



Introduction

In 1862, on a beach in what is today northeastern Somalia, a British colonial official told a Somali sultan that he faced a choice. It was a choice between personally beheading eight of his own subjects, or accepting the bombardment of his coastline by an armada of British gunboats looming in the distance offshore. Nine one-hundred-foot-long, fume-spewing steel-hulled frigates underlined the starkness of the decision confronting the Sultan. These ships were relatively new to the seas globally, and were a novel and menacing sight on this stretch of the Somali coast, which was more used to seeing elegantly-rigged wooden dhows. The combined cannons of the British and Indian Navies pointed threateningly towards the shoreline. In this particular coastal location, the Sultan and his people had witnessed the spectacle of cannon-fire only once before. On that occasion, the fire from three ships had destroyed a medium-sized town, resulting in numerous deaths. The Sultan attempted to reason with the British official, but he refused to listen. In the end, one after another, the Sultan beheaded eight of his own subjects before swearing allegiance to the British flag on the quarterdeck of one of the warships anchored off his coast.

The colonial history of the southern Red Sea region – contemporary Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen – is strewn with the bodies of victims of maritime violence. The whole culture of international relations in the region was transformed by colonial conquest. A permissive and cooperative system of diplomacy gave way to a violent and competitive regime. Incidents of maritime conflict proliferated. Focusing on three case studies from across the southern Red Sea region – Majerteen in northeast Africa, the Zaraniq coast in the Tihamat Yemen or Yemen coast, and the French enclave in the Gulf of Tadjoura (see Map I.1) – we see the unfurling of colonial chaos in the southern Red Sea. The late nineteenth century saw a steep rise in imperial competition, geopolitical jockeying and the proliferation of rival factions vying for recognition in the emerging colonial



Map I.1 Majerteen north-east Somalia, Zariq Tihamat Yemen and the Gulf of Tadjoura

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regime of sovereignty, scrambling for colonial military patronage to support their quasi-military insurgencies along the coast. By the mid-twentieth century, a historic network of coastal royals and a long-standing mode of diplomacy had given way to a tense, transactional style of international relations and lawmaking. Diplomacy was diminished in favour of colonial chaos.

Colonial officials normally described the protagonists of maritime violence as pirates, as self-serving criminals. This study takes a more expansive and historical look at peoples labelled as pirates by the international community. In three acts, focusing on three sets of characters from three corners of the southern Red Sea during the colonial era, we see that maritime violence served strategic ends.

By launching attacks against shipwrecked European steamers, taking hostages, negotiating salvage, seizing European-flagged ships on the sea, and trading arms and other colonially banned goods, upstarts and rulers from around the southern Red Sea littoral negotiated their inclusion into colonial treaty agreements. These agreements ultimately formed the basis of the modern map of regional and national power along the coast of northeast Africa and the southern Arabian Peninsula. Incidents of maritime violence and treaty making offer a porthole onto the culture of international law creation in the colonial period.

By making violence an entry-point to international relations, European colonialism created a zero-sum system we would today recognise as competitive geopolitics. Contemporary violence along the foreshores and reef-strewn coastline of the southern Red Sea originated in the colonial era, between about 1830 and the mid-twentieth century. During this time, European empires transformed the coastline into a crucible of international conflict. While we commonly think of the impact of colonial rule on the international sphere in terms of swashbuckling commonplaces such as ‘divide and rule’ and ‘gunboat diplomacy’, the true effect of colonial violence was profound. Europeans ran amok, transforming the very rules that governed the international system – and which purported to bring peace where there was conflict, and order where there was upheaval – into a violent competition for survival. Disputes over shipwrecks, treaties and maritime jurisdiction during the imperial period eroded customary forms of diplomacy, peaceful alliances between regional states and stable coastal monarchies.

Unravelling

Europeans did not introduce violence to a peaceful precolonial idyll. An extensive literature emphasises the cosmopolitan harmoniousness of the pre-colonial Indian Ocean, however this literature is now considered somewhat romantic.¹ There is in fact a long history of naval

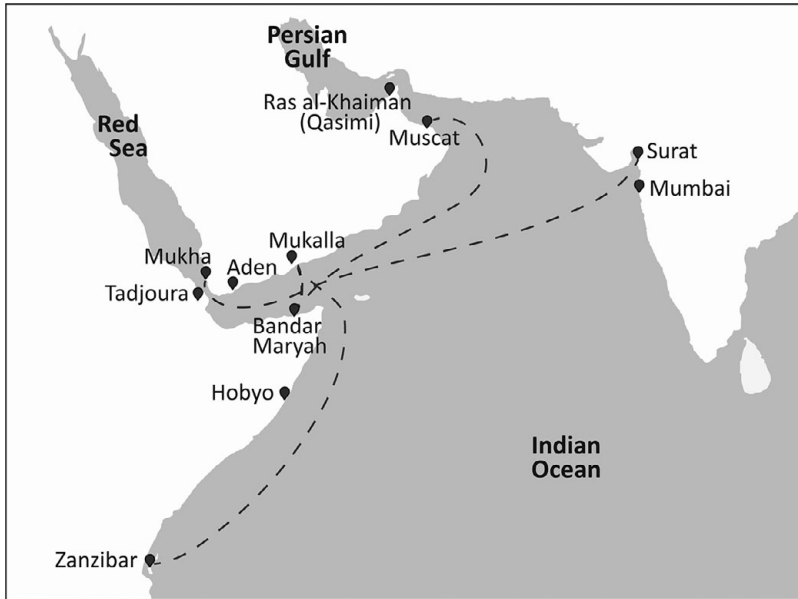
¹ See, for example, Richard Hall, *Empires of The Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and Its Invaders* (London: HarperCollins, 1996). For a critique of this literature, see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), esp. p. 44.

conflict, even imperial subjugation, by indigenous empires in the north-western Indian Ocean which long predates the arrival of nineteenth-century European colonists. Empires, port states, coastal kingdoms and island fiefdoms had long competed for control of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, which lie at the centre of East–West trade. When a world trade system first emerged with its centre in the Middle East five millennia before the present (BCE), the Red Sea became a site of commercial energy, the subject of political contestation and control. The Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians and Sabaeans all sought to some degree to control the Red Sea trade routes – notably by monopolising regional timber production and shipbuilding. The discovery of the monsoon wind patterns in about 300 BC – allowing for yearly sea-bound commercial voyages between Asia, Africa and Europe – increased traffic through and political interest in the Red Sea as a maritime thoroughfare.² The Fatimids, Mamluks, Rasulids, Ayyubids, and Ottomans all continued the tradition of shipbuilding and of using navies to protect merchant shipping in the Red Sea in the Middle Ages.³ At the same time, a number of smaller regional ports such as Aden, Adulis, Dahlak, which straddled the Red Sea’s choke-points, challenged the dominance of larger empires by building flotillas of smaller ships and using harassing tactics to overpower fairly large imperial navies in their quest to control shipping in the region, sometimes for many decades at a stretch.⁴

² Markus Vink, ‘Indian Ocean studies and the “New Thalassology”’, *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007), p. 55. G. W. Bowersock Omerod, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Shlomo Goitien, ‘Portrait of a medieval India trader: Three letters from the Cairo Geniza’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50 (1987), esp. p. 458.

