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Panel 22
'Marginal Groups'

Flotsam and Jetsam of the Empire?
European seamen and spaces of disease and disorder in mid-nineteenth century Calcutta

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Choleraic drains, a life-destroying sun, drugged brandy, brothels exceeding in beastliness the pictures of Juvenal, robbery under the name of discount and charges on Bills and Notes, hospitals and cemeteries — these are the comforts, with which India welcomes Christian sailors […] Till our sailors ashore are cared for as well as when afloat, till the sailor is made as much an object of public concern as the soldier, Christianity will continue to be disgraced and humanity outraged in every Indian port.[1]

1. Introduction

ON AUGUST 12th 1858 the 'white town' of Calcutta presented an unusual sight. Thousands of Europeans lined the roads in order to welcome sailors of the '*Shannon*'s Naval Brigade' returning from Lucknow, where they had been engaged in suppressing the Mutiny cum rebellion for several months.[2] To see the 'respectable' portions of Calcutta's European population cheering to a crowd of seamen was something completely unheard of. The relationship between the wealthier part of British India's white society and 'Jack Tar' had

[1] *The Friend of India*, 6-4-1865, p. 392 f.

[2] VERNEY, G. L., *The Devil's Wind. The Story of the Naval Brigade at Lucknow from the Letters of Edmund Hope Verney and other Papers concerning the Enterprise of the Ship's Company of H.M.S. Shannon in the Campaign in India 1857—1858*, London 1956, pp. 156-9. Cf. also BROOKS, Richard, *The Long Arm of the Empire. Naval Brigades from the Crimea to the Boxer Rebellion*, London 1999, p. 27 f.

been an ambiguous one for decades, as British seafaring men possessed a reputation for being a source of annoyance, trouble and even shame rather than pride — at least when they were on shore. Their proverbial affinity to drink and prostitution, their notoriously 'unruly conduct' and their often cruel behaviour towards the 'natives' turned these particular representatives of Britain's working classes into a threat for the ideological substructures underlying British rule. In the eyes of the colonial administration their lack of discipline and their 'reckless and irrational ways' brought them close to the 'uncivilised natives', a fact regarded as highly disturbing in a colonial setting based on the ideology of racial difference and — at least partly — informed by notions of a civilizing mission supposedly entrusted to the British by providence.

The relationship between the white establishment in the capital of British India and the European sailors that frequented the city was thus highly problematic. In contradistinction to other low-class groups of the 'white' society — European prostitutes and vagrants for instance — the problems arising from their presence in Indian seaport towns could not be easily solved by the 'politics of making invisible'. It was impossible to deport these white misfits or institutionalise them in workhouses[3] or segregated red-light districts,[4] as their contribution was vital for the running of the empire. In this respect, 'Jack' was quite similar to 'Tommy', the British Soldier, who often posed similar problems in the garrison towns of British India:[5] his presence was indispensable for the imperial project and yet at the same time threatening to undermine it.

In the present paper I shall try to explore this contradictory phenomenon by focusing on Calcutta in the 1850s and 1860s. There are two reasons for this choice: First, it is quite obvious that during the period under survey the sense of vulnerability of the British colonial society was extremely high because of the traumatic experience of the Indian Rebellion. Issues of imperial prestige and

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[3] ARNOLD, David, 'European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century', in: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* [hereafter *JICH*], 7 (2), 1979, pp. 104-27. especially p.

[4] LEVINE, Philippa, 'Erotic Geographies. Sex and the Managing of Colonial Space', in: Michie, Helena/Thomas, Ronald R. (eds), *Nineteenth Century Geographies. The transformation of space from the Victorian age to the American century*, New Brunswick-London 2003, pp. 149-60, p. 152 and FISCHER-TINÉ, Harald , '"White Women Degrading Themselves to the Lowest Depths": European networks of prostitution and colonial anxieties in British India and Ceylon ca. 1880-1914', in: *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40 (2003), pp. 163-90, especially p. 183 f.

[5] SETON KARR, W. S., *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes* (Repr. In 9 Vols.), Vol. III, Calcutta 1987 [[1]1867], p. 181. Cf. also PEERS, Douglas, 'Privates off Parade: Regimenting Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century Indian Empire', in: *The International History Review*, 20 (4), 1998, pp. 823-55 and the same author's 'Sepoys, Soldiers and the Lash: Race, Caste and Army Discipline in India, 1820-50', In *JICH*, 23 (2), 1995, pp. 211-47 and STANLEY, Peter, *White Mutiny. British Military Culture in India1825-1875*, London 1998.

legitimacy of rule were hence of critical interest. Second, for various reasons, the number of European seamen on shore rose dramatically during these years and the 'sailor problem' became so pressing that the colonial authorities were preoccupied for years with its solution, producing an abundance of sources.

After giving a brief sketch of the historical, geographical, and statistical background of the theme, the paper starts with the narrative of two events which were mainly responsible for the emergence of a 'sailor problem' in British India's most important seaport town. First, the recruitment and subsequent dissolution of 'Naval Brigades' during the Indian Mutiny, and second, a cyclone which devastated the Bengal Coast in 1864 and destroyed dozens of ships in the harbour, thus causing the distress of thousands of sailors stuck on shore. The next section examines how the growing official concern about these developments was translated into attempts to collect and categorize knowledge about the potentially dangerous 'sailor class'. Namely the official discourse on sailor's contacts with the 'corrupting' influences of indigenous society, their criminal or violent behaviour and issues of hygiene and disease are discussed in this context. Before trying to draw some conclusions, the penultimate part of the paper analyses in greater detail the various discursive strategies and practical measures employed by clergymen and colonial officials to solve the problem. Particular emphasis is placed on the convergence of the categories of race and class by analysing the analogies between efforts of 'reclaiming' the "ignorant, inexperienced, unlettered seaman"[6] with the colonial agenda of educating and 'improving' the colonised population.

2. Rebellions, Typhoons and the Emergence of a 'Sailor Problem'

The setting: Calcutta and its European seafarers

The decades following the establishment of the rule of the East India Company, witnessed a massive increase in overseas export. As a result, the number of European and American vessels sailing to Calcutta also grew tremendously, which, in turn, had a considerable effect on the overall composition of the city's 'white' community .[7] As the entire fleet of the East India Company and most of

[6] Statement of Police Commissioner Schalch; in: G. B. MALLESON: 'The State of the Sailors in Calcutta', Appendix III; OIOC, IOR: P/437/29; GoI, Home Department Proceedings, Marine, 1866.

[7] For the social impact the increase in trade had on Calcutta see also *The Friend of India*, 7-4-1859, p. 315 f.

the ships owned by private merchants were manned by European crews,[8] white seamen on shore formed an significant part of white society in British India's premier city from the late 18th century, when the total number of Europeans in Calcutta was still comparatively small. But even by the middle of the 19th century, when the 'white' population had grown tremendously, the 'sailor element' was still important. The first reliable Census of Calcutta's European population dating from 1866 lists the total number of permanent European inhabitants as about 11,000 against more than 2000 sailors who were "transient members of white Calcutta".[9] According to other sources, this number could even double during seasonal peak times.[10] Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the average sailor population must have been around 3000.

Fig. 1 A glimpse of Calcutta Port in mid-nineteenth century

The statistics of the Chamber of Commerce reveal that during the year 1863/64 1,216 European and American ships entered the port of Calcutta.[11] As the vessels were manned with an average of 17-25 sailors the total number of European seamen passing through within the time-span of one year has been estimated at 27,500.[12] The majority of these men who would only spend a couple of weeks in Calcutta, staying mostly on board of their ships and pay only occasional visits to the town itself. But over the year, an estimated 5,000 of

[8] BARNES, Leo, *Evolution and Scope of Mercantile and Marine Laws relating to Seamen in India*, New Delhi 1983, p. 27.

[9] MARSHALL, Peter, 'The White Town of Calcutta under the Rule of the East India Company', in: *MAS*, 34 (2), 2000, pp. 307-31, p. 309.

[10] CHEVERS, Norman, *On the Preservation of the Health of Seamen, especially those frequenting Calcutta and the other Indian Ports etc.*, Calcutta 1864, p. 39.

[11] ANONYMOUS [i. e. CAVE-BROWNE, JOHN] , 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', in: *The Calcutta Review*, 40 (1865), pp. 452-66, p. 455. There were tremendous seasonal variations with 75 ships arriving in May against 157 vessels entering the port in October.

[12] *The Friend of India*, 7-4-1865, p. 392.

them belonged to the 'floating population of the city'. They were seamen without affiliation to one of the ships lying in harbour and would stay for several months or even longer in the city.[13] There was a constant number of deserters in the and men discharged regularly by their captains; persons belonging to this group were usually residing either in the Sailor's Home or private boarding houses concentrated in Bow Bazar area and Lal Bazar, popularly known as 'Flag Street' because of the string of flags across the street showing the way to punch-houses and brothels. There was also a significant number of seamen being compelled to extend their sojourn in Calcutta as they were either lying in one of the city's hospitals or confined in the House of Correction.

Fig. 2 Bow Bazar Street. Many of the sailors' boarding-houses were situated in this area.

