, as his crew spoke highly of him, and according to various accounts, the Lascar allegedly deserved punishment due to his idle, shiftless, and disobedient behaviour, but his motive for killing his commander appeared to be one of revenge. [152] The reporter also stated that Captain John W. Christie was found on board that night. He stated that as far as he knew, Captain Lyall had never beaten the Lascar. ‘I don’t know how the story got abroad,’ said Captain Christie.[153]

The Guion steamer *Nevada* transported Jassiwarra back to Liverpool for trial. Once the ship returned to Liverpool Jassiwarra was met by Abdullah Quillam (formerly William H. Quilliam), who was described by the *Liverpool Mercury* as ‘chief of the Mohammedan Church in Liverpool’.[154] Detective-sergeant Allinson boarded the vessel and took the prisoner into custody upon arrival. Jassiwarra appeared in court, facing charges of wilful murder. The prosecution, led by Mr. Moss, presented the case against him, while Mr. Abdullah Quilliam undertook the defence. Witness testimonies varied, with some highlighting Jassiwarra's threats and aggressive behaviour, while others questioned the motive, suggesting concerns about caste and orders that could have led to a loss of status.[155] The court remanded Jassiwarra for eight days to allow for further inquiries and witness statements.[156]

The prosecution presented evidence of a strained relationship between Jassiwarra and Captain Lyall, including previous quarrels and threats from Jassiwarra. Witnesses Fred Seaborne and Andrew Christie testified about Jassiwarra's threats and his intention to harm the captain if provoked. Jassiwarra's defense, led by Mr. Quilliam, argued that Jassiwarra's actions were a response to provocation and mistreatment. Jassiwarra admitted to killing Captain Lyall in self-defence during a confrontation where he felt his life was at risk. Although the jury recommended mercy due to provocation, Jassiwarra was convicted of wilful murder and sentenced to death.[157] Efforts to have the sentence commuted were initially unsuccessful, but Jassiwarra's death sentence was eventually reduced to life imprisonment after a petition was sent to the Home Secretary.[158] He spent several years in prison before dying of 'consumption' at Parkhurst Prison in January 1897, at age 36. Jassiwarra's case underscores a tragic instance where the justice system failed him, leading him to take drastic actions.[159]

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[151] *Dundee Courier*, “The Murder of a Fife Captain,” 14 January 1891, 3.
[152] *Dundee Advertiser*, “The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime,” 19 December 1890, 5.
[153] Ibid.
[154] *Liverpool Mercury*, “The Murder of Captain Lyall,” 5 January 1891, 6.
[155] Ibid.
[156] *Dundee Advertiser*, “The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime,” 5.

2.a.Mrs Lyall:

Reports from various sources provided insights into the crew's perception of Captain Lyall, with conflicting accounts regarding his treatment of Jassiwarra and the events leading to the tragic incident. Newspaper reports highlighted the shock and grief among passengers and crew upon learning about the murder, emphasising the emotional impact of the crime. The captain's wife expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of Mate John W. Christie, raising questions about his handling of the situation after the murder.

Mrs. Lyall's account of the events surrounding Captain Lyall's murder contradicts Mate John W. Christie's version, casting doubt on his conduct. According to Mrs Lyall, after the murder the ship anchored between the Shetland and Orkney Islands, approximately ten miles from Fair Isle and close to Lenvich Harbour, which she identified as a safe anchorage. She criticised Christie for failing to seek assistance or provide a clear explanation of his actions at this point. As she recalled, 'I cannot understand' why he did not arrange for her to be put ashore, a decision that left her particularly unsettled given what she described as his casual demeanour in the presence of her husband's body. She further emphasised the distress caused by being denied access to the body for 24 hours, and the lasting psychological impact of the weeks that followed.[160] Furthermore, she recounted an unsettling incident where the mate entered the cabin where the body lay, exhibiting inappropriate behaviour by giggling and singing as if oblivious to the gravity of the situation.[161] These discrepancies suggest potential foul play or negligence on Christie's part, adding complexity to the overall narrative of Captain Lyall's murder.

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[157] *Dundee Weekly News*, "The Murder of a Fifeshire Ship Captain," 21 March 1891, 6.
[158] *Runcorn Guardian*, "The Condemned Hindoo in Kirkdale," 21 March 1891, 3.
[159] *Isle of Wight Observer*, "Newport," 1 October 1898, 2.
[160] *Shetland Times*, "The Murder of a Fife Captain," 27 December 1890, 3.
[161] *Shetland News*, "The Murder of a Dundee Captain," 27 December 1890, 8.

2.b. Gallant and Jovial Character:

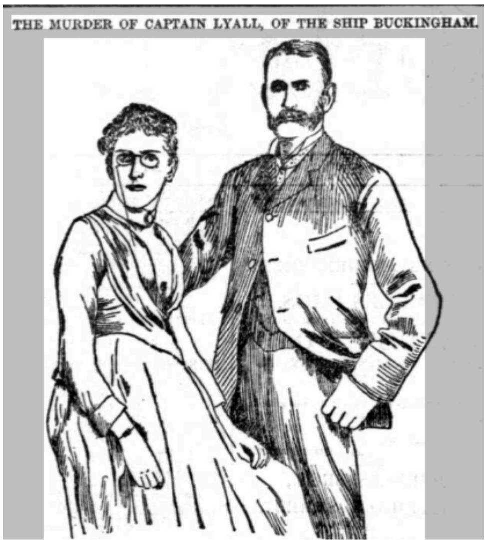
THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN LYALL, OF THE SHIP BUCKINGHAM.

Figure 7 Sketch of Captain Peter Lyall and his wife (Dundee Evening Telegraph)[162]

Although Captain Lyall faced accusations of beating and flogging Jassiwarra, which even resulted in legal proceedings against him, some newspapers nevertheless portrayed him in sympathetic terms. In this coverage, Lyall appeared as a respectable figure, celebrating his wedding anniversary with his new wife, set in stark contrast to the threatening image of the menacing Jassiwarra. Newspaper coverage emphasised an image of Captain Lyall as a 'gallant and jovial character,' noting that on the ship's arrival in New York after fifty-nine days of difficult weather, the captain, 'so well-known in those waters,' was absent, with Chief Mate Christie instead seen walking the quarter deck.[163] Such portrayals contributed to a narrative of Lyall as a respected and honourable figure, reinforced in descriptions of his death. Reports highlighted that his body was wrapped in a Union Jack and that the ship's flag was lowered as a 'mute testimonial of respect' to him.[164]

The imagery used to depict Captain Lyall's loving marriage stood in stark contrast to any implications of violence. It was reported that two days before the ship departed New York for Calcutta in October 1889, Captain Lyall married Miss Margaret Reed of Falkland, Fife, Scotland, at the residence of Captain Lawrence Garrick in Brooklyn. Captain Lyall and Miss

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[162] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, "The Murder of Captain Lyall of the Ship Buckingham," 16 March 1891, 2.

[163] *Dundee Advertiser*, "The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime," 5.

[164] Ibid.

Reed had known each other since childhood, and they were accompanied by many good wishes as they set sail for the Indies. [165]

This use of the wife to create a more sympathetic view of the captain was also used further as newspaper reports also highlighted the idea of her being a sympathetic and grieving wife. For example, it was reported that in the after-cabin of the *Buckingham* yesterday sat the wife of Captain Lyall 'pale little woman, dressed in deepest mourning'. She was described as having grief on the 'pallid face and dark rings were under her eyes, which showed the depth of her sorrow. Though she bravely tried to hide it and appear calm. At her feet sat a black retriever that gazed up at its mistress with all the sympathy a dog can express'.[166] In this portrayal, the dog assumes a quasi-testimonial role: not only illustrating her grief but also witnessing it through its instinctive fidelity. In the context of Victorian culture, dogs were increasingly endowed with affective and moral significance, serving as 'emotional prostheses' that mediated empathy and loyalty.[167]

The career accomplishments, respect and admiration from the friends of the captain was also highlighted as it was stated, 'a large number of Captain Lyall's friends, including James N. Barr, his life-long friend, went down on the tug mutual to meet the captain yesterday. They found only his sorrowing widow.' It was noted that he was 'only 38 years old,' a 'Scotchman by birth,' and had 'followed the sea from boyhood.' There was also mention of the fact that he had commanded several ships in succession, including the *Glengary*, *Glenshiel*, *Ellisbana*, and finally the *Buckingham*, 'a vessel of 2013 tons, and the largest four-masted steel sailing ship ever built on the Mersey,' capable of carrying 'a cargo of 4000 tons' and floating '1400 yards of canvas.' These details served to present him as a highly accomplished and respected seaman.[168]

2.c. A man of Iron Muscles:

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[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Keridiana W. Chez, *Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men: Affect and Animals in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 2–3.
[168] *Dundee Advertiser*, "The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime," 5.

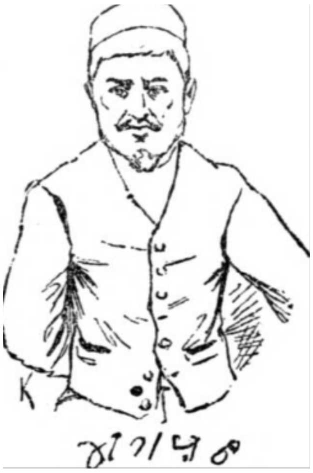

Figure 8 Sketch of Bhagwan Jassiwarra (Dundee Advertiser)[169]

In contrast to the portrayal of Captain Lyall, the descriptions of Jassiwarra were a lot more menacing and negative. Jassiwarra, was described by the *Dundee Advertiser* as a Lascar, a native of Calcutta, 'a man of iron muscles', and seemingly the most indifferent of all on board the ship to what had happened. It was reported that he even decided to smoke a pipe as he waited for a commissioner to arrive.[170] Reports also claimed:

> He turned sleepily in his berth when I entered his prison last night and gazed at me stupidly with his big, round, black eyes. Even in his reclining posture, the man's great strength was apparent. Short, but with a strong, heavy neck, and shoulders; a full, round face; clear, copper-coloured complexion; straight nose, and large, full black eyes that glow and glisten like a snake's; such is Bhagwan the self-confessed murderer of Captain Lyall.[171]

The physical side of the Lascar was also highlighted as it was stated, 'He was no mean antagonist, this Lascar, even for stalwart, muscular Captain Lyall'.[172] Jassiwarra was described as about 5 ft 9 in height and is a strongly built man.[173] Another depiction of the prisoner described him as a 'wild-looking fellow of very dark complexion' who 'could evidently speak no English.'[174] The stipendiary magistrate's decision concerning the remand had to be conveyed to him in Hindi by a native Indian interpreter, who was accompanied by two other 'co-religionists' of the Mahometan (Islamic) faith to assist in the prisoner's defence.[175] These contrasts emphasise Captain Lyall's virtuous nature and the deep respect and affection he garnered, while portraying Jassiwarra as a threatening and unsympathetic figure.

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[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] *Lancashire Evening Post*, "The Atlantic Tragedy," 5 January 1891, 4.
[174] *Manchester Courier*, "The Murder of a Captain," 6 January 1891, 6.

The newspaper extracts draw a sharp contrast between Captain Lyall and Jassiwarra. Lyall is remembered as a gallant and jovial figure, respected for his successful maritime career and cherished for his role as a husband and friend. His death is framed with dignity and sorrow, underscoring the affection he inspired. By contrast, Jassiwarra is depicted in harsh and dehumanising terms: a menacing presence marked by physical strength, indifference, and a lack of remorse. Emphasis on his inability to speak English and the need for interpreters further reinforced his image as an outsider, magnifying the gulf between him and the celebrated British captain.

One newspaper account quoted Christie as saying, 'Captain Lyall might have struck Jassiwarra with the back of his hand, but I never knew of his beating the cook, although he was a lazy fellow. Captain Lyall was very kind to his men.'[176] This remark highlights how violence against Lascars was seen as normal, with attention placed not on the act itself but on the level of force used. Together, these narratives evoke sympathy for Lyall and his family while casting Jassiwarra as a dangerous villain. They reveal not only the personal dichotomy constructed between the two men but also the wider racial and cultural prejudices of the period, where the British captain was celebrated as a tragic hero and the Lascar reduced to a threatening 'other'.

3. Comparison of the cases

Newspapers in late-nineteenth century Britain played a central role in shaping public perceptions of crime and justice, using their power to influence opinion and reinforce social and cultural norms. This media influence parallels its role in sustaining imperial authority, as highlighted in Chandrika Kaul's *Media and the British Empire*, which demonstrates how 'communication media power' was essential in creating and maintaining imperial power from the Napoleonic Wars to decolonisation.[177] Michelle Tusan further emphasises that understanding political and economic forces is key to analysing how the press represented them.[178] Similarly, coverage of crime in Britain reflected and reinforced prevailing societal attitudes, shaping public understandings of morality, law, and social order in ways comparable to its construction of imperial narratives.

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[175] Ibid.

[176] *Dundee Advertiser*, "The Murder of Fife Captain – Story of the Crime," 19 December 1890, 5.

[177] Chandrika Kaul, ed., *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

The media's role in reinforcing British racial and cultural supremacy over imperial subjects' mirrors how crime involving different racial and cultural groups within Britain was reported. Just as the Indian Mutiny coverage highlighted British superiority, domestic crime reporting often portrayed ethnic minorities and lower-class individuals negatively, perpetuating stereotypes and justifying harsher treatments. Tim Pratt argued, 'the information transmitted in this fashion during 1857–8, especially the shocking accounts of murder and defilement of Britons by Indian insurgents, has commonly been seen as having united the country in following and supporting the dramatic counter-insurgency operation.'[179] This parallels how newspapers reported sensational crime stories to capture public attention and influence political agendas. This tactic was used to create a sense of urgency and justify stringent law enforcement measures.

When it comes to the story of Captain Peter Lyall, we can begin to understand the idea that the press portrayed Lyall in a more empathetic light by adding details about his wife and loving marriage while contrasting this with the menacing portrayal of the Lascar. The flexibility of news and newspapers in the mid-nineteenth century, as discussed in the context of the Indian Mutiny, also applies to crime reporting. Newspapers could manipulate information to serve specific narratives, influencing public perceptions of crime and justice. This flexibility allowed for varying portrayals of crime, sometimes emphasising the need for reform and other times supporting punitive measures.

The cases of Captain Walters and Captain Lyall highlight a stark contrast in how violence was perceived and justified in the media, depending on who the victims and perpetrators were. The media coverage of Captain Walters' case shows a significant portion of the British press justifying his use of excessive violence as necessary. This justification is largely based on the racial and colonial mindset of the time, which viewed the management of predominantly Lascar crews as particularly challenging. The nineteenth century witnessed a major transformation in the press through the gradual liberalisation of press law. Reaching its culmination in 1855 with the repeal of the newspaper stamp tax, these reforms were widely celebrated by contemporaries as securing both freedom of the press and liberty more generally, and subsequently came to occupy a central place in the historiography of the Victorian press.[180] This transformation allowed newspapers to reach wider audiences and contributed to a more commercially driven press environment in which circulation became increasingly important. Increasingly, editors, journalists, even politicians, realising that public opinion could not be influenced or educated, sought to reflect it instead.[181] This period, often termed the 'New' Journalism era of the 1880s and 1890s, saw a significant shift in media practices. Matthew Rubery notes that the New Journalism was condemned by many novelists for its emphasis on sensationalism and human-interest stories, which often prioritised circulation over accuracy and contributed to biased and sensational reporting.[182]

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[178] Michelle Tusan, "Empire and the Periodical Press," in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2016), 161. https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.4324/9781315613345.

[179] Tim Pratt, "'Ernest Jones Mutiny': The People's Paper, English Popular Politics and the Indian Rebellion 1857–1858," in *Media and the British Empire*, ed. Chandrika Kaul (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 89.

In particular, Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe and founder of the *Daily Mail*, became the symbol of a new generation of newspaper proprietors for whom public service and political commitment increasingly gave way to the pursuit of circulation.[183] Critics argued that the journalistic methods introduced by the *Daily Mail* operated to the advantage of the ‘hurried reader,’ but at the expense of those who regarded newspapers as a means of informing and shaping public opinion.[184] Under pressure to increase sales and attract advertisers, newspapers adopted techniques that many contemporaries believed undermined the seriousness and moral purpose of journalism.[185] Through this, we can begin to understand that the emphasis on circulation over editorial principle encouraged sensationalism and frequently resulted in biased or misleading reporting. The media’s power to shape public perception is evident in these cases. By manipulating narratives, newspapers justified Walters’ harsh measures while criminalising Jassiwarra’s resistance, thereby reinforcing the racial and colonial hierarchies of the period.

The various forms of printed media during the nineteenth century significantly shaped popular attitudes toward crime. As observed by Louis James, ‘Crime was the best seller.’[186] This popularity was reflected in the numerous novels and periodicals focusing on crime, violence, and murder. Between 1820 and 1870, the number of books printed in England with the word 'murder' in the title averaged thirty-three per year.[187] Statistically, *The Times* saw a substantial increase in murder-related articles, from sixty-seven in 1801 to an average of 1,003 articles per year by the 1880s. This increase was not unique to *The Times*; *The Manchester Guardian* also saw a significant rise in murder coverage, peaking in 1883 with an average of more than four murder stories per day.[188] By framing these cases in such starkly contrasting ways, newspapers capitalised on the public's appetite for dramatic, morally charged stories, ensuring high readership and engagement. This binary narrative of good versus bad simplified complex issues, making them more accessible and compelling for the audience, and this could have shaped some of the biases shaped in these reports. One of the most prominent texts about the Victorian fascination with murder can be seen by Judith Flanders in her work *The Invention of Murder*.[189] Flanders emphasises that, while ordinary life in early nineteenth-century London may have seemed safe, capital convictions averaged just one per year in the city, high-profile crimes like the Ratcliffe Highway murders of 1811 shattered that sense of security and became national spectacles.[190] The public consumed these stories through newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets, and even attending funerals, demonstrating a widespread appetite for crime narratives.[191] As Flanders notes, murder offered a “pleasant” thrill in abstraction, allowing readers to experience danger safely and to engage with the sensational and grotesque aspects of life from a position of comfort.[192]

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[180] Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850–1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 30.

[181] Ibid., 9.

[182] Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 84.

[183] Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, 88.

[184] Ibid., 88-89.

[185] Ibid., 89.

[186] Christopher A. Casey, “Common Misperceptions: The Press and Victorian Views of Crime,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 375.

Tusan also explores the complex role of the press in British imperialism, highlighting challenges in interpreting indigenous perspectives amidst colonial mediation. She references Gayatri Spivak's question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' to underscore the difficulty historians face in uncovering subaltern voices through colonial periodicals, which often reflect imperial biases.[193] The inherent imperial biases within colonial periodicals meant that Lascars, as colonial subjects, were often portrayed negatively or their perspectives were entirely omitted (this will be explored further in Chapter 3). This led to a skewed representation where the violence perpetrated by white officers like Captain Walters was justified or downplayed, while resistance from Lascars like Jassiwarra was criminalised and depicted as unjustified mutinous violence. This biased reporting reinforced the racial and colonial hierarchies of the time, ensuring that the voices and experiences of Lascars were marginalised or misrepresented to fit the dominant imperial narrative.

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid., 377.

[189] Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (HarperCollins UK, 2011).

[190] Ibid.,1.

[191] Ibid., 5.

[192] Ibid., 1.

[193] Tusan, “Empire and the Periodical Press,” 159.

Many media outlets suggested that maintaining strict discipline was essential for the safety and order of the ship. Walters was frequently portrayed as a victim of circumstances, depicted as being in a perilous situation and justifying his severe discipline as necessary due to the adverse conditions. This portrayal was aimed at evoking sympathy and the framing reinforced the idea that his harsh measures were necessary for maintaining order aboard a ship manned by a predominantly Lascar crew. Walters received a relatively lenient sentence of 15 years of penal servitude. Despite the severe abuse and deaths of Lascars under his command, the media and public opinion largely supported his pardon, emphasising his role in ensuring the ship's safety. This leniency reflects the racial biases of the time, which often downplayed the severity of violence against non-European subjects.

In contrast, with the case of Captain Peter Lyall, there seems to be a framing of Bhagwan Jassiwarra’s actions as unjustified mutinous violence. Media coverage did not afford him the same sympathetic framing that Walters received. Instead, Jassiwarra's resistance was viewed through a lens of criminality and rebellion. This reflects the broader colonial attitude towards any form of resistance from the colonised subjects, who were expected to remain submissive. The media portrayal of Jassiwarra lacked any justification for his actions, depicting them as outright criminal and a threat to the established order aboard the ship. Jassiwarra faced much harsher penalties compared to Walters. The severity of his sentence underscores the differential treatment based on race and the nature of the violence. While Walters' actions were mitigated by his perceived need to maintain discipline, Jassiwarra actions were criminalised without such considerations.

Adding to this portrayal, the press painted a positive image of Captain Lyall, emphasising his gallantry and personal life to evoke sympathy and admiration. Despite reports of him beating the Lascar and being charged for such actions in Dundee, Captain Lyall was depicted in some newspaper reports as a great man celebrating his anniversary with his newly wed wife, contrasting sharply with the portrayal of the Lascar. The imagery of Lyall's loving marriage further added to the sympathetic view. Their long acquaintance and the good wishes they received painted a picture of a devoted husband. This portrayal was reinforced with descriptions of his grieving widow, evoking further sympathy from the public. Friends and colleagues also expressed their admiration and sorrow, emphasising Lyall's accomplishments and respect within the maritime community.

The structure of power on British merchant ships was highly hierarchical, with white officers wielding significant authority over predominantly non-European crews. This hierarchy was reinforced by racial and colonial attitudes, with white officers like Walters at the top, justified in their use of violence to maintain control. The use of physical violence and harsh disciplinary measures was a common method employed by officers to assert their dominance and ensure compliance among Lascar crews. Practices such as beating with ropes were more prevalent among non-European crews, highlighting the unequal treatment and expectations.

The portrayal of Captain Horatio Walters and Captain Peter Lyall's cases in the media exemplifies the biased reporting influenced by racial and colonial mindsets. Walters' violence was justified and sympathised with, while Jassiwarra resistance was criminalised and harshly punished. Lyall was portrayed in a positive light, with his personal and professional life used to evoke sympathy and admiration. This reflects the broader themes of racial superiority and the reinforcement of hierarchical power structures prevalent in the media during the British Empire.

4. Comparative Crime:

Captain Walters' and Captain Lyall's cases demonstrate a marked shift in the visibility, regulation, and meaning of violence within late nineteenth-century maritime labour regimes. Walters exercised disciplinary violence openly, often in the presence of both European and non-European crew members. This publicness was not incidental; it reflects a system in which coercion against Lascars was normalised, socially legible, and embedded within racial hierarchies that constructed them as expendable labour. Violence functioned as an unambiguous assertion of authority, performed before an audience to reinforce command.

By the 1890s, however, Captain Lyall's treatment of Jassiwarra reveals a different logic of discipline. His violence was concealed, taking place behind closed doors and away from collective scrutiny. This shift is not merely behavioural but structural: it signals that the exercise of authority over Lascars had become increasingly constrained by legal and moral scrutiny. Violence did not disappear, but it became risk-laden, requiring concealment rather than display.

This marks a clear transition from accepted public coercion to regulated and potentially prosecutable abuse.

Foucault’s distinction between spectacular punishment and disciplinary power clarifies this transformation. Walters’ conduct aligns with a regime in which punishment is theatrical, bodily, and publicly intelligible as sovereign power. The body of the Lascar is the direct target of authority, and pain operates as both punishment and demonstration. In contrast, Lyall’s concealed violence reflects a disciplinary environment in which coercion is still present but increasingly managed through privacy, surveillance, and the anticipation of legal consequence. Power is no longer primarily asserted through visible spectacle but through controlled, minimised, and defensible acts of domination.

This transformation is inseparable from changing patterns of resistance and agency among Lascars. In Walters’ case, resistance is largely absent from the historical record, underscoring the extent to which violence was normalised and alternative recourse effectively foreclosed. By contrast, Jassiwarra’s actions, ranging from verbal defiance to legal complaint and ultimately lethal self-defence, demonstrate a significantly expanded sequence of resistance. His response reflects not only individual agency but also the growing possibility of contesting maritime authority through both legal and extra-legal means.

This shift should not be misread as the disappearance of violence or its straightforward criminalisation. Rather, what changes is the threshold of acceptability and the conditions under which violence can be enacted without sanction. Walters was prosecuted not for the existence of violence per se, but for its perceived excess. By the 1890s, however, Lyall’s arrest indicates a tightening of legal scrutiny and an increasing expectation that disciplinary force remain within defensible limits. The result is not the abolition of coercion but its reconfiguration: violence persists, but it is displaced into more concealed, regulated, and legally precarious forms.

5. **Quilliam and Support Networks:**

Mr. Abdullah Quilliam, a Muslim solicitor from Liverpool, played a significant role in the case of Bhagwan Jassiwarra. Ron Geaves highlights the influential role of Quilliam in his biography, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam*, as he stated:

> ‘William H. Quilliam (1856-1932) was a well-known Liverpool solicitor who converted to Islam after visiting Morocco in 1887. He formally announced his

> conversion to Islam in 1888 and changed his name to Abdullah. The Liverpool Muslim Institute and British Muslim Association, which he founded to promote Islam in Britain, opened in September 1887, two years before the Woking Mosque was built outside London; although there may be a dispute about the first building to be used by Muslims in Britain as a place of prayer, there is no doubt that the first attempt to promote Islam publicly from within a mosque and an Islamic centre in Britain took place in Liverpool over the following twenty years.'[194]

He appeared for the defence, representing Jassiwarra during the court proceedings. As the defence attorney for the defendant, Quilliam emphasised the significance of caste in the proceedings. During the cross-examination of witnesses, particularly Seaborne, Quilliam brought up the concept of caste, indicating that the entire matter hinged on the fact that the captain had ordered Bhagwan to do something that would result in him being treated as a pariah and losing his caste, however, it was not specified in the newspapers what this was. This suggests that Quilliam strategically used cultural and societal factors to defend Jassiwarra, aiming to shift the focus of the case onto the captain's actions and their implications for Jassiwarra's social status within his community. [195]

It is not clear from surviving newspaper reports whether Jassiwarra identified as Hindu or Muslim, although there are indications that contemporaries understood him to be Muslim. One Manchester newspaper reported that the decision to remand him had to be translated 'in Hindoo' by 'a native Indian' who appeared in court alongside 'two co-religionists of the Mahometan faith' in support of the defence.[1] The report therefore suggests that Jassiwarra himself was regarded as a Muslim, particularly given that he was represented by Abdullah Quilliam, a prominent Muslim convert and founder of the Liverpool Muslim Institute.

Yet this does not resolve the question of why Quilliam framed the defence in terms of caste. It is impossible to know whether Quilliam's emphasis on caste reflected Jassiwarra's own explanation of the conflict or whether it was a strategic argument designed to make the case intelligible to a British court. By stressing that Captain Lyall had ordered Jassiwarra to do something that would make him a 'pariah' and cost him his social standing, Quilliam may have been translating Jassiwarra's grievance into a form that colonial judges and jurors would recognise as a serious provocation. In this sense, his use of caste may have reflected both a genuine attempt to represent Jassiwarra's perspective and a shrewd understanding of how to work within the assumptions of the colonial legal system.

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[194] Ron Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (Kube Publishing Ltd, 2010), 3. ISBN 9781847740038.

[195] *Liverpool Mercury*, "The Shocking Murder on the High Seas," 14 January 1891, 3.

At the same time, the fluidity of religious identity among Lascar sailors makes certainty difficult because Serangs and recruiting networks were often Muslim, sailors sometimes presented themselves as Muslim, adopted Muslim names, or emphasised a Muslim identity in order to improve their chances of employment at sea.[196] Lascar religious identities were therefore often shaped by the practical demands of maritime labour rather than functioning as a fixed marker of personal belief. Although the newspaper report and Quilliam's involvement suggest that Jassiwarra was understood to be Muslim, it remains impossible to say with certainty how he identified himself or how sincerely he observed any particular religion.

Quilliam's involvement exemplifies the emergence of more culturally attuned support for Lascars, contrasting sharply with earlier reliance on external actors. Between 1874 and 1890, support networks for Lascars evolved significantly. In 1874, they predominantly relied on Christian missionaries associated with the Strangers' Home for Asiatic Seamen, such as Joseph Salter and John Freeman. These missionaries assisted Lascars facing maltreatment or legal challenges, providing translation and advocacy, but their support was intertwined with religious and colonial motives, promoting Christianity while securing funding from Christian donors. This dependence underscored the Lascars' lack of robust internal networks and their isolation within British society, where language barriers and cultural differences often posed challenges.

By 1890, a noticeable shift had occurred. The case involving Quilliam illustrates how Lascars began to build internal support networks among fellow Muslims. His defence strategy emphasised caste and reflected a deeper understanding of Lascars' social and religious context, providing representation aligned with their community identities. At the same time, it highlighted the complex position of advocates whose interests intersected with those of the British state, albeit in specific and sometimes divergent ways.

The contrast between these periods illustrates a broader evolution in how Lascars sought support and representation in Britain. From relying on external Christian missionaries in 1874 to developing internal Muslim networks by 1890, they demonstrated an increasing capacity to navigate legal and social systems. This shift marked not only a change in available support but also the integration of cultural and religious considerations into legal strategies, contributing to a more nuanced approach to addressing challenges and injustices within British society.

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[196] Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain* (London: Eastside Books, 1994), 158.

6. Evolution of resistance:

In summary, while both cases involve resistance from Lascar sailors against mistreatment, Bhagwan Jassiwarra's case demonstrates a more direct and violent form of resistance, whereas the Lascars on the *Emily Augusta* resisted through legal documentation and testimonies. Both cases shed light on the harsh conditions faced by Lascar sailors and their varied responses to such conditions.

The portrayal of Lascars as docile and subservient has often overshadowed the nuanced and strategic forms of resistance they employed. As Georgie Wemyss notes:

> All seafarers sailing on British ships from the seventeenth through to the twentieth century were subject to harsh conditions and frequently brutal treatment from officers. However, owing to their status as colonial subjects and classification as Lascars, Indian seafarers who attempted to improve their conditions at sea or on land, or to resist abuse, were subject to extreme levels of violence as well as imprisonment.[197]

This historical context reveals that Lascars had to navigate a precarious balance between resistance and survival. The case of Horatio Walters exemplifies this delicate negotiation. Lascars on board ships, like those on the *Emily Augusta,* were not in a position to openly resist due to the imminent threat of violence from captains and officers. It was only upon reaching shore, and with the fortuitous assistance of establishments like the Strangers' Home, that they could seek some form of redress or respite.

In contrast, by the turn of the century, the nature of South Asian resistance had evolved to become more overt and confrontational. The 1890 murder of Captain Peter Lyall by Bhagwan Jassiwarra marked a significant departure from covert acts of defiance to direct violence. This period saw an increase in riots and protests at ports, indicating a growing militancy among South Asian seafarers (See Chapter 5). Madan Lal Dhingra's assassination of Sir Curzon Wyllie in 1909 further illustrates this shift. Unlike Jassiwarra's spontaneous act driven by personal grievance, Dhingra’s assassination of Curzon Wylie was a calculated political statement against British colonialism.[198] While Jassiwarra's act was portrayed as a desperate response to personal abuse, Dhingra's was depicted as the work of a fanatic, reflecting the broader anxieties of the British authorities regarding the rising tide of Indian nationalism.[199]

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[197] Wemyss, "Littoral Struggles, Liminal Lives," 83.

6. B. The Rise of Indian Revolutionary Activity and Cultural Shift in Resistance at the Turn of the Century

The turn of the twentieth century marked a significant evolution in the nature of resistance against British colonial rule among South Asians, particularly those residing in Britain. This period witnessed a burgeoning of revolutionary activities, reflecting a profound cultural shift in the strategies employed by Indian nationalists. The growing impatience with moderate politics and the influence of both national and international factors culminated in actions that demonstrated a readiness to employ physical force to achieve political ends. Rozina Visram's book, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, provides detailed insights into these developments, highlighting key events and figures that embodied this transformative era.[200]

The formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 and India House in 1905 were pivotal in the history of Indian resistance against British colonial rule. The INC was established by a group of British and Indian figures, aiming to create a platform where Indian grievances could be voiced and addressed within the colonial system.[201] Leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, who later became the first Indian Member of Parliament in Britain, played a crucial role in using parliamentary debates and public dissent to advocate for Indian rights and reforms.[202] The Congress sought to engage the British public and political circles to garner support for Indian self-governance. On the other hand, India House, founded by Shyamaji Krishnavarma in London, became a hub for more radical and revolutionary activities.[203] It provided a sanctuary and training ground for militants like Dhingra, whose assassination of Sir Curzon Wyllie in 1909 marked a significant shift towards violent resistance.[204] India House epitomised the growing impatience with moderate approaches and the increasing readiness among Indian nationalists to employ physical force to achieve their goals. Both the INC and India House played crucial roles in mobilising Indian resistance, though they represented different strategies and philosophies within the broader movement for Indian independence.

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[198] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (Pluto Press, 2002), 157-158.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (Pluto Press, 2002)
[201] Ibid., 125.
[202] Ibid., 126.
[203] Ibid., 150-151.
[204] Ibid., 156.

The emergence of ‘revolutionary terrorism’ in India and its eventual manifestation in Britain signified a pivotal shift. As Visram notes:

> The turn of the century saw the emergence of “revolutionary terrorism” in India, which was to culminate in London, in July 1909, in the first assassination of a British official outside India, that of William Curzon Wyllie, political Aide de Camp (ADC) to the Secretary of State, Viscount Morley, at the hands of Madan Lal Dhingra.[205]

This act of violence was not an isolated incident but the result of growing discontent among the Indian youth with the moderate approaches of their predecessors. The impatience with the moderates' failure to achieve substantial political change and the influence of revolutionary leaders and thinkers fuelled a more aggressive form of resistance.

The involvement of figures like Dhingra in revolutionary activities underscores the intensity of this new wave of nationalism. Dhingra's assassination of Curzon Wyllie was premeditated and symbolised a significant departure from non-violent forms of protest. According to Visram, Dhingra was said to have visited India House shortly after his arrival in London and to have lodged there on two occasions, once in 1908, for as long as six months. Not considered an activist, he attended India House Sunday gatherings, being first spotted in January 1909. Dhingra had also taken lessons in revolver shooting at the Tottenham Court Road rifle range for ‘some months’ and had become ‘very proficient.’[206] The meticulous preparation for the assassination highlights the resolve and strategic planning that characterised this new form of resistance.

Dhingra's motivations for his actions were deeply rooted in his experiences under colonial rule and his sense of patriotic duty. In his statement, Dhingra articulated his protest against the oppressive practices of the British, asserting that his act was a political statement against inhumane treatments and colonial injustices. As Visram recounts:

> In his prepared statement, Dhingra had written that he had tried to shed blood intentionally, as a protest against inhuman transportations and hangings. He wrote that

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[205] Ibid., 149.

[206] Ibid., 156–157.

> a country held down by force of arms was in a perpetual state of war and since "open battle" was not allowed, he had struck by surprise.[207]

Dhingra's willingness to sacrifice his life underscores the extremity of his commitment to the cause of Indian independence and marks a stark contrast to earlier, more moderate efforts.

This period also saw organised efforts to mobilise support and raise awareness about the plight of Indians under British rule. The establishment of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress in 1889, spearheaded by leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, aimed to engage the British public and political circles in the Indian cause. Visram details this initiative:

> The first steps were taken in 1888, when Naoroji, supported by Bonnerjee, Eardley Norton and William Digby, set up the Congress Political Agency. This developed into the British Committee of the Indian National Congress in 1889, with Wedderburn as its chairman. The Committee aimed to enlighten the British public about the realities of colonial rule and Indian aspirations, to win their hearts and minds through public meetings, speeches and in writing, and to gain a voice for India in Parliament.[208]

This strategic approach to gaining support reflects the multifaceted nature of the resistance movement, combining both political engagement and revolutionary actions.

The cultural shift in resistance was also influenced by personal experiences of racial prejudice and colonial exploitation, which heightened the sense of injustice among Indian nationalists. Dhingra's own experiences are illustrative of this. As Visram notes:

> His personal experiences under colonialism, too, are significant. Dhingra was said to speak little about his affairs. But he must have deeply resented his degrading experiences at the hands of some Englishmen. According to the evidence contained in the statement of a friend of Dhingra, H.K. Koregaonkar, Dhingra had been "treated badly" in the Settlement Department, which he had joined on leaving Lahore Government College. He had later travelled through Assam, and, working partly as a stoker on the P&O line, to Australia and as far as Eastern Turkestan. He had been thrown out of Australia and "ill-treated" by his "superior English officers" on the P&O.[209]

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[207] Ibid., 157-58.
[208] Ibid., 125.
[209] Ibid., 158-59.

These experiences of racial and colonial oppression contributed to a growing resentment and a determination to challenge British rule through more radical means.

The turn of the century marked a significant cultural shift in the resistance against British colonial rule among South Asians in Britain and across the world. The rise of revolutionary activities, exemplified by figures like Madan Lal Dhingra, highlighted the growing impatience with moderate political approaches and the influence of personal and collective experiences of colonial oppression. This era of heightened revolutionary fervour and organised political efforts signified a new chapter in the struggle for Indian independence, characterised by a willingness to employ physical force and strategic engagement to achieve political goals. Visram's detailed account in *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* provides a comprehensive understanding of this transformative period in the history of Indian resistance.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the turn of the century marked a significant cultural shift in the resistance against British colonial rule among South Asians in Britain and beyond. This era saw the intersection of two powerful and coinciding movements: the systemic abuse of Lascars by their superiors and the burgeoning revolutionary fervour among Indian nationalists. The brutal treatment of seafarers, exemplified by figures like Captain Walters, created an environment where violence was not only pervasive but normalised aboard ships. This culture of violence likely influenced the Lascars, contributing to their readiness to engage in more forceful forms of resistance.

Simultaneously, the rise of revolutionary movements, as epitomised by Madan Lal Dhingra and the India House, reflected a growing impatience with moderate approaches and a shift towards physical force as a means of political expression. The convergence of these two phenomena suggests that the period's heightened radicalism and willingness to employ violence were not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of resistance and retaliation against oppressive structures. This convergence provided fertile ground for Lascars and other Indian nationalists to adopt more militant strategies, mirroring the broader revolutionary zeitgeist of the time.

Visram's detailed account highlights this transformative period, highlighting how personal and collective experiences of colonial oppression fuelled a determined and, at times, violent pursuit of justice and independence.[210] The turn of the century thus stands as a poignant moment in history, where the desperation of oppressed seafarers and the fervour of revolutionaries intertwined, reshaping the landscape of resistance and setting the stage for more assertive demands for Indian independence.

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[210] Ibid., 149.

At the same time as these two movements, we also saw the evolution of punishment aboard ships from public displays of authority to more private forms of discipline. Walters' overt public abuse of Lascars contrasts Captain Lyall's concealed abuse of Jassiwarra, and the subsequent legal consequences reflect a shift towards private, internalised forms of discipline, signalling a broader societal move away from public punishment towards more regulated, internalised control.

This chapter examines the lived experiences of Lascars on British ships between 1870 and 1910, culminating in the 1910 murder of Habeeb Sued by Sulleyman Adam. By analysing real and significant cases from 1874 and 1890, the chapter situates Sulleyman Adam's actions within the broader context of maritime labour, violence, and disciplinary practices, highlighting the systemic abuses Lascars faced at sea. Considering the hypothetical of Sulleyman Adam existing in 1874 or 1890 illuminates how earlier legal frameworks, social attitudes, and shipboard hierarchies might have produced different outcomes, potentially exposing him to harsher punishments or reduced avenues for legal reprieve, thereby underscoring the evolving nature of justice and colonial control over seafarers across these decades.

Overall, the cases discussed provide a poignant glimpse into the transformation of maritime labour dynamics, the resilience of Lascars, and their evolving strategies of resistance. These narratives not only shed light on the past but also offer valuable insights into the complexities of colonial history and the enduring struggle for dignity and rights.

Chapter Three: The Whitechapel Murders: Poverty, Race, Sexuality and What the Case of Jack the Ripper Teaches Us About Lascars in Late-Nineteenth Century Britain.

The presence of Lascars in Britain and specifically the East End of London can be understood through their critical role in the maritime labour force of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Their employment on British-registered ships grew alongside the expansion of the British Empire's trade and shipping networks. Early estimates, such as those from a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry in 1814-15, placed the number of Lascars at 'not less than 1,000 or 1,100', demonstrating their early integration into British merchant fleets.[1] During the Napoleonic wars, over 1,000 Lascars were reported to be arriving in British ports every year. The majority were Muslim, referred to in more virulent Evangelical circles as 'the deluded followers of the licentious doctrines of a false prophet'.[2]

Figures of admissions to the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital provide another estimate of the proportion of Lascars to other sailors employed on British Empire ships. Colonel Hughes, writing in 1855, estimated that the British merchant service employed '10,000 to 12,000 Lascars' for work in the East Indian, Chinese, and Australian trade.[3] Of these, about half were brought to the United Kingdom annually.[4] Hughes further detailed their origins, noting that 60% were 'natives of India,' 20% were Malays or natives of regions such as the Straits of Malacca and Java, 10% were Chinese, and another 10% were from East Africa and Arabia.[5] This breakdown highlights the global reach of British maritime networks and the varied origins of Lascars serving in its fleets.

Joseph Salter's reports from the Strangers Home in 1873 and 1874 provide another layer of understanding. In 1873, Salter documented 3,271 sailors aboard ships and an additional 362 at the Strangers' Home, along with other groups, bringing the total to 3,773 individuals. His analysis revealed that 1,653 of these were East Indians, primarily Muslims, followed by 1,200 East Africans, 400 Egyptians, 180 Chinese, and smaller numbers from other regions.[6] By 1874, these numbers had increased significantly to a total of 7,815, including 4,685 East Indians, 1,440 Arabs and 220 Chinese. Salter also recorded visits to 440 individuals onshore. [7]

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[1] Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 52.

[2] Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: The History of Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2004), 39.

[3] Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 53.

[4] Ibid., 52-53.

[5] Ibid., 53.

[6] Ibid.

By the 1890s, official statistics began to offer a clearer picture of Lascar arrivals in Britain. However, fluctuations in their numbers were influenced by several factors, including agricultural cycles in their home regions, opposition from British trade unions to their employment, and the evolving definition of 'Lascar', which sometimes included sailors from diverse ethnic backgrounds as at times 'Lascar' was used loosely to denote 'Oriental' or 'Asiatic' sailor, and could also denote Arabs and Africans.[8] Lascars were concentrated in major port cities such as London, Liverpool, and Southampton. The expansion of docks in these cities, including the Royal Docks at Tilbury, facilitated their growing presence. Missionary organisations, such as the Lascar Mission and the London City Mission, sought to engage with these communities, highlighting both their visibility and the paternalistic attitudes toward them in British society.[9] Despite these efforts, Lascars faced systemic inequalities. Their lower wages made them attractive to shipping companies but provoked hostility from British trade unions. By the early-twentieth century, the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, under Havelock Wilson, adopted an overtly hostile stance toward their employment, viewing it as a threat to British sailors' livelihoods.[10] By 1914, they represented 17.5% of the workforce on British-registered vessels, reflecting their growing importance in maritime labour.[11] Despite these variations, Lascars remained a visible and integral part of port cities in Britain, contributing to the country's maritime economy and the multicultural character of its ports.

Their increasing presence in East London was facilitated by changes in recruitment and employment practices. The East India Company initially bore responsibility for feeding, housing, and returning Lascars to India between voyages. Early accommodations were in the Kingsland Road area, notorious for its poor conditions. Later, a home in Shoreditch was established, but overcrowding and high winter mortality rates prompted protests, including from Hilton Docker, a physician who exposed the exploitation faced by Lascars to the *Asiatic Society* and *The Times*.[12] As Dixon noted, Lascars had to wait until 1933 to achieve accommodation standards granted to British seafarers as early as 1867, highlighting the enduring disparities in their treatment.[13]The shipping industry grew at an unprecedented rate. The number of seamen employed on British merchant ships alone rose rapidly to 240,480 in 1891 and 295,652 on the eve of the First World War. Of these, 24,037 and 51,616 were classified as Lascars, and 30,267 and 31,396 as ‘foreign’, many of whom would have been black, undocumented British subjects.[14]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 52.

[10] Ibid., 53

[11] Conrad Dixon, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen," in *Working Men Who Got Wet*, ed. Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting (St. John's, NL: Maritime History Group, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980), 265.

[12] Ibid., 267.

The Whitechapel Murders:

The year is 1888. The streets of Whitechapel are soaked in the heavy fog of London’s industrial heart, a place where the pulse of the British Empire beats in the heart of its docks and bustling markets. It is a district both teeming with life and suffocating under the weight of poverty. In the shadows of its gas-lit streets, tales of opium dens, unspeakable violence, and squalid prostitution swirl in the air, painting a picture of decay that is as much a part of London’s story as its grandeur. Here, in the underbelly of the city, the infamous Jack the Ripper would carve his legacy, a dark figure whose very name would echo through the annals of criminal history. To the average Victorian, the East End was outcast London. There was a feeling that it was separated from the rest of the metropolis geographically, as well as spiritually and economically.[15]

The Whitechapel murders, five women brutally slain, their bodies mutilated in a way that defied comprehension, would become a symbol of urban fear, of the darkness that lurked in the cracks of Victorian society. And yet, the mystery of Jack the Ripper endures, his identity still unknown more than a century later. Scholars, detectives, and enthusiasts alike have attempted to unravel the enigma of this elusive figure. But amid the fascination with his crimes, the social and racial landscape of Whitechapel, with all its complexity and tension, often remains obscured. It is within this landscape, however, that the experiences of one particular group of people, Lascars, can shed light on the intersections of race, class, and empire in late-nineteenth century London.

Lascars were a prominent presence in East London during this period. They lived alongside other marginalised communities, including the Chinese, and found themselves increasingly swept up in the racial anxieties and cultural fears that dominated the public imagination. Largely invisible in the contemporary and historical popular narrative of the Ripper case, Lascars were often depicted in the press as part of the 'alien' underworld of Whitechapel, where crime and moral decay ran rampant. The media, ever eager to sensationalise the threats posed by the foreign 'other', frequently cast them alongside Chinese immigrants in the notorious opium dens of the East End. In this popular narrative, these communities were, and often remain, treated as interchangeable, as symbols of an unknowable and dangerous 'alien' presence within the heart of the British Empire.[16]

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[13] Ibid., 268.
[14] Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 41.
[15] Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper* (New York: Random House, 2013), 17.

