

Writing the Indian Ocean
in Selected Fiction by Joseph Conrad,
Amitav Ghosh, Abdulrazak Gurnah
and Lindsey Collen

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Abstract

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Abdulrazak Gurnah and Lindsey Collen

Tracked and inscribed across the centuries by traders, pilgrims and imperial competitors, the Indian Ocean is written into literature in English by Joseph Conrad, and later by selected novelists from the region. As this thesis suggests, the Indian Ocean is imagined as a space of littoral interconnections, nomadic cosmopolitanisms, ancient networks of trade and contemporary networks of cooperation and crime. This thesis considers selected fiction written in English *from* or *about* the Indian Ocean—from the particular culture around its shores, and about the interconnections among its port cities. It focuses on Conrad, alongside Amitav Ghosh, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Lindsey Collen, whose work in many ways captures the geographical scope of the Indian Ocean: India, East Africa and a mid-point, Mauritius. Conrad's work is examined as a foundational text for writing of the space, while the later writers, in turn, proleptically suggest a rereading of Conrad's oeuvre through an oceanic lens. Alongside their diverse interests and emphases, the authors considered in this thesis write the Indian Ocean as a space in and through which to represent and interrogate historical gaps, the ethics and aesthetics of heterogeneity, and alternative geographies. The Indian Ocean allows the authors to write with empire at a distance, to subvert Eurocentric narratives and to explore the space as paradigmatic of widely connected human relations. In turn, they provide a longer imaginative history and an alternative cognitive map to imposed imperial and national boundaries. The fiction in this way brings the Indian Ocean into being, not only its borders and networks, but also its vivid, sensuous, storied world. The authors considered invoke and evoke the Indian Ocean as a representational space—producing imaginative depth that feeds into and shapes wider cultural, including historical, figurations.

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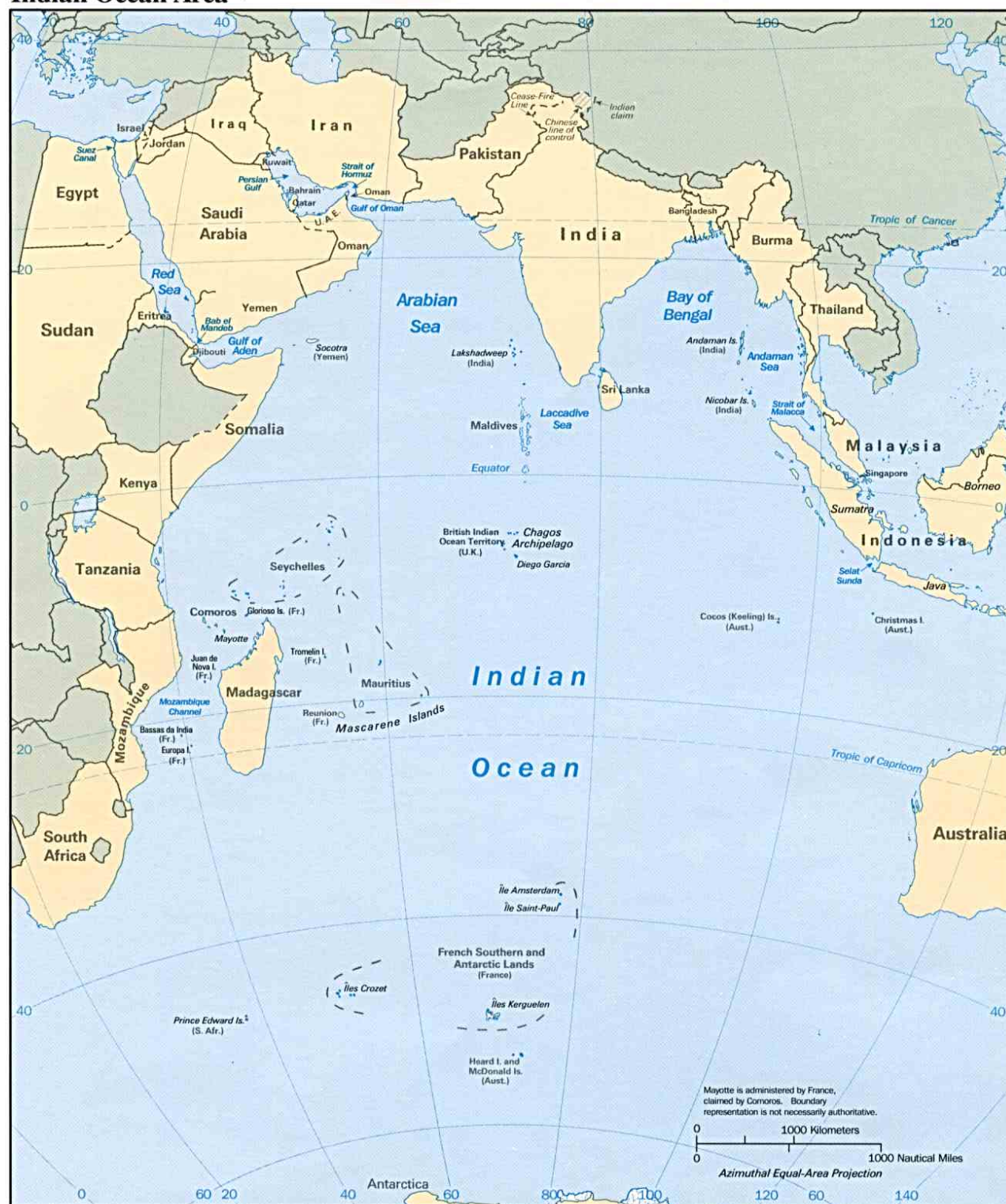
Finally, for their time, help, cheerleading, commiserating and celebrating, all my love to my family, Grunky and Noah.

List of Abbreviations

AM	Joseph Conrad, <i>Almayer's Folly</i>
AS	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Admiring Silence</i>
B	Lindsey Collen, <i>Boy</i>
BTS	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>By the Sea</i>
CR	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Circle of Reason</i>
D	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Desertion</i>
DT	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Dottie</i>
GP	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Glass Palace</i>
GR	Lindsey Collen, <i>Getting Rid of It</i>
HD	Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness and Other Tales</i>
IAL	Amitav Ghosh, <i>In An Antique Land</i>
LE	Joseph Conrad, <i>Last Essays</i>
LG	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>The Last Gift</i>
LJ	Joseph Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i>
M	Lindsey Collen, <i>Mutiny</i>
MD	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Memory of Departure</i>
MS	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Mirror of the Sea</i>
NN	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Nigger of the "Narcissus"</i>
OI	Joseph Conrad, <i>An Outcast of the Islands</i>
P	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Paradise</i>
ROS	Amitav Ghosh, <i>River of Smoke</i>
RS	Lindsey Collen, <i>The Rape of Sita</i>
SL	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Shadow-Line</i>
SLS	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Shadow Lines</i>
SP	Amitav Ghosh, <i>Sea of Poppies</i>
TLS	Joseph Conrad, <i>'Twixt Land and Sea</i>
V	Joseph Conrad, <i>Victory</i>

Figure 1

Indian Ocean Area



Introduction

“A sea of words:” Introduction

“But I won’t feel really at peace till I have that ship of mine out in the Indian Ocean. [...] He remarked casually that from Bangkok to the Indian Ocean was a pretty long step. And this murmur, like a dim flash from a dark lantern, showed me for a moment the broad belt of islands and reefs between that unknown ship, which was mine, and the freedom of the great waters of the globe.”

Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-line*

“This was Zachary’s first experience of this species of sailor. He had thought that lascars were a tribe or nation, like the Cherokee or Sioux: he discovered that they came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese.”

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*

“That was how I lived in Durban for some months. I fell in love there, but that was not the first reason for staying. [...] The cafes and the food were familiar. The buildings reminded me of my home, as had buildings in Bombay and in Madras and even Colombo. [...] I got carried away with the sights [in Port Louis]. They reminded me of home. Many places reminded me of home, the look of the houses, the fruit in the market, a crowd outside a mosque. I could not stop seeing the similarities.”

Abdulrazak Gurnah, *The Last Gift*

“‘Oh it’s easy,’ you say. ‘We used to live there. It was the only country we knew. Chagos. Our ancestors were slaves, they say, from Africa and Madagascar and India and were brought to the Islands, sometimes direct, mostly via Mauritius. The Islands are part of Mauritius, you know that don’t you? We used to take the outside husks off coconuts, men and women doing the same work for the same money.’”

Lindsey Collen, *Mutiny*

In Joseph Conrad’s short story, “A Smile of Fortune,” the captain of a ship approaches an island in the middle of a vast, calm, blue ocean.

Ever since the sun rose I had been looking ahead. The ship glided gently in smooth water. After a sixty days’ passage I was anxious to make my landfall, a fertile and beautiful island of the tropics. The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the “Pearl of the Ocean.” (TLS 3)

The Pearl soon appears, at sixty miles off, as a “blue, pinnacled apparition,” a “beautiful, dreamlike vision,” “the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar.” The Captain wonders whether this unusual sighting is a good or bad omen, and it turns out that it is a little of both: during his stay on the island he falls in and then

out of love with the difficult daughter of a scandalous ship-chandler, but on his departure takes on a cargo of potatoes which he sells at a great profit in Australia. The story ends on a strange note, as the Captain informs his devoted but irritable first mate, Mr Burns, that he has chosen to resign the command of his beloved ship.

“But the fact is that the Indian Ocean and everything that is in it has lost its charm for me. I am going home as passenger by the Suez Canal.”

“Everything that is in it,” he repeated angrily. I’ve never heard anybody talk like this. And to tell you the truth, sir, all the time we have been together I’ve never quite made you out. What’s one ocean more than another? Charm, indeed!” (TLS 108)

This thesis takes that note of departure as its point of arrival in the space of the Indian Ocean, and attempts to respond to Mr Burns and his indignant question. What, indeed, is one ocean more than another? What is it to conceive of the Indian Ocean along with “everything that is in it”? What is its—imagined, literary, compelling—charm? And what is it to bring such an oceanic space into the more fixed, but also malleable, dimensions of the text?

The story appears in Conrad’s collection ‘*Twixt Land and Sea*, published in 1912. In the prefatory “Author’s Note,” Conrad uses spatial language to explain the connection between the collected pieces.

The only bond between these three stories is, so to speak, geographical, for their scene, be it land, be it sea, is situated in the same region which may be called the region of the Indian Ocean with its off-shoots and prolongations north of the equator even as far as the Gulf of Siam. (TLS ix)

He goes on to explain that the second story in the collection was written after a long illness endured in Europe:

[Afterwards] I was inspired to direct my tottering steps towards the Indian Ocean, a complete change of surroundings and atmosphere from the Lake of Geneva, as nobody would deny. Begun so languidly and with such a fumbling hand that the first twenty pages or more had to be

thrown into the waste-paper basket, “A Smile of Fortune,” the most purely Indian Ocean story of the three, has ended by becoming what the reader will see. (TLS x)

In these short lines, Conrad effectively inaugurates a literary space in English—the vaguely-defined but nevertheless recognizable “region of the Indian Ocean with its off-shoots and prolongations” (TLS ix). Primarily, however, he raises a set of questions to do with Indian Ocean space—and the incipient, potential genre of Indian Ocean literature—opening up lines of inquiry for later writers to explore. What does it mean to speak of a spatial or “geographical bond” between different pieces of writing, and can such a bond extend to other and later works? What are those characteristics of the Indian Ocean in literature that make it so different from the eminently European Lake of Geneva, “as nobody would deny”? What does it mean to speak of the Indian Ocean adjectivally as Conrad does of the story “Smile of Fortune,” which he calls “the *most* Indian Ocean”? What makes one piece of writing more Indian Ocean than another, or, in other words, what is a generic Indian Ocean novel?

Tracked and inscribed across the centuries by traders, pilgrims and imperial competitors, the Indian Ocean is written into literature in English at the turn of the twentieth century by the mariner novelist Joseph Conrad, and later by a growing number of novelists with strong connections to the region¹. It is imagined as a space of littoral interconnections, nomadic cosmopolitanisms, ancient networks of trade and contemporary networks of cooperation and crime. As my readings will suggest, it evokes paradisiacal warmth and calm on the one hand, and piratical danger and

¹ While considered as crucially anticipatory in this thesis, due to his canonical status and consequent relative familiarity, Conrad’s work in fact acts as a node or inflection point between earlier adventure and colonial fiction of the sea and the work of the postcolonial writers considered in this thesis. As will be discussed in the first chapter, Conrad’s biographical experience traversed almost the entire Indian Ocean, and his long-lived fascination with the space has had sustained intertextual impact through the process of canonization. Examples of Conradian forerunners include Stephen Crane, Fredrick Marryat, James Fenimore Cooper and Victor Hugo, alongside non-fictional sources such as Alfred Russel Wallace’s *Malay Archipelago*. Also see Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*.

volatility on the other. This thesis considers selected fiction written in English *from* or *about* the Indian Ocean—from the particular culture around its shores, and about the interconnections among its port cities.² It focuses on Conrad, alongside Amitav Ghosh, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Lindsey Collen, whose work in many ways captures the geographical scope of the Indian Ocean: India, East Africa and a mid-point, Mauritius. Conrad's work is examined as a foundational or even an Ur-text for writing of the space—prototypical and generative—and as part of the context in which the later writing takes place—whether as discursive situation, pretext, or distant background. The later writers, in turn, proleptically suggest a rereading of Conrad's oeuvre through an oceanic lens, and write the Indian Ocean as a way in to the submerged histories and trans-categorical values beyond imperial and national narratives. Alongside their diverse interests and emphases, the authors considered in this thesis write the Indian Ocean as a space in and through which to represent and interrogate historical gaps, the ethics and aesthetics of heterogeneity and alternative geographies, as I will further define below.

