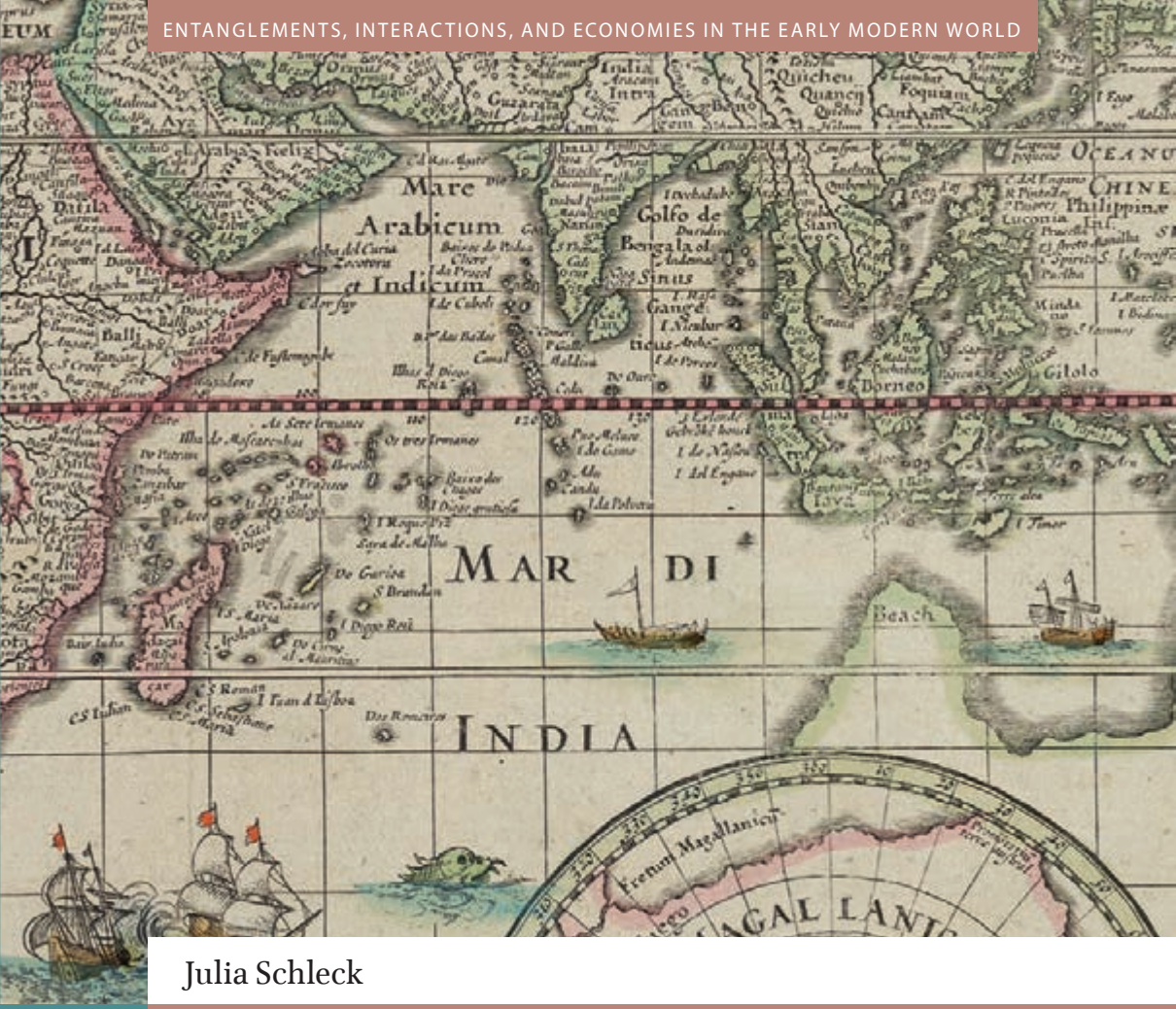
ENTANGLEMENTS, INTERACTIONS, AND ECONOMIES IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD



Julia Schleck

Conflicting Claims to East India Company Wealth, 1600-1650

Reading Debates over Risk and Reward

Amsterdam University Press

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Entanglements, Interactions, and Economies in the Early Modern World

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with Dan Vitkus in Berlin one RSA resulted in the opportunity to co-edit a special issue of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* that focused on the East India Company, giving me the opportunity to work with several excellent scholars, including Jyotsna Singh, who never ceases to give me important insights, Guido van Meersbergen, Samuli Kaislaniemi, and of course my valued co-editor Amrita Sen, who generously agreed to read the introduction to this book and provided valuable feedback. Part of chapter 4 was published in that special issue. That project also introduced me to Philip Stern, whose extraordinary work on the East India Company significantly influenced me, and who generously extended an invitation to join an invigorating symposium on corporations and the family at Duke University one spring, giving further impetus to this always lagging project. I'm also grateful to Justin Stearns for the invitation to join an impressive collection of scholars in a trip to NYU in Abu Dhabi to discuss how knowledge of Islam and the Middle East was generated and disseminated in Europe. The paper from that event was subsequently published as an essay in *Re-Mapping Travel Narratives in the Early Modern World: To the East and Back Again* (2018), edited by Montserrat Piera, and now forms a part of chapter 2.

My love of the early modern period and life in general continues to be sustained by my truly lovely colleagues, Steve Buhler and Kelly Stage. Their enthusiasm for our shared work, and their gentle humor and care of me have been a source of great healing during times of struggle. I look forward to many more years of camaraderie and music.

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Introduction

Abstract
Conflicting Claims to East India Company Wealth examines the debates surrounding England's earliest global trading ventures, centered on moral critiques of wealth and the unequal distribution of risks and rewards in the lengthy voyages required by the East Indies trade. It traces the forging of discursive rationales justifying the new capitalist inequalities in London, and the material and bureaucratic tactics Company servants abroad used to resist their masters' will, controlling information and promoting ignorance when it served their financial and sexual purposes. This book interrogates the forces that shaped England's earliest forays into capitalist imperialism by tracing the battles over corporate control of men's finances, marriages, and bare survival at the dawn of its global trade.

Keywords: East India Company, early modern merchants, early modern sailors, history from below, English political economy, mercantilism

"*bookes* [*are*] *as false as may bee and noe trust* [*is*] *to bee giuen to them*."[1]

The East India Company's servants working abroad knew how easy it was to manipulate books, presenting partial truths, inaccurate numbers, and blank silences when it served their purposes. When a reply to a given letter or set of records was a year or more away, it was a relatively simple matter to "forget" to write something, slip into an undecipherable personal shorthand, or just neglect to send an account to the masters at all. "Beware," one factor living in the East Indies counseled another, "of sending home imperfect accounts; better it were in my opinion to send none."[2] Such deception and

1 IOR/H/29, *The Black Book*, fol. 27v.

2 Danvers and Foster, *Letters Received*, vol. VI, 12–13, "Letter from George Ball, Agent at Bantam, to Richard Cocks at Firando. Bantam, [June 9, 1617]."

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neglect were part of a set of practices that developed among the mariners, factors, and other servants of the East India Company abroad, in which they implicitly rejected the nascent capitalist insistence that those with only labor to sell bear nearly all the risk while those with capital reap nearly all the rewards. Their persistent but muted rebellion against their masters participated in a larger debate spurred by the spectacular profits produced by the new long-distance trade: who should benefit from this wealth, who should bear the costs associated with fetching it from halfway across the globe, and who should have control over these decisions?

Scholars treating the English East India Company's first fifty years of voyages into the Indian Ocean have focused their attention on the concerns and records of the London masters, or the highest ranking, most highly literate servants abroad such as ambassadors, chaplains, and occasionally captains. They have focused on the words and decisions of those who claimed to direct the Company, a fact that has led them to ignore or underplay the importance of the actions of the directed, and the fact that they often ignored or only partially obeyed the will of their masters. Scholars have focused on the books, without remembering that books can occasionally be false and untrustworthy, or at least, only half the story.

This book seeks to excavate the other half of the story from those records and their gaps, thereby expanding our understanding of the scope of the struggle between competing ideas of political economy broached by the new trade in the years 1600–1650. It may have been the hired hands of the Company whose actions made clear that they thought the control and profits of the new trade should be shared more generously with those who took the risky journey to the Indian Ocean, but those people were by no means powerless to make their case. They were also numerous. Agents sent by the Company to stop their servants abroad from trading on their own behalf, often to the prejudice of the directors' and investors' profits, reported back that they "Cannott remidy it." They found, they wrote, that "wee contend even with [the] Ocean" in trying to stop this behavior, known as private trading.[3] Single drops of salt water, even small streams, were capable of being dried up, altered, and otherwise stemmed. The ocean, as every merchant and sailor knew, was a force of nature, impossible to control. The collective force of the Company's servants abroad, exerting their will in running the trade, far from their masters' oversight, was

3 IOR/H/29, *The Black Book*, fol. 46r. The date on this record is difficult to make out, but given the chronology of the entries, it is likely in the early 1650s. The entry is headed "This to bee read first for ye Smirna Merchant."

unstoppable. It was "too common to be reformed" and even to try risked a riot.[4]

Riots by groups of early modern men and women who felt they were being squeezed by new practices in land use, taxation, or other abrogations of their customary rights were not uncommon as European societies shifted from feudal to capitalist economies. These groups spoke with their actions, rarely articulating their case in words, and often expressing the expected submission to their social superiors when such words are recorded. However, as historians of commoners' revolts have noted, "Visible subordination helped to gloss over the awkward facts of plebeian assertion and rebellion … The gentry played their part too, representing as gracious grants what were really hard-won popular gains. And both sides colluded in concealing the negotiation, confrontation, threat and brokerage which went on behind the veil of deference and paternalism."[5] The deferential posture taken by the East India Company's servants abroad, including their apologies and protestations of dutiful obedience, participated in the widespread practice of practical politics among the broader hierarchies of early English society. Like their counterparts in the countryside or city, the fact they recorded such deference in their letters and books, "did not necessarily make them deferential, or accepting of their lot."[6] On the contrary, the practices these servants developed in the voyages and factories abroad, some drawn from maritime tradition and some from longstanding praxis in trading factories, constituted their own, highly effective intervention into the widespread debates in England over the control and profits of the new long-distance trade.