³ For example, Roxani Eleni Margariti, ‘Mercantile networks, port cities, and “pirate” states: Conflict and competition in the Indian Ocean world of trade before the sixteenth century’, *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51 (2008), pp. 556–559; Giancarlo Casale, ‘Global politics in the 1580s: One canal, twenty thousand cannibals, and an Ottoman plot to rule the world’, *Journal of World History* 18(3) (2007), pp. 267–296; and Alexis Wick, ‘Self-portrait of the Ottoman Red Sea, 20th of July 1777’, *Journal of Ottoman Studies* XL (2012), pp. 399–434 and Rene Barendse, ‘Trade and state in the Arabian Seas: A survey from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century’, *Journal of World History* 11(2) (2000), pp. 173–225.

⁴ Patricia Risso, ‘Cross-cultural perceptions of piracy: Maritime violence in the western Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf region during a long eighteenth century’, *Journal of World History* 12(2) (2001), pp. 295–296.



Map I.2 The precolonial commercial and diplomatic connections across the north-western Indian Ocean

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Notwithstanding these tensions, there was an entrenched culture of diplomacy in the region. Commercial continuities and standards of behaviour in the international realm smoothed changes of political order in the region in the precolonial era. Conquest looked more like absorption than subjugation. The tenor of geopolitics was tolerant and permissive, rather than competitive and retaliatory. Maritime commerce carried on in a cooperative rather than a competitive fashion. Several ethno-cultural networks facilitated the movement of goods; at the same time, a culture of gift-giving and diplomacy between regional kingdoms, which treated one another as equals, oiled the wheels of commerce between different parts of the north-western Indian Ocean. Complementary commercial and diplomatic networks criss-crossed the northwestern Indian Ocean (see Map I.2). These regional networks bridged the far corners of the northwestern Indian Ocean, facilitating the exchange of goods from across the East, including coffee, incense, Chinese pottery and silk for staples such as rice and timber, as well as currencies in the form of cowrie shells and

later silver in Maria Theresa dollars.⁵ To borrow the anthropologist Alexander Lesser's analogy, precolonial international society was not a billiard table – a mass of collisions between discrete actors – but rather inextricably interconnected 'aggregates [interwoven] near and far, in web-like, netlike connections'.⁶ Such networks were essentially cooperative, based on gift giving and reciprocity rather than on power and force.

When European traders arrived in the region in the sixteenth century, they insinuated themselves into pre-existing Hadhrami, Levantine, Venetian, Persian, South Asian, Armenian, Omani and Swahili commercial networks; or they nested their commercial interests under the wing of a regional state such as the Mughals and Gujaratis, trading as protected minorities and as leaseholders on the sufferance of larger, more powerful regional powers. Yet the nineteenth century marked an important turning point in the history of the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and their littorals. Diplomacy unravelled in favour of a system of maritime space sharing that was highly competitive, even adversarial. An environment in which trans-regional commercial and diplomatic dealings could be win-win, in which one person's power and fortune might strengthen another's, was replaced by a zero-sum logic. From the late nineteenth century onwards, one ruler's gain was another's loss – and the militarily, technologically and commercially powerful reaped the benefits while the weak were subordinated and marginalised.

The great commercial transformation driving this shift was the advent of the British East India Company (EIC). The EIC emerged from a series of internal crises and South Asian battles in the late eighteenth century as a new, imperial power; the EIC became financially secure, technologically proficient and militarily confident enough to force its way into new markets, and to seek to dominate those markets in which it was already involved. The EIC replaced the old

⁵ Michael Pearson, *Before Colonialism: Theories on Asian-European Relations 1500–1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ashin Das Gupta, *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500–1800* (London: Routledge, 1994); Niels Steensgard, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies: The Structural Crisis in the European-Asian Trade in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1973); Barendse, 'Trade and state', pp. 173–225.

⁶ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 19.

South Asian empires, such as the Mughals and Marathas, with an array of local rulers and loyalist upstarts who used their association with the British to enhance their influence.⁷ What emerged was an uneasy symbiosis between the East India Company and the surviving regional powers.⁸ However, to describe the relationship between the colonial powers, regional rulers and merchants in the southern Red Sea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an ‘uneasy coexistence’ is an understatement.

Europeans spent much of the nineteenth century disaggregating the cooperative and diplomatic bonds that knit the region together. Whereas the glue of international relations in the region had previously been exchange, gift giving, treaty making and mutual recognition, maritime powers increasingly turned to force, one-upmanship and violence to assert themselves in the international realm during the colonial period. Shipwreck and salvage, attacks against seaborne shipping, hostage-taking, slave trading and other trades to which the use of force was integral, all emerged as fundamental ingredients of the maritime political economy. The political scientists Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz argue that in the postcolonial period, African elites created and sold protection for disorder, violence and unrest to strengthen their authority in the domestic realm.⁹

⁷ Kitri N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 47; on the reinvention of the East India Company as a political organisation in the late eighteenth century, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, pp. 42–43; Kavalam M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Elizabeth Mancke, ‘Early modern expansion and the politicization of oceanic space’, *Geographic Review*, 89(2) (1999), pp. 226–228; Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 2002). More recently, see William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019). For a summary of this literature, see Markus Vink, ‘From port-city to world-system: Spatial constructs of Dutch Indian Ocean studies, 1500–1800’, *Itinerario*, 28(2) (2004), pp. 86–87.

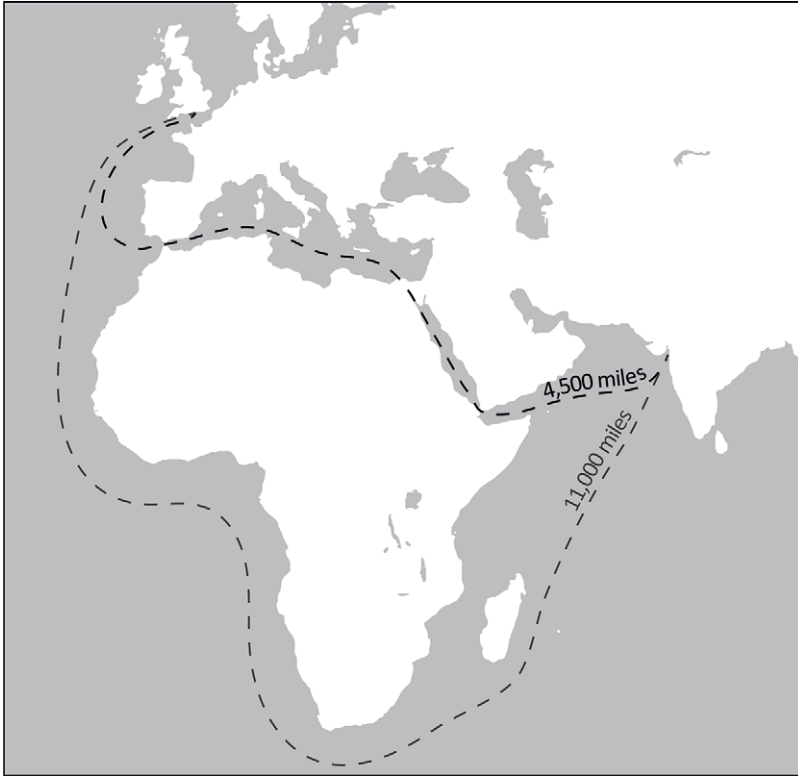
⁸ Christopher A. Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. p. 69. See also Vink, ‘From port-city to world-system’, p. 86.