Yet, what does the story of Jack the Ripper, his crimes, his public persona, tell us about the lives of the Lascars who shared the same spaces, and often the same hardships, as other marginalised groups in Whitechapel? As historian Hallie Rubenhold has shown in relation to the personal histories of the five known Ripper victims, there is potential to use the Ripper case as a gateway into social and economic relations in late Victorian London.[17] The theories about the Ripper's identity, which ranged from the outlandish to the plausible, included suggestions that he might have been Chinese, Malay, or even a Lascar. Such theories speak not only to the mystery surrounding the killer but to the fears and prejudices of the time, where racial and sexual anxieties intertwined, and where the figure of the 'alien' was both feared and fetishised. As historian Lewis Perry Curtis noted, 'occasionally a paper would print an article about the 'Asiatic' sadism of the killer.'[18] More specifically, the crimes were clearly committed by someone adept at using a knife. As this chapter makes clear, the British state and the media typically associated knife crimes with Lascar sailors. The Ripper case, therefore, is more than just a gruesome mystery; it is a window into the racial dynamics of Victorian London, and in particular, the way in which Lascars were situated within the broader social fabric of the city.

One of the key elements that tied Lascars to the narrative of Jack the Ripper was the frequent geographical overlap between where the Lascars lived, particularly in areas like Shadwell, and where the murders occurred in Whitechapel. The notion of the 'contempt for the prostitute', as discussed by Randolph Trumbach, provides a starting point.[19] He recounts an incident where the body of a woman was found after she had been seen with three Lascars the previous night.[20] The proximity of prostitution to the Lascar communities along the river, a space often characterised by violence and danger, led to the simple but compelling narrative that these men could be the perpetrators of such crimes. The spatial relationships and the associations attached to the areas inhabited by Lascars were instrumental in crafting this suspicion.

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[16] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (Pluto Press, 2002), 68-69.

[17] Hallie Rubenhold, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* (London: Doubleday, 2019).

[18] Lewis Perry Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 244.

[19] Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume 1: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 164.

[20] Ibid.

Moreover, the racialisation of crime played a critical role in framing the image of Jack the Ripper as a foreigner, an outsider. A correspondent for *The Times* suggested that the mutilations inflicted upon the victims, such as the cutting off the nose and ears, were ‘peculiarly Eastern methods’, widely recognised in the criminal underworld to express contempt and hatred.[21] This perspective emphasised the difference between the English male and the ‘other’ - the ‘Oriental’ criminal who would commit such gruesome acts.[22] In this racialised reading of the crimes, the white English male emerged as the figure of civility and rationality, far removed from the barbarity attributed to non-European criminals. By casting suspicion on ‘Asiatics’, like Malays or Lascars, this narrative served to reinforce the idea that foreign elements were the root of the problem, thereby stoking anxieties about immigration and the alien within.

This narrative was further amplified by the sensational press, which sought to tie the crimes to other instances of mutilation in foreign territories. The *Leek Times* drew a parallel with similar crimes in Nicaragua and Jamaica, hypothesising that the murderer could have been a Malay who travelled aboard a steamer.[23] The suggestion that the Ripper might have been a Lascar, or someone involved in maritime trade, shaped the investigation, pushing detectives to focus on this community. Even ten years after the murders, publications like the *Chelmsford Chronicle* maintained that the killer could have been a Lascar sailor, based on the frequency with which Lascars visited London and their eventual departure to ports abroad.[24] This association between the Ripper and Lascar sailors speaks to the extent to which Lascars were embedded in the fabric of popular consciousness in Britain at the time. The article states that:

> Although the exact identity of the man was never discovered, most of us believe that he was a Lascar sailor, who came to London at pretty frequent intervals. When the crimes ceased in London, they commenced after a short interval abroad, and generally they were either in or near a port. In the police force today, the belief is that the murderer is either dead or is confined in some criminal lunatic asylum.[25]

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[21] *Dundee Courier*, “Jack the Ripper’s Letters,” Saturday 6 October 1888, 3.

[22] Ibid.

[23] *The Leek Times*, “Jack the Ripper,” Saturday 23 February 1889, 5.

[24] *Chelmsford Chronicle*, “Detective Inspector Retires,” Friday 21 October 1898, 2.

[25] Ibid.

An even more direct link was drawn when it was reported that a Malay, claiming to be named ‘Alaska', had expressed a desire for revenge on Whitechapel women who had allegedly robbed him. He vowed to kill and mutilate every Whitechapel woman he encountered.[26] This narrative, with its exotic and vengeful foreigner, played into existing fears of the ‘alien’ and reinforced the connection between Lascars and violence. However, the idea of a Malay named ‘Alaska’ was debunked by John Freeman, the manager of the Strangers Home, who pointed out that Malays typically did not adopt European names. It was more likely, Freeman suggested, that the figure in question was a Lascar, whose name may have been misreported or misremembered.[27] This episode highlights how easily the Lascar identity could be appropriated in the narrative of the murders, even if the connection was tenuous.

Paul Begg, when exploring the death of the first Ripper victim, Margaret Hayes, states that ‘although it has never really been determined, Hayes was in all likelihood a prostitute, one of over a thousand.’[28] This statement invites scrutiny of the assumptions surrounding the victims of Jack the Ripper and the lack of definitive proof supporting such claims.[29] This mischaracterisation risks dehumanising the victims, reducing them to stereotypes that overshadow their individuality and struggles. The persistence of this narrative highlights the importance of re-examining these claims with sensitivity, avoiding the perpetuation of unsubstantiated assumptions about the lives of these women. Moreover, Rubenhold’s approach in *The Five* shifts the focus away from identifying the killer to honouring the lives of the victims, asserting that her intention in writing this book is not to hunt and name the killer but to retrace the lives of the victims and honour their dignity.[30] This perspective invites a more human-centred exploration of historical figures who have been reduced to mere stereotypes or sensationalised narratives. Similarly, an examination of Lascars should move beyond the simplistic and often derogatory associations with prostitution, instead aiming to honour their dignity and complexity as individuals. Both Rubenhold’s work and the historical study of Lascars call for a shift in perspective, one that acknowledges the full humanity of these individuals, their personal histories, and their varied relationships.

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[26] *Dundee Courier*, “Jack the Ripper’s Letters,” Saturday 6 October 1888, 3.

[27] *Huddersfield Chronicle*, “The Malay Story,” Monday 8 October 1888, 3.

[28] Paul Begg and John Bennett, *The Complete and Essential Jack the Ripper* (London: Penguin UK, 2013), 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Rubenhold, *The Five*, 13.

This chapter uses the case of Jack the Ripper, often associated with horror and fascination, to explore the experiences of Lascars in late nineteenth-century Britain. It will be argued that the media portrayal of Lascars and their involvement in Whitechapel's criminal underworld should not be seen merely as background noise to the sensationalised narrative of the Ripper. Instead, it offers us a critical view of the ways in which Lascars were racialised and marginalised, treated as both victims and perpetrators in a city dominated by the fear of the 'other'. To do this, the press coverage of the Whitechapel murders and other portrayals of Lascars will be analysed, exploring how Lascars were depicted in the media, and placing these representations within the broader context of their status in Victorian Britain.

It is crucial to understand that Lascars, despite their shared geography with the Chinese communities of Whitechapel and some overlapping conditions, experienced a separate and distinct reality. While both groups were often depicted together in the press, their experiences as colonial subjects within the empire were distinct. The portrayal of both groups as 'alien' in the media was not merely a reflection of their shared presence in the same spaces, but also the result of complex racial dynamics that positioned them as threats to the racial and moral purity of the British populace. In popular consciousness, Lascars and the Chinese appeared as morally corrupt outsiders, who needed controlling.[31] For example, in 1817, a local magistrate despaired of removing public houses and prostitutes from Shadwell since their clientele consisted 'entirely of foreign sailors, Lascars, Chinese, Greeks, and other filthy dirty people of that description and (the British) women of the Town never co-habit with any other people.'[32] The media's tendency to conflate Chinese and Lascar communities, particularly in the context of opium dens and the criminal underworld, oversimplifies the rich and varied experiences of these two distinct groups.

The press, eager to amplify public fear during the Ripper murders, speculated that the killer could have been a Lascar due to the racialised association of South Asian sailors with knives. Lascars, often portrayed as outsiders, were depicted as volatile and prone to violence, with the knife symbolising their supposed barbarism and emotional instability. This association was not just about the physical weapon, but about the racialised image of the Lascar as a dangerous foreigner, capable of unprovoked brutality. The knife, therefore, became a shorthand for the perceived threat of these immigrants, particularly in a society that already viewed them with suspicion and fear.

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[31] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 69.

[32] Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 172.

Through examining the case of Jack the Ripper, this chapter will reveal how the sensationalised media coverage of the Whitechapel murders and the violent portrayals of Lascars in the media reflect broader anxieties about race, poverty, and sexuality in Victorian Britain. It will argue that the portrayal of Lascars as part of the criminal underworld, alongside Chinese communities, is not just a matter of historical record, it is a key to understanding how these marginalised groups navigated their identities and struggled for recognition within the larger framework of the British Empire. In doing so, this chapter reconsiders the role of Lascars in British imperial history through the Whitechapel murders, highlighting their complex position in Victorian society. By analysing these relationships in light of the available evidence, and the absence of evidence supporting many of the prevailing assumptions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the lives of Lascars and the women they encountered, treating them with the dignity and respect their histories deserve.

1. Sulleyman Adam, Lascars and the Knife:

The murder weapon in the case of Sulleyman Adam further illuminates the complex relationship between Lascars and the use of knives. In a petition submitted to the Right Honourable Lord Pentland, His Majesty's Secretary of State for Scotland, the petitioners requested clemency for Adam, emphasising his young age, lack of premeditation, and the effect of alcohol on his actions. The petition stated:

> That the evidence showed that the prisoner was the worse of drink, and that the immediate cause of his action was a quarrel with the deceased whom he stabbed with a knife. That the effect of alcohol on the Indian temperament is much more acute than on more equable Northern natures. That by upbringing and tradition the Indian race are unaccustomed to control the fiery outbursts of their passionate natures and that the resort to lethal weapons which in our own people would be evidence of murderous intent cannot in the case of an Indian be held an indicating any serious and deliberate intention to commit use their knives as freely as our own people use their fists.[33]

This passage highlights a significant cultural perception of the Lascar community and their relationship with knives. It suggests that the use of a knife in the heat of an argument was not necessarily viewed as an act of premeditated violence but rather as an impulsive response fuelled by passion. The statement regarding the 'Indian temperament' implies that emotional outbursts, while intense, were not always tied to murderous intent. Instead, knives, seen as tools or extensions of the self, could escalate from an expression of frustration or anger to violence without the intention of killing.

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[33] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Letter from Adams Agent to Lord Pentland, 20 October 1910.

In the case of Sulleyman Adam, the use of a knife as the murder weapon draws attention to the complex relationship between Lascars and knives, which warrants further exploration. George Lambert Whyte, chief engineer of the ship, made a revealing statement during his cross-examination: ‘Lascars are somewhat passionate. A man is apt to lift a knife without intending any harm. I never heard of knifing among them. A “Serang” had authority to strike them if he pleased, and when he did so they did not seem to resent it’.[34] Whyte’s use of the term 'passionate' is particularly significant. It suggests that the Lascar community, marked by emotional intensity, could be prone to impulsive actions, particularly in moments of high emotion. The phrase 'apt to lift a knife without intending any harm' highlights a culture where knives, while dangerous, were perhaps seen more as tools that could quickly escalate from an expression of frustration or passion to violence.

This reflects a psychological dynamic where the knife, in the heat of the moment, might be used more out of emotional impulse than with the intent to kill. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the Jack the Ripper cases, where knives were also used in crimes that appeared driven by sudden, intense urges. The exploration of this relationship between the Lascar and the knife, and the emotional volatility implied by Whyte’s statement, invites a deeper look into how these acts of violence could be tied not just to an individual’s rage but also to a cultural context in which knives symbolised both power and passion. It suggests that the knife was not merely a tool for murder, but a reflection of the emotional turbulence that could underlie these tragic events.

Moreover, in Victorian Britain, Lascars working on British merchant ships were subject to pervasive stereotyping, often depicted as violent, knife-wielding figures in literature, media, and popular culture. This characterisation framed Lascars as inherently dangerous, unpredictable, and criminal, embodying Victorian fears around foreignness and the 'threat' posed by transient, non-English communities. By analysing this stereotype, we can see how racial prejudices shaped public perceptions of Lascars, especially in urban port cities where many settled, intensifying xenophobic sentiments during this era. Ceri-Anne Fidler's work reveals that Lascars were frequently portrayed in children's adventure stories as dangerous, cowardly, and morally corrupt figures, often depicted in opposition to heroic British characters. Knives and other weapons were commonly associated with Lascars in these narratives, symbolising their supposed treachery and propensity for violence. For example, stories like *The Black Pirate* and Kipling's *The Limitations of Pambe Serang* emphasise the vindictive nature of Lascars, who are shown using knives or other means to exact revenge on British seafarers. This repeated association between Lascars and violence served to heighten their menace and underscore their supposed inferiority and unfitness for positions of trust or authority.[35]

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[34] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Eye-witness testimonies, 18 October 1910.

The portrayal of knives as extensions of Lascar cowardice and duplicity contrasts sharply with the depiction of British characters as noble and strong, embodying 'heroic masculinity'.[36] These narratives often framed the use of knives or sneak attacks as a hallmark of weakness, reinforcing stereotypes of Lascars as effeminate or underhanded. By contrast, British characters were described as confronting challenges with physical strength and moral fortitude, further emphasising their superiority.[37] Fidler argues that these depictions were not incidental but served a broader ideological purpose: to teach young British readers imperial values and reinforce the racial hierarchies that justified colonial rule. The imagery of knives in these stories became a powerful symbol of the alleged moral and cultural deficiencies of colonial peoples like the Lascars, contrasted with the valour and honour of the British.[38] However, this image of the knife wielding Lascars did not just work in opposition to the heroic British characters but also reinforcing and embedding these associations in everyday life.

The following section examines various examples of Lascars being associated with knives in children's adventure stories and other popular cultural narratives before 1888, the year of the infamous Whitechapel murders. These portrayals highlight the consistent depiction of Lascars as treacherous, violent, and cowardly, often wielding knives as symbols of their supposed duplicity and moral inferiority. By focusing on these earlier depictions, this section sheds light on how knives were used as a narrative device to reinforce stereotypes about Lascars and their perceived threat, long before the events of the Whitechapel murders brought renewed attention to such imagery in public discourse. Such cultural assumptions not only informed public imagination during the Ripper investigation but also shaped legal and societal responses to crimes involving knives, as seen years later in the case of Sulleyman Adam. The language and imagery surrounding both instances reveal how these associations reinforced narratives of the ‘dangerous foreigner’, ultimately aiding in Adam’s conviction. By untangling these connections, we gain a clearer understanding of how stereotypes about Lascars and knife crime were weaponised in both public and legal contexts.

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[35] Ceri-Anne Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain* (PhD diss., University of Cardiff, 2011), 88.
[36] Ibid., 85.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

The trope of the 'knife-wielding Lascar’ emerged from sensationalist portrayals that regularly described these men in threatening terms, 'snarling’, 'cunning’, and intent on disrupting 'respectable' society. Writers like Reverend Harry Jones contributed to this image, noting that 'a large number of Lascar; they were reckoned, however, to be dangerous and likely to grin and run about the city’.[39] Following Dickens’s tradition of documenting urban life, the Rev Harry Jones, rector from 1873-82 in St-Georges-in-the-East, provided additional insights into Dickens’s settings, particularly regarding Jasper’s opium-smoking scenes in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Jones referenced 'Lascar Sal', an opium den operator living at the time he wrote in 1875, and a 'John Chinaman' who was her trade rival, connecting Dickens’s fictional portrayals to real-life figures in Stepney. Jones also asserts, ‘Charles Dickens used to come here and grub for sensational localities.’[40] This suggests exploration of impoverished or marginal areas could be seen as exploitative or voyeuristic. The term 'grub' might carry a derogatory undertone, hinting at a scavenger-like approach, where Dickens mined these spaces for dramatic effect rather than engaging meaningfully with their social realities. This perspective raises questions about whether Dickens’s portrayal of such ‘sensational localities’ was more about entertaining and shocking his audience than genuinely advocating for the marginalised people he depicted. It reframes his work as potentially perpetuating stereotypes or reducing complex communities to picturesque backdrops for middle-class consumption.

These portrayals tapped into broader societal anxieties about class and immigration, positioning Lascars as emblematic of the ‘dangerous foreigner’, incompatible with Victorian ideals of civility and order. Through these depictions, public perceptions of Lascars became deeply entwined with ideas of criminality and violence. The figure of the Lascar, as both foreign and violent, served as a convenient scapegoat for fears of crime and social decline in Britain’s urban spaces, especially among those who saw Britain’s growing diversity as a threat to societal stability. Another example can be seen in *The Mutiny of the Lascars*, where Lascars were characterised as 'dark-skinned rascals'.[41] Such descriptions made Lascars scapegoats for social anxieties about immigration and crime, associating them with violence and dishonesty. The characterisation of Lascars as violent figures extends beyond generalised notions of mistrust and malevolence to a specific association with knives and the act of stabbing. This portrayal can be observed in various Victorian novels and media, where the image of the 'knife-wielding Lascar' becomes a recurring and potent symbol of perceived foreign menace.

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[39] Harry Jones, ‘Life and Work Among The East-London Poor’, *Good Words*, 25 (1884), 50–54, 53.
[40] Jones, ‘Life and Work Among The East-London Poor,’ 53.

One example is found in Benjamin Farjeons's novel *Joshua Marvel* (1871), which presents a character known only as 'the Lascar', a vagabond who harasses the white, British heroine Susan Taylor, the sister of Joshua Marvel's best friend, Daniel.[42] Here, the nameless Lascar is described as less of a man and more akin to a 'wild beast', his savagery embodied in the threatening way he brandishes a knife.[43] The narrative describes the Lascar with his knife open, ready to strike, executing a 'savage flourish of his knife'.[44] This depiction serves to intensify the image of the Lascar as a violent outsider, poised to disrupt the lives of the 'respectable' English characters. Given no name and no back story or motive, the portrayal elides the one-dimensional character of 'the knife wielding Lascar' in one novel with the Lascar in general.

Benjamin Leopold Farjeon (1838–1903) was a minor Anglo-Jewish novelist known for his prolific output and his efforts to refute negative stereotypes of Jews in Victorian literature. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish household, Farjeon later assimilated into English life, marrying a Protestant and tackling contemporary issues like anti-Semitism and intermarriage in novels such as *Solomon Isaacs* (1877) and *Aaron the Jew* (1894).[45] His idealised Jewish characters, portrayed with moral strength and dignity, challenged prevailing stereotypes of Jews as vulgar or unscrupulous, which were common in the works of authors like Thackeray and Trollope. Farjeon's work was often modelled on Dickens, combining sentimentality with a strong moral purpose, and his sympathetic portrayals of Jews made him a pioneering figure in Anglo-Jewish literature.[46]

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[41] "Love on The Ocean: or, The Mutiny of The Lascars," *Every Week: A Journal of Entertaining Literature* 3, no. 67 (1870): 229–32, 231.
[42] Benjamin Farjeon, "Joshua Marvel," *Tinsleys' Magazine* (Tinsley Brothers, 1871).
[43] Farjeon, Joshua Marvel, 493.
[44] Ibid., 431.
[45] Sally Mitchell, *Victorian Britain (Routledge Revivals): An Encyclopedia* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 292.
[46] Ibid.

In contrast to his nuanced treatment of Jewish characters, Farjeon's portrayal of the Lascar in *Joshua Marvel* perpetuates colonial stereotypes. The Lascar is depicted as a nameless, knife-wielding 'wild beast', embodying a one-dimensional threat to the British heroine, Susan Taylor. This characterisation dehumanises the Lascar, reducing him to a violent outsider and reinforcing Victorian anxieties about colonial subjects. Unlike his Jewish characters, who are given backstories and moral complexity, the Lascar is denied individuality or motive, serving only as a foil to the respectable English protagonists. Farjeon's failure to extend the same empathetic approach to the Lascar reveals a blind spot in his otherwise progressive literary agenda and reflects broader Victorian attitudes that viewed colonial subjects as threatening and unassimilable. This disparity underscores the selective empathy of Victorian literature and the inability or unwillingness to challenge stereotypes beyond the Anglo-Jewish context.

Contrasting reviews of *Joshua Marvel* reveal a divided public reception to Farjeon's depiction of Lascars, reflecting broader Victorian attitudes toward colonial subjects. One positive review, which focuses on the novel's pathos and moral beauty, notably ignores the portrayal of the Lascar, suggesting that such dehumanising characterisations were either accepted or deemed unremarkable by certain readers.[47] In contrast, another review of *Joshua Marvel* harshly critiqued Farjeon's depiction of the Lascar, accusing the author of creating a character that was entirely unrealistic and sensationalised. The reviewer dismissed the Lascar as 'as unlike an Indian Lascar as Mr Farjeon would be unlike himself if an Indian Lascar painted him', highlighting the perceived absurdity and inauthenticity of the portrayal.[48] They question Farjeon's authority and understanding of Lascars, noting, 'What could he know of the Indian Lascar individually or collectively to justify him in attempting a description?' Furthermore, the review suggests that Farjeon's depiction caters to unsophisticated readers, particularly those drawn to sensationalism, who might accept such a caricature uncritically. The phrase 'just like those horrid Indians you know, my dear' reflects how the Lascar character perpetuates colonial fears and stereotypes for dramatic effect.[49] The review condemns Farjeon's reliance on exaggerated portrayals, describing them as 'grave errors' and lamenting his failure to provide a more credible or nuanced representation. This critique underscores the reviewer's demand for greater authenticity and responsibility in depicting colonial subjects, even as it acknowledges the popular appeal of such sensationalised depictions.[50]

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[47] *The British Quarterly Review* (United States: L. Scott Publishing Company, 1871), 127.

[48] *The Book-buyer's Guide: Being a List of the Principal Books Published in the Various Departments of Literature* (United Kingdom, n.p., 1870), 15.

[49] Ibid.

The theme continues in Edward Charles Mogridge's short story *The Doctor's Tale*, published in 1865, in *Powells Domestic Magazine*, where a Lascar character is implicated in a fatal assault on a woman. The magazine's purpose seemed to be to provide literary content in prose and verse, including model sketches, tales, and sentimental or comic stories.[51] Not much is known about Mogridge, however, it appears he is the youngest son of well-known author/writer George Mogridge (aka Old Humphrey).[52] The text states that 'the first thought of the Lascar was to smother her, but she escaped', underscoring the threat he poses. His aggression escalates when, 'drawing a sharp knife, which he had always in his possession, he felt for her throat, and in a moment the deed was done.'[53] This portrayal not only reinforces the association between Lascars and knives by suggesting they 'always' carried sharp knives, but also highlights the immediacy and danger of the threat they are depicted as posing, as this character immediately turns to violence and ultimately rejects smothering for the swift and efficient cut throat. The description of the Lascar's aggression, his initial attempt to smother the woman before escalating to the fatal act of throat-cutting, underscores the immediacy and brutality of the threat. Such depictions resonate with the sensationalist narratives surrounding the Whitechapel murders, where the figure of the knife became synonymous with male violence against women. The portrayal not only reinforces the association between Lascars and knives but also suggests they 'always' carried sharp blades, perpetuating a stereotype of constant, latent danger.

Furthermore, in his work *Tangles and Tales*, Mogridge portrays Lascars in a highly negative and stereotypical manner, using both physical and behavioural descriptions to evoke fear and mistrust. The Lascar is described as 'frightfully ugly and very black, with a ferocious look about him', emphasising physical traits in a way that dehumanises him and aligns with racial prejudices of the era.[54] His aggressive resistance during capture, 'screeching like a wild cat' and fighting 'with amazing energy and pertinacity', further reinforces this portrayal, likening him to an uncontrollable and animalistic figure.[55] Such descriptions strip the character of individuality and humanity, reducing him to a threatening caricature.

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[50] Ibid.
[51] James Henry Powell, *Life Incidents and Poetic Pictures* (United Kingdom: Trübner & Company, 1865), 47.
[52] *The Eclectic Review*, ed. Daniel Parken and Edwin Paxton Hood (United Kingdom: C. Taylor, 1859), 2.
[53] *The Doctors Tale*, *Powell's Domestic Magazine* (United Kingdom, n.p., 1860), 172.
[54] Edward Charles Mogridge, *Tangles and Tales* (United Kingdom: Saunders, Otley, 1865), 328.
[55] Ibid.

Behaviourally, the Lascar is depicted as ‘brutal and revengeful to a dangerous degree’ and prone to constant quarrelling, cementing the narrative of him being inherently menacing.[56] Additionally, his supposed superstition is highlighted, such as his belief in ‘visions of a visit from some of the Indian deities’, which makes him appear naive and easily manipulated.[57] This portrayal is further exploited when a magic lantern is used to create a terrifying illusion of an idol, tricking him into confessing.[58] This manipulation underscores a colonial attitude of superiority, presenting the Lascar as both superstitious and primitive. Overall, the text uses physical, cultural, and behavioural stereotypes to depict Lascars as threatening and inferior, reflecting the broader racial biases and colonial narratives of the time.

These fictional portrayals were echoed in contemporary news reports. In one instance from 1884, a Lascar was apprehended vandalising a statue; upon being seized, he 'immediately drew a knife and endeavoured to stab one of the officers’.[59] Beyond simply carrying knives, the Lascar image was sometimes invoked to describe specific acts of violence. For instance, one character in a novel remarks, 'it clove my opponent’s gizzard like the stab of a Lascar’s knife’.[60] Newspapers used similar imagery; in a murder report in the *Sheffield Telegraph* from 1881, a character, in a moment of rage, is said to have 'looked like a Lascar when he draws his knife after losing all his dollars’.[61] Charles Dickens also drew on this association, writing that fire-irons were ‘removed like the knife of a Lascar’, further entrenching the stereotype in British cultural references.[62] These repeated invocations reflect how deeply ingrained the stereotype of the knife-wielding Lascar already was by 1884. Dickens and others could assume readers would instantly recognise and understand these references, demonstrating how pervasive the association had become. At the same time, these portrayals perpetuated the stereotype, reinforcing negative connotations in the public imagination and ensuring its persistence in cultural memory.

Moreover, George W.M. Reynolds was a highly influential figure in nineteenth-century British literature and journalism. As an editor, journalist, publisher, and novelist, Reynolds managed to achieve both extraordinary commercial success and a platform for radical political expression.[63] His serialised fiction, often published in his bestselling journal *Reynolds's Miscellany* (1845–1869), outsold all his rivals. His most famous works, *The Mysteries of London* (1844–1848) and *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1847–1856), sold over a million copies, an unparalleled feat for the time. In the latter, Reynolds evokes imagery of daggers in connection with a Lascar, drawing on contemporary stereotypes of violence.[64]

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[56] Ibid., 329.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 330.
[59] *St James's Gazette,* “Untitled,” Saturday 14 June 1884, 5.
[60] Tom Kettle, *Poems and Parodies* (N.p.: Outlook Verlag, 2020), 21.
[61] *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Revelations of a Lawyer, 23 April 1881, 9.
[62] Charles Dickens, *One Dinner a Week, and Travels in the East* (London: London Cottage Mission, 1884), 109.

Reynolds combined sensationalism, political critique, and social commentary in his works. While he was an upper-middle-class Englishman, his politics were staunchly republican, a stance that added a paradoxical layer to his fiction, which often mixed radical ideals with salacious and sensational content. As Anne Humphreys noted, Reynolds's fiction and journals managed a paradoxical synthesis of 'politics and pornography, sentiment and sensationalism, rules of behaviour and calls to political action'.[65] Critics often labelled his works as dangerous, with one reviewer condemning them as 'poison' full of 'fire and brimstone'.[66] Despite his radical leanings, Reynolds's portrayal of crime and social issues frequently reflected popular Victorian anxieties about morality, criminality, and the urban poor, reinforcing stereotypes even as he ostensibly sought to critique society.

Reynolds depicts a Lascar seizing money and fleeing, while an onlooker hesitates to intervene, with thoughts of 'daggers and knives connected with that Lascar' running through his mind.[67] This can be seen as part of his broader engagement with sensationalism and the Victorian imagination's obsession with crime, danger, and the 'other'. Victorian society often relegated criminal acts and immorality to marginalised groups, including immigrants and urban lower classes, as exemplified in depictions of London's East End.[68] In this context, the figure of the Lascar fit comfortably within established tropes of violence, criminality, and racialised otherness. Reynolds's work capitalised on these anxieties, blending the sensational with social critique. For example, his fiction often fed his audience a 'regular diet of salacious tales' that shocked and reinforced moralistic judgments.[69] As Preeti Nijhar notes, sensationalist fiction of the era often depicted 'a brutalised savage poor' or 'truly fallen dangerous types', feeding

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[63] Ian Haywood, "George W.M. Reynolds and the Radicalization of Victorian Serial Fiction," *Media History* 4, no. 2 (1998): 121–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688809809357940.

[64] George William M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (United Kingdom: n.p., 1886), 191.

[65] Anne Humpherys, "G. W. M. Reynolds: Popular Literature & Popular Politics," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 16, no. 3/4 (Fall–Winter 1983): 79, published by The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals.

[66] Ibid., 82.

[67] Reynolds, *The Mysteries of the Court of London,* 191

[68] Preeti Nijhar, *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44.

[69] Ibid.

Victorian fears and fantasies.[70] By including such a portrayal, Reynolds demonstrates how even radical figures could perpetuate the same stereotypes they might critique elsewhere. His portrayal of the Lascar reflects not only the prevailing stereotypes of the time but also his use of sensationalism to captivate his readers. In doing so, he becomes another prominent voice reinforcing the trope of the Lascar as a violent outsider, shaping public perceptions in ways that resonated with broader cultural fears and prejudices.

Furthermore, Joseph Salter recalls witnessing a Lascar with a knife at his side and 'horny hands'.[71] Such descriptions compound the trope, repeatedly framing Lascars as figures of latent violence, their knives an ever-present reminder of their supposed criminal nature. Notably, this trope transcends genres, appearing both in fiction and non-fiction accounts. Figures like Salter adopt these same tropes, lending consistency to the portrayal of Lascars and reinforcing the authority of these texts and authors to define who the Lascar is. A particularly interesting news report that further exacerbated this trope appeared in *The People* in 1887, titled ‘Lascars and the Knife at the East End.’[72] This report highlighted a brawl between ‘about half a dozen Lascars’ who were drinking in a ‘public-house in the neighbourhood, when they entered into an argument with two Englishmen’.[73] The Lascars were described as using sticks, and while one of the Englishmen was on the ground, they drew their knives, and made several thrusts at their intended victims. The cries of the onlookers, including ‘shrieks from females’ were described as loud and terrifying, while several men from a crowd viewing the scene held the Lascars down in a struggle until the police arrived.[74] The paper was founded in 1881, and is an example of a new kind of popular press emerging at mid-century, the Sunday newspaper, which combined ‘general political attitudes’ with the more sensational elements of popular reading, particularly, as it developed, sports news. This movement culminated in a popular press that was not ’for the people’ but for the money amoral and apolitical.[75]

1.a. Post 1888:

Harry Blythe’s *The Black Pirate* story, published in *The Halfpenny Marvel* similarly introduced a Lascar character, Juan, described as a 'dishonest' thief.[76] It depicted a Lascar holding a grudge against a British seafarer resulting in an attempted murder by the Lascar. The Lascar is described as a vindictive, murderous wretch.[77] Harry Blyth was a Scottish journalist who created the detective character Sexton Blake, a figure heavily influenced by Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.[78] Blyth's stories, starting with *The Missing Millionaire* in 1893, were aimed at a juvenile audience and adapted the 'Holmes tradition' into a more accessible and adventurous format. Dorothy L. Sayers characterised these tales as a blend of the Holmesian detective genre and the sensationalist 'Buffalo Bill adventure type', suggesting they were crafted for a younger, less sophisticated readership.[79] Blyth's Sexton Blake emerged almost as a surrogate for Holmes after Conan Doyle 'killed off' his iconic detective in *The Final Problem*, appealing to an audience eager for similar mystery-driven narratives.[80]

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years’ Work Among Orientals* (United Kingdom: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1873), 20.

[72] *The People*, “Lascars and the Knife at the East End,” Sunday 30 January 1887, 8.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Humpherys, “G. W. M. Reynolds: Popular Literature & Popular Politics,” 83.

[76] Harry Blyth, “The Black Pirate: A Stirring Story of the Sea,” *The Halfpenny Marvel* 4 (1893): 1–15, 13.

Fictional portrayals frequently reinforced these stereotypes, casting Lascars as animalistic and menacing figures. For instance, in S. Clarke Hook's novel, *A Tale of Jack, Sam and Pete*, one Lascar is described as a 'tall, fierce-looking Lascar, who now looked about as amiable as a snarling tiger',[81] while another is depicted as 'a villainous-looking Lascar… who got his living by selling various articles and thieving'.[82] Such descriptions dehumanised Lascars, equating them to snarling animals or cunning thieves, and positioned them as archetypal 'rascals' who could not be trusted. Hook's language paints a hostile image of the Lascar, with phrases like 'Hajah's black eyes flashed, and his lips quivered until his yellow teeth were revealed. He looked like a snarling wolf', reinforcing the stereotype of inherent menace.[83]

These fictional portrayals were echoed in contemporary news reports. In *The White Slaves*, a wounded Lascar 'drew his own kris, and with a horrible cry dashed at his treacherous assailant'.[84] A periodical piece, *Half an Hour with a Living Sherlock Holmes*, describes another incident involving a Lascar attack, 'that scar on my cheek? A Lascar did that with his knife; he was made drunk with raw spirit and would have killed me'.[85] These stories in popular media reinforced the association of Lascars with violent crime, embedding this stereotype in public consciousness. By repeatedly linking Lascars with drunkenness, knives, and uncontrolled violence, such accounts presented them not as individuals but as a collective threat. This repetition across fiction and journalism normalised fear and suspicion of Lascars, shaping how they were perceived both by the public and in official discourse.

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[77] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 88.

[78] David Stuart Davies, *Vintage Mystery and Detective Stories* (United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), 14.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] S. Clarke Hook, "Perilous Times: A Tale of Jack, Sam and Pete," *The Marvel* 7, no. 159 (1907): 57–71, 63.

[82] S. Clarke Hook, "The Lascar's Revenge: A Tale of Jack, Sam, and Pete," *The Marvel* 11, no. 383 (1911): 15–26, 15.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Paul Herring, "The White Slaves: A Tale of Mystery in the Far East," *The Halfpenny Marvel* 3, no. 77 (1895): 1–14, 8.

[85] Unknown, "Half an Hour with a Living Sherlock Holmes: A Criminal-Catcher's Chat," *The Marvel* 10, no. 247 (1898): 15.

S. Clarke Hook further develops this image in his work, where a Lascar villain remarks that, although he cannot fight with his fists, he is proficient with knives. In a climactic moment, the Lascar 'sprang towards Pete, and the knife flashed in the moonlight, as he raised it to deal a fatal stroke'.[86] In the *Lascar's Revenge*, another Lascar is depicted with a 'long-bladed knife' that 'flashed in his right hand', lunging at Pete's chest with intent to kill.[87] Similarly, in *The Terror of the South Seas*, a Lascar 'raised his long knife' and 'plunged it into his victim's back'.[88] These scenes cement the connection between Lascars and brutal knife violence, feeding Victorian fears of 'foreign' and unpredictable aggression.

Moreover, in George Alfred Henty's *A Hidden Foe*, the portrayal of Lascars as knife-wielding aggressors aligns with the recurring pattern in nineteenth-century literature and popular media, where they are often depicted as violent and dangerous figures. Henty, the most widely read author of boys' adventures in Britain prior to World War I, sold more than 25 million copies of his books in the postwar era. His books were still selling 50 years after his death.[89] During a desperate moment aboard a lifeboat, the Lascars are shown leading a brutal attack, with one described as striking down Mr. Gifford before turning on the engineer: 'Philip saw his knife descend just as Mr. Solden struggled to his feet'.[90] Another Lascar, also armed, is depicted with an 'uplifted knife' as he closes in on the protagonist.[91] This association of Lascars with knives reinforces a trope that frames them as menacing and untrustworthy, amplifying their role as antagonists. Even as Constance screams and arms herself for defence, the text situates the Lascars as a threatening force, perpetuating a portrayal that reflects broader stereotypes in literature of the time.

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[86] S. Clarke Hook, "The Ghost of the Mary Ann: The First Story – Extra Long and Complete," *The Marvel* 5, no. 129 (1906): 673–88, 685.
[87] Hook, "The Lascar's Revenge," 15.
[88] S. Clarke Hook, "The 'Terror' of the South Seas. A Phantom of the Past: The House of Death—The Curse of Drink," *The Halfpenny Marvel* 16 (1894): 1–16, 6.
[89] Kimberley Ducey and Joe R. Feagin, *Revealing Britain's Systemic Racism: The Case of Meghan Markle and the Royal Family*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 75, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003167433.
[90] George Alfred Henty, *A Hidden Foe* (United Kingdom: Hurst, 1891), 264.
[91] Ibid., 265

The stereotype appears again in Henty’s *Colonel Thorndyke's Secret*, where a Lascar 'jumped suddenly out from among the men standing about and was about to stab my companion'.[92] Henty, described as ‘the dominant figure in English boys’ fiction' during his era, built his success on formulaic tales of youthful adventure that valorised British imperialism.[93] His narratives typically emphasised the physical prowess and moral fortitude of his young male protagonists, set against the backdrop of ‘a great historical movement, an insurrection, or a war’.[94]

Henty’s own imperialist leanings were evident throughout his works, where non-European characters are often cast in stereotypical roles, alternately noble or menacing. Critics noted his tendency to perpetuate racial and class biases, as in *A Roving Commission* (1890), where black characters were dismissed as ‘like children… not given to work unless they are obliged to’.[95] This attitude likely influenced his depiction of Lascars in *A Hidden Foe*, where one is described as 'closing with uplifted knife’, a portrayal that aligns with the popular association of such characters with danger and betrayal.[96] Henty’s experiences as a war correspondent and journalist also shaped his worldview. His accounts, praised for their vivid detail, reinforced his belief in the righteousness of British imperial expansion, which he saw as both a civilising mission and a source of personal adventure. Yet, as *The Times* wrote, ‘Henty “understands boys” tastes better than any man living’, crafting tales that satisfied his audience’s appetite for thrilling, morally simplistic narratives, even at the cost of reinforcing harmful stereotypes.[97]

Taken together, these literary and journalistic portrayals did more than provide sensational entertainment; they entrenched a racialised stereotype of the 'knife-wielding Lascar' that resonated with wider imperial anxieties about race, violence, and social order. By collapsing individuality into a recurring trope of menace, such depictions ensured that Lascars were imagined less as workers or neighbours and more as embodiments of danger within the Victorian cultural imagination.

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[92] George Alfred Henty, *Colonel Thorndyke’s Secret* (United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus, 1898), 361.

[93] Daniel Hahn, ed., “HENTY, G. A. (George Alfred) (1832–1902),” in *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Credo Reference, https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDgwMzI5Mg==?aid=280085.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Extract from *A Roving Commission* (1890), in Hahn, ed., “HENTY, G. A.,” *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*.

[96] Henty, *A Hidden Foe*, 265.

[97] Extract from *The Times*, in Hahn, ed., “HENTY, G. A.,” *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*.

2. Boarding Houses, Opium Dens, Brothels and Women.

The Opium Den is often depicted in a key geographical location in the depths of the East End of London. Curtis Marez highlights that, 'the most common opium den scene, however, includes Chinese and Indians'.[98] However, as Marez points out, there are many depictions of Opium Dens in popular culture, such as Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and J. Randal's *A Chinese Opium Den in East London*.[99] These depictions of Lascars in novels are important to consider, as they were frequently used to describe scenes in Opium Dens in the press. For example, the *Pall Mall Gazette* described a London Opium Den owned by a man named Shy Lee, stating, 'It is chiefly frequented by the three classes of men whom one of Dickens' characters has broadly defined as "Jacks, Chayneymen, and other knifers."'[100] This highlights how these depictions became instrumental in legitimising the negative stereotypes associated with Lascars and other non-European groups. The *Gazette* continued, describing dens where 'they board, lodge, gamble, smoke opium and fight'.[101] Their imagery depicted Lascars and Chinese as weak, lazy, and feckless. One Lascar was even described as more of a wild beast than a human.

2.a. Lascars and Chinese

This blurring of identities in the popular imagination was mirrored in official records. The tendency to conflate Lascars and Chinese was not confined to literature or the press but also reflected in administrative categorisation. Michael Fisher highlights that the categorisation of Lascars and Chinese sailors was inconsistent and often conflated, reflecting the administrative priorities of the time rather than an accurate or systematic effort to document their identities.[102] While Lascars primarily referred to seamen from the Indian subcontinent, records occasionally included Chinese and other Asians under this term. Documentation was sporadic, driven by the East India Company's aim to control European access to India rather than to account for Asian sailors comprehensively. As a result, the data was compiled using varying principles and supplemented by subjective estimates from British writers, leading to an incomplete and inconsistent portrayal of these groups.[103]

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[98] Curtis Marez, *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics* (United Kingdom: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 62.

[99] Marez, *Drug Wars,* 62.

[100] *Pall Mall Gazette*, "A London Opium Den," Thursday 17 August 1882, 4.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism,* 139.

Lascars and Chinese sailors were often treated similarly but also distinguished in various ways, reflecting both their shared experiences and distinct identities. One of the key similarities between the two groups is their classification as 'Asiatic' labour.[104] Both Lascars and Chinese sailors were racialised in this way, which led to their inclusion in anti-immigrant campaigns. These groups were collectively blamed for undercutting wages and threatening the livelihood of British workers. The economic exploitation they faced was another shared experience; both Lascars and Chinese sailors were paid lower wages compared to their British counterparts, with Chinese sailors earning slightly more than Lascars.[105] For example, during periods of anti-immigrant agitation, Lascars were often grouped with Chinese sailors and other foreign workers as part of the 'Yellow Peril', accused of undercutting wages and lowering the standard of living for British labourers.[106] Despite their crucial role in the British merchant navy, Lascars were excluded from settlement rights and relegated to a transient existence. This was evident in the system of lodging-houses run by Indian sailors, who, like the Chinese, often relied on such accommodation while working in British ports. Additionally, both groups lived under conditions of social isolation and were depicted negatively in British society.

Aaron Jaffer highlights the distinct categorisation of Chinese sailors and Lascars (Indian seafarers) within the maritime labour structure. Although Chinese sailors were occasionally grouped under the broad category of 'Lascar', they were generally treated as a separate group by officials and captains.[107] For instance, log-keepers used specific headings to differentiate Chinese sailors from Lascars. These distinctions extended to life aboard ships, where, as a passenger aboard *The Hope* in 1811 observed, 'the Lascars and the Chinese sailors were each "mustered in a separate body"'.[108] This segmentation reflects how maritime authorities maintained clear divisions between different groups of Asian sailors, possibly to reinforce control and manage potential unrest.

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 58.
[105] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 43.
[106] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 57.
[107] Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780–1860: Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 12.
[108] Ibid.

Jaffer also underscores the complexities of understanding the ranks within Indian seafaring crews, which were well-established but often confusing to Europeans.[109] As Balachandran notes, 'Even if it were possible, establishing equivalences between the ranks/occupational descriptions of Indian crews and those of other nationalities may not be very meaningful'.[110] European officials often struggled to interpret these ranks, a confusion that became evident during investigations into acts of mutiny. In several cases, authorities failed to ascertain the exact roles held by certain crew members, revealing a lack of familiarity with the hierarchical structures within Indian maritime labour. This complexity highlights both the uniqueness of Lascar ranks and the challenges they posed to European systems of categorisation and control.[111]

Ceri-Anne Fidler reveals the systemic exploitation and inequalities faced by Lascars and Chinese sailors in the maritime labour market. Lascars earned significantly less than their British and Chinese counterparts, with Chinese sailors' wages higher than Indians' but still lower than those of British workers.[112] For example, Ravi Ahuja notes that Lascars received as little as between one-fifth and one-third of the pay of European 'able-bodied seamen'.[113] The justification for this disparity was rooted in racial prejudice, as British shipowners argued that Indian workers were less efficient, requiring 'two Indians… to complete the same work' as one British seaman. These wage disparities reflect the entrenched racial hierarchies within the maritime labour system.[114]

Culturally, Lascars and Chinese sailors had distinct practices that set them apart. The European authorities often struggled to understand the complex social and labour structures within Indian maritime crews, which were unique compared to those of European or Chinese sailors. This confusion highlighted the difference in how these two groups were organised and understood within the maritime labour system. Additionally, there were instances where Chinese sailors were specifically segregated from Lascars in separate barracks, further underscoring the distinction between the two groups.[115]

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Extract from Gopalan Balachandran, "Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945" (Delhi, 2012), in Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring*, 20.

[111] Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring*, 20.

[112] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 43.

[113] Ravi Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c. 1900–1960," *International Review of Social History* 51, Supplement S14 (2006): 112.

[114] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 43.

2.b. Opium Dens:

When exploring what the Opium Den represented for the British, Audrey Jaffe argues, 'The Opium den was a fantasy about unproductivity: explicitly citing this threat, the anti-opium movement in the nineteenth century encouraged the idea that opium represented a particular danger for the working classes and raised anxiety about its spread to the middle classes'.[116] Therefore, the Opium Den can be understood as a geographical location where the British could place any alien ideas or marginalised groups that raised national fears and anxieties. The imagery surrounding Lascars and the Chinese was thus riddled with all the negative connotations that accompanied the colonial attitudes towards Opium Dens and the East End.