That the presence of such a large community of sailors was only tolerated by the city's respectable white citizens as a necessary evil, is evident from Government records[14] and English newspapers dating back to the 1780s. At quite an early stage, seamen on shore were regarded as "loafers occasionally rambling over the country disgracing the British name and weakening the Hands of the Government". [15] Complaints against the sailor population continued to appear occasionally in the press throughout the early nineteenth century, [16] but it was

[13] ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', pp. 461-3.

[14] OIOC, IOR: O/5/2, 'Europeans in India 1787-1792', pp. 11-13, [Bengal Consultations, 23-1-1788]; Superintendent of Police to Governor-General Cornwallis, 22-1-1788.

[15] LONG, James, *Calcutta in the Olden Time. Its localities & its people,* (Repr.), Calcutta 1975, p. 87.

[16] See for instance Letter by 'Aclaus' to the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, 27-4-1820, in: Das, Satyajit (comp.), *Selections from the Indian Journals, Vol. II., Calcutta Journal*, Calcutta 1965, p. 169 f. and RAY CHOUDHURY, Ranabir (ed.), *Glimpses of Old Calcutta (Period 1836-50)*, Bombay 1978, pp. 14, 68 and 106.

only in the wake of the events of 1857/58 that the problem took on threatening dimensions as to call for intervention by the government.

'The terror of friends as well as foes'?[17] *— The Indian Naval Brigades*

In the weeks following the outbreak of the Mutiny in Meerut and Delhi on May 10th 1857 an uneasy feeling prevailed among the European and perhaps even more so among the Eurasian inhabitants of Calcutta.[18] Reluctantly, Governor-General Canning agreed to raise volunteer corps among the civil population to protect the 'white' and 'mixed-race' residents.[19] More than 350 seamen residing in the boarding houses were put on alert to assist the police in case of need.[20] In addition, hundreds of sailors belonging to the merchant ships lying in the Hughli were landed and "mounted guard over the public buildings"[21]. In June and July the first units of seamen of the Indian Navy arrived in Calcutta. Shortly afterwards three ships from the Royal Navy reached the port.[22] On 14th August the 'Naval Brigade' consisting of 408 sailors and Marines from the HMS *Shannon* was the first such outfit[23] to proceed to Lucknow to assist the Army in the suppression of the rebellion.[24] Several other detachments of seamen, who had been partly raised from merchant ships left Calcutta in the subsequent weeks, after the men had received a very superficial military training.

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[17] *The United Service Gazette*, 15-1-1859, on the *Shannon*'s Naval Brigade.

[18] The following is based on LOW, Charles Rathbone, *History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*, Vol. 2, London 1877, pp. 431-7 and KAYE, John W., *The History of the Sepoy War*, Vol. III, London pp. .

[19] OIOC, MSS.Eur. B. 241.

[20] OIOC, IOR: P213/50 GoBeng Marine Progs. 1859.

[21] LOW, *History of the Indian Navy*, p. 431. Among the objects guarded by these auxiliary troops was the Governmental Palace, The Mint and, last but not least, the Nawab of Oudh who had been brought to Calcutta immediately after the outbreak of hostilities.

[22] CLOWES, Wm. Laird, *The Royal Navy. A History from the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria*, Vol. 7, London 1903 p. 138. The Royal Navy Vessels had been hastily despatched from Hongkong by Rear-Admiral M. Seymour to help quelling the rebellion.

[23] The second major Royal Navy Brigade was formed out of the crew of the HMS *Pearl*, which was despatched to Gorakhpur district in mid-September 1857. Cf. WILLIAMS, E. A., *The Cruise of the Pearl round the World. With an Account of the Operations of the Naval Brigade in India*, London 1859, p. 73.

[24] The most detailed account of the *Shannon*'s Brigade's activities can be found in VERNEY, Edmund Hope, *The Shannon's Brigade in India. Being some account or Sir William Peel's Naval Brigade in the India Campaign of 1857—1858*, London 1862. Cf. also ROWBOTHAM, C. W., *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny 1857-58*, London 1947 (=Publications of the Navy Records Society, Vol. LXXXVII), pp 1-50.

While the 'regular' Naval Brigades were continually reinforced by the crews of warships belonging to the Indian or Royal Navy,[25] the Government of Bengal kept on recruiting sailors from the merchant marine to form additional 'irregular' Naval detachments, some of them not serving as combat forces but as 'Police Brigades' in Calcutta or up-country. Thus, by the middle of the year 1858 there existed more than a dozen of military units of various sizes and backgrounds assuming the title of 'Naval Brigades'. It is difficult to estimate the total number of these troops, but by July 1859 when quite a few of them had already been disbanded there were still 1178 regular and 666 'irregular' seamen employed in Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency.[26] It might be safely assumed that there were between 2,500 and 3,000 seamen under arms in Northern India and Burma by the end of 1858.[27]

Fig. 3 Contemporary watercolour painting showing Soldiers of The Naval Brigade in combat (1857)

It has been pointed out by various military historians that the men- and firepower of the Naval Brigades proved to be a valuable asset for the British in the various campaigns of 1857-9 and that these detachments therefore had a substantial share in the suppression of the Mutiny.[28] However, before long the raising of the 'naval' troops also caused considerable trouble for the colonial authorities as well as for the wider public. Part of the problem arose from the

[25] OIOC, IOR: P/213/49 GoI, Marine Consultations, Sep.-Dec. 1858, Files No. 2-3, 10-9-1858, 'Reporting arrival at Calcutta of the steamer *Dalhousie* from Madras and Singapore with 189 seamen, volunteers for service in the Indian Navy'.

[26] OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, Files No. 11-17, 21-7-1859 'On the subject of the cost of the several regular and irregular Naval Brigades now employed in the Lower Provinces'.

[27] C. R. Low gives a total number of 1828 officers and men employed between August 1857 and May 1860 when the last detachment was disbanded. However, he seems to be referring to the regular units only. Cf. LOW, *History of the Indian Navy*, p. 492.

[28] ROWBOTHAM, *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny,* p. ix. For a more recent example see BROOK, Richard, 'Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny' in: Hore, Peter (ed.), *Seapower Ashore: 200 Years of Royal Navy Operations on Land*, London 2001, pp. ?

fact that the Brigades apparently attracted adventurers and other persons of 'dubious character', as a contemporary police report illustrates :

> for some months past the Officers of the Indian Navy have enlisted, in Fort William, a large number of men for service in the interior. The pay and bounty of this Brigade being large, and considerable license being expected at the *Mofussil* stations to which detachments are sent, the service has been to a certain extent popular, and numbers of deserters from the mercantile shipping and Army are consequently enlisted by the officers of the Brigade, who, I am sorry to say, omit altogether taking precautions by making enquiries into the previous employment of those they receive […].[29]

Some of the Brigades thus became a refuge for deserters and ship jumpers.[30] What made matters even more complicated was the fact that the legal status of these troops was not clear. In most cases they were backed by the military authorities which caused bitter complaints by the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta.[31]

Quite predictably, men of this background, "not being amenable to martial law, or accustomed to strict discipline", proved to be "uncontrollable" [32] particularly when they were quartered in remote *Mofussil* towns. In a letter to *The Englishman*, an Indian Christian from Buxar complained in January 1859 that "[s]ome of the Naval Brigade men around this place are becoming quite intolerable," and proceeded to explain that it was "quite common for them to force themselves even at the hours of 12 and one in the night into the houses of respectable families" to harass the women and insult the male family members as "niggers".[33] The behaviour of the seamen eventually caused 'respectable' Indian inhabitants to write petitions to the Government of Bengal, praying to rid them of their protectors.

But even in Calcutta itself the conduct of the Naval brigades was far from exemplary. The detachment on the Mint Guard for instance, was found to be "in the habit of committing robberies on native shop-keepers" and had to be stopped

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[29] OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No. 53, 21-7-1859, Letter No. 1046, S. Wauchope, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to A. R. Young, Secy. to GoBeng, 2-12-1858.

[30] For an example see Shipping case No. 409, 27-11-1858, 'John P. Fox, Master of the British ship Anne Royden, versus William Parkinson, articled seamen of the same', ibid.

[31] "[N]ot only the Masters of ships but the mercantile community generally, are in a state of irritation at the encouragement held out to desertion from the shipping in the River, by the officers in charge of the Indian Naval Brigade, supported as it is supposed by the Government, and at the downright opposition they meet with when any attempt is made to bring deserters to justice" Ibid., S. Wauchope, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to A. R. Young. Cf. also OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No. 53, 21-7-1859, Letter No. 1001 from S. Wauchope, CoP, Calcutta to Lieut.-Col. O. Cavenagh, Town Major, Fort William, 22-11-1858.

[32] LOW, *History of the Indian Navy*, p. 431.

[33] *The Englishman*, 15-1-1859, p. 2.

by the Police.[34] On the whole, the regular detachments seem to have been less frequently involved in 'criminal' or 'uproarious' incidents,[35] but even in their case the military authorities were constantly anxious to improve the state of discipline. Thus Lieutenant T. Barron, commanding officer of No. 11 Naval Brigade stationed in Moteeharee (a 'regular' detachment composed mostly by seamen belonging to the Indian Navy), used the daily routine in the camp to discipline and educate the sailors.[36] Matters were even more problematic with the irregular 'Police brigades', composed of "merchant seamen who had not been brought under the restraints of moral training and religion".[37] These troops soon became infamous throughout the Province and were despised as "a set of thieves and vagabonds." [38] They were considered to be "the terror of friends as well as foes"[39] even by some of their fellow countrymen.