The Indian Ocean is, in human historical terms, far older than the Atlantic or Pacific oceans, and its shores more intensely interconnected. Aside from being the smallest of the three major oceans, it is also the only one that boasts a continental “roof,” as can be seen in the frontispiece map (Figure 1). The largely continuous coastline both allows for largely coastal shipping to move almost all the way from Beijing to Durban, and also creates the predictable and powerful monsoon system that

² This is related to the distinction developed by Ferdinand Braudel between history *in* the Mediterranean, contingently a matter of location, and history *of* the Mediterranean, requiring comparisons across the scope of the ocean and a coherent sense of place. See also Horden Peregrine and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). The distinction is employed by historians Michael Pearson and Sugata Bose, albeit in slightly different ways, to argue for the unity of the space and its usefulness as an object of study, in different periods. Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons : The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006) 273, Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean, Seas in History* (London: Routledge, 2003) 9.

permits cross-ocean travel. The monsoon blows northeast across the ocean half the year, and southwest the other half, allowing for regular back and forth cross-ocean travel even in relatively weak wooden craft (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 19). The comparative strength of maritime connections has to do with the predictability of the monsoon as well as the historic inefficiency of overland as opposed to sea travel, including the dangers of moving through well-armed terrestrial kingdoms.³ The long-term connectedness underlies what historians refer to as the “Indian Ocean world,” which is defined not simply by geography or environment, but also through the relationship and interaction of these with coastal, island, and maritime communities.⁴ This unique maritime world, until the mid-twentieth century, was dominated by port cities, which represent the “quintessential merging of town and sea, the conduit through which maritime and terrestrial influences mingle and merge” (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 31). Many ports of this geographic, social and historical space recur in the novels in this thesis, and tracing their arc on a map gives a sense of its scope: Cape Town, Durban, Sofala, Kilwa, Shams, Zanzibar, Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu, Aden, Cairo, Muscat, Basra, Cambay, Surat, Bombay, Calicut, Cochin, Chennai, Colombo, Rangoon, Bangkok, Canton, Malacca, Singapore, Jakarta. The spatial frame of reference is inter-port rather than inter-national, oceanic rather than land-based. While the borders of what is known as the Indian Ocean world are contested, this thesis takes as a point of departure Pearson’s suggestion that “in fact a certain fuzziness is in order; rather than try to lay down rigid borders where land takes over

³ “The predictability of a homeward wind made the Indian Ocean the most benign environment in the world for long-range voyaging.” Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* 19.

⁴ The terminology rests on Immanuel Wallerstein’s definition of a “world-system,” so called “not because it encompasses the whole world, but because it is larger than any juridically-defined political unit” (Wallerstein 1974 15). Its importance is pointed out by Gwyn Campbell, who notes that focusing on the Indian Ocean world rather than the Asian global economy avoids the traps of centrism, as it “considerably enlarges the scope of the debate about the rise and development of the first global economy and permits a reassessment of the role of Africa in that economy” (Campbell, “The role of Africa in the rise of the ‘Indian Ocean world’ global economy” (172).

and the sea disappears, we should accept, and even celebrate, complexity and heterogeneity. We should proceed cases by case [...]” (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 28). This is even more a matter of necessity when working outwards from the concerns of the fiction; the following chapters, consequently, aim to proceed novel by novel.

In January 1995, Nelson Mandela, newly elected President of South Africa, was received on a state visit in Delhi where he expressed the hope that “the natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic cooperation and other peaceful endeavours” (quoted in Bose 281). Two years later, in Mauritius in 1997, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) was established, with the aim of supporting Indian Ocean rim countries as an “economic community of nations” by promoting investment and economic development in the region. While the organization has to date produced few tangible results, it represents one of the modern manifestations of Indian Ocean links, alongside and stemming from the Asian-African conference held in Bandung, Indonesia forty years prior in 1955. An immediate precursor of the Non-Aligned Movement, Bandung articulated a shared anti-colonial project in the Indian Ocean. The IOR-ARC invokes both the ancient history of trade in the Indian Ocean as well as the Bandung-inspired sense of shared colonial, anti-colonial and Cold War legacies to support on-going cooperation.⁵ The flip side of this cooperative construction is suggested by Robert D. Kaplan in *Monsoon* (2010), which situates the modern Indian Ocean as the theatre for political and military competition

⁵ “The common historical experience of European imperialism had left a lasting impression on the leaders of states in the Indian Ocean region—of a sense of shared identity. The rediscovery of the past littoral economic, social and cultural community, of an ocean-centric regional co-operative grouping serving as a bridgehead between Africa, Asia and Australasia, therefore seemed only natural.” IOR-ARC, *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation*, 2013, Available: <http://www.iorarc.org/>, 8 January 2013.

in the twenty-first century. As a key strategic location for the supply and transport of oil and as the point of intersection between the United States and the emerging powers of India and China, the Indian Ocean serves as the site for what Kaplan tellingly describes as “the new Great Game” (Kaplan). In addition to the ancient networks of trade and travel, these twentieth and twenty-first century constructions and connections provide a context and further impetus for critical consideration of the production of Indian Ocean space, particularly in the literature of the same period.

Key historical studies of the Indian Ocean, which inform the literary criticism in the chapters following, include Michael Pearson’s *The Indian Ocean* (2003), Sugata Bose’s *A Hundred Horizons* (2006), Engseng Ho’s *The Graves of Tarim* (2006), Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward Alpers’ *Cross Currents and Community Networks* (2007), and Clare Anderson’s *Subaltern Lives* (2012). These works rest in turn on a number of important earlier studies, including KN Chaudhuri’s *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (1985).⁶ Much of this ocean-focused history is inspired by Fernand Braudel’s work on the Mediterranean, which emphasized cross-ocean connections over the *longue durée*, a conception given imaginative weight particularly in Ghosh’s writing. In addition, recent Indian Ocean histories extend the temporal elongation to the widening of spatial focus by revising Eurocentric narratives, a reorientation that forms an equally animating principle in all the writers considered here.

Literary and cultural studies research on Indian Ocean themes has appeared more recently and again informs my readings. My thesis develops the question,

⁶ In the wider domain of popular or pedagogical history, a number of Indian Ocean history websites aim to promote awareness and education. For instance www.indianoceanhistory.org, by the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center (SQCC), named for Sultan Qaboos Bin Said al Said of Oman was established in 2005, and The New York Public Library has created an exhibition website called “The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean World,” featuring maps and multimedia, at <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africansindianocean/maps.php> [both last accessed 30 March 2013].

introduced in Shanti Moorthy and Asraf Jamal's collection *Indian Ocean Studies*, of the nature and scope of an incipient "Indian Ocean poetics," and employs the conceptualization, outlined by Pamila Gupta in her introduction to the important collection *Eyes Across the Water*, of the Indian Ocean as a space of fluidity—"a metaphor to ask how the Indian Ocean transported, kept afloat and drowned ideas and concepts" (Gupta, Hofmeyr and Pearson 3; Moorthy and Jamal 3).⁷ Indian Ocean cultural studies has had particular attraction in the South African academy, where a number of key articles have been published.⁸ Meg Samuelson and Grace Musila recount that, during a recent series of public lectures at Stellenbosch University, the "Indian Ocean emerged as a way of thinking through and from the South that promises to avoid the sentimental pieties of postcolonialism and thirdworldism in favour of theorising Africa's place in a complicated future" (Samuelson and Musila 425). Perhaps most influentially, Isabel Hofmeyr, in her 2007 essay "The Black Atlantic meets the Indian Ocean," lays out the value of an Indian Ocean focus for cultural criticism. The Indian Ocean, she argues, can be thought of as the "site par excellence of 'alternative modernities', those formations of modernity that have taken shape in an archive of deep and layered existing social and intellectual traditions" (Hofmeyr "The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean" 13). The Indian Ocean, she

⁷ In addition, a special edition of the PMLA appeared in 2010 which focused on oceanic studies, featuring literary critical work on Indian Ocean writing, and the postcolonial journal *Wasafiri* published a special edition on "Indian Oceans" in the summer of 2011, edited by Stephanie Jones. In 2012, *Comparative Studies of Asia, Africa and the Middle East* published a special issue on comparative literature, featuring a number of articles which address questions of a comparative method specifically with regards to Indian Ocean space. Routledge launched its Indian Ocean book series in 2009, which includes studies on anthropological, historical and cultural themes.

⁸ See Tina Steiner, "Navigating Multilingually: The Chronotope of the Ship in East African Fiction," *English Studies in Africa: A Journal of the Humanities* 51.2 (2008), Tina Steiner, "Writing 'Wider Worlds: The Role of Relation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction,'" *Research in African Literatures* 41.3 (2010), Gabeba Baderoon, "The African Oceans—Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture," *Research in African Literatures* 40.4 (2009), Meg Samuelson, "(Un)Settled States: Indian Ocean Passages, Performative Belonging and Restless Mobility in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction," *Social Dynamics* 36.2 (2010), Tina Steiner, "The Indian Ocean Travels of Sheikh Yusuf and Imam Ali Ali: Literary Representations in Ishtiyak Shukri's *the Silent Minaret* and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*," *Social Dynamics* 38.2 (2012).

suggests in a phrase that resonates with the representations discussed in this thesis, acts as a “complicating sea.”⁹

As the above demonstrates, there exists a relatively substantial canon of historical and cultural research on the Indian Ocean; yet less work has been done on particularly *literary* representations.¹⁰ Responding to this relative scarcity, my thesis pursues the question of cross-oceanic literary Indian Ocean continuities and differences, as expressed in English. It focuses on the imaginative histories of the Indian Ocean, exploring its appearance and characterisation as it is produced in fiction. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, argues that space should not be seen as a neutral category, universal, abstract and unchanging. Rather, space can be thought of as something produced, and, importantly, “the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action” (Lefebvre 26). Spatial criticism has often fallen into the trap of reading space as either purely ideational, on the one hand, or as objective, real and grounding, on the other—succumbing to what Lefebvre calls, respectively, the “illusion of transparency” and “the realist illusion.”¹¹ Lefebvre instead highlights the interdependency of “representations of space”—knowledge, signs, codes, maps—and “representational space”—“complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as

⁹ For a discussion see the more recent article by Isabel Hofmeyr, “The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32.3 (2012).

¹⁰ Some recent exceptions include Stephanie Jones, “The Politics of Love and History: Asian Women and African Men in East African Literature,” *Research in African Literatures* 42.3 (2011), Meg Samuelson, “Abdulrazak Gurnah’s Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics,” *Social Dynamics* 38.3 (2012). This thesis is notably in dialogue with but drawing further westwards from the purview of Stephanie Jones’ 2002 thesis on East African fiction. Stephanie Jones, “Novels of the South Asian Diaspora in East Africa,” University of Cambridge, 2002.

¹¹ Alexander Moore argues that Homi Bhabha’s usage tends towards the ideational, while Said’s *Orientalism* sometimes relies on a reificatory use of space. What this thesis attempts to keep in play is the interdependency of ideation and materiality, not reading the literary representations of the Indian Ocean as subsidiary to the historical or geographic but instead as mutually constitutive. See in particular the chapter on Gurnah, but also the discussion of literary mapping that track across the four authors.

also to art” (33). My reading here attempts to return to the Lefebvrian emphasis on production, which does not depend on a real/idea dynamic, but instead reads the literary *performance* of space, keeping in mind the warning that “representations realise. Texts are not symptoms of space, space itself is a symptom of writing” (A. Moore 21). Or, as Paul Carter writes in *The Road to Botany Bay*, the subject of this thesis is “not a physical object, but a cultural one:”

It is not the geographer’s space, although that comes into it. What is evoked here are the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence. (Carter xxii)

Following Lefebvre, this thesis is concerned to demonstrate the literary performance of space, by drawing attention not only to the way in which Indian Ocean space is represented discursively in the fiction, but also to its representationality. This involves an exploration of the space of the literary text itself, or, in other words, the interrelationship between the space *of* and *in* narrative.

In its oceanic focus, Indian Ocean studies owes considerable debt to the more established field of Atlantic, and particularly black Atlantic, studies. Inevitably, this thesis is therefore informed by Paul Gilroy’s seminal *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* which demonstrates the value of an oceanic purview for cultural studies, by viewing modernity through the lens of the “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation I call the black Atlantic” (Gilroy 2). Conrad’s writing demonstrates the contrasts between the Atlantic and Pacific, on the one hand, and the Indian Ocean, on the other, as will be discussed in the first chapter. Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* makes the transoceanic connection, beginning with a vision that appears to the protagonist Deeti: the vision of a tall-masted Atlantic ship, the *Ibis*, a former slaver, which arrives to take Deeti and others to Mauritius as

indentured labourers.¹² Gilroy highlights a similar ship-image as central to an elaboration of transnational space, one which allows for a focus on the movement of goods, people and ideas.

