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Bennett, M.D. orcid.org/0000-0003-3351-5927 (2022) Caribbean plantation economies as colonial models: the case of the English East India Company and St. Helena in the late seventeenth century. *Atlantic Studies*. ISSN 1478-8810

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2034569>

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To cite this article: Michael D. Bennett (2022): Caribbean plantation economies as colonial models: The case of the English East India Company and St. Helena in the late seventeenth century, *Atlantic Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/14788810.2022.2034569](https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2034569)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2022.2034569>



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Published online: 07 Mar 2022.



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Caribbean plantation economies as colonial models: The case of the English East India Company and St. Helena in the late seventeenth century

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ABSTRACT

In the 1680s the English East India Company (EIC) sought to develop a plantation economy in its South Atlantic colony of St. Helena, using the Caribbean island of Barbados as a colonial model. The EIC's attempt to develop Barbadian-style plantations on St. Helena demonstrates the global reach of the Caribbean sugar colonies and their importance as an exemplar for English imperial projects in the early modern period. Colonial theorists working outside the remit of the EIC even sought to expand the Caribbean plantation system beyond the Cape of Good Hope in this period, highlighting how English overseas expansion was an interconnected phenomenon which defies rigid categorization along regional lines. Yet the failure of the EIC's top-down plan for St. Helena also underscores how both historical contingencies and local factors were central to the success of colonial plantation, and that misunderstanding these conditions could undermine the best-laid plans and models.

KEYWORDS

Caribbean slavery; English East India Company; Atlantic world; Indian Ocean world; Barbados; St. Helena; slavery studies

Introduction

In March 1684 the directors of the English East India Company (EIC) gathered at East India House in London to draft a letter to their employees in Bengal.¹ Situated between typical directives about commerce and administration in Asia was a statement emphasizing that the company was “everyday more resolved to prosecute the improvement of St. Helena by sugar works, indigo, cotton, saltpeter, and many other ways.”² As this letter reveals, during the 1680s an ambitious project to develop an export-oriented plantation economy was underway at St. Helena, a 122 sq. km volcanic island located in the south Atlantic. St. Helena had long been a key port-of-call for European vessels making the arduous return journey from Asia because it was one of the few places they could safely replenish their supplies of water and food.³ Due to the island's strategic significance, the EIC occupied St. Helena in 1659 and established an English colony there. However, maintaining a permanent settlement on this remote island had become a financial burden for the EIC by the 1670s. To make the colony self-supporting, or

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perhaps even profitable, the company began experimenting with methods of colonial development that had made English colonies in the Atlantic world successful. By the early 1680s, the company's directors were drawing explicitly and intentionally upon the Barbadian model of plantation slavery. In another letter, penned in August 1683, EIC officials expressed their confidence that "every acre of plantable land" on St. Helena "will come in a few years after the Island is stockt with Negroes to be worth many more per acre than the best land of England, as it is in Barbadoes and other places of such like production that are thoroughly settled."⁴

The directors of the EIC used the Barbadian plantation system as a colonial model for the economic development of St. Helena in the late seventeenth century to an extent that has been underappreciated by scholars. Previous historians have noted that the EIC drew upon Barbadian knowledge in their plans for St. Helena, but the scheme to develop a plantation economy on the island has never been studied in detail.⁵ It is a near axiom in early American and Atlantic world historiography that emigrants from Barbados transferred features of their plantation system to other locales in the Greater Caribbean and North America. Consequently, the legal codes and social systems formulated on the island proved to be extremely influential. Indeed, Barbados has rightly been described as a "culture hearth" for multiple Anglo-Atlantic World slave societies.⁶ However, besides the failed attempt to develop Barbadian-style plantations at Assada (Nosy Be, an island near Madagascar), historians have made little effort to trace speculative English schemes to expand the plantation system into the south Atlantic and the Indian Ocean world during the early modern period.⁷

This is surprising, not least because the history of the seventeenth-century EIC has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. For decades, the focus of historians interested in the British presence in South Asia and the wider Indian Ocean world was on the period after the Battle of Plassey (1757), when Britain assumed dominion over large swathes of the Indian subcontinent. The first century of the company's existence was largely neglected: only K. N. Chaudhuri devoted a book-length study to the EIC's trading activities in the seventeenth century.⁸ More recently, Philip Stern has shown how, over a century before the Battle of Plassey, the EIC governed a network of fortified trading factories and territories in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean world. St. Helena has played a central role in Stern's argument that the early EIC should be conceptualized as a "company-state." The island demonstrates how the EIC was more than just a commercial operation and sought to exercise sovereignty over people and places during the seventeenth century.⁹ This key insight is one of the reasons why histories of the seventeenth-century EIC have blossomed in the past five years.¹⁰

The recent growth in scholarship which studies European trading companies using a broad, comparative framework, has also contributed to historians' heightened interest in the early EIC. The history of early modern trading companies has most often been written with reference to a single corporation.¹¹ However, in recent years corporate historians concerned with exploring the contributions of overseas trading companies to the process of globalization in the early modern period have increasingly begun to analyze various thematic topics – such as political economy, governance, religion, and migration – that cut across the histories of multiple trading companies. This has enriched our understanding of how the EIC was in some cases similar to, and in others distinct from, various English and European corporations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹²

The growing body of literature on the EIC remains largely unfamiliar to historians of early America and the Atlantic world. Despite repeated calls for historians to develop a more integrated approach to studying the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, the rise of global history, and the increasing popularity of the concept of “Vast Early America,” it still remains the case that very few Atlanticists have ever conducted research in the India Office Records.¹³ For all the excellent work that Atlantic history has done to combat proto-nationalist histories and foreground the significance of non-European peoples in shaping the development of early modern empires and non-colonized spaces, scholars who adopt an Atlantic framework tend to pay little attention to the broader imperial and transoceanic contexts within which the development of the early modern Atlantic world was a constituent part. Focusing exclusively on the Atlantic world therefore risks replicating aspects of the insular narrowness that an Atlantic approach was initially developed to combat. In a similar manner, scholars of British India have had a propensity to be inattentive to the historiography of the Atlantic world, and often overlook archival material relating to St. Helena because it is not in Asia, despite the fact the island played a vital role in supporting the EIC’s trading operations.

The scholarship which has, in recent years, increasingly sought to connect the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds by drawing upon the EIC’s archive has tended to focus on trade, migration, piracy, subjecthood, state formation, and legal practices, leaving the interpenetration of ideas and colonial models between Eastward and Westward expansion a relatively under-explored subject matter.¹⁴ Consequently, the histories of Atlantic slavery and the EIC have usually been dealt with separately and without reference to each other. However, this separation in the historiography has the potential to be detrimental to scholarship on early modern colonialism, because unlike present-day scholars, the merchants, colonists, and theorists who contributed to the development of the seventeenth-century English empire were not thinking or operating in terms of separate oceanic regions rigidly demarcated into “Atlantic” and “Indian Ocean” worlds. For instance, Alison Games has traced the “English cosmopolitans” who traversed the globe in multiple commercial and colonial ventures between 1560 and 1660, contributing to the development of England’s global empire.¹⁵ While Edmond Smith has demonstrated that there was significant overlap in the membership of chartered companies such as the Virginia Company and the EIC during the early seventeenth century, which had a tangible impact on the character of England’s colonizing activity in North America.¹⁶

The EIC’s involvement with slave trading and slave holding has received little attention from historians of slavery in the British Empire. Such scholars have focused their work overwhelmingly on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in North America and the Caribbean.¹⁷ A notable exception is Richard Allen’s *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean* (2014). Allen includes an important chapter on the EIC’s involvement in the trafficking of enslaved people in the Indian Ocean world, while more broadly his book is an important first step in redressing the geographical imbalance in early modern slavery studies.¹⁸

Analyzing the EIC’s project to replicate the Barbadian plantation system in St. Helena reveals how Caribbean models and expertise had a far wider geographical significance than previously understood, and highlights how the EIC participated in both the maritime trafficking and deployment of enslaved labor during the seventeenth century. It also helps

us to identify what factors were pivotal to the development of successful plantation economies in the Lesser Antilles. The rapid emergence of a mature plantation system in Barbados was highly dependent upon both the island's particular geography and several contingent circumstances which acted as a stimulus to the expansion of the Barbadian sugar industry during the 1640s. Unsurprisingly, efforts to foster the growth of a plantation economy on St. Helena were unsuccessful, principally because the EIC's directors in London were incorrect in their belief that the island possessed a tropical climate and bounteous environment. As was so often the case with top-down colonization schemes, too much centralized control combined with a lack of awareness of local environmental conditions could undermine the best-laid plans and models.¹⁹ This failed scheme exposes, therefore, how the attempts of the EIC's directors to exert central oversight over their network of fortified settlements in the late seventeenth century could at times be highly inefficient, and lead to the wastage of the company's financial resources. The efforts made by the EIC to implement a plantation system on St. Helena also raises questions about whether the deployment of Barbadian models was attempted elsewhere in the company's territories. Studying the plans drawn-up by English colonizers to expand the Caribbean plantation system beyond the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean reveals how English overseas expansion was an interconnected phenomenon which defies rigid categorization along regional lines into "Atlantic" and "Indian Ocean" world studies.

The Barbados sugar revolution in the mid-seventeenth century

The EIC's directors sought to foster the development of a Barbadian-style plantation economy on their island of St. Helena in the 1680s. Caribbean societies were commonly used as colonial models within the English empire in the second half of the seventeenth century. This was because colonies in the Lesser Antilles (such as Barbados) had become extraordinarily wealthy in a short space of time, principally by developing an economy based around tropical plantation agriculture. In colonies with a plantation economy, intensive farming methods and violent labor management techniques were used to produce valuable commodities such as sugar, which were then exported and sold within consumer markets in Europe.²⁰ Historians have outlined how sugar cultivation and the plantation system were transferred from the Mediterranean, to the Atlantic Islands, to Brazil, and eventually to the Caribbean between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries.²¹ The integrated plantation, which combined in a single site the agricultural process of cultivating sugar with the industrial procedure of refining the cane, was pioneered on Barbados during the island's economic boom between the 1640s and 1680s. This innovation increased the efficiency of sugar production, bringing rapid wealth to English planters, investors, and merchants.²² The dynamism of the sugar economy meant that Barbados had the highest total product (by value of goods exported) of all colonies in the Americas in the late seventeenth century, and enabled planters living on the island to accrue much wealth.²³

The speed with which Barbados developed a slave-based plantation economy and a profitable sugar industry in the 1640s and 1650s was remarkable. This was caused by a variety of intersecting climatic, environmental, and geographic factors, along with the powerful influence exerted by historical contingencies in shaping patterns of investment

and colonial development. Islands in the eastern Caribbean such as Barbados all enjoy a tropical climate with little seasonal variation, receive medium to high levels of precipitation (especially between May and October), and possess fertile volcanic soil.²⁴ These are ideal conditions for the large-scale cultivation of cash crops valuable in European markets, such as tobacco, cotton, indigo, and sugar. The geographical location of Barbados was also highly conducive to the development of a plantation economy in the seventeenth century. Barbados was remote enough from the centers of Spanish and Kalinago power to avoid invasion (which could seriously stymie plantation development), yet still situated in an ideal location for receiving merchant vessels crossing the Atlantic and for facilitating knowledge exchange with expert sugar producers in northern Brazil.²⁵