Given the difficulties in maintaining discipline even when the seamen were under the close supervision of their officers, it becomes understandable that some officials were anxious about the fate of the seamen after their Brigades had been dissolved. In March 1859 the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal suggested that the Government of India should charter ships to immediately convey the discharged Naval Brigadiers to Australia or England, as the "ill-consequences" of their staying on in Calcutta would be "great".[40] The situation in Calcutta port was indeed tense already, because, next to the growing number of seamen waiting to be shipped, there were hundreds of white grooms who had come from Australia or South Africa in charge of horses and failed to find work

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34 OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859**,** Letter No. 48, 30-11-1858, Brigadier W.G. Brown, commanding at Calcutta to S. Wauchope, CoP, Calcutta.

35 WILLIAMS, E. A., *The Cruise of the Pearl*, p. 303 f. Particularly the *Shannon*'s Brigade was praised by various officers as a "sober, quiet and […] well conducted body of men". See for instance, CLOWES**,** *The Royal Navy*, p. 143. Nonetheless, six seamen belonging to the Brigade had to be punished for robbery committed while on duty in Sassaram in April/May 1858. Cf. ROWBOTHAM, *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny,* p. 45.

36 He provided a special tent where they could borrow books and were given lessons by "a well educated man". Not without pride he reported the success of his experiment in July 1859: "Several attend daily and improve rapidly. Those who were drunkards appear to have given it up, for since the examples I made, now near two month ago, not a man has been in the slightest degree the worse for liquor. I am also glad to inform you that since the brigade have been here not a complaint has been made against one man by the authorities or natives of the town!", LOW, *History of the Indian Navy*, p. 470 fn.

37 LOW, *History of the Indian Navy*, p. 434.

38 OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No 6., Letter No, 14, 20-1-1859, Lieutenant H. Jackson, I.N., Commanding No. 3, Indian Naval Brigade to C.D. Campbell; Senior Officer, I.N. at Calcutta.

39 Cf. *supra*, Fn 7.

40 OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No. 20, 8-4-1859, Letter No. 1365, 1-3-1859 A. R. Young, Secy. to GoBeng to C. Beaden, Secy. to GoI, Ibid.

in India.[41] The city was thus flooded with 'idle' working-class Europeans. The Commissioner of Police painted a rather gloomy picture of the possible consequences of a further influx of seamen:

> I look forward with some apprehension to the discharge in Calcutta of at least 600 more seamen, most of them raised in a hurry, and many of them of the very worst character. As long as they have money, nothing worse perhaps will ensue than drunken quarrels in the streets; but when they are destitute of cash and credit, […], I should not be surprised, if gangs were formed for the purpose of robbery. As far as Calcutta is concerned, the European Police is in my opinion strong enough to put up a summary end to anything of that kind, if such should be attempted; but there is nothing that I know to prevent Europeans from plundering in the *Mofussil* with impunity. All that is wanted are persons to put it into their imaginations and to lead them, and I know those who are well able to do both[42]

He shared the view that immediate deportation was the only viable method of averting such a scenario. In April and May 1859 the situation indeed came to an alarming pitch with about 1200 unemployed Europeans loitering around or Bow Bazar area and sleeping on the *Maidan*.

Fig. 4 The Calcutta *Maidan* ca. 1870

In early May 1859 the Calcutta public was shocked by the article of an English Missionary, published in the *Bengal Hurkaru,* depicting in detail the sad state of affairs regarding the "destitute and homeless Europeans" in the city.[43] There were several cases of theft and robbery committed by Europeans, but the Police

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41 The problem of unemployed Australian grooms in British-India is dealt with more fully in my forthcoming article 'Britain's other "Civilising Mission": Class-prejudice, European "Loaferism" and the Workhouse System in Colonial India'.

42 OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No. 22, Letter No, 167, 25-2-1859, S. Wauchope, CoP, Calcutta to the Secy. to GoBeng.

43 *Bengal Hurkaru*, 4-5-1859**.**

eventually managed to handle the situation by "placing patrols of European Police on the *maidan* and in all the lanes inhabited by desperate characters, and by exercising a strict surveillance over those known as *Loafers*."[44]

Within a few months the agglomeration of distressed seamen was reduced to the normal number of about 400.[45] The Government had to deport but very few sailors (mostly seriously ill or mentally deranged men)[46] the majority could be shipped comparatively quickly as the trading activities reached a tremendous intensity soon after the end of the Great Rebellion. Some of those who had to wait longer to be hired were accommodated in the Alms House which received special grants by the Government for this purpose. Besides, a considerable number of ex-naval-brigadiers was encouraged to enlist in the regular army.[47]

The expected breakdown of law and order thus did not take place, but nonetheless the colonial Government as well as the public had become aware of the potential threat posed by the 'sailor class'. The enthusiastic reception accorded to the *Shannon*'s Brigade, remained but a brief episode without consequences for the public esteem of European sailors among their reputable countrymen. Quite the reverse: the distrust against this group had even grown owing to the events of 1857-9. Only a few years later 'distressed' European seamen came once again to the focus of public opinion. This time the growing sensitivity towards the 'spaces of disorder' inhabited by them was going lead to a massive interference by the colonial Government.

After the storm: The 1864 Cyclone and the growing concern about the 'State of Sailors in Calcutta'

In early October 1864 the coastal areas lining the Bay of Bengal were hit by a gale that proved to be devastating for the capital of British India. According to Government source, an estimated 50 people lost their lives in the city and the

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44 *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta For 1859-1860. (With figured statements and comparative statements for 1858-1859 and 1859-1860)*, Calcutta 1861, p. 4.

45 OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoBeng Marine Progs., No. 20, 8-7-1859, Letter No. 3811, 17-6-1859 A. R. Young, Secy. to GoBeng to W. Grey, Secy. to GoI.

46 The following is such a typical case: "JOHN WATERS— Came out to India in the *Imperatrice Eugenie* from which ship he deserted and entered the Naval Brigade. Had a coup de soleil and his mind is weakened by that and excessive drinking.[...] This man was sent by me some months ago to the Lunatic Asylum, but discharged almost immediately on the ground that he was not mad but only suffering from slight derangement of mind caused by excessive drinking" Cf. OIOC, IOR: P/173/5; Fort William, Marine Dept. Progs., 1859, No. 4, 25th August 1859. Letter No. 662, S. Wauchope, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, to GoBeng, 5-8-1859.

47 See OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoBeng Marine Progs., No. 20, 8-7-1859, Letter No. 3811, 17-6-1859 A. R. Young, Secy. to GoBeng to W. Grey, Secy. to GoI.

surrounding areas and several thousands houses and huts were destroyed.[48] The port area was affected considerably. According to an eye-witness, the damage inflicted on the buildings and parks of the city "absolutely paled in insignificance"[49] when compared with the scenes to be witnessed on the river bank.[50]

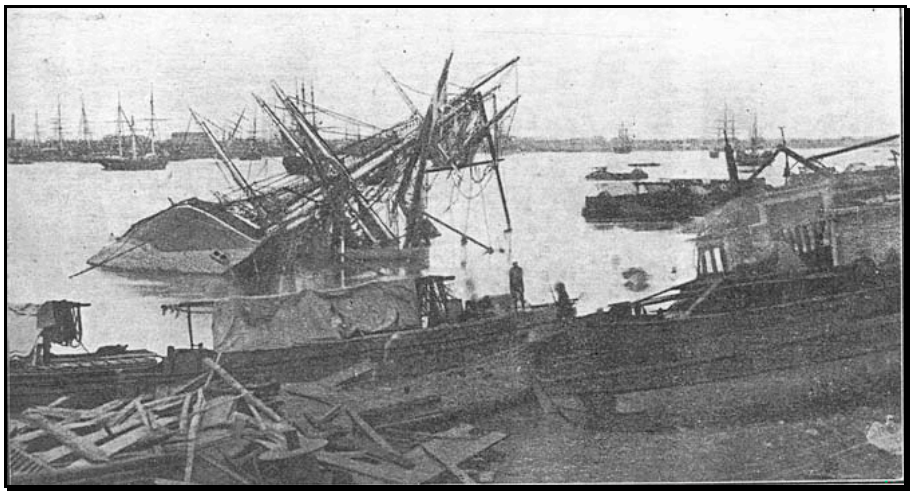

Fig 5 Shipwrecks on the banks of the Hughli in October 1864

As many as 36 vessels were completely destroyed and 96 severely damaged by the storm[51] and the effect on the shipping and commercial activities for the next months was described as "most disastrous" by an official of the Marine Department.[52] Hundreds of seamen lost their ships and their numbers added to the usual pool of those kept on reserve to replace incapacitated seamen, casualties and deserters. Within a couple of days the total number of unemployed and shipwrecked sailors rose to more than 1,000 almost equalling the figures in the post-Mutiny year 1859.[53]

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[48] N. N. (ed.), *A Brief History of the Cyclone at Calcutta and Vicinity, 5th October 1864*, Calcutta 1865, p. 3. Cf. *also* GHOSE, Partha, 'Scientific Study in Calcutta: The Colonial Period', in: Chaudhuri, Sukanta, *Calcutta. The Living City. Vol. I, The Past*, (Repr.) Delhi 1999, pp. 195-202, p. 199. For a detailed survey of the effects of the cyclone cf. also GASTRELL, J. E./BLANFORD, H. F., *Report on the Calcutta Cyclone on the 5th of October 1864*, Calcutta 1866 and OIOC, IOR: P/173/; GoBeng, Marine Dept. Progs., 1864 A-13-43, November 1864.

