Ships and Beaches as Arenas of Entanglements from Below: Whalemen in Coastal Africa, c. 1760–1900

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Remembering the moment he arrived at his first whaling ground on a New Bedford whaler in the mid-nineteenth century, sailor Charles Nordhoff remarked: »I was looking for some peculiarity in the color of the water, the strength of the breeze, or the quality of the atmosphere, to distinguish this from the other parts of the ocean.« Although »so much had been said of ›good whaling ground‹«, the sea of the Mozambique Channel turned out to be »as deeply blue, the breezes as gentle, and the air as hazy as it generally is in those portions of the tropics« (Nordhoff 1855: 90f.). The ocean with its inscrutable surface conceals its mysterious inhabitants from the whaleman as it conceals its mysterious pasts from the historian. However, when explored in the right way, the ocean reveals its secrets and regorges its whales and its pasts. »The Sea Is History,« Derek Walcott entitled his famous poem. It is not only a history of linking together ›larger‹ processes on the land, but a history in its own right, shaped by its own actors, following its own logic. »Where are your monuments?« Walcott asks and gives the answer: »The sea has locked them up.« Seeking material artifacts on the sea makes a historian look like the young Charles Nordhoff awaiting the color of the water to change when reaching a whaling ground. Notwithstanding the absence of visible tracks, the ocean is »a tracked-on space« as Greg Dening has put it:

> The wakes of ships and canoes that have crossed it have left no permanent mark on its waters. But if we voyaged in a *New 20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, looking up to the canopy of the sea's surface above us and had a sort of time-exposure vision, we would find

> the tracks a closely woven tapestry of lines. Very few of these lines would be random. They are all directed in some way by systems of knowledge: of stars, of time, of distance—and of purpose: of trade, of empire, of science, of way-finding. There are many other tracks, too, of whales in seasonal migration, of tuna, of birds. These too, more mysteriously, are directed by systems of knowledge. (Dening 2002: 2f.)

The tapestry of invisible but purposely drawn lines constituting the evidence of the sea's history turns out to be a valuable point of reference when entering current debates on how to conceptualize the spaces of history. Ships have been the essential means of linking remote spaces with each other for the greatest part of history, and focusing on maritime actors is of crucial relevance for understanding the spatial entanglements of the past (Heidbrink 2007). In this sense, Kären Wigen has stated: »Approaching human society from the water is prompting scholars to think afresh about such basic elements of geography as distance, scale, and boundaries. (…) [M]aritime social-cultural history as an analytical project requires an expansive spatial vision, extending not only from the ships to the docks but bridging multiple regions of the ocean and including littorals and their hinterlands as well.« (Wigen 2008: 12).

For several years now, historiography is renewing its spatial visions and its instruments for conceptualizing historical processes that exceed common spatial frameworks. My current dissertation research is conceived as a contribution to the debate on how to operationalize recent approaches in this field, confronting them with a phenomenon of interaction from the maritime sphere. The project focuses on contacts between coastal dwellers in Africa and its offshore islands (referred to as coastal Africa in the following) and sailors from whaling vessels (whalemen) who frequented African coastal waters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Directing our view to the movements of the actual actors of transoceanic entanglements, the field of observation cannot be specified as confined, as is usually the case in comparative or transfer-oriented studies, which often focus on two delimited spatial entities. The attention follows the ships' routes, which were determined by the

movements of the whales and other factors, and illuminates contact situations at various places, asking about their impacts on broader historical processes. How can this undertaking contribute to the renewal of spatial visions in historiography?

The goal of this article is to step into the conceptual discussion on historical space from the perspective of my research and introduce the ›beach‹ and the ›ship‹ as analytical figures. It begins by giving a short outline of the dissertation project and then portrays ›beach‹ and ›ship‹ as its central spatial images. Subsequently, it presents two empirical examples of entanglements initiated by interactions between coastal dwellers and whalemen and, in conclusion, suggests describing them as entanglements from below. Since the project is a work in progress, these considerations have a preliminary character.