Timing, or more specifically external political and economic events specific to the 1640s, was also crucial to the rapidity with which a fully-fledged plantation economy emerged in Barbados. Barbadian planters were encouraged to experiment with sugar production in the 1640s because of a recent spike in sugar prices caused by the collapse of the Brazilian sugar industry. Warfare between the Dutch and Portuguese in Bahia and Pernambuco caused annual sugar exports from Brazil to contract from a high of around 14,900 crates of sugar in 1641 to approximately 1,500 crates every year in the period between 1647 and 1652.²⁶ These external market conditions accelerated the emergence of a profitable plantation economy in Barbados.²⁷

The first successful experiments in sugar cultivation by planters in Barbados also coincided with the onset of the English Civil War (1642–1649).²⁸ At this critical early stage in the colony's transition to sugar monoculture, the domestic instability wrought by civil war stimulated the development of the plantation system in Barbados by injecting a large supply of unfree labor and capital investment into the island's economy. For example, the constitutional crisis unfolding in the Three Kingdoms led to an influx of prisoners of war into Barbados as indentured servants who performed much of the agricultural and industrial work required for sugar production.²⁹ Wealthy royalist émigrés such as Thomas Modyford also arrived at Barbados in increasing numbers during the second half of the 1640s, seeking to avoid persecution in England for their political allegiance. They reinvested their liquidated English assets into acquiring large plantations, constructing sugar refineries, and purchasing indentured servants and enslaved Africans, which helped to finance the development of the plantation system on the island.³⁰

Merchants based in the City of London also invested heavily in the Barbadian plantation economy during the 1640s and 1650s, becoming closely involved in both the production and marketing of valuable cash crops. London merchants maintained diverse business portfolios, and their involvement in both Westward and Eastward enterprise helps to explain why the EIC's directors were so familiar with the Caribbean plantation system in the seventeenth century. At least eleven London merchants who had invested heavily in sugar production on Barbados during the 1640s occupied seats on the court of directors of the EIC in the period between 1650 and 1670.³¹ Two merchants with Barbadian connections were even elected to the office of governor (Maurice Thomson from 1657–1659 and Andrew Riccard for three terms: 1660–1662, 1666–1668, and 1670–1672), which accorded them significant power to shape the direction of company policy.³²

The commercial success of sugar production in Barbados shaped the way that Englishmen imagined colonization in the Indian Ocean world as early as 1650. In the late 1640s, a cluster of interloping London merchants with investments in Barbadian plantations

sought to break the EIC's monopoly over Eastern trade by financing the settlement of an English colony in the southwest Indian Ocean using the Barbadian system of plantation slavery as a model. Their colonizing efforts were focused on Assada, an island just off the coast of northern Madagascar (now called Nosy Be). The Assada adventurers outlined their plan to the directorate of the EIC in November 1649.³³ Having already raised £80,000 to settle a colony at Assada, they intended for the island to be governed independently from the EIC, and to function both as a site of plantation production and the nexus of a global trade with Africa, Asia, and the Americas.³⁴

Promotional literature commissioned to attract English planters to settle Assada explicitly compared it to Barbados. Robert Hunt's pamphlet *The Island of Assada* (1650) optimistically argued that because Assada and Barbados both lay at 13 degrees latitude, were of similar size, and had tropical climates, English settlers would be able to use indentured servants and an enslaved workforce to cultivate at Assada a variety of profitable commodities from both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, such as sugar cane, indigo, cotton, tobacco, ginger, pepper, and rice.³⁵ The conviction of the Assada adventurers to make this vision a reality is evidenced by the mill for grinding sugar cane which accompanied the first planters who settled on the island in 1649–1650.³⁶ Hunt's pamphlet devoted much space to the relative cost of land, provisions, and unfree labor. By his estimation it cost £6000 to develop a fully-functioning 300-acre sugar plantation on Barbados, while a similar plantation at Assada would require a capital investment of just £640 to get up and running.³⁷

Sugar produced on Assada was to be sold at "Neighbouring Countries" in the Indian Ocean world in exchange for "East India Commodities." Seventeenth-century mercantilist authors repeatedly criticized how Asian trade sapped England's national wealth through its reliance on regular exports of specie. The Assada plantation was supposed to address this problem by substituting bullion for sugar, thereby saving "the sending out of a 1000 l. per annum of Silver." To exploit Assada as a site of both "Trade and Plantation," Hunt suggested emulating the policies which had helped Portuguese Goa and Dutch Batavia to become prosperous and cosmopolitan commercial entrepôts. For instance, English planters in Assada were advised to encourage non-European migration by bringing to the colony "men from Arabia, Madagascar, Africa, and India to plant, some to be free men, others servants."³⁸ Despite Hunt's optimism, a lack of institutional support from the EIC, epidemic disease, and violent interactions with local Malagasy communities in the early 1650s quickly rendered the endeavor to establish an English colony on Assada with a Barbadian-style plantation economy a failure.³⁹

In October 1657, a few years after events in Assada, an influx of merchants who had invested in the Barbados sugar economy joined the EIC's directorate. This surge is explained by Oliver Cromwell's decision to grant a new and expanded charter to the company, which for the first time gave the EIC the power to plant and fortify its own settlements. This development attracted £739,782 in new subscriptions.⁴⁰ Out of twenty-six merchants elected to the executive board of the reconstituted EIC in 1657, eight had identifiable links to Barbados, and were some of the leading investors in the sugar boom of the 1640s.⁴¹ Several of these merchants had also been involved in the Assada scheme.⁴² The EIC's newfound ability to claim and fortify overseas territory lured Barbadian capital to the company, presumably because the 1657 charter enabled the company to deploy its extensive resources toward colonial plantation agriculture,

which those with prior experience trading with the Caribbean colonies knew was a potentially lucrative business opportunity.⁴³

The new charter and the injection of Barbadian expertise into the company caused an immediate policy shift. For instance, the EIC began to take a greater interest in Atlantic commerce and colonization. Indeed, at the first meeting of the new directorate on 18 December 1657, governor Maurice Thomson confirmed that the EIC had leased the Guinea Company's monopoly over West African commerce.⁴⁴ The EIC retained a direct business interest in West Africa until negotiations with the Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa – the new monopoly company founded in 1660 to manage English trade with Africa – were concluded in 1663. In the interim the EIC had begun to integrate the gold and ivory trade at Fort Cormantine (a castle near Abandze, Ghana) with their existing Asian commerce.⁴⁵ In 1658 the EIC also devised plans to “plant, fortify and people” the island of “Poleroone” (Pulau Run, one of the Banda Islands in Indonesia) where it was hoped by investors that nutmeg plantations could be developed. By 1662 these plans lay in ruins due to the expulsion of English colonists by the Dutch, who vigorously sought to protect their monopoly over Banda Islands nutmeg production. This scheme is strong evidence that the EIC's ambitions for colonial plantation ventures in this period were not confined to the Atlantic, but also included the Indian Ocean world.⁴⁶

Another key part of the EIC's plans in the late 1650s was the colonization of the south Atlantic island of St. Helena, which the EIC dispatched a party to settle in December 1658. At this time St. Helena had no permanent inhabitants (it never had an Indigenous population), although in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries European vessels of various nations stopped off at St. Helena to replenish their supplies of food and water, leading to intermittent competition over the island's resources. The Dutch made a formal imperial claim to possess St. Helena in 1633, but they appear to have never acted on this claim by settling the island. The island was thus occupied by the EIC without conflict, enabling the company to benefit from its strategic significance as a resupply point for vessels making the return voyage from Asia.⁴⁷ From the outset the directors also envisioned “many good plantations may in tyme be made” at St. Helena, underscoring the company's commitment to establishing plantations far beyond North America and the Caribbean.⁴⁸

During the earliest years of English settlement on St. Helena, the EIC's top priority was ensuring the subsistence of colonists through the creation of farms. To this end, the company's directors ordered their factors in West Africa to supply St. Helena with provision crops. In June 1659, for example, the EIC wrote to its employees at Fort Cormantine to explain how “for the use of our plantacion at St Hellena” they had instructed Captain George Swanley, commander of the *Truro*, to “procure 10 lusty young Blacks men and women and what Graines &c are procurable in your partes.”⁴⁹ Similar instructions were sent to Fort Cormantine in July 1662. In October of the same year the commander of the *American* was notified that if he visited “St Thoma” [São Tomé] on his outward journey he was required to “procure 6 lusty Heyfer Calves and deliver them a Shore to Our Governour of St Hellena.”⁵⁰

EIC planners thought that a reliable supply of labor was essential for the construction of fortifications and the cultivation of foodstuffs in early St. Helena. Since, like Barbados, St. Helena did not have an Indigenous population that could be coerced by English settlers, EIC officials quickly reasoned that laborers needed to be imported.⁵¹ However, the

EIC struggled to attract voluntary migrants from England via the indenture system to St. Helena because of the island's extreme isolation and the attractiveness of destinations in North America and the Caribbean.⁵² To satisfy labor demand on St. Helena unfree workers from Cape Verde, West Africa, Madagascar, the Indian subcontinent, and South-east Asia were brought to the island by the company, beginning with the "5 or 6 Blacks or Negroes" procured at Cape Verde by the party the EIC sent to colonize St. Helena in the late 1650s.⁵³ Early EIC efforts to import labor were small-scale as is evidenced by the St. Helena planter Henry Gargen's estimate that from 1661 to 1665 no more than 74 people lived on the island.⁵⁴ However, these efforts do underscore the EIC's early commitment to a racialized labor system in St. Helena, even when it was subsistence agriculture, not commercial plantation production, that was the mainstay of the island's economy.

By the early 1670s, the EIC's directors were searching intently for an export crop that could be cultivated on plantations in St. Helena. The company provided planters living on the island with seeds from both the Caribbean and the East Indies for them to experiment with. In 1671, for instance, company agents at Surat were instructed to send indigo seeds to St. Helena, along with "a person skillful in the sowing of it and bringing it to perfection."⁵⁵ When St. Helena was resettled after the Dutch invasion of 1672–1673 the company quickly diversified its efforts, and between 1673 and 1684 encouraged the island's inhabitants to experiment with the production of a variety of commodities, such as sugar cane, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, cocoa, ginger, and fruit trees known as "China oranges" (probably mandarins).⁵⁶ The significance that the company placed on these endeavors is demonstrated by their instructions sent in 1674 to ensure that all people, including the English soldiers stationed for the defense of the island, have "negroes" to assist in the cultivation of these goods.⁵⁷ In the 1680s the EIC intensified its efforts to foster the emergence of a plantation economy in St. Helena, and the project also took on an increasingly Barbadian focus.