[49] MASSEY, Montague, *Recollections of Calcutta for over half a Century,* Calcutta 1918, p. 32.

[50] Ibid., p. 33.

[51] N. N. (ed.), *A Brief History of the Cyclone at Calcutta*, p. 12.

[52] REDDIE, J. G., *Annual Report of the Marine Department and Dockyard under the Government of Bengal for 1864-65,* Calcutta 1865, p. 3.

[53] OIOC, IOR: P/213/57; GoI, Dept. Progs., Marine, 1865 February 1865, A—No. 61, Letter No. 308, J. G. Reddie, Master Attendant, Calcutta to A. Eden Secy. To GoBeng, 28-1-1865, 28-1-1865.

As the trade came almost to a standstill for several weeks following the catastrophe and chances to find a ship were slim the situation in Bow Bazaar and Lal Bazaar areas once again became tense. Given their experience after the dissolution of the Naval Brigades the port authorities were anxious to prevent the distress of the sailor population from rising to a point where scenes of begging and petty crime like those witnessed five years earlier would occur again. Consequently, many of the shipless seamen were recruited for the repairing works on board the damaged ships and thus enabled to "make their own terms".[54] Additionally, fifty sailors were taken on by the Police to protect wrecked property and prevent the plunder of ships cast ashore. But the colonial authorities were well aware of the fact that these measures provided only temporary solutions for the 'sailor problem', and at an early stage two Commissioner of Police reminded the Government that "[a]s soon as the present demand for labour ceases, some steps must be taken to send home the sailors who have lost their ships."[55] Sharing his view, the Master Attendant sought various ways of getting rid of the labour surplus. 95 Sailors were sent home at the expense of the Board of Trade, 68 men had their passage paid through the Cyclone Relief Fund 30 were sent to Bombay to join the Royal Navy and 187 were shipped for nominal wages by Captains who had entered a special agreement to the effect that the seamen had to partly work for their passage. The legal basis for the immediate deportation of 'distressed seamen' at Government expense was provided by the Merchant Shipping Act 1854[56] which had grown out of a concern of the British Government to extend its control on the Mercantile Marine and improve the living and working conditions of merchant seamen. [57]

However, the costly deportations failed to provide a durable solution of the problem. Already in June 1865 the Shipping Master complained that the port of Calcutta was again "greatly overcrowded with British Merchant Seamen, most

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54 OIOC, IOR: P/173/15; GoBeng., Marine Dept, Progs, 1865, A— No. 29 *Letter No. 1287, V. H. Schalch, Comm. of Police, Calcutta to GoBeng.*, 17-10-1864. Cf. also N. N. (ed.), *A Brief History of the Cyclone at Calcutta,* p. 21 f.

55 OIOC, IOR: P/213/57; GoI, Home Dept. Progs., Marine, 1865, February 1865, A—No. 61, Letter No. 308 J. G. Reddie, Master Attendant, Calcutta to A. Eden Secy. To GoBeng, 28-1-1865, 28-1-1865.

56 BARNES, *Evolution and Scope of Mercantile and Marine Laws* p. 29.

57 In spite of the fact that the measures were thus sanctioned by law, J. Reddie, the Master Attendant, had to admit that it was no easy task to arrange for the deportation of the seamen, as many of them had previously been in the House of Correction and commanders were "naturally averse to carry away Seamen of this description". OIOC, IOR: P/173/15; GoBeng., Marine Dept, Progs, 1865; No. 41, Capt. A. Caw, Shipping Master to J. G. Reddie, Master Attendant, 12-12-1864.

of whom are in the greatest distress imaginable".[58] Nonetheless, the fact the authorities took to such unusual and expensive measures betrays that the official paranoia regarding the seamen's alleged propensity to 'disorderly behaviour' which had been aroused for the first time in the post-Mutiny-period was still alive. According to one source, ten percent out of the 500 seamen still unemployed by July 1865 were hardened 'loafers' who did not intent to find work at all, causing instead constant annoyance for the public through their begging tours in Calcutta's White Town. The Shipping Master hence went so far as to call for legal innovation in the form of "a clause giving me power to take such loafers up and send them home at the public expense" as this would be the only "means of keeping good order amongst them."[59]

As a result of the constant trouble caused by the city's distressed sailor population, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal eventually requested the Sanitary Commission in August 1865 to produce a report on the 'State of the Sailors in Calcutta'.[60] The Commission, it was hoped, would not only find out the causes of the high unemployment rates but also provide information on their actual living conditions and their state of health. Major Malleson, who headed the Commission, submitted the results of his detailed enquiry to the Government in Bengal in February 1866.[61] Meanwhile, a number of articles on the same topic had appeared in the press.[62] The interest in the *Lebenswelt* of European sailors that had first been sparked off by the events of the Mutiny thus clearly reached a peak after the Calcutta cyclone. 'Jack Tar' had become an object of official enquiry, scholarly study and public curiosity alike. As one official put it: "to judge Jack aright and to deal with him aright, we must have some data to go upon,— we must know something about him."[63] In the following section I shall examine in greater detail some of the issues and stereotypes that came up in the products of this quest for knowledge.

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58 OIOC, IOR: P/437/29; GoI, Home Dept. Progs., Marine, 1866, A—No. 29, Letter No. 135 A. Caw, Shipping Master to Board of Trade, Marine Dept., London, 30-6-1865.

59 OIOC, IOR: P/437/29; GoI, Home Dept. Progs., Marine, 1866, A—No. 29, Letter No. 30 A. Caw, Shipping Master to GoBeng., 7-7-1865.

60 Ibid**.,** No. 18. May 1866, Letter No. 115, J.M. Cunningham, Sanitary Commission of Bengal to GoBeng., 9-2-1866.

61 MALLESON, G. B. 'The State of Sailors in Calcutta' [with OIOC, IOR: P/437/29; GoI, Home Dept. Progs., Marine, 1866 No. 18.]

62 Cf. for instance ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', *The Friend of India*, 14-4-1864, p. 399 f.; *The Friend of India*, 22-9-1864, p. 1061; *The Friend of India*, 6-4-1865, p. 392 f.; *The Friend of India*, 27-4-1865, p. 483 and CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*.

63 ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', p. 453.

3. Drink, Disease and Disorder: imperial anxieties and the ethnographic gaze upon the fringes of white society

Hygiene, Health & Mortality

One issue touched upon in the Malleson Report as well as in many other publications is the health of the sailors. Already during the crisis of 1859 the high death-rate prevailing among this group had been a major concern for the colonial authorities. Along with his apocalyptic vision of hordes of sailors turning to brigandage, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta had also warned the government of the "mortality which must ensue among the men […] , turned loose in the hot weather, most of them at first with money, among the liquor shops, bazars and sinks of iniquity"[64] Such apprehensions seemed to be confirmed by the results of an official enquiry into the death rates of the various communities residing in Calcutta that was undertaken immediately after the end of the Mutiny.[65] This so-called Macpherson Report stated that European seamen were the section of white colonial society with the highest mortality, cholera being the single most important cause of death. According to Macpherson, no fewer than 76% of the European cholera victims belonged to the city's floating sailor population.[66]

All of a sudden, issues of health and infection were no longer discussed solely with regard to the densely populated 'native suburbs' which had long been perceived as "seats of diseases destructive of individual happiness and of life".[67] Such 'seats of diseases' had now also been discovered in the 'White Town' — albeit in parts of it of that were usually not frequented by members of the 'respectable' European community.[68] In a rhetoric reminding on Victorian literature depicting the dirt and depravity of the industrial cities of England,[69]

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[64] OIOC, IOR: P/213/50 GoI, Marine Consultations 1859, File No. 22, Letter No, 167, 25-2-1859, S. Wauchope, CoP, Calcutta to the Secy. to GoBeng.

[65] MACPHERSON, Hugh M., *On the mortality of Calcutta during the twenty years ending 1860, Calcutta s.a. [1861?].*

[66] Ibid., p. 206.

[67] Report of the Fever Hospital Committee, 1840, cited in HARRISON, Mark, *Climates and Constitutions. Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850*, New Delhi 1999, p. 160.

[68] *The Friend of India*, 14-4-1864, p. 400. For background information on the social geography of Calcutta see NAIR, P. Thankhappan, *A History of Calcutta's Streets*, Calcutta 1987 (= A Tercentenary History of Calcutta, Vol. II), CHATTOPADHYAY, Swati, 'Blurring boundaries: the limits of 'white town' in colonial Calcutta**',** in**:** : *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 59, (2), 2000 pp. 154-179. and KOSAMBI, Meera/BRUSH, J.E., 'Three Colonial Port Cities in India', in: *The Geographical Review,* 78 (1), 1988, pp. 32-47, pp. 42-6.