A particularly interesting aspect of the depiction of Opium Dens is the contrast between the conventional portrayal of Lascars and their depiction in these spaces. Georgie Wemyss states that 'philanthropists were appalled by the wretched conditions of “Lascars” who were, at different times, homeless, underdressed, and starving in the streets. “Asiatic blacks” constituted ten per cent of the hundreds of black poor'.[117] Fidler also describes the stark differences between common perceptions of Lascars and Chinese sailors. She argues that common fears about Chinese sailors 'centred on their poverty, living standards, drug use, and sexual behaviour, particularly with white women'.[118] By contrast, Lascars were often described as 'poor men' or ‘unfortunate Lascars'.[119] Fidler continues, suggesting that the media 'continuously portrayed them as objects of pity in need of help. They were depicted as victims of the shipping companies.'[120] This portrayal, however, sits uneasily alongside the stereotype of Lascars as dangerous and violent, particularly the ‘knife stereotype’, which painted them as volatile and prone to acts of aggression. The coexistence of these conflicting images, the vulnerable, victimised labourer and the violent, knife-wielding figure, reflects deeper anxieties about race, class, and the imagined threat of the ‘other’.

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[115] Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring,* 12.

[116] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (United States: Cornell University Press, 2018), 69.

[117] Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 150.

[118] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 91.

[119] Ibid., 95.

[120] Ibid.

While the depiction of Lascars as pitiable might elicit sympathy, it also reinforces the idea that their desperation and marginalisation make them susceptible to moral decay and dangerous behaviour. The knife stereotype plays into fears of unpredictability and a lack of control, suggesting that even in their vulnerability, Lascars represent a potential threat to English society. This tension between pity and fear illustrates the racialised contradictions in how Lascars were perceived: as both victims of systemic exploitation and agents of violence, their identity was shaped by the intersection of vulnerability and menace in the British colonial imagination.

However, the Opium Den represented a space where both Lascars and Chinese sailors came together, becoming a homogenous group of ‘alien’ others. An example of this can be seen in a newspaper report that identified three Opium Dens in the East End of London. The report notes, ‘they are all boarding houses, and are frequented by Chinese cooks and stewards, and Lascar sailors. Occasionally, they are visited by Englishmen out of curiosity; but Englishmen do not smoke opium there. They would be very brave or very reckless if they did’.[121] This again reinforces the idea that Lascars and Chinese sailors were naturally at home in the Opium Den, whereas it would be an anomaly for an Englishman to partake in such activities. The quote not only reinforces the association of the Opium Den with ‘alien’ identities but also destabilises the notion of Englishness itself. The idea that an Englishman would need to be 'brave’ or ‘reckless’ to engage in the activities of the Opium Den implies that Englishness, often imagined as a marker of moral superiority and self-control, is fragile and susceptible to corruption in these spaces. This tension underscores broader anxieties about maintaining a stable, secure sense of English identity in the face of exposure to foreign influences. By framing the Englishman as an anomaly in this setting, the report highlights the precariousness of his identity, dependent as it is on avoiding association with the perceived vice and moral degradation of the Opium Den.

2.c. The Fallen Woman:

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[121] *Dundee Courier*, “Opium Dens in London,” Wednesday 5 September 1883, 4.

Another feature that links Lascars and Chinese sailors in the Opium Den is the presence of prostitutes within the East End of London. Prostitutes were central to the complex history of attitudes toward the inhabitants of the 'alien' East End, with links to issues of sexuality, interracial relationships, venereal diseases, and prostitution. One 1867 report states, 'the prostitutes, who formerly tenanted these lower regions, lived in an immense underground vault for weeks and months together… They had unlimited intercourse with foreign sailors, many of whom were Lascars and coloured men'.[122] The relationship between Lascars and English women was thus interwoven with ideas of opium, prostitution, poverty, and venereal diseases. An example of this can be found in the American Medical Association's statement:

> bad forms of syphilis are by no means uncommon even at the present day; but they are met with chiefly among the lower classes of prostitutes, sailors, and Lascars, whose health has been vitiated by all kinds of excess, by insufficient food, by mental distress, by foul, damp air, and by analogous causes which it would be needless to specify.[123]

Here, we see the mutual association between Lascars and prostitutes as they both inhabited the East End, raising anxieties within the Victorian and Edwardian British public. Descriptions of Lascars also included, 'They were ill-used, and ill-fed; they were brought to a metropolitan port, and were left to wander amongst the lowest drunkards, thieves and prostitutes, from London Bridge to Blackwall, where they became like our most guilty population'.[124]

The stereotype of the Lascar is particularly striking in this regard: Lascars are often depicted as both pitiable victims and dangerous, unpredictable figures. This conflation of vulnerability with viciousness is crucial, as their impoverished and marginalised status is seemingly seen as a breeding ground for moral decay and violence. Society associated the Lascar's poverty, foreignness, and perceived helplessness with a latent threat. This suggests a racialised and class-based assumption that those who occupy the lower rungs of society, particularly when they are 'alien' to the British body politic, are not only to be feared but also seen as capable of great violence. In contrast, Chinese men are depicted in a slightly different light: while also marginalised, their portrayal tends to emphasise their foreignness and perceived inscrutability, often reducing them to an almost mechanical, controlled presence. The viciousness associated with Chinese men is more often linked to their association with opium and sexual deviance rather than to their poverty or vulnerability, which sets them apart from the Lascar stereotype. This contrast highlights a key difference in how vulnerability is racialised: while Lascars are portrayed as violent due to their vulnerability, Chinese men's threat is rooted more in their perceived foreignness and otherness, reflecting different racial anxieties about immigration, crime, and national identity.

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[122] Silas Durkee, *A Treatise on Gonorrhœa and Syphilis* (United States: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1867), 252.
[123] *Transactions of the American Medical Association* (United States: American Medical Association, 1874), 264.
[124] *The British Friend of India Magazine, and Indian Review* (United Kingdom: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1843), 285.

Mary Robinson's *The Lascar, in Two Parts*, published in her *Lyrical Tales (1800)*, reveals deep parallels between the Lascars' struggles as dispossessed Indian sailors and the hardships faced by marginalised women in Britain, particularly Robinson who lived a life that encapsulated the hardships and stigmas faced by women on the margins of 18th-century British society.[125] Known as 'Perdita' for her role in *The Winter's Tale*, Robinson transitioned from a promising career as an actress to a life of notoriety and eventual impoverishment following her affair with the Prince of Wales. As Hester Davenport notes in his introduction to *The Prince's Mistress: A Life of Mary Robinson* (2006), her relationship with the Prince overshadowed her subsequent literary achievements, cementing her public image as a scandalous figure rather than a serious artist.[126] Similarly, Marguerite Steen's *The Lost One* (1937) offers a dismissive portrayal of Robinson, presenting her as an 'empty-headed doll', a woman lacking both 'brains' and 'strength of character'.[127] Yet, Robinson's later works reflect her resilience and acute awareness of social injustice. After a debilitating illness left her paralysed, Robinson turned to writing as both a livelihood and a means of critique, carving a space for herself in the male-dominated literary world as a romantic poet, feminist, and autobiographer.[128]

Humberto Garcia argues that the 'psychic internalisation of external corporeal labour' symbolised by the consonant rhyme of 'brave' and 'brain' signifies how the brutal realities of capitalist exploitation impact the mind as well as the body.[129] This transformation, where 'the accumulation of capital' turns 'a healthy indentured labourer into a sick, crazy, and alienated pauper', reflects not only the conditions of Lascars but also speaks to the plight of women trapped within a similar system.[130] Both groups, alienated and treated as commodities by society, reveal how the capitalist system diminishes and discards the lives of the vulnerable. This perspective imbues Robinson's poem *The Lascar* with profound empathy for the alienation of its titular figure. Her own 'wretched experience as a disfranchised Englishwoman', shaped by societal exploitation and personal betrayal, mirrors the Lascar's plight as a colonial subject navigating a hostile and indifferent Britain. Robinson's ability to articulate this connection highlights her nuanced critique of the capitalist and patriarchal systems that marginalised both groups, rendering their struggles both analogous and interdependent.

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[125] Mary Robinson, "The Lascar (in Two Parts)," in *Mary Robinson: Selected Poems*, ed. Judith Pascoe (United States: Broadview Press, 2000).
[126] Hester Davenport, *The Prince's Mistress: A Life of Mary Robinson* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006), 9.
[127] Extract from Marguerite Steen, "The Lost One" (1937), in Davenport, *The Prince's Mistress*, 8.
[128] Davenport, *The Prince's Mistress*, 10.
[129] Humberto Garcia, "The Transports of Lascar Specters: Dispossessed Indian Sailors in Women's Romantic Poetry," *The Eighteenth Century* 55, no. 2/3 (2014): 255–72, 257, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44729985 (accessed 12 November 2024).

Furthermore, Garcia's analysis uses Marx's concept of 'pauperism', which he describes as 'the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army', to highlight how capitalism deems certain groups economically useless, yet essential for its stability. Lascars, like the most marginalised British women, were 'the lowest sediment of the surplus labour population' whose degraded status kept wages low and maintained control over the labour force.[131] Garcia explains that, confined to barracks in London and awaiting repatriation, Lascars became 'a human enclosure akin to "the hospital of the active labour-army"', a space where capitalism's incidental costs were offset by wage suppression.[132] This containment and economic disenfranchisement of Lascars directly parallels Robinson's experience as a female writer and actress who, after being deceived by powerful men, suffered financial and emotional isolation under a system that viewed her labour as disposable.

Robinson's poem becomes a medium through which she expresses empathy for the Lascar, aligning his alienation with her own wretched experience as a disfranchised Englishwoman. Robinson, too, experienced the transition from 'waged labour' to 'pauperism' within a capitalist system that turned 'rights-bearing subjects into commodities'.[133] Just as Lascars faced exploitation and confinement, Robinson's life was marked by shifts between legitimate labour and marginalisation, highlighting the limited choices available to both Lascars and women within Britain's capitalist society. Her empathetic portrayal of the Lascar, therefore, reflects her critique of a system that exploits and devalues both sailors and impoverished women, suggesting that both groups are victimised by a relentless economic machine. Garcia suggests that Robinson's position as a woman who faced poverty and alienation gave her insight into the suffering of Lascars and the deep-seated injustices of a system that discards the labouring poor, both British and foreign.[134] However, it is also worth noting that as a white, British-born woman who had experienced class and wealth earlier in her life, Robinson's ability to draw such a comparison reflects a significant degree of privilege. Unlike Lascars, whose voices were often entirely excluded or erased in public discourse, Robinson had access to platforms that allowed her to articulate these parallels and publish them in widely read literary forms. It is difficult to imagine a Lascar sailor having the means to craft and share a poem comparing his struggles to Robinson's, underscoring the asymmetrical power dynamics that shaped whose experiences could be documented and amplified. Her empathetic portrayal of the Lascar thus reflects not only her critique of systemic exploitation but also the unique privileges that allowed her to give voice to these shared hardships.

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 258.

Building on Robinson's comparison, the Lascar experience in Britain vividly reflects the themes she highlights. The 'underworld' emerges as a stark reality for many Lascars, who were often forced to navigate life in the shadows of British society. Their marginalisation pushed them into precarious situations, where they encountered exploitation, crime, and the constant struggle for survival, mirroring Robinson's depiction of a world beneath the surface. Similarly, their interactions with women reveal cultural and social tensions that underscore Robinson's exploration of cross-cultural encounters. These relationships were often marked by misunderstanding, imbalance, or fleeting connections that reflected broader societal prejudices and anxieties. Lastly, Robinson's reference to the 'knife' resonates in the way Lascars were stigmatised, particularly during the Jack the Ripper case, when they were sensationally and unfairly associated with violence and danger. Together, these elements of the Lascar experience bring to life Robinson's comparison, illustrating the layers of complexity and the harsh realities faced by these sailors in a foreign land.

Robinson's poem, with its exploration of alienation and marginalisation, provides a means for understanding broader societal anxieties surrounding those on the margins. Lascars' interactions with British women often became the subject of moral panic, with colonial and patriarchal narratives framing these encounters in ways that reinforced the stereotype of the 'fallen woman'. This trope mirrored anxieties about the perceived vulnerability of women who, like Robinson herself, navigated a precarious social position between respectability and scandal. By moving from Robinson's empathetic portrayal to the lived experiences of Lascars in Britain, we can explore how their relationships with women were used to define boundaries of class, race, and morality in a society grappling with the aftershocks of empire and capitalism.

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[134] Ibid.

The portrayal of women associated with Lascars in popular media was not one of sympathy; instead, these women were often depicted in terms that reflected societal prejudice. As Doezema argues, 'a prostitute was constructed as a sexual deviant and spreader of disease'.[135] There was rarely any distinction made between women in relationships with Lascars and those identified as prostitutes; rather, it was commonly assumed that any woman associated with a Lascar was herself a prostitute. These women were seen as 'fallen', having succumbed to what were perceived as the 'evil tendencies' of the Lascars and Chinese, and were frequently depicted in a negative light.

The label of the 'fallen woman' in Victorian culture was a fluid and multifaceted concept, often encompassing a range of stigmatised feminine identities. This included not only prostitutes and adulteresses but also women who transgressed societal norms through interracial relationships, such as those with Lascars.[136] These relationships were particularly fraught with cultural anxieties, as they challenged Victorian ideals of racial and moral purity. The rhetoric of fallenness, as Amanda Anderson argues in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, portrayed these women as lacking autonomy and coherence, embodying fractured identities that reflected broader fears about the erosion of moral agency and societal boundaries.[137] Interactions with Lascars, marginalised as both racial and class outsiders, further emphasised the 'tainted' nature of such women, complicating their status within the already stigmatised category of the fallen.

Victorian attitudes towards women as sexual beings were deeply entwined with the broader societal norms and anxieties of the period. The concept of the 'fallen woman' served as a potent narrative and cultural device through which sexual and social changes were recorded, often framing women as frail and morally vulnerable. As explored in Fallen Women, these attitudes were slow to evolve, with legal and political advancements for women, such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1867, providing only modest progress.[138] Interracial relationships, including those with marginalised groups such as Lascars, further complicated these narratives, highlighting the intersection of gender, race, and moral judgment. This preoccupation with female virtue underscores the persistence of the double standard, a legacy of Victorian sexual mores that continues to echo in modern contexts, albeit in diminished form.

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[135] Jo Doezema, "Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women," *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (1999): 23–50, 26.

[136] Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

[137] Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, 1.

[138] Tom Winnifrith, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 10.

Furthermore, prostitution, often viewed as both a moral failing and a public health crisis, rendered these women not only as symbols of moral contagion but also as scapegoats for the transmission of venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea.[139] Efforts to 'rescue' prostitutes, led largely by middle-class women, sought to transform them into 'respectable' figures through strict disciplinary regimens in institutions such as Magdalene homes. These efforts, however, were frequently unsuccessful, leading to a shift in focus from reforming individual women to broader societal campaigns emphasising male chastity and suppressing the sex trade.[140]

Mary Spongberg argued ‘sexual morality during this period was also constructed not only on gender lines but also on those of race’, and that ‘The prostitute engaging in sexual intercourse with “coloured men” is viewed as both un-British and spreading a “foreign disease.”’[141] Antoinette Burton highlights the relationship between Lascars, prostitutes and venereal disease. She notes that Victorians associated Lascars with both opium use and the spread of venereal disease, linking these fears directly to their relationships with women. Burton explains that the Lascar’s wife, ‘rendered not simply as foreign, but also as scarcely human… so “black” with dirt she could serve as soil for growing garden cress and so tattered that she resembled a bundle of rags,’ was portrayed as both a victim of the Lascar’s habits and as an active carrier of sexual contagion, posing a threat to the East End and, if a prostitute, ‘to the nation at large’[142] This raises a broader question: can a Lascar be imagined in a relationship with a white woman without that relationship being immediately framed in terms of of prostitution, contagion, and moral panic?

Additionally, an important point that has often been overlooked in research on the relationship between Lascars and English women is the tendency to label these women as prostitutes. This is due to the constant negative connotations surrounding Lascars and interracial relationships.

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[139] Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760–1914: A Social History* (United Kingdom: Orion, 2013), 127.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (United States: NYU Press, 1998), 56.
[142] Antoinette Burton, *An ABC of Queen Victoria's Empire: Or a Primer of Conquest, Dissent and Disruption* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 76–77.

However, this perspective is problematic, as it strips women of their agency and reduces them to mere prostitutes. Jo Campling argued:

> One of their first orchestrated campaigns after the First World War was to expose the prostitution rings that lay behind the East End's "Lascar Run" lodging houses and cafes … officers were "disgusted" at every level - by the trashy white girls involved, by the exploitation of these girls by non-white men, by the use of drugs, and by the spectre of miscegenation. Launching a long surveillance operation in the area, they were determined that they would not be "done down by Lascars flagrant in their contempt of English law, and by girls wearing the briefest of skirts".[143]

Here, again, we see the idea of linking Lascars and prostitution, but this may not be about the existence of legitimate prostitution rings, but rather about fears of 'alien' involvement in the criminal underworld.

Furthermore, those who fall outside the accepted norms of 'whiteness' or 'respectability' are not granted the protections of the law in the same way as their English counterparts. These women, along with Lascars and other marginalised groups, are made abject precisely because they are not afforded the same rights and recognition as full citizens. This exclusion is rooted in both racial and gendered anxieties, where the 'foreign' or 'other' is seen as inherently dangerous, unworthy of legal protection, and outside the bounds of British national identity. By making these individuals abject, through labelling, stigmatising, and criminalising their behaviours, society not only rejects their claims to citizenship but actively reinforces their marginalisation and dehumanisation.

Therefore, to label these women as prostitutes not only reduces them to a singular identity but also reflects a broader societal process of exclusion. It can be argued that this categorisation has less to do with the reality of these women's lives and more to do with who is granted protection under English law and who is not, who is considered a legitimate member of society and who is relegated to the margins. The women in relationships with Lascars are often portrayed as victims of exploitation or as moral deviants, but this framing obscures the larger issue: the citizenship status of these women and men.

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[143] Jo Campling and Pamela Cox, *Bad Girls in Britain, 1900–1950: Gender, Justice and Welfare in Britain* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 63.

Moreover, Rubenhold argues that ‘Unreliable source material has always been the obstacle to discovering the truth about (the Jack the Ripper) murders’.[144] This issue is echoed in the case of Lascars, whose lives have been obscured by the biases of the era. Like the missing or distorted police records surrounding the Ripper case, much of the documentation regarding Lascars is either incomplete, misinterpreted, or outright fabricated. This has made it difficult to gain a clear picture of their relationships with women, particularly the notion that they were frequently involved with prostitutes, a stereotype rooted in colonial and racial prejudice rather than fact.

As Rubenhold highlights, however, this assumption often lacked any evidence of women selling sex, exposing how certain groups were categorised based on constructed cultural stereotypes. These classifications were deeply embedded in intersecting biases of gender, class, and race. Rubenhold’s observations on the lack of reliability of source material surrounding the Jack the Ripper murders are also relevant to the study of Lascars. These limitations have perpetuated colonial and racialised myths, including the stereotype that Lascars were frequently involved with prostitutes. Such representations were less a reflection of historical reality and more a product of cultural prejudice, underscoring how entire groups were consigned to reductive and damaging social categories.

For instance, Marez describes the stereotypical portrayal of women in opium dens: 'In most cases, the Chinese opium den proprietor has (an) English (or sometimes Irish) wife, usually a haggard and dishevelled woman who has sunk almost as low as possible. The most despicable den inhabitants, however, are the prostitutes, sometimes seduced into Opium slavery by predatory Chinamen’.[145] This image of the 'haggard woman' in an opium den is also echoed in Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, where similar themes of degradation and moral decay are associated with women involved in such environments.[146] In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, a woman known as 'Lascar Sal' is introduced as a character who runs an opium den. She is described as 'depraved in morality as she was hideous in appearance; and that the present proprietor does give his patrons a fair amount of oblivion for their money can be seen by any casual visitor like myself’.[147] Dickens' character is based on a real person, as 'Lascar Sal' was, in fact, a public figure of her time. Her death received attention in the press, where one newspaper described her as a 'wretched old woman'. An account of her death states, 'this dreadful old "Lascar Sal" was attacked a short time since by scarlet fever'. Her story was used as a 'cautionary tale' about the dangers of opium, drawing comparisons to the plight of gin drinkers, yet with a harsher tone toward opium, which was described as 'as filthy as it is deadly'.[148]

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[144] Rubenhold, *The Five,* 13.

[145] Marez, *Drug Wars,* 65.

[146] Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1870), 6.

[147] *London Society,* ed. James Hogg and Florence Marryat, vol. 45 (United Kingdom: William Clowes and Sons, 1884), 544.

The depiction of Lascar Sal in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* reflects a broader pattern of dehumanisation that mirrors the racialised stereotypes of Lascar men, who were often portrayed as little more than animals, violent, uncivilised, and inherently 'other'. This dehumanisation is intricately linked to the question of citizenship: who is granted the right to belong and who is systematically made abject. In turn, both the women and men associated with the opium dens are stripped of agency, rendered as symbols of degradation and moral decay. In this process, the figure of Lascar Sal is not only marginalised as a poor, 'fallen' woman, but she is also positioned outside the bounds of British citizenship, her moral and physical degradation marking her as permanently abject - someone who exists on the periphery, excluded from the nation's moral and legal community. This reflects a larger societal anxiety about who can claim membership in the British body politic and who is forever marked as a foreign, dangerous 'other.'

Further emphasising the negative imagery surrounding 'Lascar Sal', Frederick Wellesley provides a vivid description:

> her hair was perfectly white, and she appeared to be very aged. She was lying on her bed close to the wall and by her side was a long narrow shelf on which several white mice were running about. The other beds…in the middle of the room, were occupied [by] Lascar sailors…. when we reached the street, Field asked us how old we imagined Sally to be, and we all guessed various ages, eighty being the lowest. We were then told that [she] was but twenty-six years old.[149]

Memoirs, by their very nature, present themselves as authoritative accounts, often blurring the lines between personal experience and supposed objective truth. The use of this genre in describing women like Lascar Sal and others not only lends these depictions an air of authenticity but also reinforces their status as 'fallen' figures, women whose moral decay is framed as an inevitable consequence of their association with Lascars and opium dens. The memoir's weight as a genre provides a powerful tool for validating these portrayals, making them seem not just like personal experiences but as universal truths. In this context, the women involved are not merely characters in a story; they are presented as symbols of societal fears, their degradation positioned as an undeniable, factual reality. The memoir serves to deepen the perception that these women, much like the men they are linked with, are irreversibly marked by their associations with poverty, crime, and vice, making them emblematic of the moral and social decline that threatens the stability of the British social order.

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[148] *Illustrated Police News*, "Death of Lascar Sal," Saturday 21 November 1874, 3.

[149] Frederick Wellesley, *Recollections of a Soldier–Diplomat* (London: Blackwood, 1947), 75–76.

However, this is not the only time a woman associated with Lascars and Opium Dens is described as down and fallen. There are countless examples of this, another can be seen through the *Windsor Magazine* which states, 'there are opium dens still extant, and very dull and decorous places they are, as sleepy as the Chinamen and Lascars who affect them.' [150] It continues 'not a single place exists with the picturesque squalor which invested Phoebe Bings (as I will call her), whom I found with her Lascar husband, when I visited the place twenty years ago'. Phoebe had reportedly:

> Sunk to the very lowest depths, but her voice and manner clearly proved that she was well born and gently nurtured, and I shall not soon forget how she dropped on her knee praying to God to thank us for our gift of half-a-sovereign; she had not seen gold for countless years.[151]

This idea that the woman has been lowered through her relationship to a Lascar is prevalent. This again can be viewed as an attack on female sexual agency.

However, this framing goes beyond victimisation and touches on a critical point: certain groups of people, particularly those who deviate from the normative expectations of white English/British citizenship, are actively constructed as abject subjects. Poor women, often associated with sex work, are transformed into figures of abjection, not only through their perceived sexual deviancy but also through their marginalisation as 'fallen' women whose femininity is undermined by the stigma of aging, poverty, and sexual labour. This process of becoming abject is mirrored in the portrayal of Lascar and Chinese men, who are similarly made into abject subjects, but through their associations with violence, crime, and the foreignness of their existence. In both cases, these individuals are depicted not just as victims of circumstance but as embodiments of what is deemed 'other' or 'un-British,' and are thereby transformed into figures of national anxiety. Through their very existence, they challenge the boundaries of British identity, highlighting the fragile line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of belonging.

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[150] *The Windsor Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly for Men and Women* (United Kingdom: Ward, Lock and Bowden, 1895), 293.
[151] Ibid.

Another example of a negative description of women who were seen with Lascars could be seen through a woman named Caroline Andrews or Flash Carry as she was otherwise known, whose story was recorded in 1865. She was described as having won the affections of a Lascar named Hamet who had reportedly gained considerable wealth from dishonest means.[152] Andrews was described as ‘more wretched than she herself was aware in the depths of infamy, to which she had fallen.’[153] It was explained that she ‘had originally been a young girl from the country, who, taking service in London, succumbed very quickly to the snares which her beauty and her humble position subjected her to.’[154] Moreover, the Lascar is described as a ‘savage Malay’, and it is explained that ‘Flash Carry encountered fearful peril, in the frenzied passion of her fierce lover, that like all his race he was madly jealous, and the probable termination of Flash Carry’s career would be the point of her lover’s dagger in her heart.’[155]

This idea of the violence of the Malay can be taken further as it is stated that, ‘Hamet ain’t no great matter to look at, nor has he any great amount of muscle for English fighting. But if he can’t box, he can stab, and so sure your alive old man, the next as you dares touch me. Hamet shall pay you with an inch or two of cold steel’.[156] This depiction of the relationship between Flash Carry and Hamet echoes broader Victorian anxieties surrounding interracial relationships and the perceived dangers of moral and social transgression. The framing of Hamet as a 'savage Malay' and the constant reference to his potential for violence tie into the same fears that were sensationalised during the Jack the Ripper murders. The violent deaths of women in the East End, many of whom were involved in prostitution, became a symbol of the dangers associated with marginalised and racialised groups, further entrenching the stigma against Lascars and the women who associated with them. These narratives reflect not only the racialised fears of the time but also the dehumanisation of both the Lascars and the ‘fallen women’, whose lives were reduced to cautionary tales of moral and physical peril. Victorian society sensationalised issues surrounding prostitution, particularly through moral panics and narratives that captured public imagination, such as the 'white slavery'[157]⍰ Flash Carry’s story was framed, her life reduced to a moralistic tale of downfall, fuelled by fears of racial and cultural transgression, much like the public response to the East End murders. Both reveal how Victorian culture commodified these narratives to reinforce existing power structures and stigmas.

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[152] Lady Maude Annesley, *The Dashing Girls of London; Or the Six Beauties of St. James's* (London: Henry Lea, 1865), 18.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

Furthermore, the sensationalism surrounding the so-called 'white slavery' scandals, as seen in W.T. Stead's partly fabricated *Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, parallels the racialised fears and exaggerated narratives surrounding Lascars and their relationships with women.[158] Stead claimed to have uncovered a trafficking ring where innocent girls were sold into 'child prostitution abroad’. His exposé included a dramatic claim that he had personally purchased a 14-year-old girl from her mother to prove how easily such exploitation could occur. This shocking narrative ignited widespread public outrage and moral panic, though much of it was later revealed to be exaggerated or fabricated.[159] The mother involved disputed Stead's account, and the actual prevalence of such trafficking was minimal compared to the systemic economic pressures forcing working-class women into prostitution. Stead's claims captured the imagination of the non-poor reading public, feeding anxieties about the corruption of society by 'outsiders’ and the exploitation of vulnerable women.[160] Similarly, the portrayal of Flash Carry and Hamet and other Women with Lascars highlight how narratives of interracial relationships were framed as threats to social and moral order. These fears were further stoked by the Jack the Ripper murders, which sensationalised the lives of women in the East End, offering what has been described as a ‘titillating glimpse into another world’ rather than genuine empathy for the victims.[161] Together, these examples illustrate how Victorian culture constructed and consumed stories of ’moral contagion,‘ often projecting societal anxieties onto racial and class-based ’others.’

The relationship between Lascars, Chinese immigrants, ‘prostitutes’, and the broader socio-political context of late-nineteenth century Britain, particularly in East London, sheds light on how figures like Jack the Ripper could be racialised, and on the role Lascars played in this narrative. As discussed previously, Lascars were often regarded with suspicion, largely due to their foreignness and their association with docklands and the ‘underworld’ of prostitution. This context makes it easier to understand how links could be made between Lascars and the infamous murders.

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[157] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760–1914*, 127.
[158] William Thomas Stead, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” cited in Steinbach*, Women in England 1760–1914, 127.*
[159] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760–1914,* 127.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

Conclusion:

This analysis demonstrates how the Jack the Ripper case reflects broader themes of racial and cultural anxieties about the Lascar population. The persistent association of Lascars with criminality, prostitution, and violence in the press illustrates how this community, though largely invisible, was integral to the popular imagination. As previously explored, Lascars were not simply transient sailors in British ports but became woven into the national narrative, often depicted as villains or as figures whose presence triggered fear and suspicion. Their involvement in the Ripper case, even if based on fragile connections, reveals much about the racial and social dynamics of the time, and how the figure of the Lascar served to embody broader fears about the foreign and the ‘other’. In a period marked by racial tensions, it is not surprising that Lascars were so easily associated with the Ripper crimes, further highlighting the ways in which the alien was viewed as a disruptive force within British society.

Contemporary accounts reflected a growing anxiety over the perceived infiltration of non-European populations into the social fabric of Britain. As Humayun Ansari notes, a member of the London Mission Society expressed alarm at ‘how extensively these dark classes are tincturing the colour of the rising race of children in the lowest haunts of this locality … It is an instance of depraved taste, that many of our fallen ones prefer devoting themselves entirely to the dark race of men, and some who are to them [sic] have infants by them.’[162] Some, as Ansari notes, ‘succumbed to the underworld of brothels, gambling rooms and opium dens, acquiring a notoriety that was sweepingly and undeservedly applied to their compatriots as a whole.’[163]

In examining the presence of Lascars in nineteenth-century Britain, particularly in the context of the Whitechapel murders, this chapter has explored the racial and cultural anxieties that shaped Victorian perceptions of crime, class, and empire. The Ripper case was not just a gruesome mystery; it served as a vehicle for projecting broader societal fears. Lascars, often depicted as violent, knife-wielding outsiders, became convenient scapegoats in a period rife with racialised anxieties and sensationalist journalism. Their portrayal alongside Chinese immigrants in the opium dens and criminal underworld of the East End further reinforced notions of an ‘alien’ threat, blending economic disenfranchisement with fears of moral and social decay.

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[162] Ansari, *The Infidel Within,* 70.
[163] Ibid.

By analysing how Lascars were racialised in the Victorian press, literature, and legal discourse, we can see how their marginalisation was not merely a product of their economic conditions but also of an empire that sought to define itself against the ‘other’. The association between Lascars and violence, particularly knife crime, was deeply rooted in colonialist narratives that framed non-European subjects as inherently dangerous and untrustworthy. These representations were not isolated but part of a broader system of racial exclusion that denied Lascars the rights and protections afforded to white British subjects. As Ceri-Anne Fidler observes, ‘The construction and dissemination of stereotypes of Indian seafarers in the British press demonstrates how racial and imperial ideology permeated British society, but this issue has been neglected in the established historiography on Indian seafarers.’[164] This underscores how the Victorian media not only reflected but actively reinforced imperial anxieties, shaping public perceptions of Lascars as both alien and criminal. These stereotypes were not mere by-products of economic hardship but deliberate constructs that served to justify the exclusion and subjugation of colonial subjects within the metropole.

Furthermore, the parallel between Lascars and the so-called 'fallen women' of Whitechapel highlights how Victorian society positioned both groups at the fringes of moral and social acceptability. Women who interacted with Lascars were often reduced to stereotypes of prostitutes or victims, reinforcing the idea that interracial relationships were illicit and corrupting. These anxieties mirrored larger concerns about British national identity and imperial control, in which Lascars, and the broader racialised underclass of the East End, became symbols of disorder and degeneracy.

The case of Sulleyman Adam offers a striking example of how these stereotypes could shape both public perception and judicial outcomes. Adam’s actions, framed through the lens of racialised notions of 'passion' and the supposed volatility of the 'Indian temperament’, reinforced the belief that Lascars were inherently prone to knife violence.[165] His case demonstrates how colonial subjects were denied the possibility of being judged by the same standards as white Britons: what was seen as a crime of passion in one man became racialised evidence of savagery in another. This racialised reading of Adam's crime shows how easily narratives of knife violence were mapped onto the Lascar community, further embedding stereotypes of danger and otherness in Victorian society.

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[164] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 78.
[165] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, 20 October 1910.

Overall, the study of Lascars in the context of the Ripper case reveals the extent to which race, poverty, and sexuality intersected in Victorian Britain. While Jack the Ripper remains an enigma, the narratives that emerged from the case tell us far more about the society that feared him than about the killer himself. The legacy of these representations endures in the ways marginalised communities continue to be framed in public discourse, demonstrating the importance of critically examining historical prejudices to challenge their persistence in the present.

Chapter Four: The Shivering Lascar and Lascar Plague

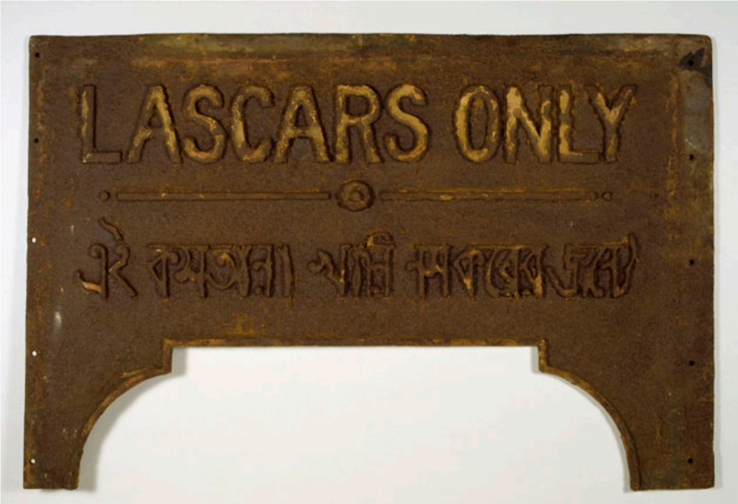

Figure 9 Glasgow Museums. 'Lascars Only' Cast-Iron Plaque from Queen's Dock, Glasgow (circa 1890s). Object type: plaque. Materials: cast iron. Dimensions: 446 mm x 670 mm x 15 mm. Collection reference: [Glasgow Museums Collection]. Place of use: Queen's Dock, St

This ‘Lascars Only’ plaque from the 1890s (Figure 9), held in the Glasgow Museums collection, offers a stark and tangible reminder of the racial segregation experienced by Lascars in British ports. Cast in iron and inscribed in both English and Bengali, the plaque would have been affixed above toilet facilities designated exclusively for Lascars in the Queen’s Dock area of Stobcross Quay, Glasgow. While seemingly mundane, this object powerfully illustrates how imperial hierarchies were inscribed into the very infrastructure of the British Empire.[1]

Its bilingual inscription reflects an effort to control and manage colonial labourers, ensuring that Lascars, many of whom spoke Bengali, understood the boundaries placed upon them. More than a matter of language or convenience, this segregation was rooted in racialised notions of difference and disease. The precise origins of the sign and the motivations behind its placement remain unclear; however, this chapter will explore possible explanations for its existence. One potential line of interpretation lies in the broader climate of anxiety surrounding disease and the so-called ‘Lascar plague’ in this period. Lascars were often viewed through the lens of public health anxieties, associated in the colonial imagination with illnesses such as cholera or plague, and frequently portrayed in British ports as the vulnerable, 'shivering Lascar’.

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[1] Glasgow Museums, “‘Lascars Only’ Cast-Iron Plaque from Queen’s Dock, Glasgow (circa 1890s),” [Glasgow Museums Collection].

Providing separate sanitary facilities allowed port authorities to isolate these seamen physically and symbolically from white sailors and local workers, reinforcing a broader imperial order that viewed them as both necessary and dangerous.

The plaque also reveals a dehumanising aspect of imperial labour relations. Referring to all South Asian seamen under the blanket term 'Lascars', the sign flattens individual identity and agency, reducing an entire workforce to a faceless category. These men were often subjected to inferior accommodation, lower wages, and harsher discipline, and were regularly abandoned or repatriated if they became ill or injured. In this context, the plaque stands as a small but potent symbol of a system that exploited colonial labour while restricting its presence in the heart of the empire. Overall, the 'Lascars Only' plaque is more than a historical curiosity - it is a material record of empire, inequality, and the lived realities of those who served it.

This chapter will explore how the Lascar body became a site upon which imperial anxieties and social boundaries were projected. Moving beyond material evidence like the 'Lascars Only' plaque, it will be examined how representations of Lascar physicality in public discourse, particularly in times of crisis, amplified fears of racial and medical contamination. The image of the ‘shivering Lascar' became emblematic of vulnerability, foreignness, and disease, while the association of Lascars with outbreaks such as the so-called 'Lascar plague’ positioned them as both victims and vectors of illness. These depictions did not arise in isolation but were deeply embedded in broader narratives that sought to pathologise the colonial subject.

Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power by Ann Laura Stoler remains a foundational text in critical colonial studies, offering an important intervention into how colonial authority was produced and maintained. Drawing on archival material from the Dutch East Indies, Stoler argues that colonialism functioned not only as a system of economic extraction and racial domination, but as an embodied and affective project in which race, sexuality, and domestic life were central to imperial governance. Rather than treating race as a fixed category, Stoler demonstrates that it was continuously produced through social and moral assessments within colonial society.[2] As she explains, to be classified as ‘European’ was not determined by skin colour alone but by ‘tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality.’[3]

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[2] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 6.

[3] Ibid.

Stoler further shows that these racial boundaries were maintained through intimate and domestic practices rather than solely through formal institutions. Colonial authority was reinforced through everyday behaviours, where judgments of belonging were measured less by public actions than by private life: 'with whom they cohabited, where they lived, what they ate, how they raised their children, [and] what language they chose to speak to servants and family at home.'[4] Particularly significant in her analysis are the roles of domestic servants within colonial households. Their proximity to European families made them indispensable to colonial life, yet their presence was also perceived as potentially destabilising racial hierarchies. As Stoler argues, it was often 'in the disarray of unwanted, sought after, and troubled intimacies of domestic space that colonial relations were refurbished and their distinctions made.'[5] By focusing on these intimate sites of power, Stoler shifts attention away from formal institutions and elite actors and instead highlights the everyday spaces in which colonial authority was negotiated, reproduced, and contested.

This chapter builds on Stoler's insights, particularly the idea that intimacy was central to the articulation of racial power but moves beyond the colonial household to consider how similar dynamics played out among Lascars in early-twentieth century Britain. While Stoler's archive focuses on elite European settlers and their domestic lives in colonial settings, this chapter examines how Lascars were positioned as colonial others within Britain, not only through racialised discourses of difference but also via public health anxieties that marked them as bodily threats to the national community. Their perceived susceptibility to disease, poor hygiene, and moral degeneracy served to reinforce their separation from white British society, shaping both official responses and popular representations of Lascar presence in port cities.

Therefore, this chapter builds on the themes explored in previous chapters, which considered how Lascars were imagined and portrayed in British society, whether through their perceived connection to knives and violence, their sexualised entanglements with white women and discourses of prostitution, or the ways their bodies were dissected and judged during courtroom trials involving murder. Together, these representations construct a Lascar identity rooted not in lived experience, but in the shifting fears, fascinations, and fantasies of empire. By focusing now on disease, fragility, and the medicalised gaze, it will be argued that the Lascar body remained central to how Britain imagined its colonial labourers, at once indispensable and a source of deep anxiety.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

This chapter explores how British port cities, such as London, Liverpool, and Cardiff, were imagined and experienced as spaces of imperial anxiety. As key nodes in Britain's global maritime networks, these ports were not only sites of connection and commerce but also places where the presence of racialised colonial subjects, particularly Lascars, unsettled prevailing ideas about race, belonging, and national identity.

The figure of the Lascar was often framed through a lens of stereotype and suspicion. Represented in newspapers, court records, and popular literature, Lascars were frequently portrayed as either pitiable victims of poverty and climate, such as the recurring image of the 'shivering Lascar', or as threatening figures associated with disorder, disease, or moral decline. These portrayals reflected broader social anxieties about the imperial presence at home and the permeability of Britain's supposed boundaries. By examining these representations, the chapter argues that British ports functioned not just as physical sites of transit, but as symbolic frontlines of empire where ideas about race, class, and citizenship were actively negotiated, and often contested.

The image of the 'shivering Lascar' trembling, fragile, and perpetually on the edge of collapse, emerges not simply as a physiological condition but as a deeply symbolic one, anchored in colonial representations of racialised bodily weakness and imperial authority. British discourses frequently pathologised the Lascar body, portraying it as peculiarly vulnerable to disease and environmental extremes, and thus as a vector of contagion and disorder within the imperial system. In this context, the term 'Lascar plague' becomes more than an epidemiological term; it is a moral and racialised judgement, branding Lascars as biologically inferior and inherently threatening to British health and order. David Arnold argues, 'Colonialism used - or attempted to use - the body as a site for the construction of its own authority, legitimacy, and control', embedding these representations within a broader structure of colonial dominance.[6] As explored in earlier chapters on Horatio Walters and the Jack the Ripper press coverage, British authorities and media consistently used the racialised body. The colonial medical gaze, therefore, was not neutral: it located the Lascar body at the intersection of fear, control, and surveillance. Shivering - whether from cold, illness, or emotional stress -

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[6] David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 8.

became a signifier of the Lascar's supposed unsuitability for British climates and norms, reinforcing imperial hierarchies of civilisation, fitness, and belonging. These portrayals helped justify the restrictive conditions of maritime labour and the racial segregation of space on board ships and in port cities. Thus, what might seem a fleeting physical symptom - shivering - becomes a lens into the larger colonial project of defining, managing, and subordinating the racialised body.[7]

Stoler's work prompts us to consider how these anxieties were not only projected outward but managed within the intimate spaces of the home, the hospital, and the ship's quarters. The act of 'shivering,' whether from cold, illness, or emotional distress, became a signifier of racialised insufficiency, reinforcing imperial hierarchies of civilisation, fitness, and belonging. These portrayals helped justify the restrictive conditions of maritime labour and the racial segregation of space on board ships and in port cities. Thus, what might seem a fleeting physical symptom, shivering, points to the larger colonial project of defining, managing, and subordinating the racialised body.

In her research, Ceri-Anne Fidler highlights the stark contrast in how Lascars and their white counterparts were portrayed in accounts of shipwrecks, while British sailors were often depicted as heroic and stoic, Lascars were frequently cast as cowardly or panic-stricken.[8] This chapter moves beyond this binary by examining how Lascars were represented in the immediate aftermath of shipwrecks and in British ports, particularly in depictions of them wrapped in blankets. What these portrayals in the press reveal about broader societal attitudes towards race, vulnerability, and belonging in Britain will be explored. What this research offers that previous work, such as Fidler's, does not is a sustained focus on the contradictory and context-specific ways Lascars were represented. Rather than suggesting a linear trajectory from heroic to tragic or passive, this chapter will demonstrate how multiple, often competing, tropes circulated simultaneously. The Lascar was not just tragic, cowardly, or heroic; he could be all these things at once, depending on who was doing the seeing, and for what purpose. One day, he was the pitiable 'shivering Lascar', helpless in the cold; the next, a threat to social order, accused of crowding lifeboats or acting out of line. This multiplicity reflects not just shifts over time, but how class, race, empire, and location intersect to produce fluctuating meanings. The press coverage, missionary reports, and visual media did not simply represent Lascars, they used them.

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ceri-Anne Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain* (Unpublished thesis, University of Cardiff, 2011). 81-85.

Furthermore, while Fidler has drawn important attention to the structural inequalities that shaped Lascar health outcomes, particularly the disproportionate rates of illness and death caused by overcrowded and unsanitary ship conditions, her focus remains primarily on institutional neglect and maritime infrastructure.[9] This chapter examines how these representations were actively constructed to serve specific agendas: to evoke sympathy, justify paternalism, signal danger, or reinforce imperial hierarchies. In doing so, this chapter challenges the idea of a static Lascar figure and instead argue for an understanding of Lascar identity as a contested, dynamic site of cultural production. This approach goes beyond the identification of stereotypes; it interrogates how those stereotypes were deployed, contradicted, and reassembled across a range of colonial contexts.

The word 'shivering', while seemingly descriptive, is loaded with layered meaning in the context of colonial portrayals of Lascars. At the most immediate level, it denotes physical cold, an unsurprising reaction to the British climate given the thin clothing and poor accommodations allotted to Lascar seamen. However, it also functions symbolically. ‘Shivering’ evokes fear, illness, and emotional fragility, all of which align with racialised narratives of the Lascar as weak, unreliable, or childlike. The term thus becomes more than a physiological observation; it becomes a narrative device, reinforcing the idea that Lascars were alien to Britain not only in culture but in constitution. To ‘shiver’ in the public imagination was to fail the imperial test of endurance and masculinity. These associations stood in contrast to the stoicism and hardiness attributed to white British sailors, whose resistance to cold was cast as a natural trait of national superiority. In this way, the repeated use of ‘shivering’ in press reports did more than describe, it coded the Lascar body as deviant, fragile, and unfit for Britain’s maritime spaces. This chapter foregrounds this language as a crucial site of meaning-making, revealing how a single word could naturalise inequality, obscure structural exploitation, and convert bodily suffering into proof of racial difference.

1. Sulleyman Adam

There was a particular controversy surrounding Sulleyman Adam's appearance in court, as he was described as being thinly clad and barefoot. This situation had prompted discussions and inquiries regarding the appropriateness of his attire for the Scottish climate and the reasons behind his choice not to wear the warmer clothing offered to him. At the governors' request, Christian missionary Aziz Ahmad asked the prisoner why he was not wearing the supplied clothing. Adam explained that he declined to wear items that did not belong to him personally, and he believed that other prisoners in the court were allowed to wear their own clothing.[10] Part of the enquiry also mentioned that there had been previous instances where Lascars were brought to England with insufficient clothing, but they were typically offered warm clothing at cost price by the ship owners. However, due to their desire to sell the clothing later, they often refused to wear it.[11] Additionally, there is a reference to a news report in the *Glasgow Herald* stating that the Lascar appeared in court thinly clad with bare feet, highlighting the native's origin from a tropical climate and the inadequacy of his clothing for the Scottish weather in October.[12]

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[9] Ibid., chapter 1.