St. Helena and the Barbadian plantation model

The EIC's wider strategy in the late seventeenth century was to extend its corporate sovereignty over people and places to "make the English nation as formidable as the Dutch or any other Europe nation, are, or ever were, in India." However, governing and defending overseas territories was expensive. The EIC's directors believed, therefore, that their ambitions for colonization and fortification could not be achieved solely through profits arising from trade but also required the "political skill of making all fortified places repay their full charge and expenses" through taxation and plantation development.⁵⁸ As one of the EIC's costly overseas territories that urgently needed "improvement" if it was to realize its place as a cornerstone of the "company-state," St. Helena increasingly attracted the attentions of the company's directors in the closing decades of the seventeenth century. The EIC's attempt to establish a Barbadian-style plantation economy on St. Helena in the 1680s was thus predicated upon the belief that arising proceeds would help to pay for fortifications and set the colony on a path towards long term prosperity.

The agricultural "improvement" of St. Helena was seen as important by the EIC because they had invested much capital in the island during the 1660s and 1670s. Besides financing the initial settlement of the island in 1659 (and its resettlement after the Dutch invasion of 1672–1673), the company had paid for the construction of fortifications,

the supply of armaments, and the wages of the soldiers stationed in the colony (of whom there were 81 garrisoned in 1678). The company had also heavily subsidized the process of colonization, covering the cost of passage to the island for settlers and paying for the supplies of food, raw materials, seeds, agricultural equipment, clothes, fishing boats, and Black laborers that officials believed planters needed if they were to become self-sufficient and productive. The directors estimated in 1683 that when all these varied charges were added together the cost of maintaining the “settlement and security” of St. Helena had, since the island was first colonized in 1659, cost them a sum total of £60,000. Despite this outlay of capital, the EIC had yet to receive a financial return on their investment.⁵⁹ For a corporation that existed to make money for its investors, such cases were unacceptable to the EIC. However, St. Helena’s strategic importance was too great for the EIC to simply cut its losses and abandon the island. A different solution was needed.

Unlike the EIC’s other fortified outposts that were located in Asia, St. Helena was a very remote island in the south Atlantic which had no nearby trading partners to help offset the cost of its garrison. Therefore, the only available option for increasing the profitability of St. Helena was for the island to produce its own commodities through the development of an export-oriented plantation economy. As part of the EIC’s wider strategy in the 1680s to make the fortified settlements within its system cover their own costs, and perhaps also in response to the temporary financial crisis the EIC experienced in 1682–1683 due to a shortage of working capital, the company began to intensify its efforts to establish a profitable plantation economy in St. Helena after 1683.⁶⁰ By 1684, the company’s directors returned to their heretofore unsuccessful attempts to identify a viable cash crop for the island. Prior to having identified such a crop, they remained convinced that it was only through “the profitable employment of such of the company’s blacks” on plantations “that we may at length raise such a revenue upon that Island as may defray the charge of such a great garrison.”⁶¹ Indeed, it was expected that forcing enslaved Africans to produce tropical commodities on the island would ensure that the inhabitants of St. Helena could “live and grow rich ... as they have in Barbados, Jamaica, and other worse places.”⁶² The commercial success of the Caribbean plantation system served as an influential model for the company’s directors in London. This suggests that the EIC’s endeavor to expand its corporate sovereignty in the 1680s through the construction of a “company-state” in the south Atlantic and Asia developed in tandem with a heightened interest in plantation models drawn from the Caribbean, at least for St. Helena.

EIC directors had global trading networks, and thus would have been aware of other models for overseas colonization. But at St. Helena they purposefully followed the model of the Barbadian plantation system. This may have been because St. Helena’s situation as a small and uninhabited island located in the Atlantic encouraged affinities with Barbados. What is certain is that the Caribbean was familiar to leading members of the EIC in this period. Indeed, merchants with business interests in the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic world were well represented on the directorate of the EIC throughout the seventeenth century, but in the 1680s their prominence became especially evident. For example, Sir Josiah Child, a powerful London merchant and economic writer, was the largest single shareholder of East India stock in the late 1670s and early 1680s. Child had £23,000 invested in the company in 1679, was elected governor of the EIC in 1681, and served as governor and deputy-governor on several other occasions between 1681

and 1690. It is likely that Child's election in 1681 was pivotal in precipitating the shift within the EIC to a focus on Barbados as an exemplar for the economic development of St. Helena. This is because Child was very familiar with the Caribbean plantation system and the transatlantic slave trade, and it is to be expected that he drew upon this knowledge when the St. Helena project was being discussed at meetings of the court of directors. Child had been a co-owner of a 1330-acre sugar estate in Jamaica since 1672 and had played an important role in provisioning an unfree workforce for the plantation. He was also a founding member of the Royal African Company (RAC) in 1672, and served as a director of the slave trading company from 1675–1676.⁶³

Other leading members of the EIC in the 1680s were also investors in the RAC and thus deeply familiar with the operation of the Atlantic slave economy. For example, half of the EIC's directors (nine out of eighteen) who signed a key letter outlining their plans to develop St. Helena along the lines of Barbados on 1 August 1683 were also directors of the RAC at various points during their business careers.⁶⁴ Sir John Banks, the governor of the EIC in August 1683, had served in the office of sub-governor of the RAC from 1674–1676.⁶⁵ Through their work planning slave trading voyages and corresponding with RAC employees in West Africa and the Caribbean, serving on the directorate of the RAC would have provided these merchants with useful business contacts and knowledge pertaining to West African commerce, the Caribbean sugar trade, and plantation management.⁶⁶ It is highly likely this experience and knowledge directly informed the EIC's plans for St. Helena during the 1680s.

The EIC had been exploring the possibility of plantation development in St. Helena since the early 1670s, but an increasing Barbadian focus made the company's plans for the agricultural "improvement" of the colony after 1683 a departure from earlier efforts. The EIC was deeply committed to the economic development of St. Helena, and at various points in the 1680s supplied planters there with seeds, knowledge, financial support, and enslaved laborers, expecting that this would help foster the growth of a plantation economy on the island. Initially, the low price of sugar in England during the early 1680s had encouraged the company to consider purchasing Caribbean sugar in London and turn a profit by exporting the commodity to markets in the Persian Gulf and South Asia where prices remained high.⁶⁷ But instead they settled on experimenting with the development of their own sugar industry based around a Barbadian model. In early August 1683 the company's directors wrote to their factors in Fort St. George (near Madras in India) to explain how they had thoughts "of making for the Company a large sugar plantacion with mills, sugar houses and still houses" at St. Helena, and also a "large great indigoe plantacion."⁶⁸ Based on later testimony it appears that a plain near Sandy Bay on the south coast of St. Helena was the region designated for development.⁶⁹ It was believed that there would be a good market in southern Persia (Iran) for the sugar and indigo produced on St. Helena.⁷⁰

The EIC made special efforts to ensure that the inhabitants of St. Helena were afforded the expert knowledge necessary to establish a plantation economy and manage large groups of enslaved Africans. As early as 1673 the court of directors emphasized that when it came to establishing plantation agriculture on St. Helena, they were giving "due encouragement to all the inhabitants in carrying on the said work of planting by appointing some experienced persons to instruct and advise such as are ignorant in that affair."⁷¹ The first evidence that the EIC was doing so dates to 1683, when the

company's directors dispatched Englishmen who had first-hand experience of the Caribbean plantation system to St. Helena. Thomas Howe, who was skilled in growing indigo and cotton, and Ralph Knight, who was an expert "overseer of such negroes as you shall employe," were vetted as candidates by the company and transported to St. Helena in the mid-1680s.⁷² Lieutenant Robert Holden, the deputy governor of St. Helena between 1683 and 1689, was another person reportedly well acquainted with the "production of indicoes, cotton, ginger and the other usual commodities of the West Indies," and was specifically put in a position of power so that he could draw upon his knowledge of the Caribbean plantation system to benefit planters living on the island.⁷³

Barbadian expertise played an important role in the EIC's plans for St. Helena. Nathaniel Cox, a man with experience as an overseer on Christopher Codrington's plantation on Barbados, was employed by the company in 1684 at a wage of £70 per annum as the "Overseer of the Honourable Company's Plantacon and Negroes."⁷⁴ He was instructed to carry tobacco seed from England and Madagascar to St. Helena, and to establish a small tobacco plantation on the company's land. But the company's directors were also pleased that Cox was reportedly "well skilled in boyling of sugar and raising a sugar plantation from the planting of the canes to the refining of the sugar."⁷⁵ It is probable that Nathaniel Cox was a younger son of the Barbados planter Capt. Josias Cox, who, like many of his generation were overlooked in their father's inheritance and left Barbados in search of new employment opportunities abroad.⁷⁶ This "Barbadian diaspora" spread knowledge of plantation agriculture and the use of violent methods to manage enslaved Africans throughout the English empire, including to St. Helena.⁷⁷ During his time in St. Helena, Nathaniel Cox served as a member of the council, oversaw the introduction of stringent new laws to manage enslaved laborers, and identified a person with useful experience of "plantation work" in Virginia who could be employed in the service of the company.⁷⁸

The EIC was aware that sugar plantations were capital-intensive operations, and consequently offered generous financial support to assist planters on St. Helena in setting up a plantation economy. The directors mobilized the company's global networks of trade and exchange to try to stimulate sugar cultivation in the south Atlantic, principally by financing the transportation of seeds, building materials, overseers, and enslaved workers from across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Between June 1683 and April 1684 the company instructed its overseas employees to supply planters on St. Helena with "useful seeds and plants of India," horses and tools from England, bricks from southern Persia, hard wood from Bengal for use as rollers in the sugar mills, oxen from India to drive the mills, and broad beans to feed the growing enslaved population.⁷⁹ To ensure that planters on the island always had a secure means of "supplying themselves with English servants and all commodities of England and Europe as cheap or cheaper than the planters of Barbados or Jamaica," the directors explained in 1683 how they were resolved to defray 40 percent of freight costs and to send one or two extra ships to the island every year with provisions and extra manpower. In 1684 it was stipulated that enslaved Africans could be sold on credit to "poor planters." By financing the initial costs of establishing plantations it was hoped that, in time, "all things will come to our Island much cheaper than they do to any plantation in America," and that therefore the company "may in time gain something for the trade of that place."⁸⁰

The clearest evidence for how the EIC was devoting its fiscal resources to developing a plantation economy on St. Helena were the multiple slave trading voyages which the

company organized in the 1680s and 1690s.⁸¹ A letter to the governor and council of St. Helena in 1684 that expressed an intention to “buy 60 or 80 Gold Coast negroes of the Royal Company and send them to you” demonstrates how the EIC also sought to purchase enslaved Africans from the Royal African Company. The crucial role played by enslaved Africans in the process of colonial development in the Caribbean informed the EIC’s plans for St. Helena. The court of directors believed that it was “utterly impossible for any Europe plantacion to thrive between the Tropicks upon any place without [the] assistance and labour of negroes,” and that the current lack of enslaved Africans on St. Helena was the “principal cause that the planters upon that Island have not yet found the way to produce any usefull or profitable commodity.”⁸² This highlights how, after more than a half-century of English experience with plantation development in the Caribbean, by the 1680s a powerful association between enslaved Africans and plantation labor had emerged, even in parts of the world far distant from the Americas.