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons. (Gilroy 9)

A similar approach is useful for Indian Ocean literary criticism, as Tina Steiner demonstrates in her article, “Navigating Multilingually” (Steiner “Navigating Multilingually”). However, this focus on the ship as chronotope (or heterotopia, as will be discussed in the first chapter) also suggests some points of divergence between Atlantic and Indian Ocean imaginaries. Ships in the Indian Ocean are depicted in the novels considered in this thesis as more diverse among themselves, incorporating dhows as well as sailing ships and steamers. Their paths across the ocean are more criss-crossed, webbed and punctuated with stops, on islands and along the encircling coastline, due to the monsoon and continuous coastline described above. The different purposes and destinations of Indian Ocean travel portrayed in the novels—including trade, tourism, drug smuggling, marriage, familial visits, indenture, slavery and escape—evoke a multidirectional movement that differs from the triangular trade that is persistently, if anachronistically, associated with the Atlantic. More generally, the terminology itself suggests its own distinction: there is no way to speak coherently of the “black Indian Ocean.”¹³ Acknowledging both points of contact and divergence, this thesis explores the question of what difference the Indian Ocean makes, if any,

¹² For a discussion see Jacob Crane, “Beyond the Cape: Amitav Ghosh, Frederick Douglass and the Limits of the Black Atlantic,” *Postcolonial Text* 6.4 (2012): 453.

¹³ While this term has occasionally been used, especially in historical reviews, it is usually paired with qualifiers which signal its imperfect fit, such as “for want of a better term.” For instance see Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review* 43.1 (2000): 29.

taking the explicit and embedded settings of the novels themselves as a point of departure, but opening outwards to wider cultural and historical constructions as well.

While the authors considered in this thesis de-emphasize the defining importance of colonialism to the culture of the Indian Ocean rim, colonial connections are still an aspect of the unity of the space. In some ways, a thesis focused on oceans and oceanic travel necessarily references colonialism, because global colonialism of the last four hundred years was enabled crucially by sea travel, including ship construction and improvements in navigation. In colonial history of the nineteenth century, the British Empire controlled, at one time or another, nearly all the key ports of the Indian Ocean, although the area is influenced by Dutch, French, German and Portuguese powers (Pietsch). In addition, historical research demonstrates the importance of “indigenous” imperialisms: the Hadrami, Omani, Zanzibari, Malagasy, Cutchi, and so on (Campbell "The Role of Africa"). However, while the postcolonial critique of ideas of centre and periphery have long been current, there have been few cognitive maps of an alternative geography. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his *Provincializing Europe*, attempts to complicate and destabilize the Eurocentric grand narrative of history with the “contradictory, plural, and heterogeneous struggles whose outcomes are never predictable, even retrospectively, in accordance with schemas that seek to naturalize and domesticate this heterogeneity” (Chakrabarty 42). Conrad combats centre-periphery models in *Almayer's Folly* by representing both imperial centres and colonial outposts as degenerate sites. He does this, as Rod Edmond describes, by “establishing a series of correspondences between these two settings,” figuring degeneration as a universal condition, as in the Congolese river and the Thames in *Heart of Darkness* (Edmond 45). More importantly, his work produces an alternative geography of wandering, chance and fluidity. This results in what

Elleke Boehmer describes as “colonial decentring,” achieved partly through the multi-voiced nature of the narrative style—pointing to the importance of literary techniques as crucial to the production of space, discussed in more detail in relation to Gurnah’s work in the third chapter (Boehmer “Immeasurable Strangeness” 99). The later authors are similarly interested in unwritten histories and alternative spaces, whether as familiar material or as ethical imperative. While Chakrabarty focuses on the fragmentariness of history, and the resultant “heterotemporality” of the world, Indian Ocean writing seems to be moving towards a radical heterospatiality (Chakrabarty 92).

This is achieved in part through the imagining of Indian Ocean space as comprising a series of overlapping networks, a figuration apparent in all the authors considered here but most developed in Conrad’s and Ghosh’s writing. The application of network thinking to the novels under consideration draws on an established literary historical method.¹⁴ Elleke Boehmer employs networks to understand postcolonial literary history in her *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920*. Rather than a top-down or bottom-up figuration of the colonial relationship, her work demonstrates the ways in which resistance movements interact, in ways that can also be useful for the definition and understanding of cross-Indian Ocean relations.

The flow of power relations in this new picture, the movement and exchange of anti-colonialist, nationalist, class, gender, and other discourses, appears as more constellated and diversified, far more multiply-mediated than in standard dualistic configurations of the colonial relationships. [...] Rather the entire imperial framework

¹⁴ In addition, the network trope is apparent in the history of the region and more widely. C.A. Bayly employs networks in order to comprehend the scope of global history, and Indian Ocean history in particular has recently been viewed in this way, for instance, Milo Kearney’s *The Indian Ocean in World History*, and particularly the Ray and Alpers’ *Cross Currents and Community Networks*. Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Milo Kearney, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (London: Routledge, 2004), Edward A. Alpers and Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

becomes at once decentred and multiply-centred, a network, one might say, of interrelating margins. (Boehmer *Empire* 6)

The conceptualization of anti-colonial resistance “amongst others” will be explored in more detail in the final chapter on Lindsey Collen and her writing of the Mauritian nation alongside Indian Ocean regionality. Leela Gandhi’s work employs a similar method in her *Affective Communities*, tracing links between various kinds of activists in the anticolonial movements, and introducing the concept of “xenophilia” which is influential for Ghosh (see Ghosh “Confessions of a Xenophile”). This thesis will dialogue with these voices, drawing on and extending them to illuminate, from various angles, the literary depictions of networks with which this thesis is concerned. In particular, rather than discussing links between authors and texts in the space, the following chapters highlight the ways in which Indian Ocean networks are written in the novels, as metaphors and tropes, as entangled and acentric maps and plotlines, and as itineraries of travel, connection and desertion.

As following chapters will show, the sense of an Indian Ocean space pervades many of the novels of Conrad, Ghosh, Gurnah and Collen. Each is marked by descriptions of maritime maps, cosmopolitan trade networks and intersecting shipping lanes, references to Arab dhows, Indian food, African music, Islam and hajj, busy harbours, the predictable and enabling monsoon, coastal fishermen, Swahili, Arabic and South Asian trading lineages, everyday acts of translation, and extraordinary encounters with racial and cultural difference. Some of these are what historian Michael Pearson considers the defining features of the unity of the Indian Ocean world, which produce a greater likeness between the port cities and fishing villages from Zanzibar to Java than between the coasts and their hinterlands (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 6). They also cumulatively create what Meg Samuelson describes as the “unique and particular coastal sensorium” (Samuelson “Fictions of the Swahili

Coast"). However, the literary unities of the Indian Ocean can also be described with a broader scope, drawing firstly on Conrad. Working from the "Author's Note" cited at the beginning, it is possible to begin to get a sense of limits, character, and use of the Indian Ocean from Conrad's writing, a sense prescient for the time, given that he was writing this space into English for the first time. In his words, "the Indian Ocean" is a phrase that can be used descriptively, contrastively and synthetically. Its appellation depends on the "scene" of a story, which includes both "surroundings" and "atmosphere." The scene should be situated in the "region which may be called the region of the Indian Ocean," a locution which draws attention to the potentially problematic regionality of the space, indicated above, as well as the problem of naming. The borders of this region are explicitly porous—"with its off-shoots and prolongations north of the equator even as far as the Gulf of Siam"—a description which corresponds to the many horizons of Braudelian oceanic history, and also extends the region eastward through the Straits of Malacca to include the Malay archipelago (Bose 3). In addition, the scene can be described as "Indian Ocean" regardless of its oceanic nature: "be it land, be it sea."¹⁵

In different ways, each of the modern authors acknowledges a connection to the space, as Conrad does in the "Author's Note"—and reciprocally, each can be seen therefore to owe an imaginative debt, to a greater or lesser extent, to Conrad. In Gurnah's novel, *Admiring Silence*, the narrator insists that he is "strictly an Indian Ocean lad."

Of course, after all this drama I did not have the heart to tell him that I was not Afro-Caribbean, or any kind of Caribbean, not even anything to do with the Atlantic—strictly an Indian Ocean lad. Muslim,

¹⁵ This suggests a tacking between land and sea reminiscent of Conrad's *Nostramo*, a novel which contributes to the writing of the more thoroughly imagined Atlantic Ocean.

orthodox Sunni by upbringing, Wahhabi by association and still unable to escape the consequence of those early constructions. (AS 9-10)

Despite the “messy contortions” of his actual experience, he finds that his Indian Ocean heritage “adorned me with authority over the whole world south of the Mediterranean and east of the Atlantic”—describing in broad strokes the spatial purview of this thesis (AS 62). In the rest of Gurnah’s work the interest and affiliation is more understated and embedded, as it is in Collen’s work. In an interview, however, she too suggests a commonality with Gurnah, admitting that the Indian Ocean has a “very personal dimension” for her. She spent holidays on the East coast of South Africa during her childhood, lived in the Seychelles and Mozambique, and settled in Mauritius.

So, that means that the space makes sense in my head, the space around the Indian Ocean. And I feel something ephemerally and vaguely “in common” in the Ports that I’ve visited that give on to it. And then, there are so many links. [...] When I read Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *By the Sea*, I feel I know everything he’s talking about, when he looks into the past of the Indian Ocean. (Collen "Interview" 3-4)

Collen’s work provides a vivid sense of a place born of Indian Ocean connections—the mixed society of Mauritius—and its connections with Africa and India. Less interested in the past than the others, she writes the Indian Ocean present. Of the three contemporary authors, Amitav Ghosh has most consciously and persistently written the Indian Ocean in his work, and reflected on that writing. Anshuman Mondal and Elleke Boehmer note that Ghosh’s oeuvre traverses almost the entire ocean, covering it at “different levels of interconnection”: “You’ve gone to the east of it, you’ve gone to the west, you’ve gone up to the north-western corner with the Arab Gulf, and now you’re beginning to map down the southern reaches of the western Indian Ocean” (Boehmer and Mondal 34). As Ghosh affirms in response:

It really has become my project, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, imagining it, giving it life, filling it in. And the more I work on it the more it fascinates me. It's just so interesting and relatively unmapped imaginatively, so un-thought. (Boehmer and Mondal 34)

In their writing, these authors are involved, following and extending Conrad, in writing the Indian Ocean into being—imagining it, giving it life, filling it in—*producing* the space.

In addition to the authors studied in this thesis, a significant number of novels with an Indian Ocean interest have been published over the last half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. I mention them here for the sake of scholarly completeness: a more extended version of this study would be able to address them also. The widening of the all-too-powerful Indian novel to include, increasingly, novels from Pakistan, has been matched by a growing interest in writing from Sri Lanka—drawing outwards, as it were, to the Indian Ocean. Sri Lankan novels in this category would include Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table* and *Running in the Family*, Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef* and *The Prisoner of Paradise*, and Roma Tearne's *Mosquito*.¹⁶ The significant Sri Lankan output, while certainly linked to ideas of the Indian Ocean, highlights slightly different aspects of the space, referring largely to Indian connections on the one hand, and the ocean itself on the other. The rise of South African Indian fiction is described by Pallavi Rastogi in her *Afrindian Fictions*, and embraces Ahmed Essop's *The Emperor* and the *Hajji Musa* collection, Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse*, Farida Karodia's *Other Secrets*, and Imraan

¹⁶ An interesting development is a novel by Sri Lankan born Australian writer Chandani Lokugé, *Turtle Nest*, which depicts the life of a poverty-stricken fishing village and its relationship to global tourism, as well as the connections between Sri Lanka and Australia. Australia as Indian Ocean-connected is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis, but such a study would likely also draw in Tim Winton, as another Conrad-inflected author. Roma Tearne, *Mosquito* (London: HarperPerennial, 2008), Chandani Lokugé, *Turtle Nest* (London: Penguin, 2003), Romesh Gunsekera, *Reef* (London: Granta Books, 2011), Romesh Gunsekera, *The Prisoner of Paradise* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family*, Bloomsbury Classics (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), Michael Ondaatje, *The Cat's Table* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011).

Coovadia's *The Wedding*. However, Rastogi argues for the specificity of the Indian literary output in South Africa, which is more concerned with "longing for belonging"—citizenship, solidarity and land—than with the back-and-forth of oceanic connections (Rastogi 1-2).¹⁷ V.S. Naipaul and M.G. Vassanji are particularly influential writers in this domain as well as elsewhere, with novels that focus on Indian expatriate communities in East Africa as well as the West, including Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and the second half of *Half a Life*, and Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* and *The Book of Secrets*.¹⁸ Both novelists are primarily concerned with the aftermath of travel more widely, referring to Indian Ocean connections largely as background. In addition, their fiction has received more critical attention than Gurnah's, whose work was selected here for the variety and depth of its representations of the African side of the Indian Ocean. However, their work will be deployed from time to time to provide helpful comparative and theoretical pointers, particularly in the Ghosh and Gurnah chapters.

This thesis focuses on the contemporary authors, Ghosh, Gurnah and Collen, because their writing represents the scope of the Indian Ocean as it is written in English, suggesting comparative links across and between its distant shores and among its intermediate islands. While other novels have been published on Indian Ocean themes—Naipaul, Vassanji and Gunesequera as noted above, but also historical novels such as Dan Sleight's *Islands* and Keki Daruwalla's *For Pepper and Christ*—these are the only novelists whose work demonstrates a lasting interest in Indian Ocean space, from a number of perspectives, over the course of their oeuvre (for a

¹⁷ Imraan Coovadia, *The Wedding: A Novel* (London: Picador, 2001), Farida Karodia, *Other Secrets* (London: Penguin, 2012), Ahmed Essop, *The Emperor: A Novel* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), Ahmed Essop, *Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker* (Columbia: Readers International, 1988).