1.a. The Poor Creature:

Following the reprieve of the sentence, John W. Harvey sent a plea to save Sulleyman from serving his sentence in a Scottish prison during the harsh winter months, expressing that the gallows might have been a better fate. He implores for Sulleyman to be conveyed back to his home country. Harvey described Sulleyman Adam as a 'poor creature' and deemed the idea of him serving his sentence in Peterhead Prison during the winter months as too dreadful to put into words. Harvey went on to assert that, in his opinion, 'facing the gallows would have been infinitely better than an exposure to the rigours of our climate'.[13]

He requested the recipient's attention to Sulleyman Adam's case, proposing a transfer to his home country. Harvey emphasised that the location of the imprisonment holds little significance for the Criminal Authorities and believes that the recipient's influence could facilitate the desired outcome.[14] A further report from the Prison Commission highlights the challenges faced by Adam due to his inability to communicate in English and his inability to adapt to the cold Scottish climate. The commissioners expressed their belief that keeping this 'poor Indian' in such conditions for life would be undesirable. They suggested that the best solution would be to transfer him to an Indian prison for serving his sentence, where the climate and food were more suitable for him. The document also referenced another Lascar, Thamboo, who was released and sent back home to Rangoon for medical reasons after serving part of his sentence. It concluded with Sulleyman Adam expressing his gratitude for having his death sentence commuted and his request to serve his term in a prison in Bombay due to its more suitable climate for his health.[15] The Mersey Mission to Seamen, led by Mr. Charles Seal, underscored the importance of considering Sulleyman's health and the climate's impact on him, advocating for his transfer to a 'wilder' climate, even suggesting the south of England.[16]

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[10] National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS), HH16/117, Aziz Ahmad to the Governors, 26 October 1910.
[11] NRS, HH16/117, Board of Trade to Dodds, 25 October 1910.
[12] NRS, HH16/117, Letter to R. Mure Mckerrell, 24 October 1910.
[13] NRS, HH16/117, Letter about Reprieved Lascar, 4 November 1910.
[14] Ibid.

2. The Shivering Lascar

The language used to describe Sulleyman Adam's suffering, his inability to withstand the cold, his frailty, and his unsuitability for Britain's climate, resonates strongly with the wider cultural trope of the 'shivering Lascar' that circulated in Victorian and Edwardian discourse. The recurring motif of the 'shivering Lascar' in British media encapsulated both the physical suffering and the racialised narratives that surrounded these seafarers. It was a representation shaped by economic exploitation, cultural othering, and a maritime world that, whilst reliant on Lascar labour, continually emphasised their difference and subordination.

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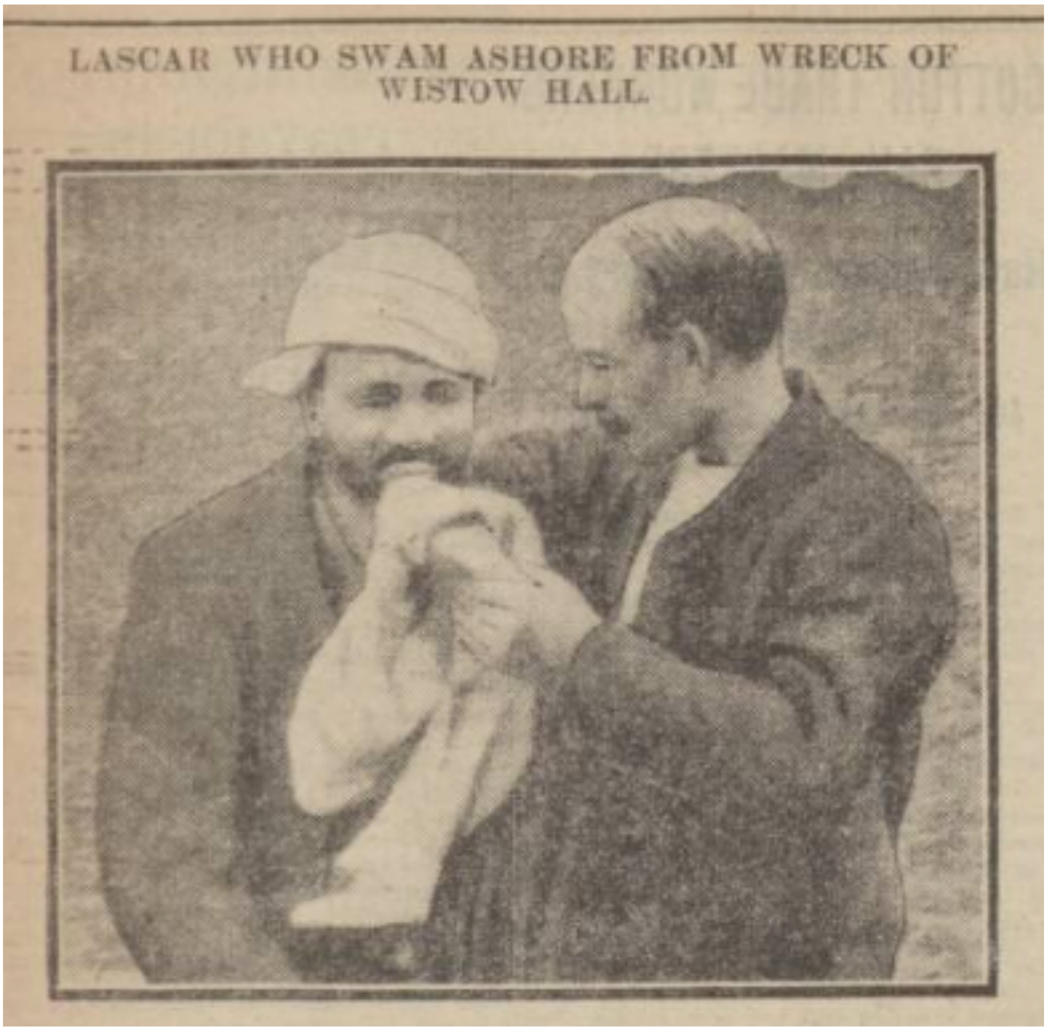
[15] NRS, HH16/117, Report from Prison Commission for Scotland, 5 November 1910.

[16] NRS, HH16/117, Mersey Mission to James M. Dodds, 8 November 1910.



LASCAR WHO SWAM ASHORE FROM WRECK OF WISTOW HALL.

Figure 10 'Lascar Who Swam Ashore from Wreck of Wistow Hall', Dundee Courier, 20 Jan. 1912, Page 6

This wider trope was not confined to abstract discourse but found expression in the popular press. Newspaper accounts frequently mobilised the image of the fragile Lascar to frame maritime disasters, casting them less as survivors and more as spectacles of suffering. The *Dundee Courier's* depiction of the Lascar Who Swam Ashore from the Wreck of *Wistow Hall* (Figure 10) contributes to a broader pattern of representing Lascars as both tragic figures and passive victims of maritime catastrophe.[17] The stark imagery of a Lascar being assisted around the hall where the bodies lie evokes a sense of helplessness, reinforcing colonial narratives that positioned Lascars as vulnerable, dependent, and peripheral within British maritime life.

The description focuses on the Lascar's role as a witness to tragedy, rather than as an active survivor. Unlike depictions of British sailors who might be framed as heroic figures in the aftermath of shipwrecks, the Lascar is presented as a sorrowful outsider, his grief underscored by the moment he identified three of the dead, one of whom was his brother.[18] This language is sparse yet poignant, reducing the survivor's experience to an almost cinematic moment of recognition, reinforcing the idea that his suffering is a spectacle for the reader's consumption. The detail that he 'swam ashore' suggests physical endurance, but this aspect is overshadowed by the portrayal of him being assisted, which diminishes his agency. This framing aligns with a broader trope in colonial media, where Lascars were often depicted as physically capable yet socially and emotionally dependent on European figures. The absence of his name further dehumanises him, he is simply the Lascar, defined by his occupation and racial identity rather than as an individual with a personal story.

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[17] *Dundee Courier*, "Lascar Who Swam Ashore from Wreck of Wistow Hall," 20 January 1912, 6.

Moreover, the funeral setting universalises the tragedy while simultaneously erasing the structural inequalities that made Lascars particularly vulnerable to maritime disasters. Lascars were frequently assigned the most dangerous duties, given inadequate safety provisions, and paid lower wages than their white counterparts. Yet rather than addressing these exploitative conditions, the newspaper article frames the event as a solemn but inevitable aspect of seafaring life, sidestepping the systemic factors that placed Lascars at heightened risk. The portrayal of this lone Lascar survivor reflects a colonial gaze that simultaneously acknowledges his suffering while maintaining his status as an outsider. His grief is momentarily centred, yet he remains voiceless within the narrative, a passive figure whose story is told about him rather than by him. This reinforces the broader erasure of Lascars' agency in historical memory, reducing them to figures of tragedy rather than active participants in Britain's maritime world.

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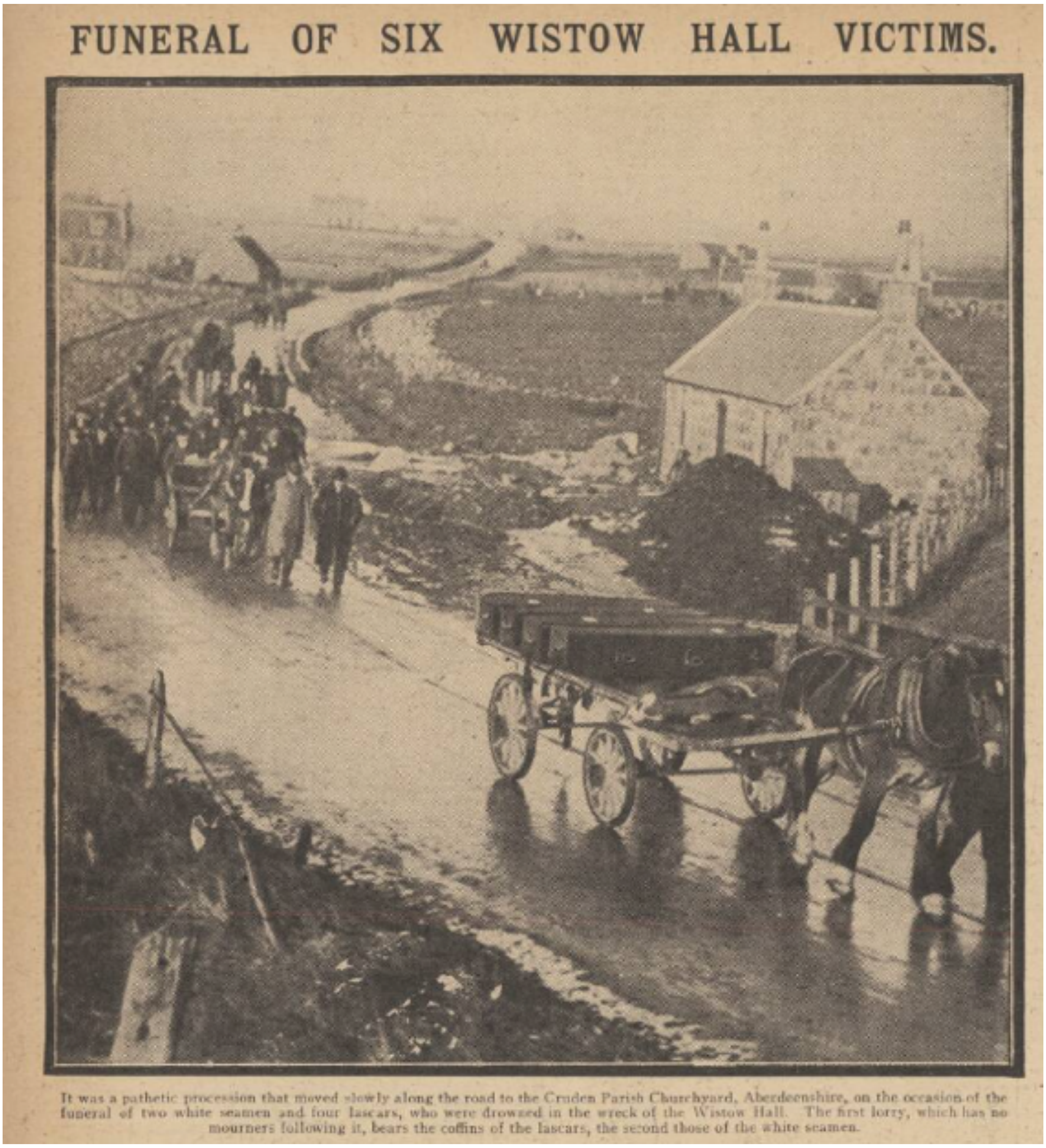
[18] Ibid.



FUNERAL OF SIX WISTOW HALL VICTIMS.

It was a pathetic procession that moved slowly along the road to the Cruden Parish Churchyard, Aberdeenshire, on the occasion of the funeral of two white seamen and four lascars, who were drowned in the wreck of the Wistow Hall. The first lorry, which has no mourners following it, bears the coffins of the lascars, the second those of the white seamen.

Figure 11 Funeral of Six Wistow Hall Victim, Daily Mirror - Wednesday 24 January 1912, 8.

The funeral procession for the *Wistow Hall* victims, as described in the *Daily Mirror (Figure 11)*, reflects a striking separation: ‘the first lorry, which has no mourners, bears the coffins of the Lascars*,* while the second carries those of the white seamen.’[19] The reasoning behind this division remains unclear, whether due to practical arrangements, social conventions, or deeper racial distinctions. The Lascars, though having endured the same perils at sea, remain othered, a silent and un-mourned presence in a funeral that should have marked a collective moment of loss. Their final journey is not one of unity, but of segregation, reinforcing their status as *essential yet invisible* labourers within Britain's imperial maritime world.

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[19] *Daily Mirror*, “Funeral of Six Wistow Hall Victim,” 24 January 1912, 8.

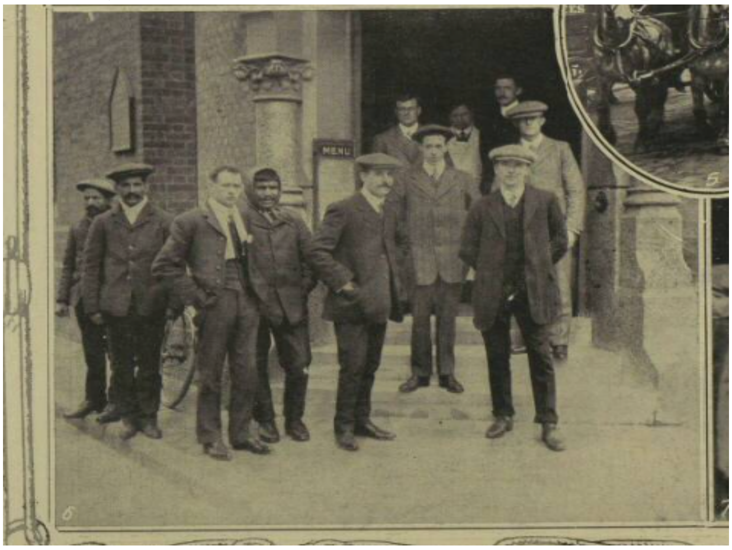

Figure 12 'The Plight of Passengers and Crew After the Oceana Disaster', Illustrated London News, 23 March 1912, 10.

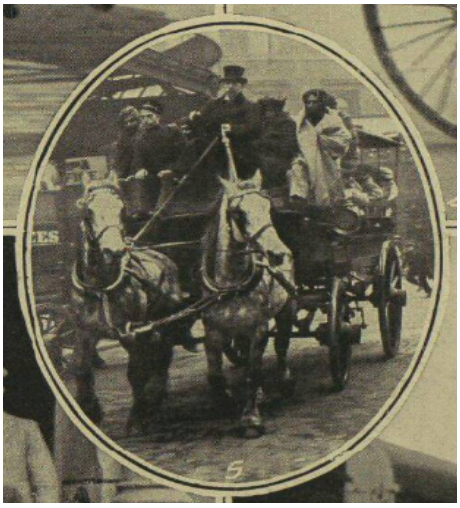

Figure 13 'The Plight of Passengers and Crew After the Oceana Disaster', Illustrated London News, 23 March 1912, 10.

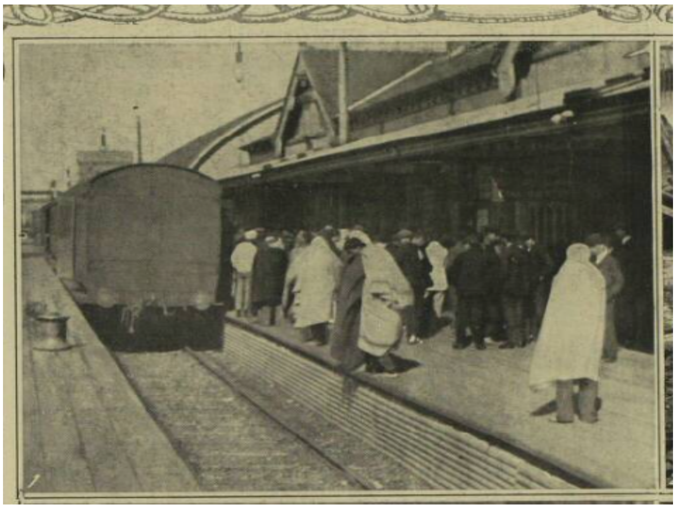

Figure 14 'The Plight of Passengers and Crew After the Oceana Disaster', Illustrated London News, 23 March 1912,10.

Similar moments were captured, by the *Illustrated London News,* from March 1912, Lascars described as mostly in night-dress, wrapped in blankets, stood alongside the European members of the crew in Newhaven following the wreckage of the *Oceana,* a ship sailing from Tilbury for Bombay (Figures 12,13 & 14). Their journey is documented as Lascars are shown waiting to board trains from the Newhaven to London Bridge station. The Lascars are then seen on their way from London Bridge Station to Fenchurch Street to continue their route to Tilbury Docks.[20]

The portrayal of Lascars in the *Oceana* disaster aligns with broader racialised narratives of Indian seafarers as cowardly and incompetent, despite evidence contradicting these claims. In examining media coverage of the *Oceana*, Fidler observes that the press accused Lascars of endangering female passengers by crowding into lifeboats, thereby reinforcing racialised stereotypes that framed them as undisciplined and lacking in courage. However, the official Court of Inquiry found that the Lascars behaved well and were disciplined, though negative perceptions persisted due to racial bias and confusion between Lascars and Goanese seafarers.[21]

These accusations can be visually linked to images of Lascars wrapped in blankets, often depicted as shivering, frail, and out of place in cold climates. The notion that exposure to colder environments 'sapped their manhood' further reinforced the idea that Lascars were unfit for British maritime service.[22] Such imagery, whether through photographs or descriptions in newspapers, played a role in constructing and perpetuating negative stereotypes about Indian seafarers, portraying them as weak and incapable rather than as skilled, hardworking maritime labourers.

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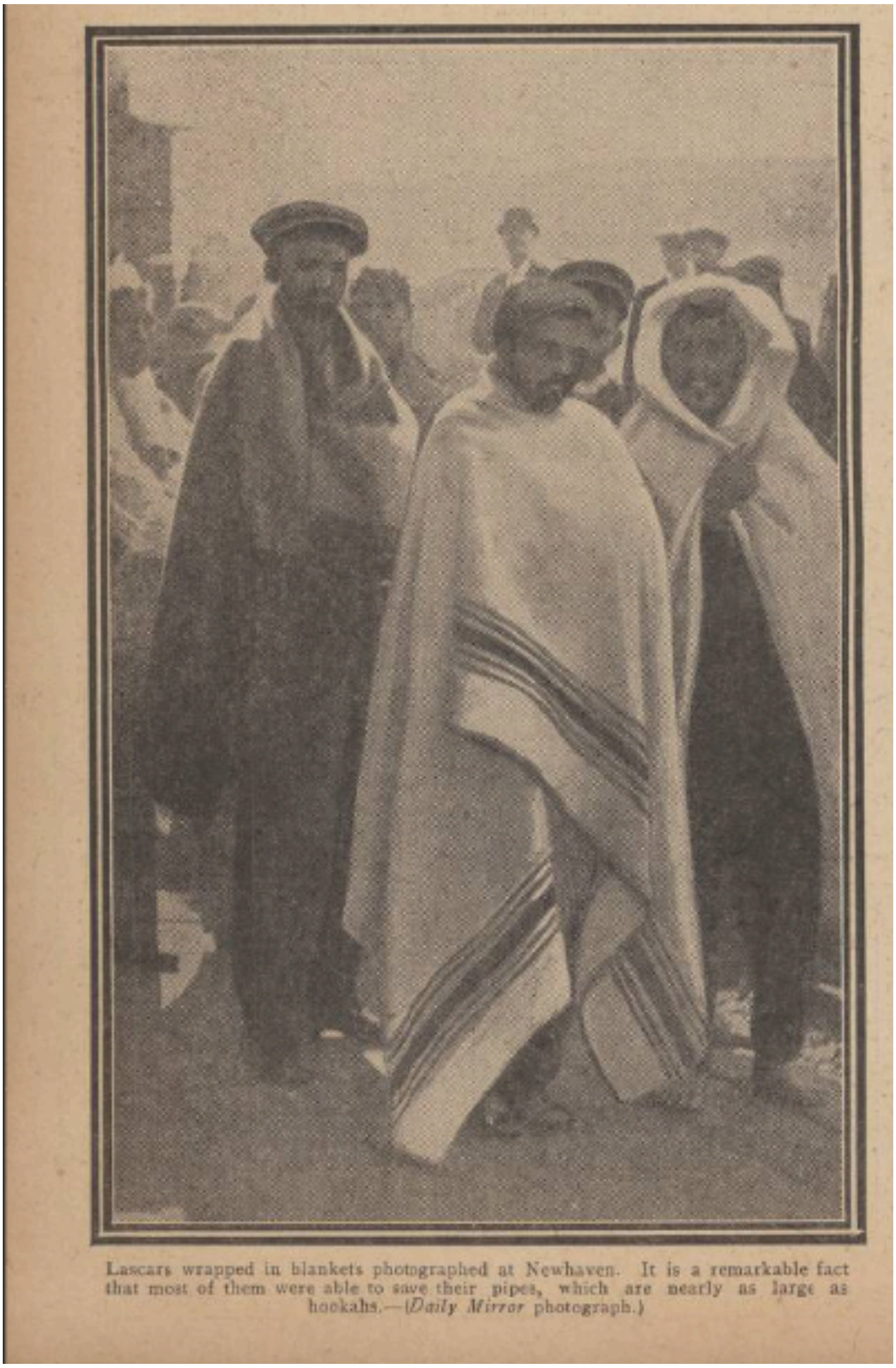
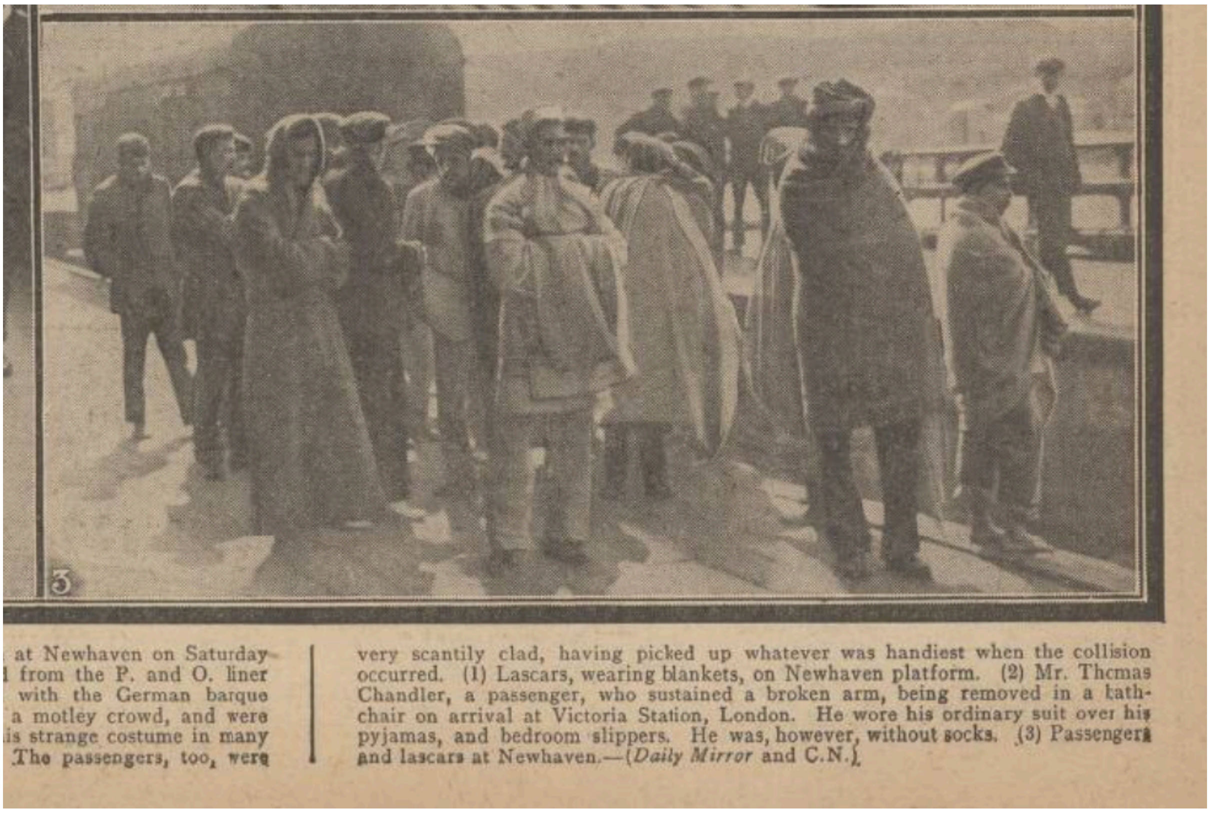
[20] *Illustrated London News*, "The Plight of Passengers and Crew After the Oceana Disaster," 23 March 1912, 10.
[21] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950*, 83.
[22] Ibid.



Lascars wrapped in blankets photographed at Newhaven. It is a remarkable fact that most of them were able to save their pipes, which are nearly as large as hookahs.—(*Daily Mirror* photograph.)

Figure 15 'Wreckage of Oceana', Daily Mirror ,18 March 1912, 8.

A further photograph from the *Daily Mirror* depicts Lascars gathered and wrapped in blankets (Figure 15). The case of the *Oceana* is particularly interesting as it features both Lascars and European sailors as victims of the wreckage. However, it is only the Lascar portion of the crew that is highlighted as wearing blankets. The report from the *Daily Mirror* highlights the Lascar members of the crew gathered and were huddled in eider-down quilts and Witney blankets, this strange costume in many cases being set off with a flaring red turban or fez.[23]



at Newhaven on Saturday
from the P. and O. liner
with the German barque
a motley crowd, and were
is strange costume in many
The passengers, too, were

very scantily clad, having picked up whatever was handiest when the collision occurred. (1) Lascars, wearing blankets, on Newhaven platform. (2) Mr. Thomas Chandler, a passenger, who sustained a broken arm, being removed in a bath-chair on arrival at Victoria Station, London. He wore his ordinary suit over his pyjamas, and bedroom slippers. He was, however, without socks. (3) Passengers and lascars at Newhaven.—(*Daily Mirror* and C.N.)

Figure 16 'Wreckage of Oceana', Daily Mirror, 18 March 1912, 1.

Another depiction of the *Oceana* survivors describes them draped in large blankets, seemingly barefoot (Figure 16). Interestingly, the news article notes that despite their predicament, most of them were able to save their pipes, which were described as nearly as large as hookahs. This detail implies that even in challenging circumstances, the Lascars managed to hold onto personal belongings that were important to them.[24]

The description of Lascars in this newspaper extract presents them as an exoticised and somewhat pitiable spectacle. Referred to as a 'motley crowd' and 'strangely-attired', the emphasis is placed on their perceived otherness, reinforcing ideas of their unfamiliarity and supposed lack of preparedness.[25] The imagery of Lascars 'huddled in eider-down quilts and Witney blankets' suggests vulnerability, weakness, and dependence on the charity of others, contrasting with the more composed portrayal of European passengers. The mention of 'flaring red turbans or fez' highlights their foreignness, aligning with the broader racialised narrative that framed Lascars as outsiders within the British maritime world.[26]

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[23] *Daily Mirror, "*Wreckage of Oceana*," 18 March 1912,* 1.
[24] Ibid., 1.
[25] Ibid., 1.

This representation echoes the concerns raised by Fidler regarding the *Oceana* disaster. The accusation that Lascars behaved cowardly during the evacuation is indirectly reinforced by the visual and textual framing of them as fragile figures wrapped in blankets, seemingly incapable of withstanding the harsh conditions. The contrast with Mr. Thomas Chandler, a passenger noted for his injuries yet still described in terms of his attire and resilience, further emphasises the racial hierarchy embedded in such accounts. Rather than being acknowledged as survivors of a maritime disaster, the Lascars are reduced to an exotic spectacle, their survival framed as a scene of disarray rather than endurance.[27]

The depiction of Lascars in ragged or inadequate clothing was not just a commentary on their working conditions but also a deliberate visual contrast meant to emphasise their lower status within the colonial and maritime hierarchy. Fidler explains how uniforms and clothing were used as tools of differentiation between European officers and Indian seafarers, reinforcing power structures on ships. European officers were distinguished by their formal Western uniforms, while Indian seafarers were issued 'Orientalised' attire, often simple and inferior in quality.[28] Within the ranks of Lascars, further distinctions were made, higher-ranking Indian seafarers like the Serang and Tindal were given more elaborate clothing, including shoes, to differentiate them from ordinary Lascars.[29]

At the same time, the imagery of Lascars wrapped in blankets departs from Fidler's analysis by introducing a different visual and emotional register, one that frames the Lascar not merely as subordinate but as pitiable. While Fidler focuses on uniform as a tool of structured discipline and status management aboard ships, the blanket, informal, improvised, and often associated with sickness or charity, evokes a more visceral sense of bodily vulnerability and emotional affect. This shift in imagery pushes beyond the controlled hierarchy of shipboard clothing to emphasise the Lascar's exposure, suffering, and marginality. The blanket becomes not a symbol of institutional order, but of breakdown, a marker of crisis, dependency, or even abandonment - expanding the visual narrative from disciplinary difference to one of emotional and racialised spectacle.

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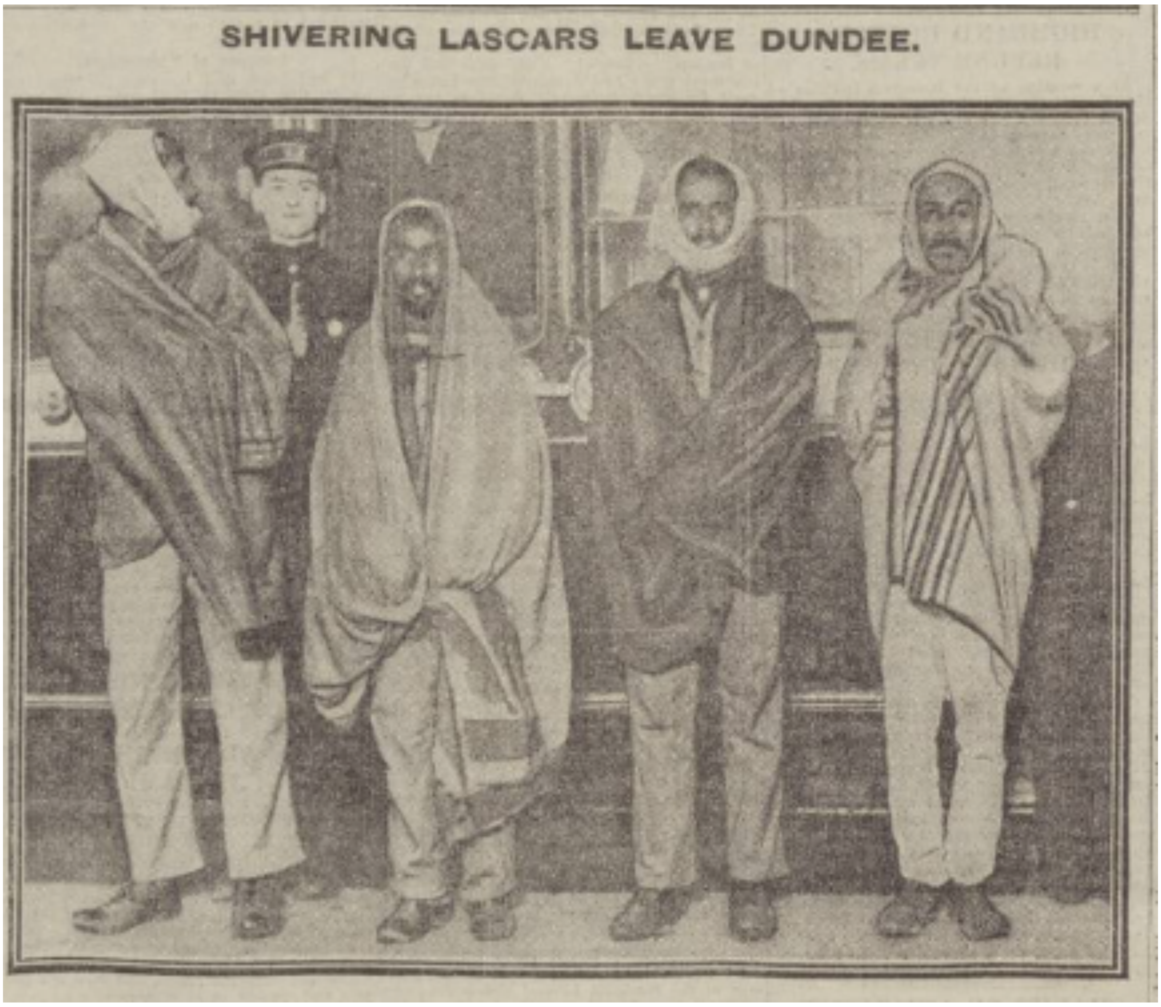
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950*, 50.
[29] Ibid., 51.

The recurring press images of ‘shivering Lascars' wrapped in blankets crystallised this racialised visual hierarchy. By emphasising their supposed fragility and unsuitability for Britain’s climate, such portrayals reinforced colonial narratives of dependence and inferiority. In doing so, they reduced Lascars to symbols of vulnerability, shaping public perceptions that overlooked their resilience and active contributions to maritime labour.



SHIVERING LASCARS LEAVE DUNDEE.

Figure 17 Shivering Lascars Leave Dundee’, Dundee Courier, 17 Dec 1912, 6.

On the 15th of December 1912, in the cold grip of a winter's day, the shores of Britain welcomed a peculiar sight, a crew of Lascar seamen off the *Clan Farquhar*, a ship arriving in Dundee. This newspaper excerpt from the *Dundee Courier* (Figure 17) provides a striking visual and textual representation of the shivering Lascar. The imagery used by the newspaper of ‘dusky sailors’, ‘scantily clad’ and ‘keenly sensitive to the extreme cold’, reinforces a colonial narrative that framed Lascars as physically ill-equipped for Britain's harsh climate.[30] This portrayal was not merely descriptive but served to highlight their perceived otherness - both in terms of race and their supposed frailty in an unfamiliar environment.

The phrase 'keenly sensitive to the extreme cold' suggests vulnerability and even helplessness, implicitly contrasting Lascars with the hardy British sailor who was presumed to be more resilient in such conditions.[31] By emphasising that they had to wrap themselves up in their endeavour to keep warm, the article implies an almost desperate struggle against the elements. The accompanying photograph, with Lascars huddled under blankets, visually reinforces this impression, evoking sympathy while also subtly marking them as outsiders. This portrayal was part of a wider discourse that depicted Lascars as inherently unsuited to life in Britain, often linked to their treatment in shipping contracts. Lascars were frequently given inferior accommodations and insufficient clothing for colder climates, making them genuinely susceptible to harsh weather. However, rather than critiquing the exploitative conditions that led to such vulnerability, newspapers often framed the Lascars themselves as fragile or exotic figures out of place in Britain's industrial port cities. [32]

Additionally, the language used in the article, describing the sailors as 'dusky' and focusing on their physical discomfort, aligns with broader orientalist tropes that depicted South Asians as both exotic and childlike. This infantilisation contributed to paternalistic justifications for their lower pay and worse conditions compared to white British sailors. Lascars faced significant challenges in terms of basic provisions and healthcare, both aboard ships and on shore. As noted by Rozina Visram, the men had to sleep on the bare floors without any bedding or furniture, and the absence of fireplaces and being provided with only one blanket each was inadequate to keep warm in the cold British climate.[33] Furthermore, there were no separate quarters or a hospital for the sick, leading to appalling scenes where sick sailors lay on the floor covered only by a single blanket.

When Lascars arrived on British shores their conditions were not much improved, leading many to seek refuge in spaces like the Strangers' Home which provided temporary accommodation and food for foreign sailors as well as acting as a repatriation centre and a space for missionary activity. Failing to secure shelter and accommodation meant that blankets were the lone protection for these sailors against the harsh winter unless they were able to find other boarding houses.

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[30] *Dundee Courier*, "Shivering Lascars Leave Dundee," 17 December 1912, 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 44, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315686509.

2.a. Lascar Clothing:

The provision of clothing and other necessities to Lascars in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries reflects both the exploitative conditions they faced and the persistent racialised narrative of the 'shivering Lascar'. Lascars were supplied with bedding and clothing, including 'two suits and three blankets sewn together to make a kind of sleeping bag, together with shoes, caps and mittens'.[34] This provision was markedly better than what European sailors often had, who frequently boarded ships with little more than the clothes on their backs, yet it reinforced the idea that Lascars required special accommodations due to their supposed physical fragility and inability to withstand the cold.[35]

This perception was not merely a justification for providing extra clothing but was also tied to the economic and racial rationale for hiring larger Lascar crews. Dixon notes that shipowners claimed Lascars needed to work in greater numbers because they 'had less physical strength and could not stand the cold'.[36] While this explanation reinforced racialised stereotypes, it also concealed the reality that Lascar crews were often padded with excess workers due to the influence of Serangs, who recruited men from their own villages and kinship networks.[37]

The so-called 'shivering Lascar' trope became an enduring image, used both as a paternalistic justification for providing additional clothing and as a reason to label Lascars as inferior to European sailors. This perception extended to their treatment ashore, where they were often left in dire conditions. Despite being provided with better rations and clothing at sea, Lascars faced severe neglect in Britain, particularly in the winter months. Dixon describes how Lascars awaiting repatriation were housed in 'boarding houses of the lowest type' in Kingsland Road before being moved to Shoreditch, where a single physician, Hilton Docker, attempted to care for them.[38] The lack of proper shelter and heating led to a high death rate, prompting a public scandal after Docker's reports reached the *Asiatic Society* and *The Times*, eventually leading to a parliamentary inquiry.[39]

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[34] Conrad Dixon, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen," in R. Ommer and G. Panting, eds., *The Working Men Who Got Wet* (St John's, Newfoundland: Maritime History Group, 1980), 267.
[35] Ibid., 266.
[36] Ibid., 266.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 267.
[39] Ibid.

This inquiry exposed the exploitation of Lascars on land, as they were found sleeping 'on bare boards with a blanket apiece in buildings that were devoid of furniture and unheated'.[40] The committee recommended stricter supervision and better record-keeping for the issue of clothing to prevent its sale ashore, further illustrating how Lascars were viewed as both helpless victims and untrustworthy workers.[41] The broader neglect of Lascars also contributed to the perception of the 'Lascar plague', as many fell ill due to inadequate housing and malnutrition. Admissions data from the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital suggests that by the late-nineteenth century, Lascars made up an increasing proportion of seamen requiring medical treatment, reaching 8.5% of admissions by the 1890s.[42] This further reinforced racialised narratives that Lascars were prone to illness and required paternalistic oversight.

The treatment of Lascars, both in terms of their clothing provisions and their neglect in Britain, underscores the contradictions of British imperial policy. While they were viewed as indispensable maritime labourers, their status was precarious, and their living conditions ashore exposed the limits of British responsibility. The 'shivering Lascar' trope thus served multiple functions: it justified the employment of larger Lascar crews, reinforced racialised notions of physical weakness, and provided a convenient excuse for their continued marginalisation within Britain's maritime labour force.

2.b. Everyday Resistance:

The figure of the 'shivering Lascar' in colonial literature and historical accounts can be read in the context of everyday resistance and survival strategies employed by Indian seafarers. Rather than focusing on overt acts of defiance, recent historical scholarship has highlighted the ways in which marginalised groups subtly challenged power structures. As Fidler notes, recent developments in South Asian history have shifted attention away from large-scale rebellions toward 'everyday forms of resistance that were 'singularly undramatic' and that stopped short of 'overt defiance''.[43] This perspective reframes the Lascar's apparent passivity, suggesting that his endurance and adaptation were acts of resilience rather than mere submission.

Indian seafarers often engaged in strategies such as selling company-issued clothing and rations as a means of asserting agency within the constraints of their employment. Norma Myers highlights, their mechanisms for survival were diverse and ranged from begging, which generated white pity, to selling items of clothing and bedding issued by the East India Company which demonstrated that by exercising their initiative, they 'worked the system' rather than directly confronting it.[44] This suggests that their ability to endure harsh conditions, whether through informal economies, community networks, or adaptive labour practices, was itself a form of quiet resistance. While such actions may not have been revolutionary in the traditional sense, they represented meaningful ways of navigating the exploitative structures imposed upon them.

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 269.
[43] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950*, 60.

Moreover, Fidler highlights that such acts of resistance 'feature rarely in the historical records'.[45] This is significant in understanding how colonial narratives often render Lascars as fleeting, nearly invisible figures, their agency minimised or erased. The image of the 'shivering Lascar', a figure seemingly helpless against the elements, can thus be reinterpreted. His physical discomfort symbolises not just material deprivation but the broader struggles of colonial subjects who had limited control over their fate. Yet, beneath this portrayal lies a story of persistence, as Lascars carved out ways to survive within a system designed to exploit them.

Arunima Datta, in her groundbreaking work *Fleeting Agencies*, explores the complex lives of coolie women in the British colonial plantation economy of Malaya. Datta provides a nuanced analysis of how gender and labour intersected within the colonial system, shedding light on the often-overlooked contributions and resistance of these women. Her study reveals that while colonial authorities framed coolie women as passive victims of exploitation and gendered violence, these women actively navigated and sometimes resisted their circumstances. As Datta argues, South Asians in Britain were not passive victims of imperialism but social and political agents who worked to transform British society.[46] This nuanced portrayal of coolie women as both subjects of colonial power and agents of resistance is central to understanding their place within the colonial economy and their efforts to assert their rights and identities.

Furthermore, Datta's work reveals how colonialism shaped both gendered labour and the social roles of coolie women. The harsh economic conditions under which they worked often led to unequal pay and exploitation, yet these women found ways to resist. For example, they would occasionally challenge colonial wage systems, bargaining for higher pay and better working conditions. Datta notes, 'Although coolie women were not paid wages equal to coolie men, even when undertaking the same work, they were aware of their roles on the estates, and they negotiated for what they considered to be their rightful compensation'.[47] This capacity for resistance, often subtle but persistent, mirrors the agency found in other marginalised labouring groups, such as the Lascars in Britain.

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[44] Norma Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 13, no. 2–3 (1994): 7–21, 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1994.9974839.

[45] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950*, 60.

[46] Arunima Datta, *Waiting on Empire: A History of Indian Travelling Ayahs in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 5.

The lives of Lascars, who worked under harsh conditions aboard British merchant ships, share many parallels with those of coolie women. Like the coolie women, Lascars were racialised labourers within a colonial system that sought to control and marginalise them. The British treated Lascars as inferior to their European counterparts, both on the ships and in port cities like London. Much like the coolie women in Malaya, Lascars were part of a system that exploited their labour while simultaneously denying them recognition or agency. Lascars were subjected to both racial and gendered discrimination, yet they maintained a sense of community and identity, which often served as a form of resistance against colonial and social subjugation.

One striking example of this everyday resistance was the practice of selling their company-issued clothing and bedding, as highlighted in the case of Sulleyman Adam. As shipowners were required to provide Lascars with clothing and basic necessities, many sailors found ways to exploit this system to their advantage. By selling these items upon arrival in port, Lascars not only supplemented their meagre wages but also asserted a degree of autonomy over their labour conditions. This act, while seemingly small, was a way of 'working the system', subtly undermining the strict control that shipping companies sought to impose. Much like the coolie women who negotiated wages or found ways to navigate colonial structures, the Lascars' sale of issued goods demonstrates how marginalised workers could carve out their own spaces of economic agency within an exploitative system.

Through these forms of resistance, whether bargaining for better wages or selling company-issued goods, both coolie women and Lascars found ways to navigate colonial oppression. Their actions may not have been grand acts of rebellion, but they reveal the resilience and agency of labouring groups who refused to be merely passive subjects of imperial control. By choosing to exchange their clothing for money or other necessities, they actively reshaped their economic circumstances, demonstrating that their struggles were not just about suffering but also about survival and adaptation. This challenges the passive image of the shivering Lascar, revealing a more complex reality in which these sailors navigated and resisted their oppression in subtle but significant ways.

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[47] Arunima Datta, *Fleeting Agencies: A Social History of Indian Coolie Women in British Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 24.

2.c. What does Shivering Mean?:

The figure of the 'shivering Lascar' occupies a potent space within colonial imagery, one that is saturated with assumptions about vulnerability, frailty, and dependency. Yet, the very word shivering invites a more layered reading. At its most literal, shivering denotes cold, a physical reaction to inhospitable weather conditions, particularly significant for Indian seafarers navigating the cold Atlantic or North Sea aboard poorly equipped British ships. This interpretation underscores the racialised neglect Lascars endured: provided with insufficient clothing, rations, and bedding, their bodies became physical testaments to imperial disregard. However, the cold here is not just environmental, it is political, institutional, and racial. To shiver is not simply to feel cold, but to be left in the cold, a symbolic gesture toward abandonment and systemic exclusion.

Glen O'Hara has argued that recent historiography has brought the sea back into view, driven in part by the pressures and frameworks of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century globalisation. This shift has allowed historians to re-evaluate the significance of maritime history, not simply as an extension of naval or economic history, but as a critical site for understanding the movement of 'goods, peoples, ideas and technology'.[48] In this context, the Lascar becomes a representative of what O'Hara identifies as the 'marginalised racial and sexual groups' brought to light by new global histories.[49] His liminal status, at sea, in port cities, and within the racial hierarchies of imperial Britain, mirrors what maritime historians now recognise as a global condition of circulation and exploitation. The 'shivering' condition of the Lascar, then, is not just a physical state but a metaphor for the cold reception Britain gave to the very labouring bodies that sustained its global maritime dominance.