In the eyes of the company’s directors, the “assistance” of the enslaved people transported to St. Helena encompassed not just their physical labor, but also their agricultural expertise, proficiency as artificers, and linguistic abilities.⁸³ As Anna Winterbottom has demonstrated, EIC directors commonly wrote that they valued enslaved laborers, in part, because of their ability to facilitate transfers of useful botanical and medicinal knowledge between company colonies.⁸⁴ Enslaved Africans with knowledge of the complex procedures associated with the cultivation and processing of sugar had been crucial to the transfer of the sugar plantation complex from Brazil to Barbados in the 1640s.⁸⁵ The 1687 decision by the EIC’s directors to purchase 15 enslaved Africans directly from Barbados for shipment to St. Helena may well have been motivated by their hope that these laborers knew much about sugar cultivation.⁸⁶ Moreover, reports that the “Madagascar blacks in Barbadoes” were the most “ingenious of any blacks in learning manuell trades” (including blacksmithing, carpentry, cooperage, masonry, and bricklaying) encouraged the EIC to license Captain Robert Knox to purchase 250 enslaved people at Madagascar and transport them to St. Helena in 1684.⁸⁷ The company’s directors even drew explicit connections between the deployment of enslaved Africans as artisans on Barbados and the eventual commercial success of the colony. If the first English planters on Barbados had not trained their enslaved Africans to work in skilled occupations, the EIC believed that “they could never have brought that Island to what it is, being now improved to such a height that from thence do saile above 500 ships yearly small and great.”⁸⁸

Caribbean models played a decisive role in shaping the formation of company policy towards their enslaved workers on St. Helena. Gaps in the historical record mean that the status of the small numbers of laborers brought to St. Helena and other company colonies in the 1660s and 1670s is not entirely clear. The company’s directors in London regularly referred to them as “black servants” and sometimes even instructed factors living overseas to treat them as “men and women and not as slaves.”⁸⁹ What the available evidence does reveal, however, is that there was a noticeable change in labor management techniques and the language used to describe these workers on St. Helena in the 1680s. Black laborers in St. Helena began to be exclusively referred to as “slaves” by the EIC’s court of directors and were subject to more vicious punishments.⁹⁰

The reasons behind this change were the growing importance of Caribbean models within the EIC and an increased incidence of rebellion among the Black population of

St. Helena from the late 1670s onwards. In 1676 an enslaved man named Robin was sentenced to death for murdering his enslaver Francis Wrangham, and there were further cases of enslaved people committing attempted murder through stabbing in 1679 and poisoning in 1687.⁹¹ The island's growing enslaved population also stoked fears among the white inhabitants of St. Helena about the possibility of large scale uprisings in 1679 and 1693, and in December 1695 settlers became deeply frightened after discovering an alleged conspiracy to "murder all the white inhabitants of this place by breaking into theare houses and cutting all theare throats."⁹² The anxiety these episodes generated would have been heightened by the alarming revelations of planned insurrections of enslaved Africans on Barbados in both 1675 and 1692, conspiracy scares that were well publicized and sent shockwaves around the English empire.⁹³ After every attempted murder of a white planter and each rumor about slave rebellion, new laws were introduced by the governor and council of St. Helena to further restrict the freedoms of the Black inhabitants of the island. In April 1682, for example, reports that "many blacks of the sayd Island" were entering the houses of white planters when the owners were absent, but their children were inside, led to severe penalties being introduced for any enslaved person who entered the houses of white men without first obtaining explicit permission.⁹⁴

Caribbean plantation economies could not have functioned without a group of overseers who had legal sanction to instill the psychological terror required to exert control over an enslaved majority.⁹⁵ The directors of the EIC recognized this, and hence sought to institute on St. Helena some of the laws and practices used to manage large groups of enslaved Africans on Barbados. In 1683 the company's directors explained how they saw the systematic application of violence as the only way through which the "6,000" white inhabitants of Barbados could keep a population of "50,000 blacks" in subjection "without other garrison than the planters themselves."⁹⁶ At this time the population of St. Helena was much smaller than Barbados and more numerically balanced between different races. Reliable census records for St. Helena do not begin until the 1720s, though estimates suggest that in the 1680s the roughly 500 English men, women, and children lived alongside 200 enslaved people.⁹⁷ Despite these demographics, the EIC's directors still insisted that on St. Helena the enslaved were to be managed under the "rigours of the Barbados discipline."⁹⁸

In 1684 the company sent a copy of the "lawes and customes of Barbadoes" which contained information relating to the "government, workings, diet, times of labor, and use of their negroes" to help inform the planters of St. Helena how Englishmen in the Caribbean extracted the maximum amount of labor from their enslaved Africans. The council of St. Helena was instructed to observe these strict rules "as near as possible may be" to ensure the continued safety of the island. If enslaved persons were caught breaking the laws of the island which forbade them from possessing firearms, for example, they were to be "severely whip'd."⁹⁹ When corporal punishment was used to discipline an enslaved man named Frank who had committed a burglary in June 1686, the company's directors responded that they "thought very meanly" of the Council for letting those "blacks pass with whipping" whereas "an English man would have been condemned to dye by a jury." They found this weakness of judgment to be even more concerning because Nathaniel Cox, a former Barbadian overseer, should have appreciated more than any other person on St. Helena that "the English could not keep the knife from

their throats at Barbados if they did not punish their theevish blacks with farr greater severity.”¹⁰⁰

As this episode reveals, the growth of the enslaved population of St. Helena during the 1680s caused the EIC’s directors to become concerned about colonial security and the maintenance of order. Besides emulating the violent labor management methods used in the Caribbean, the company’s directors also adopted some of the practices that had been implemented in Barbados in response to the island’s declining white population and the potential implications this had for the safety of the colony due to its enslaved majority. In 1683 all white planters in St. Helena who owned more than four “negroes” were instructed to employ at least one Englishman as an overseer for the “watching and warding” of the plantation. The EIC also stipulated that “as the negroes do increase upon the island” there had to be a corresponding growth in St. Helena’s garrison. Like in Barbados where free white men were heavily armed and organized into a colonial militia to help protect against both external and internal threats, the EIC’s directors ordered that on St. Helena “all free planters and all persons living within the said island that are able to bear arms (except the blacks) shall be duly quartered as they have been and instantly upon all alarums appear at their respective quarters in arms.”¹⁰¹

The demise of the St. Helena project

The EIC clearly deployed its financial resources and global networks in the 1680s to try to develop Barbadian-style plantations in the south Atlantic. But the reasons why this scheme was unsuccessful, even when it had the full institutional support of the company, require explanation. Important was the extent to which the EIC’s directors made incorrect assumptions about the climate and environment of St. Helena and the reality of the island as they subsequently experienced it. Early modern theories of climate suggested that St. Helena would possess a tropical climate because of its latitude, while travel literature commonly extolled St. Helena’s bounteous and commodious environment. Based on the information available to them, the EIC’s directors made a rational decision when they attempted to introduce sugar and indigo plantations in St. Helena. In reality of course St. Helena’s climate and natural environment were not at all conducive to tropical plantation agriculture. Enough empirical evidence had filtered back to the directors in London by the late 1680s for them to finally accept the futility in seeking to establish a Barbadian-modeled plantation economy in St. Helena. In addition, although the EIC’s directors were clearly well-informed about the Caribbean plantation system, their understanding of what had made Barbados successful was flawed. The company’s directors did not account for certain geographical and commercial factors which had been fundamental to the rapid prosperity achieved in 1640s Barbados but were impossible to replicate in another part of the world forty years later. Ultimately, the EIC directors’ inability to replicate the Barbadian model evidences the difficulties of global knowledge transfer under seventeenth-century conditions, and the importance of local factors and historical contingencies in determining the success of colonial plantation ventures.

The most important factor which underpinned the failure of the EIC’s project is that, unlike Caribbean islands such as Barbados, the climate and environment of St. Helena is not conducive to the production of tropical cash crops. The mild climate, high elevation,

mountainous environment, and rocky terrain of St. Helena made the island thoroughly unsuited to developing a commercial industry based around the production of sugar cane and indigo.¹⁰² It is, however, critical to emphasize that this was not what contemporary descriptions of the island had initially suggested, nor what early modern climatic theories proposed should be the case. English authors have often used Edenic, Arcadian, and Picturesque imagery to portray uninhabited islands. In the seventeenth century, St. Helena was a prominent part of what Richard Grove has termed an “Edenic island discourse” within the genres of travel literature and fiction. St. Helena was depicted as a botanical paradise, which provided mariners making the long journey between Europe and India with much-needed water and bounteous supplies of wild fruit.¹⁰³ In the fictional work *The Man in the Moone* (1638), the protagonist Domingo Gonsales invites the reader to consider “the healthfulness of the Aire there, the fruitfulness of the soile, and the abundance of all manner of things necessary for sustaining the life of man.”¹⁰⁴ Such misrepresentations influenced the EIC’s perception of St. Helena.¹⁰⁵ A sensational report sent by the company to the governor and council of St. Helena in 1683, which detailed the “severall singular and great advantages that this Island hath above any English plantacion we know in any part of the world,” suggests these flawed beliefs informed the EIC’s decision to try to develop a plantation economy on the island during the 1670s and 1680s.¹⁰⁶

Also crucial was how European theorists believed that latitudinal variation was the most significant determinant of climate.¹⁰⁷ In *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon* (1681), for example, the EIC employee and slave trader Robert Knox observed that “the difference of Longitude doth not much chang or alter the nature of the Climate as the Latitude doth.”¹⁰⁸ It was presumed, therefore, that all regions of the world which lay between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn would possess a tropical climate. Such theories circulated widely within the communication networks of the EIC and had a direct bearing on company policy. Comparisons with other colonies at roughly the same latitude as St. Helena (16° S) suggested to the directors that commodities such as “indigo, coco, olive trees, wool, vineyards, Cyprus and cedar trees” would be the most profitable goods that the planters could produce until they received “nutmeg clove or cinnamon plants” from company employees in Asia.¹⁰⁹ This was partly because it was believed that “the nature of cloves trees [was] to grow upon high land, such as St. Helena is, and in much about the same latitude.”¹¹⁰ Reflecting the recent findings of Anya Zilberstein in which she demonstrates that people in the early modern period did not necessarily believe that the climate of a particular region was fixed, the company’s directors also contended that the mountainous environment of St. Helena caused dramatic temperature fluctuations, with the valleys being “as hot as Barbados,” while the peaks of the mountains were “as cold as the middle parts of France.”¹¹¹ By this logic, the company thought that planters should have been able to cultivate sugar cane, indigo, and spices in the low-lying valleys which run throughout the island.¹¹²