¹⁸ V.S. Naipaul, *Half a Life* (London: Penguin, 1980), V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2002).

chronology see Appendix 1).¹⁹ Ghosh and Gurnah in particular have each published a series of novels which are explicitly interested in Indian Ocean networks and histories. Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* is a crucial text, cited in both historical and literary critical accounts of the space, and employed as an object of literary study as well as a critical contribution in this thesis. His first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, deals in part with South Asia and in part with the cross-ocean connections between India and the Arab world; *The Glass Palace* recovers a history of oceanic interactions in the eastern Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal; and *Sea of Poppies* imagines the experience of indenture among other forms of imperial and sub-imperial Indian Ocean travel.²⁰ Four of Gurnah's novels are set primarily in Zanzibar or elsewhere on the east coast of Africa: *Memory of Departure*, *Paradise*, *By the Sea* and *Desertion*, while *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* describe journeys to and from that littoral, whether in memory or reality. While *Paradise* is mostly concerned with the representation of Africa as a space connected to the wider world via oceanic and overland routes, the plotlines of *By the Sea* and *Desertion* in particular rest on journeys across the sea and the diverse societies that they produce. Lindsey Collen is slightly different to the previous writers, less explicitly interested in ship journeys and the Indian Ocean as an historical unity. Rather, she actively writes the Indian Ocean as a contemporary reality, and is one of the few writers writing primarily in English from the islands of the Indian Ocean. The exceptions are the Sri Lankan writers mentioned before, but Collen was selected as a writer deeply invested in issues of gender, and also a writer who is actively self-creolized, rather than expatriate. In

¹⁹ Dan Sleight, *Islands* (London: Harvill Secker, 2004), Keki Daruwalla, *For Pepper and Christ* (London: Penguin, 2009).

²⁰ I use the term "sub-imperial" to refer to those processes operating at the time of, but independently from, formal empire, as a way to describe Ghosh's interest in what happens "underneath the as-it-were dome of Empire." Elleke Boehmer and Anshuman Mondal, "Networks and Traces: An Interview with Amitav Ghosh," *Wasafiri* 27.2 (2012): 34.

addition, her consistent writing of the nation as overlain with crossings but still importantly central, allows a valuable reading with and against the other writers considered here.

While none of the more contemporary authors considered in this thesis necessarily takes Conrad as a point of departure, his is a significant if diffuse presence in their work, as already suggested. Padmini Mongia writes that postcolonial writers such as Ghosh are involved rather in the project of “provincializing Conrad”—a term adapted from Chakrabarty—than in “writing back” (Mongia 98). Reading Conrad in this way is in some ways proleptic, in dialogue with authors of the late twentieth and twenty-first century, who imagine the Indian Ocean sometimes more consciously or explicitly in their work. Conrad nevertheless serves as model, interlocutor, or persistent echo for later writing of the space. As Gene Moore writes,

An artist’s work influences or ‘flows into’ the popular imagination in ways that are difficult to trace in detail or describe with precision [...] Even in the absence of explicit testimonies one can point to parallels and resemblances that seem too striking to be accidental; but in the final analysis we have no terms with which to measure the strength of influence. (G. M. Moore “Conrad’s Influence” 223)

Or, as Ankhi Mukherjee notes, pointing to the fine line between explicit and embedded forms of indebtedness, “postcolonial revisions and rewritings of the high literary canon hover between conscious strategy and unconscious symptom” (Mukherjee 534). In this thesis, Conrad will be read *alongside* the later authors, in a manner that borrows from Françoise Lionnet’s methodological *métissage*.

To establish non-hierarchical connections is to encourage lateral relations: instead of living within the bounds created by a linear view of history and society, we become free to interact on an equal footing with all the traditions that determine our present predicament. On a textual level, we can choose authors from across time and space and read them together for new insights. (Lionnet *Autobiographical Voices* 7)

In her work on Caribbean women's writing, Lionnet begins with a discussion of Nietzsche and Augustine; while these authors act as a kind of model, they are also read through the work of the later writers. Since this thesis is concerned to examine the literary representations of "networks of interrelating margins," it employs a correspondingly lateral comparative method, one that seeks to place the texts considered in non-hierarchical relations of interreferentiality—reading them together.

Generically, this thesis focuses on novels partly for comparative coherence, but also because, as Ghosh notes, the novel genre is intimately linked to place.

This, then, is the peculiar paradox of the novel. Those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a "sense of place." Yet the truth is that it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible. (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 119)

Poems, as Boehmer writes, are placeless in a way that is also, but differently, connecting. For instance, the jingo poem at the time of empire constituted "a portable form that unfixed easily from wherever it was first heard, proclaimed or published," as opposed to the novel which provided a "symbolic cartography, however incomplete, of that expanding world" (Boehmer "Circulating Forms" 12-13).

Similarly, while it may appear that historical research of the Indian Ocean is in many ways prior to the literature and to literary studies, historical constructions of the Indian Ocean draw on the literary. Many of the key texts open with quotations from Conrad, Luís Vaz de Camões *The Lusiads*, or Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (De Camões and Atkinson). Sugata Bose quotes at length the poetry of the twentieth-century Bengali poet Jibanananda Das as well as Rabindranath Tagore. As he suggests, "whatever the relationship might be between Atlantic history and poetry, there is no question that the history of the Indian Ocean world is enmeshed with its poetry and in some ways propelled by it" (Bose 5). More importantly, these authors

affirm the literary, insisting on the importance of this mode of expression. As Gurnah writes in an interview, “[Writing] should be about what cannot be easily said” (Nasta *Writing across Worlds* 362).

In addition, the authors considered here draw on a number of sources other than the historical for their work. These include lived experience, familial memory, collective memory, folk tales, religious education and traditions, and various kinds of research: newspapers and hearsay (Conrad), archival research (Ghosh), research through travel and oral histories (Gurnah), and the cultural learning involved in self-creolisation (Collen). This catholicity is due to a real dearth of historical sources, particularly those relevant to the kinds of stories that the authors are interested in telling.²¹ Whatever their differences, the authors share this dubious legacy, and are therefore interested in questions of memory, rumour and hearsay—foregrounding these in the form and content of their novels. Gurnah in *Desertion* considers the disjuncture between written history and personal knowledge, official records and familial memory, through the character Rashid. Rashid has knowledge of the occurrence of love unions between “native” women and white men through the experience of his family, but remarks on the absence of this reality in the documentary record of the area. Ghosh’s first writing on the Indian Ocean world, *In an Antique Land*, is an example of generic crossing between fiction, history and memoir, while Collen draws repeatedly on her experiences in the political party Lalit in order to tell the stories of ordinary Mauritians.²² In Conrad’s case the experience of

²¹ Ghosh’s work has a particularly interesting relationship with historical research, and in particular the Subaltern Studies group, as will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

²² Makarand Paranjape describes Collen’s “deeply ambivalent location as a writer” and states that although she has consistently embraced Mauritian and egalitarian causes, she remains an “ethnic misfit.” Felicity Hand calls her the “insider-outsider,” considering that position a privileged one. Makarand R. Paranjape, “Foreword,” *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen (1948-), Mauritian Social Activist and Writer* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) iii.

the Indian Ocean is of a much shorter duration, and demonstrates a shallower involvement than the later authors. Norman Sherry records Conrad's complaint that, "I have spent half my life knocking about in ships, only getting out between voyages. I know nothing! Nothing! Except from the outside. I have to guess at everything!" (Sherry 3). Conrad's is an itinerant rather than a settled view, generating an outsider's view of the space.²³

One of the ways in which this problem of the insider/outsider is worked out formally in the fiction is through manipulations of perspective. Since each of these authors will be read in terms of their literary mapping of an oceanic space, the question of position and perspective is paramount, including narrative position and narrative authority. Conrad's well-known layers of narrative framing are crucial to his writing of the Indian Ocean, as is the attention he pays to the positioning of his narrators and protagonists—whether a view from the rigging of a large ship, from a hillside hospital in the harbour or from a small boat on the sea. In addition to the ethical ambivalence of travel, Gurnah's work interrogates its literary effects. In *Pilgrim's Way*, Gurnah outlines the importance of perspective in and for Indian Ocean narratives. Remembering his childhood, the narrator describes a moment during which a friend takes him on an excursion out to sea. From the boat, the pair look back toward the East African port city which is their home.

That famous water-front, with its white-washed houses and minarets, was like a quaint model in a builder's office, clean and ordered, belying from that distance the chaos and the filth of the narrow alleyways. Visitors spoke of the charm of our narrow streets and steeply rising houses, and the pungent smell of spices in the air. They

²³ For a related discussion see Said's classic *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Autobiography* and also Ankhi Mukherjee, "The Death of the Novel" for a discussion of Naipaul, Conrad and the intergenre novel. Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966), Ankhi Mukherjee, "The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers," *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.4 (2008).

first saw us from the sea, from a distance that encouraged such self-delusion. From there it did not matter that the windows charmingly shuttered looked out of rooms that were congested with people, and enclosed women who were hidden from the lustful gaze of men. There were no smelly alleys to walk through, no slippery ditches to cross, no fanatical elders to humiliate you. From the sea, the town seemed the luscious heart of paradise. Come nearer and you have to turn a blind eye to the slimy gutters and the house walls that have been turned into open-air urinals. Come nearer so we can see whether you are dark or fair, friend or foe. (BTS 154, original italics)

The outsider's perspective—triply delineated as that of a visitor, from a distance, from the sea—reveals a place that is quaint and ordered, and almost entirely “unreal.” One thinks of Marlow gazing towards the idealized “Pearl of the Ocean” in “A Smile of Fortune,” as opposed to the socially diverse and critical portrayal of Mauritius in Collen's fiction. However, as the contrast between Ghosh's and Gurnah's nostalgic and melancholic modes (discussed below) suggests, any perspective that “comes nearer” is both required to ignore messy realities and to open itself up to judgment: “dark or fair, friend or foe.”

In this thesis, as is appropriate to oceanic ideas, I avoid tethering the authors too strongly to their national points of origin or location. Each of the authors considered is diasporic in some way, living between New York and Goa, in Ghosh's case, in England but hailing from Zanzibar in Gurnah's, and from South Africa but very much Mauritian in Collen's, alongside Conrad's Polish-French-British affiliations. More importantly, however, their self-positioning reflects precisely a discomfort with unitary identities, and the fiction, as is the argument of this thesis, embraces a more fluid conception of space, position and belonging. This is related to the fact that the fiction is linked by a concern that can be called, as is discussed in the second chapter, post-postcolonial. The authors reveal in their different ways a resistance to shaping either the space or time of their novels around the “hiatus” of colonialism. Conrad disrupts centre-periphery models of imperial space by

emphasizing wandering itineraries, especially in *Victory* and the Almayer trilogy. Ghosh's writing follows a plethora of characters who operate under the "dome of empire," and Gurnah's writing represents "alternative universalisms" to European imperial narratives, such as Islamic networks and familial ties. Collen resists imperial centrality by employing the language of empire to critique capitalist power relations, erasing the difference between nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century inequalities. Providing a sense of a longer history and an alternative oceanic map, the Indian Ocean allows them to write with empire at a distance.

The alternative map their work suggests involves writing the Indian Ocean, as was indicated above, as a series of overlaid, palimpsestic networks: networks of arms, marriage, oil, ships, planes, prisoners, trade, friends, information, medical personnel, drugs and smuggling. In the representations in these novels, the social networks overlap and connect to one another in three-dimensional ways. They also have a life of their own, comprising links both between individuals and between generations—networks of networks, forming a cobwebby palimpsest. The palimpsest features networks of different temporal moments—a series of networks connected, for instance, generationally—of different types—such as networks of people and networks of information—and of different scales.²⁴ In Ghosh's *Circle of Reason*, Jeevanbhai Patel, escapes with his new wife from South Africa to al-Ghazira, "pulled like a bucket on the chain of Indian merchants along the coast." Henry James uses a similar metaphor in describing the narrative structure of Conrad's *Chance*, in which

²⁴ Spatial criticism is very diverse, partly due to the question of scale. Spatial literary studies consider everything from the configurations of particular rooms to the ways of walking city streets, to the overwhelming sense of size of the global. As Brooker and Thacker note in their collection, *Geographies of Modernism*: "What is interesting, however, is how questions of modernism and modernity are coupled in these essays with a reckoning of the significance of intimate, metropolitan and regional as well as national and transnational locales. This intersection and layering of scales, itself a geographical concept, becomes part, we realize, of what a 'geography' of cultural texts will entail." Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, *Geographies of Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2005) 4.

the story itself is handed, like a bucket full of water, from hand to hand along a queue of people: “in the manner of the buckets of water for the improvised extinction of a fire, before reaching our apprehension; all with whatever result, to this apprehension, of a quantity to be allowed for as spilt by the way” (James 61). In Ghosh’s work, the metaphor is closer to a bucket in a well, which gathers rather than spills, as the canny businessman uses the information he derives along that journey to become a marriage broker, linking up families across the Indian Ocean world, and so building one network upon another.²⁵ The marriage trade leads to the gold trade, which in turn leads to the lucrative trade in weapons, connecting Jeevanbhai to all the ports around the Indian Ocean. Gurnah’s writing enlarges the scope of both Conrad’s and Ghosh’s networks to include Africa more integrally, while Collen represents female characters as crucial nodes in Indian Ocean networks, whether as a mule in the Indo-Mauritian drug trade or an activist in the women’s movement.