Yet shivering can also signify fear, the trembling of a body anticipating harm. This brings us to the psychological dimensions of the Lascar experience. As colonial subjects far from home, often mistreated by officers, isolated by language, and facing hostility in port cities, Lascars had ample reason to feel anxiety and dread. Their vulnerability was not just bodily but also existential. Still, in light of Fidler's work on everyday resistance, this fear must not be read as passive submission. Rather, it reflects the emotional toll of navigating an oppressive structure while seeking ways to survive within it. Fear did not preclude agency; it coexisted with strategies of endurance, negotiation, and quiet defiance.

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[48] Glen O'Hara, "'The Sea Is Swinging into View': Modern British Maritime History in a Globalised World," *The English Historical Review* 124, no. 510 (October 2009): 1110, 1109–1134, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40270519.
[49] Ibid., 1112.

Another resonance of shivering relates to illness, the involuntary shaking of a body in fever. In this reading, the Lascar's shiver becomes a sign of infection, but also of contamination within the broader imperial system. Lascars were often seen by the British as vectors of disease, their bodies racialised as both dangerous and disposable.[50] Yet this image also hints at the broader sickness of empire itself, an institution dependent on exploitative labour, racial hierarchies, and violence. The Lascar's shaking body becomes a symptom of that systemic malaise.

Finally, there is a more metaphorical and even emotional register to shivering, that which arises from overwhelming feeling. While rarely acknowledged in colonial narratives, the emotional lives of Lascars were rich and complex. Their endurance was not just physical but affective. Separation from families, encounters with other diasporic communities, religious observance, and communal solidarity all formed part of their lives. If we read the shiver in this light, it becomes a sign of human intensity, of longing, memory, and resilience. It is perhaps in this emotional dimension that the Lascar most powerfully escapes the confines of colonial caricature.

Thus, shivering is not merely a sign of weakness. It is a multivalent symbol, of bodily vulnerability, psychological distress, systemic neglect, but also of emotional endurance. By reinterpreting the shivering Lascar through these varied lenses, we uncover a far more complex figure: not a passive recipient of imperial charity, but a subtle resistor, whose very presence on the page challenges the empire’s efforts to render him invisible. Yet to read the shivering Lascar solely through metaphor or symbolism risks overlooking the epistemological complexity of emotion itself. William Reddy has argued that ‘emotions are the most immediate, most compelling, and most self-evident experiences imaginable’, and yet, when studied, they present 'some of the most troubling difficulties of definition’.[51] The figure of the Lascar evokes sympathy, loneliness, and suffering, reactions that seem intuitive to the modern observer. But to take these emotions as self-evident is to fall into the trap Reddy warns against by mistaking projection for understanding. The Lascar's emotional life, filtered through colonial sources and literary renderings, remains ultimately inaccessible, shaped by cultural difference, narrative mediation, and the emotional regimes of empire.

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[50] For discussion of disease, race, and maritime labour in the colonial context, see: Tim Carter and S. E. Roberts, “Infectious Disease Mortality in British Merchant Seamen and Lascars since 1900: From Causes to Controls,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 4 (2017): 788–815; Manikarnika Dutta, “Cholera, British Seamen and Maritime Anxieties in Calcutta, c.1830s–1890s,” *Social History of Medicine* (2021); David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[51] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

In this light, the shiver functions as a cipher for emotion itself, at once legible and resistant to interpretation. Reddy likens emotions to sensory experiences, noting that 'just as sugar always tastes sweet and red always looks red, loneliness always feels cold'.[52] Yet, he cautions that empirical research has 'failed to substantiate' such claims, revealing how the metaphorical coding of emotions may not be as universal as presumed.[53] The assumption that the Lascar's shiver indicates emotional coldness - loneliness, abandonment, despair - relies on culturally specific associations that may obscure more than they reveal. Thus, the shivering Lascar forces us to confront the limits of emotional legibility in historical analysis. Rather than affirming what he felt, we are left with traces of a deeply affective life that resists capture, challenging us to think more critically about what it means to feel across boundaries of race, empire, and time.

This layered understanding of shivering allows us to move beyond its simplistic association with cold and highlights the broader social, emotional, and political context in which Lascars were viewed. The image of Lascars wrapped in blankets, trembling after shipwrecks or navigating treacherous waters, becomes more than a visual representation of physical coldness. It becomes a symbolic expression of colonial exploitation, fear, sickness, and the emotional toll of living under imperial domination. The 'shivering Lascar' thus embodies both the racialised vulnerability and quiet resilience of the Lascar, a figure whose humanity was often obscured by colonial stereotypes but whose complex experience we can now begin to better understand.

The representation of Lascars in British newspapers, particularly through tropes of the shivering Lascar and the Lascar plague, mirrors the emotional politics of nationhood and othering that Sara Ahmed outlines in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Ahmed's exploration of how 'emotions work to shape the "surfaces" of individual and collective bodies' is crucial for understanding how Lascars were framed as figures of vulnerability and contagion, marked not just by physical weakness but by symbolic emotional excess.[54] The image of the shivering Lascar, wrapped in blankets following a shipwreck, became a recurring motif in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British print culture, evoking a dual emotional response of pity and unease. These portrayals did more than report on suffering; they positioned Lascars as bodies 'out of place', their presence in British spaces unsettling the national body through associations with weakness, dependency, and foreignness.[55]

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

Ahmed writes that metaphors of emotional softness, such as being a 'soft touch' are often racialised and feminised, presenting the nation as dangerously open to the emotional and material demands of racial others.[56] The shivering Lascar, cast as helpless and childlike, embodies this fear of emotional openness. His vulnerability, displayed on British shores, invited a charitable but conditional gaze, one that confirmed his outsider status and the benevolence of the national subject. As Ahmed notes, 'softness is narrated as a proneness to injury', and in these newspaper accounts, the Lascar's suffering appears as both a threat and a justification for the hardening of national boundaries.[57] His very need for aid marked him as someone who could never fully belong.

Similarly, the trope of the Lascar plague further demonstrates how emotions become national attributes and tools of exclusion. Ahmed argues that ‘hardness is not the absence of emotion, but a different emotional orientation towards others’.[58] In depictions of the plague, Lascars are not pitied, but feared, reimagined as vectors of disease and disorder, endangering the health of the British population. This shift from sympathy to paranoia reflects what Ahmed describes as the transformation of feeling into political response: the soft touch must become hard to protect itself from being 'taken in by the bogus’.[59] The Lascar, no longer a victim in need of blankets, becomes the contaminant who must be quarantined, controlled, or expelled.

The emotional charge of these narratives, whether shivering or contagious, contributes to the construction of British national identity through contrast and exclusion. As Ahmed notes, such emotional narratives 'secure the white subject as sovereign in the nation' by aligning 'you' with ‘national body’.[60] In this representation, Lascars serve as emotional objects through which

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[54] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion: Tenth Anniversary Edition*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 1, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700372.
[55] Ibid., 2.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 2–3.
[58] Ibid., 4.
[59] Ibid., 2.
[60] Ibid.

Britishness is both defined and defended. Their suffering and supposed threat to health were not only sensational newspaper topics but also instruments for disciplining the emotional and racial boundaries of the nation.

2.d. Shivering Lascars in Literature:

Henry Mayhew's description of the *Asylum for the Houseless* provides a vivid portrayal of the extreme poverty and dehumanisation faced by the city's most marginalised populations, including the shivering Lascar.[61] The Asylum, which opens only when temperatures reach freezing point, is a place of last resort for the destitute, offering only dry bread and shelter in exchange for the suffering of those who arrive. Mayhew introduces a diverse group of individuals, ranging from an American seaman to a Polish refugee, alongside the shivering Lascar crossing sweeper. This collection of humanity highlights the global nature of poverty, emphasising the shared plight of the impoverished, regardless of their nationality or background.[62]

The shivering Lascar is depicted as part of a 'ragged congress of nations' representing the physical and social suffering faced by many of the empire's forgotten subjects. These men, who had contributed to Britain's maritime economy, find themselves in a state of despair when they arrive on land, without any support or means of survival. The image of Lascars, alongside other destitute figures like the Chinese beggar and Italian organ boy, underscores the intersection of poverty and racialised suffering in Victorian London.[63] For the shivering Lascar, who has been exposed to the elements in inadequate clothing, Mayhew captures both their literal cold and the metaphorical isolation they experience in a foreign land that has exploited their labour but fails to provide for their well-being.

Mayhew's description of the shivering Lascar in the cold, standing with other beggars and outcasts, reinforces the idea of alienation. The Lascars, dressed in 'thin cobwebby garments', struggle to protect themselves from the cold by tying their clothes with string to prevent the wind from cutting through their clothes.[64] The stark imagery of their bare skin visible through torn clothes, 'like the hide of a dog with the mange', emphasises their extreme vulnerability. Mayhew contrasts the shivering Lascar's suffering with the indifference of the city around him, symbolising the broader neglect of those who were once integral to the imperial machinery but are now reduced to shadows in the streets of London.[65]

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[61] Henry Mayhew, William Tuckniss, Bracebridge Hemyng, John Binny, and Andrew Halliday, *London Labour and the London Poor: The London Street-Folk; Comprising, Street Sellers, Street Buyers, Street Finders, Street Performers, Street Artizans, Street Labourers* (London: Griffin, Bohn, 1861), 428.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

The Asylum's role as a 'last dwelling' on the road to ruin emphasises the complete abandonment of these individuals by society. The shivering Lascar is part of a silent, sullen crowd, struggling not only against the elements but also against the social structures that have left them destitute. Mayhew's depiction serves as a powerful critique of the imperial system that built its wealth on the labour of people like the Lascar but neglected their humanity once their usefulness had expired.[66] The shivering Lascar, in this context, becomes emblematic of the broken promises of empire, illustrating the harsh realities faced by marginalised colonial subjects in Britain.

Henry Mayhew, though largely forgotten in contemporary ethnography, was a pioneering figure whose work straddled both journalism and social science, offering an insightful and original account of London's poor in the mid-nineteenth century. His work in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) documented the lives of street vendors, beggars, and labourers with an extensive collection of verbatim life stories, allowing individuals to narrate their own experiences without interpretive intrusion. Unlike the realist ethnographers who later dominated the field, Mayhew avoided imposing theoretical frameworks or disciplinary classifications, instead presenting himself as a 'pleasantly neutral, transparent presence'.[67] His work challenged the conventional categorisation of ethnographic writing, as he both adhered to and subverted realist conventions - utilising documentary style and extensive direct quotations while resisting interpretive omniscience. Mayhew's approach, often dismissed as an idiosyncratic blend of journalism and ethnography, serves as a valuable methodological model, demonstrating how ethnographic work can balance empirical observation with deep human empathy.[68]

Mayhew's portrayal of the shivering Lascar within *London Labour and the London Poor* aligns with his broader approach to depicting the suffering and resilience of the urban poor. His method, shaped by his background in journalism and theatre, involved immersing himself in London's underworld, allowing those he interviewed to speak for themselves while he provided rich, evocative descriptions of their lives.[69] His fascination with the city's marginalised figures, be they costermongers, beggars, or prostitutes, was coupled with a sharp awareness of the dehumanising effects of poverty. As seen in his sketches of figures like Jack Black, the 'rat and mole destroyer', Mayhew used meticulous visual details to highlight both the individuality and plight of his subjects.[70] The shivering Lascar, standing in tattered garments in the bitter cold, fits within this framework; his image is both deeply humanising and emblematic of the wider suffering of Britain's imperial subjects.

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] B. S. Green, "Learning from Henry Mayhew: The Role of the Impartial Spectator in Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31, no. 2 (2002): 99–134, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241602031002001, 103.

[68] Ibid.

Mayhew's work often carried an elegiac tone, mourning the decline of traditional livelihoods in the face of industrial capitalism.[71] His depiction of the Lascar as a forsaken figure, once useful to the empire but now discarded, mirrors his concern for other displaced workers, such as those once-independent craftsmen who had been reduced to proletarian drudgery. This thematic connection suggests that Mayhew saw the Lascar not only as a racialised outsider but as part of a broader class of labourers whose exploitation had left them destitute. Furthermore, his descriptions often revealed an underlying sympathy for those whom society deemed criminal or immoral, including thieves and prostitutes, recognising the structural conditions that forced them into desperation.[72] The shivering Lascar, then, is not merely a pitiable figure but a testament to the failures of an imperial and industrial order that extracted labour without responsibility for its workers' fates.

2.e. James Payn:

In an excerpt from *Thicker than Water* by James Payn, we see a vivid portrayal of a district in London, which Payn uses as a backdrop to discuss a complex set of social dynamics, with particular attention to the diverse and often marginalised individuals who inhabit it. His description of the neighbourhood near Victoria Station, marked by a strong nautical presence and the interplay of foreignness and poverty, sets a scene that encapsulates a microcosm of London's diverse working-class environment.[73] The shivering Lascar appears in this context as one of many individuals, representing not just the racial and ethnic heterogeneity of the area but also the shared experience of marginalisation.[74]

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[69] George Woodcock, "Henry Mayhew and the Undiscovered Country of the Poor," *The Sewanee Review* 92, no. 4 (1984): 556–573, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27544347, 557.
[70] Ibid., 571.
[71] Ibid., 573.
[72] Ibid.
[73] James Payn, *Masterpieces of the World's Literature, Ancient and Modern: The Great Authors of the World with Their Master Productions*, Classic Reprint (United States: American Literary Society, 1899), 8800.
[74] Ibid.

Payn’s description of the Lascar reflects a common trope of the outsider in Victorian literature, particularly in the narrative of empire. The Lascar is presented alongside a host of other foreign, 'earthy figures, including Negroes, Norsemen, and Frenchmen, all sharing a “rolling gait” from their “sea legs”’.[75] The exoticism of these characters is highlighted by their physical traits, such as the ‘ear-ringed’ and ringleted sailors or the shivering Lascar bound for the opium shop. These details speak to the ways in which Payn casts the neighbourhood as a liminal space where the foreign and the domestic collide, and the boundaries between different peoples and classes become increasingly blurred.[76]

Notably, Payn’s portrayal of a Lascar, one among many ethnic and national representations, is part of a larger mosaic that includes sailors, thieves, and various working-class figures from different corners of the world. The Lascar, like others in the district, is marked by a particular physicality (such as the 'swart' appearance or the 'shivering' nature) and social role (a labouring seafarer).[77] Payn’s portrayal evokes both sympathy and suspicion, suggesting the Lascar’s connection to a shadowy world of illicit activities and societal transgressions. Yet there is also an implicit recognition of the man’s humanity, his connection to a larger, global community of seafarers.[78]

The shivering Lascar thus becomes a symbolic figure in this context: he is a representation of both the exploitation inherent in the British empire’s maritime labour system and the complex, often uncomfortable interactions between different races and classes in Victorian London. The image of the shivering Lascar bound for an opium shop is emblematic of the way colonial subjects, whose labour once served imperial interests, now find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and dependence in the very city that had once relied on their contributions.

Payn’s focus on physical detail, such as the 'rolling gait' of the sea-faring figures or the way the Lascar stands out for his lack of 'sea signs’, underlines the separation between those who belong to the elite, like the ‘aristocratic air’ of the well-dressed man passing through, and the displaced figures of the working class and immigrants.[79] The Lascar’s shivering body, marked by his attire and actions, becomes a symbol of the larger social and racial divide, and Payn’s careful attention to the ways in which individuals interact within this space highlights the intersections of class, ethnicity, and imperial power. In this passage, Payn gives life to a distinct Victorian trope, that of the outsider in a foreign city, exploring the socio-political implications of migration and empire. The shivering Lascar, among other figures, represents the struggle for belonging in a world that sees them only as transient, foreign, or even disposable, despite their integral roles in the empire's economic and social structures.

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 8800-8802
[79] Ibid., 8800-8801

James Payn, a prolific nineteenth-century novelist and editor of *Chambers's Journal*, was a popular but conventional writer of his time. Born in 1830, Payn was educated at Oxford and made a living through magazine writing, contributing to *Household Words*, a publication edited by Charles Dickens.[80] His admiration for Dickens is notable, as Dickens himself often portrayed the poor and marginalised with a mix of sympathy and moral judgment. However, while Payn demonstrated 'technical skill and some humour and observation', his works were often 'conventional in subject and lack[ed] depth'.[81] This conventionality likely extended to his depiction of Lascars, who, as with many colonial subjects in Victorian literature, were often framed through simplistic, stereotypical lenses rather than afforded nuanced representation.

Given Payn's literary background, his portrayal of Lascars would have been shaped by the prevailing attitudes of the time, particularly the anxieties surrounding empire, race, and class. As an editor of *Chambers's Journal*, he would have been exposed to, and possibly influenced by, the period's popular discourse on imperial subjects, which often oscillated between fascination and fear. His approach to Lascars might have mirrored the wider literary and journalistic tendency to depict them as exotic, pitiable figures, stranded in an alien and often hostile Britain. The fact that his novels have not maintained their popularity suggests that their treatment of such subjects may have lacked the depth or complexity needed to endure beyond their immediate historical context.[82]

2.f. Joseph Salter:

Joseph Salter's mentions of Lascars and the image of a shivering figure also evoke a powerful sense of the dehumanising effects of the British Empire's treatment of colonial labourers, especially in maritime contexts. In the first excerpt, Salter contrasts the image of a shivering black Arab in the port of Liverpool with the same individual now working as a stoker aboard a ship. In this context, the term shivering is particularly telling, evoking both bodily distress and emotional and social isolation. This figure, initially depicted as a vulnerable, powerless labourer, is now working in a role that, while warmer, still positions him in a subordinate and harsh environment (the stoker's role being a notoriously gruelling, low-status position). This dual imagery of the shivering labourer highlights the transient and precarious nature of the Lascar's position within the colonial system. He is caught between two spaces, his past suffering in Liverpool and the ongoing exploitation aboard the ship. The 'warm fire' that he now works beside may represent physical warmth, but it can also symbolise the continued dehumanising conditions under which he labours, with the promise of warmth not necessarily leading to comfort or dignity.[83]

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[80] Stanley Kunitz, ed., *British Authors of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1964), 492.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

The second passage presents a much bleaker image of the shivering Lascar, now depicted as a homeless and destitute figure, 'crouched in the angle of the street' and begging for money.[84] Salter points out that under the Merchant Shipping Repeal Act 1854, a captain is legally responsible for ensuring that no Lascar is left behind in England, yet this law is not enforced and is largely ignored. The Lascar, once a necessary part of the British maritime workforce, is now abandoned, left to sink into obscurity and poverty. The image of him 'shivering in rags' is stark and symbolic of both physical and social coldness, the Lascar's condition reflects the indifference of society and the empire to his well-being once he is no longer useful. This shivering becomes a metaphor for his existential plight: he is not only cold in a literal sense, but also emotionally and socially abandoned, left to survive in the harsh streets of London.[85]

Salter's critique of the enforcement of the law that is supposed to protect Lascars is also significant. He points out the futility of the law when it is not followed by those in power. The captain sails away, free from responsibility, while the Lascar is left to suffer. The Lascar's fate after his abandonment, whether it is begging in the streets or dying in obscurity, demonstrates the systemic neglect and exploitation faced by these labourers. Salter's phrasing of the Lascar 'shivering in rags' and the mention of his death, found by a night policeman, emphasise the starkness of his decline from an essential member of the maritime workforce to a forgotten, neglected figure of British society.[86]

In both passages, the shivering Lascar represents a figure trapped by the empire's systems of labour and race. The term evokes a sense of fragility and exposure, both physically and metaphorically. The Lascar, who might once have been celebrated as a valuable worker, becomes increasingly invisible and irrelevant once his usefulness has expired. The shivering figure is symbolic of the harsh realities faced by those who were integral to the imperial machinery but were discarded once they no longer served the needs of the empire. Salter's use of shivering connects the physical coldness of the Lascar's suffering with the societal and systemic indifference to his plight. Furthermore, Joseph Salter's *The East in the West* provides vivid depictions of the harsh conditions faced by Lascars in nineteenth-century Britain. His descriptions emphasise both the physical and social challenges that these marginalised figures encountered, underscoring their exploitation and suffering in the face of an indifferent society.

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[83] Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work among Orientals* (London: Seeley & Co., 1873), 159.
[84] Ibid., 36.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

In the first excerpt, Salter describes the state of a hovel that he had attempted to convert into a meeting room, which had evidently seen better days. The details he provides, such as the 'whitewashed' beam and the bare brick wall, set the stage for a scene of neglect and abandonment. At one end of the room hung a hammock, brought from the forecastle of a ship, suggesting it was an invitation to an Eastern stranger in need of shelter.[87] The imagery of the hammock and the 'shivering Lascar' alludes to the transient and precarious existence of the Lascars, who, in Salter's view, were often reduced to living in squalid conditions. The presence of 'spots for the nine-pins', likely used for gambling or heating purposes, also indicates the hard and desperate lives led by these men, whose needs for warmth and shelter were often met in unhealthy and temporary ways.[88]

The mention of a shivering Lascar is indicative of the physical toll exacted on the seamen, especially in Britain's unforgiving climate. The reference to the 'defective window' and the light beyond it creating a 'danger signal' reinforces the idea of a hostile environment, where the Lascar's struggle for survival is inextricably linked to both physical cold and societal neglect.[89] The room and the figures it shelters become metaphors for the precarious, fragmented lives of the Lascar population in Britain.

A second passage from the text paints a stark image of the shivering Lascar as a figure caught between social and legal marginalisation. Salter highlights the contradiction in the Lascar's life: while begging was often his only means of survival, it was simultaneously a criminal offence under the law. In this sense, the Lascars' struggle to survive in the harsh English winter becomes even more desperate. Salter describes 'the poor Lascar who shivered' is not only cold from the weather but also from societal indifference.[90] He 'meekly solicits backshish', yet this act, a customary practice in his culture, leads him into conflict with the law, often resulting in his imprisonment.[91] Lascar's condition is marked by a paradox: he is compelled to beg to survive but is criminalised for it.

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[87] Joseph Salter, *The East in the West* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1896), 22.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 22–23.

Salter's description of these men as 'scantily clad, half-starved and ill-sheltered' reinforces the vulnerability of the Lascars. They are not only physically unprepared for the cold English winters but also deprived of the basic necessities for survival. The cycle of suffering, shivering in the cold, begging for alms, enduring imprisonment, and dying in hospitals, illustrates the tragic life of these men who, far from their homelands, faced a grim existence in the streets and institutions of London.[92]

In the final excerpt, Salter notes the widespread sight of Lascars shivering in London, 'sweeping street crossings as a convenient mode of begging'.[93] This image underscores the degree to which Lascars were relegated to the lowest rungs of society. The act of sweeping street crossings, typically associated with low-paid labour, becomes a form of begging, an indication that the Lascars were both invisible and exploited. The shivering Lascar is emblematic of a broader social phenomenon: men who had once been valued as essential workers aboard ships now found themselves discarded in the streets, without resources, and subjected to the harshness of British society. Here, shivering registers as both exposure to harsh conditions and social abandonment, locating the Lascar within a system that withholds care while demanding labour. The fact that Lascars were often seen in this condition reflects the systemic neglect and abandonment that characterised their existence in Britain.

In these passages, Salter's use of the shivering Lascar as a recurring motif symbolises the vulnerability and exploitation of colonial labourers in Britain. These men, who had contributed significantly to the maritime trade and the expansion of the British Empire, were met with indifference and cruelty once their labour was no longer needed. The shivering Lascar, whether in a hovel, on the street, or caught in the cycle of begging and imprisonment, becomes a powerful symbol of the imperial system's failure to care for those it had used and discarded.

2.g. William Hone:

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[90] Ibid., 16.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., Preface v–vi.

In *The Every-day Book* (1827), William Hone draws an evocative parallel between seasonal bird migrations and the plight of shivering Lascars in Britain's winter streets. As he describes the departure of swallows, those ‘truly summer visitors’, and the arrival of hardier winter birds like fieldfares and redwings, Hone introduces a striking simile:

> If one or two [swallows] are seen during the warm days that sometimes occur for the next two or three weeks, they are to be looked upon as strangers and wanderers, and the sight of them which has hitherto been so pleasant becomes altogether different in its effect, it gives one a feeling of desolateness such as we experience on meeting a poor shivering Lascar in our winter streets.[94]

Here, the shivering Lascar serves as a human analogue to the disoriented and misplaced swallow lingering past its season. The imagery of the Lascar evokes a sense of isolation and vulnerability, emphasising his status as an unwelcome or out-of-place presence in an inhospitable environment. The association between the Lascar and desolation suggests that he, like the swallow, is a transient figure, unable to find true belonging in a foreign climate.

Hone’s choice of comparison reflects a broader nineteenth-century trope that framed Lascars as both pitiable and out of place in Britain. Rather than portraying them as active agents in the imperial world, this literary device casts them as passive sufferers, unable to adapt to the cold and destined for hardship. The shivering Lascar thus becomes a marker of imperial displacement; a figure whose suffering serves to heighten the melancholy mood of the changing seasons.

This passage also speaks to a broader anxiety in nineteenth-century Britain about the presence of colonial subjects within the imperial metropole. Just as the belated swallow is an unsettling sight, reminding the observer that something is amiss, so too does the shivering Lascar serve as a visual reminder of imperial contradictions: the exploitation of colonial labourers and their subsequent abandonment in a land that does not welcome them.

William Hone was a significant figure in early-nineteenth century British journalism, known for his satirical and politically charged writing. As a bookseller, publisher, and journalist, Hone's irreverent humour and scathing critiques of the political establishment made him a target of state repression, particularly in the aftermath of his satirical publications mocking the government's policies.[95] Hone's legal battles, particularly his trials for blasphemous libel in 1817, stand as a landmark in the fight for a free press. His trials, where he defended himself with great eloquence, not only demonstrated his commitment to challenging government oppression but also shed light on his deep disdain for the corruption within the political system.[96] Hone's close associations with influential reformers like William Hazlitt and George Cruikshank, and his unwavering dedication to social justice, positioned him as a key figure in the broader reform movement of the time.[97]

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[94] William Hone, *The Every-Day Book* (London: Hunt & Clarke, 1827), 1294.

It is essential to contextualise Hone's stance within his broader political and social critique. As an advocate for the oppressed and a fierce critic of societal inequalities, Hone would likely have viewed Lascars through a lens of sympathy. Given his focus on exposing the abuses of power and his compassion for the downtrodden, Hone's writings on such figures would reflect his broader critique of exploitation and social exclusion. Lascars, often subject to racism and mistreatment, embodied many of the injustices Hone sought to expose through his journalism. His commitment to challenging the status quo would likely have extended to their struggles, placing them within his larger narrative of social reform and press freedom. Thus, Hone's writings, though primarily focused on political and religious satire, could have been a vehicle for highlighting the plight of such marginalised groups in a rapidly changing society.[98]

2.h. Rudyard Kipling:

An extract from Rudyard Kipling's *Works* (1898) presents a complex blend of mythology, spirituality, and existential questioning. A Lascar is presented in Kipling's *The Bridge-Builders,* a short story that features an interaction between Hindu deities and British engineers, exploring themes of fate, permanence, and the transient nature of power - both divine and colonial. The phrase 'Whither went they, said the Lascar awe-struck, shivering a little with the cold?' suggests a moment of existential uncertainty.[99] Unlike some of the other literary Lascars, who are often depicted as street-dwellers suffering from physical cold, this Lascar's shivering appears more psychological, rooted in fear or religious awe. His question comes after an otherworldly event, implying that he is deeply unsettled by the experience.

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[95] Michael Pickering, "Book Review: The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight for a Free Press," *European Journal of Communication* 21, no. 4 (December 2006): 527–530, https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323106070020., 527.

[96] Ben Wilson, *William Hone: The Political Life of a Radical* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 2005), 8.

[97] Pickering, "Book Review," 527–530.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Rudyard Kipling, *Works* (Germany: Tauchnitz, 1898), 43.

The passage presents the image of a 'shivering Lascar', reinforcing the trope of the Lascar as a figure of vulnerability and uncertainty. The Lascar, described as 'awe-struck' and 'shivering a little with the cold', is positioned as an outsider in both a physical and existential sense, observing events beyond his comprehension or control.[100] His reaction underscores a sense of powerlessness, aligning with broader colonial narratives that depicted Indian sailors as marginal figures on the fringes of empire. However, this portrayal can also be interpreted in relation to the ways in which Lascars navigated their circumstances, while physically shivering, his awe suggests a moment of awareness or reflection, hinting at an inner life often overlooked in colonial representations.

Rudyard Kipling’s portrayal of Lascar characters, often ambivalent, paternalistic, or steeped in exoticism, can be more fully understood when placed against the backdrop of his own life, as outlined in James Harrison’s *Biography* (1982). Kipling’s early years in colonial India were formative, not only in shaping his affection for the subcontinent, but also in embedding within him the attitudes of an Anglo-Indian elite, those who, as Harrison notes, were already 'fully fledged' members of British imperial society by the age of four or five.[101] Raised initially among Indian servants, Kipling spoke 'the vernacular more fluently than English’ and required prompting to use English in his parents’ presence, an upbringing that produced, according to T.S. Eliot, both a lifelong affection for India and an imperialist paternalism.[102]

Such a worldview is crucial for understanding why Kipling portrayed Lascars the way he did. His Lascar characters, marginal, mobile, often mysterious, are not merely narrative devices of Orientalist curiosity but rather figures positioned within the imperial order Kipling sought both to justify and to romanticise. The Lascar’s subordinate place in his fiction often mirrors the social hierarchies Kipling himself internalised, having grown up in a household where servants obeyed his every whim. These figures are rarely fully humanised, reflecting instead what

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[100] Ibid.

[101] James Harrison, “Biography,” in *Rudyard Kipling* (Twayne Publishers, 1982), 1–24, *Twayne’s English Authors Series* 339, Gale Literature: Twayne’s Author Series, https://link-gale-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/apps/doc/CX1898100011/G-Twayne?u=duruni&sid=bookmark-G-Twayne&xid=14ef452d, accessed 7 April 2025, 2.

[102] Ibid.

Harrison calls Kipling's admiration for 'men of action', soldiers, administrators, sailors, those who carried out the work of Empire and embodied its codes of discipline, hierarchy, and duty.[103]

Preeti Nijhar's *Law and Imperialism* highlight how Lascars were marginalised through legal and social measures in Britain, often portrayed as both a criminal threat and an object of pity. From the early-nineteenth century, parliamentary committees sought to police and relocate Lascars, blaming their destitution on their own supposed moral failings. Their poor living conditions, described as 'worse than a pigsty' with 'no fire and very little clothing' mirrors Kipling's image of the 'shivering' Lascar, caught between a homeland left behind and a hostile, unwelcoming Britain. [104]

The depiction of Lascars as vagrants and beggars, shivering and lost in an alien land, aligns with Augustus Sala's account of 'poor, bewildered, shivering, brown-faced Orientals' staring in astonishment at the bleakness of London's docks.[105] This sentiment echoes Kipling's Lascar, whose shivering suggests both physical cold and a deeper cultural alienation, symbolising how imperial subjects were left adrift in the metropole, unmoored from both legal protections and social belonging. The legal responses, ranging from incarceration under the Vagrancy Act of 1824 to deportation, demonstrate how British authorities sought to control and contain Lascars, treating them as an unwanted by-product of empire rather than as workers who had served its global machinery.[106]

3. The Lascar Plague:

In stark contrast to the sympathetic image of the 'shivering Lascar', the notion of a 'Lascar plague' painted a more hostile and fear-driven narrative in the British media. This portrayal framed Lascars as carriers of disease, social disorder, and moral corruption, often depicted as a threat to public health and safety. Such narratives were steeped in racial and colonial anxieties, where the presence of South Asian seafarers in port cities was linked to fears of contamination and the undermining of societal norms. By invoking the metaphor of a 'plague', the media dehumanised Lascars, casting them as an invasive and uncontrollable force, further fuelling prejudice and justifying exclusionary policies. This dual portrayal of Lascars, as both pitiable and perilous, reveals the complex and often contradictory ways in which colonial subjects were represented in British society.

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[103] Ibid., 1.

[104] Preeti Nijhar, *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2015), 88.

[105] Ibid., 89.

[106] Ibid., 89–90.

This section will explore the multifaceted dimensions of the so-called 'Lascar plague', unpacking how disease, fear, and racialised anxieties converged in British port cities. It will begin by examining Beriberi, a condition frequently associated with Lascars in both medical and popular discourses, to reveal how illness was racialised and pathologised. From there, it will consider the port city itself as a site of anxiety and spectacle, where the presence of South Asian seafarers became a visual and symbolic marker of colonial threat. Drawing on the work of Tania Bhattacharyya, it will then turn to the often-overlooked conditions aboard ships that contributed to poor health among Lascars, revealing how institutional neglect and systemic exploitation shaped their vulnerability. Yet, the framing of disease was not limited to ships or isolated outbreaks; rather, it was portrayed as diffuse and ever-present, amplifying public fears and legitimising exclusionary responses. Finally, this section will also reflect on Lascar agency, how these seafarers navigated, resisted, and sometimes subverted the narratives imposed upon them, complicating the notion that they were merely passive victims of colonial discourse.

3.a. The Plague by Numbers:

Between 1871 and 1921, India faced a severe rise in deaths, which some have called a 'woeful crescendo of death'. The death rate increased from 41.3 per 1,000 people in the 1880s to 48.6 per 1,000 between 1911 and 1921. Experts debate the causes, some blame the spread of diseases due to modern trade and travel, while others point to worsening economic, social, and environmental conditions.[107]

The main cause of this crisis was major disease outbreaks, including malaria, cholera, influenza, and plague. Malaria alone may have caused up to 20 million deaths, while respiratory diseases like tuberculosis and pneumonia were also deadly. Although smallpox cases declined due to vaccination, cholera remained widespread, especially during famines.[108] The plague arrived in India in 1896 and killed about 10 million people by 1921.[109] Influenza spread quickly and killed over 12 million people in a short time, while the plague remained a major killer for decades. It first affected cities like Bombay, Pune, Karachi, and Calcutta, then spread to rural areas, where most deaths later occurred. By 1904, annual plague deaths had surpassed one million but started to decline after 1907.[110]

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[107] Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 200.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

The exact number of plague deaths is unclear due to underreporting and people hiding cases. However, most deaths occurred in northern and western India, especially in the United Provinces (3.5 million deaths), Punjab (2.9 million), and Bombay (2.4 million). Southern and eastern India were less affected.[111] The plague had a huge social and political impact. The British colonial government took strict measures to control it, but these efforts often caused fear and resistance among Indians. Unlike diseases like smallpox and cholera, which had religious associations, the plague was mostly seen as a government-imposed crisis. The colonial government's heavy-handed response raised questions about the role of Western medicine and its impact on Indian society, as many Indians resisted government medical interventions.

In response to the growing threat of plague, the British colonial authorities in India enacted sweeping emergency measures that often disproportionately affected mobile populations like Lascars. On February 4th, 1897, Lord Elgin sanctioned the 'Epidemic Diseases Act', legislation rushed through the Viceroy's council with minimal consultation. As David Arnold explains, this act empowered the government to conduct intrusive public health interventions: ships and passengers could be inspected, suspected plague cases detained and segregated, and dwellings forcibly disinfected, ventilated, or demolished. It also allowed for the detention of road and rail travellers, granting officials near-total discretion in the name of disease control.[112]

For Lascars, Indian seamen often travelling between port cities like Bombay, Calcutta, and those in Britain, this meant intense scrutiny. From the late eighteenth century onwards, Lascars became a numerically significant element within the black presence in Britain; their increasing numbers resulted in contemporary alarm.[113] Their mobility made them targets of suspicion, and ships arriving from India were often subjected to rigorous inspection regimes. In cities like Bombay, local health governance was transferred from Indian-led municipal councils to European-dominated committees, effectively sidelining Indian voices. As Arnold notes, religious and caste concerns were largely ignored, dismissed as superstitions obstructing scientific sanitation. Forced hospitalisation, the destruction of property, and physical searches became routine. This heavy-handed response reflected a colonial approach that saw public health as a tool of control, particularly over racialised and itinerant subjects like the Lascars.[114]

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[110] Ibid., 201.
[111] Ibid., 202
[112] Ibid., 204–205
[113] Myers, "The Black Poor of London," 7.

3.b. Stuart Hall:

Stuart Hall's discussion of the sociological approach to race and ethnicity helps us understand how British media racialised Lascars through narratives such as the 'shivering Lascar' and the 'Lascar plague'. Hall argues that the sociological perspective views race and ethnicity as 'specifically social or cultural features of the social formations under discussion'. This means that racial categories are not just reflections of economic conditions but are actively shaped by cultural perceptions, media narratives, and social relations.[115]

In the case of Lascars, British media constructed racialised images that reinforced their outsider status. The 'shivering Lascar' trope depicted them as vulnerable and physically weak, often shown suffering in the harsh British climate, reinforcing stereotypes of their supposed racial unsuitability for Britain's climate. This portrayal was not just a neutral observation but served to mark them as fundamentally different and out of place. Similarly, the 'Lascar plague' narrative framed Lascars as a threatening, diseased presence, playing into fears of contamination and overpopulation. This discourse racialised them as a social problem, linking their presence to broader anxieties about immigration, public health, and empire.

Hall's framework helps us to see that these portrayals were not simply economic reflections of Lascars' working conditions but were part of a larger social and cultural process of racialisation. The British media and public discourse did not just describe Lascar, they actively shaped how they were perceived, reinforcing ideas of racial difference that had material consequences in terms of legal restrictions, employment discrimination, and social exclusion.

The way Lascars were represented in British media, through images like the 'Shivering Lascar' and the 'Lascar Plague', highlights how racial and ethnic identities shaped social and political tensions. Stuart Hall notes that conflicts in society often take on a racial or ethnic form, rather than being seen purely as economic struggles. Lascars were not just depicted as poor workers but were racialised in ways that reinforced negative stereotypes. The 'Shivering Lascar' portrayed them as weak and dependent on British charity, reinforcing colonial ideas of racial hierarchy. At the same time, the 'Lascar Plague' narrative painted them as a threat to public health and social stability, fuelling fears about migration and racial integration. These portrayals show how race was used to frame economic and social issues, positioning Lascars as both victims and dangers within British society.[116]

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[114] Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 204–205.

[115] Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 306.

3.c. The Emergence of The Lascar Plague:

Lascars had markedly higher mortality rates from infectious diseases compared to their British counterparts in the Royal Navy and the general onshore population. This disparity is largely attributed to their exposure to harsher conditions aboard ships and in foreign tropical ports, where diseases like typhoid, cholera, malaria, and typhus were prevalent. The lack of adequate preventive measures, such as vaccinations, and the lower quality of food and hygiene aboard ships contributed to the high mortality rates among Lascars, particularly before the 1940s, when such diseases were more effectively controlled.[117]

The recruitment of Lascars from regions where infectious diseases were endemic made them more susceptible to these conditions. Furthermore, their working conditions were often substandard, and they were employed under what were known as 'Asiatic contracts', which put them in less favourable positions compared to their British colleagues. Their deaths from infectious diseases were recorded separately from other seafarers, which reflects the different challenges they faced. Over time, the improvements in public health standards, such as the better control of arthropod vectors, better food, and improved accommodation, helped reduce mortality. However, progress was slower for merchant seamen compared to the Royal Navy, primarily due to their prolonged exposure to foreign ports with inadequate health interventions.[118]

By the 1940s, the introduction of antibacterial medications and antibiotics led to a sharp decline in mortality rates, especially after World War II. Yet, it was not until later, by 1960, that infectious diseases became a rare cause of death in seafarers. The historical challenges faced by Lascars highlight the complexities of their health and social integration, as their struggles were not just medical but also deeply entwined with racial and socio-economic factors. This history portrays the ‘Lascar plague’ as not only a health crisis but also a reflection of the systemic inequalities faced by South Asian seafarers in the British merchant navy.[119]

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[116] Ibid., 307.

[117] Tim Carter and S. E. Roberts, "Infectious Disease Mortality in British Merchant Seamen and Lascars since 1900: From Causes to Controls," *International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 4 (2017): 788–815, https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1177/0843871417726746.

[118] Ibid.

The transmission of infectious diseases among British merchant seamen, especially Lascars, highlights the substantial health risks faced by this group during the early-twentieth century. Plague, for example, continued to affect merchant seamen, predominantly Lascars, into the 1920s, long after it had disappeared from the Royal Navy. This was largely due to the continued endemic presence of the disease in the port cities of Asia, where Lascars were commonly recruited. Infected rats in ports and aboard ships were key vectors, with rat populations contributing to the spread of the disease. To combat this, fumigation and de-ratting measures were introduced, alongside the implementation of rat guards on mooring ropes, to reduce the likelihood of transmission.[120]

Yellow fever, another major concern, was nearly eradicated in British onshore populations by the 1910s, but it continued to impact merchant seamen well into the 1920s. While the Royal Navy had eliminated the risk by 1910, merchant ships were still vulnerable, especially in tropical ports where mosquitoes, which were the primary vectors for the disease, were prevalent. The lack of effective mosquito control aboard merchant ships contributed to ongoing cases. The majority of the affected seamen were not Lascars, as they rarely travelled to tropical African or American ports, except perhaps during wartime. In response to the growing understanding of yellow fever’s transmission by mosquitoes, the British seafarer community began to adopt anti-mosquito measures, though these were implemented slowly.[121]

Lascars were disproportionately affected by several diseases, including those endemic to South Asia, due to their origins and the regions they sailed through. Malaria, amoebic dysentery, and other tropical diseases claimed many lives, contributing to the higher mortality rates among Lascars compared to their British counterparts. The study of these trends highlights how infectious diseases among seafarers were often exacerbated by substandard living conditions aboard merchant ships, where medical resources were limited and preventative measures inconsistent. Additionally, the mortality rates from diseases like syphilis and tuberculosis were influenced by the lack of immediate medical attention and the prolonged nature of these conditions, which often led to death many years after a seafarer's service had ended.[122]

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

Concerns around Lascar health and their association with the disease must be understood within a broader maritime context of poor shipboard conditions and the inequitable distribution of resources, which could foster both physical vulnerability and public suspicion. Aaron Jaffer notes that Lascars were often last in line when it came to the provision of food and water, with severe shortages sometimes affecting only the non-European crew. This differential access to basic sustenance not only heightened the risk of illness among Lascars but also contributed to deep-seated tensions aboard vessels.[123] For instance, Helenus Scott's account of the *Natalia*'s 1779 voyage reflects how Lascars' reliance on rice alone made them more susceptible during times of scarcity, a condition that would have amplified fears of contagion when outbreaks occurred.[124]

The frequent depiction of Lascars in the media and in colonial narratives as inherently unhealthy or disease-prone cannot be disentangled from the squalid and often overcrowded conditions under which they laboured. Jaffer demonstrates that not only did Lascars have to endure inadequate storage and sanitation aboard ships, but they were also vulnerable to blame when illness struck. This framing conveniently shifted attention away from systemic neglect and redirected suspicion onto the bodies of racialised workers themselves. Mutinies, such as those prompted by denied water rations or attempts to poison food due to mistreatment, further fed narratives of Lascars as volatile and dangerous, enabling sensationalist media portrayals during times of crisis, including outbreaks of disease.[125]

Moreover, Jaffer argued that opium usage and occasional alcohol consumption among Lascars was often racialised in contemporary accounts, serving to further stigmatise their health and moral character.[126] These portrayals became especially potent when combined with fear of epidemic diseases like the plague, where Lascar mobility and proximity to port cities made them convenient scapegoats. Thus, as the chapter explores the spectre of the 'Lascar plague', it must foreground these racialised tropes and systemic inequalities that shaped both the lived experiences of Lascars and their media representations during health crises.

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[122] Ibid.

[123] Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780–1860: Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 41–42.

[124] Ibid., 42.

[125] Ibid., 43–44.

[126] Ibid.

3.d. Beriberi:

David Arnold highlights the 'almost exclusive concentration' of beriberi in the Northern Circars of India during the nineteenth century, emphasising its 'apparently non-contagious nature and likely climatic (or, less frequently, dietary) influences'.[127] Medical officers perceived beriberi as an extremely localised disease, reinforcing ideas of 'Indian exceptionalism' in disease patterns, with a continuing emphasis on 'place and climate as determinants of disease'.[128] Arnold notes that W. C. Maclean, former Surgeon-General of the Indian Army, attributed beriberi's causes largely to 'the water, soil and climate of the Northern Circars' exacerbated by 'poverty, insufficient food and clothing'.[129] Reports of south Indian Coolies and Lascars suffering from beriberi reinforced the view of the disease as 'peculiar to south India and its extensions overseas'.[130]

The disease's elusive character was heightened by its 'anomalous nature' and the 'uncertainty over its possible epidemicity', as beriberi was often seen as merely 'a name attached to a set of symptoms' rather than a distinct disease.[131] Confusion persisted with conditions like hookworm anaemia until the late 1880s, creating a 'lamentable confusion' between ancylostomiasis and 'true' beriberi. In 1886, Norman Chevers argued for a major reclassification, suggesting beriberi should be recognised as 'beriberi fever' and placed next to scarlet fever because of 'certain marked features in common'. Chevers' theory linked beriberi to epidemic dropsy, entangling the two diseases in Indian medical literature for decades, a confusion that 'distracted from research on beriberi itself'.[132]

Despite the dominance of epidemic dropsy theories in India, this association 'had no parallel in debates elsewhere' and eventually proved a 'false trail', as epidemic dropsy was later found to be caused by 'contaminated cooking oil' rather than the same factors behind beriberi.[133]

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[127] David Arnold, "British India and the 'Beriberi Problem', 1798–1942," *Medical History* 54, no. 3 (2010): 295–314, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300004622, 300.

[128] Ibid., 300-301.

[129] Ibid., 301

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid., 302.

[133] Ibid.