Another important reason for the EIC’s lack of success in establishing a plantation economy on St. Helena is the remote location of the island, which lay 1930km west of the nearest landfall in Angola.¹¹³ Unlike in the Lesser Antilles, the island’s isolation was an impediment to commerce and the sharing of agricultural knowledge. Since there were neither nearby Indigenous peoples nor European colonies, English settlers at St. Helena found local knowledge, food, supplies, extra manpower, and unfree labor hard

to come by. The only relief was when EIC ships called at the colony on their voyages to and from Asia, or when private merchants who were engaged in the Madagascar slave trade intermittently visited the island for refreshment while en route to the Americas.¹¹⁴ St. Helena's remoteness likewise explains the difficulties the company faced in recruiting colonists and maintaining effective control over the colony, as evidenced by the ease with which the island was captured by four Dutch vessels in 1672–1673, and the repeated rebellions of white settlers, soldiers, and enslaved people there in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁵ The EIC records are filled with examples of the inhabitants of St. Helena stealing or stowing away on visiting ships, largely because they struggled to cope with the colony's extreme isolation and sought desperately to get off the island.¹¹⁶

Timing is the final reason that Barbados developed a plantation economy and St. Helena did not. More specifically, contingent political and commercial circumstances unique to the 1640s were a critical reason why a mature plantation economy emerged so rapidly in Barbados. When planters in Barbados first began experimenting with sugar cultivation during the 1640s they benefitted from a sizeable injection of both labor and capital from the metropole as a side effect of the English Civil War. This was also an era with highly favorable market conditions for sugar following the precipitous decline of the Brazilian industry. While the development of Barbados as a plantation economy benefitted from a rare confluence of circumstances, the opposite was the case in St. Helena.

By 1689, the directors of the EIC admitted that the "infertility of the ground" on St. Helena was the reason for their "changeable attempts upon sugar, cotton and indigo," not a lack of enslaved Africans.¹¹⁷ Those living on St. Helena, who had a much better understanding of local conditions, had been trying to tell the company's directors this for years.¹¹⁸ For example, the St. Helena plantation owner Orlando Bagley, who claimed to have experience planting "in many severall countries," told the company explicitly in 1684 that "no West India commodities will grow well at St. Helena."¹¹⁹

The failure to establish a Barbadian-style plantation economy on St. Helena did not do great damage to the larger fortunes of the EIC. Their main interest had always been, and would remain, the calico and spice trade in Asia with St. Helena retaining value as a strategically located island where company ships could resupply on lucrative trading voyages. Despite the island's role in facilitating trade, the company's directors still bemoaned it as a financial burden. For example, in a 1708 letter they complained how "St Helena is a dead charge to us, and as you know we have no commerce there to make it good."¹²⁰ Possibly in response to these criticisms, the following year the governor of St. Helena, John Roberts, sought to draw upon his personal experience in the Caribbean to revitalize the project to erect sugar plantations in Sandy Bay valley. Despite some unsubstantiated reports from September 1709 that the canes were "flourishing very well" while Thomas Gargen was employed as an overseer, the efforts to cultivate sugar on St. Helena remained small scale, and the sprawling plantations envisioned by the company's directors during the 1670s and 1680s never emerged.¹²¹

Caribbean plantation models in the Indian Ocean world

Did the EIC also seek to export the Caribbean plantation system beyond the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean world? An analysis of the EIC's correspondence, court

minutes, and factory records for the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries reveal that there were no attempts to experiment with using the plantation system and Caribbean systems of population management at Bombay, Madras (Fort St. George), or Calcutta, even though the company's directors conceived of many of these settlements not just as trading factories but also as "plantations" (used in this sense by contemporaries as a synonym for colony), which like those in the Atlantic world, needed to be fortified, peopled, and planted.¹²² The only surviving evidence of Caribbean practices directly being used as an exemplar by the EIC in India dates to 1694, when the company's directors instructed its employees at Fort St. David (near Cuddalore) to allow their enslaved workers "little plots of ground each for their wives to plant potatoes upon as is done in Barbados."¹²³ It is not entirely surprising that there is a lack of evidence of the EIC explicitly and intentionally seeking to emulate Caribbean forms of colonial development and population management in India. The main function of the company's fortified settlements there was to facilitate long-distance trade in valuable merchandise, not plantation production. Hard-won experience had proved that accommodation with Asian powers and integration into their political structures, social hierarchies, and commercial networks was the key to success in India, not colonial plantation.¹²⁴

Unlike at their bases of operation on the Indian subcontinent, the EIC did seek to develop a plantation economy based around pepper and sugar production at several of its outposts in southeast Asia. The company's settlement at Bengkulu, founded in 1684 on the west coast of Sumatra, was the focus of these efforts. Seeing as Sumatra was "a proper country for sugar canes," in August 1687 the EIC suggested to the Barbadian expert Nathaniel Cox that he relocate from St. Helena to Bengkulu, where it was hoped he might better "employ his talent and his stock in making sugar."¹²⁵ This provides tantalizing evidence for how the frontiers of the Barbadian diaspora may have reached the shores of Sumatra by the late 1680s.¹²⁶ Crucially, however, the company's directors did not make frequent reference to Barbados in their subsequent instructions to factors at Bengkulu. Instead, the EIC's project to develop a plantation economy at Bengkulu drew heavily upon the example of nearby Batavia (Jakarta, on Java in Indonesia), the administrative center of the Dutch Empire in Asia, where the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) had been successful in renting land to Chinese planters for them to cultivate sugar using enslaved labor.¹²⁷ Although southeast Asia is a region with an island geography and tropical climate that bears many resemblances to the Caribbean, the fact that the EIC did not use Barbados as a direct model for the development of a plantation economy and slave system on Sumatra is unsurprising. The EIC often followed the Dutch example in the East Indies, and there was a model of plantation development in the immediate vicinity of Bengkulu which had already led to proven success for the Dutch on Java.

While there is no surviving evidence to suggest that the EIC ever experimented with developing plantations in the Indian Ocean world using the Caribbean colonies as an explicit model, English merchants and colonial projectors operating outside the institutional oversight of the company *did* devise plans to export the Caribbean plantation system beyond the Cape of Good Hope at various points in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. We have already seen how interloping London merchants seeking to break the EIC's monopoly in the late 1640s financed efforts to develop a plantation colony at Assada in northwest Madagascar, drawing directly on Barbados as a

colonial model. Despite the failure of the Assada venture in the early 1650s, some English colonial theorists working outside the remit of the EIC remained convinced that the southwest Indian Ocean was a region suitable for the expansion of the Caribbean plantation system. For example, beginning in the late 1690s, the merchant and former EIC ship captain Thomas Bowrey drew up several proposals for the settlement of new colonies in the Indian Ocean, and in 1712 he formulated a detailed set of plans outlining his vision for the colonization of the East African coast.¹²⁸ His proposal was never discussed by the directors of the EIC in their court meetings (and thus likely never formally presented to them), nor was it ever published, but three manuscript drafts of Bowrey's scheme survive at the London Metropolitan Archives.¹²⁹

Bowrey began his proposal by highlighting several natural advantages of the East African coast which made it fit for colonization. Along with supposedly being a "Healthy Country" that was free from disease, the region also possessed "Fertile soil," "navigable rivers," and "good Harbours for Shipping." With the industry of English planters, Bowrey was convinced that very soon Mozambique would be capable of supporting plantations of sugar, indigo, ginger, and cotton: tropical commodities that had made the Caribbean colonies extraordinarily wealthy. There are many parallels between Bowrey's proposal of 1712 and Hunt's pamphlet of 1650, which make it highly likely that Bowrey had read *The Island of Assada*. The most striking similarity is a series of meticulously detailed tables that were intended to help prospective planters evaluate the potential profits and expenses of establishing sugar and indigo plantations. The colonial model used by Bowrey to create these tables was Jamaica, reflecting the fact that by the early eighteenth century the locus of plantation production in the British Empire was shifting from Barbados to Jamaica.¹³⁰ After breaking down all the expenses associated with establishing a plantation, Bowrey estimated, with almost certainly far too much optimism, that because land and enslaved workers would be much more affordable at the "Intended Settlements" on the East African coast, the cost of establishing a thousand-acre sugar plantation there would be £2760, 77 per cent less than the £12,000 required to set up the same plantation on Jamaica. The sugar produced in Mozambique would be transported to India and exchanged for "East India Goods," thus saving "to this nation a good part of those large sumes of Silver & Gold wch they yearly export from hence to East India."¹³¹ Much like Hunt's vision for Assada, Bowrey's plan for settlement on the East African coast looked to minimize exports of bullion out of England by integrating plantation production with the trade in Eastern luxuries.

It is notable that the EIC, an organization which was remarkably well-informed about the Caribbean colonies, never experimented with using Barbados as a model to develop plantations in India and Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The EIC sought to develop nutmeg plantations at Pulau Run in the Banda Islands during the late 1650s, but these efforts quickly failed and there is no surviving evidence to suggest that the company's directors were drawing explicitly on a Caribbean model as part of their plans. Moreover, a slave-based plantation economy was implemented on the west coast of Sumatra at the EIC's settlement of Bengkulu, but this drew upon the example of nearby Dutch Batavia, not a Caribbean model. The surviving evidence suggests that it tended to be English merchants and theorists operating *outside* of the EIC who imagined developing Caribbean-style plantations beyond the Cape of Good Hope in this period. Even still, when viewed together, the several projects to develop

plantations at St. Helena, Madagascar, and along the East African coast underscore how the Caribbean colonies of Barbados and Jamaica were the go-to models for English attempts at colonial plantation in the south Atlantic and the Indian Ocean world during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These schemes thus provide insights into where contemporaries imagined it was feasible to recreate early American economic systems. The region of the Indian Ocean world where English colonizers outside of the EIC thought was most appropriate to emulate Caribbean forms of plantation development was in the southwest, an area which encompassed the East African coast, Madagascar, and other surrounding islands. As Edmond Smith has persuasively argued, the islands and coastal landmasses located in the southwest Indian Ocean literally and conceptually formed a liminal zone between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds in the eyes of seventeenth-century Englishmen. This made it ripe for fantasies of Caribbean replication. Like contemporaries, historians should also understand this as a region of the globe which, uniquely, connected the Eastern and Western spheres of English expansion in the early modern period.¹³²

Conclusion

Reading across archives and historiographies that are not usually consulted by historians of the Atlantic world reveals how the model of the Caribbean plantation system had a more widespread influence than previously understood. That there was significant exchange in personnel and ideas between English ventures to the West and East Indies is now broadly familiar to most Atlanticists, but it is rarely acknowledged how Caribbean knowledge circulated extensively within the EIC in the second half of the seventeenth century, and that this had a tangible impact on the formation of company policy. Caribbean modes of production, centered on the plantation system and African slavery, formed a powerful colonial model for the directors of the EIC, who in the 1680s sought to emulate the prosperity of Barbados at their colony of St. Helena. Colonial projectors working outside of the company even imagined the development of Caribbean-style plantation colonies in the southwest Indian Ocean. The importance of Caribbean colonies has been understated in the historiography for decades, and this imbalance has only started to be addressed in recent years. Historians are increasingly highlighting the significance of the early modern Caribbean as a dynamic center of change within the broader currents of Atlantic and global history.¹³³ The scheme to introduce the Barbadian plantation system to St. Helena, though unsuccessful, underscores the crucial role played by Caribbean colonies in the structure of the early English empire. It was neither Virginia nor New England, but the sugar-producing plantation economies of the Caribbean which the directors of the EIC frequently mentioned in their correspondence and were eager to replicate on St. Helena.