The extremely challenging conditions of voyages between England to the Indian Ocean and the magnitude of the profits from the trade made the East India Company's internal policies and governance structures, and the monopoly it held over the trade by virtue of a Crown charter a flash point for debates over the newly emerging economy as England shifted from a feudal to a capitalist society. Both the expense and the risk of such voyages were enormous. So were the profits in many of the Company's earliest voyages, a fact confirmed by the extraordinary wealth accrued by the Dutch and Portuguese through their own trading ventures in the Indian

4 Danvers and Foster, *Letters Received*, vol. V, 119, "The Surat Factors to the East India Company. Suratt, the 26th of February, 1616 [i.e. 1617])." Whether one trusts *this* report or not depends on how loyal one believes the writers to be.

5 Wood, "'Poore men woll speke one daye'," 78.

6 Harris, *The Politics of the Excluded*, 11.

Ocean. How were such voyages to be financed? What was owed to the financiers? What was owed to the men whose bravery and skill physically accomplished the trade, particularly in the face of its staggering death toll? Who should make the myriad decisions required to keep the trade running in England, on shipboard, and in the entrepôt and factories abroad? In London, debates raged between merchant and gentry members of the Company, between the Company and Parliament, and more broadly in the printed literature as each party sought to make its case for the shape of the emerging political economy through control over the East India Company and its profits. Abroad, Company servants, from the highest ranking factors and ship's captains to the lowest ranking sailors and apprentices, made their own case for how the Company should be run and its profits allocated. Traditional practices that encouraged decentralized decision-making and shared profit-making such as private trading, consultation on shipboard, and field promotions, were vastly expanded and enabled by the extraordinary distances and levels of risk involved in the trade.

Through silently engaging in these practices, the factors and mariners of the East India Company made their own quiet but effective contribution to a debate that often played out in more rhetorical ways back in London. Company masters were being attacked by other merchants, the traditional landed elites in Parliament, and at times the Crown, all of whom challenged the Company's literal monopoly on the trade and their virtual monopoly on the profits of the trade. The inequities embedded in global capitalism were arguably more visible, and more contested at the dawn of England's trading and colonial empire than they would be later on in its history. These debates form the central topic of this book.

The English East India Company was issued its charter in 1600 and was formally stripped of its power by the British Parliament in 1858.[7] In the course of this long history, it generated a legendary nine miles of records, nearly all of which are still preserved in the Asian and African Studies section of

7 There were ongoing debates in the nineteenth century as to whether the East India Company should maintain its trade monopoly to India and China and whether it should continue to rule in British-controlled India. The Indians living under East India Company rule, particularly in the northern states, answered this latter question in a firm negative by launching what became a widespread rebellion in May 1857. The Company eventually regained control in late 1858, but at a substantial cost to Indian and British lives and property. The rebellion ended the debate in the British Parliament, which voted to transfer governmental control of the subcontinent from the Company to the Crown. For a broad overview of this period see Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 492–520 and Lawson, *the East India Company*, 144–63.

the British Library in London, the National Archives of India in Delhi, and other major archives on the Indian subcontinent. Most work on the East India Company understandably focuses on some part of this extraordinary wealth of documents, which are largely a mix of records generated by the directors in London and documents received by them from employees abroad. Most of this scholarly work is concerned with the Company's role in British imperialism and is centered on the second half of the Company's history, following the battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Company's subsequent territorial expansion in the Indian subcontinent.[8] Relatively few works focus on the earliest years of the Company's history, prior to the English Civil War. In addition to marking a turning point in the nation's history, 1649 also marks a significant moment for the Company as it is restructured to include one of the domestic factions previously excluded from the Company's leadership, a faction that made the planting of colonies a condition of the new settlement. After this point, what had been primarily a trading company with a small footprint abroad becomes an increasingly complex corporation with an ever-expanding set of colonies in Africa, India, and other points in the east. Prior to this moment, the Company's history is marked by structural instability and fluctuations in financial gains, and while the debates over the distribution of money and power in and beyond the Company are by no means concluded after the 1649 restructuring (indeed, they arguably intensify), they do take on new shapes, making the early period unique. This book focuses on early domestic and internal arguments over political economy, prior to the Company's engagement in colonial settlement as a means of forwarding the trade and England's power. In both its focus on the earliest years of the Company's history and its emphasis on the practices of servants abroad as participating in larger domestic debates, this book enriches an overall scholarly field whose focus is primarily later and tends to center the concerns of the masters over those of the servants. In so doing, it participates in a recent swell of works attending to the Company's factories in the early years of its history, bringing literary critical analytic methods to available records in order to highlight an important cultural debate over England's political economy that was focalized through the East India trade.

Many scholarly works on the East India Company's history devote only a single opening chapter to the founding and early history of the Company, something that Rupali Mishra's, *A Business of State: Commerce, Politics, and*

8 The Battle of Plassey in 1757 marks the turning point in the traditional division of the Company's history from one of trading company to imperial rule. This narrative has been strongly challenged by the work of Stern, *The Company-State*.

the Birth of the East India Company (2018) seeks to rectify by settling her institutional history squarely on the first several decades of the Company's existence. This detailed work treats the words and actions of elite actors almost exclusively, describing "the heart of this book" as "the very complicated relationship between the East India Company and the state in early seventeenth-century England."[9] Mishra takes a deep dive into the early records of the company, focusing on its foundational documents and the policy decisions of the masters, and its close if sometimes fraught relations with the governments of Elizabeth I, James II, and Charles I. Mishra uses the extensive Company and government archives to build a detailed picture of this "business of state" in the opening years of one of England's first global trading corporations. This focus on questions of governance and relations with the Crown keeps questions of the distribution of profits to disputes over customs, Crown incursions on the monopoly, and power struggles between investors and directors. Complaints about unequal divisions of wealth are considered as arguments raised primarily by investors, even while they are sometimes articulated in the terms of an abstract "commonwealth." Questions over "private" versus "public" good are treated as a problem "of state."[10] Following the directors' lead allows Mishra to define the Company explicitly as a body politic composed only of the directors and investors—"like that of the political nation as a whole"—neatly eliding the role played by the "servants," who, as the hired help that enacted the trade, were not enfranchised members of the political body. With no capital to invest in the Company's voyages, the servants had no voice and receive none in this account.[11]

This focus on the state is shared by the second major book to be published in the last decade which treats the first hundred years of the Company's

9 Mishra, *A Business of State*, ibid., 3. For an example of a history of the East India Company that devotes only an initial chapter or section to its founding and initial few decades see Lawson, *East India Company*. The works that focus more closely on these opening decades include Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company*; Foster, *England's Quest of Eastern Trade*. Keay devotes a quarter of his book, *The Honorable Company*, to the Company's first forty years. Additional discussion is included in Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*.

10 Mishra, *A Business of State*, 9–11.

11 Robert Brenner has written what is arguably the most influential account of the new merchant class, including the leaders of the East India Company, and the questions of political economy linked to England's Civil War. In showing "how London's merchants organized themselves politically, as well as commercially, to respond to these economic opportunities and difficulties" and explaining "the sociopolitical effects of commercial development," Brenner wades deeply into questions of political economy (xi). However, his analysis focuses on the actions of the merchant elite in London and not on the varied servants working for them abroad. See Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

history, Philip J. Stern's *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India*. But in contrast to Mishra's focus on the London-based directors and investors, Stern attends carefully to conditions in select Company factories as they are founded and grow in the second half of the seventeenth century. He uses this history as a means to question the concept of a "state" more broadly, asking why "the national form of state is, and has been, the final and ultimate form of sovereignty and political community" and pushing us to reframe our understanding in broader terms. Deeply provocative, Stern's framing questions about political theory allows him to approach the early Company "as a form of government, a corporation, a jurisdiction, and a colonial proprietor." He necessarily focuses on the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Company is clearly a colonial proprietor, rather than spending significant time on the Company prior to its acquisition of Bombay in the late 1660s.[12] However, Stern's strong interest in the factories and emerging colonies abroad places it within a recent trend in the literature to expand the scope of analysis beyond London in the Company's early years, considering the actions and ideas of the men who performed the Company's work in Asia.