Importantly, networks have a way of appearing complete and delimited from any one of their nodes, and there is no point outside the network from which to take its measure.²⁶ In other words,

Every global vision occludes even as it reveals, allowing us to see some things clearly while making others difficult to detect. Only by entertaining multiple frameworks and vantage points, we believe, can

²⁵ “In his little back room Jeevanbhai spun out his web, spanning oceans and continents, and such are the ironies of fortune that he, whose marriage had cast him out of his family, found fame as the most successful marriage-broker in the Indian Ocean. As his ‘marriages’ blossomed and grew rich in progeny, Jeevanbhai grew rich with his bridal pairs, for he had another talent—he had learnt the secret of spinning gold from love [...] He went into the ‘gold trade’ between India, al-Ghazira and Africa. Within months he had almost eliminated the competition, for in all the ports around the Indian Ocean grateful husbands and eager grooms stood by to receive his consignments [...]” (CR 222).

²⁶ Or, as Felicitas Becker, in an historical chapter which attempts to view the East African Indian Ocean from the point of view of the hinterland, notes, “networks have a way of appearing complete from any one of their outposts, and it is up to the observer to make sure to identify the limits of their place-specific horizons.” Felicitas Becker, “Cosmopolitanism Beyond the Towns: Rural-Urban Relations on the Southern Swahili Coast in the Twentieth Century,” *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, eds. Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (London: Hurst & Company, 2007) 288.

global geography begin to capture the complexities of the world.
(Lewis and Wigen 162)

This is a persistent problem for oceanic history or world literature. Employing the Indian Ocean as a lens or perspective for this thesis requires remaining cognizant of various vantage points, and of holding these in balance; it is no accident that the authors considered here perform the problem of perspective in a variety of different ways. In any layered and ramifying network, all we can do is touch upon selected nodes and networks, identifying wherever possible the particular perspective involved and the limits of those visions. Braudel employed the idea of a hundred frontiers that constituted the shifting boundaries of the Mediterranean world; similarly, as Sugata Bose suggest, “in exploring Indian Ocean history in all its richness, we have to imagine a hundred horizons, not one, of many hues and colors” (Bose 3). The imagining of an Indian Ocean, in each work considered in this thesis, is contingent on its functioning in the texts—whether centrally or peripherally—as setting, subject, lens or heuristic device. Collen provides a cautionary warning that should be kept in mind both for her writing and for the rest of this thesis: “But”, she suggests, “I suppose I wouldn’t take it too far” (Interview 4). This thesis seeks to illuminate a set of interests in each work and a network of connections between them, but also, maintaining an awareness of its own limited perspective, provides a reading of the fiction for its own sake. The following chapters will explore those continuities which recur repeatedly in the work of the various writers considered here, strands which emerge in related but differing ways, in the work of two, three, or all of the authors.

This thesis is made up of author-based chapters, which correspond to different geographic regions of the Indian Ocean, triangulating across its shores—the eastern (Gurnah), the western (Ghosh and Conrad) and an island mid-point (Collen). In addition, each chapter is devoted to three or four themes or conceptions which, while

they cross-cut the broader argument, are most relevant to or best explored through that particular author. The first chapter considers Joseph Conrad's formative contribution to writing the Indian Ocean in English, laying the theoretical and literary groundwork of this writing and, as it were, opening up lines of enquiry for the later writers to explore. Conrad's experiences as a sailor, mate and captain in the three short years of his sea life, in the setting of the wide Indian Ocean world, had a disproportionate effect on his writing. This chapter will introduce the making and unmaking potential of the literary maps both described in and produced by his work, outlining an interpretive framework for the discussions of mapping which occur in especially Ghosh's and Gurnah's fiction. Conrad's Indian Ocean is blue, calm and solitary, but undermined by lurking dangers like the submerged wreck in *Lord Jim*, or the ghostly appearance of an Arab dhow in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. Its official imperial maps, radiating out from Europe across the Indian Ocean world, are overlain with the tracks of drifters who map instead a disorienting cobweb of routes—whether Sulu pirates, imperial adventurers or travelling circuses. The entangled networks also produce encounters with radical otherness, producing the Indian Ocean as a space of excessive cosmopolitanism, as I will explain.

The second chapter explores Amitav Ghosh's nostalgic and recuperative writing of the Indian Ocean, one which expands Conradian a-centricity over time as well as space through representing a literary *longue durée*—elongating the temporal scope of Indian Ocean literary imaginings. His novels produce the Indian Ocean as a cross-historical, transnational space, one which operates beneath empire and beyond nations. His representation of non-national networks—of lascars, traders and slaves—suggests the idealistic possibility of an Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, a way of accommodating difference produced by centuries of tolerant trade. This is mediated

through multilingualism, a characteristic of the space that represents a problem for formal representation, resulting in the invented lingua franca of *Sea of Poppies*.

Ghosh's recuperative historical-literary project is hampered, if animated, by rare and fragmentary evidence, which both sets up his work as the literary end of the Subaltern Studies project and productively destabilizes the otherwise totalizing thrust of his recreations.

One of the gaps in Ghosh's account is highlighted by Abdulrazak Gurnah's work, which maps Africa into the Indian Ocean, producing the literary space of an Indian Ocean Africa. The third chapter will examine the erasure of Africa in Indian Ocean history and literature, an erasure which undermines Indian Ocean regional cooperation and forms a part, more broadly, of Africanist discourse. This chapter explores the darker sides of travel and cosmopolitanism as constructive markers of Indian Ocean space. In addition to figuring travel as an opportunity borne of freedom, Gurnah also represents oceanic journeys as desertions motivated by restlessness or greed. He pursues Conrad's performance of perspective as crucial to Indian Ocean imaginaries, exploring the distorting impact of travel on perspective and interrogating the view from the sea, as suggested above. Similarly, his localized vision troubles cosmopolitan attributions by representing Islam as an alternative, and not necessarily accommodating, universalism. His work highlights the formal implications of and approaches to writing the Indian Ocean, and the final section of this chapter focuses on the contributions of a dialogic approach to representing Indian Ocean space.

The final chapter complicates Indian Ocean representations in a different way, through examining its implications for gender and postcolonial politics. Lindsey Collen writes Mauritius as a postcolonial nation linked by oceanic and air travel to the Indian Ocean region, a cross-national representation that incorporates a politics of

resistance. This involves representing the internal networks of the island as intimately connected to regional networks, among other Indian Ocean islands and the surrounding coasts. Like Ghosh, Collen recuperates memories of forced migration, including slavery and indenture, but like Gurnah she highlights the traumatic nature of these experiences and represents them as a Conradian haunting of a paradisiacal space. Her work provides a critique of the gendered representations of Indian Ocean networks, which focus on men who travel rather than the women left behind. Collen instead represents women travellers, exploring the liberatory potential as well as the repercussive dangers of such journeys. This chapter will explore her poetics of cyclonic revolution, which suggest the on-going political possibilities of Indian Ocean networks and imaginaries in the twenty-first century.

In an interview about her novel, *Nile Baby*, Elleke Boehmer suggests inverting the map of the world so that the land recedes and the rivers and oceans come to the fore, evoking the interconnection of land and sea across time as well as space.

The imagistic point is that if we allow our geographical imaginations to think of the world not so much in terms of continental land systems surrounded by seas, or bisected by rivers, but rather as watery systems that happen to be bordered by dry lands, then we are able to focus more clearly on the routes, passages and exchanges between these lands across the centuries, and how fluidly interconnected they have been, if only through washed-up flotsam and jetsam, the detritus of histories of travel and trade. (Boehmer and Masterson 225)

I have attempted in the following chapters to take that watery and oceanic view, exploring the interconnections of a particular ocean as they are expressed as literary flotsam and jetsam. This thesis, as I have outlined, explores some of the themes, modes and methods that are involved in producing the Indian Ocean as a literary space. It is written as a networked and well-travelled space, its fluidity associated with both freedom and danger, possibility and insecurity. It provides a different

perspective—“this other point of view”—on wider questions of globalization and narrower claims of nationalism, and invokes a *longue durée* that reaches both before and beyond the time of Empire. It therefore stakes out an interregional arena, to use Bose’s phrase, not only in geographic but in imaginative terms, providing a literary map of an alternative geography.

Chapter 1

“Steps towards the Indian Ocean:” Joseph Conrad

*For the boy playing with his globe and stamps,
the world is equal to his appetite—
how grand the world in the blaze of the lamps,
how petty in tomorrow's small dry light!*

*One morning we lift anchor, full of brave
prejudices, prospects, ingenuity—
we swing with the velvet swell of the wave,
our infinite is rocked by the fixed sea.*

Charles Baudelaire translated by Robert Lowell, “The Voyage”¹

Introduction

Joseph Conrad, in the last line of his essay, “Geography and Some Explorers,” describes his literary calling as primarily cartographical, following in the footsteps of the early European explorers who traversed and mapped the sea.

The sea had been to me a hallowed ground, thanks to those books of travel and discovery which had peopled it for me with unforgettable shades of the masters in the calling which in a humble way was to be mine, too. (LE 17)

While all the blank spaces of the world map had already been filled in, Conrad’s fiction could blaze new literary trails, bringing into the consciousness of an initially Western readership previously unexplored territory. As Henry James, writing to Conrad about *The Mirror of the Sea*, commented, “No one has *known*—for intellectual use—the things you know” (Sherry 2-3). Conrad here links cartographical exploration with literary writing, and both of these with the sea, figured as a hallowed ground.

¹ Charles Baudelaire, “The Voyage,” trans. Robert Lowell, *The Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs Du Mal)*, eds. Marthiel Mathews and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions, 1989).

This chapter follows and expands upon that self-assessment, reading Conrad as a literary cartographer of the sea. In particular, many of Conrad's novels, stories and essays map the particular ocean in which the majority of his own experience lay—the “Eastern Seas from which I have carried away into my writing life the greatest number of suggestions” (SL 111). That territory can also be described, as it is by the author in the foreword to *Twixt Land and Sea*, as “the same region which may be called the region of the Indian Ocean with its offshoot and prolongations north of the equator even as far as the Gulf of Siam” (TLS ix). If Melville can be thought of as the literary progenitor of the Atlantic, and Stevenson the Pacific, then Conrad is the inaugural writer, in English, of the Indian Ocean. Each of these writers is associated with the respective oceans in some powerful way, producing their dimensions and distinctness in the popular and literary imaginations.

Conrad's work maps an Indian Ocean of ambiguous calm, wandering travellers, and disorienting difference. In so doing, he creates a sub-genre, a space of potential within the novel, pinpointing some of the coordinates of a new way of understanding oceanic space in literature. In a recent publication, Robert Tally describes the ways in which Melville achieves a similar literary-cartographical coup for the globalized Atlantic world: “New spaces call for new maps. The genius of Melville was that, in 1851, he detected the emergence of these new spaces and developed a baroque literary cartography to map them” (Tally xii). Writing of his own interest in “travel and movement,” Amitav Ghosh suggests a framework for understanding the generative contribution of Conrad's oceanic oeuvre.

I wanted to write about it because it was a challenge, because the whole terrain of the novel has historically been so much one of exploring a place, creating a sense of place, a sense of rootedness: as in Turgenev, for instance, or George Eliot. It was a challenge to try and

see how you could take the form outwards, explore these different sorts of connections. (Boehmer and Mondal 31)

Both Conrad and the later authors like Ghosh write the Indian Ocean as comprising these different sorts of connections: familial, criminal, political, religious, mercantile, imaginative. Conrad, as proto-modernist and literary cartographer, takes the form outwards, exploring new geographic settings for novel-writing as well as new ways of writing.

This chapter reads Conrad's work as anticipatory of the distinctive interests of the other authors considered here—in the Indian Ocean as well as in questions of travel, diversity, alternative mapping and fluidity. One consequence of this proleptic reading is the choice of spatial focus itself. In his essay, "Conrad's Darkness," V.S. Naipaul famously wrote that "Conrad—sixty years before, in the time of great peace—had been everywhere before me" (Naipaul *The Return* 216). His words refer to a particular strand of Conradian influence, one that is signalled by the title of his essay, which invokes *Heart of Darkness*. This chapter attempts to describe a different strand, which arises from more and different works of Conrad's oeuvre, in particular those that take as part of their setting or subject the space of the Indian Ocean: *Lord Jim*, *Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, *The Shadow Line*, *Youth*, *'Twixt Land and Sea*, *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *Victory*. These works, in turn, provide an interpretive frame for the other, later writing considered in this thesis.