Whalemen and coastal dwellers in the African context

People act intentionally, but history, as Wolfgang Reinhard reminds us, hardly follows the purposes of its actors—it »instead results dialectically from unintended side effects.« (Reinhard 2010: 87, translated from German by the author). An initial idea informing my dissertation project is to put such unintended consequences on center stage, namely: to interpret the American-style pelagic whaling of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a mobile practice that entailed far-reaching side effects of a global range. When whaling vessels from North America and Europe extended their voyages to all oceans from the 1760s onward, they spanned a net of hunting grounds, maritime routes, transport chains, and supply posts across the world.[1] About a hundred years later, when this

1 On the dynamics of exploration in particular, see Davis & Gallman 1993: 56–59, 62; Dolin 2007: 227–229; Francis 1990: 78f., 125–135; Jackson 1978: 92, 98–106, 117–130, 136–142; Jones 1981: 23–25, Mc Devitt 1978: 113f., 207–212; Macy 1835: 54; Spence 1980: 83f., 93, 96, 99, 107, 113, 117–119, 123; Stackpole 1952: 33–35, 51–55, 68; Starbuck 1878: 56, 95f., 176. I borrowed the term »American-style pelagic whaling« from Randall R. Reeves and Tim D. Smith, who developed a periodization model for the global history of whaling (Reeves & Smith 2006: 90f.).

whaling era reached its peak, around nine hundred vessels were being navigated simultaneously by more than twenty-thousand whalemen across the globe (Hohman 1928: 5f., 41f.). Since most voyages took several years and supplies continuously had to be obtained en route, contacts between sailors and coastal dwellers emerged wherever the ships opened up new whaling grounds. Viewed in this way, the legacy of whaling—spatially, probably the farthest reaching practice of exploiting natural resources in history—is not only a legacy of depleted species. In manifold and sometimes unforeseen ways, the hunt for whales shaped the everyday experiences and actions of those who came in contact with it—on sea and on land, in huge harbors and on small islands, in the Sea of Okhotsk as well as in the Great Australian Bight.

The encounters, exchanges, and communication between whalemen and coastal dwellers left traces on the beaches as well as on the ships. In my dissertation, I investigate the depth of these traces, or rather the shaping powers of such contacts, by examining a seascape topography that involves places on the eastern and western coast of Africa and its offshore islands. The field of observation includes places where, at times, whalers made up the largest and most influential segment of ships, such as in Annobón (today a part of Equatorial Guinea), Walvis Bay (Namibia), and Mutsamudu (Comoros). It also includes places where merchantmen, dhows, and naval ships commonly dropped their anchors as well, such as Delagoa Bay (Moçambique), Port Louis (Mauritius) and Saint Augustin (Madagascar). I am not examining all the places whalemen frequented in the African context, but all those where they appeared as a distinct group of actors.[2] The sites under consideration were not only distant from each other, but also different in terms of their social, political, economic, and cultural settings. However, the encounter with the whalemen and their consistent interests was a shared experience: the sailors sought provisions and water, wood to fire up the on-board tryworks, trading opportunities, recreation, time and space for ship repairs, sexual activity, and,

2 In the world harbors Cape Town and Zanzibar, whalers apparently made up only a minor portion of the shipping traffic, and whalemen hardly made an appearance as a distinctive group.

from time to time, opportunities to escape from the vessel. The basic question of the project is what impacts these practices had on coastal communities, particularly with regard to social and political dynamics as well as changes in economic structures and trade networks.

Why is ›Africa‹ a valid spatial reference for this kind of research? There are two reasons; the first is a pragmatic one: from the perspective of social and cultural history, there are hardly any studies on whalers' activities in the seas surrounding the African continent. Unlike the Pacific or the North Atlantic, there is a gap in the empirical research.[3] Secondly, this subject has the potential to widen and to delineate the common understanding of Africa's connections with the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Most studies in this field are located in the broader framework of colonialism and the Atlantic Slavery. It is doubtlessly justified and necessary to pay particular attention to this domain of maritime connections, not least because it contributed to Africa's long-lasting marginalization. At the same time, however, centering on colonialism and slavery has created powerful paradigms which sometimes mislead scholars to pre-structure their analytical frameworks by assuming a ubiquitous asymmetry in every relationship. Viewed against this background, studies of coastal contacts are particularly prone to »teleological fallacy,« as Ian C. Campbell terms it, namely that: »knowledge of the later outcome of contact influences perception of the nature of early contact.« (Campbell 2003: 63). In such a framework, scholars tend to confine historical actors from Africa to the role of victims and, as Monica Juneja criticizes, lose sight of ambiguous, unexpected, and disparate phenomena (Juneja 2003).