[69] Cf. PICK, Daniel: *Faces of Degeneration. A European Disorder ca. 1848-1918*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 189-202 and Hamlin, C., 'Providence and Putrefaction: Victorian Sanitarians and the

Calcutta's Bow Bazar and Lal Bazar areas came to be portrayed as "the most hateful haunts in the world for Jack Tar."[70] According to a Christian missionary writing in the *Friend of India,* even the "most infamous purlieu of Wapping or Ratcliff Highway [wa]s clean and respectable compared with Flag Street."[71]

In an influential booklet published in 1864, Norman Chevers, surgeon of the Bengal Army and Professor of medicine in the College Hospital presented the results of his survey on the mortality of European seamen. His calculations, based on figures for the years between 1853 and 1864, resulted in the estimate of a "terrible and, in the present day unexampled, death-rate of 96.48 in every thousand annually". which was "a very near approach to annual decimation, or total

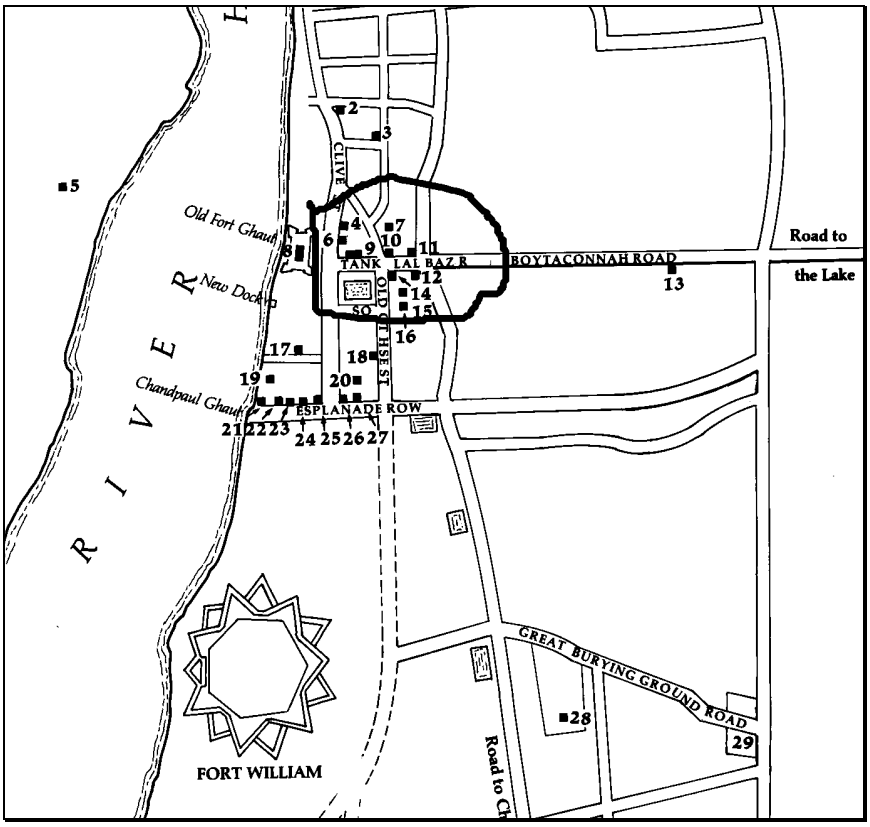

Fig. 6 Map of Central Calcutta (c. 1858). European seamen mostly frequented the Lal Bazar and Bow Bazar (Boytaconnah Road) areas, situated at the intersection of 'White Town' and 'Black Town' to find accommodation and amusement.

Natural Theology of Health and Disease' in: *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985), pp. 381-412. For a famous (though though slightly later) example see BOOTH, William, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, London 1890. Cf. especially p. 16.

[70] *The Friend of India*, 14-4-1864, p. 399 f.

[71] Ibid., p. 400.

extinction in ten years."[72] Like Macpherson he also pointed to the high number of cholera victims among the European seafaring population. The reference to cholera inevitably raised issues of hygiene and sanitation, as by mid-nineteenth century it was accepted knowledge that the contamination of air and drinking water through 'filth' and 'night soil' were the causes of the disease.[73] In drastic terms, Chevers hence denounced the housing of sailors in the vicinity of Lal Bazaar:

> The manner in which European sailors are lodged and 'done for' in most of the boarding-houses in Flag Street and the adjoining lanes is most disgraceful, and […] hence arises much of the worst diseases occurring among seamen on shore. The whole neighbourhood is extremely ill-drained. The cause alone would be sufficient to render these lodging houses pestilential. About one and a half years ago, there was one of the most frequented of these houses where you would see a row of sailors seated early every morning before the door, enjoining the air immediately over one of the worst open sewers in the town. That house sent five cases of malignant cholera into Medical College Hospital in one week.[74]

In the judgment of other officials, the unsanitary housing conditions were further aggravated by the supposed absence of personal cleanliness among the 'sailor class'.[75]

Recent scholarship has pointed to the fact that from about the 1830s onwards the prevalence of diseases and epidemics in India was no longer regarded as a natural outcome of the region's climate, but increasingly understood as a product of the "social conditions, habits and morals, of the population", in other words, of their defective civilization.[76] The relative paucity of epidemic outbreaks in Europe thus seemed to underscore not only the advanced scientific and medical knowledge but also the moral superiority of the colonizers. Consequently the twin project of imperial medicine and sanitation became a

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[72] CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the Health of Seamen*, p. 40. Chevers' calculations were later criticised as much to high by other observers.[Cf. *The Calcutta Review*, 40 (1865), p. 465.] Nonetheless they were often cited in official documents as well as in the press.

[73] HARRISON, Mark, *Public Health in British India. Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine 1859-1914,* Cambridge 1994, p. 204.

[74] CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the Health of Seamen*, p. 42.

[75] MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', p. 3.

[76] H ARRISON, Mark, *Climates and Constitutions. Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850*, New Delhi 1999, Chap. 4. See also RAMANNA, Mridula 'Perceptions of Sanitation and Medicine in Bombay, 1900-1914', in: Fischer-Tiné, H./ Mann, M. (Eds.). *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission. Cultural Ideology in British India*, London 2004, pp. 205-25, especially pp. 206-8, PATI ,Biswamoy, '"Ordering" "Disorder" in a Holy City: Colonial Health Interventions in Puri During the Nineteenth Century', in: Idem/M. Harrison (eds.), *Health, Medicine and Empire. Perspectives on Colonial India*, London: 2001, pp. 270-298 and ARNOLD, David, *Colonising the Body. State Medicine and epidemic Disease in 19th Century India*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1993, pp. 183-92 and the same author's 'Cholera and Colonialism in British India', in: *Past & Present*, 113 (1986), pp. 118-51.

cornerstone of the rhetoric of Britain's civilizing mission in India.[77] The discovery of enclaves of putridity and disease in parts of the 'white town' of a colonial metropolis then, was more than disturbing for the colonial authorities, as it laid bare the mockery of such legitimising claims. The myth of the existence of the neat boundaries between the life-styles of 'white', 'mixed-race', and 'native' inhabitants of Calcutta seemed additionally damaged when the average diet of those staying in these boarding-houses was revealed to a wider audience: Norman Chevers informed his upper-class reader-ship that the food served to the sailors was "generally bad", mostly consisting of "the diseased bazaar pork, which none but the very poorest willingly eat."[78]

An even greater blow to claims to a moral superiority of the 'imperial race' resulted from the seamen's drinking habits which were also considered to be partly responsible for the frightening death-rate. The excessive consumption of alcohol had been a problem in the British navy for a long time[79] and the propensity to drink was certainly part of the image of the sailor current in contemporary elite discourse, where he was usually portrayed as morally weak and easily influenced by all sorts of temptations. In a colonial setting, his alleged lack of self-restraint made 'Jack' very similar to the 'natives' in the eyes of many upper-class observers. This trope of racial boundary-crossing is also important in a more direct sense, as it was widely assumed that the worst effects of alcohol abuse did not arise of the consumption of 'pure and sound European brandy' but of 'country liquor'. It was understood that liquor sold in native shops was not only "drugged with several powerful narcotics" but also "doctored to the point of giving cholera to him who swallows it almost as certainly as a pistol fired into the mouth blows the head off."[80] Hence several medical experts proposed to prohibit the selling to Europeans of "that most intoxicating and deleterious of all drinks, the native Rum or 'Doasta'."[81]

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77 Cf. ARNOLD DAVID: *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, Cambridge 2000, (=NCHI, III.5) p. 85 f.

78 CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*, p. 43.

79 Cf. for instance LLOYD, Christopher, *The British Seaman 1200-1860. A social survey*, London 1968, pp. 254-6.

80 Ibid., p. 37. See also JOYCE, Michael K., *An Exposure of the Haunts of Infamy and Dens of Vice in Bombay. Collected from Facts*, Bombay 1854, p. 3. Joyce, a former Police officer describes the degree of 'intemperance' prevalent among European sailors in Bombay and mentions that Indian liquor-shop owners had reacted to the strong demand by offering a cheap brand of arrack mixed with chillies and opium under the label 'Sailor Jack'.

81 MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', p. 3. Cf. also CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*, Appendix B, 'Adulterated Liquor sold to Sailors and Soldiers in the Bazars of Calcutta', pp. 62-4.

