# Introduction
# A Free Wage Labor African Diaspora

African laborers known simply as "Kru" or "Kroomen" from the west coast of Africa played a significant role in the history of global trade in the nineteenth century. Navigating ships through adverse surf, currents and sub-sea terrain, transporting cargoes, hiring out their labor on European and American commercial and military ships sailing the West African coast, Kru mariners and shoreside laborers worked for wages in-kind and eventually monetary wages. They labored in ports in West Africa before expanding their services throughout the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Beginning as early as perhaps the fifteenth century, Kru-speaking peoples traded with passing ships until the 1790s when the British offered free wage labor contracts to Kru seafarers who made the journey from their homeland on the Kru Coast (modern Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire) to work in Freetown in the Sierra Leone Peninsula. Almost immediately, they established a labor community in Freetown that gradually grew to nearly half of the port's population in the first decade of the nineteenth century and ensured their regular employment on British ships sailing the West African coast.[1] This period saw the expansion of Kru labor beyond ships in shoreside infrastructural projects, porterage, and domestic work.

The establishment of Freetown proved to be a catalyst affecting Kru labor as it became institutionalized through free wage labor contracts and had a deep impact on Kru social, political, and economic norms in their diaspora community and homeland. While Kru continued to trade with passing ships on the coast, the traditional age-set system that governed intergenerational power structures in their communities gradually shifted towards supplying a steady flow of migratory laborers for contracts abroad based on ever-growing demand. Competition between the Liberian state (founded in 1847) and European powers to harness the economic benefits of Kru labor fostered increased growth in Kru diaspora communities as Kru workers sought economic opportunities beyond the reach of Liberian policy. By the close of the nineteenth century, Kru workers had established diaspora communities throughout the Atlantic and Caribbean and forged shipboard communities while contributing to abolition and military campaigns in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and on the African continent.

**1** Thomas Ludlam, "An Account of the Kroomen on the Coast of Africa," *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 2 (1825): 45; Christopher Fyfe, *A Short History of Sierra Leone* (London: Longmans, 1962), 44.

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This book is about the Kru free wage labor force that worked with the British on ships and shoreside in ports and on estates, used their expert mariner skills in navigation, delivered and received cargoes, carried weapons, and engaged in battles at the front in such theatres as Hong Kong and southern Africa. Kru oral traditions, ship captain and traveller accounts, British Royal Navy muster lists, official policy in Britain and its colonies, gravestones, paintings, sketches, music, and postcards illuminate the global nature of the Kru diaspora. Although Kru worked on contract with other Europeans and Americans, particular attention is focused on their service with the British who offered the bulk of their contractual employment and whose relationship had a much more profound socio-economic impact in their homeland and diaspora communities.

The deep roots of their diaspora can be traced to fishing villages that grew into trading towns along the West African coastline known interchangeably as the Malaguetta Coast, Grain Coast, Pepper Coast, Windward Coast, and by the nineteenth century, based on the mass export of Kru laborers, the Kru Coast.[2] The identity of its Kru-speaking inhabitants became associated with surfboats and the practice of paddling and fishing far out to sea as observed by de Sintra in 1461 and Duarte Pacheco Pereira in 1508.[3] Kru oral traditions suggest the Portuguese were their first European trading partners following their migration from the interior to the coast.[4] Within several decades of Pereira, in 1555, Captain William Towerson recognized what appeared to be a shared language among the inhabitants of the Malaguetta Coast.[5] His observations are supported by Kru oral traditions and twentieth century linguists, Dietrich Westermann and M.A. Bryan,

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**2** Ronald W. Davis, *Ethnohistorical Studies on the Kru Coast* (Newark: Liberian Studies Monograph Series 5, 1976), 5.

**3** Pedro de Sintra, *Voyages of Cadamosto*, Second Series, 80, trans. Gerald Crone (London: Hakluyt Society, 1927), 83–84; Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, Second Series, 80, trans. and ed. George H.T. Kimble (London: Hakluyt Society, 1936), 110.

**4** Kru belonging to the Proper Kru, Gbeta and Kabor *dakwe* are thought to have migrated down the St. John River before dispersing eastward on the coast. Interviews with Deputy Governor S. Tugbe Worjloh in New Krutown, Monrovia on December 11, 2012 and Doe Smith (retired labor lawyer and son of Kru headman) in Krutown, Freetown on December 13, 2012 suggest the interior migration to the coast occurred at an unknown date before contact with the Portuguese who became their first European trading partners (see Appendix B for a full list of interviewees). Also see Jo Mary Sullivan, "The Kru of Liberia," review of *Ethnohistorical Studies on the Kru Coast* by Ronald W. Davis, *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 2 (1978): 282; Christine Behrens, *Les Kroumen de la* Côte *Occidentale d'Afrique* (Bordeaux: Center d'études de Géographie Tropicale, 1974), 7.

**5** William Towerson, "Voyage to Guinea in 1555," 241, accessed on June 14, 2018, https://www.e-reading.club/chapter.php/80243/53/Kerr_-_A_General_History_and_Collection_of_Voyages_and_Travels%2C_Vol.VII.html.

who subdivided the region between Cape Mount (modern Liberia) and the Bandama River (Côte d'Ivoire) into two Kru dialect clusters. Belonging to the family of Niger-Congo languages (according to Joseph Greenberg), Kru speakers in the west between the Bassa region and Sassandra River constituted the Bakwé cluster, while those in the east between the Sassandra River and the Bandama River formed the Bété cluster.[6] The fundamental role of the surfboat in subsistence and trade and shared language became the lasting hallmarks of Kru identity along the coast. Beyond the vantage of European ship captains and merchants, Kru-speaking peoples had many layers of identity that distinguished one community from another including dialect, *dako* (territorial unit based on collective historical tradition), village, trade items, and in some cases, secret society affiliation and ceremonial masks.

Maps remain a testament to the presence of Kru-speaking traders in the region as early as the sixteenth century. The earliest historical mention directly associated with the Kru dates to 1588, when a location named "Crua" on the southeastern coast of the Malaguetta Coast appeared on a map in James Welsh's *A Voyage to Benin beyond the Country of Guinea made by Master James Welsh, who set forth in the Yeere 1588*.[7] Nearly a century later, Olfert Dapper mentioned a town called "Crouw" or "Krau" in the same vicinity in 1686.[8] According to Kru oral traditions, the name "Krao" (also pronounced "Klao" or "Claho") was the original name of the people in the region before it morphed to "Kru" or "Kroo."[9] Around 1600, Pieter de Marees located a village named "Crou" in the same region that was described by Levinus Hulsius several years later in 1606.[10] Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Crou became a

**6** Interviews with Kru Chief Davis in Krutown, Freetown, on December 4 and 5, 2012, Smith and Deputy Governor S. Tugbe Worjloh reveal that the Kru language was a binding factor between coastal peoples even while recognizing their internal differences. Dietrich Westermann and M.A. Bryan, *Languages of West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1952), 48–54; Joseph H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa*, *International Journal of American Linguistics* 29, no. 1 (Part 2) (Publication of the Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, 25) (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1963), 8, 39, 167.

**7** James Welsh, "A Voyage to Benin beyond the Countrey of Guinea made by Master James Welch, who set forth in the Yeere 1588," in *The Principle Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. Richard Hakluyt, vol. 6 (London: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1904), 451.

**8** Harry Johnston, *Liberia* 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), 1: 88.

**9** Interviews with Deputy Governor Worjloh and Smith suggest that Kru oral tradition recognizes the name Kru having evolved from "Krao" or "Klao". Ronald Davis also suggests that the word "Krao" is the most plausible origin of the word Kru. See Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 2.

**10** Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 1602, eds. A Van Dantzig and Adam Jones (London: British Academy, 1987), 7, 14.

major trading town and watering station that was frequently included on maps of the region and played a role in the naming of local inhabitants on the coast.

Early trade between Europeans and Kru-speaking peoples suggests that ship captains formed a dependency on Kru surfboats in order to conduct trade on their coast. As early as the seventeenth century, Kru were observed as essential to European landings through the challenging surf and rocky seabed that characterized their coastal waters as they transported Europeans from ship to shore and back in their surfboats for the purpose of trading, watering, and replenishing supplies.[11] Furthermore, the design and number of occupants in the boats, which ranged from single-manned craft to three or more paddlers, are reminiscent of Pereira's description of local boats nearly two centuries earlier and reveal the deep roots of mariner tradition in Kru-speaking communities in the region.[12]

With trade firmly established on the coast by the seventeenth century, Kru-speaking peoples entered the next phase of labor by working on European ships sailing the coast as one Spanish ship manifest in Elmina Castle dated to 1645 indicates.[13] In order to ensure that Kru seafarers were not enslaved but free to labor on ships, early nineteenth century accounts and Kru oral traditions first recorded in the 1850s tell of a form of scarification applied by the Kru that dated to at least the early seventeenth century known as the "Kru mark".[14] The mark was made

**11** Jean Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea, and of the Ethiopia Inferior, Vulgarly Angola... And a New Relation of the Province of Guiana, and of the Great Rivers of Amazons and Oronoque in South-America* (London: A. & J. Churchill, 1732), 128–141. Barbot's account was published in English in 1732, 20 years after his death in 1712. The publication was based on observations he made during his 1678–79 and 1681–82 voyages, which was originally published in French in the 1688. It is most probable that the 1732 publication was enhanced by his brother James Barbot who may have added details based on his voyage to West Africa in 1699. See P.E.H. Hair, Adam Jones and Robin Law, eds., *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa: 1678–1712* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1992).

**12** Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, 110.

**13** The "Journal of Sao Jorge da Mina" is in K. Ratelband, ed., *Vijf Dagregisters van Het Kasteel Sao Jorge da Mina (Elmina) aar de Goudkust, 1647–1945* (Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), 11. See George E. Brooks, *The Kru Mariner in the 19th Century: A Historical Compendium* (Newark, Delaware: Liberian Studies Monologue Series no. 1, 1972), 2; Reverend John Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History, Conditions and Prospects: With Numerous Engravings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), 103. Wilson does not mention the exact date but suggests that the Proper Kru were the first to work on European vessels before all other Kru-speaking peoples.