3 Haywood (1967) is the only separate study on whalers' activities in the African context. It is largely a survey of sailors' records and only superficially outlines the conditions and dynamics of coastal societies. Aside from Haywood, there are a few articles touching upon the issue of coastal interaction with whalemen, see in particular Booth 1964; Richards & Du Pasquier 1989; and Wray & Martin 1983. For the Pacific context, see Gray 1999; Kenny 1952; Kugler 1971; Martin 1979; Mrantz 1976; Ralston 1977; and Webb 1988.

The contacts between coastal dwellers and whalemen in the African context bear such a disparate character. Whalers were among the first ships that came from North America and Europe to coastal Africa on a regular basis without any interest in obtaining slaves (Duignan & Gann 1984: 58f.). Unlike many other actors who arrived on African beaches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whalemen had no intention of intervening in the societies they encountered. They were neither affected by the sense of vocation that distinguished missionaries, nor did they necessarily think of themselves as bearers of a superior civilization, as explorers or agents of colonial powers did. Their routes followed the movements of their prey, and, in a way, coastal contacts came along as an incidental side effect of the pursuit and capture of whales. For a whaler, roaming the oceans was not merely an intermezzo between departure and arrival, but the principal purpose of a voyage. A considerable portion of their itineraries was unpredictable. Coastal contacts which occurred over the course of these movements cannot be understood when acting on the a priori assumption that the actors involved encountered each other on a predetermined basis with unequal agencies. Accordingly, the investigation of this comparatively ambiguous context of interaction can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Africa's maritime pasts.

Ships and beaches

The history of whalemen's activities in coastal Africa is a history of exchange and communication that transcends boundaries—foremost in the spatial, but also in the social, cultural, political, economic, and normative sense. In this regard, it touches upon recent debates in historiography on how to conceptualize the spaces of history: influenced by globalization discourse, postcolonial criticism, and other stimuli, historians have developed, revitalized, and borrowed a number of instruments from other disciplines that aim to overcome the conventional understanding of spaces as holistic containers. Approaches such as *transnational history*, *histoire croisée*, or *entangled histories,* and concepts such as cultural transfer, hybridization, or *Black Atlantic* emphasize inherent and reciprocal dy-

namics of interactions beyond the borders of nation-states or other spatial entities imagined as fixed by restrictive boundaries.[4]

Some research in this field has been criticized for not applying its criticism of narrowing prefigurations to itself. Which constrictions, exclusions, and normative determinations do popular images from the digital age such as *network*, *flow*, or the *global* involve? And how does this conceptual equipment affect not only the potential findings, but also the constructions of the objects of empirical research? To this effect, Frederick Cooper has indicated the danger of projecting present experiences (or rather expectations) of global connectivity onto the past: in doing so, scholars create totalizing and therefore misleading paradigms that lose sight of important nuances (Cooper 2007: 159; see also Luutz 2007).

I meet this challenge by focusing on the actual practices and experiences of mobile actors who created spaces through their movements. The point of observation is not centered on a fixed spatial entity, but lays out a polylocal field and thus escapes the embedding of history in territorial space.[5] Utilizing a concept by Mary Louise Pratt, the places and spaces of interaction between whalemen and coastal dwellers can be described as ›contact zones‹: where persons of different cultural and social backgrounds came into contact, the reciprocal exchange was able to create its own dynamics and thus partially or fully detach lifestyles and normative systems in such spaces from those of their neighboring social environments (Pratt 1992: 4, 6f.). In coastal areas, however, such processes were subject to the dual character of the shoreline: separating the land from the sea, the shore only opened up to a contact zone when ships dropped anchor. Being ›in-between‹ spaces *and* boundaries, and at the same time limiting *and* expanding ranges of mobility, coastal areas were a specific type of ›contact zone‹, which Greg Dening has described as the ›beach‹. In Dening's understanding, a beach is not—or not only—a cer-

4 Regarding the objectives of these approaches, see in particular Randeria 1999, Subrahmanyam 1997, and Werner & Zimmermann 2002.

5 The idea of operating with polylocal fields of study came up in cultural anthropology; see in particular Marcus 1995 and Clifford 1999: 31.

tain type of the earth's surface in the geological sense, but an arena of interaction where the dynamic of becoming never leads to a static being. Unlike ›frontiers‹ in the history of settler colonialism, beaches did not necessarily become sites of a permanent overpowering, since, in the words of Dening, they »have to be crossed both by those who came first and those who come after.« Accordingly, a beach must be understood as a permanent »double-edged space, in-between; an exit space that is also an entry space; a space where edginess rules.« (Dening 2004: 13, 16). Consequently, a characteristic feature of beaches as ambivalent spaces of crossings and the ›in-between‹ was the prominent role of intermediaries: translators and pilots, beachcombers and middlemen, and many other border-crossers and negotiators had significant impact on the dynamics of interaction (Dening 1978: 31–34; Dening 2004: 18).