⁹ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

In this study, I argue that disorder-making as political strategy originated – or was at the very least prefigured – in the colonial era. By instigating acts of aggression along the coast and at sea, actual and aspiring rulers inflated their political stock, positioning themselves as indispensable colonial proxies and military clients for foreign powers.

The creation of a new international order in the region was not, therefore, a top-down imposition on the region; on the contrary, it emerged in the course of maritime conflicts between the colonial newcomers and coastal actors. Rather than approach international relations from the vantage point of the Colonial Ministries of European capitals – or from the deck of a European steamship – I approach conflict and violence from the level of the shoreline, from the point of view of the coastal rulers, militias and mercenaries who tried their luck in the international system. Each chapter follows the career of a different protagonist of maritime violence. Each used violence to compel – or attempt to compel – the colonial powers to share power in the region, to nest their claims to sovereignty under the wing of the imperialists. Positioning ourselves on the Red Sea's shoreline, each chapter reveals another facet of the unfolding colonial chaos and maritime violence in the region. Starting with a review of indigenous, precolonial cultures of diplomacy, the story moves through the disruption of this system during incidents of shipwreck, salvage and treaty making in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. We then see the unravelling of cooperative approaches to international relations when an assortment of hitherto marginal social groups, including private individuals, upstart chiefs, traders and military commanders, became embroiled in the work of international politics.

Told from the perspective of littoral populations, their stories are discoverable in the colonial archives. Thus in one sense, this is an imperial study, employing an archival methodology and backlit by the kinds of grand geopolitical upheavals, new technologies and epochal events, like the advent of colonialism in Africa, favoured by imperial historians. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which imbued the region with a strategic and world economic significance that it retains to this day, cuts the time frame of this study in two. After the 1870s, what was once a six-month journey under sail via the Cape route, or an arduous sea and land journey via Egypt, was transformed by 1900 into a routine two-week steamship passage via the Red Sea

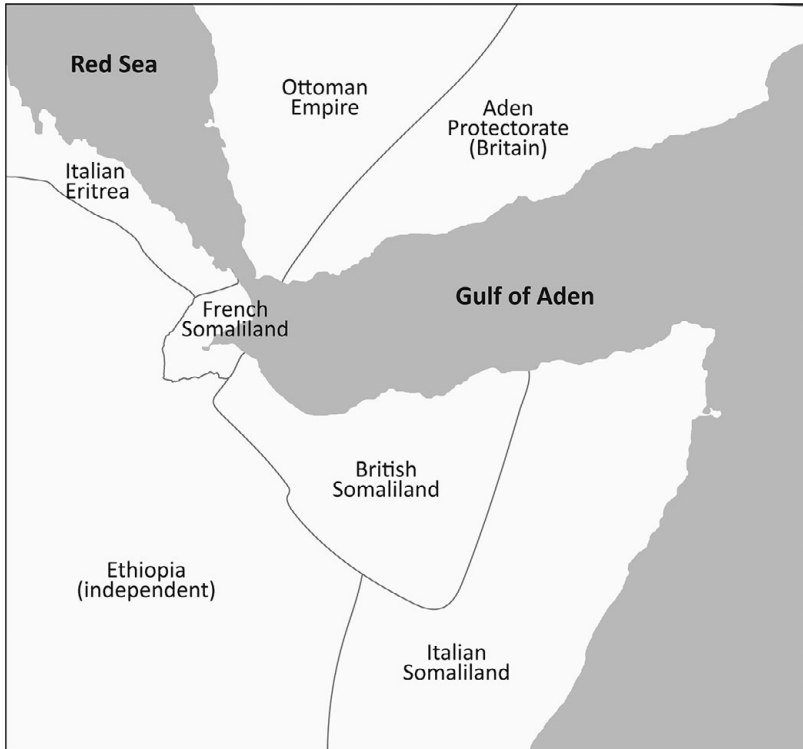


Map I.3 The Cape versus the Red Sea shipping routes between India and Europe

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and Gulf of Aden.¹⁰ The Red Sea shipping route to the East cut the journey between Europe and Asia by as much as a third (see Map I.3). As a result of the opening of the canal, the entire Red Sea region

¹⁰ See Boyd Cable, *A Hundred Year History of the P & O: Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, 1837–1937* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Limited, 1937); Colette Dubois, ‘The Red Sea ports during the revolution in transportation, 1800–1914’, in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (eds.), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 58–74; Robert J. Blyth, ‘Aden, British India and the development of steam power in the Red Sea, 1825–1839’, in David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds.), *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 68–83.



Map I.4 The colonial powers in the southern Red Sea, circa 1900
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became crowded with rival imperial superpowers competing to advance their interests along the strategic route to the East with the advent of steam and large-scale commodity trading between Europe and Afro-Asia: Italy in Eritrea and northeastern Somalia, France in the Gulf of Tadjoura, Britain in Aden and Somaliland and the Ottoman Empire in the Tihamat ‘Asir (see Map I.4). As we will see, even this steep rise in the region’s importance as a trade route and the arrival of European empires jostling for influence does not capture the complexity of the geopolitical situation in the late nineteenth century. Added to these territorial players were several other meddling powers, notably Germany.

Yet while the surface of this study is colonial conquest, the real concern here is the new currents of international politics, law and diplomacy swirling beneath the large-scale political and technological

advances. The twentieth-century colonial map of the region was just a superficial expression of rising geopolitical complexity. In the late nineteenth century an array of small-scale actors proliferated within colonial borders. Militias, secessionists and even private individuals intermingled with European and regional empires, pushing the boundaries of empire, championing their own ambitions, and new territorial arrangements. These coast-level actors played an equally important role in international relations as did the British, French and Italian governments in shaping and advancing the culture of colonial chaos, the new style of international relations. While the sources – and to some extent the subject matter – of this study are those of the imperial maritime historian, the sensibilities are those of the Africa- or Asia-specialist historian. Thus, in Chapters 1 and 2, the protagonists are Africans; in Chapter 3, they are Arab, from the Arabian Peninsula; Chapter 4 is about the machinations of a private French citizen. By putting the normally divergent fields of African and Imperial History into a single conceptual framework, the full impact of colonialism on the political, legal and international landscape swims more clearly into focus.