Emily Erickson's *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* is even more squarely centered on the actions of factors abroad, in this case their economic rather than their political decisions.[13] Erickson's economic history considers the relationship between European overseas trade and the state, specifically the state-sponsored chartered company with a domestic monopoly on trade to a given region, but she pivots to considering competition from *within* the Company itself.[14] Erickson argues that the English East India Company's longevity and success as compared to other state companies is due to its "organizational decentralization and the intertwining of private and company interests aboard the voyages of the East Indiamen ships." The development of extensive trading networks built up by Company employees operating on their own behalf (private trading) was, Erickson argues, critical to ensuring the Company's ability to shift into new markets and to expand as the political and commercial circumstances changed over time. She insists that state-granted "monopoly rights were not the key to Company success; it was the partial abrogation of

12 Stern, *The Company-State*, viii.

13 This is not to imply these two realms were somehow separable. I make the distinction here only to mark a difference in emphasis between the two books. Studies focusing on the later history of the Company have more frequently paid attention to factories abroad as they were better established and more numerous. See for example, Chaudhuri's *Trading World of Asia*.

14 Erickson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*.

those rights that sustained England's commercial success in Asia."[15] Erickson thus documents the substantial impact of the actions of the Company's servants abroad. Erickson's economic history, in its use of network theory to track the movements and decisions of Company factors living in Asia, pushes beyond the usual focus on the Company's upper echelons and its relations with England's governing and financial elites and their counterparts in Asian nations and empires. It performs this analysis, however, as an intervention into debates over corporate organizational form and measures of corporate success such as longevity and the successful generation of profits for shareholders. As a work of economic history, its interests do not encompass broader socio-political questions about this phenomenon and how the actions of factors abroad participated in larger debates over political economy in the mercantilist phase of England's emergence as a capitalist economy. But Erickson's findings point to the importance of attending to the actions of factors as a critical intervention into that debate.

The other two recent works focusing on the actions of the Company's servants abroad in the early years of its history make equally important claims regarding those men and their decisions. Alison Games' influential *Web of Empire* tracks the global reach of these men and their circulation through multiple overseas ventures, highlighting the ways that they experimented with different modes of engagements in their foreign locales and bringing the knowledge they gained to new places in a constantly evolving search for ways to keep English overseas fortunes alive and ideally increase them as the nation began to explore the possibilities of trade and empire enabled through new sailing technologies.[16] She emphasizes what she calls the cosmopolitanism of these men and their willingness to accommodate themselves to new cultures and often to integrate deeply into them not only through diplomacy and long habitation but also through marriage, families, and other forms of intimate social exchange. The scope of the book is necessarily global, but East India traders play central roles in Games' discussion of these dynamics. This is confirmed by David Veevers' *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, where he tracks these forms of integration in order to show how Company traders grew to positions of considerable wealth and influence *within* Asian polities, serving the needs and goals of Asian rules even as they simultaneously grew the Company's power on the subcontinent. He emphasizes that in the early years of the Company's history in Asia, these

15 Erickson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, 2. The extensive private trading by Company servants is the subject of chapter 3.

16 Games, *The Web of Empire*.

men understood that they were acting from a position of weakness. Such integrative strategies were necessary for any modicum of success, and at times simply to keep the trade alive. Veevers' important work shows that the methods of Company servants were "often actively and even violently resisted by their corporate employers in Europe," as "metropolitan authorities always were [concerned] with notions of 'corruption' and 'going-native'," but they ignored and overcame these objections, driven as they were by "private ambitions" as much or more than Company or national aspirations for wealth or power.[17]

Conflicting Claims to East India Company Wealth shares the interest of these works in the actions of the Company's servants in the early years of the Company's history. It also shares Veevers' skepticism that "the development and growth of the Company in Asia was largely determined by national interests and the domestic forces of a faraway European metropole." It will in particular challenge the contention that the Company operated with a smooth "chain of command" that bound all its far-flung employees to the will of the London directors, acting with "institutional unity and unanimity."[18] The goal of this book, in contrast, is to show precisely how the Company's servants abroad participated in a significant debate back in England over the new global trade and how its wealth would be allocated by largely ignoring the will of those in England and pursuing their own goals instead.

Many scholars have noted the importance of these early debates over the nature of the trade and what they indicate about the developing theorization of capitalist macroeconomics. Intellectual histories focused on early economic theories of what would be termed mercantilism frequently examine pamphlets written by East India Company apologists, considering the explanations of the Company masters and major investors as weighed against the ideas of later writers and those not involved in long-distance trade. Although such works engage with popular print media such as pamphlets, the social position of most of the authors studied ensure that the terms of the debate generally stay between the traditional religious and landed elite and newer mercantile wealth.[19] The pamphlets published

17 Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, 6.

18 Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, 8.

19 See for example Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*. Andrea Finkelstein's *Harmony and the Balance* is more nuanced, opening with a discussion of traditional critiques of merchants and international trade and performing a compelling analysis of the arguments used by Company and other mercantile apologists in their efforts to counter such criticism. The book is, however, ultimately focused on explicating the ideas of such figures as Malynes, Misselden, and Mun (and other later writers) and not on exploring sustained social resistance to the economic

by select Company members in defense of their monopoly articulate early capitalist theories of the benefits of global trade, striving to explain what was meant by "the balance of trade" to Parliamentarians skeptical that shipping boatloads of England's bullion to the East Indies increased their country's wealth. The rhetoric deployed by mercantilist theorists like Company man Thomas Mun (1571–1641) has been of particular interest, as he attempted to make coherent and persuasive to his contemporaries what was a relatively new set of ideas about how trade worked and how wealth was generated. These studies are primarily interested in tracking the development of a particular strand of economic thought and do not therefore consider in depth the contemporary objections made to these new capitalist theories, or if they do, they limit their consideration to those articulated by early modern social elites in Parliament, Whitehall, and the wealthy citizens of London.

English Renaissance literary critics have also participated in this line of inquiry, adding to the archive of sources numerous stage plays and other works of literature and pageantry printed or performed before 1650. Such studies insist on the role played by literary works not only in reflecting the economic theories of the time, but in locating the metaphors and other rhetorical figures central to conceptualizing such theories in language and communicating them to London's population more broadly.[20] Literary historians thus sometimes expand consideration of the economic changes spearheaded by the nascent long-distance trade to include objections staged by and to the lower echelons of early modern English, particularly London, society. However, there are very few literary works published before the Civil War that directly feature the East Indies as a setting or the Company as an institution, so those seeking to use literary analytic methods to address the socio-political role played by the East India Company in particular must obliquely tie the East Indian merchants with literary works set elsewhere through crossing their concerns with pamphlets written by Company authors

vision they articulated. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind's collection of essays, *Mercantilism Reimagined*, more usefully broadens the subject to "one in which morality, politics, and science were front-and-center in people's minds," thus allowing questions of political economy to play a larger role in the discussion (7).

20 Bradley Ryner's book on the work done by playwrights in processing, mediating, and correcting the metaphors and other rhetorical figures used to conceptualize the new economic theories of the time is particularly thoughtful and convincing. See Ryner, *Performing Economic Thought*. See also Valerie Forman's theorizations of loss in the new mercantile theories and in tragicomedy, in Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions*. Gitanjali Shahani performs an insightful analysis of Fletcher and Massinger's *The Sea Voyage* in relation to Mun's defense of the exportation of bullion in "Of 'Barren Islands' and 'Cursèd Gold'."

themselves or string together numerous brief allusions across multiple works.[21]

Instead, literary critics working on prose accounts within a post-colonial or global Renaissance studies tradition have increasingly attended to the large archive of East India Company materials, analyzing travel narratives by Company chaplains, ambassadorial correspondence, ship's logs, factor's reports and general correspondence from the East. Early critical interest focused on Sir Thomas Roe (1581–1654), the first English ambassador to India and a Company servant. More recent publications have studied Indian women whose lives intersected with the English trading company, such as Jahangir I's mother, Maryam-uz-Zamani (1542–1623), who was involved in many highly successful trading ventures, and Mariam Khan (dates unknown), who consecutively married two Company captains and traveled to London to argue for her widow's rights in front of the directors. But regardless of whether the essays focus on English or Indian figures, men or women, they remain firmly ensconced in the experiences of the Company's elite—its directors, captains, ambassadors, and chaplains—and the nobility and upper strata of Mughal India and other Asian polities.[22]

21 The only play staged before the Civil War that I am aware of which features characters or scenes set in the realm of the East Indies trade broadly speaking is Fletcher's *The Island Princess*. This play is set entirely in Indonesia, and while it features a Portuguese rather than an English cast of European characters, it clearly speaks to the Company's trade and role in English society. For representative analyses of this play, see Neill, "'Material Flames'"; Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 115–36; Loomba, "'Break Her Will, and Bruise No Bone Sir'"; and Jowitt, "*The Island Princess* and Race." There is another, quite unusual play, which was written but not performed during this period. Walter Mountfort, a clerk working for the East India Company in Persia, appears to have composed *The Launching of the Mary, or The Seaman's Honest Wife* while voyaging home to London. The play is set in the London dockyards and features long set pieces dramatizing the arguments included in Thomas Mun's printed apologias for the Company. Mountfort sold the script to Prince Charles' Men, who paid to license it, but the troupe never staged it. Although there are some indications that a modern edition has been planned, the only currently available edition was edited by J. H. Walter for the Malone Society Reprints series in 1932. Relatively little scholarship has been completed on the play so far, but see the excellent beginnings made by Christensen, *Separation Scenes*, 177–212, Ryner, *Performing Economic Thought*, 16–49, and Pangallo, *Playwriting Playgoers*, 74–90.