Whalemen and coastal dwellers not only faced each other on beaches, but also on the vessels, when, for example, traders, pilots, or messengers came aboard. Above all, however, newly hired sailors crossed the beaches towards the ships. American whalers normally recruited parts of their crew en route. During the second half of the eighteenth century, these cases were still sporadic. They occurred, for example, when captains had to replace men that had deserted, had suffered accidents, or were not fit for service for other reasons. Over the course of nineteenth century however, picking up shipping labor along the way became a widespread practice: the spatial and temporal expansion of the voyages opened up manifold opportunities to hire unskilled men who would work for little pay and could be taught most onboard jobs in little time. Especially on overcrowded Atlantic islands such as the Cape Verdes or the Azores, willing young men could be found in abundance (as I will discuss in more detail below) (Gillis 2007: 31).

The ranks and rules that structured life on a whaler hierarchically relativize the shaping power of the sociocultural diversity on board. By linking everyday experiences and practices with sharply defined status positions, the ship tended to de-individualize its occupants, comparable, for example, to a military barrack or a prison (Dening 1978: 159). Nevertheless, the ship was a space of cultural exchange. Since sailors

continuously had to deal with the diverse cultural and social practices within the frequently changing crews, David A. Chappell refers to ships as travelling border zones, or *periplean frontiers* (Chappell 1991: 1–9).

Understanding whaling vessels in this sense, as dynamic sociocultural arrangements, the resemblance between ships and beaches becomes apparent. Every sailor was shaped by the society in which he experienced his socialization and learned his categorical assumptions, but a ships' crew was no miniature model of these societies. Rather, it was a specific community formed at sea that followed its own logic. In the same way, a coastal place was not necessarily representative of the hinterland. In the Atlantic world for example, from the sixteenth century on, some coastal communities shared more similarities with coastal societies on different continents than with neighboring societies. It would be misleading to understand cultures in coastal Africa as homogenous entities which could be defined in an absolute sense (Gillis 2007: 30). Culture in the contact zone was no culture of place, as Michael Pesek has stated, but a culture of situations in which people configured and negotiated their encounters again and again (Pesek 2005: 67, 98). According to Marshall Sahlins, this practice of configuring and negotiating unfolds its own dynamic »which meaningfully defines the persons and the objects that are parties to it.« In fact, as Sahlins states, it is not the case »that the situations encountered in practice will stereotypically follow from the cultural categories by which the circumstances are interpreted and acted upon.« (Sahlins 1981: 35). In the words of Campbell, forms of behavior in the contact zone were not necessarily »part of the normal cultural expressions of the parties involved. They belonged, in other words, to the culture of contact only, not to the culture of daily life or the culture of normal experience.« (Campbell 2003: 64).

In this sense, beaches as well as ships—each in their own manner—were arenas of situational dynamics of transculturation which »lay beyond a confrontation of holistic cultures clearly distinguishable from each other.« (Pesek 2005: 99, translated from German by the author). In view of this, I am skeptical about reading the history of maritime interaction in coastal Africa as an interruption of something ›authentic‹ through out-

side intruders. Individuals who related their everyday life practices to the sea in a connected manner encountered each other at the beaches and on the ships, not representatives of ›Africa‹ on the one hand and of ›the West‹ on the other. Therefore, ›beaches‹ and ›ships‹ as arenas of this history as well as ›whalemen‹ and ›coastal dwellers‹ as its actors should be understood as categorical models which are necessary to make empirical processes describable, but not as holistic categories.