However, this line of argument did not remain uncontested as some critics soon pointed to the results of an official enquiry conducted in 1858 where it had been "conclusively proved that the excessive drunkenness and its results" among Europeans resorting to the native shops "was due rather to the quantity than the quality of the liquor drunk in them"[82]. Accordingly, official endeavours to remedy the evil pursued a double strategy. On the one hand the authorities tried to control the quality of alcoholic beverages and regulate the access to liquor stores (particularly the 'native' ones) by restricting the opening hours.[83] On the other hand, attempts to educate the seamen, to persuade them to be "moral and religious" and abstain from heavy drinking were encouraged. Norman Chevers himself tried to convince an audience of sailors of the advantages of temperance by invoking their manly pride as well as their fear of God:

> You are not poor men: you are, as a body, rich in health and in an amount of strength and manly beauty such as is granted by Providence to scarcely any other race under the sun. Your Father, who made you in His image cares for and loves you in that equal measure in which he cares for and loves all His children; and you violate his law and hopelessly separate yourselves from him when you deface His image in this abominable disease and death which drunkenness engenders.[84]

The debate about another issue directly linked to questions of health, hygiene and mortality was similarly shaped by strong moral overtones. 'Jack's inclination to visit brothels was as much part of the popular image of the seafaring population as his fancy for liquor[85]. The official concern about the sailors' health therefore also included anxieties about the spread of venereal diseases.[86] Such fears were additionally fed by the new scientific interest in the 'sailor class'. A medical officer who accompanied a large party of sailors from Calcutta to Assam in 1863 discovered that 90 % of them had contracted syphilis during their stay in the port.[87] Here again the close physical involvement with 'natives' was held largely responsible for the contamination of the seamen as the majority of them visited Indian prostitutes, rather than the few and expensive European and 'Eurasian' sex-workers available. As Philippa Levine

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[82] Ibid. p. 2.

[83] *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for 1862-63*, Calcutta 1863, p. 3 f.

[84] CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*, p. 38.

[85] MALLEY, James, *Our Merchant Ships and Sailors*, London s. a [1876], p. 63 f. Cf. also LLOYD, Christopher, *The British Seaman,* p. 246 f.

[86] LEVINE, Philippa, *Prostitution, Race and Politics. Policing Venereal disease in the British Empire*, New York-London 2003, p. 285 f.

[87] CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*, Appendix C, 'The Dangers to which Soldiers and Sailors are exposed in the Bazars of Calcutta' p. 68. See also OIOC, IOR: P/173/9; GoBeng, Judl. Dept. Progs., 1862, A—74, March 1865, Letter No. 1666, 15-2-1864, , A. Turnbull, Secy. to the Justices of Peace of Calcutta, to S.C. Bailey, Secy. to GoBeng.

and others have shown, even the concept of venereal diseases was affected by racial ideology since it was widely held that they were the main carriers of syphilis and gonorrhoea because of their low standards of hygiene.[88]

The 'natural' affinity of sailors to prostitution was taken for granted to the extent that even the Seamen's Chaplain of Calcutta port believed it to be "a matter of impossibility" to prevent them from "launching in the wildest debauchery" once they were ashore.[89] In consequence, appeals to the moral feelings of the sailors alone did not seem a promising way to avoid the "death from a disease that must be nameless"[90]. Both Norman Chevers in his booklet as well as the Malleson Report accordingly recommended the introduction of a lock hospital system as the only viable measure to protect the health of European sailors.[91] Their suggestion met with official acclaim and a law to that effect was eventually enacted in 1867.[92]

Crime and 'Disorderly' Behaviour

The seamen's health was not the only concern of the colonial authorities. Even before the official interest in the sailor population had led to an increased effort in data collection about drunkenness, disease and debauchery another facet of the seafarers' behaviour had been the object of statistics compiled by the colonial government: their 'disorderly' or even criminal conduct. In the context of the Naval Brigades we have already seen that European crime was a topic that could provoke a mild hysteria in official circles, particularly when the victims were natives and the credibility of Britain's self-proclaimed civilizing mission was at stake.

As far as Calcutta is concerned, the sources leave no doubt that the sailors' unenviable notoriety in this regard was not completely unfounded. They were indeed largely responsible for the high crime rates among Europeans. In 1855, for instance, the magistrate tried more than 500 cases in which seamen were

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88 LEVINE, *Prostitution, Race and Politics,* p. 85 f. and WHITEHEAD, Judy, 'Bodies Clean and Unclean: Prostitution, Sanitary Legislation and Respectable Feminity in Colonial North India', in: *Gender and History*, 7 (9), 1995, pp. 41-63.

89 MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', Appendix III, Statement of Rev. A. L. Mitchell, Seaman's Chaplain, Port of Calcutta, p. x.

90 *The Friend of India*, 6-4-1865, p. 393.

91 CHEVERS, *On the Preservation of the health of Seamen*, p 51. In a later publication the same author severely criticised the abolition of the lock-hospital system in 1883, as it resulted in a significant increase venereal diseases among European seamen. Cf. CHEVERS, Norman, *A Commentary on the Diseases of India,* London 1886.

92 BANERJEE, Sumanta, *Dangerous Outcast. The Prostitute in 19th Century Bengal*, Calcutta 1998, p. 65.

involved. Next to the more obvious breaches of marine law like 'wilful neglect of duty',[93] 'disobedience' or desertion, there were 248 sailors involved in violent assaults, several of them resulting in loss of life. The Police Commissioner of Calcutta observed "that in four of the nine manslaughters, and five of the eight cases of cutting and wounding, the offenders were sailors sojourning at this port".[94] It is also remarkable that in 1864 as many as 12 out of 21 inmates of the prison in Ootacamund — one of the few jails that had been especially constructed to accommodate European long term-convicts — were former sailors, sent over from Calcutta.[95]

The frequent occurrence of crime made the Police soon resort to special controls of sailors ashore with the aim of disarming the men of their "clasp knives and other offensive weapons".[96] Nevertheless, drunken brawls in the 'Punch houses' remained quite common, as did disputes over money in the brothels, which were also often the causes for quarrels and punch-ups, sometimes even for murder.[97] Notorious were the incidents of arbitrary violence against the Indian population, often in connection with excessive drinking. The following is a rather typical example:

> On the 18th of February a party of sailors, ripe for mischief, were parading a part of town most infrequently visited by persons of their class, and were amusing themselves by striking more or less every person passing them, or destroying the articles (water jars &c,) they carried At length they entered a liquor shop and called for liquor, which on getting they refused to pay for, at the same time destroying the bottle it was served in, by throwing it at the vendor and decamping.[98]

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93 In the five years from 1856 to 1861 1522 seamen were sentenced to imprisonment in the Calcutta House of Correction for 'refusal of duty' alone. Cf. OIOC, IOR: P/173/9; GoBeng, Judl. Dept. Progs., 1862, A—77.

94 *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta For 1855. (With figured statements and comparative statements for 1854 and 1855)*, Calcutta 1856, p. 3.

95. OIOC, IOR: P/147/4; GoBeng, Jail Dept. Progs., Nov. 1864, No. 82, 'Statement of Prisoners in the European Jail Ootacamund'.

96 *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta For 1861-62. (With figured statements and comparative statements for 1860-61 and 1861-62)*, Calcutta 1862, p. 3.

97 The case of Frank Fowles, a sailor on board the American ship *Eliza,* is quite characteristic for such a crime. He cold bloodedly killed the mother of a prostitute called 'Bebee Jaun'. When the woman asked him to go elsewhere, because he did not have enough money to pay for her daughter's sexual services, "Fowles took from his pocket a pistol, and without saying anything presented it in the direction of the mother; the pistol exploded and the old woman was shot in the head, and shortly after died." However he was convicted for manslaughter and not for murder as it was presumed "that he presented the pistol to the woman more with intent to frighten than to shoot her". *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta For 1860-61. (With figured statements and comparative statements for 1859-60 and 1860-61)*, Calcutta 1861, p. 16 f.

98 *Report on the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta For 1855*, p. 16.

There are dozens of references to similar cases in the Police reports. This particular excursion, it ought to be added, ended with the murder of an Indian watchman; however, the sailor accused of the deed was eventually acquitted by the English magistrate.

Given the frequent occurrence of such atrocious crimes (and the notoriously mild punishment received by European perpetrators), the question arises as to how the indigenous population did react to such incidents? Was the official *angst* that the 'disorderly' behaviour of the seafaring specimens of the ruling race might endanger the slender basis of British power a mere product of colonial imagination? There are a number of indications that this was not the case. As far as we can judge from articles in the 'native' press,[99] at least the elite section of the Indian population in the seaport towns affected by the problem was well aware of the misdemeanours by European seamen and condemned them in the strongest terms. Already decades before unemployment had become a mass phenomenon in Indian ports, the British had realized what effect the presence of 'drunk and disorderly' Europeans could have for their missionary aspirations. The account of one Reverend Wilson, a clergyman living in Bombay during the 1830s and 1840s, marvellously illustrates this point:

> In the discharge of my duties as a Missionary to the heathen, I go to the high-ways and hedges to invite sinners to come to the marriage supper of the Son of God; I announce the glad tidings of Salvation through our crucified Redeemer; and I speak of the sanctifying influence of his gospel. As I proceed in my discourse my attention is frequently directed to a gang of drunken sailors or soldiers, bearing the Christian name, staggering along the streets in a state of intoxication; and I am sneeringly asked by the natives. "Would you like to become us like these your kindred"? I need not to tell you [..] what my answer is. [...] The unbelievers triumph; and it is the promise of God alone, which can sustain me and enable me to repeat my message.[100]

One might speculate, that Britain's cultural civilizing mission was probably affected by such incidents in much same manner as the Christian one. It seems highly probable, therefore, that the 'sailor question' indeed contributed to the erosion of the colonizers' prestige. How, then, did British officials try to come to grips with a dilemma threatening to acquire imperial dimensions?