22 Jyostna Singh established early seventeenth-century India as a rich site for exploration through, among other publications, her early work on the writings of the first English ambassador to India, Company servant Thomas Roe, and on Company chaplain Edward Terry. See Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues*, 17–44, and Singh, "History or Colonial Ethnography?" See also Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-Cats"; Das, "'Apes of Imitation'"; and Harris, *Indography*, and the special issue of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* devoted to Company, edited by Schleck and Sen. There has also been substantial and interesting work done on female members of the Mughal courts of this period. See for example Sen, "Early Liaisons";

This is partly a function of the archive. Most of the documents generated by the Company are composed by English masters, or by ambassadors, captains, chaplains and other high-ranking officials abroad. Although some inter-factory correspondence has been preserved, the content of personal letters written outside the aegis of the Company's required record-keeping were not preserved in the Company's early archives, and of course, in terms of sheer numbers, most of the men working to enact the East India Company's global trade were likely illiterate, including the mariners and dockworkers of several continents, and lower-ranking servants in factories abroad.[23] The voices of these men, and those of their wives or families when they had them, are rarely found in unmediated form in the extant documentation, posing the usual problems for scholars seeking to illuminate the lives of those who expressed their beliefs and made their arguments through their actions and their oral speech rather than on the page. Methods for studying such individuals and communities are therefore more laborious, requiring the careful sifting of elite records, against-the-grain readings, and other tactics. A few literary scholars have undertaken to tease out a few details of the lives of the lower strata of East India Company employees, but they are exception.[24] As a whole, the story of England's first fifty years of trading voyages to the East remains a tale only of the aspirations, convictions, and decisions of the elite.

Malieckal, "Mariam Khan and the Legacy of Mughal Women"; Robertson, "A Stranger Bride"; Findly, "The Capture of Maryam-uz-Zamani's Ship"; and Singh, "Boundary Crossings in the Islamic World."

23 Preserved correspondence between factories can be read in Foster, *The English Factories in India*; additional material can be found in Danvers and Foster, *Letters Received*. In 1617 Company directors required all personal correspondence sent home on Company ships to be unsealed so that it could be reviewed for information the directors wished to keep private to protect their monopoly. However, they did not transcribe these letters into their records, and many of the Company's servants resented this directive and found other means of transporting their letters home. See chapter 3 for further discussion.

24 Amrita Sen and Richmond Barbour have both written articles that address lower-status servants of the Company. Sen's article on the Indian broker Jadow begins to move out of the rarified air of the Mughal Court to tease out the details of the lives of Indian men who served the English factors in their attempts to break into the complex and well-established Indian Ocean trade. She writes that the Company's "very survival, in fact, depended on its ability to include in its operations a diverse group of people including natives and women" and her article explores one of these "new set[s] of affiliations and allegiances linking the English factors and the Indians, both of whom worked for the Company, although in different capacities" (39). Barbour's careful and detailed accounts of particular Company voyages often pay attention to shipboard conditions and contain information about the lives of all of the men who served on the voyage, and his article on the presence of foreign labor in the company addresses the work done by mariners. See Sen, "Searching for the Indian" and Barbour, "A Multinational Corporation."

The vision of this minority elite has thus generally come to dominate the literary historical treatment of the East India Company and of England's early forays into global capitalism, particularly when it aligns with the Company's later engagement with colonial settlement and military control. Numerous literary and cultural studies articles explore with great nuance the jingoistic nationalism of ambassadors, head factors, captains, and similarly placed servants, tracing their sense of their own religious and cultural superiority and their disdain for the Indian Ocean residents with whom they interacted.[25] Their views often metonymically come to stand in for "the English" or the "the Company" writ large, but without greater attention to the attitudes of the mass of men who worked and died for the Company, such generalizations are unwarranted. Those men interacted intensively with their Indian Ocean counterparts on the docks of Surat or Bantam and were frequently required to welcome them aboard as members of their own crews if they wished to return home, all of which led to a different set of social formations and identifications than those of their often more insulated and insular superiors and the mass of Company investors.

To take a representative example, a thoughtful article on hybridity published by Adrian Carton in 2007 examines as part of its primary evidence the East India Company's 1687 decree encouraging Company servants and soldiers living in the newly established colonies at Fort St. George and Bombay to marry native women, offering to each couple a purse on the day their first child was christened. Carton argues against scholars who have read the edict as "encouraging inter-cultural relationships across the colonial divide and the establishment of a 'mixed-race' community in early colonial India," insisting instead that a detailed attention to the context of the decree shows that it served instead "to re-assert the boundaries of Protestant Englishness along an historicised politics of place where racial mixing was negotiated by other markers of difference," primarily religion.[26]

25 Most of the books and articles cited in notes 21 and 22 above pursue this project to a greater or lesser degree.

26 Carton, "Historicizing Hybridity," 148. Nocentelli writes that the Dutch, who similarly encouraged marriages between their men and Indonesian women at this time, cited a demographic explanation for the position. Dutch authorities claimed offspring born of European men and women tended to be fewer, feebler, and died at higher rates than the children born from European-Asian couples. The need for greater numbers within the European enclaves in Asia pushed the English East India Company first to reverse its position on bringing English wives to India, and then to encourage the formation of Anglo-Indian families. Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 10–11. For more on transporting European women abroad versus engaging in liaisons (formal and informal) with local women and their families, see Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, 18–23; Sen "Early Liaisons: East India Company, Native Wives"; and

He concludes that when "set against the social markers that determined relations of domination and subordination between Europeans and Indians in the early colonial period, whiteness emerges as a highly contested arena of symbolic capital where questions of status were shaped by patriarchal privilege as much as they were religious sectarianism." Company leaders, he insists, issued the edict to gain control over the sexual and marital behavior of its men and to ensure the religious identity of their offspring, and not to encourage hybridity. Part of Carton's evidence for this conclusion is the concern evinced by Company leaders such as the minister William Isaacson at the high number of marriages and less formal liaisons already taking place between Company servants and women who were the offspring of previous intercultural marriages between Portuguese and Indian families. Carton also notes that bringing English women East did not much stem this trend, as the women who made the voyage were few, and the "impossibility of maintaining a European-style marriage in India on low Company salaries" rendered such matches difficult.[27] Carton's argument about the goals of Company directors in issuing the edict is persuasive: there is substantial evidence that Company elites sought actively to cultivate and preserve a "proper" English Protestant identity in its servants abroad, employing the patriarchalism of early modern society and the master/servant relationship to achieve its ends. This doubtless reflects their belief in the superiority of their own cultural and religious identity and their paternalistic attempts to control the nature of the role played by the Company globally and domestically through managing the lives of its employees.

Yet this evidence also tells us something else. Many lower-ranking members of the East India Company were evidently comfortable integrating domestically into an already-established Indian or mixed Indian-Portuguese society, and in some cases preferred Indian to English domestic partners due to the greater levels of financial comfort and opportunity such liaisons afforded them. As Nocentelli notes, "intermarriage was far from rare, with formal and informal unions steadily increasing in number throughout the seventeenth century."[28] The differences in the religious practices of two

Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender and the Global Turn*, 61–69. This topic is treated at length in chapter 4 and the conclusion.

27 Carton, "Historicizing Hybridity," 147.

28 Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, 10. This trend continued into the eighteenth century, involving not only lower-ranking servants of the Company, but also many of its leading figures abroad. Dalrymple's *White Mughals* provides a compelling history of some of these relationships and further efforts by the Company's directors to end the practice. See also Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*.

partners—particularly when both parties were Christian—was obviously not deemed of sufficient importance by the couples and their families to impede these intercultural matches. It was precisely this demonstrated lack of concern for such differences on the part of lower-ranking men that caused Company elites such anxiety. Carton's argument, like those of many other scholars examining similar aspects of the Company's history, focuses on the anxiety and control of the elites, with an eye towards what will later become an even more explicitly racist imperialism. But one might argue that there are two different Company attitudes on display, and two different ways of living Englishness. The fact that one group was dominated by the power and wealth of the other should not erase this fact or invalidate the history of the men whose beliefs were represented only obliquely in Company records. Those men made their vision clear through their actions, regardless of the bigotries of their social superiors. This is not to say that lower-ranking Company men were free of religious or cultural prejudice, or that they practiced a radical egalitarianism. If nothing else, their lives with their Indian domestic partners or wives were surely marked by the patriarchalism of English (and Indian, and Portuguese) societies more broadly even when motivated primarily by emotional attachment. But it's clear that their attitudes on this point differed from the religious men and social elites whose words are preserved in the Company's records and who sought to impose their beliefs and priorities upon their inferiors.

In erasing or underplaying the importance of the actions and obliquely accessible beliefs of the majority of English East India Company men, literary and cultural critics run the risk of validating and replicating the hierarchical social structure that largely ensured the dominance of a national and economic vision which generated wealth and comfort for a privileged English few at the expense of a multi-cultural oppressed many. It was the elite members of the Company and of English society more broadly who largely envisioned and ultimately enforced a racist imperial regime sustained through appropriation and violence abroad, and created a socio-economic regime that induced or coerced the participation of England's seafarers and soldiers through poverty and impressment.

The lure of studying Britain's imperial regime in India at the height of its power is strong, particularly for literary critics motivated by post-colonial commitments. Recovering the lives of subordinated populations and theorizing the modes of power which oppress them and the methods these people used to resist and undermine colonial regimes remain important tasks. Early modernists working one or two centuries prior to this imperial moment have understandably struggled to shake off the vision of its shadow

on the distant horizon. Even while striving to avoid teleological readings of early modern materials of England's trading and diplomatic relations with various Eurasian powers, scholars have focused their analyses on teasing out "imperial envy" or similar incipient marks of England's eventual dominance of the Middle East and subcontinent.[29] Recovering a complete sense of historical contingency is difficult when faced with the magnitude of later events, and tracing the factors that lead up to them is a legitimate project. But not at the cost of completely obscuring competing possibilities and visions for society. Crushing these alternatives was the project of England's imperial-minded elites; scholars should not collude in this goal.