Entanglements from below

In an oral history interview in 1983, Joseph Andrade recalled: »My oldest brother had shipped out from New Bedford on a whaling boat.« Following his brother, Andrade signed onto an American whaler at São Nicolau in 1914 with the intent to migrate to the United States: »When I heard he was coming to the Cape Verde Islands, I was on the lookout for him. I was eighteen years old. When he arrived I asked him to ask the captain to give me a chance and he did.«[6] Joseph Andrade's story indicates how interactions between coastal dwellers and whalemen could initiate structural relationships that outlasted temporary contact situations. The chain migrations from the Cape Verdes to New England in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are but one example of the historical entanglements that emerged from whaling operations in coastal Africa. They originated in the practice of young men from the islands attempting to escape unemployment, the notorious famines, and the threat of Portuguese military service by joining American whalers. For these men, working on a whaler was firstly a strategy for survival. It meant having a regular supply of food and drink available, and it provided an opportunity to find better prospects in life in the United States. Ship owners took advantage of the availability of cheap labor at the Cape Verdes by sending out whalers with only a skeleton crew and instructing captains to man the rest of the crew with islanders recruited en route for low wages (Almeida 1978: 16–27; Creighton 1995: 9; Haywood 1967: 13–15, 59–62; Whitecar 40–42). Most captains who pursued this strategy

6 Joseph Andrade cited in Halter 1993: 69.

hired less than five men—in particular on São Nicolau, Santo Antão, Maio and, above all others, on Brava (Almeida 1978: 29)—, but in some cases it was considerably more. (When the schooner *Arthur V. S. Woodruff* from New Bedford visited São Vicente in December 1917, captain John T. Edwards shipped as many as 18 men, see Logbook ARTHUR V. S. WOODRUFF, 26 December 1917.) Over the years the hiring added up to substantial numbers. In 1868, the American consul at Brava, Benjamin Tripp, estimated that about four-thousand men had left the island temporarily or permanently with American whalers—or *Americanos*, as they were known on the Cape Verdes (Haywood 1967: 60f.).

Towards the end of the century, Cape Verdean-American entrepreneurs began operating passenger and cargo vessels, so-called packet ships, that transported migrants, mail, goods, and seasonal workers between New England and the islands on a regular basis. This traffic, often described as ›Brava Packet Trade‹, contained many old whaling schooners, brigs, and barks that had been taken out of service, and involved up to twenty-two voyages a year at its peak in the early 1900s. Via the Brava Packet Trade, Cape Verdeans followed their relatives, friends, and ancestors in large numbers and thus initiated a process of chain migration to New England, especially to the port cities and to the labor-intensive textile and cranberry industries in southeastern Massachusetts. In the period from 1900 to 1920, more than eighteen-thousand migrants from Cape Verde entered the United States, creating Luso-American *Crioulo* communities that still shape coastal New England today, New Bedford and Providence in particular. The exact number of migrants who crossed the Atlantic from the Cape Verdes to the United States is not known, but it is estimated to add up to between thirty-five thousand and forty thousand for the period from 1820 to 1976. The money these migrants and their descendants sent back to their relatives became an important source of income for many islanders and substantially stimulated the Cape Verdean economy (Almeida 1978: 30f.; Brooks 2006: 134; Halter 1993: 37, 41, 92f.; Lobban & Lopes 1995: 46–49).

A second example for an entanglement effect of whalemen's activities in coastal Africa can be found in the history of Walvis Bay. The ǂAonin (a

small community who speak a Nama dialect[7]) at this barren place on the desert coast of today's Namibia were no seafaring people, and for a long time vessels from Europe avoided the desolate Namib shore because of its dangerous seas and winds, the scarcity of protected bays, and the notorious fog. From the late fifteenth until the late eighteenth centuries, only a handful of vessels passed along Walvis Bay, not making any (documented) contact with the inhabitants of the bay (Dekker & De Jong 1998: 51–56; Gewald 1995: 419f.; Hartmann 2006: 11–13; Kienetz 1977: 555f.; Kinahan 2000: 14f.). However, when whalers from Nantucket, Dunkirk, and London extended their operations in the South Atlantic after the end of the American Revolutionary War, Walvis Bay evolved into one of their most important hunting grounds within a few years. Between 1788 and 1795, up to forty vessels came to the bay every year between June and September in order to hunt southern right whales, which migrate each winter from their Antarctic feeding grounds toward their breeding and calving grounds in the sheltered bays along the coasts of southern Africa. The few sources that provide information on whaling operations in the bay during these years indicate that they involved frequent trade and communication between whalemen and the ≠Aonin. (Booth 1964: 278f., 281 n. 27.; Jackson 1978: 108f.; Richards & Du Pasquier 1989: 232–234; Smith 1971: 210–217; Stackpole 1953: 164f.; Wray & Martin 1983: 215f.). Sailor James Choyce, who was in Walvis Bay from June to September 1793 on the British whaler *London*, reports in his memoirs: »While we stayed here we often went on shore to trade with the Hottentots for goats and small bullocks, for which we gave them iron, buttons, knives, and tobacco, of which they seemed very fond.« (Choyce 1891: 4).