**14** Parliamentary Papers, "Reports from Commodore Sir George Collier concerning the Settlements on the Gold and Windward Coasts of Africa," vol. 12 (1820), 15; Esu Biyi, "The Kru and Related Peoples, West Africa, Part I," *Journal of the African Society* 29, no. 113 (1929): 72; Reverend Connelly, "Report of the Kroo People," *American Colonization Thirty-Ninth Annual Report* (1856): 38. Interviews with Reverend Joseph Kamara in Freetown on December 12, 2012, Chief Davis, and

by an incision down the forehead with a needlepoint and charcoal (in some cases dyed blue), often accompanied by three incisions on the cheeks, which became widely recognized amongst European slave traders and African merchants as a signifier of Kru identity, independence, and immunity from enslavement.[15] It seems that scarification may well have been a cultural development within Kru communities as a direct response to trading with Europeans, which in theory ensured that the Kru were not enslaved. It may also be that Kru scarification practices preceded European contacts and were adapted to a new system of trade with Europeans, yet this remains speculative.[16] While it is not clear whether all Kru-speaking peoples bore the mark from its inception, it became what one nineteenth century observer called a "passport" that was supposed to guarantee Kru laborers return passage to their villages following the completion of shipboard work.[17] The Kru mark continues to be remembered in Kru oral traditions and it was frequently mentioned in nineteenth century ship captain, missionary, and traveller accounts throughout West Africa and became a marker of Kru identity in their diaspora in locations as varied as British Guiana and Zanzibar.[18]

The founding of Freetown in 1792 opened a new era of Kru employment with the British as they established a permanent diaspora community that supplied

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Worjloh revealed that Kru oral tradition remembers tattooing as having been practiced since trading with Europeans was inaugurated. Worjloh revealed that the mark could be blue or black and was created using a needlepoint and charcoal, which left a permanent mark. For a discussion on tattooing and scarification in West Africa, see Katrina Keefer, "Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register, 1814–1815," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 47, no. 3 (2013): 537–553; Katrina Keefer, "Group Identity, Scarification, and Poro Among Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone, 1808–1819," *Journal of West African History* 3, no.1 (2017): 1–26.

**15** Parliamentary Papers, "Reports from Commodore Sir George Collier concerning the Settlements on the Gold and Windward Coasts of Africa," vol. 12 (1820), 15; J.W. Lugenbeel, "Native Africans in Liberia – Their Customs and Superstitions," *African Repository* 28, no. 6 (1852): 173; George Thompson, *The Palm-Land; Or West Africa, Illustrated: Being a History of Missionary Labors and Travels with Descriptions of Men and Things in Western Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1859), 189; Robert Clarke, "Sketches of the Colony of Sierra Leone and Its Inhabitants," *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 2 (1863): 354; Adolphe Burdo, *The Niger and the Benueh; Travels in Central Africa*, trans. Mrs. George Sturge (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1880), 83; Agnes McAllister, *Lone Woman in Africa: Six Years on the Kroo Coast* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1896), 142–143.

**16** Connelly, "Report," 38.

**17** Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 76, Appendix, No. 6 *Aprilis*, 1821, p. 787.

**18** Henry Kirke, *Twenty-Five Years in British Guiana* (London: S. Low, Marsten, 1898), 171–172; Reverend J.J. Halcombe, *Mission Life: A Magazine of Information about Church Missions and the Countries in which They are Being Carried On* (London: Lothian and Co, 1866), 58–59.

the British with a readily available labor pool for work on ships and shoreside. Whereas they had previously only been hired as transient workers between their trading towns, ships, and worksites, they now remained for longer contractual work periods as an institutionalized system of migratory labor based on 18-month to three-year contracts developed between Kru villages and Freetown. Their quarter gradually became known as "Krootown", and later, Krutown.[19] Perhaps the most visible marker of the Kru diaspora, Krutown provided a space where the Kru spoke their language and dialects, sang their music, practiced secret society rituals, and maintained direct links with their homeland, as evident in the street names that were named after specific Kru villages.[20]

Following the British decree to abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807, Kru were increasingly employed in the British Royal Navy and tasked with intercepting slave ships throughout the Atlantic Ocean, and from the 1860s, the Indian Ocean. Increased work opportunities on commercial and military vessels coupled with the Kru's ability to find employment in Freetown for other destinations throughout the Atlantic enabled a broad network of labor communities to emerge. Krutowns modelled after the one in Freetown and smaller quarters soon developed in Cape Coast, Ascension Island, Fernando Po, Simon's Town (South Africa), Monrovia, and Lagos as a result of their service in the Royal Navy.[21] Other diaspora communities such as those in Calabar and Bonny in the Niger Delta and across the Atlantic in Trinidad and British Guiana were the result of commercial contracts in agriculture, marine transportation, timber, and mining.

As job opportunities increased in the nineteenth century, the Kru's reputation and cultural influence grew exponentially affecting language, literature, art, and music throughout the Atlantic world. The Kru maintained their hard-

**19** *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, vol. 13 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), 65; *Missionary Register for 1817*, vol. 5 (London: Seeley, 1817), 251; *The Christian Observer* 15, no. 11 (1816): 756.

**20** See Chapter 2.

**21** All of the Krutowns and quarters mentioned were founded as a result of their employment with the British with the exception of Monrovia. Kru traded in Cape Mesurado for centuries and they are thought to have formed a permanent diaspora community in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Their community in Monrovia provided the same services to British ships as they did in their homeland, loading and unloading cargoes and bringing crew from ship to shore and back. Kru hired in Monrovia also had the opportunity to work on British ships and circulate between the network of Krutowns throughout the Atlantic. Their employment became more complicated with the founding of the colony of Liberia in 1822 as American Colonization Society agents sought to control their labor through taxation as discussed in Chapter 6. See Merran Fraenkel, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 71.

working reputation as the "Irishmen of Western Africa" compelling Captain John Whitford to boldly proclaim that the Kru were the "only African race on the West Coast that can be depended upon to work for merchants or on board ships."[22] Across the Atlantic, in January 1862, *The New York Times* ran a piece that described Kru mariners as an "invaluable adjunct to a cruiser on the coast."[23] Sailing between their homeland villages and diaspora communities, Kru were instrumental in the spread of a creolised version of English as the lingua franca of trade along the West African coast.[24] They were observed by ship captains and missionaries as speaking creolized versions of English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese.[25] Kru were routinely referenced in Victorian literature, most notably by Rudyard Kipling and Charles Dickens, who illuminated the connection between Kru seafarers and the British public, both bound by the production and transportation of commodities such as palm oil.[26] Their cultural influence extended into the twentieth century, as artist Pablo Picasso took inspiration from Grebo (Kru-speaking peoples) masks during his blue period in order to produce one of his most famous pieces, *The Guitarist*.[27] The rhythms and call-and-response singing style informing Kru work songs on ships sailing between their villages and diaspora communities (which occasionally included guitar accompaniment) is recognized in oral traditions and scholarly literature as having influenced the

**22** John Whitford, *Trading Life in Western and Central Africa* (Liverpool: The "Porcupine" Office, 1877), 27.

**23** January 4, 1862, *The New York Times*, 2.

**24** For an informative discussion on the spread of so-called "Pidgin English" as a lingua franca in West Africa, see David Dalby, *Black through White: Patterns of Communication* (Bloomington: Indiana University of African Studies Program, 1970), 1–40.

**25** Wilson Armistead, *A Tribute for the Negro: Being a Vindication of the Moral, Intellectual and Religious Capabilities of the Coloured Portion of Mankind* (Manchester: William Irwin, 1848), 252; Edward Manning, "Six Months on a Slaver," in *Slave Ships and Slaving with an Introduction by Capt. Ernest H. Pentecost, R.N.R.* (1879), ed. George Francis Dow (1927; repr., Cambridge, MD: Cornell Maritime Press, 1968), 326; William Bosman, *New and Accurate Description* (London: J. Knapton, 1705), 484.

**26** Charles Dickens, "Our Phantom Ship," in A Collection of British Authors, vol. CCXII: *Household Words* V (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1852): 363–378; Charles Dickens, "Cheerily, Cheerily!" *HouseHold Words: A Weekly Journal*, no. 131 (Saturday September 25, 1852): 25–31; Maragret Mendelawitz, *Charles Dickens Australia: Selected Essays from Household Words 1850–1859 Book Two* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2011), 125–126; Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea* in *The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling*, vol. 16, Part 2 (London: Charles Scribner's Sons Publications, 1899), 75.

**27** Jonathan Hay, "Primitivism Reconsidered (Part 2): Picasso and the Krumen," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 69–70 (Spring-Autumn 2018): 227–250; Christine Poggi, "Picasso's First Constructed Sculpture: A Tale of Two Guitars," *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 2 (June 2012): 274–298.

growth and popularity of palm wine guitar styles throughout West Africa in the 1920s.[28]

The Kru case exemplifies Frederick Cooper's call to "remember how much Africa has been shaped by its connections to the rest of the world and how much the world as we know it has been shaped by the labor of Africans."[29] Yet, until recently, as important as they were, the Kru largely remained a silent partner in the canon of British maritime history. British-Kru working relations were informed by race but in a way that was unique from the institution of slavery, which sought to dehumanize the enslaved. While the British hired the Kru, they were never perceived as equals but were frequently assigned the derogatory term "Kroo Boys."[30] Regardless of their intention and any sentiment the British felt towards the Kru, the application of the term "boys" to Kru of all ages and rank meant that they were not considered real men in the European sense simply because of their black race and their perceived lower position of societal development in stadial theory.[31] They were often romanticized by the British as an "exotic" "other." Assigned almost animalistic properties in some written accounts and newspaper images, they were perceived as perfect for meeting the arduous physical demands required on contracts in tropical climates, while British

**28** Cynthia Schmidt, "Kru Mariners and Migrants of the West African Coast," in *Garland Encyclopedia of Music*, ed. Ruth Stone (New York: Routledge, 1997), 386 – 398; Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, ed. Nathanial Hawthorne (London: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 16 – 17; John Smith, *Trade and Travels in the Gulph of Guinea* (London: Simkin, Marshall, 1851), 105; May 12, 1849, *The Athenaeum Journal of Literature, Science and Fine Arts*, no. 1124 (London, J. Francis, 1849), 482. I was able to record a traditional Kru work song as sung by Chief Davis during an interview in Freetown on December 4, 2012. He revealed that work songs functioned to uplift the morale of Kru laborers.