Literary criticism of the last decade has demonstrated an increasing interest in Conrad, space and questions of spatiality. Con Coreonos, in his *Conrad, Space and Modernity*, employs Conrad as a model for a wide-ranging study of the spatial turn and Russell West-Pavlov, in his *Spaces of Fiction, Fictions of Space: Postcolonial Place and Literary DeiXis*, finds in Conrad a model for a postcolonial reading of the

chiasmic and deictic link between thought and place (Coroneos; J. Ho; West-Pavlov). However, Conrad has, until recently, not been primarily considered as a writer of the watery space of the Indian Ocean. Instead, critics have focused on Conrad as a writer either of the Malay world or of globalization, or, in other words, of areas smaller or greater than the interregional arena of the Indian Ocean. Norman Sherry's well-known division of Conrad's works into Eastern and Western worlds conflates the Eastern world with the Malay archipelago, as do later critics such as Agnes Yeow in her *Conrad's Eastern Vision* and Robert Hampson in *Cross-cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay fiction* (Sherry; Yeow; Hampson *Cross-Cultural Encounters*). It is certainly the case that the Malay trilogy, *Victory*, *The Rescue*, and some of the short fiction are set exclusively within the Malay archipelago. However, large sections of Conrad's arguably more well-received works—*Lord Jim*, *Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, *'Twixt Land and Sea*, *Youth*—describe journeys across the Indian Ocean. A greater number of the works again refer to those characteristics which Michael Pearson suggests constitute the "unity" of the Indian Ocean world: lascars, dhows, sailing ships, beaches, Islam, palm trees, diversity, monsoons and so on, as was suggested in the introduction (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 6).

Conrad has also been described as a writer of globalization—although not of a specifically oceanic form. Stephen Ross argues that Conrad appears concerned less with colonialism and more with Hardt and Negri's conception of an "emerging post-imperialist modernity," and therefore with "imperialism as global-capitalist (rather than nation-statist)" (Ross 14). Stephen Clingman highlights Conrad's implicitly global transnationalism, and Janice Ho, in her article, "The Spatial Imagination and Literary Form of Conrad's Colonial Fictions," considers the incursions of, and

resistance to, globalization in Conrad's fiction (Clingman; J. Ho).² Even Cesare Casarino's *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*, which argues that the modernist sea narrative is an emergent form in the late nineteenth century, focuses on the ship and the globe rather than a particular ocean. As he writes,

It is precisely such a preoccupation with the world of the ship and the sea voyage conceived as autonomous enclosures that turns the emergent form of the modernist sea narrative into a representation-producing machine for the turbulent transitions from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism, into a laboratory for the conceptualization of a world system that was increasingly arduous to visualize, the more multiple, interconnected, and global it became. (Casarino 10)

Similarly, however, a preoccupation with a particular ocean allows Conrad's narratives to be read as representation-producing machines for a longer history and a more localized and attenuated world system. Given the interest of later writers in writing beside but not beyond the nation, and within an encompassing but particular space, this chapter is focused on Conrad's relationship with the interregional arena of the Indian Ocean.

Throughout, this chapter will attempt to keep in mind the spatiality of the texts themselves. Conrad, as an "outsider" to the space, writes the Indian Ocean from a particular position; simultaneously, his writing highlights the importance of positioning and narrating, realized through complex depictions of acts of seeing. These interrogations of the gaze—of the various characters, the authors, and ultimately the reader—are of central importance for representations of the Indian Ocean, and will be returned to in the other chapters. In addition, it is a truism in Conrad criticism that his work resists absolutes and oppositions, as the author himself

² The lack of interest in Conrad's Indian Ocean is indicated by Said's error, in his early *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Autobiography*, in interpreting the island in "A Smile of Fortune" as a Pacific island, rather than Mauritius, based on Conrad's 1899 visit. See Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 158.

writes in the oft-quoted letter to the *New York Times*, affirming that “the only legitimate basis of creative work lives in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms” (Stape 122). What this chapter hopes to show is the relationship between this antithetical force and the space of the Indian Ocean. What emerges from Conrad’s writing is an entangled and multi-layered network, which corresponds to Chakrabarty’s provincializing acentrism and highlights the importance of wandering itineraries and disorientation to figurations of the Indian Ocean. Conrad’s maritime travellers map out a world roughly centred on the Indian Ocean, a fluid centre which belies imperial ideas of centredness at all. They move through the space in drifting, wandering patterns, encountering radical otherness with disturbing regularity, and exploring the limits and implications of that encounter. Conrad’s Indian Ocean is written as a space of shifting perspectives, which destabilize any sense of certain position or identity; in its turn, that writing becomes a perspective from which to view the spatial and formal preoccupations of the later work.

The first section will outline the context of provisional mapping in which Conrad’s work is generally interested, describing both the “making and unmaking” forces in relation to Jameson’s “cognitive mapping.” Conrad is both diagnostic of Jamesonian “spatial confusion,” and involved in the aesthetic mapping of a fluid, interconnected interregional space (Jameson *Postmodernism* 92). The disruptive force can be discerned in the links between mapping, surfaces and race, and the constructive in the beginnings of a Conradian cartography of Indian Ocean space, which in turn forms an interpretive frame for the later work. This section will focus on the cartography of shadowy borders and the “atmosphere” of sunshine and uncanny calm, that recur in particular in Ghosh’s and Collen’s writing, respectively. The second section expands on one of the most distinctive aspects of Conrad’s production

of a literary map of the Indian Ocean: his representation of the wandering itineraries which overlay and undermine official routes and maps. Importantly, this anarchic movement also produces his Indian Ocean as a multilayered web of travel, gossip and drifting. This section will discuss the ways in which Conrad both represents primarily imperial cartographies of centre and periphery, while also suggesting the possibility of an alternative, interconnected geography. These suggestions become central in the later work, which expands the temporal and spatial boundaries of interconnected networks. The final section addresses the question of difference and disorientation, through considering Conrad's depiction of the Indian Ocean as a space which is filled with disturbing encounters with radical otherness. Writing the Indian Ocean as a scene of excessive cosmopolitanism, Conrad interrogates the workings of the othering prejudice, a project which the later authors pursue in different ways. In particular, Conrad sets up Gurnah's writing, which highlights the dangers of travel and diversity, and the insecurity of a fluid, oceanic narrative position.

"The cruel grip of this sunny and smiling sea:" Ambiguous cartography

Conrad's work is involved in laying down imaginative coordinates and tracing trajectories, while also signalling the disorientations of an increasingly fluid and border-defying world. Particularly in *Lord Jim*, which explores questions of surfaces and depths, his writing acknowledges the distortions of perspective and the duplicities of mapping. At the same time, he produces Conradian Indian Ocean space, outlining its shadowy borders and describing its calm, blue, sunshine-filled, lonely and ultimately dangerous character. Conrad both builds and dismantles a cognitive map of the Indian Ocean—at the same time interrogating and imaginatively producing the space.

Conrad's *Lord Jim* was published serially in *Blackwoods Magazine* precisely at the turn of the century, between 1899 and 1900. In the "Author's Note," the author describes the novel as a "free and wandering tale," which has as its starting point a "pilgrim ship episode," in which a shipload of pilgrims from the Malay archipelago, on their way to Mecca, are abandoned by their officers in the middle of the Indian Ocean (LJ 305). One of those officers, the central character Jim, is at first described only negatively, as "not a figure of Northern mists" (LJ 306). Instead, he is associated with sunshine and "the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead" (LJ 306). His journey takes him in the opposite direction to that of the ill-fated pilgrim ship which fetches up at Aden—"in the course of years he was known successively in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia" (LJ 4). *Lord Jim* is therefore a novel which is bound up with the Indian Ocean: traversing its breadth to both east and west, invoking Islamic networks of trade and pilgrimage, and resting on questions of cultural difference.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson describes *Lord Jim* as a novel which is paradigmatically transitional, revealing characteristics of high modernism as well as postmodernism (Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 207). The postmodern elements of the novel can best be seen in the break between its two sections, the epistemic *Patna* and the romantic Patusan, a discontinuity which projects "a bewildering variety of competing and incommensurable interpretive options." In a later essay, "Postmodernism," Jameson describes the alienation and disorientation of the subject in a world of growing confusion, beyond the time of landmarks and itineraries, in "the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself" (Jameson *Postmodernism* 79). Jameson here follows Kevin Lynch's work on the city but extends it to the global scale, and suggests that what is required in

response is the cultural work of cognitive mapping. Cognitive mapping, he argues, is “the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along moments of mobile, alternative trajectories” (Jameson *Postmodernism* 89). This chapter draws on both of these insights, suggesting that Conrad’s work is not only involved in the writing of disorientation but also direction. This allows a reading of Conrad’s work, in its relation to questions of space, as both diagnostic—of disorientation and spatial confusion—and constructive—laying out some coordinates for a cognitive map of Indian Ocean space.

One side of this double gesture is evoked by Conrad’s representation of actual maps, which appear in his work in ways that highlight the inevitable distortions of mapping. This is apparent in the well-known passage from the *Heart of Darkness*, the first of the Marlow narratives.

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. [...] But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after.

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. (HD 108)

As the years have passed the contents of the map have gradually changed, creating a sense of disorienting spatial fluidity over time. Conrad creates a disjuncture between differing representations of space, a lag or gap which produces a vertiginous sense of disorientation, and which creates the possibility for future remappings.

The world map also provides the justification for the central journey of *Heart of Darkness*, but even in the moment of its memorialization betrays its dual and shifting nature. Later in the novella, Marlow describes the “large shining map” on the walls of the waiting room in his prospective employer’s office (HD 110). It is “marked with all the colours of the rainbow,” representing the dominions of England, Germany, France and the sea itself—“a deuce of a lot of blue” (HD 110). However, the cheerful and orderly brightness of the map is belied by the appearance of a river, “dead in the centre [...] fascinating—deadly—like a snake” (HD 110). The snake-river suggests a fissure at the heart of the simplistically triumphal map, one which reveals its simultaneous passivity—“dead in the centre”—and dangerous, “deadly” activity. Earlier, looking at a similar map in a shop window, the river is compared to a snake: “which fascinated me as a snake would a bird—a silly little bird” (HD 108). Again, the river is both active and passive; in this case, the snake has charmed the onlooker. Gurnah meditates on a similar theme in *By the Sea*, through Omar’s passion for maps which “speak” to him, as they do to Ghosh’s character Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* (BTS 35, SLS 29). “Map-gazing,” Conrad’s favourite youthful pastime, is an active, multi-directional process: the gaze produces the map as the map directs the gaze.

The interimplication of mapping and perspective is central to *Lord Jim*: mapping implies a particular perspective and the choice of perspective in turn produces a map-like view. Jim, the younger son of a parson, discovers his vocation for the sea after a course of “light holiday literature” (LJ 4). The light literature has weighty consequences: it is the contemplation of romantic adventure and heroic deeds that paralyzes him at crucial moments, such as the rescue of a crew during a storm while on the training ship and the decisive moment of the *Patna*’s collision. The

apparently omniscient narrator of the opening section makes it clear that there is little overlap between Jim's vision of the world and the world itself: "After two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure" (LJ 8). While Jim imagines himself as a "hero in a book," he assumes the characteristic position that he will return to repeatedly in the novel.

His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream, while scattered on the outskirts of the surrounding plain the factory chimneys rose perpendicular against a grimy sky, each slender like a pencil, and belching out smoke like a volcano. (LJ 5)

As Jim gazes from above, the passage establishes a connection between his elevation and the perceptual distance created by his romantic imagination. It hints also at what is hidden from view from the perspective of the foretop—daily toil masked by the "peaceful multitude of roofs," and the violence of industry by abstraction.

Later, Jim gazes from the elevated deck of the *Patna* out on the dark ocean, engaged in a similarly ecstatic reverie of daydreams, while the doomed pilgrims sleep quietly below.

Above the mass of sleepers, a faint and patient sigh at times floated, the exhalation of a troubled dream; and short metallic clangs bursting out suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a furnace-door, exploded brutally, as if the men handling the mysterious things below had their breasts full of fierce anger: while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway of her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the inaccessible serenity of the sky. (LJ 14)

Jameson cites this "art-sentence" as indicative of the many levels apparent in the proto-modernist text, its triplicate structure suggesting layers of perception (Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 202). Beneath the "roof of awnings" lie the many pilgrims

in their diversity and humanity, concealed from Jim's view-from-above; further beneath them, engineers toil with anger and violence in the depths of the ship. Finally, the narrator's perspective rises high above the scene, highlighting Jim's distance from these harsh realities, and focusing on the duplicitous serenity of the ship which appears to move without effort through an unthreatening sea.

It is no accident that the gaze from above produces a strikingly map-like view: foreshortened and idealized. From his position on the elevated bridge, Jim, "when he happened to glance back saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart" (LJ 15). The idealized straightness of the charted line is conflated with the real track of the ship, just as romantic daydreams overlay Jim's reckoning of reality. In its turn, the map is compared to the sea, both characterized by a misleading surface.

From time to time he glanced idly at a chart pegged out with four drawing-pins on a low three-legged table abaft the steering-gear case. The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of a bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters. (LJ 15)

The sheet of paper, on a "low table" viewed from above, presents a shiny and obscure surface, just like the waters of the Indian Ocean which it represents. Both surfaces, however, conceal dangerous depths.

Parallel rulers with a pair of dividers reposed on it; the ship's position at last noon was marked with a small black cross, and the straight pencil-line drawn firmly as far as Perim figured the course of the ship—the path of souls towards the holy place, the promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life—while the pencil with its sharp end touching the Somali coast lay round and still like a naked ship's spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock. (LJ 15)

The course of the ship is figured, as the narrator recounts, by a simple pencil line and small black cross, a simplicity which conceals the complex motivations of its

occupants and the unpredictability of its future. The pencil, responsible for this inscription, lies “round and still like a naked ship’s spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock”—linked with and foreshadowing the unidentified obstacle which the Patna is soon to strike in the calm and ostensibly safe ocean. The idealization and simplicity of the map and chart are therefore dangerous, an obstacle to clear perception of reality and the hazards of chance.