Internationally, Arnold shows that by the early-twentieth century, beriberi had become an urgent 'international problem', particularly in Japan, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines, where it caused major incapacitation among 'soldiers, sailors, plantation labourers, prisoners and asylum inmates'.[134] In these contexts, dietary explanations, especially regarding polished rice consumption, became dominant following the work of Kanehiro Takaki and Christiaan Eijkman.[135]

India's medical services appeared 'aloof, anachronistic', pursuing 'issues like epidemic dropsy' while international researchers were increasingly focused on nutritional explanations.[136] Modern processing practices were pivotal: mechanised rice milling, Arnold argues, removed thiamine-rich pericarp layers, turning white rice into a 'palatable, prestigious' but nutritionally dangerous staple that contributed to the rapid spread of beriberi. He notes that 'beriberi spread not through contagion... but by the replication of similar institutions and workforces' across Asia, with rice acting as the vector through shared dietary practices.[137]

Despite the disease's impact, Arnold points out that beriberi was rarely mapped territorially like cholera or plague; it was inscribed 'on local sites and institutionalised bodies' rather than across broad swathes of the population, making its broader epidemiology difficult to assess.[138] The *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* report from 18th of May 1894 sheds light on the precarious health conditions aboard ships manned by Lascar crews and the limited medical understanding of diseases affecting them. The inquest into the death of Sheik Yacoob Jamoo, the head Serang of the Lascar deck crew aboard the *Carradale*, revealed that the crew had been struck by yellow fever while off the coast of Rio de Janeiro, leading to the death of a steward. However, by the time the ship reached London, Jamoo's illness was diagnosed as beriberi.[139] This shift in diagnosis highlights both the confusion surrounding tropical diseases at the time and the difficulties Lascars faced in accessing appropriate medical care. Many crew members, fearing abandonment, refused hospital treatment despite their condition, reflecting the precariousness of their employment and their lack of trust in British medical institutions.

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[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 303.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette,* “Lascar's Death,” 18 May 1894, 4.

The inquest findings, particularly the discussion of 'small worms' found in Jamoo's intestines, suggest early but flawed attempts to understand the causes of beriberi.[140] The disease, later identified as a thiamine deficiency, was common among sailors, especially those on long voyages with nutritionally poor diets. Comments made by a number of travellers suggest that Lascars were often 'disproportionately affected by shortages of food aboard ship' which 'undoubtedly served to heighten the huge disparities in the quality and quantity of food eaten by Europeans and Lascars'.[141] This points to broader structural issues, including poor working conditions, inadequate provisions, and neglect of their welfare. The restricted nature of their diet and the practice of 'storing their provisions separately' not only exacerbated nutritional deficiencies but also reflected systemic inequalities.[142] The presence of a sanitary inspector at the inquest underscores the growing concerns about disease transmission in British ports, linking Lascar health to wider fears of contamination.

While Arnold powerfully demonstrates how colonial medicine regulated Indian bodies within the empire, the case of Sheik Yacoob Jamoo highlights dimensions that extend beyond his analysis. The inquest into Jamoo's death reveals how anxieties about disease transmission were not confined to the colonies but actively shaped public health concerns within Britain's port cities.

Moreover, the agency of the Lascars, particularly their refusal to seek hospital treatment due to fears of abandonment, complicates the notion of passive colonial subjects, suggesting that Lascar resistance was shaped by both mistrust of British medical institutions and the precariousness of their employment. Furthermore, the maritime setting introduced distinctive forms of racialised deprivation: segregated and nutritionally poor diets aboard ship heightened Lascar vulnerability to diseases like beriberi, in ways not fully captured by land-based accounts of colonial health disparities. Finally, misdiagnosis was not only a medical failure but an economic threat, with the potential to result in lost wages or forced disembarkation, underscoring how deeply illness intersected with the material insecurities of colonial labour at sea.

3.e. Media Portrayal of the Plague:

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring*, 41.
[142] Ibid.

A *Dundee Courier* report from the 25th of July 1898 details an incident involving plague cases aboard the P&O liner *Carthage*, which had recently arrived in Plymouth. The first case occurred four days before reaching Aden, when a Lascar fireman was struck by the plague. He was landed at Aden for medical care. Shortly after departing Port Said, another native fireman fell ill with similar symptoms. This second man was isolated on a boat on the starboard quarter, attended by native staff until the ship reached Plymouth. By the time of arrival, the second fireman had recovered.[143] This incident sheds light on the health risks faced by Lascar sailors, particularly in the context of maritime travel, where plague outbreaks could spread quickly through confined spaces like ships, especially with Lascars as a highly mobile and often isolated workforce in these global shipping lines.

The Officer of Health inspected the *Carthage* after its arrival, and following an inspection of the passengers and crew, allowed the ship to proceed to London. However, the bedding used by the infected men was destroyed to prevent further contamination.[144] This illustrates the measures taken to prevent the spread of plague aboard ships, with a particular focus on quarantine and the destruction of contaminated materials. It also underscores the vulnerability of Lascars in situations of disease outbreaks, where their living and working conditions aboard ships exposed them to serious health risks. Ports like Plymouth, Liverpool, London, Southampton, and Newcastle emerge as zones of national exposure, entry points through which disease might infiltrate the British body politic. The transient, international character of ports made them sites of acute medical surveillance and control. The arrival of the *Carthage* in Plymouth, for example, triggered medical inspections, destruction of bedding, and quarantine measures, clear signs of how ports were viewed as frontline defences against foreign contagion.

The Echo (London) report from the 31st of December 1898 details concerns over a potential plague case involving a Lascar seaman named Felix Toussaint, who had arrived aboard the *Goleconda* at the Royal Albert Docks. Initially, Toussaint was taken to the hospital in Greenwich but was later transferred to the Sanitary Hospital at Denton, a riverside village near Gravesend. Upon arrival, he was isolated in a separate room and later examined by Dr. Collingridge, the Port Sanitary Inspector of London, and Dr. Williams, the hospital superintendent. It was reported that while Toussaint displayed swollen glands and abdominal pain, symptoms commonly associated with bubonic plague, medical officers were uncertain whether he had the disease.[145] The case underscores the heightened vigilance in British ports regarding plague outbreaks, particularly when dealing with Lascar seamen, who were often subjected to strict quarantine measures due to fears of disease transmission from colonial shipping routes.

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[143] *Dundee Courier*, "Untitled," 25 July 1898, 5.
[144] Ibid.

Despite his condition, Toussaint was reportedly alert and aware of his surroundings, and doctors noted that if he did have the plague, he posed minimal risk of spreading it due to his isolation. However, the uncertainty surrounding his diagnosis highlights broader anxieties about public health in port cities, where maritime trade made places like London, Plymouth, and Gravesend particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases. This case also reflects how Lascar seamen, due to their migrant status and association with ships from colonial territories, were often the focus of medical scrutiny and containment policies.[146] It further demonstrates how port authorities sought to balance containment efforts with a degree of medical uncertainty, as even suspected cases prompted swift isolation and intervention in the interests of preventing outbreaks. Lascars were consistently treated as potential health threats rather than victims of poor working and living conditions. Their presence in British ports often prompted swift, sometimes disproportionate action. Toussaint's ambiguous symptoms were enough to send him into isolation, reflecting deep-rooted anxieties about the colonial 'Other' as a vector of plague.

Furthermore, a *Dundee Courier* report from the 5th of June 1899 details an incident involving a Lascar sailor who had recently been removed to the infectious hospital in Liverpool for treatment of smallpox. In what was reported as a dramatic turn of events, the sailor managed to escape the hospital, running through the city wearing only a shirt, before being apprehended and taken to the district bridewell. This case again shows the vulnerability of Lascar sailors to infectious diseases, as their living conditions, often crowded and unsanitary, made them particularly susceptible to illnesses like smallpox.[147] This escape can be interpreted as a form of resistance akin to the earlier example of Sheik Yacoob Jamoo's refusal of treatment. The sailor's dramatic flight through the city, wearing only a shirt before being apprehended, reveals not just his desperation to avoid hospitalisation but also his resistance to the dehumanising conditions he faced within British medical institutions. Much like Jamoo's refusal of treatment, the escape underscores the mistrust and agency of colonial sailors in the face of systemic neglect and racialised health risks.

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[145] *Echo*, "The Plague," 31 December 1898, 3.
[146] Ibid.
[147] *Dundee Courier*, "Weekly Welcome," 5 June 1899, 2.

Moreover, the incident underscores the public health concerns surrounding infectious diseases in maritime communities during this period. The policeman who came into contact with the sailor was also sent to quarantine and vaccinated, demonstrating the precautions authorities took to prevent the spread of smallpox.[148] This case serves as a reminder of the precarious health risks faced not only by Lascars but also by the wider public in port cities where maritime labourers frequently interacted with local populations. The event illustrates the challenges of managing infectious diseases among the transient, often marginalised, communities of sailors who moved between countries and frequently encountered dangerous outbreaks.

A *Kentish Mercury* report from the 10th of August 1900 further highlights the anxieties surrounding disease outbreaks in Britain's port cities, particularly regarding Lascars and the bubonic plague. Amid wider fears about the spread of the disease, rumours circulated in London newspapers claiming that two Lascar seamen had died from plague at the Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich. However, the Kentish Mercury refuted these claims, clarifying that only one suspected case had been recorded, a Lascar who had already been transferred to an isolation hospital in Gravesend.[149] This demonstrates how Lascars were often associated with disease, whether or not they were actually infected, fuelling public health concerns that sometimes bordered on hysteria. The rapid spread of misinformation suggests that fears about Lascars and contagion were deeply embedded in the public consciousness, reinforcing the perception of these sailors as potential carriers of foreign illnesses.

This episode also reflects the heightened surveillance and isolation measures imposed on Lascars compared to other seamen. That a single suspected case warranted a response strong enough to merit correction in the press underscores how quickly authorities and the media reacted to any hint of disease among colonial subjects.[150] The Seamen's Hospital in Greenwich, historically a key medical institution for maritime workers, became one of the many sites where Lascars were medically scrutinised, reinforcing their precarious position as both essential workers in Britain's maritime economy and perceived health risks to the nation.

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[148] Ibid.

[149] *Kentish Mercury*, "Seamen's Hospital Greenwich," 10 August 1900, 6.

[150] Ibid.

A *London Evening Standard* report from the 22nd of March 1901 provides insight into how cases of bubonic plague among Lascars were handled in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. In Southampton, a Lascar, who had recently arrived on a transport ship, was diagnosed with plague after initially being misdiagnosed by multiple doctors. The eventual confirmation by Dr. Wellesby Harris, Southampton's medical officer, led to strict containment measures, including isolating those who had been in contact with the Lascar and disinfecting the vessel.[151] This case illustrates contemporary anxieties about ships as carriers of disease, with Lascars often cast as the primary threat. The report's suggestion that the sailor contracted plague from an infected rat reinforced such fears, while the use of a hospital ship anchored away from the port reflected both an awareness of risk and a desire to contain the outbreak discreetly.

A *Shields Daily Gazette* report from the 22nd of March 1901 briefly mentions the discovery of a Lascar suffering from the plague after returning from South Africa, which highlights the continued concern about plague outbreaks among sailors and the general vulnerability of Lascars to contagious diseases.[152] This case reinforces the pattern observed in various reports where Lascars, especially those returning from places with endemic diseases like South Africa, were at risk of contracting and spreading diseases like the bubonic plague. Despite Lascars' isolation from mainstream society, the spread of plague to ports such as Southampton reveals how easily disease could travel along global maritime networks. It also underscores the inadequate medical provisions for these sailors, who often had limited access to healthcare, both aboard and upon arrival.

This case, along with others of its kind, emphasises the marginalised status of Lascars in British society. They were typically treated as expendable members of the workforce, and the medical risks they faced were often downplayed or neglected. The plague, in this instance, was treated with the same level of alarm as other outbreaks among seamen, but there was no public outcry or significant intervention until the disease had spread. The brief mention of the Lascar's condition reinforces the routine nature of such deaths among immigrant workers, pointing to how often their suffering went unnoticed until it became a public health concern.[153]

The North Devon Gazette report from the 7th of October 1902 recounts the extraordinary disposal of a Lascar seaman's body at Newcastle Royal Infirmary, driven by fears of bubonic plague. The Lascar, part of a crew aboard a steamer on the River Tyne, fell suddenly ill and was removed to the infirmary, where his symptoms suggested plague. Following his death, authorities, concerned about public health risks, opted to burn the body entirely, rather than conduct a standard burial.[154]

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[151] *London Evening Standard*, "Reported Plague at Southampton," 22 March 1901, 3.
[152] *Shields Daily Gazette*, "Untitled," 22 March 1901, 3.
[153] Ibid.

It was reported that before cremation, samples from the deceased's glands and other tissues were sent to the Local Government Board for analysis, revealing that the death was not caused by plague, but by an illness with similar symptoms.[155] Nevertheless, the Local Government Board defended the actions of the Newcastle authorities, endorsing the incineration as a precautionary measure against potential infection. The Registrar-General in London also accepted this unusual disposal method, deeming the explanation satisfactory.[156]

Notably, the report suggests that the Lascar's religious beliefs may have aligned with cremation, portraying the act as culturally appropriate, though this likely served as a justification for the authorities' decision rather than a genuine consultation with the deceased's community. This case reflects the extreme fear of disease transmission associated with Lascar seafarers, who were often viewed as vectors of contagion due to their maritime work in British imperial trade networks. It also underscores how public health measures could override customary burial practices, revealing imperial anxieties over disease and the racialised treatment of non-European seamen in Britain.[157]

A *Manchester Evening News* report from the 9th of December 1902 sheds light on the vulnerability of Lascar seamen, particularly in relation to workplace injuries and inadequate medical care. Abdul Codare, a young Lascar from the *Clan Farquhar*, initially sought treatment at Birkenhead Borough Hospital for what seemed to be a minor cut on his finger, but despite receiving medical attention, lockjaw (tetanus) set in, leading to a painful death.[158] The fact that such a small injury resulted in a fatal outcome suggests the poor health conditions and lack of preventative care available to Lascar sailors. Unlike their British counterparts, Lascars often lacked access to timely or sufficient medical treatment, making them more susceptible to infections and diseases that could have been prevented or managed with better healthcare provisions.

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[154] *North Devon Gazette*, "Untitled," 7 October 1902, 2.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

[158] *Manchester Evening News*, "Lascar's Death from Lockjaw," 9 December 1902, 3.

The report also highlights a lack of accountability or follow-up in cases involving Lascar deaths at sea. Since the *Clan Farquhar* had already departed, there was no one to explain how Codare sustained his injury, leaving the circumstances of his death ambiguous.[159] This reflects a broader pattern in which the deaths of Lascars were often dismissed with little investigation, reinforcing their disposable status in Britain's maritime workforce. The absence of records or testimonies from shipmates also points to how Lascars, despite being essential to Britain's merchant fleet, were often isolated in death, with few mechanisms in place to advocate for their welfare or ensure justice in cases of negligence.

This case mirrors the Liverpool outbreak of 1905, where authorities concealed news of a Lascar's plague-related death to avoid public alarm.[160] The secrecy surrounding such cases suggests a pattern in how public health crises linked to Lascars were managed, prioritising control over transparency. Additionally, the focus on fumigation and the supposed eradication of rats aboard the transport ship illustrates contemporary understandings of how plague spread and how ports were both entry points for disease and sites of containment.[161] These outbreaks reinforced racialised fears of Lascars as disease carriers, contributing to their broader marginalisation in British society while also shaping maritime health policies that balanced medical science with social prejudices. An article from the *Dundee Evening Post* (February 8, 1905) also provides an example of how Lascar sailors were associated with public health concerns, particularly in relation to disease outbreaks like the plague. The secrecy surrounding the Lascar seaman's death suggests anxieties about the potential spread of infectious diseases, as well as an effort by authorities to avoid public panic.[162]

This case aligns with broader narratives about Lascars being viewed as vectors of disease, a stereotype that contributed to their marginalisation in Britain. The fact that the port medical officers confirmed the case only after the bacteriological examination indicates the perceived necessity of scientific verification before acknowledging the presence of plague. Moreover, the decision to isolate the crew and disinfect the vessel reflects both medical precaution and the broader concerns about colonial-era shipping networks facilitating the spread of disease. This report fits within the larger historical discourse on the 'Lascar plague’, where South Asian seafarers were often scapegoated for outbreaks. It also demonstrates how port authorities exercised control over information related to public health, balancing containment efforts with fears of social unrest. The use of secrecy in handling the incident suggests that the presence of plague in Liverpool was seen as not only a medical issue but also a political and economic concern, given the city's importance as a trade hub.

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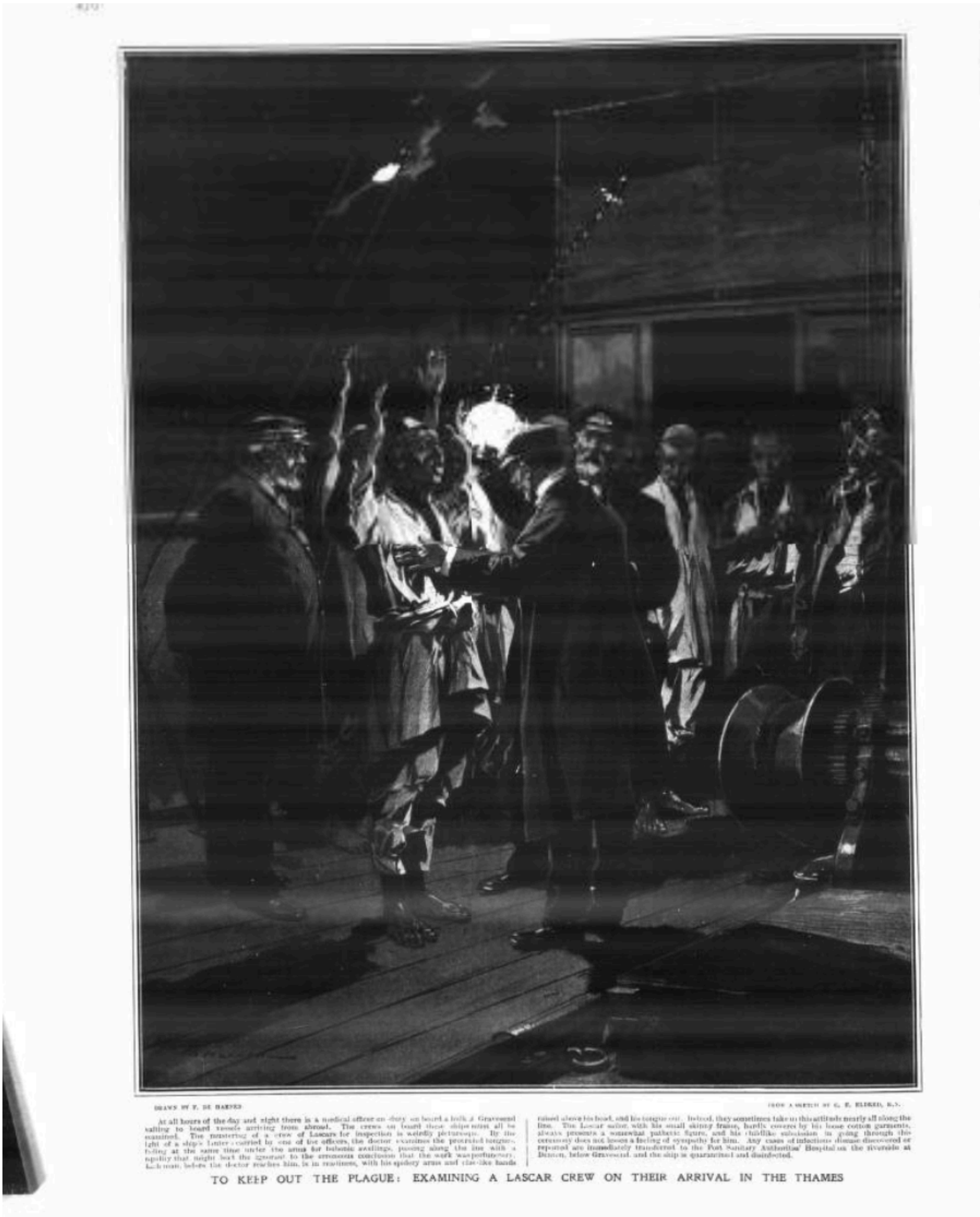
[159] Ibid.
[160] *Dundee Evening Post*, "Plague in Liverpool," 8 February 1905, 4.
[161] *London Evening Standard,* "Reported Plague at Southampton," 22 March 1901, 3.
[162] *Dundee Evening Post*, "Plague in Liverpool," 4.



TO KEEP OUT THE PLAGUE: EXAMINING A LASCAR CREW ON THEIR ARRIVAL IN THE THAMES

Figure 28 The Graphic, To Keep Out the Plague: Examining a Lascar Crew on Their Arrival in the Thames, Saturday 14 October 1905, 6.

This report from *The Graphic* (Figure 18) offers a vivid, almost theatrical depiction of British imperial medical inspection practices targeting Lascar crews arriving in the Thames. Accompanied by an illustration titled *To Keep Out the Plague: Examining a Lascar Crew on*

Their Arrival in the Thames, the article captures both the logistics of plague surveillance and the racialised gaze through which these inspections were framed.

The text describes a scene of nightly medical scrutiny: at Gravesend, a medical officer boarded ships from abroad, especially those crewed by Lascars, to inspect for signs of bubonic plague. The process involved checking tongues and underarm glands for 'bubonic swellings', a typical sign of the disease. The description of the inspection is deeply orientalist, casting the Lascar as both exotic and pathetic, his body 'spidery', his arms 'claw-like', and his submission 'childlike'. These dehumanising descriptors reflect a colonial anxiety not only about disease, but about the racialised bodies thought to carry it.[163] The inspection is described as 'weirdly picturesque', suggesting that it holds a kind of morbid aesthetic appeal for the British observer. This is reinforced by the visual image of Lascars standing in line, tongues out, arms raised above their heads, simultaneously disciplined and displayed. The article notes that this posture is often assumed even before the doctor arrives, implying both habitual compliance and a ritualised performance of subjection.[164]

Despite the supposedly rapid and efficient method of inspection, done by lantern light, the report reassures readers that it is not 'perfunctory', anticipating concerns about medical rigour. However, the speed and theatricality described suggest otherwise, pointing to a symbolic as much as scientific function: to visibly reassert control over colonised bodies as they cross into the imperial metropole.[165] The process concludes with any suspected cases being sent to the Port Sanitary Authorities' Hospital at Denton, and the ship undergoing quarantine and disinfection. This final act underlines the biosecurity role that medical inspection played in British ports, especially when dealing with crews from the colonies.

The article encapsulates the intersection of empire, medicine, and race. It presents a racialised medical drama, where the Lascar body becomes the site of inspection, suspicion, and control, all under the guise of protecting the British public from contagion. It reinforces imperial hierarchies by portraying Lascars as passive, disease-bearing ‘others', and British medical officers as the rational, authoritative agents of cleanliness and civilisation. The description of this medical inspection as a visual spectacle taps directly into national fears about contagion, particularly from colonised spaces, and the anxiety over racial and cultural contamination. The Lascar's body becomes a site of tension, where British fears about disease, race, and imperial control are projected and worked through. This process of inspection and quarantine at the port is not simply about preventing disease but about visibly reasserting control over bodies that are framed as foreign and potentially dangerous. It also serves as a means of reinforcing imperial power by presenting the British medical officers as the rational, civilising force in contrast to the Lascar body, which is portrayed as disorderly and suspect. Thus, the spectacle of the inspection becomes a symbolic reinforcement of both imperial authority and national anxieties.

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[163] *The Graphic*, “To Keep Out the Plague,” 14 October 1905, 6.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.

These newspaper reports illustrate not only the heightened scrutiny of Lascar sailors during plague scares but also the inconsistent and, at times, contradictory nature of the medical response. As Pratik Chakrabarti has argued, *'*Western science was not seen as a monolithic structure imposed from above by the colonial state. There were tensions and a lack of consensus among the colonial officials and physicians regarding the medical policies*'*.[166] This observation is particularly relevant in the context of Lascar sailors, whose treatment varied significantly depending on local authorities, individual medical officers, and shifting public anxieties. In the case of Felix Toussaint, ambiguity around his diagnosis led to an uncertain but strict isolation regime, while in Liverpool, a Lascar's dramatic escape from hospital underscored both his mistrust of institutional care and the unpredictability of responses to suspected illness. The varying responses across Plymouth, Gravesend, Southampton, and Newcastle show that colonial medical interventions were not uniformly applied, but rather shaped by local pressures, bureaucratic interpretation, and racialised perceptions of threat. The newspapers, in reporting these inconsistencies, both reflect and reinforce this dynamic, portraying Lascar health crises not as systemic failures, but as episodic threats requiring emergency containment. In doing so, the media served as both a chronicler and amplifier of the contested space where colonial medicine, racial anxiety, and working-class resistance intersected.

The geographical spread of plague-related incidents involving Lascar sailors between 1898 and 1905 demonstrates that concerns about disease were not confined to a single port but constituted a national, and indeed imperial, phenomenon. Cases documented in ports as far apart as Plymouth, London, Liverpool, Southampton, Newcastle, and Birkenhead, alongside global transit hubs such as Aden and Port Said, reveal a network of maritime vulnerability intricately tied to Britain's imperial shipping routes. Lascar seamen, whose labour underpinned much of the British mercantile fleet, were consistently framed in medical and media discourse as mobile vectors of contagion, reinforcing racialised anxieties about the colonial body as a site of disease. While responses varied in their local implementation, port authorities across Britain repeatedly deployed similar measures, quarantine, hospital isolation, ship disinfection, and, in extreme cases, the incineration of bodies, indicating a shared public health framework. This consistency in approach reflects a broader national strategy that cast Lascars not only as essential workers but also as potential threats to the health of the British population.

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[166] Pratik Chakrabarti, *Medicine and Empire: 1600–1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xxvi.

The fact that even isolated suspected cases, such as those in Gravesend and Newcastle, elicited significant public concern and official intervention illustrates the pervasive fear that maritime commerce could serve as a conduit for epidemic diseases into the metropole. This fear was not based solely on epidemiological realities but was amplified by imperial ideologies that racialised disease and framed colonial subjects as dangerous 'others’. Thus, the ‘Lascar plague’ was less a discrete outbreak than an ongoing social and political condition, one which mirrored Britain's broader struggles to maintain both imperial control and domestic security in the face of increasing global mobility. By examining the spatial and narrative dispersal of these cases across multiple ports, it becomes clear that the phenomenon should be understood not as isolated incidents, but as a manifestation of systemic anxieties about empire, race, and disease at the heart of Britain’s global maritime economy. British ports, as gateways to international trade and cultural exchange, became sites of heightened anxiety as the presence of foreign, racialised labour forces, like the Lascars, was increasingly associated with disease outbreaks. These fears often reflected broader racial and imperial anxieties, where the Lascar community’s perceived 'foreignness' and their proximity to disease were seen as markers of contamination and racial difference. Thus, these cases demonstrate how British ports became symbolic spaces not only of colonial economic activity but also of racial and health anxieties, illustrating a complex intersection of colonialism, race, and public health.

Taken together, these newspaper cases reveal more than isolated incidents of suspected disease; they uncover a broader framework of racialised medical surveillance, maritime control, and imperial health governance at the turn of the twentieth century. The Lascar body, often treated as both a biological threat and a moral suspect, was scrutinised not just through clinical suspicion, but through the anxieties of empire, mobility, and contamination. While authorities responded with quarantine, disinfection, and sometimes cremation, these responses were shaped as much by racialised fears as by scientific certainty. Yet the Lascars were not passive figures within this regime. Instances of resistance, misdiagnosis, and confusion show the limits of colonial authority and the unpredictable nature of medical knowledge in practice. These encounters at ports, hospitals, and on ships show how disease became a site where empire, labour, and race collided, and where the Lascar's presence, however transient, left a powerful and unsettling imprint on the British medical imagination.

3.f. The Working Conditions of Lascars:

The working conditions faced by Lascars and other racialised sailors offer essential context for understanding their heightened susceptibility to disease, which was often misrepresented or obscured in contemporary media portrayals. Tania Bhattacharyya has highlighted how colonial structures racialised communities such as the Sidis and Lascars, often depicting them as inferior, subhuman labourers. This parallels the British approach to Lascar sailors, who were frequently viewed as prone to disease and illness, not because of inherent weakness, but because of the harsh working and living conditions they were subjected to on British ships. Colonial powers viewed the Indian Ocean as a space populated by 'slavers', 'slaves', and 'liberators', where roles were racialised and labour was divided according to perceived racial characteristics.[167] Lascars, like the Sidis, were assigned physically demanding and hazardous jobs such as stokers and firemen, often in poorly ventilated and unsanitary conditions.[168] This contributed to the spread of diseases like cholera and typhoid among Lascar crews, yet the British focused on racial explanations for their sickness, suggesting it was an inherent flaw rather than a product of systemic exploitation and neglect.

In a similar vein, the Sidis' experiences challenge the racial categories imposed upon them. As described by Bhattacharyya, they rejected the homogenising term 'African' in favour of identities like 'Sidi' or 'Habshi', reflecting a complex self-understanding that went beyond colonial racial constructs.[169] Similarly, Lascars resisted the racialised roles forced upon them, even as they were labelled as inherently inferior. The formation of solidarity within communities, like the jamāt among the Sidis, offers an analogy to how Lascars, despite being racialised as 'outsiders' and often scapegoated for illness outbreaks, formed their own support networks on ships and in port cities. They were not just passive victims of British colonial racism; rather, like the Sidis, they sought ways to build collective identity and strength in the face of overwhelming oppression and discrimination.[170] This parallel highlights the broader struggle of marginalised groups to resist colonial classifications and to create meaningful communities and solidarities in an otherwise hostile environment. The integration of former slaves and other non-European workers into the boiler rooms of the empire's steamships was not a random development but rather a deliberate racialised allocation of labour. Steamships like those operated by P&O required enormous coal consumption and thus a vast labour force to work in the stokeholds under intensely gruelling and hazardous conditions. Bhattarcharyya explains how this labour hierarchy mirrored colonial ideologies of race: 'Sidis and freedmen aboard steamships were almost always employed in the stokehold, the boiler and the engine room – the lowest, hottest and most manually exacting parts of the vessel'.[171] This reflects what Bhattacharyya calls the 'racialisation of labour', the systematic relegation of Black and colonised bodies to the most dangerous, devalued, yet essential forms of labour. The steamship economy, in other words, became an arena for enacting and enforcing imperial racial hierarchies. While European stokers were sometimes valued and even paid more for their technical skills, colonial companies discovered it was far more profitable to employ non-European men at lower wages: 'Commercial companies like the P&O … discovered the benefit of employing non-European men as seamen and stokers at far cheaper rates'.[172]

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[167] Tania Bhattacharyya, "Steam and Stokehold: Steamship Labour, Colonial Racecraft and Bombay's Sidi Jamat," *Historical Materialism*, 21 March 2024, www.historicalmaterialism.org/article/steam-and-stokehold/.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

This economic exploitation was legitimised by racial assumptions that positioned Sidis, and other non-Europeans as naturally suited for such physically demanding labour. Despite the backbreaking work, the individuals who powered the steamships were rendered invisible in public memory and historical narrative. Bhattarcharyya brings their presence to light, especially in the inclusion of a sketch in P&O Pencillings that shows Sidis in the stokehold: 'For steamers, you had to have coal. That was difficult and dirty enough. Then you had to have stokers, frequently "seedies" from East Africa, and the "stokehole" where they had to work was indescribable'.[173] This quote underscores both the brutality of the work and the racialised assumptions that informed hiring practices in imperial maritime economies. In sum, the steamship was not just a technological instrument of empire but a racialised space of labour, wherein African-descended peoples like the Sidis were essential yet dehumanised cogs in the machinery of imperial expansion.

The squalid and often dehumanising conditions endured by Indian seafarers on British ships formed a fundamental part of their experience and were integral to the broader dynamics of exclusion and racialised labour. Indian seafarers lived and worked in deeply unequal environments compared to their European counterparts. Despite successive rounds of maritime legislation, Indian crew members were routinely allocated far less living space. Under the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1876, Europeans were entitled to ten superficial feet of space (or 60 cubic feet), while Lascars received just six superficial feet (or 36 cubic feet), a distinction that remained in force even with the 1906 Merchant Shipping Act, which explicitly exempted Lascar quarters from new minimum space requirements.[174] The result was not just discomfort but a documented pattern of overcrowding, filth, and unsanitary conditions that some Board of Trade officials outright refused to enter. One Surveyor declared he 'would not enter them to make a proper inspection... owing to the smell and filth'.[175] Such testimony underscores how spatial inequality aboard ship became a vector for racial discrimination and structural neglect.

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[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

The consequences of these material conditions were not merely symbolic but had life-threatening implications. Medical investigations by the Board of Trade indicated that Lascar seafarers consistently exhibited higher death rates than both their European counterparts and other occupational groups such as the Army and Navy. In 1913–14, Lascars experienced a death rate of 5.4 per 1000 compared to 3.5 for Europeans, and overall death rates in the Merchant Navy were more than double those in the Royal Navy or Army).[176] Diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis were particularly lethal in the crowded and poorly ventilated Lascar quarters. Even as death rates from these diseases declined into the 1930s, Lascars remained disproportionately affected, indicating that improvements lagged significantly behind those for European seafarers. The limited space and unsanitary conditions were not simply occupational hazards but active contributors to preventable illness and death, reinforcing how imperial hierarchies were maintained even within the tight confines of maritime life.[177]

A Parliamentary discussion on 30 June 1904 about the presence of Beriberi among Lascars and Sidi boys directly relates to the themes explored in the article on Lascars and the Sidi jamāt. In the debate, Sir Patrick Manson’s claim that beriberi was 'very common' among Lascars and Sidi sailors shows how racialised labourers were publicly associated with disease. In the debate, Lascar and Sidi sailors are singled out as being especially afflicted by disease while working on British steamships.[178] This highlights the idea that colonial authorities constructed racial categories, labelling Africans, Arabs, and Asians as biologically suited for hard labour, and then used these stereotypes to explain away the brutal conditions they imposed. Beriberi, a disease caused by poor nutrition and harsh shipboard conditions, was prevalent not because of any racial predisposition among Lascars and Sidis, but because they were relegated to the dirtiest, most gruelling jobs aboard ships, where proper food, ventilation, and rest were lacking. Yet the debate frames the disease as something almost natural among these racialised sailors, echoing the colonial belief in 'racial types' inherently linked to disease and degradation. Furthermore, the fact that the Local Government Board president, Walter Long, states that no special precautions were necessary suggests a profound disregard for the well-being of Lascar and Sidi sailors.

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[174] Fidler, *Lascars, c.1850–1950,* 22–23.
[175] Ibid., 23.
[176] Ibid., 23–24.
[177] Ibid., 24.

The poor health outcomes among Lascars were not incidental but structurally produced by the conditions in which they laboured, a point that has been repeatedly demonstrated in earlier chapters. As previously shown, Lascars were disproportionately assigned the most physically punishing, poorly ventilated, and disease-prone sections of the ship, such as stokeholds and engine rooms. These environments, often saturated with coal dust and lacking adequate nutrition or rest, directly contributed to outbreaks of beriberi, cholera, and respiratory illnesses. Still, rather than recognising the health risks as consequences of systemic exploitation, British authorities and medical professionals frequently interpreted these outcomes through a racialised lens, framing Lascars as biologically predisposed to disease. This circular logic, where racialised labour produces poor health, which is then used to justify racial hierarchies, reveals how maritime labour practices were not only economically exploitative but also medically pathologising. These earlier findings help contextualise the official indifference displayed in debates like that of 1904, where the lived experiences and structural vulnerabilities of Lascar sailors were dismissed in favour of narratives that reinforced imperial dominance.

Conclusion

The figure of the 'shivering Lascar' has served throughout this chapter as a powerful lens through which to examine the emotional, political, and racial dimensions of colonial Britain.

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[178] Hansard, "Beri-Beri in the Port of London," *House of Commons Debate*, vol. 137, 30 June 1904, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1904-06-30/debates/2b9e1d9c-770e-4b95-9bd8-e68cb56c5a29/Beri-BeriInThePortOfLondon.

Shivering, while ostensibly a physical reaction to harsh climatic conditions, becomes a multilayered metaphor for abandonment, alienation, and structural neglect, both symptomatic of the harsh conditions Lascars faced and symbolic of their outsider status within the imperial metropole. These sailors, integral to Britain's maritime dominance, were rendered in public discourse as both pitiable victims in need of charity and as figures of anxiety whose presence disrupted the imagined boundaries of national identity.

Nowhere is this duality clearer than in the pairing of the 'shivering Lascar' with the spectre of the 'Lascar plague'. While one image evoked compassion, the other instilled fear. The association of Lascars with disease transformed physical suffering into a moral and racial indictment, casting them as dangerous vectors of contamination within Britain's urban and maritime spaces. In this way, imperial discourse pathologised the Lascar body, presenting it as biologically and emotionally unsuited to British life. This shift, from sympathy to suspicion, mirrored broader imperial logics that justified segregation, surveillance, and the erosion of rights under the guise of public health and national security.

Yet, as this chapter has shown, these representations were not fixed. The Lascar was never simply tragic or threatening, weak or defiant, he was all of these things, depending on the viewer, the moment, and the agenda. By drawing on frameworks of everyday resistance, affective history, and visual culture, we can begin to see how Lascars navigated their conditions with subtle forms of agency, endurance, and adaptation. Acts such as selling issued clothing, refusing institutional uniforms, or clinging to cultural practices were not signs of helplessness but of survival.

The 'shivering Lascar' and the 'Lascar plague' thus emerge not just as tropes of imperial discourse, but as entry points into a deeper understanding of how empire functioned - through emotional regulation, racialised health panics, and the simultaneous exploitation and rejection of colonial labour. In recovering the complex and contradictory ways in which Lascars were represented and responded to, this chapter contributes to a broader project of rehumanising those made marginal by empire and reminding us that beneath every stereotype lies a history of struggle, resilience, and agency.

Chapter Five: Ports of Conflict: 1916, Lascar Resistance, and the Pre-History of the 1919 Race Riots

The Sulleyman Adam case reveals the dynamics of subaltern violence among racialised sailors in British port cities during the early-twentieth century. Port spaces such as Glasgow, Cardiff, Liverpool, etc., were not merely centres of commerce but volatile sites of cross-cultural interaction, often marked by racial tension, economic precarity, and episodic violence. The capacity for violence within these marginalised communities can be understood both as a product of their structural exclusion and as a mechanism for negotiating contested social spaces. This is reflected on an individual scale in the Sulleyman Adam case, where an act of lethal violence emerged from the fraught interpersonal dynamics between racialised sailors navigating both imperial hierarchies and the social pressures of diasporic life. The presiding judge in Adam's trial made clear that the legal verdict could only be murder, emphasising that the act was intentional, unprovoked in legal terms, and carried out with a clear disregard for life. As Andrew Jameson (Lord Ardwall), a Scottish barrister and judge noted in his case report, although there was no evidence of prior malice, the deliberate act of retrieving a knife, stabbing the victim in the chest, and subsequently stabbing him in the back with the broken blade reflected a formed intent to kill.[1]

Therefore, the case of Sulleyman Adam offers a compelling entry point into understanding the long and complex history of subaltern violence in British port cities. In early-twentieth century Glasgow, Adam, a Muslim sailor and British subject, was found guilty of murder in a case that reflected the volatile interpersonal dynamics among racialised seafarers navigating the pressures of imperial hierarchies, diasporic life, and economic marginalisation. Although the court maintained that the act was intentional and unprovoked in legal terms, the jury's unanimous recommendation for mercy pointed to the social and cultural tensions that shaped the incident.[2] The violence here was not merely criminal, but symptomatic of deeper structural conditions: exclusion, racialisation, and the contested nature of belonging in imperial Britain.

This kind of interpersonal conflict, emerging within marginalised communities, can be read as a form of subaltern violence, a concept that disrupts the binary between resistance and criminality. It provides a useful entry point through which to examine broader urban unrest, particularly in port cities like Cardiff. Rather than treating the 1919 Cardiff Race Riots as a spontaneous outbreak of violence, the Adam case urges us to consider a longer, less visible pre-history of conflict, in which racialised individuals negotiated identity, space, and survival in a society structured in dominance. This type of interpersonal violence, while significant on an individual level, mirrors broader patterns of racialised conflict in port cities like Cardiff. Indeed, the Sulleyman Adam case can be seen as a microcosm of the larger-scale violence that erupted during the Cardiff race riots of 1919, an event well-documented in scholarship, but also the earlier 1916 riots, which remain comparatively overlooked despite their clear demonstration of how imperial labour migration, racialised labour hierarchies, and social marginalisation produced volatile, and sometimes violent, urban landscapes. Both the individual case and the collective upheavals point to the ways in which port cities became not only nodes of imperial commerce but also contested spaces where subaltern populations navigated, and sometimes violently contested, the racial and economic fault lines of empire.

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[1] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Report by Andrew Jameson on Case of Sulleyman Adam, 21 October 1910.

[2] Ibid.

Here, Ben Highmore's work in *Everyday Life* becomes particularly illuminating. Highmore invites us to look for the extraordinary in the ordinary, asking provocatively whether, as detectives of the past, we should expect to find obvious evidence, or learn to work with 'slight and obscure traces'.[3] Applying this approach to Cardiff compels us to read the 1919 riots not as an isolated incident but as the visible tip of a submerged history of racialised urban tension. One such trace is found in Cardiff in 1916, a year that saw racially charged disturbances now largely forgotten in mainstream scholarship. These earlier episodes of unrest, emerging from the same dockside communities where Lascars, Arab sailors, and Black British subjects lived, highlight how Cardiff's urban geography was already shaped by imperial entanglements and racialised labour hierarchies. The story of 1916 Cardiff, then, allows us to see how racial identities and subaltern violence were already deeply embedded in the urban fabric before 1919.

To fully grasp the racialised conflicts of 1919 and the moments of upheaval in 1916, it is essential to locate them within a longer history of collective resistance by racialised seafarers, particularly South Asian Lascars, in port cities like Cardiff. As Peter Fryer reminds us in *Staying Power*, 'Black people - by whom I mean Africans and Asians and their descendants, have been living in Britain for close on 500 years'.[4] Long before the mass mobilisations of the postwar period, groups of Lascars were already asserting labour agency and protesting the harsh, often exploitative, conditions of maritime work. Across the 1890s and early 1900s, Cardiff and Newport police courts became key sites where this resistance unfolded, essentially becoming a visible and public challenge to the racialised power structures governing maritime labour. Multiple cases document Lascars refusing to board ships *en masse*, especially vessels destined for ports like New Orleans and Buenos Aires, locations perceived by crews as especially dangerous or beyond the terms they had agreed to. These protests were rarely isolated acts; they often involved large numbers, sometimes over thirty or forty sailors, who collectively refused orders, challenged captains, and brought their grievances into legal space.

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[3] Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 12–13.

Though these challenges were often met with coercion, imprisonment, or forced re-embarkation, they reveal a striking sense of shared purpose and tactical solidarity. In some cases, Lascar crews used interpreters to articulate concerns over unsafe conditions, inadequate clothing, or contractual breaches, and even expressed a willingness to face jail rather than endure unfair voyages. These protests were not union-led but organically forged through the shared experiences of confinement, overwork, and racialised discipline aboard ship. The spatial politics of port cities like Cardiff, where dockside courts, boarding houses, and alleyways intersected with imperial maritime routes, offered temporary reprieve and opportunity for resistance. This pattern of group refusal and confrontation with state and shipping authorities provides an essential pre-history to the more visible, violent clashes of 1919. The earlier actions of Lascars demonstrated that racialised seafarers had long been aware of their power as workers and had developed ways to resist long before the explosion of postwar discontent. Understanding this continuum helps make sense of how and why Cardiff became a focal point of unrest, rooted not only in postwar disruption but in decades of accumulated tension, refusal, and racialised struggle at sea and on shore.

Recognising this pre-history of the Cardiff Race Riots 1919 is crucial. It challenges the idea that racialised conflict was sudden or exceptional and instead positions it as a constitutive element of everyday life in Britain's imperial cities. It also brings people of colour, long marginalised in traditional labour histories, back into the frame, enriching our understanding of urban social dynamics and the entangled legacies of empire, migration, and race. There are now methods in place to research this history. This chapter will look towards Police Photograph and fingerprint registers of the Glamorgan Archives while tracing back examples of disturbances, riots, mobilisation and collective resistance by Cardiff's 'coloured' population in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, leading up to the 1916 and 1919 riots. In addition to this, newspaper articles and records will be consulted to build a picture of racial tension, violence and resistance in Cardiff pre-1919. This is where this chapter will depart from other historians as it will focus on these records to tell this story. Cardiff has been selected as the focal point for this study not only because of its prominent role in the 1919 unrest, but also due to the relative richness and accessibility of its archival collections, which provide rare and detailed insight into the racialised dynamics of everyday policing, labour, and public disorder. In researching this history, this chapter attempts to build on the study of the Black experience in Britain with a specific focus on the spatial relationship between the 'coloured' population and the Cardiff docks.

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[4] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), xi.

The analysis will proceed in three stages. First, it will reconstruct the narrative of the key events identified as 'riots' in 1916 and 1919. Second, it will unpick how these incidents were represented and by whom, paying particular attention to newspapers, judicial commentary, and official reports in framing racialised violence. Third, it will consider what these episodes reveal about wider systemic issues, especially the spatial and structural dimensions of racial tension in Cardiff's docklands. Finally, it will situate these disturbances within a longer trajectory of racial conflict, touching on earlier collective actions by Lascars in the 1890s and early 1900s to show how organised engagement morphed into frustrated riot.

1. What were the Cardiff Race Riots of 1919 and 1916:

The infamous 1919 race 'riots' are etched in the history of Britain, and historians are all too familiar with what occurred during this episode of racial tensions. The Race Riots of 1919 seem to be a watershed moment in British race relations and certainly the moment that most people reflect on when considering the plight of foreign sailors in Britain. Port cities like Cardiff, Glasgow and Liverpool were the main arenas for the race riots in 1919 as Black and other 'coloured' seamen were subject to racial prejudice and attacks over the course of a few nights. However, the term 'riot' has been synonymous with foreign sailors long before the Riots of 1919, most significantly seen through the riots that took place in 1916. Neil Evans and Jacqueline Jenkinson are two of the main historians who have written extensively on these episodes of unrest, helping to contextualise them within the broader histories of labour, race, and empire in Britain's port cities.[5]

In June 1919, Cardiff experienced serious violence during a wave of race riots that happened in British port cities after World War I. These riots were partly caused by rising unemployment among white British sailors, many of whom had just left the military. Some trade unions blamed Black, Arab, and Chinese sailors for taking jobs from white men, and they pushed for only white workers to be hired. In Cardiff, as in other cities like Glasgow and Liverpool, tensions grew in dockside areas where sailors from different backgrounds lived close together. There were also problems with housing shortages and racism. Many white people were angry about Black men having relationships with white women, which added to the violence.[6]

The Cardiff riots in June were some of the worst in the country. Homes and boarding houses were attacked, and people were beaten, and at least three people were killed.[7] Black and minority ethnic residents were often blamed and arrested, even when they were defending themselves, while white attackers were given lighter sentences for similar offences.[8] These riots showed the deep racism in Britain following the First World War and the struggles faced by people of colour who had settled in port cities like Cardiff.