**29** Frederick Cooper, "African Labor History," in *Global Labour History: A State of the Art*, ed. Jan Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 91 – 116.

**30** They are referred to as "Krooboys" in Henry Buckler, *Central Criminal Court. Minutes of Evidence, Taken in Short-Hand*, no. 618 (London: George Herbert, 1836), 510; Thomas Stevens, "Punjabee Well-Jumpers and Krooboy Divers," *Harper's Round Table* VIII (September 27, 1887), 7.

**31** A product of the Scottish Enlightenment, stadial theory refers to the four stages theory of human societies, which proposes that human societies evolve from a primitive society characterized by hunting and pastoralism and agriculture before they reach the commercial stage, which was the fourth stage and regarded as the most civilized. Europeans understood themselves to inhabit the fourth stage, while African societies were assigned a place in the lower three stages. For further discussion of the four stages of stadial theory see Nathaniel Wolloch, "The Civilizing Process, Nature, and Stadial Theory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 2 (2011): 245 – 259; Ronald Meek, *Social Science and The Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 5.

sailors were deemed "unfit" for such labor.[32] Kru oral traditions show that they were well aware of uneven socio-economic relations in their workplaces, yet wages and the opportunity to rise in social status back in their homeland outweighed any animosity they felt towards the British.[33] After all, Kru had largely rejected two of the most important symbols of British culture in the period: Christianity and literacy.

However, the character and actions of Kru laborers were shrouded in ambiguity having worked towards the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trades on British, French, and American ships, and Royal Navy vessels tasked with intercepting slave *dhows* (slave ships circulating between the Middle East and East Africa) in the Indian Ocean, while also transporting enslaved Africans on slave ships along the West African coast bound for the Americas.[34] In some cases, Kru served on slave ship voyages from West Africa to the Caribbean, most notably to Cuba between the 1830s and 1850s.[35] As a result of these overlapping labor trajectories, the Kru free wage labor diaspora and labor networks that developed may point to the entrepreneurial nature of the Kru as a mechanism of survival in the face of encroaching capitalist and colonial forces in their homeland.

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**32** Edward Bold, *The Merchant's and Mariner's African Guide* (Salem: Cushing and Appleton, 1823), 122; Charles Rockwell, *Sketches of Foreign Travel: And Life at Seal Including a Cruise on Board a Man-of-War, as Also a Visit to Spain, Portugal, the South of France, Italy, Sicily, Malta, The Ionian Islands, Continental Greece, Liberia and Brazil; And a Treatise of the Navy of the United States* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842), 258. The romanticization or exoticization of the African was an important part of constructing the colonial subject or "other" from the vantage of the imperial gaze of the European. For a discussion on nineteenth-century European racism that regarded Africans as uncivilized, savage or "other" see V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (London: James Currey, 1988), 1–23; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (London: James Currey, 1994), 1–70; Meek, *Social Science*, 5; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 1–30.

**33** Interviews with Chief Davis, Smith, and Deputy Governor Worjloh suggest that the Kru remember contractual labor with the British with a sense of pride.

**34** See Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures and the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986); Erik Gilbert, *Dhows and the Colonial Economy of Zanzibar, 1860–1970* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004).

**35** "M.L. Melville and James Hook to the Earl of Aberdeen, Sierra Leone, August 14, 1844," no. 69, in General Report of the Emigration Commissioners vol. 2, *Correspondence with the British Commissioners at Sierra Leone, Havana, Rio De Janeiro, Surinam, Cape of Good Hope, Jamaica, Loanda, and Boa Vista Relating to the Slave Trade* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1845), 84.

## Diaspora

The Kru free wage labor diaspora is framed within the concept of an "African diaspora." Alusine Jalloh proposes the following model:

> The African diaspora was born out of the voluntary and involuntary movement of Africans to various areas of the world since ancient times, but involuntary migration through the trans-Saharan, trans-Atlantic, and Indian Ocean slave trades accounts for most of the black presence outside of Africa today. The concept of the African diaspora has also come to include the psychological and physical return of people of African descent to their homeland, Africa.[36]

Jalloh's emphasis on the "voluntary" movement of Africans and both the "physical" and "psychological" return to a homeland resonates with the Kru who routinely circulated between diaspora communities and their homeland on the Kru Coast in timeframes dictated by the terms of their contracts. Their diaspora was unique from the larger enslaved populations in the Americas, which derived its number from an estimated 12.8 million Africans who were sent from Africa.[37]

The Kru diaspora can be qualified as a free wage labor diaspora based on several factors. These include that the Kru were paid for their labor (whether in-kind or cash), they served on limited-term contracts, they had the power and choice to continue to labor or terminate a contract, and they carried reference letters known as "books" that ensured future employment as they circulated between labor communities and their homeland. Wage labor historians Peter Scholliers and Leonard Schwarz have defined wage labor as "(legally) free labor done by a person for another person or an institution."[38] The editorial board of the *International Review of Social History*, despite their critical stance towards the shortcomings of free labor, suggests that a primary feature of free wage labor in the Marxist sense is that the worker is "free of non-economic compulsions to

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**36** Alusine Jalloh, "Introduction," in *The African Diaspora*, eds. Alusine Jalloh and Stephen E Maizlish (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 3.

**37** Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database www.slavevoyages.org. The estimated figure of 12.8 million refers to the number of Africans who left Africa. The third edition of Paul Lovejoy's *Transformations in Slavery* (2011) shows that the number of enslaved Africans who left has risen from 12.5 million to 12.8 million, according to Lovejoy's calculations. See Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18.

**38** Peter Scholliers and Leonard Schwarz, "The Wage in Europe Since the Sixteenth Century," in *Experiencing Wages: Social and Cultural Aspects of Wage Forms in Europe since 1500*, eds. Peter Scholliers and Leonard Schwarz (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 7.

work."[39] While some Kru were most certainly sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trades over the course of four centuries, Kru oral traditions, British official papers, and wage lists reveal that the great majority of Kru were engaged in a voluntary diaspora both during and after the trans-Atlantic slave trade era in which they worked for wages and were not enslaved.

In the nineteenth century, regardless of where Kru worked, official accounts reveal that the British considered them as "free labourers" or "free agents" and they thus had a large degree of self-determination.[40] Royal Navy and commercial ships created a fluid diasporic space that could not contain the Kru within a rigid racial system based on a zero-sum outcome that was the order informing white-black racial relations throughout much of the world in the nineteenth century in the form of slavery.[41] Kru did however run the risk of enslavement when sailing on slave ships to the Caribbean where they could be arbitrarily sold into slavery.[42] While serving on Royal Navy vessels tasked with intercepting slave ships, Kru risked capture should the impounded vessel be overthrown en route to the disembarkment port before continuing their voyage to the Americas.[43] Kru frequently led the charge, boarded slave ships, and served on battlefields in naval brigades, putting their lives at risk for which some were awarded

**39** Editorial Committee, "Free and Unfree Labour," *International Review of Social History* 35, no. 1 (1990): 1.

**40** H. Barkly, "Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting," Fifth Report from the Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting Together with Minutes of Evidence, And Appendix, March 18 1848 (1848), 24; Despatches from the Right Honorable Earl Grey to Governor Barkly, Enclosure in no. 19, July 5, 1850, Accounts and Papers, Sugar Growing Colonies, vol. 9, Session February 4-August 8 1851 (1851), 402; Robert Gordon Latham, *The Ethnology of British Colonies and Dependencies* (London: J. Van Voorst, 1851), 38.; J.G. Cruickshank, "African Immigrants After Freedom," *Timehri: The Journal of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana* 6, Third Series (1919): 81.

**41** Zero-sum is a concept rooted in game theory that proposes that one party can only benefit at the expense of another party. In the case of British-Kru relations, both parties were able to benefit economically from contractual labor despite racial hierarchies underscoring their relationship. See Alan D. Taylor, *Mathematics in Politics: Strategy, Voting, Power and Proof* (New York: Springer, 1995), 1–2, 21–25; Robert Harms, *Games Against Nature: A Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–10.

**42** Manning, "Six Months," 326, 349. Manning reveals that the Kru were paid in tobacco and clothes for their service of managing the enslaved on the trans-Atlantic voyage. Yet, he also implies that some Kru may have been sold upon arrival in the Caribbean, which is at odds with nearly all other nineteenth century accounts; see Chapter 1.

**43** Eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts mention the enslavement of free laboring African crewmen who were detained and sold in the Americas; see British and Foreign State Papers, 1822–1823, "Inclosure – Evidence of Quashie Sam" (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1850), 522.

medals.[44] Their normal role as stevedores, porters, and boatmen could be augmented at a moment's notice to heroic status.

However, their mobility was not uniform amongst the nineteenth century workforce. On ships, Kru worked alongside British sailors and other Africans such as the Fante, Yoruba, Liberated Africans, "Seedies", and Asian "Lascars."[45] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker illuminated the diverse nature of ship crews in the period, who formed a "multi-racial, multi-ethnic, international working class."[46] Unlike enslaved black seamen who worked on British ships in the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and who had a degree of mobility, contracted Kru were not operating under the same socio-economic structure of slavery and were therefore not obliged to remain on the ship if they were not satisfied that the terms of their contractual employment were not being met.[47] Enslaved seafarers and bondsmen were usually identifiable in wage books of the period with a line indicating the wages due to their master.[48] In stark contrast, wage lists and the migratory nature of their employment signal that Kru were not enslaved on British vessels in the nineteenth century.

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**44** Roy Dutton, *Forgotten Heroes: Zulu and Basuto Wars including Medal Roll 1877–8–9* (Prenton: Infodial, 2010), 374; ADM 127/40, "Acting Lieutenant Henn to Commander Colomb, 6 May 1869, and Admiralty to Commodore Heath," no. P270, September 21, 1869; Raymond C. Howell, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1987), 71.