These passages highlight the novel’s overriding concern with questions of surfaces and depths. The surfaces of the map and the sea conceal their depths in the same way as Jim conceals his “subtle unsoundness” by his “sound” appearance (LJ 65). Similarly, the simple fixity of a map corresponds to the “fixed standard of conduct” with which Marlow wrestles throughout the novel (LJ 37). Jim, like the ship’s spar lurking under the surface of the ocean, is the rare but real exception that upends the rule, his appearance of racially coded perfection contrasting so convincingly with his cowardice. In this way, the problem of mapping is analogous to the problem of race, both revealing a troubling disconnection between surface, simplified appearance and unpredictable, treacherous depths. Mapping, in both the specific (cartographical) and the general (code) sense, is always treasonous, doubled, in flux. In Robert Hampson’s words, Conrad is “the maker and unmaker of maps” (Hampson “Conrad’s Heterotopic Fiction” 122). While a focus on the fluidity of maps in time and the deceptiveness of surfaces provides an unmaking force, the shadowy borders and shaded-in places of the Indian Ocean world that are produced through a reading of Conrad’s fiction also begin to describe a (contingent and heterogeneous) *map-making*, as the authors featured in this thesis will continue in their work.

Keeping all this in mind—Conrad’s deep suspicion of mapping, surfaces, codes moral and visual—we turn now to the provisional, qualified literary map of the

Indian Ocean that his work produces. At times, Conrad seems to refer very broadly to the Indian Ocean world as just one part of that region which fascinates him: all that which lies “east of the Suez Canal.” At other times, however, his work describes a particular space, marked out by border zones that could also be considered “off-shoots and prolongations” (TLS ix). As was noted in the introduction, the Malay archipelago is described by Conrad as being the most influential locality for his work. However, it seems important that this statement is itself located in the “Author’s Note” to *The Shadow-line*, a novel very much concerned with borders. In the opening pages of *The Shadow-line*, the narrator sets up a distinction between two kinds of temporal boundary: that between childhood and youth, which is compared to the clear boundary of a garden gate, and that between youth and maturity, which, in contrast, is likened to a wide and insubstantial shadow. The novel begins when the narrator enters the latter temporal boundary-area, characterized by “moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction,” and ends with acquired maturity (SL 3). The novel is concerned, rather than with either youth or maturity, with the boundary between the two. This temporal focus is in turn reflected by the setting, within a geographical area consciously figured as a boundary-zone. Having received the fortuitous command of a ship, the young narrator comments worriedly to his benefactor, Captain Giles:

‘But I won’t feel really at peace till I have that ship of mine out in the Indian Ocean.’

He remarked casually that from Bangkok to the Indian Ocean was a pretty long step. And this murmur, like a dim flash from a dark lantern, showed me for a moment the broad belt of islands and reefs between that unknown ship, which was mine, and the freedom of the great waters of the globe. (SL 36)

Between the ship in Bangkok, identified with the narrator by claim of possession, and the wide ocean, later described as “the sea—which was pure, safe, and friendly,” lies the broad “reef-scarred” ocean border (SL 4). It is the wateriness of this spatial

metaphor which Ghosh embraces in describing shady boundaries in his later novel, *The Shadow Lines*, as will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

The other important oceanic border of the Indian Ocean is also portrayed as hazardous, albeit in a different way. The *Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is the novel which most vividly describes the storm-ridden south-western ocean and Cape that separate the Indian from the Atlantic Ocean. Not long afterwards, however, the ship runs out of the monsoon, and into what Gurnah calls "an impenetrable sea of strange mists, and whirlpools a mile wide, and giant luminescent stingrays rising to the surface in the dead of night and monstrous squids obscuring the horizon" (BTS 14). Conrad describes the same boundary in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*.

Anxious eyes looked to the westward, towards the cape of storms. The ship began to dip into a southwest swell, and the softly luminous sky of low latitudes took on a harder sheen from day to day above our heads: it arched high above the ship vibrating and pale, like an immense dome of steel, resonant with the deep voice of freshening gales. [...] It was a bad winter off the Cape that year. (NN 49)

Beyond the influence of the beneficent monsoon, and featuring a different sky, higher and harder, the Cape is a trial through which the sailors must pass. Coming out on the other side was like "dying and being resuscitated," so that "all the first part of the voyage, the Indian Ocean on the other side of the Cape, all that was lost in a haze, like an ineradicable suspicion of some previous existence" (NN 100).

The contrast with the border zones of reef, on the one hand, and storm, on the other, seem to depict the Indian Ocean as a space of calm and sunshine, an impression confirmed by its comparison with other oceans.³ In *Typhoon*, the irrepressible Jukes describes the Indian Ocean as restful compared to the more demanding Atlantic and

³ It is important to note here that Conrad's writing of the East, the Malay world and the Indian Ocean is based upon relatively brief experience in these areas, as Sherry notes. Not having experienced a typhoon in the Indian Ocean, Conrad writes it as a space of calm—later writers, all of whom have lived for long periods in the area, do not necessarily share this view.

the China Seas are the setting for the depiction of the tropical storm in the novel (NN 17).⁴ The Pacific, even more than the Atlantic or North seas and despite its name, is presented in Conrad as the Indian Ocean's "other," traversed by malevolent characters. The West Australian named Chester in *Lord Jim*, who offers Jim the likely fatal position mining guano on a remote island in the South Seas, had lived a piratical life in which "the Pacific, north and south, was his proper hunting ground" (LJ 116). The malevolent Gentleman Brown, before he appears in Patusan as the hand of fate—or globalization—spent his days of "greatest glory" in the Pacific, and the Captain of the Patna states confidently, "Bah! the Pacific is big, my friend. You damned Englishmen can do your worst; I know where there's plenty room for a man like me: I am well acquainted in Apia, in Honolulu, in..." (LJ 31, sic). Most explicitly, Willems, in *An Outcast of the Islands*, meets a card-playing traveller who had "drifted mysteriously into Macassar from the wastes of the Pacific, and, after knocking about for a time in the eddies of town life, had drifted out enigmatically into the sunny solitudes of the Indian Ocean" (OI 8). As Marlow sums up, describing in contrast both of the other, wilder oceans: "The Pacific is the most discreet of live, hot-tempered oceans: the chilly Antarctic can keep a secret too, but more in the manner of a grave" (LJ 128).

In positive terms, the first part of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* evokes the atmosphere of Conrad's Indian Ocean—peaceful, blue, empty:

The *Narcissus*, with square yards, ran out of the fair monsoon. She drifted slowly, swinging round and round the compass, through a few days of baffling light airs. [...] Then, again, with a fair wind and under a clear sky, the ship went on piling up the South Latitude. She passed outside Madagascar and Mauritius without a glimpse of the land.

⁴ "First of all he would insist upon the advantages of the Eastern trade, hinting at its superiority to the Western ocean service. He extolled the sky, the seas, the ships, and the easy life of the Far East" (NN 17).

However, the calm and safe appearance of the Indian Ocean has a particular, paradoxical character. The Indian Ocean is a place of “sunny solitudes,” but also mystery. As Marlow points out in *Youth*, “this was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious” (HD 98). The mystery has to do with its ambivalent representation: in Conrad’s work the “sunny and smiling sea” also has a “cruel grip.”

The Indian Ocean is a space of quiet danger, and the calm is often a cause or context of destruction. The *Judea* in *Youth* endures a week-long storm just off the coast of England and is forced to return twice for repairs, in keeping with the stormy reputation of the North seas and Atlantic Ocean. When she finally enters the Indian Ocean she is greeted with a peaceful, almost monotonous blue sky, and makes good time under fine winds. In these perfect conditions, however, the shipment of coal which has been agitated during the storms and unloadings begins slowly to burn.

The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone, extending on all sides, all round to the horizon—as if the whole terrestrial globe had been one jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet. And on the lustre of the great calm waters the *Judea* glided imperceptibly, enveloped in languid and unclean vapours, in a lazy cloud that drifted to leeward, light and slow: a pestiferous cloud defiling the splendour of sea and sky. (HD 83)

The *Judea* eventually bursts into flame, and must be abandoned by its crew, who continue to sail on in small boats until they hit Java, the site of Marlow’s first dramatic encounter with “the East.” Similarly, in *Lord Jim* the doomed *Patna* heads across the Indian Ocean in a “fulgor” of sunshine,

And under the sinister splendour of that sky the sea, blue and profound, remained still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle—viscous, stagnant, dead. The *Patna*, with a slight hiss, passed over that plain luminous and smooth, unrolled a black ribbon of smoke across the sky, left behind her on the water a white ribbon of foam that vanished at once, like the phantom of a track drawn upon a lifeless sea by the phantom of a steamer. (LJ 12)

Here, the perfect conditions themselves become imbued with a sense of threat—“viscous, stagnant, dead.” The references to phantoms in the passage—“the phantom of a track drawn up on a lifeless sea by the phantom of a steamer”—foreshadow the mysterious piece of shipwreck that the *Patna* hits in the night, causing the near-sinking of the ship and Jim’s shameful leap. The Indian Ocean in Conrad’s work is filled with these ghostly presences, which turn a safe and familiar space into something unfamiliar and dangerous.⁵

In addition, beneath the rhetoric of uncanny haunting (which is at least partly complicit with Orientalist mystification) lies an awareness that the solitude is not empty as it seems. When the *Narcissus* leaves Bombay to sail across the Indian Ocean, around the Cape and back to England, it is described at first as completely alone.

The passage had begun, and the ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing. *Now and then another wandering white speck, burdened with life, appeared far off—disappeared; intent on its own destiny.* (NN 29-30, my emphasis)

Just as calm seas hide dangerous fire or floating wrecks, the emphasis on solitude suggests that the author is protesting too much: solitude acts as a mystification of the awareness of local presence. Notably, one of the “wandering white specks” in the distance, is, the narrator tells us later, “the pointed sail of an Arab dhow running for Bombay [which] rose triangular and upright above the sharp edge of the horizon, lingered and vanished like an illusion” (NN 30).

⁵ This is consistent with Sherry’s suggestion that the curious similarity between the disaster-passages of the story *Youth* and *Lord Jim*. “First there is the calmness, then there is the sudden jolt throwing someone to the ground, and then the calmness returns, but with a new aspect of unreliability”. Norman Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern World* (Cambridge ; London: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 51.

It is in this context that the imperial influences on Indian Ocean constructions are manifest. The Indian Ocean is safe for Conrad because at the time of his experience with the British Merchant Service much of the ocean was under British influence. In addition, his work reveals—particularly through its gaps, ironies and throwaway lines—the material motivations and consequences of empire. In “A Smile of Fortune,” Conrad’s narrator describes an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, most likely based on Mauritius, in very similar terms to his description of the ocean itself—“be it land, be it sea.” On first encounter the island is “fertile and beautiful,” a “blue, apparition that very few sailors have been privileged to behold” (TLS 3, 4). The language of calm sunshine becomes the language of the paradisiacal island. But the Captain’s first vision of the island is also described as “dreamlike,” a dream which soon becomes a nightmare. He finds himself in an insular society, uncertain how to read its codes and held in thrall by one of its outcasts. Trapped in a garden within the idyll is a wild girl who embodies a history of violence and exclusion, and the captain leaves the island disillusioned. A similar doubleness is immediately apparent in Collen’s work—the narrator in *Mutiny* is cruelly imprisoned, in a reference to island penal colonies, and yet describes the island of her incarceration as “so green and blue and turquoise you could cry” (M 275). Sharae Deckard, in her study of the representations of paradise in the twentieth century, describes “the myth’s double valence, its dyadic tendency to fluctuate between the promise of labor-free delight—*paradise*, garden, gold-land—and the ‘infernal’ shadow of its repressed material realities—*anti-paradise*, wasteland, depraved Eden” (Deckard 3).

Indeed, in the opening pages of “A Smile of Fortune,” Conrad makes explicit the material underpinnings of the romantically named “Pearl of the Ocean”: the beauty of a pearl corresponds to its monetary value.

The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the “Pearl of the Ocean.” Well, let us call it the “Pearl.” It’s a good name. A pearl distilling much sweetness upon the world.

This is only a way of telling you that first-rate sugar-cane is grown there. All the population of the Pearl lives for it and by it. Sugar is their daily bread, as it were. (TLS 3)

Similar to the characterizations in Conrad’s more well-known work, the description lies somewhere between colonial mystification and postcolonial interrogation, an ironic gesture towards the exploitative underpinnings of the imperial romance (Parry). More generally, Conrad’s writing of the ocean is consistent with what Jameson describes as the fundamentally dyadic nature of the ocean in literature. Not only is it a romantic trope of “light literature,” but the sea represents “the very element by which an imperial capitalism draws its scattered beachheads and outposts together, through which it slowly realizes its sometimes violent, sometimes silent and corrosive, penetration of the outlying precapitalist zones of the globe” (Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 201).

In addition, as is well established, imperialism is enabled by mapmaking. Both are processes concerned with territory and knowledge: “the empire exists because it can be mapped; the meaning of empire is inscribed into each map” (Edney 2). Based on a study of the maps of British India in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Matthew Edney argues that imperial maps were caught between the idealistic desire for a perfect panoptical survey, and the actual practices of mapping which produced what might be described as “cartographic anarchy” (Edney xiii). This was the result of the bureaucratic structure of the East India Company, the vagaries of illness, interest, weather and finances, as well as the misunderstanding and resistance of local informants (Edney 162).