These clashes formed part of a wider pattern of racial unrest that affected many British ports during the difficult postwar transition, particularly as demobilisation placed added pressure on housing and employment. In the immediate aftermath of the violence, legal proceedings were swiftly initiated. In Cardiff alone, 28 people faced prosecution, comprising 10 men of colour and 18 white individuals. The sentences handed down varied significantly, ranging from cautions and fines to discharges and, in some cases, up to 20 months of hard labour.[9] It is easy to explain the 1919 riots only as a product of post-war conditions, demobilisation, unemployment, housing shortages, and resentment towards colonial seamen, but this interpretation risks being too narrow. Such a reading overlooks the longer history of hostility and structural racism in Britain's port cities, where tensions had already erupted before the end of the war. By looking back to the disturbances of 1916 and beyond, we can see that the violence of 1919 was not an isolated response to wartime dislocation, but part of a deeper pattern of exclusion and scapegoating directed against Black and foreign sailors.

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[5] Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Neil Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," *Llafur: Journal of Welsh Labour History* 3, no. 1 (1980): 5–29.
[6] Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 72–73.
[7] Ibid., 85.
[8] Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," 18.
[9] Ibid.

1.a. 1916 Riots:

On Monday, 31st July 1916, a man named Mohammed Hammet was allegedly attacked on Hayes Bridge in Cardiff. The story appeared under the headline ‘Alleged Cardiff Outrage’, a framing that already casts doubt on the victim’s account and raises questions about how committed the authorities were to investigating the case.[10] While newspapers reported that the police searched for the assailant, the use of the word 'alleged' makes it difficult to know how genuine or sustained these efforts really were. A few weeks later, another incident was reported involving a man of the same name in what had by then been identified as the 1916 Cardiff ‘riots’. It is likely that both references concern the same individual. However, this assumption also highlights a wider problem with contemporary reporting: newspapers often misnamed or confused men of colour, treating them as interchangeable, which makes it hard to establish with certainty who was being referred to. This unreliability is not a minor detail but a serious challenge for historians, since it complicates our ability to trace events and individuals in moments of racialised conflict. The precise causes of the 1916 Cardiff riots cannot be reconstructed with certainty, as our understanding is mediated almost entirely through newspaper reports and fragmented official records, both of which were shaped by racialised and politically charged frameworks of interpretation.

In reports of the initial attack on Hammet on 31st July, the *Western Mail* described him as an Arab, while another source referred to him as a Greek sailor.[11] Therefore, it is important to be careful when reading these newspapers and understanding the complexities surrounding ethnic identities and the understanding of these during the period. Fortunately, through the photograph archives in Glamorgan, we are able to find pictures of those involved in these riots and can see physical features that suggest which ethnic groups these men may belong to, an approach that is discussed further below. However, the way newspapers reported these identities was not neutral; perceptions of ethnicity were often shaped by broader political and social biases.

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[10] *Western Mail*, “Alleged Cardiff Outrage,” 2 August 1916, 3.

[11] *Western Mail*, “Cardiff Street Affray,” 1 August 1916, 6.

The instigating action of the riot was reported to be a fight on Saturday, 12th August, between what newspapers described as an 'Arab' and a 'negro', resulting in the latter's arrest and the former's injury. The attack in question was from James Adams, who was described as a 'negro', who attacked the man described as an Arab, Ahmed Aden.[12] The specific incident unfolded when Adams, reportedly fuelled by 'bad feelings', approached the door of No. 49 Loudoun Square, a boarding-house where the prosecutor was lodging.[13] Upon Ahmed Aden answering the door, Adams allegedly struck him to the ground with a stick and proceeded to stab him twice in the face with a knife, narrowly missing the eye.[14]

The *Western Mail* explained to its readers:

> For the information of the acquainted with the peculiarly cosmopolitan character of this neighbourhood it should be stated that the men commonly classed as Arabs, are for the most part, natives of Somaliland … Those who come under the category of 'coloured men' as distinct from the Arabs, are principally West Indians and West Africans.[15]

This shows that, during the riot, men described as Arabs, primarily Somali and likely including Yemeni sailors, tended to act together in solidarity, while the 'coloured men' or 'negroes', described as West African and West Indian sailors, also formed their own aligned group. The incident highlights both the alliances and divisions along ethnic and racial lines within this cosmopolitan neighbourhood.

The main part of the riot occurred on Sunday, August 13th, when it was reported that at around 2:30 pm there was a quarrel between an Arab and a 'coloured' man, which transformed into a complete riot.[16] Boarding-houses, the focal points of the confrontation, bore the brunt of the violence, with sticks, staves, and dumbbells becoming the instruments of choice. The clash reverberated through the district from Peel Street to Loudoun Square, leaving a trail of smashed windows and wrecked boarding-houses. During this episode, the police, led by Acting Superintendent Ben Davies, Acting-Superintendent Charles Jones, and others, were forced to deal with the ongoing riots.[17] A truncheon charge through several streets from Peel Street, Maria Street, Christina Street, Sophia Street, on to Loudoun Square, was needed to bring the unrest under control after about two hours of disorder. Windows and doors of boarding houses were found smashed, and many individuals had sustained injuries.[18]

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[12] *Western Mail*, "Cardiff Street Melee," 15 August 1916, 3.
[13] *Western Mail*, "Sequel to Racial Riots in Cardiff," 4 November 1916, 8
[14] Ibid.
[15] *Western Mail*, "Riotous Scene, Street Fighting Cardiff," 14 August 1916, 2.
[16] Ibid.

It was reported that several revolver shots were heard during the riot while 14 men were treated at King Edward VII's Hospital, three of whom were detained due to serious injuries. All the men treated at the hospital were identified as Arabs, predominantly suffering from head wounds, with several also sustaining fractured fingers, however, their identities remain unclear. Six men, three from each faction, faced arrest and were set to appear before the magistrates on Monday, 14th August.[19] It appears from police fingerprint and photograph records that the six men who were charged with these riots on Sunday, 13th, were Gustas Laurence, Ralph Thompson, Edward Cousins (West Indians and West Africans) and Ahmed Benahamed, Mohamed Smailie, Mohomed Hamed (Arabs).[20] Other individuals involved over the course of the entire series of events included Ali Mohammed, Ahmed Benahmed, and Mohammed Tard (Arab), while James Adams, Joseph Thompson, and Tom Bestman (West Indian and West African) were identified as part of the opposing group.

Following the riots, Ali Mohamed (21) faced charges of wounding Jesiah Francis Sawyer, but ultimately, all charges were dropped as there was no evidence offered.[21] Mohammed Hamed was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, while Mohammed Tard was sentenced to three months. Ahmed Benahamed and Mohamed Smailie were handed six-month and nine-month sentences respectively. James Adams was discharged, while Gustas Laurence was sentenced to three months' imprisonment along with Ralph Thompson and Edward Cousins. Additionally, Joseph Thompson and Tom Bestman, both participants in the Cardiff riot, were sentenced to two months in prison for assaulting Arab Mohamed Ahmed.[22]

The *Western Mail*'s coverage, heavily relied upon here, reflects its longstanding antagonism toward working-class and radical political movements. Its framing, especially the use of

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Glamorgan Archives, Fingerprint and Photographic Register, 1914–1918, DCONC/3/2/4.
[21] *Western Mail*, "Cardiff Docks Melee," 18 August 1916, 3.
[22] *Western Mail*, "Cardiff Riot Sequel," 31 August 1916, 3.

'alleged', casts doubt on the credibility of victims like Hammet and potentially downplays the seriousness of police response. The antagonistic relationship between the *Western Mail* and working-class and radical political movements helps to explain the newspaper's framing of events like the 1916 Cardiff riots, particularly its treatment of colonial seamen and striking workers. The *Western Mail* was not a neutral observer, but a politically driven outlet with longstanding ties to Conservative interests and a history of portraying organised labour, and by extension, any disruption of the economic or social order, as suspect or dangerous.[23] By 1916, amid wartime anxiety, industrial unrest, and racial tensions in port cities like Cardiff, the paper was part of a wider media culture that often reinforced narratives of disorder rooted in xenophobia and hostility to labour agitation.

Given the *Western Mail's* coverage of later events, such as the vilification of striking miners during the 1926 General Strike and its efforts to 'divide the workers against themselves'.[24] The *Western Mail*'s coverage of the 1916 riots likely reflected this same impulse: to cast unrest as a breakdown of discipline, fuelled by foreign influence or agitators, rather than as a symptom of systemic inequality, racialised labour exploitation, or legitimate worker grievance. As with its earlier responses to Chartist and trade union activity, the press sought to delegitimise subaltern agency.[25] This aligns with David Featherstone's emphasis on how marginal places defined by seafaring were often articulated as integral to imperial power yet simultaneously produced unruly and radical political cultures.[26] Cardiff's dockside communities can be read as sites where subaltern resistance emerged, and where dominant institutions, including the press, worked to suppress or pathologise such activity.

The *Western Mail* received significant financial backing from the Conservative Marquess of Bute and was closely aligned with the political and economic interests of both the Welsh and British elite. Its ownership and editorial direction were closely tied to Conservative Unionist agendas, particularly in Cardiff, where the Bute family held significant commercial power.[27] This positioning meant that the paper was less a platform for journalistic independence and more a tool for reinforcing elite perspectives on social order, imperial commerce, and national identity. Editors exercised little autonomy; decisions over content and tone were ultimately in the hands of proprietors, reflecting their priorities and concerns.[28]

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[23] David M. Barlow, Philip Mitchell, and Tom O'Malley, *The Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 54.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 59.
[27] Barlow et al., *The Media in Wales*, 44.

As such, the *Western Mail* catered to an Anglophone, middle-to-upper-class readership, comprising shipowners, merchants, and professionals with vested interests in Cardiff's docklands economy and imperial trade networks.[29] Its reporting on issues like Lascar desertion, race riots, or seafaring unrest was likely framed through a lens of discipline, stability, and authority, rather than social justice or structural critique. This reflects a broader nineteenth-century media landscape in Wales where newspapers functioned as extensions of political and religious interests rather than neutral observers, with the *Western Mail* standing out as a commercially successful yet deeply politicised voice.[30]

1.b. Friction in a Colonial Port: Race, Space, and Conflict in Butetown, 1914–1916

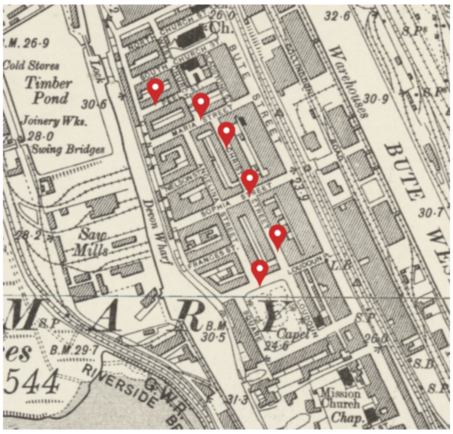

Figure 19 Map of Butetown with Peel Street highlighted with red icon at the top, subsequently followed by the route of the riot down to Loudoun Square. Base Map: National Library of Wales, no date. Locations of Streets: Western Mail - Monday 14 August 1916, 2.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 52.

[30] Ibid., 42.

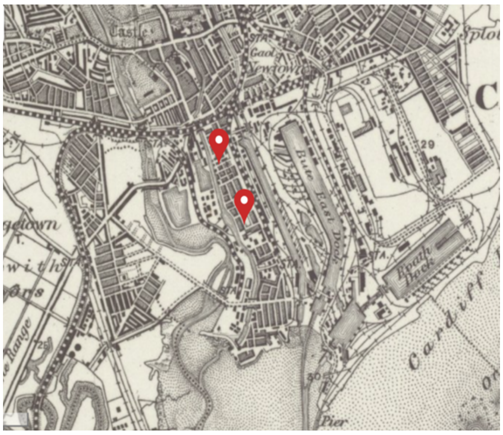

Figure 20 Map of Cardiff Docks with the Peel Street (top icon) and Loudoun Square (bottom icon) shown. Base Map: National Library of Wales, no date. Locations of Streets: Western Mail - Monday 14 August 1916, 2.

As Cardiff's docks expanded into a hub of imperial trade and migration, Butetown emerged as a contested colonial port where race, labour, and space increasingly collided. In the nineteenth century, Cardiff and other South-East Wales Ports began to grow as a result of the rise in coal trade and by the turn of the twentieth century, Cardiff became the number one coal exporting port in the world, second only to London in total tonnage of cargo cleared in Britain, and the largest tramp shipping port in Britain.[31] To put this in perspective, in 1862, coal exports from Cardiff exceeded two million tons per annum.[32] However, by 1900, this had risen to 7.5 million in 1900 and to 10.5 million tons by 1913.[33] Neil Evans identifies the expansion of Cardiff's multi-racial community beginning to assemble in the late-nineteenth century as a result of the 'far-flung reach of its coal trade' gathering seamen from many parts of the globe.[34] However, it was not until the outbreak of war that manpower shortages made it necessary to transfer British colonial seamen, who had previously worked on well-defined routes, onto other routes to meet wartime demands.[35]

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[31] Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," 5.

[32] David Jenkins, *Shipowners of Cardiff: A Class by Themselves* (United Kingdom: University of Wales Press, 2013), 2.

[33] Ibid., 26.

[34] Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," 6.

The scale of this expansion not only transformed Cardiff into a global port city but also reshaped its demographic profile, as the demands of war and the far-reaching coal trade drew an increasingly diverse population into Butetown. Data shows that in 1911, there were fifty-seven different nationalities recorded as living in Tiger Bay.[36] There were 3,894 foreign-born people within Cardiff, while there were also 1,304 colonial-born.[37] These represented 2.2% of the town's 182,259 population. The permanently settled 'coloured' population was smaller than this, as these figures include many people of white skin; one contemporary estimate put the 'coloured' population at about 700 at the outbreak of war in 1914. Other 'coloured' men would be in port on a transient basis, but there seems to be no way of measuring this. Regardless, Cardiff remained second only to London for its population, which was foreign-born in 1911.[38] Jenkinson's analysis of the 1919 riots provides interesting context for the conflict in 1916. She highlights the growing presence of Arab sailors following the commencement of the war, as she states, 'Arab sailors attracted by enhanced wartime wage rates moved to Cardiff in increasing numbers during the First World War. Of an estimated 25 Arab boarding houses in Cardiff in 1918, the majority had opened since the outbreak of the war.'[39] Evans has suggested that there were 1,000 Arabs in Cardiff by 1916, a threefold increase from the pre-war level, while the 'coloured' men were estimated at 700.[40]

The rapid growth of Cardiff's multi-racial community, intensified by wartime labour demands and the influx of Arab seamen, set the stage for new forms of friction within the docklands. These demographic shifts created conditions in which racial tension and competition over work and space would erupt, culminating in the riots of 1916. The Cardiff riots of 1916 offer a complex window into the spatial and racial dynamics of early-twentieth century Britain. These incidents, centred around the district of Butetown, also known as Tiger Bay, reveal the intricate ways in which geography, labour, race, and imperial structures intersected in Britain's port cities. Rather than viewing these riots simply as moments of breakdown or disorder, they must be understood as part of a broader diasporic and urban struggle, shaped by colonial migration, economic precarity, and spatial proximity.

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[35] Ibid., 8.

[36] Lucy Andrew and Catherine Phelps, eds., *Crime Fiction in the City: Capital Crimes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 31. Accessed via ProQuest Ebook Central, 21 December 2023.

[37] Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," 6.

[38] Ibid., 6.

[39] Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 18.

[40] Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," 8.

Butetown's geography was central to this dynamic. The district, approximately a mile long and a quarter-mile wide, was tightly bound between the Bute Docks to the east and the main railway line to the west.[41] The streets most frequently mentioned in accounts of the unrest, Maria Street, Sophia Street, Peel Street, Christina Street, and Loudoun Square, were all concentrated within this small area. As shown in *Map 1* (Figure 19), these streets were located within just a few minutes' walking distance from one another, bounded closely by the Bute Docks to the east and the main railway line to the west. This compact geography meant that communities that may have harboured cultural or occupational rivalries, such as Arab seamen and Black Caribbean labourers, were living quite literally side by side. The spatial intimacy of these groups made both cooperation and conflict inescapable facets of daily life.

Map 2 (Figure 20) provides a broader spatial perspective on Butetown's layout, situating the cluster of unrest within the wider geography of Cardiff. It reveals how closely the district sat in relation to the city's commercial core to the north and the docks to the east and south, positioning Butetown at a literal and social crossroads between industry, commerce, and marginality. This wider view emphasises how compressed the district truly was, hemmed in by dock infrastructure, tidal flats, and railway lines, creating a confined environment in which diverse communities were concentrated. The placement of the red markers shows how the episodes of unrest were not isolated incidents but occurred within a small, tightly knit area, just minutes apart on foot. Glamorgan historian W.R. Owen stated, 'when night fell, Cardiff became a divided city of two civilisations, the white and the dark. Each civilisation kept itself to itself and the dividing line was at Hayes Bridge'.[42] This underscores the racial and social divisions within Cardiff. By describing the city as divided into two 'civilisations', Owen emphasises the deep-seated segregation and lack of interaction between the white and non-white communities. Hayes Bridge acting as the dividing line suggests that the separation was not just social but also physical, with each community remaining within its own distinct area, especially after nightfall.

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[41] Jane Aaron, Henrice Altink, and Chris Weedon, eds., *Gendering Border Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 225-226. Accessed via ProQuest Ebook Central, 21 December 2023.
[42] Andrew and Phelps, *Crime Fiction in the City*, 31.

Owen's assertion encapsulates the intimate yet divided nature of Butetown, again highlighting the diverse mix of ethnic groups and nationalities residing in the compact area. The reference to Hayes Bridge becomes particularly poignant, serving as the site of the first attack on Mohammed Hammet in 1916, a pivotal event in the racial tensions of that year. In this sense, *Map 2* (Figure 20) reinforces how Butetown's geography, narrow, bounded, and overlaid with competing uses of space. shaped the conditions that allowed conflict to flare and spread rapidly. With the red markers indicating Peel Street at the northern end and Loudoun Square at the southern edge, the map reveals how the violence unfolded over a relatively short but densely populated stretch of the district. The distance between these two points is minimal, just a few minutes' walk, underscoring how quickly unrest could travel through such a tightly confined space. By 1911, the district housed 7,135 residents within less than a square mile, of whom 1,187 (16.6%) had been born outside Britain or Ireland.[43] This represented a striking rise from just 353 overseas-born residents in 1881 (4.3% of the population) to 717 by 1901 (10.3%), reflecting the steady accumulation of seafaring and migrant communities.[44] The census also shows that these newcomers were overwhelmingly male (86% in 1911) and often single or living in boarding houses, with over 60% of overseas-born residents recorded as unmarried.[45] Such figures underline how tightly packed and socially precarious the area was: a district at once crowded, transient, and ethnically diverse. This progression through the heart of Butetown highlights not only the compactness of the area but also its vulnerability to rapid escalation.

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[43] Jenna R. Twyford-Jones, *Cardiff's "Tiger Bay": The Formation of a "Sailortown," Immigration, Urban Development, and Media Portrayal, c. 1880–1939* (PhD diss., University of Portsmouth, 2022), 83.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

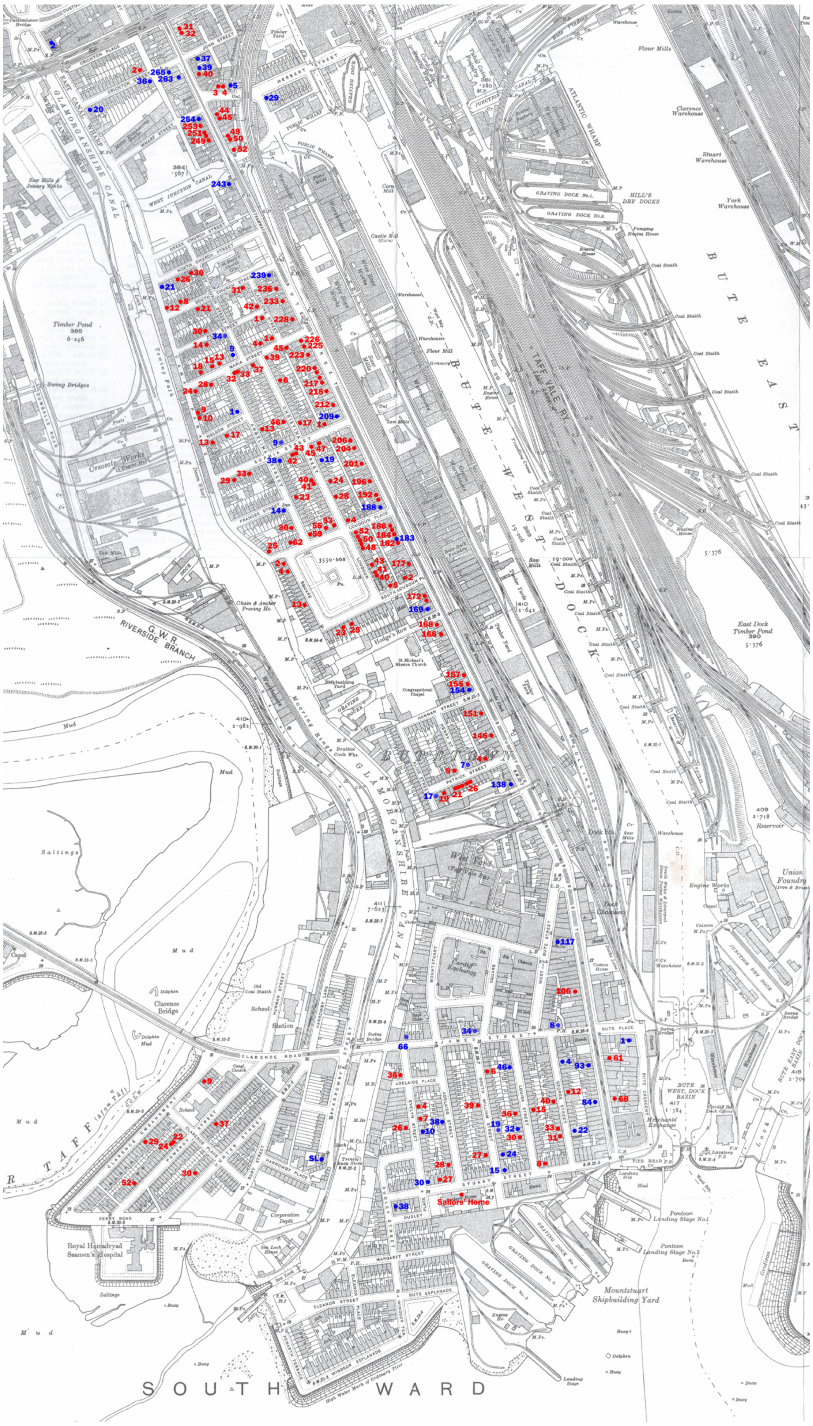
BUTE EAST
BUTE WEST DOCK
GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
TAFF VALE RY.
Timber Pond
G.W.R. RIVERSIDE BRANCH
Flour Mills
Sailors' Home
Royal Hamadryad Seamen's Hospital
Mountstuart Shipbuilding Yard
East Dock Timber Pond
Union Foundry
SOUTH WARD

Figure 21 Tiger Bay & the World. 2020. Map of Butetown and Tiger Bay Lodgings for Seafarers and Public Houses during WW1. People's Collection Wales. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1619161.

Map 3 (Figure 21), which plots the addresses of boarding houses in red and public houses in blue, reveals the intimate geography of Butetown's social life during the First World War. The clustering of boarding houses reflects the density of transient seafaring populations, particularly those employed in the engine rooms, who made up more than two-thirds of the 319 overseas seafarers recorded as lodging in the area. These houses were not evenly distributed but tightly concentrated within the streets most associated with unrest, Maria Street, Peel Street, Sophia Street, Christina Street, and Loudoun Square, indicating how central boarding houses were to the daily rhythms of the district. Interspersed among them were the numerous public houses, which formed the other half of this infrastructure of sociability. The map shows that within a few steps of most boarding houses, there was a pub, highlighting how leisure, rest, and labour were spatially entwined. This close proximity meant that quarrels which began in cramped boarding houses often spilt out into the streets and were amplified in the more public and volatile atmosphere of local drinking houses.

What this spatial layout suggests is that Butetown's infrastructures of lodging and leisure were not neutral spaces but actively shaped by patterns of cohesion and conflict. The concentration of seamen in a small number of streets, combined with the ready availability of alcohol and the presence of large crowds, created conditions that could quickly escalate tensions into collective disturbances. The map also highlights how limited the options were for colonial seafarers: there were few alternative sites of recreation or respite beyond these boarding houses and pubs. Unlike middle-class areas of Cardiff, where residential and leisure spaces were spatially segregated, Butetown's compressed geography blurred the boundaries between domesticity, sociability, and conflict. In this way, *Map 3* visually reinforces the argument that the 1916 riots were not simply the result of interpersonal disputes but were produced through the very spatial organisation of the district. It demonstrates how Butetown's urban form, densely packed, bounded by docks and railways, and organised around boarding houses and public houses, both sustained diasporic life and made it vulnerable to eruption.

Boarding houses were flashpoints of tension as well as spaces of intimacy and cultural transmission. Their significance is clear in a number of major disturbances. In July 1914, for example, the *Western Mail* reported on a violent outbreak in a boarding house on Maria Street, where a conversation between Arabs and West Indians escalated into a street brawl involving dozens of men armed with shovels, sticks, and other makeshift weapons.[46] Similarly, the 1916 riots also began with disputes that spilt from the cramped quarters of these houses into the public sphere, triggering widespread unrest. These incidents underscore what Doreen Massey has called the 'power geometry' of space, where spatial arrangements both reflect and reinforce social and racial hierarchies.[47]

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[46] *Western Mail*, "A Racial Feud," 31 July 1914, 7.

Tiger Bay functioned as both a refuge and a pressure cooker for colonial seamen. Boarding houses offered seafarers some respite from the abuses of shipboard life, and the area itself was a hub of diasporic settlement, religious practice, and community-building. Yet the same confined geography intensified tensions. This duality is vividly expressed in a *Western Mail* report from the week of the 1916 riots, which described police raids on opium dens in boarding houses and noted that the men, as they were marched to the police station, were watched by 'thousands' of onlookers. It was reported that these raids left the docks area in greater excitement than the riots.[48] These micro-spaces became arenas where imperial subjects from different parts of the world navigated the challenges of cohabitation in Britain's imperial core. The idea that seamen who settled brought with them their cultural traditions, establishing diverse social and religious institutions, can be seen in full effect here as it played out in such a small, confined space.[49]

Scholars such as Gill Valentine have argued that physical proximity between ethnic groups in urban settings does not necessarily lead to intercultural understanding.[50] The Cardiff case illustrates this clearly. Despite shared experiences of marginalisation, the diversity of Butetown did not always translate into solidarity. As Valentine's research shows, everyday contact between different groups often lacks meaningful interaction and can even reinforce existing divisions when shaped by inequality, competition, or mistrust.[51] This is evident in both the 1914 and 1916 riots, where relatively minor disputes spiralled into major confrontations. In one case from 1914, a friendly conversation turned violent after a perceived slight, leading to a large-scale brawl involving men from across the area, reportedly drawing in hundreds of participants and spectators. Valentine's caution, that contact does not automatically lead to cohesion, helps illuminate why seemingly diverse yet coexistent communities could erupt into violence. Rather than viewing Butetown as a multicultural success story, it is more accurate to see it as a fragile patchwork of communities navigating shared space under structural pressures that often-reinforced division rather than unity.

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[47] Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 59–69.
[48] *Western Mail*, "Chinatown Raid," 18 August 1916, 2.
[49] Aaron et al., *Gendering Border Studies*, 224-25.
[50] Gill Valentine, "Living with Difference: Reflections on Geographies of Encounter," *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 3 (2008): 323–337, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309133308089372.
[51] Ibid.

These forms of intra-racial friction differed significantly from later racialised violence in Britain. Christopher Hilliard's analysis of the 1958 Notting Hill riots, for instance, shows how postwar race relations often revolved around white resistance to the presence of Black neighbours in formerly white spaces. In those cases, violence became a mechanism for asserting white control.[52] In areas like Brixton and Notting Hill, 'friction', a term used by housing authorities, described the growing antagonisms between white tenants and newly arrived Black residents, especially when the latter became landlords or even co-tenants in subdivided, low-quality housing.[53] By contrast, the 1916 Cardiff riots involved no white incursion but were rather the result of intense competition and rivalry among racialised groups already sharing the same urban space. Here, 'friction' was not merely about racial difference, but about proximity, masculinity, economic precarity, and a complex imperial urban ecology. These were not riots caused by white incursion, but by subaltern conflicts within shared racialised space.

The contained nature of this violence also shaped how it was perceived publicly. Unlike the later 1919 or 1958 riots, which drew widespread attention because of the visible intrusion of white mobs into racialised neighbourhoods, the 1916 disturbances remained largely confined within the docklands. As the *Western Mail* observed at the time, 'Racial faction fighting are not infrequent occurrences in the Cardiff docks districts and come and go without arousing much interest outside the circles immediately concerned'.[54] This framing underscores how the riots were rendered less visible, perceived as part of the ordinary turbulence of the docks rather than a broader social crisis.

As such, the 1916 violence reveals how urban racial conflict in Britain did not always follow the model of white aggression against Black or Brown populations. Instead, the event reflects the tensions that could arise within colonial diasporas, where different groups, all subject to marginalisation, found themselves competing for housing, employment, and status. Unlike the 1919 riots, where white mobs invaded Butetown, or the 1958 riots in Notting Hill, where white violence was directed at Black households, the 1916 Cardiff riots were an eruption of friction from within, shaped by overlapping identities and imperial trajectories rather than a singular racial binary.[55]

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[52] Christopher Hilliard, "Mapping the Notting Hill Riots: Racism and the Streets of Post-war Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 93, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 47–68, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbac012.

[53] Ibid.

[54] *Western Mail*, "Riotous Scene, Street Fighting at Cardiff, 14 August 1916, 2.

Understanding Cardiff as a diasporic port city helps frame these events in global terms. As Ishan Ashutosh argues, ports are not just sites of movement but infrastructures that shape diasporic life, reproducing both connections and separations. His concept of diaspora urbanism is crucial here: Butetown was an urban node within imperial labour circuits, a space where migrants from across the British Empire reconfigured their identities through daily struggle.[56] The 1916 riots, then, were not an isolated rupture but part of a longer negotiation of identity and belonging within colonial modernity.

Simon Peplow offers another useful interpretive lens by framing riots as a form of collective bargaining. In his reading, crowds in moments of unrest express the frustrations of politically excluded populations.[57] The Cardiff riots, though lacking formal organisation or leadership, embodied precisely this kind of subaltern visibility. For Arab, West African, and West Indian men, integral to the functioning of the British Empire yet socially excluded, the riot became a way to occupy and contest urban space. As Peplow argues, such moments should not be dismissed as senseless violence but understood as rational responses to structural exclusion.

The localised nature of the 1916 Cardiff riots distinguishes them further from the 1919 riots in the same city and the later disturbances in London. Unlike those events, which often involved external mobs entering multi-ethnic areas, the 1916 violence was rooted in the internal dynamics of a single neighbourhood. It was a riot from within, not from outside, a manifestation of everyday tensions under extraordinary pressure. As such, it offers a vital case study of how empire, migration, and urban spatiality intersected to produce conflict not only between racialised and white populations, but within Britain's own colonial diaspora.

1.c. Key faces of the 1916 Riots:

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[55] Ibid. 50

[56] Ishan Ashutosh, "The Spaces of Diaspora's Revitalization: Transregions, Infrastructure and Urbanism," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 5 (2020): 898–918, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519868765.

[57] Simon Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain: Racism, Resistance and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 2.

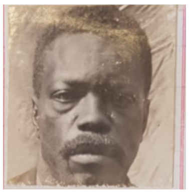
Figure 22 James Adams charged with wounding on 14-8-1916.

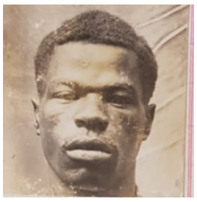
Figure 23 Gustas Laurence charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

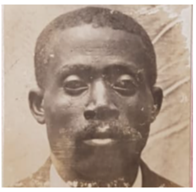
Figure 24 Ralph Thompson charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

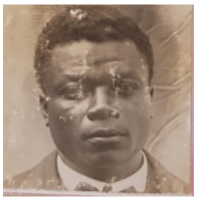
Figure 25 Edward Cousins charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

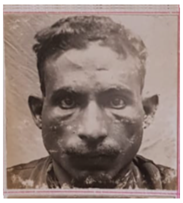
Figure 26 Ahmed Benahmed charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

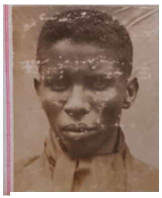
Figure 27 Mohamed smaile charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

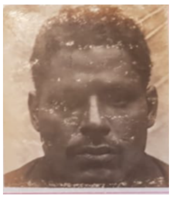
Figure 28 Hamed Mahomed or Hammatt charged with Riots on 14-8-1916

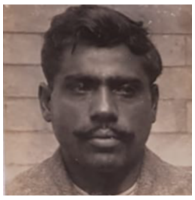
Figure 29 Mahomed Tard or Freed –charged with wounding on 15- 8-1916

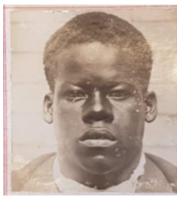
Figure 30 Joseph Thompson – charged with wounding 15-8-1916

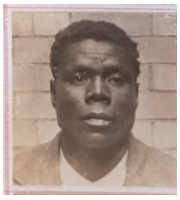
Figure 31 Tom Bestman charged with wounding on 15-8-1916

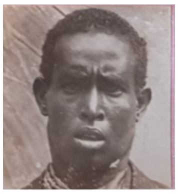
Figure 32 Mohamed Ali charged with wounding and riots on 17-8-1916

All Pictures from Glamorgan Archives.

Picture archives are an interesting development in the study of the Black presence in Britain, and the work of Caroline Bressey is key in the development of the use of photographs. Bressey states that we are ‘unable to utilise more traditional methods of research, due to the absence of colour in the census returns, birth, death or marriage certificates, hospital admission registers, or prison registers, etc., photographs have become an important primary source'.[58] Bressey highlights that in using archives we can no longer assume that everyone in the archives who is not allocated another colour is white and that although the use of photographic archives as a primary source is not without problems, they represent important points of departure from traditional views of the British archives. In the case of the 1916 riots the photographs provide a key understanding of the racial and ethnic differences between the main characters of the riots.

The police mugshots taken during and after the 1916 Cardiff race riots offer a striking, if deeply problematic, visual archive of the individuals involved. These images, posed, standardised, and stripped of personal context, serve not only as documentation but as instruments of racialised governance. The accompanying descriptors, often limited to crude, homogenising labels such as 'Black', 'Arab', or 'coloured', reflect what Jenkinson has noted as a bureaucratic tendency to collapse diverse ethnic, national, and cultural identities into simplified racial categories.[59] This flattening of identity is more than an administrative oversight; it is an act of ideological violence. As Allan Sekula argues, the photographic archive, particularly in its institutional form, emerged as part of a larger 'bureaucratic-clerical-statistical' apparatus that worked to classify, monitor, and control populations, especially those deemed deviant or dangerous.[60]

Sekula's analysis of 'instrumental realism' is central here: he views criminal identification photographs as operating at what he calls the 'zero degree' of socially instrumental realism, a form of visuality designed not to honour or humanise but to regulate, classify, and ultimately repress.[61] These images are not neutral records but function within a broader regime of power to facilitate the arrest and control of their subjects. The Cardiff mugshots, in this light, do not simply document individuals; they are part of a system of visual governance that works to define and manage deviance. In doing so, they participate in the semantic refinement of criminality that Sekula argues was essential to the development of modern policing and state control. These photographs, therefore, reveal not just who was targeted but also the underlying social anxieties, particularly around race, mobility, and disorder, that the state sought to manage during this period of crisis. Following John Tagg's foundational claim that photography is never a passive mirror of reality but a mode of power and cultural production, we can understand these images as tools of governance, tools through which the state attempted to assert control over a multiracial, mobile, and unruly urban population.[62] As such, these photographs reveal far less about the individuals pictured than about the state's racialised fears and fantasies during a moment of social and political crisis.

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[58] Caroline Bressey, "Invisible Presence: The Whitening of the Black Community in the Historical Imagination of British Archives," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 51, 47–61.

[59] Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 107.

[60] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986):16. 3–64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778312.

[61] Ibid., 7.

Yet, Sekula reminds us that photographic archives are not closed or fixed systems. While they were originally developed to serve the needs of police and state authority, their meanings are not predetermined. As he cautions, we should avoid adopting an overly monolithic view of photographic realism; not all realist practices necessarily serve the interests of the police. In fact, such archives can be reinterpreted, subverted, and mobilised for other ends.[63] Caroline Bressey has shown how such visual records, despite their oppressive origins, offer vital glimpses into the presence and lives of marginalised communities often absent from official histories.[64] In this light, the 1916 Cardiff mugshots become more than evidence of state control; they serve as rare visual documentation of Cardiff's multiracial dockland population during a period of heightened racial tension and imperial anxiety. Ariella Azoulay's concept of the 'civil contract of photography' (2008) further opens up the political potential of these images. To 'watch' these photographs, in Azoulay's sense, is to refuse the position of the passive viewer and instead engage with the image as a space of civic encounter.[65] Through this lens, the men captured in the Cardiff mugshots re-emerge not merely as criminalised subjects but as individuals asserting claims to space, rights, and recognition in a society that sought to exclude them. Their photographic presence, however mediated and constrained, becomes a form of historical resistance.

In rereading these mugshots through the combined frameworks of Sekula, Tagg, Bressey, and Azoulay, we come to understand them as politically charged artifacts: documents of repression, yes, but also traces of resilience. They invite us to reconstruct alternative narratives of belonging, mobility, and racial justice, narratives that counter the reductive logic of the archive and the state's attempt to fix identity through the photographic gaze. Among the mugshots produced during the 1916 Cardiff race riots, several individuals visually disrupt the intended uniformity and control of the police photographic archive. Tom Bestman and Mohamed Tard are notable in this regard: both avert their gazes from the camera, refusing the direct eye contact typically required to render the subject fully visible and knowable to the state. Bestman's head is upright, his eyes cast downward or away, while Tard looks off to his left with a clenched jaw and guarded expression. These subtle refusals resist the disciplinary logic of the mugshot, which relies on full ocular submission to classify and contain. Their averted gazes may suggest discomfort, mistrust, or even a quiet refusal to participate in the visual economy of criminalisation. In this context, looking away becomes a minor but meaningful gesture of agency, one that pushes back against the presumed transparency and objectivity of carceral photography.

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[62] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 63–64.
[63] Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 58.
[64] Bressey, "Invisible Presence," 61, 47-61
[65] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.

Mohamed Smaile offers a different but equally complex disruption. His head is turned slightly off-centre, and while he does not face the camera squarely, his eyes meet it from the side in a narrowed, almost evaluative gaze. This partial engagement, neither full confrontation nor avoidance, produces a visual tension. Smaile appears wary, observant, and emotionally guarded, introducing an interpretive ambiguity that unsettles the photograph's purpose as a straightforward tool of identification. His posture and expression do not conform to the state's expectations of docility or deviance; rather, they register a subtle refusal to be fully legible. This sideways glance reintroduces subjectivity and emotion into a format designed to suppress both, suggesting that even under the controlling gaze of the colonial archive, space remains for the performance of scepticism, dignity, and alertness.

Mohamed Ali's mugshot also breaks from the expected narrative, though in a quieter, more introspective register. Unlike those who avert their eyes, Ali looks directly at the camera, yet his expression is not defiant. His slightly furrowed brow and soft, steady gaze convey something closer to worry, a muted apprehension that speaks to the psychological strain of his situation. His face suggests the emotional toll of racialised policing, and the uncertainty faced by colonial subjects criminalised in the imperial metropole. Ali's expression humanises the archive; it reveals the internal weight of being rendered a threat by a society structured to exclude him. Together, these men, Ali, Bestman, Tard, and Smaile, fracture the image of the compliant, deviant subject that the mugshot seeks to construct. Their faces register presence, resistance, ambiguity, and emotional complexity, offering not just evidence of state power, but traces of individual interiority and refusal within an archive designed to erase them.

1.d From Division to Solidarity: The Shift to 1919

Racial difference in early-twentieth century Britain was not a fixed biological or cultural fact but a fluid and contested political category shaped by shifting relations of power.[66] The populations labelled as ‘black’ or ‘coloured’ were ethnically and culturally diverse, including Africans, West Indians, South Asians such as Burmese and Indians, Arabs, and people of mixed race, especially in port cities like Cardiff, where imperial migration brought together a wide range of colonial subjects. As Laura Tabili has noted, groups often categorised under broad racial terms shared little physically but were linked through their histories of British colonisation. This meant that the boundary between black and white was drawn less on appearance and more on political and historical relations, which changed over time.[67] Such complexities underpinned the tensions that erupted during the 1916 riots, suggesting that the conflicts were shaped by struggles over power and identity rather than simple racial difference.

Efforts to categorise participants in the 1919 Cardiff race riots by ethnicity or nationality are hampered by the vagueness and imprecision of contemporary records. Jenkinson explains how the blurring of nationalities and the limited information on ethnicity in the press and official accounts makes it difficult to make any attempt to assign the rioters to ethnic or national categories.[68] She further notes that photographic evidence held in police archives, monochrome prints of arrested rioters, shows that many of those described as 'Black’, 'coloured’, or 'Arab' possessed very dark skin pigmentation.[69] Similar issues arise when examining the 1916 riots, where press reporting failed to distinguish clearly between various racialised groups. Instead, we are left to infer identities through names, some clearly Arab, others more anglicised, or through the few visual records that survive. These difficulties reflect the broader racialised logic of early-twentieth century Britain, in which colonial subjects were routinely grouped into imprecise and homogenising categories that obscured significant cultural and national differences.

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[66] Laura Tabili, “The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925,” *Journal of British Studies* 33, no. 1 (1994): 60–61, https://doi.org/10.1086/386044.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 107.
[69] Ibid.

Newspaper archives make it clear that the fighting involved so-called ‘coloured men’, described as mainly from the West Indies and West Africa, while Arab men were said to be primarily from Somaliland. However, the sources offer little ability to distinguish between the Arab men referenced, even when names are provided. Many of the names, such as ‘Mohammed’, were common across the wider Muslim world and do not clearly indicate regional origin. As such, it is difficult to tell whether a man was Yemeni, Somali, or from elsewhere based on name alone. Similarly, the categorisation of individuals as West Indian or West African overlooks the possibility that some may have been African American, especially given their anglicised names. Photographs used in this study offer some visual clues that help differentiate between certain Arab individuals, but distinguishing between West African and West Indian men is more difficult, highlighting both the value and limitations of black-and-white photography. These blurred lines of identity underscore the complexity of racial and ethnic categorisation at the time and suggest that such ambiguity may have shaped the kinds of relationships and solidarities these men were able to form. [70]

For example, in the case of the Somali men, they were able to create bonds with the Yemeni men as opposed to the men who were described as African American or West African. We can then begin to question whether this is due to the shared religion between them or if it could be the cultural bonds that they share. These questions highlight the complexities of racial and ethnic relations prior to 1919 and that the ‘Black’ population in Cardiff prior to 1919 were not just one big homogenous group but rather built bonds with one and other between shared interests. These bonds were not necessarily built around racial lines but rather these bonds were dependent on many factors at play during the time as in 1916 Somali and Yemeni sailors fought together against West Indian and West African Sailors, whereas in 1919 these groups came together to fight against the white population in Cardiff.

The 1916 disturbances in Cardiff reveal an often-overlooked dimension of Britain’s racial history: the internal dynamics and tensions within subaltern communities themselves. Unlike the 1919 race riots, commonly framed as a confrontation between white and non-white populations, the events of 1916 highlight the limits of solidarity, the fragility of inter-ethnic alliances, and the everyday frictions among colonised peoples living in close proximity. These episodes demonstrate that affiliations in Butetown were shaped not only by shared marginalisation, but also by religion, language, labour hierarchies, and uneven relationships to imperial power. Conflict and mistrust were as present as cooperation. Caroline Bressey's work provides a vital framework for understanding these complexities, foregrounding how racial and ethnic identities in early-twentieth century Cardiff were fragmented, contingent, and frequently obscured in the historical record. Her reflections on the erasure of Black presence from both scholarly and popular narratives underscore the need for a critical reading of the archive, one attentive to what is remembered, what is forgotten, and how the stories of marginalised communities are shaped by the silences and exclusions of the historical record.[71]

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[70] *Western Mail*, “Riotous Scene, Street Fighting Cardiff,” 14 August 1916, 2.

The contrast between the 1916 and 1919 disturbances in Cardiff reveals a significant shift in the dynamics of racialised solidarity. By 1919, as Jacqueline Jenkinson observes, Black and Arab residents in Cardiff responded to violence with an unprecedented show of collective resistance. Amid the June riots, they organised a joint meeting involving Somalis, Egyptians, Arabs, West Indians, and others described as 'coloured races' to protest the attacks they faced.[72] This act of political unity marked a decisive departure from the fragmented landscape of 1916, when inter-group tensions often escalated into violence without any recorded attempts at solidarity or dialogue. The absence of such cooperation in 1916 underscores the degree to which racialised communities remained divided, often competing for limited economic resources and social standing within the imperial port city.