Studying the EIC's project to emulate the "Barbados model" in the 1680s contributes to our rather limited knowledge of the EIC's involvement with slavery by highlighting how the company participated in both the forced maritime trafficking of enslaved people in the south Atlantic and Indian Ocean and the exploitation of an enslaved workforce at St. Helena and elsewhere at the company's territories in Asia. It also provides insights into what well-informed contemporaries believed were the "keys" to the success of the Caribbean plantation system. The company supplied planters on St. Helena with seeds,

knowledge, financial support, and enslaved workers, expecting that this would foster the growth of a Barbadian-style plantation economy in the colony. What the EIC's directors did not appreciate was how Barbados' unique geographical location in the Lesser Antilles archipelago, along with several external contingencies that would have been impossible to replicate, were pivotal to the rapidity with which the plantation system and a commercial sugar industry emerged in Barbados during the mid-seventeenth century.

Even more significant was how seventeenth-century theories of climate and travel literature led the company's directors to the erroneous belief that the climate and environment of St. Helena was conducive to the development of a plantation economy. As so often occurred with seventeenth-century colonization efforts, planners, investors, and potential colonists in England were misled by travel literature, which in the case of St. Helena wrongly portrayed the island as having a tropical climate and bounteous environment. The EIC's attempt to exert distant, centralized control over the economic development of St. Helena in the late seventeenth century meant that the local knowledge of colonists concerning the reality of the island's climate and physical environment could not easily be communicated to the directors in London, and was therefore not used to inform the company's decision-making process. Even when reports eventually arrived from some inhabitants of St. Helena explaining how the island was not suitable for plantation agriculture, it took several years for the company's directors to alter their policy in consideration of this new empirical evidence, probably because they remained convinced by early modern climatic theories and were blinded by travel literature and the enormous success of the Caribbean sugar islands.

This disjunction between the company's directors in London and the inhabitants of St. Helena sheds light on a broader theme in the history of the early EIC. The directors' effort to govern the EIC's territories centrally as a "company-state" in the late seventeenth century could at times be wasteful of economic resources, especially when it led the EIC to conduct expensive top-down colonial experiments that someone with local experience would know were never going to work. The EIC was at its most effective as a commercial operation when it embraced the decentralized private trading networks and initiatives devised by its employees who lived overseas and were thus well-acquainted with local conditions.¹³⁴

Though efforts to recreate a Caribbean plantation economy on St. Helena in the 1680s were ultimately unsuccessful, this project did have some lasting demographic and ecological implications. The several hundred enslaved Malagasy and East Indians transported to the island during the 1680s and 1690s led to the multiracial population of present-day St. Helena.¹³⁵ In 1723 there were 647 enslaved laborers on the island, a population which by 1811 had nearly doubled to 1,253.¹³⁶ Although this enslaved workforce was small when compared to elsewhere in the British Empire, the inhabitants of St. Helena would remain dependent on enslaved laborers working in agricultural and skilled occupations until the abolition of slavery in 1834, after which point the island became an important site of British efforts to suppress the slave trade, serving as a base for the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron and housing over 25,000 "recaptive" Africans in depots between 1840 and 1868.¹³⁷ Environmental degradation, partially caused by the clearing of land for plantations, was first described by contemporaries soon after the EIC had begun to experiment with developing a plantation economy on the island in the 1680s. Deforestation and soil erosion would become major issues for the inhabitants of St. Helena,

eventually leading to the implementation of some of the first colonial conservation policies during the eighteenth century.¹³⁸

The EIC's efforts to develop a plantation economy on St. Helena in the 1680s, and the similar proposals for Madagascar and the East African coast, are part of a broader story about speculative schemes to export the plantation system to regions of the world beyond the Caribbean. The RAC attempted to develop sugar, indigo, and cotton plantations near its African forts at various points between 1690 and 1720, while in the mid-eighteenth century the colonial projector Malachy Postlethwayt envisioned extending the plantation system to West Africa under the auspices of the EIC.¹³⁹ Ultimately, what these ambitious projects highlight is how English overseas expansion was an interconnected phenomenon. Early modern merchants, planters, and colonial theorists did not divide the world neatly into an American plantation sphere and an area of Asian trade administered by the EIC. They had an expansive worldview, and on several occasions experimented with implementing the plantation system in the south Atlantic and the southwest Indian Ocean. Artificial divisions in the historiography between "Atlantic" and "Indian Ocean" world studies therefore mistake the contexts in which contemporaries were thinking; not in "Atlantic" frameworks, but in terms of the interconnectedness between the spaces and environments that the English were attempting to colonize across the globe.¹⁴⁰ In their effort to more firmly integrate the early modern Atlantic within broader global currents, Atlanticists have rightly looked to the emerging field of global history for inspiration. However, they might also fruitfully revisit an older style of "imperial" history – in which developments in multiple oceanic basins were analyzed simultaneously – but without discarding with the immense contributions that Atlantic history has made in challenging Eurocentric paradigms and parochial proto-nationalist histories.¹⁴¹ Considering together the histories of English activity in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds (and ideally other oceanic regions too) is a daunting task, as it requires extensive work reading across multiple historiographies and archives. But as the evidence presented in this article has shown, it does shed new light on the global dimensions of English overseas expansion and more effectively captures the interconnected way that contemporaries were thinking about colonization in this period.

Notes

1. The managing directors of the East India Company in the City of London were commonly referred to as "committees" during the seventeenth century. But for the purposes of clarity, the term "director" will be used throughout this article.
2. British Library, India Office Records (hereafter BL, IOR), E/3/90, f. 159, London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84. All archival references in this article are from these records at the British Library unless otherwise specified.
3. For the common usage of St. Helena by European vessels returning from Asia in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see: Royle, *Company's Island*, 11–17.
4. E/3/90, f. 108, London to St. Helena, 15 August 1683.
5. Schulenberg, "Transient Observations," 158, 201–202, 223, 326–327; Royle, *The Company's Island*, 26–27; Stern, *The Company-State*, 22; Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State," 1307, 1311; McAleer, "Looking East," 81. For studies of slavery in St. Helena more generally, see: Schulenberg, "Transient Observations," 200–205, 211–226; Royle, *Company's Island*, chap. 6; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, chap. 2; Fox, *A Bitter Draught*; Pearson, *Distant Freedom*; Bennett, "The East India Company."

6. The concept of a “culture hearth” was coined by Meinig in *The Shaping of America*. See also: Mulachy, *Hubs of Empire*, 3–4, 61–62.
7. On the Assada venture, see: Games, *The Web of Empire*, 208–215; Smith, “Canaanising Madagascar,” 277–298; Roper, *Advancing Empire*, 146–149.
8. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*.
9. Stern, “Politics and Ideology,” 1–23; Stern, “Soldier and Citizen,” 83–104; Stern, *Company-State*, chap. 1.
10. For example, see: Eacott, *Selling Empire*; Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*; Mishra, *A Business of State*; Veevers, *Origins of the British Empire in Asia*.
11. For example, see: Stern, *Company-State*; Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt*.
12. For example, see: Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism,” 487–501; Pettigrew and Veevers, eds, *The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History*; Smith, *Merchants*.
13. Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?” 725–742; Games, “Atlantic History,” 741–757; Stern, “British Asia and British Atlantic,” 693–712. On “Vast Early America,” see: Wulf, “Vast Early America.”
14. For examples of this scholarship, see: Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*; Games, *Web of Empire*; Ogborn, *Global Lives*; Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*; Rothschild, *The Inner Lives of Empire*; Stern, *Company-State*; Bowen, Mancke, and Reid, eds, *Britain’s Oceanic Empire*; Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire*; McDonald, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves*; Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign*; Eacott, *Selling Empire*.
15. Games, *Web of Empire*.
16. Smith, “The Global Interests of London’s Commercial Community,” 1118–1146; Smith, “Reinterpreting the Virginia Plantation”; Smith, *Merchants*, 212–217.
17. For the handful of older studies on the EIC and slavery, which mostly focused on Bengkulu in Sumatra, see: Logan, “The British East India Company”; Platt, “The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade”; Makepeace, “English Traders.” There is a vibrant historiography on slavery within the Dutch empire in Asia. For examples, see: Vink, “The World’s Oldest Trade”; Lucassen, “A Multinational and its Labor Force”; Ward, *Networks of Empire*.
18. Allen, *European Slave Trading*, chap. 2. For other recent scholarship on the EIC and slavery, see: Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge*, chap. 6; Allen, “Slavery in a Remote but Global Place”; Bennett, “The East India Company”; Bennett, “Migration”; Bennett, “Slaves, Weavers.” The history of slavery in early modern South Asia more broadly has an extensive historiography. A good starting point is Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*.
19. For another example, see: Kupperman, *Providence Island*.
20. For a succinct description of the main features of the Caribbean plantation system, see: Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 91–105; Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 3–4.
21. Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*; Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*; Schwartz, ed., *Tropical Babylons*.
22. The integrated plantation developed gradually in Barbados over the course of several decades and was closely linked to the use of violent disciplinary methods to organize enslaved Africans into regimented gangs. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 91–99; Burnard, *Planters Merchants and Slaves*, 4–5, 55–58.
23. Eltis, “The Total Product of Barbados,” 334–336. For quantitative data on Barbadian exports, see: Eltis, “New Estimates of Exports,” 631–648.
24. Mulachy, *Hubs of Empire*, 13–14.
25. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 17–18, 25–30. On the importance of transnational knowledge exchange with Brazil to the development of the Barbadian sugar industry, see Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 147–148; Otremba, “Inventing ingenios,” 129.
26. Schwartz, “A Commonwealth within Itself,” data gathered from the graph on page 169.
27. Samuel Hartlib, the Anglo-German intellectual living in London, commented in 1649 that because of “the mills being destroyed in Brasil, the Sugar-trade in Barbados prospers the more.” The Hartlib Papers, Ephemerides 1649 Part 3, 28/1/26B–38B, in Greengrass et al., eds, *The Hartlib Papers*.
28. The English Civil War has produced an enormous historiography. For a succinct narrative and analysis of events, see Braddick, *God’s Fury, England’s Fire*.