Colonial Chaos

In one sense, the story of colonial chaos is a straightforward narrative: a roster of colonial conquests and proliferating subaltern factions along the coast. But on another level, it involves reckoning with a new culture of international law, of maritime law and custom, of diplomacy and international relations. The subaltern and legal turn in maritime history in recent years has refocused historians' attention on the nature of maritime law and maritime economies in the Indian Ocean during the colonial era. These studies have focused on the impact of colonial rule on the maritime economy and on the development of new, hybrid legal cultures.¹¹ While studies of Africa's

¹¹ See Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 282–287; David Armitage, 'The elephant and the whale: Empires of land and sea', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 9(1) (2007), pp. 23–36; Tamson Pietsch, 'A British sea: Making sense of global space in the late nineteenth century', *Journal of Global History*, 5 (2010), pp. 423–446. On the Indian Ocean, see Simon Layton, 'Hydras and Leviathans in the Indian Ocean world',

international relations focus understandably on the postcolonial period,¹² treaty making has attracted more historical attention.¹³ The older notion that colonial treaties established a ‘pax colonia’ has been thoroughly debunked.¹⁴ But what is less well understood is the culture of international relations that colonial diplomacy left in its wake, the style rather than the form of hybrid international law and diplomacy.¹⁵

International Journal of Maritime History, 25(3) (2013), p. 213. See also Johan Mathew, *Margins of the Market: Trafficking and Capitalism across the Arabian Sea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), *passim*; Renisa Mawani and Iza Hussin, ‘The travels of law: Indian Ocean itineraries’, *Law and History Review*, 32(4) (2014), pp. 733–747; Fahad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Erik Gilbert, *Dhows and the Colonial Economy of Zanzibar, 1860–1970* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004).

¹² Kenneth Ingham (ed.), *The Foreign Relations of African States: Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Symposium of the Colston Research Society Held in the University of Bristol, 1973* (London: Butterworths, 1974); Gilbert M. Khadiagala and Terrence Lyons (eds.), *African Foreign Policies: Power and Process* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw, *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning and Amitav Acharya, *Africa in Global International Relations: Emerging Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Siba Grovogui, ‘Regimes of sovereignty: International morality and the African condition’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 8(3) (2002), pp. 315–338; Amr G. E. Sabet, ‘The Islamic paradigm of nations: Toward a neoclassical approach’, *Religion, State & Society*, 31(2) (2003), pp. 179–202; Surabhi Ranganathan, *Strategically Created Treaty Conflicts and the Politics of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹³ Compare C. H. Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies: 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

¹⁴ See more broadly, John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The imperialism of free trade’, *The Economic History Review*, 6(1) (1953), p. 11; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), *passim*; Saadia Touval, ‘Treaties, borders, and the partition of Africa’, *The Journal of African History*, 7(2) (1966), pp. 279–293; Lauren Benton, ‘Abolition and imperial law, 1790–1820’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39(3) (2011), pp. 355–374; Edward Keene, ‘A case study of the construction of international hierarchy: British treaty-making against the slave trade in the early nineteenth century’, *International Organization*, 61(2) (2007), pp. 311–339.

¹⁵ Although interesting work has been done on the topic in other geographies and time periods, see for example Michael H. Fisher, ‘Diplomacy in India, 1526–1858’, in H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke and John G. Reid (eds.),

The creation of a colonial regime of sovereignty in the southern Red Sea did not simply involve the replacement of one set of documents with another, or the substitution of one constellation of international figureheads with a new cast of sovereigns. European colonial actors destroyed conventional habits of international coexistence and maritime space sharing in the region. They left in their wake a new, more violent, competitive and transactional culture of diplomacy.

The transformation of the culture of international law and international relations in the region under colonial rule stands to reason, given the worldview European conquerors brought with them. As Charles Tilly makes clear, the European state system was born of violence, emerging from the civil and religious wreckage of intra-European wars. Treaties such as the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 reconciled diverse, competing military powers who threatened to destroy one another over their confessional and regional differences. In the course of the 1600s the largest, most aggressive powers, namely central Europe's monarchies, signed various agreements with one another that gave them sovereign and territorial integrity, as well as freedom of religious conscience within their domains, setting aside their differences in exchange for self-preservation. However, the signatories of the Peace of Westphalia did not create an international treaty system based on the sovereignty of the state – on the state's monopoly over violence and law in a territory – solely to prevent bloodshed. Rather, Europe's states sought a practical alternative to the logical conclusion of total war, which was the destruction of the enemy. Peace treaties between European monarchies allowed contracting parties to preserve their power relative to other large entities with significant military capabilities like the Hanseatic League and the Papacy.¹⁶

Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 254–266 and elsewhere; Henning Trüper, 'Save their souls: Historical teleology goes to sea in nineteenth-century Europe', in Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Historical Teleologies in The Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 117–141; Ian Hurd, 'Law and the practice of diplomacy', *International Journal*, 66(3) (2011), pp. 581–596.

¹⁶ Charles Tilly, 'War making and state making as organised crime', in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 172–175. See also, Hendrick Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 3–33.

When European colonists began formalising their relations with Africans and Asians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they likewise started on a war footing, signing treaties of peace where possible and expedient. Treaties in the European view were contractual capitulations, a way of enforcing the outcome of battles, or agreements that forestalled the likelihood of defeat. Writing a little more than four decades before the Peace of Westphalia, Hugo Grotius completed his *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty* in 1608 in the defence of a United Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship's attack and seizure of the Portuguese merchant brig *Santa Catarina* in the Strait of Malacca in 1603. The value of the *Santa Catarina*, laden with a cargo of spices, was enormous, and the case attracted considerable public attention. In defence of the Captain's actions, and the Company's right to retain the spoils, Grotius subverted European law's focus on the state's duty to prevent the perpetration of wrongs, transforming the state's role into one that empowered its citizens to seek private retribution. 'It is wrong', Grotius wrote, 'to inflict injury, but it is also wrong to endure injury.' 'Regard for others', Grotius continued, 'is usually held up [by] us [the Dutch] with excessive zeal, the implication being that we are by nature sufficiently inclined to care for ourselves.'¹⁷

Grotius laid down two concrete principles of law which flowed from his observations about the justness of maritime aggression. The first was that all seizures of prize or booty are just if they result from a just war.¹⁸ This was not a novel proposition: the ancient Greeks had established the principle that states could declare legal wars and legally sanction privateering and prize-taking in war. Grotius' second principle was more striking. It flowed from the natural rights of citizens to trade freely and to seek profit, that private companies could be agents of war, and therefore in certain conditions, justly claim their enemies' possessions as prizes. The first condition in which private companies could justly claim enemy ships as prizes was when the company's country of origin had publicly declared war on the country under whose flag the prize was sailing. Thus, a Dutch East Indiaman could justly seize Spanish or Portuguese ships during the Dutch–Iberian wars, as occurred in the case in the seizure of the Portuguese merchant ship *Santa Catarina*.

¹⁷ Hugo Grotius, Gwladys L. Williams (trans.), *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950, first published 1608), p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–88.