7 ≠Aonin is etymologically derived from the Nama word »≠áob,« which means »top.« There are different explanations of what top refers to in this particular case. ≠Aonin could basically mean »people of the point,« or »people from the margins of the Nama area,« or »people standing on the top of the Nama people,« or something similar. The name was translated into Dutch as »Topnaar« (top = top, peak, above…; naar = to, as, according, aside…). See Lau 1985: 1243; Van den Eynden et al. 1992: 3.

Other sources support the view that contacts between whalemen and the ≠Aonin basically involved barter in particular (but not exclusively) of livestock and water in exchange for tobacco and beads (Alexander 1838 II: 87–93, 96, 106; Andersson 1861: 18; Booth 1964: 281; Galton 1891: 10; Kinahan 2000: 15, 17, 93; Wallace 2011: 37f.). Since there was neither a colonial government nor a class of professional middlemen interfering with trade, whalers could obtain provisions directly from the producers for lower prices than, for example, in Cape Town or St. Helena. The outbreak of the Anglo-French War in 1793, the Quasi-War between the United States and France (1798–1800), and the Anglo-American War of 1812 turned whaling into a high-risk business and reduced the number of vessels in the bay. After the peace agreements of Ghent and Paris in 1814, the route to Walvis Bay generally was open again to whalers, but since by that time their main interest had shifted to the sperm whales of the Pacific, and the southern right whale population was already decimated, the bay did not become a major whaling ground again (Haywood 1967: 82f.). Regular visits by whalers continued at a lower frequency until about 1840, and even thereafter some few vessels called on the bay until the American Civil War (Andersson 1861: 338; Booth 1964: 281; Griffiths et al. 2004: 309; Hopkins 1938: 165; Whitecar 1860: 362).

By 1840, the trade at the bay had attracted the attention of Oorlam and Nama groups[8] from the hinterland. Beginning in the 1790s, these soci-

8 Oorlam is a collective term for five groups, each involving several hundred to several thousand persons, which migrated into the southern and central areas of today's Namibia from the northern Cape frontier between the 1790s and the 1850s. The Oorlam groups were comprised of clans who had merged with social outsiders such as impoverished Khoisan herders and hunters, farm workers, fled slaves, and outlaws. The Nama lived in the southern area of today's Namibia and, around 1800, were divided into eight independent chiefdoms. In face of the scarce pasture and water resources, Nama lived in relatively small communities numbering between a few dozen and about fifteen hundred persons. Their total number was estimated between nine thousand one hundred and thirty-three thousand by the mid-nineteenth century (Dedering 1997: 25–29, 30, 34, 80; Lau 1982: 33–35, 43f., 75–77, 88f., 146).

eties had established a raid economy in the sparsely populated area of what is today southern and central Namibia. It was chiefly based upon mounted groups (*komandos*) carrying out hit-and-collect attacks on cattle posts. This practice must be regarded as an element of the cumulative incorporation of southern African regional trade systems into the expanding capitalist world economy: in order to barter guns, ammunition, horses, and ox-wagons from traders based in the Cape Colony, a growing number of Oorlam and Nama groups aimed at looting cattle herds as trade goods from each other as well from other pastoral societies; from the Herero in particular. This process involved far-reaching socioeconomic transformations and reached Walvis Bay in about 1840, when the most powerful Oorlam group from the interior, the Afrikaner Oorlam, connected the bay with regional centers in the interior by building a road for ox-wagons. Although the Afrikaner Oorlam leaders did not leave written records explaining their motives, it seems quite obvious that their aim was to gain access to maritime trade networks.[9] At the beginning of the 1840s and again in 1844, *komandos* allied with the Afrikaner Oorlam raided the ≠Aonin, killing many people, taking captives, and carrying away the cattle. It seems that the raids left the ≠Aonin as impoverished herders for the cattle of the Afrikaner Oorlam, who, for their part, brought Walvis Bay under their control (Hahn 1844; Kinahan 2000: 18; Scheppmann 1916: 238; Tindall 1959: 32, 40, 71, 74).