I contend that the focus of existing literary critical scholarship primarily or solely on the discourse of an articulate (and prolific) elite in the first fifty years of the Company's history has entrenched a teleological and excessively hegemonic understanding of English overseas trade in the east that too often ironically replicates the imperial vision of those very promoters and investors. This effectively conceals both the robust resistance from within the metropole to the expenditure of material and labor resources on those projects and the competing interests and conflictual relations that emerged from within the Company to the ways in which those projects were conducted. Mariners, factors, and other servants dispatched on long-distance voyages and posted to distant factories confronted intense problems of economic viability, cultural navigation, and physical survival. They did so outside the direct control by Company masters and in situations that both produced extreme interdependence and gave rise to novel social connections. Their attempts to navigate those situations often produced unexpected social, economic, and cultural dynamics that were at odds with the stated intentions and goals of Company masters and investors. As subsequent chapters will show, the Company often struggled or entirely failed to resolve the tensions and contradictions within its trading enterprise either internally or to English society at large. In this way, this book seeks to produce a more nuanced portrayal of this early period, challenging both the economic inevitability and the cultural pessimism of prevailing accounts

29 For example, the term "para-colonial" was proposed by John Archer specifically to avoid the teleology of "pre-colonial" but keeps later imperialisms in view. See Archer, *Old Worlds*, 1–22, especially 16–17. MacLean coined "imperial envy" to describe England's position vis-à-vis one of those empires in *Looking East*, 20–23. Barbara Fuchs proposed a method of connecting early modern Europe's admiration for classical empires (particularly Rome) with their contemporary imperial ambitions in "Imperium Studies." Although these early framing suggestions have been critiqued and modified, on the whole they have been absorbed into the field and can be found as implicit assumptions in many more recent articles.

by examining the debates over risk, reward, and control at the very start of the Company's history.

Conflicting Claims to East India Company Wealth covers these debates from two positions, divided geographically. The first half considers arguments made among various groups living in London, through printed pamphlets, Parliamentary and other government records, and the records of the East India Company masters living in London. These debates will feature writings and figures known to those familiar with the early history of the Company, such as the pamphleteer Robert Kayll, Company defender Sir Dudley Digges, Company governor Thomas Smythe, James I, and so on. The second half of the book considers the arguments implicit in the actions of the men who traveled abroad on the Company's behalf, the hired mariners, factors, and other servants assisting factors in the trade. Both mariners and factors, who together made up the vast majority of the men performing the trade of the East India Company in the Indian Ocean basin, had a reputation for challenging, directly and indirectly, the social hierarchies in which they conducted their work. They insisted upon a degree of consultation and/or independent decision-making that would have been regarded as unacceptable in other occupations, and they were known for making their own fortunes while technically traveling abroad at the behest of London masters.[30] The two groups are by no means identical in terms of skills, education, occupation, or potential mobility in early modern society. There

30 See, however, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, for other significant loci of revolt from lower in the social hierarchy of early modern England. Linebaugh and Rediker's opening discussion of the mariners' revolt during the wreck of the *Sea Venture* on Bermuda reinforces my description of mariners as accustomed to independent decision-making. Sailors feature frequently in historical accounts of insubordination and revolt, a fact that is reflected not only in Shakespeare's opening scene of *The Tempest*, a scene drawn directly from Strachey's account of the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, but in works like *Pericles*, Massinger and Fletcher's *The Sea Voyage*, and of course the depiction in literary and popular pamphlets of the multi-ethnic pirate crews of the Mediterranean. For a historical account of these mixed pirate crews in the Mediterranean, see Matar, "England and Mediterranean Captivity." For a variety of essays on the role of pirates in English popular and literary culture, see Jowitt, *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder* and Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy*. Jowitt's interest in pirates as seafarers that challenge the hierarchies, goals, and beliefs of national and imperial authorities aligns well with the goals of this book. Unlike the popular English pirates who separated themselves from their home, physically and culturally, the "unruly" servants of the East India Company were able to enact their disagreements with their masters over trading policies from within the body of the Company itself, using it as a vehicle to realize their own financial aspirations. That said, many seafarers switched readily from licit to illicit trading voyages, taking work with different crews as opportunities arose, so the overlap in Company and pirate personnel could be considerable.

were also hierarchies among both seafarers and traders ranging from ship's boys and apprentices to captains and factors. These were very different men with different prospects. They are grouped together here to emphasize a basic divide in the structure of the East India Company as a trading corporation: those who financed the voyage were "members" and "governors" of the corporation, who managed the corporation from London.[31] Those who "served" were hired to travel abroad and enact the trade, carrying out the orders of their masters in London. The former took a financial risk in providing funding for the voyage, but otherwise remained safe in London and benefited financially from a successful voyage. The latter were hired at a fixed rate, bore a high risk of disease and death, and were expected to trade only for the benefit of the masters (after a brief and quickly rejected experiment with allowing limited personal trading). This arrangement of risk and reward suited the London members and governors of the Company quite well. They squabbled primarily, as will be examined in the first half of the book, over who would have control of the trade to the East Indies and who would have control over the East India Company's operations. It did not suit the servants and mariners who traveled nearly as much, as will be made clear in the second half of the book. This book therefore takes into account not only the words and decisions of the men who did not travel, but also the actions of the men who did, showing how their practices challenged the arguments and decisions of their masters in London about the way the new capitalist enterprise would be shaped.

The mariners, factors, and other servants who enacted the East India Company's trading activities in the Indian Ocean basin are sometimes treated as tools for accomplishing the plans of the London governors, but they were far from being passive conduits of their masters' ambitions or even from being obedient servants of their orders. On the contrary, these men collectively crafted a set of practices and values that meshed their masters' goals with their own, and in the process irrevocably altered the successful performance of the former. Particularly in the early decades of the Company's history, both mariners who signed on for East India voyages

31 Anyone who purchased shares in a voyage was a "member" of the Company, and could participate in Company meetings, voting on various matters of governance. There were hundreds of members, who were known as "the Generality" in the Company records. Day-to-day operations of the Company were run by a governor and group of men known as "committees," as various aspects of the trade were committed to their care. Their meetings were known as "the Court of Committees." Who served in the role of governor or committee was a matter of some debate, as will be discussed further in chapter 2. Those who were hired to perform the business of the trade were known as "servants." They were not members and had no voting rights in a meeting of the Generality.

and the factors and other servants traveling and living abroad worked largely in isolation from their countrymen apart from their immediate peers. They also worked at a great distance from England, engaging intensively with Indian, Persian, Indonesian, and other Near and Far Asian counterparts as well as select European traders and sailors abroad. This encouraged the growth of cultural values distinct from and sometimes at odds with those recognized in London.[32] In addition, both factors and sailors could draw on a long history of such independence and relative isolation, one that the advent of long-distance trading voyages and voyages of exploration in the early modern period only intensified. These conditions helped to empower the men who did the Company's work abroad, from apprentices and sailors to captains, pursuers, and factors, to act with independence and to allocate to themselves a greater share of the wealth generated by the trade than their masters saw fit.

The East India Company servants were merely the latest and arguably most effective group of factors and sailors to act in such a way. As Gerard Malynes would state drily in his book on maritime law and custom a few years after the Company began its voyages east, "it behooueth [merchants] to make good choice of the persons which they doe imploy, for their welfare dependeth vpon Trafficke; otherwise, the Factor groweth rich and the Merchant poore, because his gaine of Factoridge is certaine, howsoeuer the successe of Merchants imployment doth prooue."[33] Thus, while the East India Company servants could swear to their masters that "generally we affirm it, your factors and factories in these parts are as well governed as if they lived in Fraunce or nearer you to give daily account of their actions," their assertions were still not exactly reassuring, as factors living in France were hardly above suspicion.[34] As one fictional factor announced with relish, "Little thinkes my master in England what ware I deale withall here in France … this tis to haue the Land & the Sea betwixt me & my master, here can I keepe my french Reuels, and none say so much as blake is mine eye."[35] Any measure of land and sea between servants and masters gave wide latitude to the servant. As the "french Reuels" imply, factors and their staff used this

32 Games, *The Web of Empire*, explores these conditions and differences through the lives of factors and captains in the context of England's early global trading and colonial ventures.

33 Malynes, *The Ancient Law-Merchant*, 111.

34 Danvers and Foster, *Letters Received*, vol. V, 121, "The Surat Factors to the East India Company. Suratt, the 26th of February, 1616 [i.e. 1617])."

35 Heywood, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, act I, scene xii, lines 1770–71, 1786–88. For more on the suspect nature of factors and their fictional representations, see Sebek, "'After My Humble Dutie Remembered'."

latitude not only to engage in their own enrichment, often at the expense of their masters' business, but also to participate in sexual and social activities that would have been banned to them in England, at their masters' sides. The distances between the East India Company servants and their masters ensured near immunity for servants to act in a manner they felt was most appropriate, both financially and sexually, whether it accorded with the orders of their masters or not. As will be discussed further in the final chapter, sexual sins were often intertwined with financial ones, rendering debates between masters and servants over marriage, concubinage, and even less formal liaisons extremely vexed.