**45** "Seedies" was the name assigned to Liberated Africans who served on ships along the east coast of Africa. The term "seedies" derives from the word *sayyids*, which was the term applied to Africans in India. The British term evolved to refer to sailors from Zanzibar and the Swahili coast in the nineteenth century. See Alessandro Stanziani, *Sailors, Slaves and Immigrants: Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750–1914* (New York City: Springer: 2014), 63. "Lascars" was the term assigned to Arab and Southeast Asian sailors who engaged in labor with the British. For information on the origins of the word "Lascar" and their labor with the British see Michael H. Fisher, Shompa Lahiri, and Shinder S. Thandi, *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishers, 2007), 6–9.

**46** Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, no.2 (1990): 225–252. Although focusing on the eighteenth century, their findings on the diverse nature of crews continued to inform crews on nineteenth-century British ships.

**47** For further discussion on enslaved seamen serving on British ships see Heather Cateau, "Itinerant Slaves: On the Plantation's Margins-Hired Slaves and Seamen," paper presented at the Association of Caribbean Historians 35th Annual Conference, Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico, April 28-May 2, 2003.

**48** An example is found in Captain John Small's wage book for the *Hawk* in 1781. He hired six Fante seamen and one enslaved black seaman as he sailed from West Africa to Liverpool. John William, the enslaved black seaman, held bondsman status and was forced to give his earnings to his master. See Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33. For information on West Indian seamen working on serving

Beyond ships and ports in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, Kru also formed an important component of a mixed labor force in ports and on estates in the Caribbean.[49] In the post-slavery period after 1838, the British government provided economic initiatives for West Africans to work in the Caribbean plantation setting. British planters understood hiring migrant workers as a strategic maneuver to compete with slave-produced crops in French, Spanish, and Dutch domains and ultimately realize their 1815 goal at the Congress of Vienna by abolishing all illegal trans-Atlantic slave trading and slavery. The consensus amongst planters in the British Caribbean was that they needed an immediate new source of labor as a result of the shortage caused by Emancipation.[50] Kru were part of an economic "experiment" in the region and were hired along with Indians, Chinese, emancipated African descendants as well as African laborers including Yoruba, Ibo, and Congos.[51] However, unlike the emancipated Africans who in many cases remained on their former master's grounds and indentured workers from Asia who were tied to estates in the Caribbean with the threat of punishment for breaking contractual obligations, Kru laborers had mobility and the choice of working on contracts or seeking out new opportunities.[52]

In Trinidad and British Guiana, they were frequently recorded as moving between jobs and were "unindentured", meaning not tied to any single estate or

on ships see Alan Cobley, "Black West Indian Seamen in the British Merchant Marine in the Mid Nineteenth Century," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 58 (Autumn, 2004): 259 – 274.

**49** For further discussion on the mixed labor force on ships see Costello, *Black Salt*, 68. For mixed labor force on plantations and estates in the Caribbean see Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860 – 1899* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

**50** "Topic: Labour Problem and African Immigrants," West Indies Committee Papers 1833 – 1843 Box 4, Folder 1, Minutes July 1833-June 1843, Resolutions of the Standing Committee of West India Planters: On Immigration, February 18, 1842, 109. West Indiana Special Collections Library, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago.

**51** Newspapers and magazines of the period frequently referred to African labor in the British Caribbean as an "experiment." See *The Economist*, January 15, 1848, in *The Economist Weekly Commercial Times*, *Bankers Gazette*, and *Railway Monitor*, vol. 6 (London: Economist Office, 1848), 60.

**52** For a discussion on the differences between free wage labor and indentured labor in the British Caribbean see Tayyab Mahmud, "Cheaper than a Slave: Indentured Labor, Colonialism and Capitalism," Seattle University School of Law Paper Series, *Whittier Law Review* 34, no. 215 (2013): 215 – 243. For indentured labor in the West Indies and the Indian Ocean world see Stanziani, *Sailors*, 89 – 91, 114. See also David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834 – 1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4 – 9, 16 – 50, 80, 144.

port for a prescribed period.[53] Law professor Tayyub Muhmud and labor historian Alessandro Stanziani have distinguished free labor from indentured labor, a form of unfree labor, in terms of consequences and the connections between laborer and specific estate or ship, the free laborer being exempt from the rules informing indentureship.[54] Therefore, the power dynamics governing Kru labor differed from both slavery and indentured servitude that characterized nineteenth-century labor in the British Caribbean.

In the context of the Caribbean, the Kru diaspora showed signs of continuity and change. "Krooman's Village" in Trinidad was reminiscent of the Krutowns in West Africa, albeit on a smaller scale. Although they were employed in agricultural production, many returned to their traditional role in marine transportation between estate and ships. By comparison, one of their most populous communities in British Guiana known as Canal No.1 adjacent to the Demerara River was inhabited by Kru along with many other Africans, most notably Yoruba. The Kru became members of multi-ethnic communities that Stuart Hall has characterized as being structured by cultural "hybridity."[55] Kamau Braithwaite and Édouard Glissant have emphasized the significance of the unique social and cultural influences affecting identity in the Caribbean as being as much if not more of a factor in the "creolization" process as European and African influences.[56] While some Kru maintained a unique identity with the application of the Kru mark and continued to work in marine labor using surfboats and flotillas, new opportunities to own land independently and obtain contracts without the need of a headman or foreman led some Kru to permanently remain in British Guiana, thereby ending the migratory labor cycle between their homeland and diaspora communities that had characterized and sustained their work in West Africa and elsewhere. Intermarriage with Creoles and Yoruba workers resulted in a new generation of Kru with multiple African ancestry and their amalgamation into the wider Creole community, as reflected in the lack of Kru categories in official documents by the early twentieth century. The Kru's work

**53** Accounts and Papers, Emigration, Session 3 February to 12 August 1842, vol. 21, Correspondence Relative to Emigration, 1842, Extract Minute from the Proceedings of the Immigration Committee, Tuesday the 25th May 1841, James Hackett, Agent-General (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1842), 368.

**54** Mahmud, "Cheaper than a Slave," 215–243; Stanziani, *Sailors*, 63, 89–91, 114.

**55** Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

**56** Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 1–30; Éduoard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor The University of Michigan Press, 1997), xi-xx, 5–37; Édouard Glissant, "Creolization in the Making of the Americas," *Caribbean Quarterly* 54, no. 1–2 (2008): 81–89.

experience in the British Caribbean differed from West African ports where they have maintained a distinct Kru identity in their diaspora communities well into the twenty-first century.

Regardless of where the Kru labored, the headman or foreman became the most significant enabler in the Kru free wage labor diaspora. A position which most probably developed from the lead trader and paddler who directed surfboats to European ships and conducted trade first observed in the sixteenth century, the headman was the intermediary between Kru laborers and British employers.[57] They were tasked with selecting a labor gang, distributing food and wages, maintaining discipline, and negotiating contractual terms.[58] Laborers were drawn from the age-set system that traditionally spawned a warrior class and was largely redirected towards migratory labor. Adolescent laborers completed contracts as a right-of-passage into adulthood with the goal of becoming headmen one day themselves. Headmen were necessary in the organization of labor on commercial and military contracts and the higher wages they received compared with regular laborers reveals the hierarchal structure governing their contracts. The labor gang was expected to hand over an agreed upon percentage of their wages to both their headman and village leader, the *krogba*, following the completion of a contract. An entirely new socio-economic system based on contractual wage labor developed from periodic trade on the coast to a system of outsourcing based on timeframes, monetary value, and British demand – all of which was dependent on the headman.

## Identifying the Kru

One of the most contentious issues facing historians regarding Kru labor lies in the pursuit of a simple answer to the complex question: who were the Kru? What is known about the Kru prior to the nineteenth century is that Kru-speaking peoples made a living in fishing, rice, salt, ivory, and agricultural trade, with a specialization in boating and transporting commodities, Europeans, and enslaved Africans in the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trades along the West African

**57** In 1555, Towerson noted that all transactions were to be completed through one individual. See Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The First Voyage Made by Master W. Towerson to the Coast of Guinea in the Yere 1555* (London: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1904), 184–85.

**58** Thomas Ludlam, "An Account of a Tribe of People called Kroomen, inhabiting a small District of the Grain Coast of Africa, between Cape Mount and Cape Palmas," *The Sixth Report of the Directors of the African Institution The Sixth Report of the Directors of the African Institution Read at the General Annual Meeting* (London: African Institute, 1812), 95–96.

coast. They inhabited the region between the southeastern coast of modern-day Liberia and southwestern extremity of Côte d'Ivoire from perhaps as early as the fifteenth century. Oral traditions tell of an inland migration to the coast by the *Claho* people (or Krao/Klao), which most likely took place prior to the mid-fifteenth century, however, the exact date remains unknown.[59]

From the perspective of the Proper Kru, the Kru homeland, which became known as the Kru Coast in the nineteenth century, refers to the region between the Cestos River and Grand Cess River in the southeastern coast of Liberia.[60] According to primary published documents and Kru oral tradition first recorded in the nineteenth century, the five main trading settlements within the region included Nana Kru, Little Kru, Krobah, Settra Kru, and King William's Town (King Weah's Town) on the Kru Coast.[61] As early as 1812, former Governor of Sierra Leone Thomas Ludlam recognized these towns as the heart of the Kru homeland from which migratory laborers cycled back and forth to Freetown. This position was upheld by Kru oral traditions recorded in the 1850s by Reverend Connelly in his *American Colonization 39th Annual Report*, Reverend John Leighton Wilson, and Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle in his linguistic milestone *Polyglotta Africa*, published in 1854.[62] These remained some of the most significant trading towns in the nineteenth century with populations numbering 600 or more each and a regional population estimated to be upwards of 40,000.[63] Although the people residing in the towns recognized themselves as Proper Kru, they functioned autonomously, traded independently with Europeans and amongst themselves, and could as easily find themselves celebrating intermarriage between members of the towns as entering into conflict with one another.

However, the concept of a Kru homeland is more complex than limiting it to the five settlements inhabited by the Proper Kru and has been a topic probed by scholars for decades. The Kru Coast was not static, but evolved over time as evi-

**59** Connelly suggests the Kru migrated from the interior to the coast around the year 1600; see Connelly, "Report," 38–40. However, some scholars suggest it was upwards to 400 years earlier than Connelly's account in 1856; see Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 7.