29. Newman, *A New World of Labor*, 73–74, 79–80.
30. Ligon, *True and Exact History*, 66–67; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 81–82; Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 137.
31. The eleven merchants were: Thomas Andrews, Jeremy Blackman, James Drax, Thomas Kendall, Martin Noell, William Pennoyer, Andrew Riccard, Maurice Thomson, Roger Vivian, William Williams, and John Wood. For the commercial involvement of these merchants in Barbados, see Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 16–166; Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 49–61; Bennett, “Merchant Capital.” For their role as directors of the EIC, see Sainsbury, *A Calendar of Court Minutes, etc., of the East India Company* (hereafter CCMEIC): Vol. 2, 195; Vol. 4, 331; Vol. 5, 52, 197–199, 268; Vol. 6, 23. For the history of company directors in the seventeenth century more broadly, see: Brock, “The Company Director.”
32. CCMEIC: Vol. 5, 197; Vol. 6, 22; Vol. 7, 218; Vol. 8, 322.
33. The Assada Adventurers with Barbadian investments were: Maurice Thomson, Martin Noell, William Pennoyer, Richard Batson, Jeremy Blackman, and Thomas Andrewes. For a full list of the “Assada Adventurers,” see: Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 192–193; CCMEIC: Vol. 3, 369–372.
34. CCMEIC: Vol. 3, 369–372; Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, 4.
35. Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, 3–4.
36. Games, *Web of Empire*, 210.
37. Hunt, *The Island of Assada*, 3–4.
38. *Ibid.*, 4. For examples of mercantilist authors who criticised how the East India trade was dependent on bullion exports, see: Misselden, *Free Trade*; Malynes, *The Maintenance of Free Trade*.
39. Games, *Web of Empire*, 213–214; Smith, “Canaanising Madagascar,” 290–293.
40. On the EIC’s 1657 charter, see: CCMEIC: Vol. 5, xiii–xx; Stern, *Company-State*, 21; Mishra, *A Business of State*, 313.
41. These merchants were: Maurice Thomson, Thomas Andrewes, James Drax, Andrew Riccard, Martin Noell, William Williams, William Vincent, and John Wood. Within this group were the new governor of the company (Thomson), and his deputy (Andrewes). CCMEIC: Vol. 5, 197–198.
42. For example, see: Maurice Thomson, Martin Noell, and Thomas Andrewes.
43. Interlopers in the East Indies trade, such as the Courteen Association, had been clamoring for permanent English settlements in the Indian Ocean world since the 1630s. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 168–181; Mishra, *A Business of State*, chap. 10.
44. CCMEIC: Vol. 5, 199.
45. Makepeace, “English Traders on the Guinea Coast,” 237–284; Bennett, “The East India Company,” 32–39.
46. Quoted in: Stern, *Company-State*, 21. See also: Roper, *Advancing Empire*, 171–174; Royle, *Company’s Island*, 17.
47. Royle, *Company’s Island*, 1–19.
48. The directors explained in January 1659 how they had “taken a resolution to Fortifie on the Island of St Hellena for the securing of refreshment to our ships homeward bound.” E/3/85, f. 88, EIC in London to Captain Peeter Butler, 3 January 1659; IOR B/26, f. 81; CCMEIC: Vol. 5, 302–303.
49. E/3/85, f. 114, London to Fort Cormantine, 28 November 1659. See also: E/3/85, ff. 114–115, London to St. Helena, 23 June 1659.
50. E/3/86, F.75, London to Fort Cormantine, 11 July 1662; E/3/86, ff. 85–86, London to Fort Cormantine, 27 October 1662.
51. There is archaeological evidence for the presence of Indigenous peoples in Barbados, but by the time the English first settled Barbados in 1627 they had deserted the island leaving it uninhabited. Arena, “Indian Slaves,” 74–75. St. Helena’s extreme isolation meant that it never had an indigenous population. Royle, *Company’s Island*, 84.
52. Royle, *Company’s Island*, 44–48.
53. Quoted in Royle, *Company’s Island*, 45. See also: Bennett, “Slaves, Weavers,” esp. 232–241.
54. Henry Gargen, *A Narrative of ye Island St Helena for the Planting it & Soile of ye Island & how the Inhabitants Employed &c from anno 1661 to 1665*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson

- Manuscripts C. 843. Gargen estimated the white English population to be 53 and the black population to be 21 at this time. For a more detailed analysis of this document and of the early years of settlement in St. Helena, see Royle, *Company's Island*, 24–25, 45–46, 174.
55. E/3/87, f. 162, London to Surat, 16 February 1669/70. See also: IOR H/33, f. 23, 103; E/3/90, f. 105, London to Fort St. George, 14 August 1683.
 56. There are numerous examples in letters sent by the directors of the EIC. For examples, see: E/3/88, f. 43, 68, 183, 249, 275, 287; E/3/89, f. 62; E/3/90, f. 159, 165–166. See also: Royle, *Company's Island*, 170. There were experiments with “China oranges” taking place simultaneously in Barbados during the 1670s. Anon., *Great newes from the Barbadoes*, 7.
 57. E/3/88, f. 70, London to St. Helena, 18 December 1674.
 58. E/3/90, f. 293, London to Fort St. George, 26 August 1685; E/3/91, f. 19, London to Fort St. George, 14 January 1685/86. On the construction of the East India “company-state,” which began in earnest in the 1670s and 1680s, see: Stern, *The Company-State*, chaps 1 and 2. On the expense associated with fortification and plantation with the EIC’s system, see Stern, *The Company-State*, 40.
 59. The £60,000 figure is quoted in Royle, *Company's Island*, 26. See also: IOR B/35, ff. 180–182; IOR B/36, f. 115. For the variety of supplies that the EIC paid for and dispatched to St. Helena at this time, see: Royle, *Company's Island*, 24–26. Also instructive is the list of goods sent to St. Helena on the *Johannah* in 1678 (a cargo worth £2809 16s 5d) in Royle, *Company's Island*, 25, 171–173. For the size of the company’s garrison in 1678, see: *ibid.*, 187. For the company providing free passage to colonists, see: *ibid.*, 45–46. For the expense of re-settling St. Helena after the Dutch invasion of 1672–1673, see: *ibid.*, 47–48.
 60. On the financial crisis of 1682–1683, see: Chaudhuri, *Trading World of Asia*, 63–64.
 61. E/3/90, f. 274, London to St. Helena, 6 May 1685.
 62. E/3/90, f. 177, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684.
 63. Child’s partnership agreement with the Port Royal merchant Samuel Bache stipulated that he was to supply the indentured servants and enslaved Africans needed to labor on the estate. Grassby, “Child, Sir Josiah, first baronet.” The directors of the Royal African Company were commonly called “assistants” in the seventeenth century.
 64. The members of the EIC’s directorate who signed the letter of 1 August 1683 and were also RAC directors during their business careers were: Sir Jeremy Sambrooke (deputy governor), Lord George Berkeley, Sir Josiah Child, John du Bois, William Jarret, Sir John Moore, Edward Rudge, Francis Tysson (sometimes spelt Tyson), and Sir James Ward. For the meeting of the court of directors on the 1 August 1683, see: IOR B/37, f. 158. For the EIC’s letter of the same date, see: E/3/90, f. 95, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683. A directory of the RAC’s directors between 1672 and 1750 can be found in Appendix 4 of Pettigrew’s, *Freedom's Debt*, 237–239.
 65. Despite being the EIC’s governor, Sir John Banks was not in attendance at the 1 August meeting. Coleman, “Banks, Sir John, baronet.”
 66. On the RAC, see: Davies, *The Royal African Company*; Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*.
 67. IOR B/37, f. 24.
 68. E/3/90, f. 95, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683.
 69. St. Helena Consultation, 26 July 1709, published in Janisch, ed., *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*, 90–91.
 70. E/3/90, f. 175, London to St. Helena, 1 April 1684.
 71. E/3/88, f. 43, Commission and Instructions to the Governor and Council of St Helena, 19 December 1673.
 72. E/3/90, f. 95, 98, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683; E/3/90, ff. 177–178, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684. One “Thomas How” was listed as a servant of the wealthy Barbados planter Christopher Codrington in a ticket of leave granted by the secretary of Barbados in 1679, which permitted How to journey to Nevis on the *Dove*, almost certainly after the expiry of his indenture contract. This is possibly the same man as the “Thomas Howe” who found employment within the EIC in 1683 and was dispatched to St. Helena due to his Caribbean experience. Hotten, ed., *The Original Lists*, 379. One John Knight is listed as a merchant

- operating out of Barbados in the late 1660s, and by 1673 he was serving on the council and listed as “one of the most eminent planters in Barbadoes” (owning 350 acres of land). It is probable Ralph Knight was his family relation. Barbados Department of Archives, RB 3/2, 879–80, 894–895; Sainsbury, *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*, Vol. 7, May 1673, 487–499.
73. E/3/90, f. 175, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684. One Robert Holden was appointed as the Receiver General and Collector of the Customs for Carolina in February 1679. It is likely this is the same Robert Holden who was appointed as deputy governor of St. Helena in 1683, and that it was while he was working in Carolina that he became acquainted with the commodities produced in the Greater Caribbean. Sainsbury, *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Vol. 10*, February 1679, 321–334.
 74. E/3/90, f. 251, London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684. See also: BL EAP524/1/3/2, 186.
 75. E/3/90, f. 178, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684; E/3/90, f. 251, London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684; IOR B/38, f. 58.
 76. Josias Cox appears in the Barbados census of 1679–1680 as the owner of 247 acres, which was manned by 122 enslaved Africans and 9 servants. Hotten, ed., *The Original Lists*, 500.
 77. On the “Barbadian diaspora,” see: Roberts, “Surrendering Surinam.”
 78. BL EAP524/1/3/2, f. 186, 262–263, 284–285, 317–318.
 79. E/3/90, f. 83, London to Fort St. George, 13 June 1683; E/3/90, ff. 95–96, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683; E/3/90, f. 159, London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84; E/3/90, f. 174, 178–179, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684; See also: IOR B/37, f. 148, 225.
 80. There is evidence that at least one St. Helena planter, named Thomas Smoult, wrote to the company’s directors to seek the credit he needed to raise a plantation. E/3/90, ff. 91–94, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683. For the sale of enslaved Africans on credit at St. Helena, see: Royle, *Company’s Island*, 86.
 81. For example, see: E/3/90, ff. 182–183, Instructions to Capt. Robert Knox of the *Tonqueen Merchant*, 4 April 1684. See also: Allen, *European Slave Trading*, chap. 2.
 82. E/3/90, f. 251, London to St. Helena, 26 November 1684.
 83. To enable them to communicate with planters and overseers and better impart their knowledge and skills, the company preferred their enslaved workers to be able to speak either English or Portuguese, the *lingua franca* of the Indian Ocean world. For examples, see: E/3/90, f. 154, London to Fort St. George, 29 February 1683/4; E/3/90, f. 159, London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84.
 84. Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge*, chap. 6; Winterbottom, “From Hold to Foredeck.”
 85. Otremba, “Inventing ingenios,” 129.
 86. E/3/91 f. 186, London to St. Helena, 3 August 1687. See also Royle, *Company’s Island*, 86.
 87. E/3/90, f. 180, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684; E/3/90, ff. 182–183, Instructions to Captain Robert Knox of the *Tonqueen Merchant*, 4 April 1684; Royle, *Company’s Island*, 86; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, 37.
 88. E/3/90, ff. 176–177, 180, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684.
 89. For “black servants” and the quotation see: E/3/87, f. 208, London to Bantam, 18 January 1670/71; IOR B/35, f. 49, 50, 64; IOR B/35, f. 183.
 90. Bennett, “Slaves, Weavers, and the Peopling of East India Company Colonies,” 239–241.
 91. Royle, *Company’s Island*, 93–94, 97.
 92. *Ibid.*, 96–99. For the quote relating to the 1695 conspiracy scare, see: IOR G/32/2, St. Helena Consultation, 2 December 1695.
 93. For the 1675 conspiracy scare see Anon., *Great Newes from the Barbadoes*; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 257–258. For the 1692 conspiracy, see: Sharples, “Discovering Slave Conspiracies,” 811–843. On rebellion in Barbados more generally, see Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados*.
 94. IOR G/32/2, ff. 13–14. For other examples of this trend, see: IOR G/32/2, ff. 7–10; IOR G/32/3, ff. 8–9; BL EAP524/1/3/1, ff. 67–72, 82–83; BL EAP524/1/3/2, ff. 21–22.
 95. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*.
 96. E/3/90, f. 91, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683. According to Richard Dunn’s population estimates for Barbados in 1684, it appears that while the EIC’s figure for the number of