Mariners had an even more strongly established tradition of independence and expectations for a share in the financial gains of a voyage. Mariners independently negotiated a contract for each voyage they took, unless they were impressed by the Crown. While they were subject to a strict shipboard hierarchy when sailing, they also had a firm expectation of consultation about major decisions during the voyage, and could individually desert or collectively mutiny when they disagreed with a captain's decisions.[36] They also had well-established practices for dividing up the wealth accrued through the taking of prizes or other piratical activities, and took advantage of their travels from place to place to conduct such trade as they could.[37] As Hubbard notes, "[n]othing could have been further from [seamen's] experience than the notion that they ought to sacrifice their own interests to those of the merchant companies … From their perspectives, the risks they took in the service of English enterprise entitled them to shares of its proceeds."[38]

They also identified strongly as sailors, rather than Company servants. Mariners signed on for single voyages, and were thus servants of the East India Company only for the length of a voyage. A significant number would have served on ships other than those that were English owned, and nearly all would have served with mixed crews. English sailors had for centuries been voyaging regularly to ports in the North Sea, Atlantic, and Mediterranean, interacting with other mariners who spoke different languages, many of whom, in addition to other cultural differences, practiced a different religion, particularly since the Reformation. However, the East

36 For a description of the custom of consultation and the various options available to sailors who were dissatisfied with shipboard decisions, see Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 45–83.

37 For maritime practices regarding the division of prizes and booty along with the expectation of consultation, see Hubbard, *Englishmen at Sea*, 8–14, 26–64. See also Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*.

38 Hubbard, *Englishmen at Sea*, 11–12.

India Company's voyages employed English mariners on such a vast scale, and required so many mariners who were not born in England (or Europe) to man ships on return voyages that it greatly magnified the number of seafaring languages required to communicate on shipboard and cultural differences between mariners employed by the Company. It also intensified the differences between the seafaring communities in England and the rest of the population, including the London-based East India Company directors.

These cultural differences are not minor. In the eighteenth century, an Englishman could talk about walking into areas of London "chiefly inhabited by sailors" as an unsettling experience: "but that somewhat of the same language is spoken, a man would be apt to suspect himself in another country. Their manner of living, speaking, acting, dressing, and behaving are so very peculiar to themselves." Seamen, he claims, "are a generation differing from all the world."[39] The seeming foreignness of mariners to those who remained at home must have been even more striking at the very beginning of England's engagement with long-distance trade. Seamen sailing to Indian Ocean ports would have expanded upon a maritime *lingua franca* developed through regular voyages to Northern and Atlantic European ports and more recently to Mediterranean destinations all the way to the Levant. Adding the vocabulary and phrases needed to communicate with their counterparts in Eastern Asia would render mariners' speech even less familiar to their more domestic countrymen as specific technical and geographic vocabulary spilled into their everyday speech. On East India Company voyages, these linguistic skills would become important not only when in foreign ports, but even when communicating on shipboard, as the high death rate on most voyages required adding crewmen hired abroad in order to be able to complete the journey home. When the Company's second voyage, headed by Henry Middleton, arrived at Bantam "the majority of Middleton's crews were sick or dying," and thus, as Edmund Scott wrote, they were constrained to "hyre so many as wee could gett of *Goossaratt,* and *Chyneses* to helpe bring home our ships."[40] Contemporaries complained about this necessary practice, writing about Company ships that "whereas they were carried forth with Christians, they are brought home with Heathen."[41] Nor was this a feature only of early exploratory voyages. As Peter Linebaugh writes, "by

39 Fielding, *A Brief Description of the cities of London and Westminster,* xv.

40 Makepeace, "Sir Henry Middleton (d. 1613)"; Scott, *An Exact Discourse*, K3r. For further discussion of the necessity of hiring foreign labor to run Company factories and man their ships, see Barbour, "A Multinational Corporation." For a discussion of the men who journeyed from the India Ocean trading zone to England, see Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism.*

41 Kayll, *The Trades Increase*, 20.

1700 the Navigation Acts had been amended to permit up to three-quarters of the merchant complements to consist of foreigners." Seafaring labor "was fully international."[42] Hiring local pilots to assist in navigating foreign shorelines was also a common practice, all of which resulted in crews of mixed national origin communicating through the mélange of languages that sailors learned to speak to ensure smooth operations on shipboard as well as to negotiate shore leaves. Throughout a period well known for the development of vernacular literatures in Europe and a corresponding development of national pride in a distinct literary culture, Elizabethan and Jacobean mariners were participating in the development not of a national vernacular, but of a language spoken in ports across the globe derived from dozens of languages. Thanks to their presence, English would now be added to the mix. It was a language that marked them not as Englishmen but as sailors, an identity they shared with men across the globe.

Other cultural markers served a similar function, marking them as seafarers first and foremost. Modes of dress, forms of bodily comportment including walking, and damage to the body by sun, ropes, and other sailing-related injuries all served to make sailing men distinct from those who worked on the land. In this period, dress served a strong identity function, visibly signaling a person's gender, religion, and social status.[43] In wearing a dress peculiar to their trade, sailors made clear to all their primary mode of identification in early modern society.[44] As Cheryl Fury notes in her

42 Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, 67.

43 The imposition of sumptuary laws in this period indicates the importance of dress as a marker of social status. The often transgressive and playful use of gendered cross-dressing on the English stage has been noted for decades. There have also been many discussions of the significance of changing one's headgear in relation to religious conversion, particularly sailors and others captured by pirate crews and held in captivity. Matar highlights the phrase "donning the turban" as a means of indicating conversion to Islam in "The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination." For various insightful discussions on the importance of clothing to identity in the period both domestically and internationally, see Richardson, *Clothing Culture*; see also Rublack, *Dressing Up*.

44 Rediker describes the typical early eighteenth-century mariner as wearing "wide, baggy breeches, cut a few inches above the ankle and often made of a heavy, rough red nap. The breeches were tarred as a protection against the cold, numbing wetness. He frequently wore a checked shirt of blue and white linen, a blue or gray 'fearnought' jacket, gray stocking, and a Monmouth cap. Some of his apparel he might well have made for himself, so deft was he with needle and thread after years of mending sails at sea. Always making clever use of commonplaces, the seamen used bits of hardened cheese or 'ye Joints of ye Back-Bone' of a shark as buttons on a jacket." Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 11. While some aspects of this dress would doubtless be different in the prior century, dependent upon the wider availability of particular fabrics and influenced by prevailing styles on land, the necessity for certain cuts to facilitate movement on shipboard,

book on Elizabethan seamen, most "were recognizable by their distinctive apparel [which] helped to single them out to other seafarers … This type of visual recognition routinely led to conversations and acquaintanceship. Barring visual identification, seamen were recognized by their speech." When in port on shore leave, mariners sought out accommodations with other sailors they knew or met while on shore, and were "clearly more at home with other seafarers" than anyone outside their profession.[45] Many, although born in England, had no fixed place of abode there or anywhere else in the world.

The distinctiveness of sailors and their willingness to mix with other populations of portside residents in places around the world often made their social superiors anxious.[46] Their often wild behavior while on land led many, including their captains, to regard them as a different species of human being, closer to the "masterless men" that caused such anxiety to authorities in the period. While in between the contracts they independently negotiated for themselves, mariners were indeed "masterless," and they caused port city authorities considerable trouble. The admiral William Monson speculated on sailors' behavior on shore, wondering

> whether it is the sea that works contrary effects to the land, or whether it be a liberty you feel ashore after you have been penned up in a ship like birds in a cage, or untamed horses when they are let loose; certain it is neither birds nor horses can show more extravagant lewdness, more dissolate wildness, and less fear of God, than your carriage discovers when you come ashore and cast off the command of your superior officers at sea had over you.[47]

the attempts at water- and wind-proofing and other trade-related aspects of the clothing would be similar and would similarly mark out the sailor from other laborers on land.

45 Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 201. Fisher also notes that "[i]n Britain, Indian slaves, servants, and seamen often had more in common with their British peers than with wealthy Indians there." *Counterflows to Colonialism*, 49.

46 As Fury notes, there were "frequent complaints from those in authority about the lack of seamen's clothing." Although evidence from wills indicates that nearly all mariners had at least two sets of clothes, thus allowing for changing and cleaning, as well as for the considerable wear and tear their profession entailed, commanders worried that seamen worked practically naked, a state that indicated a profound challenge to their identity as Englishmen and as Christians. See Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 162–63. The physician Andrew Boorde in his *First Book of the Introduction to Knowledge* surveyed the dress of various nations and presented the Englishman as naked in order to mock the lack of a firm national identity. For a discussion of Boorde's image and the cultural associations of nakedness, see Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 14, and Hentschell, "Treasonous Textiles," 546–48.

47 Monson, *The Naval Tracts*, vol. III, 123. Quoted in Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 201.

Another commentator writing a century later echoed the animal metaphor, emphasizing the radical difference of seafarers from others on land: "the sailor out of water is, indeed, as wretched an animal as the fish out of water; for though the former hath, in common with amphibious animals, the bare power of existing on land, yet if he be kept there any time, he never fails to become a nuisance."[48] In the early decades of its history, the East India Company's business was, in terms of sheer numbers, transacted primarily by these wild horses, and their behavior reflected their identification with other sailors rather than with their masters in London.