**60** Dan Webster, *Report of the Secretary of State* (September 14, 1850), 75.

**61** Ludlam, "Account," 88; Connelly, "Report," 38–40; Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (London: Church Missionary Society House, 1854; republished 1963), 4; Wilson, *Western Africa*, 101.

**62** Ludlam, "Account," *Sixth Report*, 88; Connelly, "Report," 38–40; Koelle, *Polyglotta*, 4; Wilson, *Western Africa*, 101.

**63** This figure includes the Proper Kru region between the Cestos River and Grand Cess River and Cape Palmas. See Mr. Pinney, Canfield and Alward, "Report of Messrs Pinney, Canfield and Alward," *The Missionary Chronicle* 8 (1840): 213; *The Missionary Chronicle* 11 (1843): 6; "Miscellany," *The Missionary Magazine* 46 (1866): 120.

dent with the application of the term "Kru" to peoples living beyond the geographical boundaries of the Proper Kru villages. Even within the boundaries of the Proper Kru, there were other trading towns in the vicinity, which included Crou, Crou Settra, Sinoe, Sanguin, Wappo, Nifo, Rock Cess, River Cess, Sasstown, and Picaninny Cess, some of which maintained a long-standing tradition of trade.[64] Adjacent to these trading centers, a significant number of smaller fishing villages dotted the coast containing inhabitants who were frequently identified as "Fishmen", "Fishermen" or "Fishes" who belonged to the Kabor and Gbeta *dakwe*.[65] They were often represented as being in competition with the Proper Kru in many ship captain accounts of the period.[66] Moreover, there were Kru-speaking communities in the hinterland who belonged to the Matro, Bolo, Nanke, and Bwa *dakwe*.[67]

Several factors seem to be at play when conceptualizing who identified as Kru and who was categorized as Kru both within and outside of their communities. Linguistics have been a crucial factor informing analyses of Kru identity. Although the Proper Kru towns and others in the vicinity formed the hub of Kru exchange with Europeans in the region, all of the communities on the coast, between the Mesurado River (Monrovia) and the Bandama River (west of Abidjan), were inhabited by people who could be categorized as Kru speakers.[68] Guenter Schroeder and Andreas Massing propose that as early as the sixteenth century dialects of a common language were recognized between villages

**64** For an overview of the many trading towns see the map "Guinea Itself, as Well as the Greatest Portion of Nigritia or the Land of the Blacks, the One Called Ethiopia Inferior by Modern Geographers, the Other Southern Ethiopia", published by German firm Homännische Erben, 1743. For more discussion on the difference between Proper Kru and "Fishmen" see Wilson, *Western Africa*, 103–104; Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 21; Ibrahim K. Sundiata, "The Rise and Decline of Kru Power: Fernando Po in the Nineteenth Century," *Liberian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 27.

**65** Elizabeth Tonkin, "Sasstown's Transformation: The Jlao Kru 1888–1918," *Liberian Studies Journal* 8, no. 1 (1978–1979): 3; Jo Mary Sullivan, "Mississippi in Africa: Settlers Among the Kru, 1835–1847," *Liberian Studies Journal* 8, no. 2 (1978–1979): 83, 86–88. *Dakwe* is the plural form of *dako*.

**66** Ludlam, "Account," 44.

**67** Merran Fraenkel, "Social Change on the Kru Coast of Liberia," *Africa* 36, no. 2 (1966): 154–155; Diane Frost, *Work and Community Among West African Migrant Workers Since the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 7.

**68** Guenter Schroeder and Andreas Massing, "A General Outline of Historical Developments within the Kru Cultural Province" (paper presented at the Second Annual Conference on Social Research in Liberia, Bloomington, Indiana, April 30-May 2, 1970), 5. See also Jeanne Hein, "Portuguese Communication with Africans on the Searoute to India," in *The Globe Encircled and the World Revealed*, ed. Ursula Lamb (London: Routledge, 2016), 6.

along the Malaguetta Coast.[69] Kru speakers including the Proper Kru, Bassa, Grebo (Glebo), Krahn, Sapo, Neyo, Wane, Godié, Bété, and Dida inhabited this vast coastal region.[70] All of these peoples were frequently categorized and hired as "Kru" laborers and seafarers by European and American ship captains and merchants based on a shared language.

Maps played a significant role in the European perception of Kru identity. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the region was named after the commodities that dominated trade such as the Malaguetta Coast, Pepper Coast, Grain Coast, Ivory Coast, Tooth Coast, and, later, nautical terminology, the Windward Coast.[71] Setracrou (Settra Kru), Crou, Sanguin, Wappo, Tabou, and Bereby were frequently marked as trading towns on maps dating to the mid-seventeenth century.[72] John Ogilby's 1670 map included towns between the Cestos River and Cape Palmas within the Greya Cust (Grain Coast) and towns to the east of the Cavalla River in the Tand Cust (Tooth or Ivory Coast).[73] In contrast to most maps of the period, Herman Moll's 1704 map placed Sino, Sanguin, and Setra Kru (Settra Kru – a Proper Kru town) in the Ivory Coast rather than belonging to the Grain Coast.[74] In 1837, American Colonization Society (ACS) agent Jehudi Ashum published a map with a special note on the Kru in the region between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers which read: "Kroos are the waterman and laborers of the coast."[75] Ashmun's note not only revealed the unique persona the Kru had formed based on their long history of trade and sea-

**69** Ibid., 5.

**70** Louis Henrique, *Les Colonies Françaises*, vol. 5 (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1890), 203; Élisée Reclus, *The Universal Geography: Earth and Its Inhabitants*, ed. A.H. Keane (London: J.S. Virtue & Co., 1885), 233; Ronald W. Davis, "The Liberian Struggle for Authority on the Kru Coast," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 2 (1975): 227; Frost, *Work*, 7–8.

**71** Writing in the 1960s, Merran Fraenkel has suggested the Kru ancestral migration to the coast occurred some 400 years ago; see Fraenkel, "Social Change," 154. This date is confirmed by Kru oral traditions as revealed during an interview with Deputy Governor Worjloh.

**72** Nicolas Sanson, *Afrique* (Paris, 1650); John Ogilby and Jacob van Meurs (engraver), "Africae Accurata Tabula" (London, 1670); William Berry, *Africa Divided According to the Extent of Its Principall Parts in Which Are Distinguished One from the Other the Empires, Monarchies, Kingdoms, States, and Peoples...* (London, 1680); Hermann Moll, "New and Exact Map of Guinea," in Bosman, *New and Accurate*, n.p; Barbot, *Description*, 136; Jacques Nicholas Bellin, *Carte de la Coste Occidentale D'Afrique* (Paris, 1739). A settlement containing a variant of the name Kru appears in the map of the Windward Coast in Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell, eds., *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton) 1750–1754* (London: Epworth, 1962), 117.

**73** Ogilby and van Meurs, "Africae".

**74** Moll, "New," n.p.

**75** Jehudi Ashmun, "Map of the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to Cape Palmas, Including the Colony of Liberia," 1830.

faring, but also implied the important economic role the Kru could play in the newly-established Liberian Commonwealth.

A combination of shared language and maps that showed the close geographical proximity of their trading towns served as variables informing Kru identity from the perspective of European traders and Kru-speaking peoples alike. While the five trading towns came to define the region known as the Kru Coast in the nineteenth century, earlier maps show that only some of the Proper Kru trading towns had formed in previous centuries or were relevant enough to garner mention. Yet, the inhabitants in the region between Cape Mesurado and the Bandama River were recognized as Kru people from the European perspective. From the vantage of Kru-speaking peoples, they would have easily identified the differences amongst themselves based on their *dako*, dialect, secret society affiliation (if any), and geographic location of their towns, and continued to trade with Europeans regardless of their external label.

Scholars have influenced the perception of Kru identity and their homeland based on analytical parameters. Kru have mostly been studied within the national boundaries of Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire in isolation from one another, resulting in a fragmented image of the Kru homeland. This separation is not limited to political boundaries, but has been influenced by both the language used by the scholar in his/her writing and their sources primarily in English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese. Writing in English and relying mostly on British and American sources, George Brooks and Ronald Davis limited their discussion of the Kru within the boundaries of Liberian state (although the map on Davis' book cover includes one town to the east of the Cavalla River).[76] Christine Behrens, writing in French and relying mostly on French sources, concentrated her study on Bakwé and Bété Kru-speaking groups who are identified as Kroumen or Croumaines between the Cavalla and Sassandra Rivers within the boundaries of Côte d'Ivoire.[77] Jelmer Vos, writing in English while relying on Dutch sources, limited the greater part of his study of the region within Côte d'Ivoire with minimal connection to the Proper Kru region. He noted that many Kru were sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade for enslavement in Dutch Guiana, which seems to be at odds with practices in the Proper Kru region.[78] Relying on French sources, Jonas Ibo's contention that Kru-speaking Neyo laborers fabricated Kru identities for the purpose of obtaining work contracts near the Sassandra River may apply to his period of study in the twentieth

**76** Brooks, *Kru Mariner*, 50; Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 31–35.

**77** Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 27–28.

**78** Jelmer Vos, "The Slave Trade from The Windward Coast: The Case of the Dutch, 1740–1805," *African Economic History* vol. 38 (2010): 29–51.

century, but is not so readily acceptable in earlier centuries when notions of Kru identity were emerging.[79]

Thus far, the problem has been extrapolating a segment of Kru-speaking peoples and projecting that group as representing the total experience of Kru traders, seafarers, and laborers on the coast. Although Andreas Massing sought to resolve this issue by examining what he termed the "Kru Cultural Area", which included the region between the Cestos River in Liberia and the Sassandra River in Côte d'Ivoire, he was criticized by Elizabeth Tonkin, a pioneer of Kru studies in the early 1960s, for a lack of recognizing the unique specificities between Kru-speaking peoples in the region, while generalizing diverse groups under a single "Kru" conceptual category.[80] Thus, the most productive approach towards analyzing the activities of Kru-speaking peoples has been to read Behren's work on Kroumen communities in Côte d'Ivoire in collaboration with works focused on Kru communities in Liberia while using a range of multilingual primary sources in English, French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish and oral traditions offered by Kru-speaking peoples.