Grotius' second and more radical idea was that a trading company could engage in a private war against other merchants or the agents of another sovereign state. This, he claimed, was to 'enforce natural law, which mandated freedom of trade and navigation'.¹⁹ The Dutch captain's right to war reparations from the *Santa Catarina* could be established by the fact that the Dutch and the Portuguese were embroiled in a trade war and that the Portuguese had been known to hinder freedom of commerce. Moreover, the private party seizing the prize would, according to Grotius, be entitled to take the prize as his own as repayment of the losses he incurred in the course of war and also to award himself compensation for general war losses and damages.²⁰

This element of Grotius' thinking about the strong rights of private persons in international maritime law to attack other ships did not gain widespread acceptance, although Dutch domestic jurists accepted his case. Section 39 of the UK Naval Prize Act of 1864, for example, made it clear that only enemy combatant ships in a time of war could be taken as a prize (this was further limited by the Prize Act of 1939). Today, various bodies, notably the EU and the IMO, now coordinate internationally binding legislation and treaties governing maritime actors. Nevertheless, Grotius' radicalism endured in the spirit of maritime interactions witnessed throughout the maritime world, most visibly when the colonial era led to the spread of his legal approach to maritime space. The core Grotian ideas – freedom of trade and freedom of navigation; the rights of merchants to seek restitution for losses and reward for salvage; and the principle that all nations should be treated alike and not be divested of private or public rights of ownership on grounds of conquest, discovery or sovereign grant – all also became important features of international maritime law.²¹ The sanctioned and widespread use of private security aboard commercial ships to tackle piracy, legal sanction for the payment of ransoms, international acquiescence in aggressive and even lawless competition for fishing stocks, and the limited duty owed by merchant vessels to others

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 89–91, 300–390. ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 195–196.

²¹ Ibid., esp. pp. 300–390. See also the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), esp. Articles 89, 90 and 98–106. Available at: www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf. Last accessed 18 February 2020.

in distress are a few examples of the persistence in some quarters of the adversarial, even chaotic, culture of the seas.²²

On one level, sanction for the defensive use of force by private merchants in the maritime arena makes sense. It was a jurisprudential defence of a principle that was of general utility to seafarers. The scarcity of assistance for ships in distress at sea, the importance of a ship's positive rights to take proactive steps to defend its free movement in ungoverned space, the inherent riskiness of seaborne enterprise and the downright loneliness of ships venturing to far-flung locations demanded that seafarers be allowed to take their own decisive actions in perilous situations. Crew should, moreover, not be discouraged from taking risks for other ships in distress, and rewarded for aid they provided to one another at their own expense. Such ideas have proven particularly important in areas such as the law of salvage, in which the rewards for salvors can be considerable and strong.²³

However, the colonial case study outlined here points to the ways that European ideas about freedom and geopolitics created a fractious maritime realm. As well as establishing a foundation of rules and principles to which international maritime contact should conform, Grotius' approach unleashed a torrent of self-assertion among European seafarers and traders who journeyed to Africa and Asia. To adapt a phrase from Grotius' contemporary Thomas Hobbes, all men acquired an interest in all things.²⁴ Indeed, if Grotius' conception of the international maritime realm was more structured and rule-oriented than Hobbes', it was hardly more cooperative.²⁵ Notwithstanding the British government's efforts to regulate the practice via Admiralty Courts, and legislation such as the British Naval Prize Act of 1864, prize-taking and

²² A fascinating first-hand account of the persistence of adversarial undercurrents among sections of various maritime industries can be found in Ian Urbina, *The Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier* (London: Vintage, 2019). Authority for the legality of ransom payments in the UK can be found in *Masefield AG v. Amlin Corporate Member Ltd* [2011], 1 Lloyd's Rep 630, para 66.

²³ See the judgments in *The 'William Beckford'* [1800] 165 E.R. 492 (Adm) and *Owners of the Glengyle v. Neptune Salvage Co Ltd* [1898] A.C. 519 (HL).

²⁴ Thomas Hobbes, J. C. A. Gaskin (ed.), *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; first edition, 1651), p. 83.

²⁵ See analysis in Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society of States: A Study of Order in World Politics Fourth Edition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 95–193. See also Tuck, *The Rights of War*, esp. pp. 78–108.

coercive salvage practices became part and parcel of European seafaring. Indeed, generous awards of prize and salvage kept the British Navy's wage bill down from the seventeenth century through until the nineteenth century, allowing sailors to be paid without financial support from the British state.²⁶

In short, there were several – political, military, cultural, juridical and environmental – aspects to colonial conquest. The commonplace characterisation of violence as an unsolicited interference with the integrity of a person, a state or their property is therefore a solid but insufficient starting point for a working definition of violence in this study. Violence is not an absolute category of behaviour: it is a field of action which 'moral imagin[aries] ... legitimized, criminalized, or criticized'.²⁷ European colonists forcibly reordered international norms in the Red Sea region, reorganising the relationships between regional rulers along more hierarchic, chaotic and competitive lines.²⁸ Colonialism thus created systemic chaos in the region, it institutionalised international instability and conflict, it expanded the parameters for when aggression was permissible. Systemic chaos increased violent conflict between regional rulers. But colonialism also impelled the region's political leaders to expand their definition of legitimate behaviour in the international and maritime realm to include practices such as gunboat diplomacy, countervailing and power politics.

Precolonial Indian Ocean Diplomacy

The anarchic approach to maritime life was not mirrored in the Islamic ecumene of which the Red Sea forms a part. As we see in Chapter 1, regional, Islamic notions of international and maritime law were rooted in mutual gift giving, common faith, recognition and tribute between rulers and the protection of strangers. Bold assertions of individuals' or states' natural rights and military might were foreign to the rich, ceremonial and diplomatic texture of regional inter-ruler relations. The difference is evident, for example, in the contrast between Islamic and

²⁶ Gilbert, *Dhows*, p. 64. See also, E. S. Roscoe, *Reports of Prize Cases Determined in the High Court of Admiralty from 1745 to 1859, Vol. 1* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1905).

²⁷ David Schoenbrun, 'Violence and vulnerability in East Africa before 1800 CE: An agenda for research', *History Compass*, 4(5) (2006), p. 746.

²⁸ Grovogui, 'Regimes of sovereignty', esp. p. 323.

European approaches to salvage, an important theme in the narrative that follows. In Grotius' view, outlined in the previous section, the fortunate and the powerful had the right to extract salvage awards from the weak and unfortunate on their own – favourable – terms. The stronger, rescuing party received part of the weaker, rescued party's property. In Islamic maritime law, however, regional rulers in maritime trading zones such as the southern Red Sea agreed among themselves to pay rewards to salvors who protected and offered assistance to their ships floundering at sea. Systems of mutual aid between neighbouring empires were concretised by treaties – not by the natural rights of the strong to claim part of the property of the weak as a prize. As historian and legal scholar Hassan Khalileh writes, 'Latin law allowed a salvager to claim a certain percentage of salvaged goods. Islamic law . . . did not'.²⁹

The more cooperative and cordial approach to maritime safety was deep-rooted in the region. As early as the twelfth century, an Egyptian ship is recorded as having foundered in the southern Red Sea, resulting in the coastal African salvors taking from the cargo only an amount commensurate with their wages for the rescue operation; the rest of the property remained that of the ship or cargo-owner. Moreover, there is good evidence that Islamic rulers in the region inclined towards establishing treaty contracts with Latin rulers to safeguard their merchants' property rights in case of disaster. Thus, the Egyptian Mamluk Sultan Qalawun signed a treaty with Lady Margaret of Tyre in 1285 to the effect that the Sultan retained all rights over his subjects' ships and their cargoes whenever they were wrecked on Levantine or Cypriot shores. This in turn allowed the Mamluk Sultan to hold the property in its entirety on behalf of its owners.³⁰ Yet such Eurasian relations were the exception prior to the eighteenth century: the commercial centre of gravity for the southern Red Sea region was the eastern Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, northwestern south Asia and other, predominantly Islamic, coastal regions further afield.