Sailors were joined on their voyages by the merchant factors and their servants who stayed to establish and maintain Company factories in foreign locales. Factories were generally combination warehouses and living spaces where the factors could live and store goods bought or sold at the most opportune times of the year in order to maximize profits. Although the men who managed the business of the factories lacked the reputed wildness of mariners, and were far fewer in number in the early decades of the Company's history, they died at equal or perhaps even higher rates than the Company's sailors, and they knew the extremity of the risk they took in order to amass wealth through trade. As described above, factors also had their own reputation in early modern English society. Although supposedly working on behalf of their masters in London, factors were suspected of working on their own behalf while trading far from their masters' oversight. As Barbara Sebek argues, factors were "ideologically vexed figures" who "trouble[ed] normative notions of hierarchy and obedience" and brought out "the conflicts of authority, agency, and interest at issue in larger discourses and practices of global travel and trade."[49]

Due to the extreme distances involved in the East India trade, the challenges mounted by mariners hired by the Company and factors and other servants working as traders were both relatively muted and demonstrably more successful than the revolts against the inequities of new economic practices back in England. But they had in common the determination to renegotiate the terms of the political economy. Extreme inequality was a longstanding characteristic of English society, but as the groups with access to wealth and power realigned and the sources of such wealth shifted, justifications for these inequalities and their distribution needed to be forged and new forms of oppressing protests or negotiating settlements developed. Apprentices routinely rioted and defied the authority of their

48 Unnamed author, quoted in Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 200.
49 Sebek, "'After My Humble Dutie Remembered'," 114.

masters, especially in London and other large cities where they could congregate en masse.[50] Riots instigated by dearth were extremely common in the privation of the final years of the sixteenth century, immediately prior to the founding of the East India Company. Landed peasants who found themselves threatened by enclosure and other abrogations of their customary rights similarly staged acts of violent resistance in an effort to halt their dispossession.[51] Sectarian religious groups, particularly during the English Civil War, pushed back explicitly upon the social and economic hierarchies of the time, sometimes establishing alternative communities in the relative isolation of North America.[52] By comparison, the actions of the East India Company servants were less dramatic, but they were overall successful in shifting the allocation of at least some part of the wealth generated through trade away from London financiers and into the pockets of those who took the risk of sailing and trading abroad. Some factors even survived to achieve great wealth themselves, returning to London as newly rich merchants, able to pass on the risk of traveling abroad to other, poorer men.[53]

Although they seemed to have few ambitions to mount a comprehensive challenge to the social and occupational structures in which they labored, the servants of the East India Company abroad used their relative isolation from these traditional structures of patriarchal authority to engage in practices designed to decentralize decision-making and reallocate wealth

50 Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects*.

51 Linebaugh and Rediker describe the density of the resistance to early modern expropriations of land and changes to customary rights, listing "the Cornish Rising (1497), the Lavenham Rising (1525), and the Lincolnshire Rebellion (1536)—as well as the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536), the Prayer Book Rebellion (1549), and Kett's Rebellion (1549), all of which took place in the countryside. Urban insurrections for their part intensified toward the end of the sixteenth century with the Ludgate Prison Riot (1581), the Beggars' Christmas Riot (1582), the Whitsuntide Riots (1584), the Plaisterers' Insurrection (1586), the Felt-Makers' Riot (1591), the Southwark Candle-Makers' Riot (1592), and the Southwark Butter Riot (1595), whose very names evoke the struggle of handicraft workers to preserve their freedoms and customs … the Enslow Hill Rebellion (1596) … the Midlands Revolt of 1607 … The exuberant resistance to expropriation slowed the pace of enclosure, delayed the undercutting of wages, and laid the basis for the concession and compromise that we misleadingly term 'Tudor paternalism,' as if they had been a pure gift of parental goodness." Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 19. For further discussion of popular rebellion in the early modern period, see Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd." For rural revolts, including a discussion of the role played by women, see Wood, "'Poore men woll speke one daye'."

52 The Diggers, Levellers, Quakers, and the various Calvinist sects dubbed "Puritans" are the most well-known groups of this kind.

53 After 1650, East India factors and other servants who were successful in gaining personal wealth could also choose to remain in the East, purchasing large estates or plantations or otherwise enjoying the fruits of growing imperial dominance.

in a way the servants abroad found more satisfying. They generally did so without incurring any significant penalties upon returning home, assuming they survived. The conditions of their work afforded them the protections of isolation and lax or ineffective oversight while officially retaining their pivotal role within the London-based Company. Mariners, factors, and other servants living abroad could work both for the Company and for themselves at the same time, deciding where to journey and building up a trading network within a trading network, one that allowed them to take a greater share of the wealth England accessed through its nascent participation in the established markets of the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. Their actions were not hidden from the Company's directors and investors, who, after a brief experiment with permitting limited private trade, took strenuous efforts to suppress all private trading by their servants abroad. Yet however vigorously the masters sought to bring their servants back in line, they entirely failed to do so in the early decades of the Company's history. Ultimately, the actions of the Company's servants persisted for so long that they succeeded in normalizing greater decision-making and wealth-sharing within the Company and helped to craft a larger trade network that was distinctly different from those of Portuguese or Dutch. As Erickson argues, it was the more decentralized structure of the English Company, a direct result of the Company's persistent "problems" with private trade, that led to the Company's longevity and ultimate success in the region over its European counterparts.[54] It is a historical irony that the masters who sought for so long to suppress their servants' private trading were arguably working against their own best interests and those of their investors in the long term.

In pairing the debates over political economy and control of the Company in London with the implicit actions of the Company men abroad, each according their own traditions and capabilities, I join critics like Mark Netzloff in "attempt[ing] to foreground the struggle between classes and cultural groups in competing formulations of nation and empire in the early modern period," expanding that goal explicitly to include the allocation of wealth among different classes and groups.[55] The founding and development of the East India Company plays a central role in England's global imperial aspirations and the concurrent shift into modern capitalism. *Conflicting Claims to East India Company Wealth* attends not only to the dreams of wealth and domination articulated by the masters and investors in London but to the arguments articulated by the Company's servants through their

54 Erickson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*.

55 Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies*, 8–9.

actions rather than their words. That argument is not a justice-oriented counter-discourse in which wealth is shared equally between labor, middle management, and capital, or characterized by respectful equal partnership between merchants, sailors, and businessmen of the Indian Ocean basin and those voyaging from England. East India traders and mariners are not the global equivalent of the radical groups that emerge in the 1640s and 1650s in England. But in engaging in what their masters regarded as a kind of mass embezzlement and insubordination, the varied classes of men who traveled abroad in the East India Company's service in the first fifty years of its existence successfully built a corporate structure that allowed for greater decentralized decision-making and control over the distribution of the new wealth than was the case in other new capitalist formations, such as, for example, enclosure. They used the leverage of distance, and the unparalleled expertise they acquired to make good on their own empowerment and enrichment. They did so collectively and deliberately, rebutting the masters' efforts to bring them to heel, sailors and servants up and down the chain working together to deny London's power. In addition to working successfully with each other to accomplish this, they partnered, with varying levels of enthusiasm, with their counterparts in the Indian Ocean trading and maritime communities. A utopian vision for intercultural harmony and enrichment it was not. But it was, nevertheless, different in important ways from the corporation envisioned by their employers: a London-controlled, purely English monopoly in which subordinated labor (when it survived) returned untold wealth back to a select group of English elites. Eventually the masters' vision would gain the upper hand, and be further intensified and racialized by the colonial ambitions of a restructured governing body in London after 1649. But this fact does not mean that the alternative practices of global trade enacted by the servants of the East India Company and their Indian Ocean counterparts in its earliest decades should, as the masters wished, be erased and subsumed into a single dominant narrative of European capitalist imperialism. The careful tracing of that dominant narrative's formulation, as material conditions supported or diverged from it, is an important project. But recognizing and carefully studying the resistance to it—from within English society as well as beyond it—is equally critical.

This book therefore differs from other literary historical studies in placing part of its focus on the labor conditions appertaining to service in the Company's trade and the social relations of the men who performed it, rather than primarily or entirely upon the written discourses about the nascent global trade crafted by those in London, and the perceptions of those writers' national, religious, and racial identities vis-à-vis foreign peoples. As

with all studies seeking to illuminate the lives of those who did not leave extensive written records, for reasons of literacy and/or socio-political standing, this book must read extant documents obliquely, attempting to tease out a perspective they were not generally designed to give.[56] One result of this process is a strong focus on the actions taken by mariners and factors abroad in addition to their written words. Patterns of behavior exhibited by these groups constitute a community of practice whose values can be analyzed and used as a supplement to those articulated in more recognizable written documents composed by literate elites participating in a culture of disciplined record keeping, and of book and manuscript publication.

In contrast to other works on early English capitalism, this is not primarily a "discursive history" that seeks to elucidate the development of "knowledge *about* capital … a knowledge that had resided in a wide range of technical instruments and that began to find expression in many different words, concepts, and kinds of writings, a knowledge that might be put to new strategic uses once it had coalesced into a new intellectual formation."[57] The men who serve as the main subject of this study developed less a discursive than an *embodied* understanding of the workings of early capital circulation, experiencing physically its need for expendable flesh to forward its material movement across the globe. These are also the men whose labor amassed the specific bits of local knowledge that collectively enabled London-based merchants to test in the global market their developing theories of mercantilism and to defend their political privileges and use of common resources to an often-skeptical Parliament and public.