Yet, the emergence of this tentative unity in 1919 did not erase underlying tensions. At the funeral of Mohammed Abdullah, one of the riot's victims, 13 Arabs were reportedly present alongside several hundred mourners described in press reports as 'Negroes of all types'.[73] This demographic disparity points to distinct affiliations within the wider Black and colonial populations. Jenkinson notes that solidarity among British colonial subjects was contingent and situational, not fixed. In some cases, colonial Britons opposed one another in struggles over employment or status.[74] One telling example is a 1919 letter published in the Newport local press by a self-described 'Barbados Negro', who sought to distance West Indians from West Africans, blaming the latter for the violence and invoking stereotypes to assert cultural superiority: 'There is as much difference between West Indians and West Africans as chalk and cheese… We are accustomed to living in houses in the West, not grass huts; neither did we come to England to learn the use of a knife and fork'.[75]

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[71] Caroline Bressey, "Race, Antiracism, and the Place of Blackness in the Making and Remaking of the English Working Class," in *Histories of a Radical Book: E. P. Thompson and The Making of the English Working Class*, ed. Antoinette Burton and Stephanie Fortado (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 71

[72] Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 9.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

This articulation of difference reveals the fluid and often contested nature of identity among racialised communities. The 1919 meeting at Cardiff Docks reflects an emergent coalition formed in the face of shared oppression, but it did not represent a stable or uniform collective identity. Instead, as Jenkinson's work shows, alliances within Black and colonial populations were shaped by specific contexts, and at times fractured by competing claims to respectability, culture, and belonging.[76] The evolution from division in 1916 to partial solidarity in 1919 highlights the complex, negotiated character of subaltern politics in imperial port cities.

1.e. The Making of the English Working Class:

While E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* laid the foundations for 'history from below', his construction of working-class subjectivity has since been challenged for its narrow framing of class experience, one that often centred white, male industrial workers and failed to fully engage with the racial and imperial dimensions of British labour history.[77] Laura Tabili's work offers an important corrective to this tradition. In her influential study on the Coloured Alien Seamen Order of 1925 (1994), Tabili shows how racial categorisation in Britain was not natural or inevitable, but rather a legal and bureaucratic process actively shaped by the state to exclude non-white British subjects from the protections and identities afforded to their white counterparts.[78] This process of racialisation, Tabili argues, was central to the construction of a fragmented working class. The exclusion of Black and Asian seamen, many of whom were British subjects, from national belonging, economic security, and even basic civil recognition, underscores how race was used as a key tool to divide labour and maintain social hierarchies.[79] In doing so, Tabili not only challenges Thompson's framing, but urges historians to account for how empire, migration, and state power shaped class experience in twentieth-century Britain.[80] Her work is therefore vital in expanding what we mean by 'the working class' and highlights the importance of avoiding narratives that replicate white-centric assumptions.

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963)

[78] Laura Tabili, "Race Is a Relationship, and Not a Thing," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 125–130, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790317.

[79] Ibid.

The Cardiff race riots of 1916 and 1919 must be understood not only as eruptions of violence but as events deeply rooted in the spatial and social dynamics of working-class life in Britain's port cities. While earlier traditions of labour history, especially those shaped by E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, were instrumental in centring the experiences of working people, they often did so through the lens of white, skilled, male artisans.[81] As Rohan McWilliam has noted, both historians helped develop a view of the world 'through plebeian eyes'.[82] Yet, the eyes through which that history was seen were typically those of settled, native-born labourers, rather than the colonial seamen, dockers, and casual workers who laboured under the empire's shadow.

Reframing the Cardiff riots through this lens allows for a deeper engagement with the spatial politics of labour. David Featherstone has argued for a rethinking of labour history that considers how political agency emerges in marginal spaces, shaped by uneven geographies of work and resistance.[83] His work invites us to see places like Cardiff's docklands not simply as backdrops to racial violence, but as dynamic sites where migrant labourers forged collective identities, sometimes in solidarity and often in tension.[84] These tensions were exacerbated by housing shortages, police surveillance, and the racialised structures of local labour markets, all of which contributed to the outbreak of violence in June 1919. Paul Griffin applies this framework in his analysis of the 1919 riots in South Shields and Glasgow, demonstrating how class struggle and collective identity are not fixed, but shaped by place-based politics, mobility, and the shifting geographies of resistance.[85]

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Rohan McWilliam, "Back to the Future: E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and the Remaking of Nineteenth-Century British History," *Social History* 39, no. 2 (2014): 149–159, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2014.905274.
[82] Ibid.
[83] David Featherstone and Paul Griffin, "Spatial Relations, Histories from Below and the Makings of Agency," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 3 (2015): 375–393, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515578774.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Paul Griffin and Hannah Martin, "The 1919 'Race Riots' – Within and Beyond Exceptional Moments in South Shields and Glasgow," *Political Geography* 88 (June 2021): 102408, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102408.

Building on Featherstone's conceptualisation of agency in marginal spaces, it is useful to consider how acts of resistance and survival often occur under conditions of precarity. Satyasikha Chakraborty's study of colonial South Asian ayahs in Britain highlights how agency was not simply a matter of independent choice or empowerment, but was contingent on the constraints imposed by employers, racial hierarchies, and institutional structures. Such conditions produced what Chakraborty describes as a 'precarious existence' among colonial workers, marked by 'constant possibilities of destitution.'[86] Ayahs negotiated these circumstances through strategic compliance, careful management of social relations, and adaptive practices, such as performing cheerfulness or participating in Christian rituals, to secure their return passages or improve material conditions.[87] These acts exemplify precarious agency, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness while simultaneously being shaped and limited by systemic inequalities.

Similarly, in the context of Lascars in British port cities, their everyday strategies of survival, whether through informal labour networks, careful navigation of racialised workplaces, or subtle forms of defiance, can also be read as expressions of precarious agency. Just as Chakraborty's ayahs acted under the constant threat of destitution, Lascars negotiated the racialised, exploitative labour structures of ports and shipping lines. Even gestures captured in the 1916 Cardiff race riots mugshots, such as averting the gaze or resisting the disciplinary photographic logic of the police, can be interpreted as minor but meaningful claims to self-determination under precarity.[88] By foregrounding precarity alongside agency, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how subaltern workers and colonial subjects exercised forms of resistance that were neither absolute nor unconstrained, but contingent, adaptive, and deeply shaped by the socio-racial and economic structures of early twentieth-century Britain.

While moments of multiracial solidarity undoubtedly existed, they were often fragile. Works like *The Many-Headed Hydra* have offered celebratory accounts of interracial cooperation among sailors and workers in the Atlantic world, portraying these figures as radical agents of unity and resistance.[89] Yet scholars such as Robert Gregg and Kathleen Higgins have cautioned against idealising these alliances, reminding us of the divisions, frictions, and betrayals that also characterised everyday life in such communities. These tensions, produced and intensified by racism, exclusionary state policies, and entrenched structural inequalities, frequently fractured any emerging sense of shared class identity and undermined possibilities for sustained solidarity.[90]

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[86] Satyasikha Chakraborty, "'Nurses of Our Ocean Highways': The Precarious Metropolitan Lives of Colonial South Asian Ayahs," *Journal of Women's History* 32, no. 2 (2020): 37–64, 56, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2020.0019.

[87] Ibid., 55.

[88] Ibid., 56–57

[89] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000)

Understanding the Cardiff riots, both in 1916 and 1919, through these complex and contested histories expands our definition of the working class and enriches our conception of 'history from below'. It brings into view the experiences of those too often rendered invisible, those whose 'plebeian eyes' saw not a world of rising class consciousness, but one marked by exclusion, mobility, and survival. In doing so, it offers a more grounded and critical account of how imperialism, race, and class converged in Britain's port cities during a moment of crisis.

2. **Collective Resistance pre-1919:**

While historians have often framed racialised labour conflict in port cities as a distinctly twentieth-century phenomenon, this should not obscure the fact that seamen resisted exploitation and asserted agency well before the outbreak of the First World War. Incidents in the 1890s, where Lascars refused to board ships, offer valuable insights into spatial politics, labour agency, and the perception among Lascars that they could resist within port cities like Cardiff. Notably, New Orleans emerges in these accounts as a city perceived as particularly dangerous for Lascars. Such examples reveal a clear sense of awareness and agency in their decision-making, particularly regarding working conditions and destinations. An early example of resistance by Lascars occurred in Cardiff Police Court in 1894, when 31 seamen refused to take up duty aboard the *Knight of St John*. They had been signed on in Bombay for a 12-month voyage, under the understanding that they would be discharged back in Bombay at the end of that term. However, the vessel was docked in Cardiff and preparing to sail to New Orleans when the men refused to proceed. Despite their objections, the police forced them to board the ship.[91] The *South Wales Echo* headline of 'Lascars Refuse Duty', and the choice of wording, emphasising the men’s failure to perform 'duty’, reveal the paper’s political and cultural lens. The crew had been signed on in Bombay for a 12-month voyage, under the understanding that they would be discharged back there at the end of that term. However, the vessel was docked in Cardiff and preparing to sail to New Orleans when the men refused to proceed. Despite their objections, the police forced them to board the ship. [92]

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[90] Kathleen J. Higgins, "Review of The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic" by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1529–1530, https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/107.5.1529; Robert Gregg, "Review of The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4, no. 1 (2003), https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2003.0016.

[91] *South Wales Echo*, "Lascars Refuse Duty," 20 November 1894, 3.

A few years later, a contrasting outcome unfolded in Newport Police Court, involving 41 Lascar crew members from the S.S. Rydall Hall. Like the earlier case, the crew had been contracted in Bombay for 12 months, with the expectation of returning there by the end of their term. When the captain ordered the ship to sail to New Orleans, the entire crew objected, referring to the city as the 'Lascars’ Grave’, and arguing that such a detour would prevent them from returning to Bombay within the agreed timeframe. Reporting in the *South Wales Daily News* under the headline, ‘The Lascars’ Grave’, offered a strikingly different framing from the *Echo*. Rather than stressing disobedience, it emphasised the mortal risks associated with New Orleans, implicitly legitimising the crew’s stance and presenting their resistance in a more sympathetic light. Unlike the earlier case, the court ruled in their favour: they were repatriated to Bombay and replaced by another Lascar crew.[93] This episode underscores that resistance was often collective, coordinated, and grounded in a formal contractual and legal framework, rather than isolated or spontaneous acts.

Large groups of Lascars occasionally defended themselves in court, as seen in an 1897 case at Cardiff Police Court involving 32 seamen. Reporting in the *Western Mail* under the headline, ‘another Lascar Crew in Court at Cardiff’, carried a telling implication: the use of ‘another’ suggested that such disputes were habitual, framing Lascars as frequently refusing work.[94] Yet from another perspective, this repetition highlights not a failing of the sailors themselves, but of the system that continually sought to compel them into conditions and destinations, such as New Orleans, that were not part of their contracted agreements. Reports noted the group’s 'peculiar and varied costumes’, highlighting their visibility and difference in the courtroom.[95] This was another instance of Lascars refusing to board a vessel and collectively bringing their grievances before the authorities. Speaking through an interpreter, the crew objected to sailing to New Orleans, citing the cold weather and the fact that five crew members were unwell, leaving the ship undermanned. It was also alleged that while many were willing to return to duty, one man, said to be under the influence of alcohol, refused and intimidated the others into standing down. In the end, the court ordered the entire crew to be returned to the vessel.[96] Like the *Echo*'s emphasis on refusal of 'duty' and the *Daily News*'s focus on the dangers of New Orleans, the *Western Mail*'s framing reveals how newspaper reporting shaped public perceptions of Lascar resistance, presenting it alternately as disobedience, self-protection, or a recurring problem.

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[92] Ibid.

[93] *South Wales Daily News*, “The Lascars Grave,” 5 December 1895, 3.

[94] *Western Mail*, “Another Lascar Crew in Court at Cardiff,” 20 January 1897, 7.

[95] Ibid.

Newspaper headlines consistently framed Lascar resistance through the language of disobedience and insubordination, rather than acknowledging the contractual grievances that underpinned their actions. A couple of years earlier, the *South Wales Daily News* had reported an 1895 dispute under the headline 'Mutinous Lascars'.[97] Seventeen men from the *St. Enoch* appeared before Cardiff Police Court after leaving their vessel on arrival and refusing to rejoin, despite having signed articles in Bombay for a return voyage to Cardiff. Although they presented their case, the court dismissed their claims and ordered them back on board.[98] Here, as in other cases, the language of 'mutiny' foregrounded disorder and disobedience, while the underlying grievances, about contractual obligations and conditions of service, were sidelined. The following year, the *South Wales Echo* employed a similar register with the headline 'The Disobedient Lascars', reporting on 43 men brought before the same court. Once again, refusal and defiance were highlighted, while the circumstances behind their resistance went largely unexplored.[99] Although the matter was quickly resolved, the men were instructed to return to duty and were later described as 'perfectly submissive' and even 'cheerfully' resuming work; the framing continued to emphasise insubordination over the reasons why they resisted.[100]

The speed with which these cases were dismissed reflects the rigid legal framework Lascars faced and the severity of the consequences for disobedience. While the British legal system functioned as a tool of maritime discipline, it also inadvertently offered a formal platform for Lascars to articulate grievances and negotiate outcomes, revealing the layered and complex nature of their resistance. Docking in port created a rare moment when sailors came under a different jurisdiction than that aboard ship, offering opportunities, however limited, to contest authority and seek redress. For many, Cardiff served as a temporary refuge from the harsh conditions aboard ship. Lascars confined to the engine room, characterised by extreme heat, darkness, and overcrowding, were often likened to prisoners, with such spatial and social confinement contributing to a growing number of suicides (as discussed in Chapter 2).[101] Yet in port cities like Cardiff, even within their restricted quarters, Lascars found space not only for protest and resistance but also for limited moments of rest, reprieve, and the assertion of collective agency.

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[96] Ibid.
[97] *South Wales Daily News*, "Mutinous Lascars," 22 June 1895, 6.
[98] Ibid.
[99] *South Wales Echo*, "The Disobedient Lascars," 2 December 1896, 3.
[100] Ibid.

Another case heard at Cardiff Police Court in late 1897 further illustrates Lascar resistance, this time in relation to a voyage to New Orleans. The sailors denied ever consenting to travel to America and raised several complaints about the conditions aboard the vessel. They claimed they had not been given adequate time to wash, were provided with insufficient clothing, and stated they would prefer imprisonment over continuing to serve on the ship. The complaint about inadequate clothing resonates with broader concerns about Lascar treatment in colder climates (as discussed in Chapter 4), where poor provisioning left many exposed to the elements. In this instance, officials attempted to placate the crew by promising extra clothing and assuring them that the climate in the Gulf of Mexico resembled that of Calcutta. Despite these reassurances, the Lascars refused to comply. The authorities responded by handcuffing the men and forcibly returning them to the ship.[102] While the sailors were likely hoping for restitution of their rights, bringing their complaints into the courtroom also created a rare window to make the invisible visible, asserting their personhood through refusal and exposing shipboard conditions that were otherwise hidden from public view.

A striking instance of collective resistance occurred in 1906, when a group of 36 Lascars refused duty aboard a ship bound for Buenos Aires. Despite repeated requests from the master and officers, the crew refused to work or board the vessel. As a result of their refusal, the ship eventually departed Newport with a cargo of coal, but with only three firemen available to manage the stoke-hole. Engineers and officers were forced to step in and assist. Tensions escalated when the captain reportedly threatened the men with the phrase, ‘No work, no food’, and warned he would lock up the galley. In response, the Lascars are said to have replied, ‘If you lock up the galley, we will kill you and throw you overboard'. The confrontation intensified, with the captain surrounded and the second officer and others drawing their revolvers to maintain control. A police escort was subsequently called, and the 36 Lascars were taken to the central police station. They were later brought before the magistrate and sentenced to 21 days in prison. In their defence, the Lascars insisted they had never agreed to sail to South America and maintained their refusal to do so.[103] Although their articles allegedly required them to proceed, the men argued they had not signed up to travel to a destination at that latitude.[104] This episode not only underscores their determination to resist but also reveals a collective awareness of their contractual rights, and a willingness to insist upon those rights, even in the face of severe consequences.

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[101] Ravi Ahuja, “Capital at Sea, Shaitan Below Decks?” *History of the Present* 2, no. 1 (2012): 79, 78–85, https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0078.

[102] *South Wales Daily News*, “Lascar Seaman Difficulty,” 6 November 1897, 6.

These Lascars were described in a racialised manner as, 'motley, dusky squad, mostly of small proportions and shambling gait,'[105] a characterisation that reflects the prejudiced and dehumanising attitudes of the time. It was reported that the men signed on at Colombo on May 25th to trade for one year within certain latitudes. When the ship arrived at Newport, the men refused to work and were taken before the magistrates. When they were ordered to go on board, it was reported that the Lascars stated, 'If you put us on board, you cannot make us work.' After being called to join the ship, they stated they would rather die than go to South America. There were, however, several members of the crew who expressed their willingness to go on, but they had to be separated from the other Lascars as they declared they would drop these men overboard. When questioned in 'Hindustani', the Lascars reportedly held up their right hands, which signified that they would not go to America. One of the defendants claimed that at Colombo, they were told by the shipping master that they would go to Europe and back to India, but not America. After arguments between the Serang and a Lascar, it was made clear that the Lascars would not go and thus they were sentenced to 21 days with hard labour.[106]

A specific theme that is clear throughout all of these cases is the collective nature of Lascar resistance, as they consistently showed a united stance and refused duty in groups. Through this, we can begin to see a shared understanding among Lascars of their agency, their rights, and how strong they could be if they acted together. Another recurring theme concerns the unclear or contested nature of their contracts, particularly regarding destinations such as New Orleans and South America, which were seemingly not specified in their agreements. While Lascars did bring cases before the courts, the frequent dismissal of their claims and the rigid enforcement of shipboard obligations may have contributed to a perception, shared through networks of sailors in boarding houses and ports, that legal redress was unlikely to succeed. This trajectory of repeated court losses and enforcement could explain why some Lascars chose to refuse duty outright, rather than relying on formal legal mechanisms, reflecting a pragmatic awareness of how the system typically operated.

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[103] *Rhos Herald*, "Lascar Mutiny," 15 September 1906, 6.
[104] *South Wales Weekly Argus*, "Lascars Refuse Duty," 8 September 1906, 10.
[105] *Daily News* (London), "Lascar Mutiny," 5 September 1906, 8.
[106] Ibid.

In exploring this theme, we can question whether Lascars were taken advantage of or manipulated when signing contracts, they did not fully understand, or whether they signed in good faith but anticipated they could dispute terms, such as unspecified calling points, once they arrived at Cardiff, Newport, or Barry. Additionally, these instances show Lascars expressing concerns over sickness and the hazards of working on undermanned or intolerable ships. At the same time, the repeated insistence on returning to India highlights that, despite being a mobile and transient workforce, Lascars had strong attachments to particular places. Their resistance was not only about immediate working conditions, but also about protecting ties to home and dependents, linking their labour and protest to broader familial and social obligations.

These repeated acts of collective refusal, protest, and defiance can be situated within a broader history of working-class agency in British port cities, particularly among Black and colonial seafarers. Although often described as transient or marginal figures, Lascars clearly understood how to exploit the spatial and legal ambiguities of port life to assert their rights, not just as individuals, but as a racialised segment of the global working class. Their resistance complicates traditional narratives of the British working class by foregrounding imperial labour, race, and mobility as central factors in labour struggle.

These repeated acts of collective refusal, protest, and defiance can be situated within a broader history of working-class agency in British port cities, particularly among Black and colonial seafarers. Although often described as transient or marginal figures, Lascars clearly understood how to exploit the spatial and legal ambiguities of port life to assert their rights, not just as individuals, but as a racialised segment of the global working class. Their resistance complicates traditional narratives of the British working class by foregrounding imperial

labour, race, and mobility as central factors in labour struggle. These years also reveal an important pattern of engagement, whether trustful or wary, with formalised legal and contractual structures. This mode of resistance was largely peaceful and non-violent, relying on the courts and the law as arenas in which grievances could be voiced and, at times, remedied.

Moreover, these moments of protest, from strikes and refusals to more confrontational scenes requiring police intervention, anticipate and feed into the later language of urban disorder and rioting. The legal and spatial dynamics seen here (police courts, jail sentences, threats of violence) prefigure the conditions that would later erupt in events like the 1919 race riots. In that context, the Lascars' earlier actions can be understood not just as isolated episodes, but as part of a lineage of Black working-class resistance in Britain, one that pushed against racial hierarchies, economic exploitation, and state repression in highly local but globally connected ways. Their actions remind us that port cities like Cardiff, Barry and Newport were not just sites of imperial extraction, but also of contestation, where colonial workers claimed space, challenged authority, and made visible the global entanglements of race and class. In this sense, Lascar resistance becomes a crucial pre-history of later forms of urban unrest and Black radical politics in twentieth-century Britain.

The protests of Lascars in Cardiff, Newport, and other ports reveal not only maritime resistance but also a distinctly racialised strand of working-class agency in Britain. As Satnam Virdee argues, 'Reading the history of the working class in England against the grain helps to make more transparent the influential contributions made by individuals from different ethnic groups in the formative struggles for economic and social justice…'[107] The collective refusals, court appearances, and organised resistance by Lascars challenge the notion that the British working class was ever a white or homogeneous entity. Instead, their actions speak to the multi-ethnic character of the working class from its very inception. These Lascar rebellions, including protests over unclear contracts, food deprivation, and exploitative voyages, can be seen as early forms of racialised class struggle in Britain's imperial core. Virdee's notion that race was constitutive of the making and unmaking of the English working class is clearly illustrated here, as Lascars were both subjected to racialised exclusion and, at the same time, instrumental in forcing moments of labour contestation and redefinition.[108]

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[107] Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7-8.
[108] Ibid., 7–8.

The idea of there being threats and intimidation toward Lascars and their ability to resist and express their dissatisfaction in the face of this highlights the idea that even in the face of these forced conditions on ships, Lascars were able to show a form of labour agency. Lascars showed a level of control over their work conditions while challenging the dynamics of power that were inherent in the shipping industry during this period.

The refusal of Lascars to board ships destined for New Orleans, a city perceived as perilous by the sailors, or South America, suggests a keen awareness and agency in their decision-making related to their work environment. Transfers between vessels were a significant trigger for resistance among the Lascars. Such resistance often surfaced at critical moments, 'usually upon arrival at a foreign port, close to sailing, or when seamen were being transferred from one vessel to another.'[109] These acts of defiance were not typically union-led, but rather emerged from the crew's own initiatives, involving various state agencies, including local authorities, police, and the judiciary. The specific locations mentioned, such as Cardiff Police Court and Newport Police Court, therefore highlight not only the spaces in which these struggles took place, but more importantly, the structures of authority and discipline, legal, civic, and maritime, through which Lascars were compelled to engage, contest, and negotiate their position.

Importantly, the collective action of Lascars, from mass refusals to sail, to courtroom challenges and threats of shipboard mutiny, also reflects what David Featherstone describes as subaltern political agency, constituted not through formal organisations but through situated, spatially stretched practices of resistance. As Featherstone notes, subaltern groups generate agency through 'ongoing negotiations of cross-cutting relations of power' and through reconstituting the geographies of resistance via mobility, solidarity, and contestation.[110] In this light, Lascar protests in Welsh port cities become not merely localised acts of defiance but part of a networked form of working-class resistance, shaped by imperial shipping routes, contested labour contracts, and their own transnational experiences. Their demands, whether to be repatriated, to receive proper clothing, or to avoid destinations like New Orleans or South America, were not only grounded in a keen awareness of their rights and working conditions but also suggest the existence of clear networks of knowledge and information-sharing among sailors. Such shared understandings of particular routes, risks, and exploitative practices enabled Lascars to transform individual grievances into collective refusals, reinforcing their capacity to contest power within the maritime world and its institutional structures.

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[109] Gopalan Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, no. 2 (2008): 46, http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC.

[110] Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*, 7.

2.a. Understanding Lascar Resistance:

Understanding Lascar resistance requires more than simply inserting them into existing narratives of working-class struggle; it necessitates a rethinking of what constitutes class consciousness and solidarity in a racialised and imperial context. Virdee's concept of the 'racialised outsider' provides a useful lens here, not to explain Lascar experience in general terms, but to help articulate how these seamen's actions, refusing exploitative contracts, asserting rights in courtrooms, and resisting voyages into more dangerous imperial circuits, embodied a form of working-class agency that was shaped as much by race and colonial status as by labour itself. Virdee's argument that racialised minorities acted as 'leavening agents' in British class politics can be seen in the way Lascars expanded the terrain of resistance: their struggles were not simply for improved wages or working conditions, but for recognition, safety, and dignity within a labour system that was simultaneously racialised and imperial.[111]

Race has never been a fixed or stable identity category. Instead, it has functioned as a shifting and contested signifier that has organised perceptions of difference, belonging, and legitimacy across time. In the context of British working-class politics, race operated as more than a descriptor of physical or cultural difference: it served as a deeply political marker through which hierarchies of labour, nation, and identity were structured, and at times, resisted.[112] Nowhere is this more visible than in the case of Lascars, whose experiences at the margins of the British working class expose the ideological work required to sustain racial boundaries. Rather than reflecting any stable biological essence, race was deployed through media, law, and public discourse to position the Lascar as perpetually foreign, while their collective actions, including strikes and legal challenges, actively disrupted this framing.

Such an approach resonates with Stuart Hall's theorisation of race as a 'floating signifier', a discursive construct that, despite lacking scientific or biological grounding, continues to organise systems of social meaning and power. Hall emphasises that while academic recognition of race as constructed has gained ground, this understanding has not displaced the 'common-sense' ways in which race continues to shape perception and political experience beyond the university.[113] This insight is particularly valuable when analysing figures such as the Lascar, whose exclusion from the imagined community of the British worker depended not on evidence or logic, but on the enduring visibility of 'colour, hair, and bone'.[114] In this sense, Hall's work is not merely deconstructive but diagnostic: it provides a framework for understanding how race becomes meaningful in specific historical moments, how it is, in his words, 'made to matter' in struggles over legitimacy, labour, and national belonging.

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[111] Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 164–165.
[112] Ibid., 6-7

Applying this framework to the Lascar protests of the 1890s reveals the instability of the racial categories that sought to contain them. The representation of Lascars in courts and media, as 'motley', 'shambling', or otherwise disordered, did not reflect any objective truth but rather performed ideological work. These descriptions functioned to mark Lascars as outsiders to the British working class, reinforcing the perception that they lacked the discipline, respectability, and legitimacy required for inclusion. Yet Lascars challenged these racialised framings through collective resistance. Their industrial action, court appeals, and refusal to accept imposed roles disrupted dominant narratives and asserted forms of political agency that racial ideology had denied them. These interventions expose the ideological labour required to sustain race as a category and demonstrate how class and race were co-constructed in the imperial world of dockside labour.

Yet Lascar resistance cannot be fully understood within a nationally bounded frame. Their political actions were shaped not only by their position within the British economy but also by diasporic affiliations, familial obligations, and political cultures rooted in the colonies. Their recurring demands to return to India, for example, were not acts of withdrawal but pointed political gestures, insisting on the right to define the terms of their own mobility. This highlights the need for a transnational approach to working-class politics, one that foregrounds imperial circuits of labour and the uneven geographies of political subjectivity they produced.

The testimony of Lascars themselves underscores how central the demand for return was to their politics. Sulleyman Adam's plea to the King, written while imprisoned in Scotland, conveys the way that mobility was negotiated through obligations to family and homeland. He stresses that his brothers, sister and wife were entirely dependent on his wages. In his plea to the King he states, ‘For the sake of Allah, I beseech Your gracious Majesty to command my pardon. I implore you to show mercy to my brothers and sisters, as they were supported by my savings, and we are all in need.’[115] Here, return is not framed as retreat but as a political insistence that imperial authority recognise his right to sustain kinship networks disrupted by indenture and penal servitude.

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[113] Stuart Hall, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Paul Gilroy, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 359–360.
[114] Ibid., 360.

Adam’s experience also illustrates the psychic cost of imperial displacement. Reports describe him suffering 'fits of depression, which are due to homesickness', and at times preferring 'to be hanged rather than kept in prison’. [116] His despair was not reducible to individual pathology but emerged from forced separation from India, isolation in a foreign environment, and the denial of his right to return. The state’s eventual consideration of transferring him to India underlines how central this demand was, even within the carceral system.

Placed in a broader context, such testimonies illuminate why Lascars in Britain resisted redirection into other imperial circuits, including voyages to America. When sailors refused to board ships bound westward, they were not shirking labour but asserting that their mobility should not be determined by imperial economic logics. Their refusals paralleled Adam’s petitions: both expressed a politics rooted in familial obligation and a refusal to be severed from India. These struggles remind us that Lascars’ resistance was shaped not only by conditions of work but also by the right to return, the preservation of community, and the refusal to be rendered permanently diasporic against their will.

James Barrett’s conception of a transnational working class offers a useful entry point here. Rather than confining class consciousness to the nation-state, Barrett argues for a framework in which racialised workers navigated a global system of exploitation informed by diverse political and cultural traditions. These workers, like the Lascars, developed forms of solidarity and resistance that were not rooted in assimilation but in strategic negotiation, often positioning themselves in an ‘inbetween’ racial status to navigate dominant hierarchies and labour markets..[117] Lascar defiance, therefore, was both situated and expansive: grounded in the specificities of Cardiff’s docks, but also shaped by wider imperial connections, enabling a form of globalised class politics that challenged national labour narratives long before such frameworks became common in historiography.

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[115] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Letter to the King from Sulleyman Adam Asking for Pardon, 30 March 1911.

[116] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Prison Case File of Sulleyman Adam, 30 March 1911.

[117] James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997): 3–44, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27502194.

Equally important are the spaces in which this resistance took shape. The port city, the ship, the boarding house, and the colonial dockyard were not passive sites of imperial infrastructure but volatile zones of political possibility. These were the spaces through which Lascars moved, often imagined by imperial authorities as orderly and disciplined, but in practice shaped by contestation, mobility, and alternative political imaginaries. David Featherstone's work on oppositional politics in marginal and connected spaces is particularly instructive here. He shows how political agency emerged not from imperial metropoles but from the peripheries: from Newfoundland's fisheries to the Atlantic docklands, where workers engaged in strikes, desertion, and other forms of refusal that destabilised the rhythms of regulated imperial labour.[118]

Moreover, these practices were not isolated or reactive. They were shaped by transnational political cultures, shared grievances, diasporic solidarities, and inherited repertoires of resistance. Subaltern actors drew on diverse traditions, from Irish agrarian agitation to Caribbean maroon resistance, to generate new political identities. Actions like desertion, then, were not simply refusals to work but affirmative redefinitions of space, belonging, and political possibility.[119] They transformed imperial 'nurseries of seamen' like Cardiff or Calcutta into contested arenas of dissent, spaces where the boundaries of labour, race, and empire were actively renegotiated.

Conclusion:

This chapter argues that the racial tensions and violence in Cardiff leading up to the 1919 race riots were not isolated incidents but part of a broader continuum of racial conflicts and resistance that began at least as early as the 1890s. By examining the 1916 Cardiff Riots, the chapter demonstrates that racialised violence in Cardiff had deep roots and was influenced by the city's ethnic diversity and socio-economic dynamics. The findings indicate that the earlier riots were characterised by internal conflicts within Cardiff's Black community, which evolved into more unified resistance against racial aggression by 1919. This shift highlights the development of a collective identity among diverse racial and ethnic groups, driven by shared experiences of racism and violence. Understanding this pre-history is essential for contextualising the 1919 riots and recognising the long-standing nature of racial struggles in Cardiff.

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[118] David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*, 70–72.
[119] Ibid.

In doing so, the chapter challenges conventional chronologies of riot and resistance. Rather than following the Thompsonian or Hobsbawmian trajectory in which disorderly riot gradually gives way to organised, purposeful protest, the Cardiff evidence suggests something more complex: organised and largely peaceable engagement with structures of power in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries increasingly gave way to frustrated, violent confrontation in 1916 and 1919. These events, therefore, invert dominant assumptions about the linear progression from riot to organisation, revealing how racialised inequities and structural constraints shaped both the form and trajectory of collective resistance.

This chapter also highlights the need to critically interrogate the very language of 'race riots’. While the term 'riot’ has rightly been problematised in historical scholarship for the way it delegitimises protest and agency, the 'race' in 'race riot’ requires similar scrutiny. The Cardiff disturbances were not simply spontaneous eruptions of inter-ethnic violence but were rooted in structural inequalities, labour exploitation, and the precarious conditions of life for racialised communities in port cities. The violence of 1916 and 1919 must therefore be understood not just as 'riots’, but as responses to deeper and ongoing systems of oppression.

By tracing these longer histories, the chapter has examined the intertwined themes of history and resistance, with a particular focus on marginalised communities and urban spaces as pivotal arenas of social interaction and conflict. The discussion of port cities and urban spaces as sites of cultural exchange, economic struggle, and social tension has provided a rich context for examining instances of collective resistance, such as that of Lascar sailors in Cardiff prior to 1919. By focusing on these sailors, the chapter has illustrated how subaltern groups assert their agency and challenge oppressive structures within specific urban settings.

Overall, the examination of the 1916 Cardiff Race riots has offered a vivid portrayal of inter-ethnic violence and its complex social dynamics, serving as a microcosm for broader themes of identity, conflict, and community formation in urban contexts. Through these interconnected narratives, the chapter underscores the enduring significance of studying marginalised histories and urban spaces as essential components of understanding social change and resistance throughout history.

Thesis Conclusion:

This thesis has traced the multifaceted histories of Lascar sailors in Britain and beyond, uncovering the ways in which they were simultaneously indispensable to imperial power and yet persistently marginalised within it. Across episodes of shipboard violence, radical politics, sensationalist media portrayals, cultural representations, and urban unrest, Lascars emerge as figures through whom anxieties about race, labour, discipline, and empire were repeatedly negotiated.

The case of Sulleyman Adam and Habeeb Sued epitomises the fragile and combustible hierarchies of maritime labour. Serangs, poised uneasily between solidarity and subordination, embodied the contradictions of colonial authority at sea, while Adam's act of violence exposed the volatility of these relationships and their capacity to rupture imperial order. When situated alongside broader patterns of abuse, resistance, and shifting disciplinary practices, such incidents highlight how maritime spaces were both crucibles of coercion and arenas of contestation, where authority was never fully secure.

This instability mirrored transformations on land. At the turn of the century, the systemic exploitation of Lascars intersected with the rise of revolutionary nationalism, producing a climate where violence and radicalism became increasingly normalised. The brutalities of shipboard life overlapped with the political militancy of figures such as Madan Lal Dhingra, creating common ground for the articulation of resistance. The convergence of maritime and nationalist struggles underscores the interconnections between colonial oppression at sea and the wider revolutionary zeitgeist that was reshaping South Asian politics and diaspora communities.

Simultaneously, representations of Lascars in Britain reveal the extent to which they were embedded in the cultural and racial imagination of the metropole. The association of Lascars with Jack the Ripper exemplified how imperial fears were projected onto marginalised groups, transforming them into scapegoats for broader anxieties about crime, sexuality, and racial 'degeneracy'. Such portrayals, amplified by the Victorian press and public discourse, reinforced stereotypes of danger and disorder that served to legitimise exclusionary practices within Britain itself.

The image of the 'shivering Lascar' and the fears of the 'Lascar plague' further demonstrates how representations oscillated between pity and suspicion, casting Lascars alternately as vulnerable victims and as racialised threats. Through tropes of cold and contagion, imperial narratives pathologised Lascar bodies, naturalising their exclusion from full participation in British society. Yet even within these restrictive frameworks, acts of everyday resistance, whether through cultural persistence, economic adaptation, or subtle defiance, testify to the agency and resilience of Lascar communities.

Finally, the study of racial violence in Cardiff situates these histories within a longer trajectory of resistance and collective struggle. The riots of 1916 and 1919 reveal that inter-ethnic violence in Britain's port cities was not merely episodic but the product of entrenched inequalities and systemic exclusion. By re-examining these disturbances not as isolated 'race riots' but as responses to oppression, we uncover the ways in which racialised groups forged collective identities and asserted agency in the face of hostility.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that Lascars were never peripheral to Britain's imperial story. They were central actors in the making and unmaking of maritime hierarchies, in the circulation of radical ideas, in the construction of racial discourse, and in the contested spaces of Britain's port cities. Their histories reveal how empire functioned not only through material exploitation but also through emotional regulation, cultural stereotyping, and the policing of boundaries between inclusion and exclusion.

This thesis ultimately argues that the study of Lascars opens a window onto the larger dynamics of empire: its reliance on precarious labour, its racialised systems of discipline, and its constant need to manage instability through coercion and representation. By rehumanising these sailors, too often reduced to stereotypes of weakness, danger, or invisibility, we gain a fuller understanding of both the operations of imperial power and the myriad ways it was resisted, negotiated, and, at times, overturned.

As Caroline Steedman argues, history is always written 'after the archive', in the uneasy space between silence and recovery, where the historian animates traces of the forgotten dead.[1] The figures who haunt this thesis, the shivering Lascars, the vilified outsiders of Whitechapel, the victims and perpetrators of shipboard violence, and the sailors drawn into Cardiff's racial unrest, emerge only fleetingly in the official record, often distorted through the lens of stereotype, criminalisation, or bureaucratic indifference. Yet, as Steedman notes of Jules Michelet's vision, the work of the historian is to offer these lives 'a second life', to acknowledge both their suffering and their agency.[2] In drawing together fragments from legal cases, press accounts, and imperial discourse, this study has sought to rehumanise those whom empire rendered essential yet expendable, visible yet voiceless.

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[1] Carolyn Steedman, "After the Archive," *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2–3 (October 2011): 321–340, https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2011.0026

Steedman also describes the historian hunched over minor registers of the local state, struggling with 'technologies of retrieval' to decipher names in faded handwriting, and confronting the epistemological paradox that what we read may never have been there 'in the first place'.[3] This struggle over the instability of names and records echoes Jacques Rancière's insistence that history is the pursuit of the 'lost ones'.[4] In much the same way, the Lascars enter the record misnamed, misheard, or mistranslated, whether in court documents, newspaper reports, or imperial discourse. To recover their presence is not only to piece together scattered fragments but also to acknowledge the instability of the archive itself, which both reveals and conceals subaltern lives.

The archive, as Steedman and others explain, is never neutral; it is a site of power where empire 'listed, registered and classified' its subjects into knowable, governable categories.[5] To write 'after the archive', then, is also to write against its silences. This thesis has attempted such a task: to trace the contours of lives lived at the edge of empire, to expose the processes that consigned them to invisibility, and to insist that even the most fleeting archival trace can illuminate histories that empire sought to erase.

Antoinette Burton reminds us, archives are never neutral storehouses of 'fact-retrieval' but are instead 'complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention, processes set in motion by, among other things, one's personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one's reading of what is to be found there'.[6] This reminder underscores the point that what the record yields about Lascar lives is not simply evidence, but evidence already shaped by power, omission, and circumstance. If Steedman alerts us to the haunting instability of the archive, Burton forces us to reckon with its active role in producing the very conditions of historical truth. Reading the traces of empire's sailors 'after the archive' therefore, requires not only recovering fragments, but also telling what Burton calls 'archive stories': narratives of how those traces were compiled, distorted, or excluded, and how our own encounter with them shapes the histories we write today.

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7-8

With all this in mind, the case of Sulleyman Adam provides a critical point of departure for imagining future directions in Lascar history. Adam's trajectory, his imprisonment in Britain, subsequent transfer to India, and eventual confinement in a mental asylum, exposes the ways in which state systems of criminal justice and mental health intersected with race, religion, and colonial hierarchies. Reports from his time in prison showed a profound deterioration in his mental health, including severe depression, homesickness, and threats of self-harm, despite efforts to accommodate his religious needs and cultural practices.[7] His transfer under the Penal Servitude Act of 1853, the ongoing correspondence between the Home and India Offices, and his eventual confinement in the Lunatic Asylum at Ratnagiri underscore the precariousness of colonial and imperial bureaucratic interventions in individual lives.[8] Observations from the asylum over the years document Adam's fluctuating mental state, alternating between periods of rationality, excitable and violent behaviour, and deep despondency, demonstrating the long-term consequences of incarceration and displacement on Lascars and colonial subjects more broadly.[9] His eventual sentence remission in 1923, following more than a decade of confinement, further illuminates the contingent and negotiable nature of penal power, particularly when applied across imperial jurisdictions.

Adam's story suggests that future research into the history of Lascars, Muslims, and other Asian communities in Britain must follow traces that are often dispersed across institutional, archival, and personal records. The overlapping bureaucracies of prisons, asylums, and colonial administration offer glimpses into previously neglected dimensions of these lives, particularly in relation to mental health and institutional confinement. Investigating these intersections opens a new avenue for understanding not only the lived experiences of individuals like Adam, but also the structural conditions that shaped these experiences. In methodological terms, this entails assembling a mosaic of sources, prison reports, asylum records, correspondence between colonial and metropolitan authorities, and contemporary press accounts, while reading them critically for silences, contradictions, and the specific historical pressures under which they were produced.

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[7] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Prison Case File of Sulleyman Adam, 30 March 1911.

[8] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Letter from H. B. Simpson, 3 July 1911.

[9] National Records of Scotland, HH16/117, Notes of the Medical Officer and the Facts Observed by the Visitors of the Asylum, 16 January 1922.

Similarly, research into events such as the Cardiff race riots suggests that tracing the social, residential, and communal geographies of these populations can further illuminate the historical experiences of Lascars and South Asian communities in Britain. By mapping who lived in particular areas, the institutions they interacted with, and the networks they formed, it becomes possible to situate individual narratives like Adam's within broader socio-political and spatial contexts. Such work not only reconstructs overlooked lives but also challenges the conventional archival boundaries that often obscure the histories of marginalised communities.

Writing the history of Lascars, Muslims, and Asian communities in Britain requires a multi-sited, multi-sourced approach. Adam's confinement in both prison and mental asylum exemplifies the necessity of following fragmented traces across diverse institutional spaces, while remaining attentive to the interpretive challenges posed by incomplete or biased records. His life demonstrates that archives are not neutral repositories; rather, they are sites where political, social, and cultural forces intersect to produce partial, contested narratives. Tracing these archives, and critically engaging with the gaps, absences, and silences within them, offers both a methodological framework and an ethical imperative for future research: to recover histories that have been obscured, to recognise the human consequences of institutional power, and to imagine new ways of writing the histories of those long relegated to the margins. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains, silences in history are not merely accidental absences but are actively produced at multiple stages: in the creation of sources, their assembly into archives, their retrieval in narratives, and the retrospective assignment of significance.[10] Power, he argues, 'begins at the source' and shapes what is recorded, preserved, and ultimately remembered. [11]

The lives of Lascars such as Sulleyman Adam exemplify this process: their experiences were often documented incompletely, interpreted selectively, or omitted entirely, leaving historians to contend with records that encode both imperial authority and racialised assumptions. By attending to these silences, by asking not only what is present in the archive but also what is absent, this thesis aligns with Trouillot's broader claim that the making of history is inseparable from the operations of power. Recovering the traces of Lascars, Muslims, and other marginalised communities in Britain thus requires not only piecing together fragmented evidence but also interrogating the very processes through which empire shaped historical knowledge, privileging some voices while silencing others.

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[10] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.
[11] Ibid., 29.

In tracing the fragmented, often painful traces of Sulleyman Adam's life, historians are reminded that recovering the histories of Lascars, Muslims, and other marginalised communities in Britain demands not just diligence and imagination, but a commitment to following the archives wherever they lead, even into prisons, asylums, and other spaces long neglected by historical inquiry.

Finally, it is important to note that the discovery of the case file of Sulleyman Adam exemplifies both the fragility and the possibility of reconstructing Lascar histories. It was not unearthed in the expected imperial repositories of London, but instead in the National Records Office of Scotland, a site less commonly associated with the histories of empire. At first glance, the name did not appear to be noticeably South Asian or Muslim, and the seven-hundred-page file could easily have been passed over. On the final day of a research trip in that archive, the document was unavailable for consultation; it required a deliberate decision to return, weeks later, solely to pursue what might have proved a dead end. Yet this file, stumbled upon through curiosity and persistence, became central to the thesis. Such an encounter illustrates the precariousness of archival recovery: crucial fragments may lie buried in unexpected places, waiting for the moment when a decision not to overlook them transforms the direction of research.

As Arlette Farge describes in *The Allure of the Archives*, 'the archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse offered into an unexpected event.'[12] The work of the historian is often propelled by such accidents: the sudden encounter with a document that might easily have been missed, the fragment that demands pursuit, the allure of a file whose significance is not yet clear. The Adam file exemplifies this archival conquest, reminding us that historical discoveries are rarely the product of systematic design alone, but often of curiosity, persistence, and the willingness to follow an uncertain lead.

Far from being incidental, this experience speaks to the wider methodological imperatives of writing Lascar histories. To reconstruct lives at the margins of empire often requires not only diligence and systematic inquiry but also a willingness to follow uncertain trails, to embrace accidents, and to seek sources in archives beyond London-centric or conventional imperial repositories. The recovery of Adam's story thus demonstrates how luck, persistence, and risk are themselves conditions of historical knowledge, shaping what can be known about those whom empire rendered invisible.

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[12] Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton, foreword by Natalie Zemon Davis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 6.

This thesis has also been shaped by the structural conditions under which it was produced. The ability to undertake doctoral research in Britain remains closely tied to financial security and institutional access, with many researchers reliant on stable funding to carry out extended archival and historical work. These conditions create barriers that disproportionately affect those from working-class or first-generation backgrounds, limiting who is able to contribute to academic knowledge. As Diane Reay has observed, higher education often remains a space of exclusion for such scholars, where belonging is conditional and precarious.[13] Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that research is never neutral, but a political practice shaped by who is permitted to ask questions, access archives, and speak with authority.[14]

Recognising these barriers is crucial for the future study of marginalised communities such as the Lascars. To make historical scholarship more representative, it is therefore necessary not only to address the silences of the archive but also the silences of the academic sector, ensuring that scholars from a wider range of backgrounds are supported to contribute to and reshape the field. Future research into the history of Lascars would benefit from such widening participation, creating space for perspectives that might otherwise remain excluded.

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[13] Diane Rea, *Miseducation: Inequality, Education and the Working Classes* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2017)

[14] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Ireland: Zed Books, 2021)

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Globe
Graphic
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Huddersfield Chronicle
Illustrated London News
Illustrated Police News
Indian Statesman
Isle of Wight Observer
Kentish Mercury
Lancashire Evening Post
Leek Times
Leigh Chronicle and Weekly District Advertiser
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Liverpool Mercury
Liverpool Shipping Telegraph and Daily Commercial Advertiser
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Manchester Courier
Manchester Evening News
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