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99 BANERJEE, , *Dangerous Outcast*, p. 52. For a example from Bombay see *Bombay Samachar,* 9 June 1868, in: *Report on Native Papers, Bombay*, 1868.

100 *Proceedings of a Meeting for forming a Temperance Society, held in the Town Hall of Bombay etc.,* Bombay 1834, p. 10. Cf. also SPEAR, Percival, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth-Century India,* (Repr.) London-Dublin, 1980 [[1]1932], p. 59 f. and Rraychaudhury, Tapan, 'Transformation of Indian Sensibilities: The west as catalyst', in: Idem, *Perceotions, Emotions, Sensibilities. Essays on India's Colonial and Post-colonial experi*ences, New Delhi 1999, pp. 3-21, p. 7.

4. Bringing 'Jack Tar' within the Pale of Civilization: practical and discursive Strategies to solve the 'Sailor Problem'

The events of the 1850s and 1860s had brought the fate of distressed seamen to the notice of a wider public, but initiatives to improve the lot of European sailors had a much longer history in Calcutta. As early as 1827, the Seamen's Friend Society was founded with the aim of contributing to the spiritual welfare of sailors arriving in the port.[101] In 1852 a Seamen's Mission was founded for the same purpose.[102] I entertained two 'floating churches', one of which, however, was destroyed during the 1864 cyclone.

More pragmatic considerations had led to the inauguration of the Sailor's Home in Lal Bazar Street in July 1837,[103] only two years after the first such institution in the British Empire had opened its doors in London.[104] The institution had been opened with a view to protect the seamen from "imposition and extortion"; it offered refuge for unemployed, shipwrecked or distressed sailors up to a period of 25 days. The rules and regulations of the Home placed emphasis on discipline and the observance of fixed times for the meals and prayer, leaving no doubt that the institution should provide an alternative to the 'anarchy' prevailing in private boarding-houses.[105] In spite of its ostensibly secular character, the promotion of the inmates' "moral, intellectual and professional improvement" was also mentioned in the objects of the institution.[106] Referring to the United Kingdom, Alston Kennerley has pointed to the fact that this blending of issues of 'material' and 'moral welfare' was typical for 19th century Sailors' Homes, since they came "from the same stock" as the missionary societies and the temperance movement.[107] The Home was shifted to new

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101 *Thacker's Bengal Directory*, 1869, Calcutta 1868, p. 203.

102 Ibid.

103 *The Englishman*, 6-7-1837.

104 For the history of the early British institutions see also HALL, W. H., *Sailors' Homes, Destitute Sailors's Asylums and Asylums for aged Seamen, Their Origin & Progress,* s. l. 1852, p. 10.

105 *Bengal Directory and Annual Register 1858*, Pt. XI, Calcutta 1858, p. 107. See also ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', p. 461. We know from other sources, that the home — at least in the first years of existence did not live up to this expectations and was a centre of "liquor traffic" characterised by the "prevalence of disorder and intoxication". *Cf.* ATKINS, Thomas: *Reminiscences of Twelve Years= Residence in Tasmania and New South Wales; Norfolk Island and Moreton Bay; Calcutta, Madras and Cape Town; the United States of America and the Canadas*, s. l. 1869, p. 91 f.

106 *Bengal Directory and Annual Register 1858*, Pt. XI, Calcutta 1858, p. 106 f.

107 KENNERLEY, Alston, 'Seamen's Missions and Sailors' Homes: Spiritual and Social Welfare Provision for Seafarer in British Ports in the Nineteenth Century, with some Reference to the South West', in: Fisher, Stephen, (ed.), *Studies in British Privateering, Trading Enterprise and Seamen's Welfare, 1775-1900*, Exeter 1987, pp. 121-50, p 147 f. See also HALL, *Sailors' Homes, Destitute Sailors's Asylums and Asylums for aged Seamen,* p. 6 f.

location in 1865, partly because the building had become to small to accommodate the ever growing number of distressed seamen and partly its being situated "in the very centre of the touters' hell"[108] provoked constant criticism both from medical officers and missionaries.

A strong moral and paternal element is also evident in some of the "simple measures of control and precaution"[109] recommended by the Malleson Commission. The different suggestions were characterised by their common aim to protect the victimized seaman from those who could cause him the most harm: greedy commanders, vile boarding house keepers and, last but not least, his own 'lower instincts'. They included, among others, the intensification of control and the provision of reliable statistics about the sailors through a system of registration, the reduction of the number of seamen ashore by a prohibition of discharging European Sailors in the port,[110] and the appointment of a Marine Magistrate who would "keep a constant watch"[111] over them. The strict regulation of the opening hours of liquor stores and punch-houses already referred to above can be seen in the same light.

Perhaps more intriguing than the practical steps suggested are the discursive strategies employed in the elite discourse on 'Jack Tar'. An analysis of the texts produced on European seamen in the period under study shows that there are two main varieties of interpreting the distress and 'moral state' of the sailors. On the one hand it is a recurrent theme to epitomize them as helpless victims: either of their commanders and officers whose authority over them "may be likened to that of a parent over a child"[112] or of villainous boarding masters, crimps, pimps or liquor vendors. They are perceived as simply lacking the intelligence and 'character' to defend themselves against injustice, resist temptations or even think for themselves. Having described the miserable sanitary conditions and moral dangers existing in the Lal Bazar area, one writer invokes the parental feelings of his educated countrymen explaining to them that, "sailors will not think of these facts, but the better educated portion of the community ought to

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108 *The Friend of India*, 6-4-1865, p. 393.

109 OIOC, IOR: P/437/29; GoI, Home Dept. Progs., Marine, 1866, No. 18, Letter No. 115, J. M. Cunningham, Offg. Secy. to Sanitary Commission for Bengal to A. Eden, Secy. to GoBeng, 9-2-1866.

110 The widespread practice by commanders of European ships to get rid of their expensive European crew soon after arrival in the port a major cause for the huge numbers of unemployed sailors in Calcutta port. A number of Captains tried to save money by either replacing their men by Indian *lascars* (who usually earned less than a quarter of the wages) or discharging the entire crew while lying in port. MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', p. 8. Cf. also ibid., Appendix I, Statement of J. H. Branson, Magistrate Southern division, p. ii-iii.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p, xi.

think a little for them".[113] In a similar vein. another author remarks that "Jack may fairly claim protection against the evil influence which he himself cannot resist"[114]

Narratives of this kind suggest that the sailor was ultimately not responsible for his deeds. Not surprisingly, the search for scapegoats plays a crucial role in this trope We have already seen that contact with natives and particularly with *dalals* (touts) and prostitutes is made out as moral (and often also physical) contamination. It was also believed that European and Eurasian 'crimps' 'harpies' and 'land-sharks' were critical in corrupting the seamen morally and ruining their health. Especially the keepers of private boarding-houses are frequently depicted as ruthless parasites.[115] According to one statement they cared for the sailors "only so long as they could to make a money out of him"; in order to achieve their goal they would "encourage him to drink and get drunk on their premises; and [...] when his funds are exhausted they turn him out, beggared, into the streets."[116] Moreover, almost all the boarding-houses were situated in the red light area around Flag Street and the amusements so easily available in their vicinities further contributed to the sailors' becoming "depraved, vicious, self-abandoned" and ultimately "the tempters and destroyers of others".[117] To sum up this line of argument: the seaman was, at bottom, "good-hearted but led astray",[118] he only stood in need of parental guidance and protection by the members of the European elite. And so it was the responsibility of "men of educated minds and refined tastes and full purses" to do their "utmost to improve Jack's character".[119]

There was, however, a second narrative converging with first the one in the point that the seamen were also seen as immature and hardly able to speak for themselves. But instead of being perceived as 'good-hearted', they were held to be "hopelessly degraded and irreclaimably vicious"[120]. For this reason, they

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113 *The Friend of India*, 14-4-1864, p. 400.

114 MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', Appendix II, 'Memorandum of Rev. J Cave Browne, Cathedral Chaplain and Chaplain of the General Hospital on the want of official sanitary measures for our seamen while in the Port of Calcutta', p. vi.

115 This trope was also current in the metropolitan discourse on sailors. Cf. DIXON, Conrad, 'The Rise and Fall of the Crimp, 1840-1914', in: Fisher, Stephen, *British Shipping and seamen, 1630-1960. Some studies* (= Exeter Papers in Economic History, No. 16), Exeter 1984, pp. 49-67, p. 65.

116 MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', p. 11.

117 Ibid., Appendix III, Statement of Rev. A. L. Mitchell, Seaman's Chaplain, Port of Calcutta, p. xiii.

118 MALLEY, *Our Merchant Ships and Sailors*, p. 63.

119 ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', p. 466,

120 Ibid.

were portrayed in a language strikingly reminding on the depictions of 'insubordinate natives' rather than of innocent children. One of the experts interviewed for the Malleson Report pronounced his view, that sailors

> as a class, […] are insolent, wasteful, insubordinate, and slothful. All will admit, that the active, quiet, respectful seaman of a quarter of a century since is now rarely met with, and how different a being in his place. In self-defence, then, it is necessary to adopt measures effective and so possibly extreme, to prevent what otherwise will be a periodical and increasing nuisance, expense and danger to this community.[121]

This was the same sort of class-distrust which had stirred up the paranoia after the dissolution of the Naval Brigades. Sailors, according to this strand of opinion were potentially perilous and hence it was regarded as necessary that the colonial government reacted with a strong hand to suppress their misdemeanours.