As they amassed this local knowledge through risking their bodies and lives, mariners and factors abroad reported it in an uneven and selective manner to their masters, even when pressed by their superiors. Without their willingness physically to voyage to distant locales, and without their diligent reporting of their navigational and local market findings to their masters, the directors in London were blind and impotent. It was often the silence, rather than the words, of the East India Company's men that held power. The East India Company's mariners and traders recognized this power and deployed it to ensure the wealth generated by their labor and risk-taking would devolve partially to themselves and not merely to

56 In this, I am of course indebted to post-colonial methods of against-the-grain reading, as well as critiques of the archive originating in postcolonial works such as Spivak's influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I have also found useful Betty Joseph's work on women in the East India Company archive. See Joseph, *Reading the East India Company*.

57 Turner, *The Culture of Capital*, 6.

elite investors in distant London. These men actively used ignorance, as a defensive tool and as an offensive weapon, against their social superiors. This study therefore also participates in the examination of "the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices."[58] The history of capitalism, as it began to be conceptualized and articulated by the apologists writing from within the East India Company, was one strongly marked not only by evolving knowledge discourses, but strategically deployed ignorance by groups of men who declined or were unable to write elaborate tracts or even basic correspondence detailing their embodied knowledge of the trade. Attempts by the masters to pry this knowledge from their servants through increased documentation and surveillance were marked by frequent failure in the early years of the Company's existence, as mariners and traders used their isolation and a shared desire for greater control and wealth to resist such disciplinary actions.

In summary, this book details the struggle over England's entry into global trading flows in the Indian Ocean, and specifically, the fight over who would control the levels of suffering and risk versus financial reward for all participants in the new enterprise. Masters and servants engaged both with each other and with other elements of English society in a long, elaborate contest over how the profits of this early capitalist enterprise would be allocated and who would bear the brunt of its costs. Both groups used as weapons the strategic deployment of both knowledge and ignorance to serve their own ends, and servants took advantage of the isolation inherent to their voyages to control flows of information and create the solidarity needed to do it.

The first two chapters of *Conflict Claims to East India Company Wealth* consider in detail the public debates surrounding England's early support of the Company, through monopoly, the provision of supplies and men, and the authorization of the export of bullion. Rather than focusing on the monetary and early mercantilist theories these debates bring into print and government records, these two chapters highlight more basic questions of political economy as members of the Company debated with the crown, MPs, and members of the public over whom the new trade would benefit and at whose cost. These questions were articulated explicitly and implicitly in multiple arenas in the early decades of Company history, providing a window onto the London merchants' early capitalist justifications for the

58 Sullivan and Tuana, *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 1.

suffering and death caused by their enterprise, for their rapidly increasing wealth vis-à-vis the Crown and traditional landed elites, and for their monopolization of the profits of the trade. In short, they detail early strategies used to normalize the dominance of capital over labor and other sectors of early modern society. They also show that these economic flows were not yet accepted as natural, and highlight the objections mustered by those segments of society being excluded from this newfound source of prosperity.

Chapter 1, "Wasting Mariners," examines an early pamphlet exchange in which the question of whether the East India Company benefited the nation as a whole was debated. Robert Kayll's scathing denunciation of the East India Company, *The Trades Increase* (1615), lays out the basic charges against the Company, detailing the various ways in which the nation at large suffered to enrich the few. Kayll argues passionately against the long-distance trade in favor of building up a domestic fishing industry off English's shores, citing as primary points in his attack the staggering loss of life and resources that resulted from early Company voyages. He articulates a robust critique of the masters' callous willingness to sacrifice lives and common resources in the pursuit of profits that would not be widely shared. In response, the Company masters authorized Dudley Digges to publish the counterattack *The Defence of Trade* (1615). Digges defended the Company through *ad hominem* attacks on Kayll and corrections of his calculations of ships and deaths, as well as detailing ways in which the trade had benefited the nation as a whole through lowering prices and increasing England's wealth overall. The masters considered this public defense a necessary part of protecting their interests, perceiving the need to justify their monopoly of both resources and profits, and to defend the morality of their enterprise in the face of rampant loss of life on the part of mariners and factors. Kayll's attack demonstrates that select London-based merchants' accrual of wealth and power through global trade had not yet been naturalized in early modern England and the defenses mounted by Digges showcase some of the earliest attempts at rendering the unequal distribution of costs and benefits under capitalistic enterprise acceptable to English society.

Chapter 2, "Justifying Wealth," considers the critiques of the Company originating from the upper strata of this society, including wealthy London tradesmen, merchants based outside London, gentlemen excluded from Company membership, and occasionally even the Crown. Such men questioned the dominance of the small group of London merchants over the operations of the Company and their monopoly on the trade and its profits. If the Company's detractors in chapter 1 asked why mariners and the poor suffered while elite groups of investors profited, those in chapter 2

asked why these particular elites were permitted to retain control of those profits. The quarrels over the Company's monopoly over the trade and the London merchants' monopoly over the Company's leadership are recorded in public pamphlets, Parliamentary and other government records, and the East India Company's committee minutes. They show the struggles of the Company's directors as they sought to articulate convincing arguments for the status quo, despite the challenges posed by the darkening economic and geopolitical conditions of the 1620s.

One of the primary justifications the directors put forth to maintain their power in London was their unique access to knowledge, both through their experience in global trade and the network of agents already established by the Company abroad. However, while this functioned rhetorically to protect their position against those seeking to redistribute the wealth of the Indies trade in London, the fact that one of the main sources of their knowledge was the hired mariners and their servants abroad made them vulnerable to attempts by those same men to retain some of the profits generated by the trade for their own personal enrichment.

The final two chapters of the book uncover the argument over wealth and control that implicitly took place between mariners, factors, and other servants abroad on the one hand and their London masters on the other. This struggle has been recorded not in print, but in the letters and between the lines of intra-Company correspondence and records. While the Company's factors and mariners used their knowledge of and presence within local economies to skim the cream of the trade for themselves, sometimes marrying into or otherwise embedding themselves in extant non-English trading communities, their London masters sought to devise new ways to extend their authority across the miles and years spanned by each voyage. In an effort to maximize the material gains from their overseas enterprises and suppress resistance by their servants to their attempts to monopolize profits, Company masters pursued two interrelated strategies: increasing surveillance and policing, and controlling, through a series of shifting strategies, the domestic and sexual needs of its servants.

Chapter 3, "Contending with the Ocean," discusses how the London-based masters combated efforts on the part of sailors and traders to create and claim a greater share of the profits for themselves by deploying agents to clamp down on private trading and instituting complicated systems of record keeping and accountancy. In response, mariners and factors abroad developed a culture of solidarity to combat and ultimately stymie the masters' efforts to surveille the trade-related activities of their servants abroad. They deployed a wide variety of methods for delaying or obfuscating

the transmission of information critical to determining the masters' trading decisions, and they persuaded, threatened, or otherwise co-opted agents sent to reign in private trading abroad. Traitors within the group were disciplined, and their accusations were disarmed by launching reciprocal charges against the original accuser, so that the masters at home had little basis to judge between the two claims, creating confusion and ignorance in London about the facts on the ground abroad.

Chapter 4, "Desiring Servants," describes how Company masters strove to manage what it regarded as the unfortunate but seemingly unavoidable emotional and sexual desires of its servants which, on the one hand, the Company depended on for the social reproduction of its enterprise and used to cement trading relations and alliances, and on the other hand, threatened to distract its servants from the task of profit seeking and to debilitate them through disease and disruptive or deadly conflict. Although the masters were able to control whether English wives would be permitted to sail out with their husbands, the masters had little real control over the choices of their factors once they were living abroad, or of mariners who sailed from port to port. Denied the ability to bring their families with them, captains and factors engaged in romantic and sexual liaisons at their own volition, sometimes using Company resources to maintain and entertain their chosen partners and making marital alliances with local trading families to further buttress their private trading interests. As per longstanding custom, mariners of all ranks sought the pleasure and entertainment of foreign sexual partners whenever and wherever they had shore leave, a fact Company masters used to excuse the high mortality rates on their voyages, blaming mariners' behavior for their own demise.

Far from the oversight of their masters, East India Company servants created a set of sailing and trading practices characterized by local collaborations to facilitate private trading and to serve servants' sexual and emotional needs. These practices successfully created space for greater private wealth accumulation than Company masters officially permitted. The argument that these groups of men made through their actions from within the Company are here placed alongside attacks on the Company from other interests back in London in order to emphasize the unsettled nature of the trade and how it would be structured and justified. Some of those writers questioned the control over the trade and its profits by a small group of London merchants. Others objected to the unequal distribution of risk and reward between both Company masters and their servants, and between the investors (including the masters) whose capital outlays enabled stunning rates of return, and the common men and women of

England who suffered dearth at home in exchange for the importation of luxury goods they would be unable to afford. By means of their rhetoric, wealth, and social standing, the men who benefited from the Indies trade managed (barely) to suppress early skepticism of their methods within Parliament and at court, but the actions of the men who managed the trade abroad proved harder to control. Although such men didn't participate in the printed or Parliamentary debates taking place over the East India Company's place in the commonwealth, the mariners and factors hired by the Company effectively allocated wealth to themselves, claiming more than the masters wished to give to the laboring men whose work enriched those comfortably seated in their armchairs at home. These men, some of whom were illiterate and few of whom ever wrote about their experiences or ideals, nevertheless made their mark in the heated debates over political economy in the unsettled conditions of the first half century of long-distance trade to the east. They did so through their actions, their silences, and their untrustworthy books.

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