Official records provide another avenue of inquiry into the nature of Kru identity. The designation of "Kroomen" in official documents including muster lists, shipping records, ordinances, estate registers, the Navy List, and ship captain accounts points towards a unique identity that differentiated Kru from other categories such as "Africans", which included Yoruba, Ibo, Congo or Liberated Africans.[81] Indeed, Frederick McEvoy attributed the creation of Kru ethnicity to external factors where their group identity emerged in contrast with other African labor groups serving on ships and in British ports in West Africa.[82] Based

**79** Jonas Ibo, "Le phénomène "Krouman" à Sassandra: la marque d'une institution séculaire," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, Issue I (1998): 65–94.

**80** Andreas Massing, *The Economic Anthropology of the Kru* (Wisbaden: Steiner, 1980), 10–21. For information on various Kru-speaking peoples within the region see Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22; Elizabeth Tonkin, review of *The Economic Anthropology of the Kru (West Africa)* by Andreas Massing, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1983): 101–103.

**81** Liberated Africans (frequently referred to as recaptives) were Africans whose slave ships were intercepted and who were delivered to Freetown or Monrovia. See John Rankin, "Nineteenth- Century Royal Navy Sailors from Africa and the African Diaspora, Research Methodology," *African Diaspora* 6 (2013): 183–184.

**82** Frederick D. McEvoy, "Understanding Ethnic Realities among the Grebo and Kru Peoples of West Africa," *Africa* 47, no. 1 (1977): 62–80. For a similar process that informed Hausa traders in West Africa, see Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (London: Routledge, 1969).

on their close geographical proximity, the Grebo (Glébo as they were sometimes known to the east of the Cavalla River), Bassa, Sapo, and Krahn, among others, were amalgamated under the ethnic category of Kru. Lawrence Breitborde went further and suggested that their identity was equally influenced in their homeland by the Liberian state based on Port of Entry and land acquisition laws that were aimed at controlling Kru manpower and the profitability of the Kru Coast.[83] By considering what McEvoy determined to be the three most important identity markers in the region including *dako*, *dea* (village), and patrilineage, as well as the age-set system and secret society affiliations which transcend *dako*, Kru identity becomes increasingly complex in its analysis.[84]

Another layer informing Kru identity is the link between ethnicity and occupation. The importance of Kru as crew is indisputable. In 1856, Rev. Connelly reported on the correlation between the Kru and their reputation for serving on ships dating back to the seventeenth century with the Portuguese.[85] However, it has sometimes been thought that the term "Kru" and the English term "crew" are purely related because the Kru worked as crew on British ships. Lynell Marchese has argued that the term "Kru" resulted from their employment on ships stating: "the homonymy with crew is obvious, and is at least one source of the confusion among Europeans that there was a Kru/crew tribe."[86] Similarly, Diane Frost has proposed that the Kru formed an "ethnic-occupational" identity that was a response to trade with Europeans. She suggests that the morphing of their identity from *Claho* (their original name in oral tradition) to Krao/ Klao to Kru was based on their role in the "crew" associated with ships.[87] While her position holds true in the nineteenth century following their labor in Freetown after which their identity crystallized and came to encompass a wider group of communities under the Kru label, it must be emphasized that a distinct Kru ethnic group can trace its roots to a much earlier period before its dispersal.

Furthermore, it is possible to argue the connection between the words "Kru" and "crew" is a coincidence in the English language and is not reflected in other

**83** Lawrence Breitborde, "Structural Continuity in the Development of an Urban Kru Community," *Urban Anthropology* (1979): 111–130.

**84** McEvoy, "Understanding," 62–80.

**85** Connelly, "Report," 39.

**86** Lynell Marchese, "City Countryside and Kru Ethnicity," *Africa* 61, no. 2 (1991): 186–201; Lynell Marchese, "Kru," in *The Niger-Congo Languages*, ed. Bender Samuel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 113–119.

**87** Frost, *Work*, 10.

European languages.[88] For example, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and French ship captains referred to a community in the region as "Crou" in the early seventeenth century before they were hired en masse on board ships sailing the coast, which confirms the identification of the Kru is not related to the English word "crew."[89] Similarly, English merchant James Welsh identified a community named "Crua" in 1588, before they worked on British vessels, which also demonstrates that there is no association between "Kru" and "crew."[90] A closer look at the work of vernacular connections proposed by P.E.H. Hair may shed some light on how the name "Kru" pre-dated their work on ships and how the correlation between Kru and crew may only be arbitrary.[91] As Behrens has shown, the Kru were known interchangeably as "Krou, Kru, Krew, Krow, Crew, Carow, Courou, Crou, Kroo, Croo, Kroe… Krewmen/Krewmens, Croumane/Croumanes, Kroemens… Kruboy, Kruman, Krumani, Krooman, etc." between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.[92] Hence, many of the inhabitants residing between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers identified as Kru long before they were routinely hired for work on ships sailing down the West African coast.[93] Moreover, the inhabitants of the region continue to self-identify as Proper Kru or simply Kru in the twenty-first century and they are listed as Kru in Liberian government censuses.[94] A testament to the spread of the Kru label, the inhabitants to the east of the Cavalla River including a mixture of Grebo, Bété, and Godié peoples continue to be identified as Krou or Kroumen in government census records in Côte d'Ivoire.[95] The Kru language is the force that binds all Kru-speaking peoples along the coast in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Yet, while they may have accepted the label Kru while engaging in trade and employment abroad, they maintained

**88** The word "crew" shows no similarity to Kru in Portuguese (*tripulação*); French (*équipage*); Spanish (*tripulación*); or Dutch (*bemmaning*).

**89** Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 23.

**90** Welsh, "Voyage," 451.

**91** P.E.H. Hair, "Ethnolinguistic Continuity on the Guinea Coast," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 247–268; P.E.H. Hair, "An Ethnolinguistic Inventory of the Upper Guinea Coast before 1700," *African Language Review* 6 (1967): 32–70.

**92** Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 13.

**93** Johnston, *Liberia*, 1: 88.

**94** Kru-speaking peoples who inhabit Grand Kru County, Sinoe County, River Cess County, Maryland County, Grand Bassa County, and Montserrado County form a great proportion of the total population, as shown in a national demographic survey conducted in 2008. See Government of the Republic of Liberia 2008 Population and Housing Census, Preliminary Results. Accessed on May 1, 2017, https://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/census_2008provisionalresults.pdf.

**95** Kroumen formed 8.5 percent of the total population in a demographic survey conducted in Côte d'Ivoire 2018. Accessed on May 1, 2017, https://www.indexmundi.com/cote_d_ivoire/demographics_profile.html.

a clear understanding of the internal differences between their communities and the multi-tiered nature of their identities.

One of the most valuable avenues for understanding Kru identity arises from oral traditions. Conversations with Kru leaders in their villages and diaspora communities provides rare information that is simply inaccessible through written sources. Although subjective, in many cases, they confirm known traditions and practices that were recorded in primary and secondary sources, while adding nuances and fresh information on Kru labor. Kru studies by Ronald Davis, Elizabeth Tonkin, and Diane Frost included interviews with Kru community members, which proved valuable for understanding their labor experiences.[96] This study includes interviews with Kru community members who in some cases worked on ships or had immediate family members who worked in the nineteenth century as headmen.[97] Understanding how the Kru remember their own histories provides an invaluable layer to the meaning of Kru identity.

Given all of these variables informing Kru identity and its dissemination, I argue that a more precise way of analyzing the trajectories of Kru laborers and making meaningful connections between diaspora community and homeland village is to be very specific about the segment of Kru under analysis based on the geographic location of their villages or places of embarkation, if known. This allows for analysis to move between the general label Kru and more specific hybrid identities, which trace labor itineraries between specific region or village and workplace and identifies the different experiences of Kru to the west of the Cavalla River who mostly worked with British compared with those to the east whose greatest employer was the French. As such, for the purposes of analysis, Kru laborers are more accurately identified as Bassa-Kru, Proper Kru, Grebo-Kru, Bété-Kru, Bakwé-Kru, Neyo-Kru, Godié-Kru, Dida-Kru, and so forth. Hyphenated identities provide an analytical template for understanding the specificities of the inhabitants residing in key sub-regions within the Kru Coast.

Once the region or place of hiring is known, a second level of identity analysis becomes possible and an understanding of *dako* affiliation is necessary. For instance, in the case of the region between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers, *dakwe* include: Jloh, Kabor, Gbeta, Sasstown (or Pahn), Grand Cess (or Siklio),

**96** Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 197–202; Elizabeth Tonkin, "The Boundaries of History in Oral Performance," *History in Africa* 9 (1982), 273–284; Elizabeth Tonkin, "Jealousy Names, Civilized Names: Anthroponomy of Jlao Kru of Liberia, *Man* New Series 15, no. 4 (1980), 653–664; Frost, *Work*, 44, 175, 221, 227.

**97** Doe Smith's father was a headman. Smith was 90 at the time of the interview in 2012 and his father was working on ships at the close of the nineteenth century.

and the "Five Tribes" or Proper Kru.[98] In the case of the Grebo residing between the Grand Cess and the Cavalla Rivers, there are Garaway-Grebo, Palmas-Grebo, and Half-Cavalla Grebo, among others, whom identify with *dakwe* and specific villages.[99] The same level of complexity informs all regions of the Kru Coast and understanding the inhabitants' hybrid identities provides a starting point for a deeper exploration of the peoples involved in Atlantic trade in each region. Perhaps most significantly, it is important to recognize that their work experience in Freetown crystallized a sense of "Kru" or "Kroomen" identity from the perspective of the British, other Europeans, and amongst Kru-speaking peoples.[100] Although the Kru had engaged in trade with Europeans for centuries, it was not until the 1790s that the Kru or Kroomen label became commonplace amongst the peoples between Cape Mesurado and the Bandama River, as evident in historical records, increased employment, and the recognition of their homeland as the Kru Coast thereafter.