²⁹ Hassan S. Khalileh, *Islamic Maritime Law: An Introduction* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1998), p. 109.

³⁰ Khalileh, *Islamic Maritime Law*, pp. 112–113. See also Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) and Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955).

This is not to suggest that ‘Europe’ and ‘Afro-Asia’ constituted discrete and coherent zones of law or international relations prior to colonisation. To argue that the entire *dar al-Islam* approached the international and maritime sphere in a unified way would be as outlandish as suggesting that every European official carried with them a copy of Grotius’ *Commentary* in their travelling trunks. In speaking of European and Islamic ‘systems’ of international relations and maritime law in the nineteenth century, I indicate simply that Europeans and the people of the southern Red Sea were not in regular or intensive contact prior to the colonial episode, and did not, as a consequence, share ‘common interests and values’, or even common notions of diplomacy.³¹ As can be seen from this brief comparison, both Europeans and regional actors approached the international sphere in a coherent, rational way; both adopted observable and enforceable rules. But there was a disjuncture – a misalignment – in the way Europeans and Africans approached sharing maritime space in the southern Red Sea. Europe’s expansion into the region put the two approaches into competition.

As we will see, these differences played out in the course of negotiations over treaties relating to maritime law and coastal sovereignty. Indigenous regional rulers sought to incorporate foreign trading partners and neighbouring sovereigns into a cooperative and reciprocal web of shelter. In contrast, European colonial officials reduced their relations to miserly, self-interested contractual agreements. Colonial actors forged ahead with contracts heedless of regional rulers’ efforts to involve them in a system of regional diplomacy. Rather than be incorporated into a regional network of Islam and diplomacy, colonists threatened war, and foisted peace agreements onto local rulers with the spectre of gunboats looming in the background. Indeed, the bulk of diplomacy in the region was also truce-making, conditional offers of peace, against the backdrop of violence.

The impact of the warlike spirit of colonial treaties is difficult to overstate. Practically the entire colonial map of the region was created as protectorates, colonies by treaty rather than by effective

³¹ This language is from Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 12–16. Bull himself draws on the work of the Göttingen school historian Arnold Heeren; see Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, *Handbuch der Geschichte des europäischen Staatensystems und seiner Kolonien* (Göttingen: Johann Friedrich Bower, 1830).

occupation.³² The only way to fully understand the complex and contingent ways these agreements unfolded is not simply to study these agreements' terms, but also their context. This context is in part that of Europe's ascendancy. Europeans became technologically, commercially and politically powerful enough to enforce their anarchic vision of maritime space sharing in the earlier period. But power relations is not the only lens through which to understand the encounter. Rather, the emergence of a regional system of international relations in the colonial period must be understood against the backdrop of the events that precipitated colonial agreements: shipwrecks and increasingly violent confrontations over the safety of international shipping.

Paying close attention to the circumstances surrounding the creation of Euro-African and Euro-Arab colonial agreements in the southern Red Sea region offers a new vantage on the nature of international relations that colonial rule created in the region. What emerges defies straightforward characterisation. But the new logic of international space in the region was shaped by colonial opportunists who used violence for their own benefit, by various actors who instrumentalised violence to compete with and partake in the new gunboat regime of diplomatic order. As Martin Wight puts it, treaties were often but 'empty professions of peaceful purpose and common interest' that belied a 'general preference for going down to defeat fighting rather than consenting to unresisted subjugation.' In the blunter words of Carl von Clausewitz, international law was little more than a fig leaf, a collection of 'self-imposed restrictions' which, compared to the imperatives of geostrategy and realpolitik, were 'hardly worth mentioning'.³³ But treaty negotiations did not simply paper over conflicts, they were also themselves a source of considerable tension, even bloodshed. To

³² Some of these treaties can be found in the appendix to this study. The numerous volumes of Sir Edward Hertslet (see Sir Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty Vols I-III* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909)) are a useful continental guide to many of the colonial treaties which helped form the contemporary map of Africa. This study only deals with the Majerteen treaties in Somalia; on the colonial treaties with Somalia more generally, see D. C. S. Healy, 'British perceptions of treaties with the Somalis, 1884-1897', in Hussein M. Adam and Charles L. Gesheker, *Proceedings of the First International Conference of Somali Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 167-168, 175.

³³ Carl von Clausewitz, J. J. Graham (trans.), *On War* (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), p. 5 and Martin Wight, 'Why is there no international relations theory?', *International Relations*, 2(1) (1960), p. 43.

borrow historian David Kennedy's phrase, war was legalised and the law was weaponised.³⁴

Ironically, Europeans tended to blame the chaos which ensued colonial rule on the 'primitive' character of local groups. But as I highlight throughout this study, chaos and competition in the maritime realm was a colonial creation, not evidence of some imaginary, pre-civilised past. But nor was colonial chaos in the international realm simply an imposition, a great tsunami whose origins lay in a European earthquake. This study paints a messier picture. There were undoubtedly winners and losers; the whole system of colonial international relations was premised on strategic gains and concessions, advances and retreats. The winners in one sense were the colonial powers, who had gone from being mere guests to wresting control over the international system in the region. In the process, they gained control of the shipping lanes and adjacent littorals, reinscribed the rules of diplomacy, maritime law and international politics on their own terms – terms over which they could prevail. At the same time, established ruling aristocracies toppled; local coastal peoples became collateral damage in episodes of gunboat diplomacy and civilian casualties in contests for military patronage. Yet in another sense, there were no 'winners' or 'victims', at least not at the level of leadership on which this study is focused. In fact, chaos was cocreated by the regional rulers, upstarts, agents and insurgents who recognised the opportunities for personal advancement which a more competitive international arena offered. As we will see, no one enjoyed any permanent success in an inherently unstable environment; everyone was a victim of rising instability.

An Itinerary

The shift in the culture of international law and international relations can be best understood by considering the careers of various characters from the Red Sea's coastline. We meet a colourful sweep of characters, all of whom helped shape a chaotic, competitive and even cut-throat international environment in the southern Red Sea in the colonial era. Beginning in northeastern Somalia, in Chapter 1 we see Sultan Uthman Mahmud Yusuf, ruler of the Majerteen sultanate, used the

³⁴ David Kennedy, *Of War and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 12.

management of shipwrecks as a pretext to negotiate treaties and codify his rights as a coastal sovereign. Uthman initially approached the British in the same way he approached other regional rulers, as sovereign equals who could be incorporated into an existing regime of treaties and diplomacy. However, in Chapter 2 we see Uthman's early hopes for Anglo-Majerteen accommodation dashed. In part, this was the result of British colonial actors' differing approach to international relations and maritime law. On the other hand, we will see that imperial vanity and local intrigue was also at play – the British were easily exploited by Sultan Uthman's ambitious regional rivals. In the 1870s and '80s, Uthman's cousin, Yusuf 'Ali, promoted himself as a more attractive diplomatic partner, encouraging the British to renege on their agreement with Uthman. A diplomatic precedent began to emerge, leaving in its wake a culture of brinkmanship, countervailing, leveraging, *realpolitik* and competition. By the late 1870s, treaty making had become a fraught and divisive process, fundamentally different to the more cordial statements of coexistence signed between regional rulers, and between regional rulers and the colonial newcomers, until the mid-1800s.