In 1843, the Afrikaner Oorlam invited two traders from the Cape, James Morris and Sidney Dixon, to set up a permanent trading post near Walvis Bay. Morris and Dixon sold beef to vessels passing by and contracted to provide the island of St. Helena with cattle and sheep (Henrichsen 2011: 21, 83f.; Kinahan 2000: 18, 70; Tabler 1973: 29f., 78f.; Tindall 1959: 71, 73). The more regular shipping traffic resulting from their activities, and the road connection to the interior, made the bay an attractive place for the Christian missionary societies, which had extended their activities in southern Africa by this time. In 1846 the German

9 Missionary Johannes Rath reported in 1845 that any trade at the bay had to be authorized by the Afrikaner Oorlam (Rath 1845: 228).

Rhenish Missionary Society established a station in the vicinity of the bay, seeing it as a suitable starting point for expanding into ›heathenish‹ areas (Tabler 1973: 95). The trade at the bay increased remarkably from the 1850s onward when hunters began to ship ivory and ostrich feathers from the interior via Walvis Bay to the Cape markets. De Pass & Co., a company from Cape Town, hunted for sharks in Walvis Bay and erected a fishing establishment in its vicinity in 1852. Some storehouses were to follow, and the first regular ship connection between the bay and Cape Town was set up (Andersson 1861: 340; Hahn 1984/1985: 897; Henrichsen 2011: 89; Kinahan 2000: 18). The number of cargo vessels frequenting Walvis Bay on a regular basis increased from eight in 1857 to twenty-eight in 1890, and notable amounts of ivory tusks, animal skins, and ostrich feathers were exported through the bay (Henrichsen 2011: 21f., 131–7, 327–9). Reciprocally, firearms were dispersed across southwestern Africa via Walvis Bay, even reaching Ngamiland in the northwest of today's Botswana (Tlou 1985: 66). During these decades, Walvis Bay emerged as the major trading port between Cape Town and Luanda and eventually came under the sphere of colonial politics. For the arguments of this article, it is important to realize that the barter between whalemen and the ≠Aonin marked the beginning of a process that transformed the beach of Walvis Bay from a boundary into an arena of interaction and crossings, and initiated far-reaching and long-lasting connections with larger trade networks.

The briefly outlined examples of the Cape Verdean-American migration and the emergence of Walvis Bay as a trading port show that in the case of whaling, ordinary people initiated entanglements through their everyday (mobile) practices that could span large spatial and temporal distances. However, ›entangled histories‹ as conceptualized by Shalini Randeria and others are often thought of in rather macrohistorical terms as an historical intertwining between big structures (such as epistemological systems or legal orders), large processes (such as globalization or modernization), and huge entities (such as society or nation-states). Such perspectives on entangled histories tend to involve a dualistic configura-

tion of the entities and spaces of study.[10] I am using the expression ›entanglements from below‹ to emphasize that the interconnections I am investigating were created from the bottom up, through the actions and experiences of ordinary, underprivileged actors. Entanglements from below were not necessarily structural processes, but a more multifaceted array of interconnections which evolved from an intertwining of everyday practices and meanings across long distances. For me, ›from below‹ firstly refers to a height of observation where the »little peope,« as Dening calls them, stand in the center, those »on whom the forces of the world press most hardly« (Dening 2004: 12). As Gayatri Spivak might put it, the actors of such entanglements from below often cannot speak for themselves, as they may have passed down comparatively few texts. However, as Alf Lüdtke reminds us, »to experience and to act is more than a text« (Lüdtke 1991: 17). Most of the migrants who crossed the Atlantic from the Cape Verde Islands to the United States and most of those who established the trade at Walvis Bay could not inscribe their voices in the predominant written discourses. However, they could act and they could travel, and through their mobile practices create what Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have described as »new and unexpected connections, which variously appeared to be accidental, contingent, transient, even miraculous« (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000: 6).

The case of the interactions between whalemen and coastal dwellers in the African context shows the potential of a maritime and polylocal field of study to challenge methodological territorialism in historiography. In order to unfold this potential, the concept of ›entangled histories‹ needs to be linked to a historical anthropological perspective that does not conceal the diversity of individual appropriation strategies behind a macrohistorical height of observation. Understood as analytical figures, the images of the ›beach‹ and the ›ship‹ can establish this link and illumi-

10 In a programmatic article, Randeria described »entangled histories« as a project aiming to »conceptually reformulate the past and present relations between western and non-western societies« (Randeria 1999: 87, translated from German by the author).

nate the ways in which the history of global entanglements was created from below.

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