## Significance of Hiring the Kru

The story of the Kru contributes a vital chapter in the history of precolonial wage labor in Africa and offers insights towards the evolution of outsourcing wage labor practices on a global scale. Kru seafarers were routinely recorded on British Royal Navy wage lists as early as 1819, receiving rank-based wages in an era when Atlantic slavery was prevalent and nearly a century before the implementation of cash-crop wages in the colonial era in Africa.[101] While the transformative socio-economic effects of precolonial wage labor have been investigated by Paul Lovejoy and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch in the period of transition from slavery to free labor in West Africa, Peter Gutkind in his exploration of Fante seafarers on the Gold Coast, and Stephen Rockel in his study on Nyamwezi caravans in East Africa, the temporal, geographic, and socio-economic scale of the Kru

**98** Fraenkel, "Social Change," 155.

**99** *British and Foreign State Papers, 1856 – 1857*, vol. 48 (London: William Ridgeway, 1866), 586.

**100** For further discussion on the crystallization process affecting Kru identity see Jeffrey Gunn, "Krutown: A Catalyst for the Kru Diaspora," in *Sierra Leone: Past and Present*, eds. Paul Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2021), in press.

**101** ADM 30/26 "Muster Lists, Pay List for African Krou employed on board His Majesty's Brig Snapper between the 5th day of September and 31st December 1819," The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom; source: ADM 30/26. June 1, 1819 to October 1, 1819. "Muster Lists, Pay List for African Krou employed on board His Majesty's HMS *Morgiana*, between 1 June 1819 to 1 October 1819," The National Archives, London, United Kingdom; ADM 30/26, "Muster list of Kroomen Serving on Various Ships," The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.

free wage labor diaspora renders it truly unique from all other African diasporas.[102]

Although other African laborers worked on European vessels, in ports and agriculture, what distinguished the Kru from their competitors, including Cabinda seafarers in Angola, Fante canoemen on the Gold Coast, Sereer and Wolof boatmen in Dakar, and Vai workers in the Gallinas, to name a few, was the longevity of their service with the British (between the sixteenth century and twentieth century having served in WWI and WWII and beyond), the geographical breadth of their laboring activities in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, the diversity of their roles which ranged from pilots, interpreters, divers, porters, gunners and stevedores serving on Royal Navy and commercial ships, their service in naval brigades engaged in British military campaigns, the volume of Kru who were awarded medals for their naval and military service, their establishment of diaspora communities named "Krutowns", the appearance of the category "Kroomen" on muster lists and official records compared with other workers from the continent who were collectively grouped under the label "Africans" despite distinctions between them, and the long-term infrastructural impact of their laboring contributions in the construction of such engineering marvels as the Panama Canal, Suez Canal, and Congo-Railway.

Questions arise as to how the Kru were able to garner a generally favorable reputation in the face of eighteenth century pseudo-scientific theories and nineteenth-century Victorian views that ordered the world according to European supremacy and subjected Africans to the lower echelons of humanity and, in some cases, a sub-human species.[103] The humanity of the African was an element in eighteenth-century religious debates between monogenetic theory and polygenetic theory, which had been born out of Columbus' arrival in the Americas.[104]

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**102** Peter C.W. Gutkind, "Trade and Labor in Early Precolonial African History: The Canoemen of Southern Ghana," in *The Workers of African Trade*, eds. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Paul E. Lovejoy (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), 25–49; Peter C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen, and Jean Copans, eds., *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978), 1–10; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *The Workers in the African Trade* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985); Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann: 2006), 4–5.

**103** David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, vol. 21 (London: n.p. 1741), 1–35; Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica. Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government*, vol. 2 (London: n.p., 1774), 363.

**104** The arrival of Columbus in the Americas caused a crisis for Europeans because the Amerindians challenged traditional notions of the Biblical origins of humankind and they needed to be accounted for. See Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9–33.

While monogenetic theory proposed the common origin of all humanity as explained in the Bible, polygenetic theory suggested that there were plural origins of humankind and other subhuman species that were arranged in a hierarchal fashion.[105] Even for those who accepted the African's place in Mosaic theology, their blackness was often associated with the biblical curse of Ham's descendants, the Canaanites, or the mark of Cain.[106] Africans were assigned a subhuman status by prominent Scottish philosopher David Hume whose pseudo-scientific arguments regarded Africans as a separate species, more animal than human.[107] Stadial theory proposed four stages in which Europeans represented the culmination of civilization and African societies the lower stages in evolution.[108]

Given the European inclination to enslave Africans en masse rather than hire them, hiring the Kru was not only a way of obtaining a cheap labor force, but a means of combating the trans-Atlantic slave trades as their example revealed that it could be more profitable and moral to hire Africans for the benefit of the British empire rather than enslave them.[109] For abolitionists like Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa) and Ottobah Cugoano (John Stuart) (themselves formerly enslaved), to hire the Kru was to humanize the African within an evolving

**105** Kidd, *British Identities*, 15.

**106** Mosaic theology was concerned with tracing the ancestry of the various ethnic groups of humanity in order to secure their position in a biblical framework. Since the publication of Benjamin of Tudela's *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* in the twelfth century, it was commonly believed that the black skin color of the African was the mark of a curse from God like that which had been given to Cain or Ham's descendants, the Canaanites, in the Bible, thereby permitting their enslavement by the descendants of Shem and Japheth from whom Europeans and Asians supposedly traced their origins. Apologists for the slave trade used this concept to justify enslaving Africans. See Kidd, *British Identities*, 9; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 156, 183; M.N. Adler, ed., *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (New York: Philipp Feldheim Inc., 1907), 62, 68. For the original story of Ham in the Bible see *Genesis* 9:25.

**107** Hume, *Essays*, 1–35.

**108** Wolloch, "Civilizing Process," 245–259; Meek, *Social Science*, 5.

**109** The reasons for the abolition of the British trans-Atlantic slave trade continue to be debated in scholarship; see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 126–177; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006), 1–28; Sir Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1964), 36–56; Selwyn H.H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the slave trade, 1775–1810* (Gainsville: University of Florida, 2002), 7, 10, 217; Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1975), 127, 140–141; 190–193, 234–235; Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, 2nd edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 165, 184–185.

Atlantic capitalist system that continued to make large profits in the trans-Atlantic slave trades.[110]

Therefore, it is very significant that the Kru were hired for their labor, and represent an anomaly when compared to the 12.8 million enslaved Africans in the trans-Atlantic world.[111] After all, Africans were sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade along the same coast, and yet the Kru were able to avoid mass enslavement. One probable reason arose in the late-eighteenth century, when the ever-increasing British need for local labor in West Africa based on malarial, climatic, and manpower concerns led to a willingness of the British and the Kru to experiment with free wage labor contracts.[112] The high mortality rate of European sailors in West Africa played a significant role in the decision to hire Kru mariners on the Kru Coast.[113] West Africa had been widely known as the "white man's grave" until the mid-nineteenth century because of the high mortality rate of European sailors due to a lack of immunity to malaria and yellow fever.[114] Stephen Behrendt estimated that 17.8 percent of British crews died on voyages between West Africa and Liverpool between 1780 and 1807.[115] Over 1,203 sailors in the British West Africa Squadron died as a result of fever between 1825 and 1845.[116] In the face of high mortality rates, it was common for Kru and other African seafarers hired on the coast to continue with the ship on its voyage across the Atlantic to the West Indies to spare British crew.[117] It was not until the advent of quinine and its increasing availability in the second half of the nine-

**110** Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of The Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to The Inhabitants of Great-Britain, By Ottobah Cugoano, A Native of Africa* (London: n.p., 1787), Eighteenth Century Online, accessed July 7, 2014, 135; Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, 1789, ed. Vincent Carretta, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), 144.

**111** Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, www.slavevoyages.org; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 18.

**112** Newspapers and magazines of the period frequently referred to African labor in the British Caribbean as an "experiment." See *The Economist*, January 15, 1848, in *The Economist Weekly Commercial Times*, *Bankers Gazette*, and *Railway Monitor*, vol. 6 (London: Economist Office, 1848), 60.

**113** Philip Curtin, "'The White Man's Grave': Image and Reality, 1780 – 1850." *Journal of British Studies* 1, no. 1 (1961): 94 – 110.

**114** Ibid., 94 – 110.

**115** Stephen D. Behrendt, "Crew Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century," *Slavery & Abolition* 18, no. 1 (1997): 49 – 71.

**116** Alexander Bryson, *Report on the Climate and Principle of Diseases of the African Station* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1847), 177.

**117** Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*, 2nd ed. (London: James Phillips, 1788), 63.

teenth century that Europeans could serve on ships in West Africa more efficiently.[118]

Further support can be found by looking at trans-Atlantic shipping figures, which reveal that the Windward Coast (which included the region known as the Kru Coast) was the second lowest region exporting enslaved Africans with approximately 230,000 between 1500 and 1880 in the British legal and illegal eras of trans-Atlantic slave trading.[119] Low figures may point to the lack of natural harbors, perilous surf, and rocky sub-sea terrain that made for difficult ship landings and anchorage in the region. Because Europeans could not easily transport commodities from ship to shore nor bring goods and enslaved captives to the ships, they came to rely on the Kru as their workers in trade.[120] Hence, the Kru Coast was a region where Europeans could buy provisions as well as hire workers for their voyages along the West African coast. For their part, the Kru could take advantage of the opportunity to work on ships for wages. These trans-Atlantic statistics, which are numerically low when compared with other slaving regions in West Africa and West Central Africa in the same period, suggest that the natural environment played a crucial role in positioning the Kru as workers and traders with the British in the early stages of their trading relationship.

Analyzing the Kru calls for a rethinking of diaspora and notions of race in the Atlantic world. The Kru engaged in a different kind of diaspora built on free wage labor contracts and circulated between British ports maintaining and evolving their culture through the establishment of Krutowns and community settlements. A crucial component of Paul Gilroy's argument in *Black Atlantic* is that diaspora communities originated in slavery, which, in turn, shaped transnational black identity. As such, Gilroy suggests that African diaspora communities collectively created "a counterculture of modernity."[121] Gilroy's focus on the impact of slavery raises interesting questions as to whether the migration of the

**118** For a full discussion on European mortality rates due to disease in West Africa see Curtin, "White Man's Grave," 94–110; Philip Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Philip Curtin, "The End of the 'White Man's Grave'? Nineteenth Century Mortality," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21, no. 1 (Summer 1990): 63–88.