By the early twentieth century, the whole tone of international relations in the region had begun to change. In Chapter 3, we move to another part of this emerging geostrategic circulation system, to adapt a phrase of the scholar of Oman, John Wilkinson.³⁵ On the opposite shore of the Red Sea, along the coast of the western Arabian Peninsula, the Tihamat Yemen runs from about the Bab al-Mandab straits in the south to just above the port of Hodeida in the north (Map I.1). This coastline played host to an important maritime uprising, the conditions for which were created by colonial chaos in the international sphere. The uprising was led by Shaykh Nasr Ambari, who was followed by his lieutenant Ahmad Fatini, and it spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their followers were known by the British and Italians as the 'Zaraniq'.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, Ambari and Fatini perpetrated attacks against ships and other forms of maritime violence in the seas near Hodeida to try to lure the British into supporting their campaign for independence against their regional

³⁵ John Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), p. 33.

rivals, Ibn Saud and the Imam Yahya. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the British in Aden, the Ottomans in Hodeida, the French in the Gulf of Tadjoura and the Italians in Eritrea all began to cast around for local military allies along the coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The process set in motion the creation of a market for colonial proxies which proved perilous to its participants. Coastal sovereignty had previously focused on controlling shipping lanes and protecting the region from the disruptive influence of outsiders. After 1900, this venerable system of coastal governance collapsed, leaving in its wake a much more competitive struggle between coastal rulers for territorial influence and international recognition.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the doors to the international system – and sovereignty of the coast – had been thrown wide open to a whole host of ambitious traders and mercenaries. In Chapter 4, we meet Henry de Monfreid who was simultaneously a private citizen, an entrepreneur of violence, and an agent of French imperialism in the region. Following the demise of royalty in the diplomatic sphere, characters such as de Monfreid were free to insinuate themselves as delegates of the colonial state. The brittle, fickle temper of international affairs blurred the distinction between maritime mercenary and navy. In reality, the distinction between ‘legitimate’ state-sponsored violence and ‘illegitimate’ private violence was one mediated by the courts and by officials in colonial governments. So-called outlaws, pirates, privateers and maritime mercenaries always stood ‘in dialogue with’ rather than in simple opposition to power.³⁶ Although many colonial governments lasted

³⁶ See Sebastian R. Prange, ‘The contested sea: Regimes of maritime violence in the pre-modern Indian Ocean’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 17(1) (2013), p. 33; Sebastian R. Prange, ‘A trade of no dishonor: Piracy, commerce, and community in the western Indian Ocean, twelfth to sixteenth century’, *The American Historical Review*, 116 (5) (2011), pp. 1269–1272; Michael Kempe, ‘“Even in the remotest corners of the world”: Globalized piracy and international law, 1500–1900’, *Journal of Global History*, 5(3) (2010), pp. 353–372; Anne Pérotin-Dumon, ‘The pirate and the emperor: Power and the law on the seas, 1450–1850’, in C. Richard Pennell (ed.), *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (London: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 25–54; Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State Building and Extra-Territorial Violence in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Molly Green, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Simon Layton, ‘Discourses of piracy in an age of revolutions’, *Itinerario*, 35(2) (2011), pp. 81–97.

for over a century, they depended for their survival on their ability to marshal force to their cause, to win by violence and imposition what might otherwise be achieved by diplomacy, consensus-building and cooperation.

As Yusuf 'Ali's, Shaykh Nasr Ambari's, Ahmad Fatini's and de Monfreid's stories show, local strongmen adopted the new rule of force enthusiastically. The new colonial international environment liberated men like Yusuf 'Ali, Ambari, Fatini and de Monfreid from the constraints of traditional diplomacy in the region, which involved a complex mix of factors, including birth and aristocracy, networks of contacts, and intricate, learned customs and ceremonials. The colonial *modus operandi*, by contrast, was crude: the threat or application of force, harsh bargaining, and written contracts were its critical elements. Being largely devoid of nuance, the colonial system also empowered upstarts such as de Monfreid, Yusuf 'Ali and Ahmad Fatini to burst onto the international scene, and to help transform the international situation into one of colonial chaos.

Hazards

Putting colonial officials, colonial subjects, indigenous royal rulers, upstarts, Europeans, Arabs and Africans in the same story reflects the reality of political life in the region. The increasing differentiation of historical sub-disciplines has pushed African and Imperial History further apart in the last few decades. Without in any way wishing to detract from the importance of understanding African history in its own right, this book seeks to blur the boundaries, at least a little, in order to reflect the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-governmental reality of life. De Monfreid, Uthman, Fatini and others were simultaneously architects of the system and its victims. The patron–client relationship was a two-way street.³⁷ It would be false to exclude these characters from the story of international relations, even though – apart from Uthman – they were not traditional, high-born members of Yemeni or Somali society, or just because they were not associated with one of the major regional powers. The characters at the centre of

³⁷ See for example, Clapham, *Africa and the International System*; Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, esp. pp. 85–87, 155–163; Colin Newbury, *Patrons, Clients and Empire: Chieftaincy and Over-Rule in Asia, Africa and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

this study were both the architects and the subjects of colonial chaos in the international, maritime realm.

The motley social make-up of the southern Red Sea in the nineteenth century is mirrored by the somewhat erratic geography of this study. Rather than remain safely in one place, we start south, strike north and finally head west, dotting from the Somali coast, to Yemen and on to the Gulf of Tadjoura, or contemporary Djibouti. Nevertheless, there are hazards associated with the blurring of geographical boundaries and mixing of sub-disciplines. One important danger is that telling the story from both sides of the Red Sea coast involves integrating the independently rich, and largely divergent, historiographies of northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. These two regions are normally considered culturally, linguistically and historically distinct and are studied by highly separated, highly specialised groups of scholars. Historians of the Arabian Peninsula do not often venture to Africa; historians of northeast Africa tend to remain on the continent.