Such a perception reminds on the contention recently brought forward by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in the context of the late 18th century 'revolutionary' Atlantic. They argued that the multi-ethnic 'motley crews' of sailors found creative ways of resisting authorities and posed a threat to existing hierarchies.[122] In the light of this line of reasoning, their violent behaviour as well as their frequent transgression of racial boundaries also acquire a new meaning: they could well be read as challenges to the colonial order of things.

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121 Ibid., Appendix III, p. xxv. The trope of a progressing moral corruption of European seamen from a 'golden age' where they had been obedient and respectful can also be found in earlier as well as in later writings. Cf. for instance Reverend H. Jeffreys in his speech 'Intemperance: root of crime, disease and poverty' held in Bombay, 13-11-1834, in: *Proceedings of a Meeting for forming a Temperance Society, held in the Town Hall of Bombay etc.,* Bombay 1834, p. 9. MALLEY, *Our Merchant Ships and Sailors*, p. 63 and HOOD, W.H., *The Blight of Insubordination. The Lascar Question and rights and wrongs of the British Shipmaster*, Liverpool 1903 p. 17 f.

122 LINEBAUGH, Peter/REDIKER, Marcus, *The many-headed Hydra. Sailors, slaves, commoners and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic*, London New York 2000, pp. 214-21.

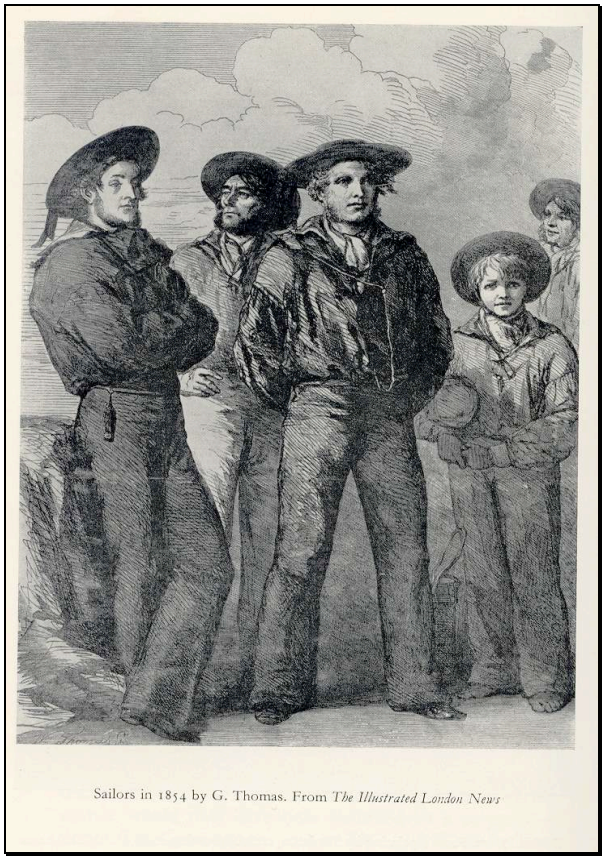

Fig. 7 'Children of the Sea': typical representation of 'Jack Tar' in an English magazine (1854)

Promoters of this view repeatedly tried to underline their argument by pointing to the Police statistics. The sailors, they maintained, possessed a 'natural' tendency to commit breaches of discipline, to conspire against their officers, to work out "mischievous plans" and resort to "vicious courses" in order to avoid the lawful discharge of their duty.[123] Small wonder that the advocates of this stance were convinced that "strict control" had to be "kept over the sailor; if an effort be made to bring him within the pale of civilization." Only then, their argument ran, would it be possible "that he will become a better citizen and a better man."[124]

It must be admitted, that such extreme statements are quite rare. Public (i. e. European elite-) opinion seems to have oscillated between the two poles just described. Sometimes there were even conscious attempts to reconcile the seemingly contradictory positions. Several writers tried to divide the sailor class into two parts: the 'seamen proper', i.e. a sailor on board his ship, as opposed to

[123] OIOC, IOR: P/173/9; GoBeng, Marine Dept. Progs., 1862, No. A—73] H.W.I Wood, Secy. to Bengal Chamber of Commerce, to E.H. Lushington, Secy. to GoBeng, 20-1-1862. Cf. also NAI, Home Dept., Judl. No. 65, 29-07-1859 'Imprisonment of Seamen at Bombay and Calcutta'; N. Oliver, Magistrate of Police, Calcutta to W. Crawford Senior Magistrate of Police, Bombay 13-4-1859.

[124] MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', p. 21.

the 'seaman living an idle life on shore'. All the positive qualities of 'Jack Tar' were ascribed to the former and all his 'defects of character' to the latter. Reflecting on the crime statistics, one observer notes that

> *drunkenness* and confinement of seamen on shore is more than is double that of those who are on the river. For *assault*, which so often grows out of drunkenness, the proportion, though somewhat less, is still sadly against the man on the shore. But the third class of *theft* tells a melancholy tale how the idleness of shore life leads to graver crime.[125]

The solution thus seemed to be simple: the sailors needed only to be kept to their ships, protected from the temptations of the port and particularly from the degenerating influences of native society and "disease, crime and pauperism" would be "greatly diminished".[126] At the same time, one might want to add, the colonized population would be kept from being confronted with elements of British/European societies that could have made them ask questions about the civilizational superiority of the 'ruling race' and the legitimacy of the British *Raj*.

5. Summing up

Ports, we have been reminded of late, are "multi-purpose interfaces" and hence basically about "bringing things and people together".[127] In a colonial make-up, ports thus do not only play a pivotal role because of their economic significance but also as zones of 'colonial contact'. In the South Asian context, the 'bringing together' of indigenous and European societies and civilizations was doubtlessly most intense in Calcutta, the central seat of British power since the late 18th century. Many Indians formed their opinion about the colonizers in the place where British presence was strongest. As soon as colonial rule began to be legitimised with civilizational, moral or even racial superiority, 'prestige' became a crucial ingredient for the stability of the *Raj*. In such a constellation,

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125 ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', p. 463.

126 MALLESON, 'The State of Sailors', Appendix II, Memorandum of Rev. J. Cave-Browne, Cathedral Chaplain and Chaplain of the General Hospital on the want of official sanitary measures for our seamen while in the Port of Calcutta, p vi.

127 JARVIS, Adrian; 'Port History: Some Thoughts on where it Came from and Where it Might be Going', in: Fischer, Lewis/ Jarvis Adrian (eds.) R., *Havens and Harbours essays in Port History in Honour of Gordon Jackson*, St. John's, Newfoundland 1999 (=Research in Maritime History No. 16), pp. 13-34, p. 14 f.

groups among the 'white' population who could cast a shadow of doubt on the myth of the colonizer's 'natural' supremacy were difficult to handle.

The case of distressed European seamen in Calcutta during the 1850 and 1860s has provides an excellent example of a 'colonial predicament' caused by such an 'in-between-group'. On the one hand, sailors were vital for the military dominance and economic exploitation of India, on the other, their presence ashore tended to create serious problems. The episode of the Mutiny has illustrated this ambivalence. Within a time span of a few months, sailors were first hailed by their fellow countrymen as heroes and saviours of the empire and then feared as vandals 'of the worst character' who posed a serious threat to their reputation, live and property.

The mass unemployment of the 1860s disclosed the deep class divide within the society of the colonizer conspicuously. In many ways, distressed European seamen were treated and talked about by the members of the colonial elite like those segments of the 'native' population that were deemed 'dangerous'. In both cases the first reaction to the perceived threat was to collect scientific data, compile statistics and ascertain control over the group in question. Next, colonial authorities would penetrate the 'spaces of disease and disorder' inhabited by the said community, trying to transform them through sanitary measures, medical treatment moral advice and, if necessary, policing.

Moreover, our case study has offered a fine illustration for an internal 'orientalisation' in the sense that the sailors were not accepted as responsible human beings, able to act rationally and speak for themselves but either perceived as good-hearted "children of the sea"[128] in need of parental guidance or condemned as a "drunken, reckless, mutinous lot"[129] which had to be disciplined. Especially in the latter discourse they were often compared to insubordinate 'natives'. Their exposure to a predominantly Indian environment when they were on shore, the supposedly degenerating impact of Indian food, liquor and physical contact with 'native' prostitutes and *dalals* seemed to substantiate a view that placed the seaman outside the pale of civilization. That schemes to relieve the distressed sailors coupled practical measures with attempts at uplifting them morally or even 'Christianising' them thus is hardly surprising.

[128] ANONYMOUS, 'Sailor Life in Calcutta', p. 461.

[129] Ibid., p. 453.

Finally, it should be noticed that the plans to confine the seamen on board of their ships alluded to in the last section, can be read as a prelude to the policy of institutionalisation and segregation later applied to European 'women of ill-fame', criminals and vagrants. However, in the case of European sailors it turned out to be a strategy which could never be implemented, and 'Jack Tar' continued to be a source of embarrassment for the white colonial elite until the end of the *Raj*. _