

## **Elizabeth Libero – Navigating a British South Atlantic, 1800-1815.**

Supervisors: Cathryn Pearce, Brad Beaven, Rob James.

'Navigating a British South Atlantic 1800-1815' uses naval operations at the Cape of Good Hope, Rio de la Plata, and South Atlantic islands during the Napoleonic wars to explore ways the Royal Navy acted as producer and conduit of imperial knowledge. As naval personnel described, depicted, surveyed, enumerated, and charted these lands, seas, and communities, they enhanced the state's ability to control and manipulate them. Simultaneously these activities bolstered an emergent British communal identity and asserted the sailor's crucial place in it. Finally, by including the challenges faced in these areas and especially the failure of the South American expeditions, the thesis indicates some of the limits to imperial power. The core of the thesis compares the success of combined forces at the Cape of Good Hope in 1806 to the failure of a similar expedition to Rio de la Plata some months later. My analysis of accounting records, diaries and memoirs, maps and charts, and official correspondence will explain how the processes of cartography, written description, hydrography, resource allocation, and cultural contact and exchange could lead to two such divergent scenarios. Yet, participants and members of the public at the time explained the Plata fiasco by arguing that individual leaders deviated from core communal values. This gap between what the Navy actually did at the edges of empire and how the British public perceived them warrants further investigation. In this way, study of the Navy's work in knowledge production is poised to shed new light on evolving formulations of state power, communal identity, and the interaction between the two.