In many respects, the Afro–Middle Eastern continental divide in Red Sea studies remains strong. However, compelling arguments have been made about the connectedness, coherence or otherwise of the southern Red Sea region over the historical *longue durée*.³⁸ In this study I suggest an alternative basis for considering the region in a single composition: in the minds of regional rulers, colonial officials and various international actors, the southern Red Sea region was a single strategic theatre. By imposing on the southern Red Sea a geostrategic coherence different in nature and more limited in scope than the commercial and diplomatic connections that entangled the area before colonial rule, colonialism divided the region in a myriad of ways. Following the conquest of Aden in the nineteenth century, the entire

³⁸ See Ali A. Mazrui, 'Towards abolishing the Red Sea and re-Africanizing the Arabian Peninsula', in Jeffrey Stone (ed.), *Africa and the Sea* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University African Studies Group, 1985) and Alexis Wick, *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 97–103; Mostafa Manawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Jonathan Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009); Roxani Eleni Margariti, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). An older review of the state of this literature can be found in Jonathan Miran, 'Mapping space and mobility in the Red Sea region, c. 1500–1950', *History Compass*, 12(2) (2014), pp. 197–216.

region became deeply embroiled in a cycle of change which culminated in a more chaotic, competitive, real-political international realm. Thus reading the region through the colonial archives allows us to observe connectedness in its absence, to reckon with the colonial impact in terms of what was destroyed, and to form an estimate of how the fabric of international relations and regional connectedness changed.

Piecing together their stories involved navigating a tangle of incomplete administrative records strewn across disparate locations. Much of the research took place in the India Office Records (IOR), now housed in the British Library in London, England. The IOR host the bulk of the records of the East India Company and its successor, the British government in India based in London and South Asia. The records are thus voluminous, but also impressively diverse. They touch on the history of the whole of the EIC's sphere – including South Asia, the Persian Gulf and Aden, but also Southeast Asia. For the period from 1600 to about 1800 they are a commercial company's records, but they are concerned with issues far wider than balance sheets, including ethnography, languages, local history and military operations. The British government took over, gradually, from the EIC beginning with the East India Company Act of 1784 – which placed the administrative aspects of the EIC's activities under British government control – and culminating in the Government of India Act of 1858, which nationalised the EIC. While the archive becomes increasingly governmental in form thereafter, it remained eclectic throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A similar kind of heterogeneity characterises the records of France and Italy in the region, particularly those of their foreign and colonial offices. Research also encompassed the French diplomatic archival records and the French Colonial Ministry records in Paris and Aix-en-Provence respectively, as well as the Italian Foreign and Africa Ministry records in Rome. The nature of these records was similar to the British India Office Records – a mixture of military memoranda, diplomatic correspondence, local intelligence gathering, regional histories, treaties in local languages, translations of treaties into European languages, court records and administrative memoranda. Within are several points of view: colonial official, local agents interpreting colonial strategy and regional royalties asserting their own standpoints against colonial interests. Read over time, however, the shape of the archive points to the way in which the tone of regional relationships

changed, as well as discernible developments in the kinds of regional people who appear in the records. Local royalties were sidelined in favour of upstarts and local military leaders, the content of official-local interactions became more concerned with local geopolitics than with historical rights. The form of the paper trail of colonial rule is thus sometimes as revealing as its content, notably of the governmental cultures.³⁹

I sought to embrace the material diversity and geographic scatter of the records in other ways. Research for this study also involved stints in several smaller archives, as well as interviews with officials in the region, NGO workers, lawyers, journalists writing on Somalia during the piracy crisis and the descendants of some of the characters in this study in Europe and in East Africa. All of this work contributed to the study; direct links are cited, but other more indirect influences are omitted, mindful that this is already a densely footnoted study. Further archival research took place at the League of Nations archives in Geneva, Switzerland, and in libraries and interviews in Nairobi, Kenya and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as well as in the British Colonial, Admiralty and War Offices, all housed in the National Archives in Kew. I have pieced together a narrative which I hope is consistent but which, perhaps more importantly, evokes the deep shifts in the culture of law, politics and international relations that took place in the region in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The extensive geographical scope and diverse empirical substrate of this study presents some more practical hazards, mapping high among them. All the regions discussed in this book – Majerteenia, French Somaliland and the Tihamat Yemen – were malleable political zones rather than sharply demarcated administrative units in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we will see, the Ottomans and Europeans attempted to delimit the southern Red Sea littoral in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, but even today the region's administrative borders are contested in practice, in spite of the lines drawn around them. Maps are therefore no substitute for political narratives in understanding the region's geopolitical history. And there is no good way to draw fluidity on a map. The

³⁹ Ann L. Stoler, 'Colonial archives and the arts of governance: On the content in the form', in Carolyn Hamilton, V. Harris, M. Pickover, G. Reid, R. Saleh and J. Taylor (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), pp. 83–102.

maps placed throughout this study should be approached with this caveat in mind. I trust that the narrative that accompanies these geographical abstractions will do the work of unravelling the impression that the southern Red Sea can be 'mapped'.

There are other difficulties around complexity, notably in nomenclature. I have in general favoured simplicity and accessibility wherever possible. For example, my approach to the transliteration of Arabic and Somali words relies on common English or Latinate usages, wherever this does not distort their meaning too much. For example, I refer to Ibn Saud in the conventional Latinate way, rather than using his actual Arabic name – Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad al Saud. Similarly, in the transliteration of Arabic and Somali words I have mostly retained the Arabic 'ayn in the conventional way, using an apostrophe – as in 'a. But where modern standard spellings of people and places are available, notably as they appear in online maps and resources, I have used these simpler transcriptions because this makes them easier to look up. For example, I refer to Yemen rather than Yaman, Hodeida rather than Hudayda. Simplicity and accessibility is not always possible. With some place names, translation to the modern form would result in anachronism. I have therefore used the historic name – such as Bandar Maryah or Bandar Cassim – rather than the contemporary equivalent – Bossaso. In general, Somali first names are used more often than is common in Latin and Arabic cultures, as is conventional in the region. Dollar amounts are Maria Theresa dollars, unless otherwise stated.

More broadly, I have of necessity and by design removed historical and local detail from the story. The study makes reference to various entities and historical processes along the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula, the Hadhramaut, Oman, Zanzibar, northwestern South Asia, the East African coast, the Horn of Africa and the Egyptian ecumene. I have sought to include only as much detail in the body of the text itself as is necessary for the sake of understanding the international, geostrategic narrative. Instead, I have also included a Note on the Text, which contains a number of general notes on the history of many of the regions and political entities mentioned in this study. It is not necessary to read the glossary in order to understand the story, but it provides important context about the way these different imperial

powers fit into the history of international relations in the southern Red Sea. The Note on the Text also provides guidance on the way in which certain terms, which have become overburdened with meaning, are used in the text, especially the many overused synonyms that occur in the wider literature, such as Ethiopia and Abyssinia, Djibouti and French Somaliland, or the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Gulf, to name a few. Such elisions sometimes conflate time periods – such as the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories of the Gulf of Tadjoura – and others elide political detail, such as the competing politico-ethnic claims to control the gulf region between contemporary Iran and the Emirates. The Note on the Text provides some explanation and guidance; so too, the *Dramatis Personae* offers a shorthand guide to some of the main characters in the story. There is clearly a cost to taking such an expansive approach, but it is hoped that placing several regions in the same analytical frame offers the advantage of a different perspective and a deeper understanding of the origins of the region's febrile international climate. In Chapter 1, we explore the older political culture of diplomacy in the Red Sea – before exploring in the subsequent chapters how it unravelled during the better part of a century of colonial conquest that lasted from 1839 until well into the twentieth century.