- enslaved Africans on the island was relatively accurate (46,602), the belief that there were only 6,000 whites on Barbados was a considerable underestimate (19,568), see: Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 87.
97. Royle, *Company's Island*, 176.
 98. E/3/90, f. 178, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684.
 99. E/3/90, ff. 95–96, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683; E/3/90, f. 178, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684. This was presumably the 1661 Barbados slave code, entitled “An Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes,” TNA, CO 30/2, 16–26.
 100. IOR G/32/1, f. 49; BL EAP524/1/3/2, ff. 262–275. For more on the harsh treatment of enslaved people at St. Helena, see: Wilson, “Rethinking the Colonial State,” 1311.
 101. E/3/90, ff. 90–91, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683. In Barbados planters were legally compelled to maintain one white militia man for every ten enslaved Africans. For fears about the declining white population in Barbados and the countermeasures that were implemented, see: Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 87–89; Newman, *A New World of Labor*, 98–99. For the Barbados militia, see: Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 86–87.
 102. Despite lying between the tropics, St. Helena has a mild climate, with average temperatures fluctuating between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius over the course of a year. This is because prevailing southeast trade winds and the Benguela current act as a cooling influence. Grove, “St Helena as a Microcosm of the EIC World,” 250–252.
 103. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 5, 42–45, 96–103; Schulenburg, “Island of the Blessed,” 535–553; Schulenburg, “Transient Observations,” chap. 3.
 104. Gonsales, *The Man in the Moone*, 14–16. See also: Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 99–101.
 105. In 1644, for instance, the company employee Richard Boothby extolled the “pleasant, healthfull, fruitfull, and commodious” nature of the island. Boothby, *A True Declaration*, 24.
 106. E/3/90, f. 93, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683. The attitude that St. Helena was a pleasant, healthy, and commodious island survived well into the eighteenth century, and probably informed later efforts by the EIC to try to cultivate grape vines on the island (to produce wine) using Huguenot experts. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 107–108; Royle, *Company's Island*, 28–29; Stanwood, *The Global Refuge*, 95–96, 139–141; Schulenburg, “Transient Observations,” chap. 3.
 107. This theory features regularly in seventeenth-century travel narratives and promotional literature written for Virginia and New England. See: Kupperman, “The Puzzle of the American Climate,” 1262–1289; Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates,” 213–240.
 108. Quoted in Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge*, 153.
 109. E/3/90, ff. 93–94, London to St. Helena, 1 August 1683.
 110. E/3/90, f. 159, London to Bengal, 5 March 1683/84.
 111. Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire*, 164–173; E/3/92, f. 19, Instructions for Mr Poiror, 22 February 1688/89; Royle, *Company's Island*, 28. The EIC was not wholly mistaken in this observation. Altitudinal variation on St. Helena does, in fact, produce distinct microclimates. According to A. T. Grove, “temperatures on the island diminish with height above sea level at a rate of 1.3° per 100m of ascent, twice the usual rate.” See: Grove, “St Helena as a Microcosm,” 252.
 112. E/3/90, f. 178, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684.
 113. Schulenburg, “Island of the Blessed,” 537.
 114. On the Madagascar slave trade, see: Platt, “The East India Company,” 548–577; Armstrong, “Madagascar and the Slave Trade,” 217–222; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, 36–40.
 115. On difficulties with recruiting settlers, see: Royle, *Company's Island*, 44–47. On the capture of St. Helena by the Dutch in 1672–1673, see: Royle, *Company's Island*, 148–153. On the “ungovernable nature” of St. Helena’s inhabitants and the rebellion of white colonists and soldiers there in 1674, 1684, and 1693, see: Wilson, “Rethinking the Colonial State,” 1309–1311; Royle, *Company's Island*, 113–125. For slave rebellion, see: Royle, *Company's Island*, 96–99.
 116. A good example of the inhabitants of St. Helena stealing vessels to escape the island dates to June 1718, when a fishing boat was stolen by four enslaved men, who were all “gone together to seek their own country [Madagascar]” by heading in the direction of the

- rising sun. IOR G/32/6, St. Helena Consultation, 10 June 1718. See also: Allen, *European Slave Trading*, 45.
117. E/3/92, f. 19, Instructions to Mr Poiror, 22 February 1688/89.
 118. The only evidence which suggests that the governor and council of St. Helena actually did explicitly consider the “practices of other plantacons particularly Barbados” was in August 1686, when a new law was passed which provided compensation for slave-owners whose enslaved workers had committed crimes and were subsequently executed to preserve the public peace. BL EAP524/1/3/2, ff. 284–285.
 119. E/3/90, f. 179, London to St. Helena, 5 April 1684.
 120. IOR G/32/1, p. 134, London to St. Helena, 7 April 1708.
 121. IOR G/32/4, f. 23, 33, St. Helena Consultation, 20 September 1709. See also: St. Helena Consultations, 15 August 1710, 9 January 1711, and 7 March 1711, published in Janisch, ed., *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*, 93, 95, 96.
 122. Stern, *The Company-State*, chap. 1; Stern, “British Atlantic and British Asia,” 701–705.
 123. E/3/92, f. 201, London to Fort St. David, 6 March 1694.
 124. Veevers, *Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, passim.
 125. E/3/91, f. 179, London to St. Helena, 3 August 1687; IOR G/35/2, f. 99, London to Bengkulu, 3 August 1687.
 126. It is uncertain whether Nathaniel Cox ever reached Sumatra. In early January 1688 he was serving on the St. Helena council and debating whether to venture to Bengkulu. Cox was still on St. Helena in April 1688, when he was embroiled in controversy after being hauled into a tribunal to verify allegations that he had “misemployed the Honourable Company’s negroes; many times, converting their Labour to his owne particular profit.” After this, he disappears from the historical record. The two most likely possibilities are that he either died while en route to Sumatra or returned to England. BL EAP524/1/3/3, [no folio numbers, but the relevant councils were convened on 5 January 1687/88, 8 January 1687/88, and 26 April 1688].
 127. On sugar cultivation and slavery at Batavia, see: Blusse, *Strange Company*, 20, 26–27, 73, 84–88, 90–93. For the EIC emulating this model at Bengkulu, see: E/3/92, f. 61, London to Bengkulu, 19 December 1690. For similar observations, see: IOR G/35/6, f. 122, Bengkulu to London, 4 July 1710; E/3/98 f. 121, London to Bengkulu, 15 January 1713/14; Farrington, “Bengkulu: An Anglo-Chinese Partnership,” 114–117; Jayasuriya, “East India Company in Sumatra.”
 128. Thomas Bowrey is mostly remembered for his role in publishing the first English-Malay dictionary in 1701, and for his geographical descriptions of the East Indies. Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge*, chap. 2; Hunt, “Bowrey, Thomas.”
 129. London Metropolitan Archives, Ms. 3041/3 (ii), “Proposals for Settlements & Colonies on ye East Coast of Africa.” Historians have noted the existence of the documents outlining Thomas Bowrey’s Mozambique scheme, but they have never been studied in detail. Stern, *Company-State*, 181; Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge*, 173.
 130. On the wealth of the eighteenth-century Jamaican plantation economy, see: Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, chap. 4.
 131. London Metropolitan Archives, Ms. 3041/3 (ii).
 132. Smith, “Canaanising Madagascar,” 279, 293–294. See also: McDonald, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves*.
 133. For example, in September 2018 Carla Pestana and Molly Warsh convened a two-day symposium at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, which explored the concept of the “Early Modern Global Caribbean.”
 134. This is explored in detail in Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*.
 135. On the multiracial population of modern St. Helena, see: Royle, *Company’s Island*, 82.
 136. Allen, *European Slave Trading*, Appendix C, 226–227.
 137. Royle, *Company’s Island*, chap. 6; Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 3, 271.
 138. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 95–125; Grove, “St Helena as a Microcosm,” 255–258.

139. Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 142–145; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 265–273; Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*, 162–163; Burnard, "Placing British Settlement in the Americas in Comparative Perspective," 427–428.
140. This complements similar arguments made by Alison Games, Philip Stern, and Edmond Smith. Games, "Atlantic History"; Stern, "British Asia and British Atlantic"; Smith, "Canaanising Madagascar," 279, 293–294.
141. For scholarship written in the "imperial history" tradition that integrates the study of the English activity in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, see: Harlow, *Founding of the Second British Empire, Vol. 1*; Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*. Other more recent histories (not necessarily written in the "imperial history" tradition) have also successfully studied English overseas expansion in the seventeenth century while ignoring the artificial divisions between "Atlantic" and "Indian Ocean" worlds: Games, *Web of Empire*; Roper, *Advancing Empire*; Smith, *Merchants*.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mike Braddick, Tom Leng, Will Pettigrew, Justin Roberts, Edmond Smith, Alex Traves, and Mabel Winter for their helpful comments on various versions of this research. Thanks also to Nathaniel Millett and the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

The research for this article was generously funded by a University of Kent School of History Masters Scholarship (2015–2016) and an AHRC White Rose Competition Scholarship (Grant number: AH/L503848/1) at The University of Sheffield (2016–2019). I am also grateful to have been awarded a Royal Historical Society Adam Matthew Digital Collections subscription, which helped me to access archival material in 2020–2021 during the Covid-19 crisis.

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