**119** See Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database at http://www.slavevoyages.org.

**120** Francis Bacon, "Cape Palmas and the Mena, or Kroomen," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 12 (1842): 199. The role of the natural environment informing socio-economic activity has been explored by Gutkind, "Trade and Labor," 25–49; Gutkind, Cohen, and Copans, *African Labor*, 1–10; Harms, *Games*, 1–10.

**121** Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Verso, 1993), 25–26, 218.

Kru, as free laborers in an era of both slavery and emancipation, can inform Gilroy's insights on modernity, "double consciousness", and the meaning of blackness in the nineteenth century Atlantic world.[122] The complex nature of the Kru case reveals the limitations of Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" framework, which needs to be expanded in order to contemplate the social, economic, and political dimensions of other black experiences in the Atlantic. In short, both systems of slavery and free labor must be considered in the project of constructing black identity in the Atlantic world.

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Kru economy in Liberia was in a state of decline. Walter Rodney's position that Europeans undermined African societies economically and politically through the creation of colonies, while having merit, is incomplete.[123] The Kru story adds a complex layer demonstrated through the case of Americo-Liberian settlers who played a major role in the colonization process in Liberia. As indigenous Africans, Kru were perceived by Americo-Liberians as uncivilized savages who were not included in Liberian settler society unless they converted to Christianity and thus became "civilized."[124] While it is important to recognize that the ACS inaugurated the colonization process and funded the settlers, it is equally as important to understand the ways the Liberian state continued to marginalize the Kru through regulation, taxation, and the acquisition of land, all of which led to a series of military conflicts by the mid-nineteenth century. The wider processes of European colonization and global capitalism framed the Kru's socio-economic experience on British contracts. Yet, the Kru experienced a unique form of settler colonization distinct from any other region of Africa in the nineteenth century.

## Tracing Surfboats

Tracing the Kru free wage labor diaspora means following the water trails of their surfboats through time. Thus, the chapters in this book follow the evolution of their diaspora with a chronology that bears the markers of continuity and transformation emblematic of each stage. In Chapter 1, the role of the surfboat in Kru communities is analyzed as the enabler of the Kru free wage labor dia-

**122** Ibid., 25–26, 218.

**123** Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1972), 115–142, 231–319.

**124** Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism. Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 1–10; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 2 vols. (New York: Central Books, 1947), 2: 724; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 13.

spora. Surfboats, shared language, the Kru mark, headmen, gender roles, shipboard labor, and naming practices provide the framework for studying their diaspora as it emerged from their villages. Two of the earliest known images of the Kru reveal that they crafted a unique identity as traders, boatmen, and laborers in their villages, on European ships and in workplaces along the West African coast prior to the nineteenth century. The chapter establishes their villages as the homeland in their free wage labor diaspora that followed.

Chapter 2 investigates the presence of Kru in Freetown, Sierra Leone after 1792. Krutown effectively became their first diaspora community and created a space for new meanings in the role of headmen, the Kru mark, age-set system, and the role of women to emerge. Royal Navy wage lists published in 1819–1820 allow for an assessment of the number of Kru serving on Royal Navy ships and their pay rates. By the late 1820s, at least, Freetown became the main hub of Kru employment on British vessels and provided the opportunity for their diaspora to rapidly expand throughout the Atlantic. Most significantly, employment in Freetown resulted in the crystallization of Kru identity and their homeland, known thereafter as the Kru Coast, from the perspective of British employers and Kru-speaking peoples alike. While most Kru laborers were contracted from the Proper Kru region between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers, Grebo and Bassa laborers, both Kru-speaking peoples, migrated from the adjacent regions and were simply categorized as Kru upon arrival in Freetown by British officials. While Proper Kru self-identified as Kru, an unprecedented hybrid Grebo-Kru and Bassa-Kru identity emerged in the context of Freetown based on common language, similar occupations, and place of residence in Krutown. While all Kru-speaking communities in the homeland maintained their distinct identities, Freetown served as a melting pot where Grebo and Bassa workers accepted the label "Kru" out of convenience, which carried a positive reputation in the nineteenth century and ensured access to contracts. While it is important to recognize that the label "Kru" or "Kroomen" was not in regular use by the British or other Europeans until the 1790s after they engaged in contractual labor in Freetown, the roots of Kru identity for one segment of Kru-speaking peoples in the region between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers can be traced to at least the sixteenth century.

Chapter 3 investigates the Kru diaspora communities that developed in Cape Coast, Ascension Island, Fernando Po, and Simon's Town, South Africa, as a result of their service in the Royal Navy. While some Kru continued to work on slave ships in the Cuban slave trade in the nineteenth century, increasingly, Kru labor was instrumental in the suppression of the trans-Atlantic slave trades in pursuit of Cuban, French, and Brazilian slave ships. Population figures are examined in order to reveal the size of Kru communities in Ascension Island and

Fernando Po. Kru gravestones enable an analysis of the demographics of their community in Simon's Town. As in the Atlantic, Kru were hired on Royal Navy ships in the Indian Ocean to assist in the suppression of the slave trade, particularly between 1862 and 1881, by intercepting slave *dhows*. Kru operated out of Simon's Town in South Africa, Zanzibar, the Seychelles, Aden, Basra, Bombay, and Trincomalee. In the Indian Ocean, their diaspora network was founded on the decks of Royal Navy ships as no diaspora communities were established shoreside. Rather, Royal Navy ships became cultural spaces where Kru were able to evolve their seaborne practices first developed in their homeland on the Kru Coast. However, gravestones provide physical evidence of their lasting presence in Zanzibar, a major depot for resupplying ships and delivering recaptives. The chapter closes by reflecting on the socio-economic relationship between diaspora communities, ships, and homeland on the Kru Coast as traditional power structures between *krogba*, headmen, and women increasingly adjusted in response to migratory labor.

Chapter 4 examines Kru labor in the context of the British Navy, Army, and Merchant Marine. Between the 1820s through the 1880s, Kru served in British expeditions of exploration and diplomatic and military campaigns in several parts of Africa and Asia. The British depended on the Kru as boatmen, pilots, porters, and collectors of water and wood. Kru service in various expeditions is analyzed including Hugh Clapperton's second expedition to the Sokoto Caliphate (1825–1827), the series of Niger River expeditions led by Richard and John Lander (1830), Macgregor Laird, Richard Lander, and R.A.K. Oldfield (1832–1833), William Allen, Henry Dundas Trotter, and Bird Allen (1841–1842), and William Balfour Baikie (1854), and David Livingstone's Zambezi Expedition (1858–1864). The expeditions paved the way for Britain's increased involvement in the Niger Delta as palm oil production soared from the 1850s. As a result of their service in these expeditions and the palm oil industry in the Niger Delta, Kru established diaspora communities in Bonny and Calabar. During the same period, Kru were involved in military campaigns in Asia and Africa, including the First Opium War (1839–1842), the occupation of Lagos (1851–1852), the campaign against Asante (1873–1874), the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), and the Sudan Campaign (1884–1885). Rather than forming permanent labor communities through their involvement in these military campaigns, Kru expanded their labor network as they sailed between ports and enlisted for specific campaigns without further establishing settlements. The exception was Lagos, where a sizeable Kru diaspora community developed in tandem with an increase in harbor work and infrastructural projects following British occupation. Kru participation in exploratory and military campaigns not only points to the diverse nature of their labor experience but

also raises questions about the nature of empire and race in the nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 analyzes the Kru diaspora in the British Caribbean from the early 1840s through the 1890s. The nature of Kru contracts and their laboring activities on estates, wharves, and canals in Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana are examined. Estate records listing Kru workers' lodgings, occupation, wages, and names are analyzed. The socio-economic impact of purchasing land, the decline of headmen and traditional channels of gift-giving, the establishment of Krooman's Village in Trinidad and the Kru community in Canal No. 1 in British Guiana, and intermarriage with Creoles illuminate some of the greatest transformations in their communities. These factors prevented their regular return to the Kru Coast and limited the development of diaspora communities in the Caribbean between 1841 and 1900, thereby altering the pattern of Kru diaspora formation.

Chapter 6 examines the social, economic, and political relationship between the Kru and the colony of Liberia between 1822 and 1846, and the Republic of Liberia between 1847 and 1900. The relationship between the Kru and Liberia was a determining factor in the pattern of Kru migration from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Analysis of the laws affecting the Kru diaspora community in Monrovia reveal the extent of Liberian attempts to control and profit from Kru labor. Following statehood, Port of Entry Laws were legislated, which imposed a tax on Kru labor. In attempting to evade taxation, Kru migration to their diaspora communities in West Africa increased. The chapter investigates Liberian state measures that fostered competition between the British and French in their attempt to assert greater social, economic, and political control in the region. As a result, some Kru were inclined to remain in Freetown or accept French contracts in Libreville beyond Liberian authority. Kru who remained in their communities on the Kru Coast were subjected to state-sanctioned land acquisition. Legislation impeded the authority of the *krogba* and headmen and, by the 1870s, led to a shift in the Kru economy away from shipping contracts towards increased palm oil production. Equally disruptive was the state strategy to support Christian missions on the Kru Coast, which resulted in increased conversion to Christianity amongst the Kru. The chapter closes by suggesting Liberian policies created a labor drain on the Kru Coast while increasing economic opportunities in Kru diaspora communities in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

What has emerged thus far is a fragmented history of the Kru. This book offers a comprehensive diaspora framework for the analysis of the migration of Kru workers in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Their service in commercial and military contexts which represents a movement of free wage labor trans-

formed the Kru Coast into a homeland that nurtured a diaspora and staffed a vast network of workplaces. As the Kru formed permanent and transient working communities, they underwent several phases of social, political, and economic innovation, which ultimately overcame a decline in employment in their homeland on the Kru Coast by the end of the nineteenth century by increasing employment in their diaspora