The process and the end result of Conrad's literary mapping both tend towards structure and resist it. Conrad represents maps in their making and unmaking, and the map of the Indian Ocean has both consistent characteristics and troubling indeterminacy. The borders of Conrad's Indian Ocean are shadowy, and its "atmosphere" is ambivalent: it is a tropical, blue, serene space, although one which is haunted by blurred boundaries, unexpected danger and other presences, whether spectral or material. The next sections will discuss two of the mechanisms which are crucial to this "composite map-making": the importance of wandering itineraries alongside official Indian Ocean networks, and an overarching interest in responses to difference in a space of bewildering diversity.

"What about mere wanderers:" Drifting itineraries

In addition to atmosphere and setting, the Indian Ocean world in Conrad's work is written by means of the journeys taken by his characters. As Jameson describes, advances in mapping allowed cartographers to move from the itinerary, to the sextant, to the achievements of latitude. Conrad himself outlines this progressive history, in "Geography and Some Explorers." Hampson suggests, in addition, that Conrad "reads maps in terms of the spatial practices that produced them" (Hampson "Spatial Stories" 56). Conrad, in addition to writing about maps, returns us to the itineraries of their production; in so doing, his writing "resists the map's colonization of space and reinstates the historical operations that produced it."⁶ His writing prefers the kind of traveller he describes in "Travel," the preface to Richard Curle's *Into the East*.

⁶ The discovery of a means of measuring longitude, that relied on time and journeying, is described in Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*, vol. 3 (London: HarperPerennial, 2007).

What about mere wanderers?—those individuals that one meets in various fairly well-known localities, but who come upon one round unexpected corners, often shabby and depressed, sometimes haggard and jaunty, with tales in their mouths of the flattest description or of a comic quality bordering on tears; with, now and then, a story that would frighten you to death if you were one of those men who don't know how to smile in time. I would class them as an outcast tribe if it did not sound so rude. (Conrad 66)

This focus results in a processual, literary mapping that allows for what Jameson terms “alternative trajectories” to sit palimpsestically above official geographies (Jameson *Postmodernism* 92). In particular, Conrad's work highlights the undirected journeys taken by wanderers and drifters—a kind of Benjaminian *flanerie*, but played out on an oceanic rather than an urban scale.

Much of Conrad's writing of the non-European world has as its source his travels as a sailor between 1883 and 1888, which happened to traverse nearly the full extent of the Indian Ocean world—all that which lies “on the other side of the Cape” (Sherry 1). He sailed from England to Singapore, and back, to Madras and Bombay, around the Cape, to Calcutta, to Singapore again and Bangkok, around the Malay islands, to Australia and Mauritius. One notable exception amongst the places he visited is the East African coast, which, again, is almost completely unrepresented in his writing. While Conrad's most well-known work is about Africa—*Heart of Darkness* and “An Outpost of Progress”—he includes almost no African involvement in the Indian Ocean networks he depicts. In *Conrad's Eastern World*, Sherry proposes an intriguing counterfactual history explaining why Conrad mysteriously gave up his command of the *Otago*, which was based in Australia. Sherry notes, from the ship's records, that the *Otago* had been commissioned to travel to Port Elizabeth, South Africa, but the destination was changed to Port Adelaide at the last minute. Sherry suggests that “since Conrad had hoped to take the *Otago* to Africa, and then found that plans had been altered, he may have left Australia for Europe with the

determination to fulfil his hopes by some other means” (Sherry 36-7). Conrad’s elision of Africa may have been remedied by a journey such as this; looked at from the other side, the literary elision can be partly attributed to this missed opportunity.

Conrad’s biographical journeys, from Madras to Mauritius, create a criss-crossing pattern that covers the broad sweep of the Indian Ocean world, one which is mirrored, and extended, in his fiction. The *Narcissus* leaves Bombay to pass outside of Madagascar and Mauritius and around the Cape; in *Lord Jim*, the *Patna* is intercepted by a French gunboat from Réunion, and brought to Aden, while Marlow is approached by a businessman “fresh from Madagascar” and meets with the French captain in Sydney (LJ 123); in *Victory*, the peripatetic Heyst appears in Timor, “Delli, that highly pestilential place,” Saigon, Borneo and Singapore (V 12); in “A Smile of Fortune,” the narrator sails to Mauritius, where he eats beef imported from Madagascar, and on to Melbourne (TLS); in “Youth,” the *Judea* heads towards Bangkok, passes Western Australia and attempts to reach Jakarta, while its crew eventually lands in Java (HD 82). The routes cross and place names reappear in the various works, forming networks of familiar coordinates in an increasingly overlaid map of the Indian Ocean.

For the most part, the journeys which constitute these networks—and form the basic plot of the novels, as outlined above—follow European imperial trade routes. These are the kind of routes identified by David Lambert and Alan Lester as constituting the focus of “traditional” imperial history, which is primarily concerned with the movement of capital and commodities between “discrete, pre-constituted, bounded places.”

The places mentioned in this tradition of imperial history, then, are significant as locales only in the Cartesian sense of points on a grid or

map, set out in relation to an imperial core which may be Britain as a whole or London in particular. The purpose of this map is to allow the driving forces of Britain's expansion to be plotted. In such an imperial history, neither colonial nor British places are of interest as configurations of peoples, experiences, things and practices in their own right. (Lambert and Lester 9)

Lambert and Lester's collection, in contrast, describes the "imperial careering" of figures whose "life geographies" tracked a set of trans-imperial trajectories.⁷ CA Bayly's *Empire and Information* adds another level of complexity to this largely European network, overlapping European networks with the networks of indigenous informants and social communicators: "running-spies, newswriters and knowledgeable secretaries [...] astrologers, physicians, experts in the philosopher's stone, midwives, marriage-makers, and other knowledgeable people who brought news from one community and region to another" (Bayly *Empire and Information* 1-2). These "careering" European and informal or even underground indigenous networks overlap, suggesting a historical spatiality that is messier and more entangled than the Cartesian imperial history suggests.

It is in this context that the description of routes of travel, in "Freya of the Seven Isles," takes on a greater significance with regard to the Indian Ocean. The narrator of "Freya of the Seven Isles" writes that Nielsen had been "trading and sailing in all directions through the Eastern Archipelago, across and around, transversely, diagonally, perpendicularly, in semi-circles, and zigzags, and figures of eights, for years and years" (TLS). It is these various, haphazard itineraries that create the effect of a dense, thick, congested "cobweb" (TLS). Like Zangiacomo's eastern tour and Jacobus' circus, as will be shown below, the patterns created by the routes of travel are criss-crossed and fluid. Conrad's vision seems here to foreshadow Lambert,

⁷ See also John Darwin for a characterization of the British imperial project itself as wandering, chaotic and capricious. John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

Lester and Bayly's historical mapping, which is in turn representative of a wider interest in transnational and cross-border entanglement. Notably, Lambert and Lester invoke Tony Ballantyne's historiography of "web-like spatiality," developed in "Race and the Webs of Empire," to support their vision of imperial space.

The web captures the integrative nature of this cultural traffic, the ways in imperial institutions and structures connected disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks. Moreover, the image of the web also conveys something of the double nature of the imperial system. Empires, like webs, were fragile (prone to crises where important threads are broken or structural nodes destroyed), yet also dynamic, being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort: the image of the web reminds us that empires were not just structures, but processes as well. (Ballantyne 39)

Elleke Boehmer links the two ideas in her "Global and textual webs in an age of transnational capitalism," taking an "elongated" historical view of globalization in the time of empire, in order to gain critical purchase on twenty-first century interconnectedness, a point of focus for Indian Ocean writing and Ghosh's work in particular, as discussed in the next chapter. Describing the "cross-hatched, cable-linked" networks of colonial and native elites, based on military and trade routes, Boehmer also suggests the significance of an overlapping web of significance.

Importantly, too, subsisting within these networks, and imaginatively reinforcing them, there were the nets or 'webs of language', intertextual webs of common metaphors and shared images, including the webs of interrelationship with which both fictional and nonfictional writings self-consciously themselves registered the operations of the imperial networks. (Boehmer "Global and Textual Webs" 16)

Developed on the global map of empire, this kind of mapping can be applied to the imagining of Indian Ocean space. Conrad lays out the initial imaginative threads in his novels, threads which are "remade and reconfigured" in the fiction of the later authors.

Conrad's work makes passing but pointed reference to the indigenous networks that persist in the region. In *Lord Jim*, part of the problematic of the novel is the overlap of industrialized trade routes with ancient and indigenous routes of pilgrimage, represented by the eight hundred pilgrims who form the "cargo" of the *Patna*. The pilgrims in turn represent a vast network of Islamic influence, which mysteriously, from the point of view of the narrator, connects diverse people and places.

Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there, coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East, after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by strange fears, upheld by one desire. They came from solitary huts in the wilderness, from populous campongs, from villages by the sea. (LJ 11)

The diverse cultures and locations are connected geographically by routes of travel—paths, canoes, island to island, and eventually the steamer journey across the Indian Ocean to Aden—as well as by the universal of faith. The strangeness of their origins, emphasized by the narrator, is contrasted with the single desire of pilgrimage—the representation of a network that precedes and exceeds the small-world network of white shipmasters.

The networks of travel described here, connecting across the small scale of island to island travel and the larger oceanic routes, are overlaid with movements of information. Communication networks are represented as both official and unofficial, institutional and anarchic. For instance, the news of the discovery of the *Patna* reaches Singapore from Aden by cable—the official communication network—after which it is passed around, far and wide, by word of mouth. This unofficial, unstructured network of hearsay and gossip is, importantly, no respecter of racial

boundaries: “you heard of it in the harbour office, at every ship-broker’s, at your agent’s, from whites, from natives, from half-castes, from the very boatmen squatting half naked on the stone steps as you went up” (LJ 27). As Hampson argues, the “idle talk” of the sailors, lascars, and local villagers defines both Jim’s dilemma and the boundaries of those communities. More generally, “Conrad produces his narrative by reference to the oral forms of gossip and legend” (Hampson *Cross-Cultural Encounters* 129-30). Rumour also breaches the divide between land and sea, as is described in *Almayer’s Folly*.

The rumour of the capture or destruction of Dain’s brig had reached the Arab’s ears three days before from the sea-fishermen and through the dwellers on the lower reaches of the river. It had been passed up-stream from neighbour to neighbour till Bulangi, whose clearing was nearest to the settlement, had brought that news himself to Abdulla whose favour he courted. (AF 134)

In *Victory*, the narrator presents rumour as a direct rival to scientific knowledge. The remoteness of the island at the centre of the story is highlighted by the fact that not only is it unknown to geography, but also, and far more significantly, to the “traders’ special lore which is transmitted by word of mouth, without ostentation, and forms the stock of mysterious local knowledge” (V 13). This “mysterious local knowledge” becomes, in a slightly different guise, the stuff of the stories told by Ghosh, Gurnah and Collen. Their fiction draws on and depicts rumour, family lore, overheard tales, as will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The shiftiness and uncontrollability of rumour is linked also to the more haphazard, unpredictable and wandering travel, as is depicted in “A Smile of Fortune.” The story is notable for its concern with the world of imperial business and trade, which is described in more than usual detail. The narrator is anxious about meeting the company’s preferred trader on the island—literally networking, in

contemporary usage—and with the availability and price of sugar. The harbour setting of the story is explicitly a stopping-point on a longer journey, so that the story is framed by an arrival and departure by ship, at the beginning and the end. The story hinges on an error of misidentification, when the Captain on arrival welcomes the wrong Mr Jacobus on board his ship. While the “real” Mr Jacobus is identified by the owners as a “business friend” and a “prominent merchant and charter” (TLS 8), his brother is a mere ship-chandler who lost his reputation through a scandalous affair. The narrator describes the remarkable travels of Mr Jacobus prior to his settling on the island, linking rumour and an unusual sort of travel.

The two brothers had been partners for years in great harmony, when a wandering circus came to the island and my Jacobus became suddenly infatuated with one of the lady-riders. [...] He followed that woman to the Cape, and apparently travelled at the tail of that beastly circus to other parts of the world, in a most degrading position. The woman soon ceased to care for him, and treated him worse than a dog. Most extraordinary stories of moral degradation were reaching the island at that time. (TLS 44)

The circus traces a circulating, wandering route around the Indian Ocean, from Mauritius to the Cape, after which the “lady-rider” finally returns to Mauritius via Mozambique, while rumours travel both more and less directly, reaching the island by routes which cross those of the circus itself (TLS 46).

It is after the unqualified success of his commercial relationship with Mr Jacobus—selling a load of potatoes at great profit in Australia—that the Captain loses interest in the Indian Ocean. After all the mystery and promise which the Pearl of the Ocean signified at the start, the disappointment of his romantic interests and the reduction to purely commercial concerns is disillusioning. He identifies those illusions with the charm of the Indian Ocean: “But the fact is that the Indian Ocean and everything that is in it has lost its charm for me. I am going home as passenger by

the Suez Canal” (TLS 108). Part of that charm has been a yearning for a different kind of travel, or relationship with the ocean, closer to that of the wandering circus. As the captain exclaims early on in the story,

Ah! These commercial interests—spoiling the finest life under the sun. Why must the sea be used for trade—and for war as well? Why kill and traffic on it, pursuing selfish aims of not great importance after all? It would have been so much nicer just to sail about with here and there a port and a bit of land to stretch one’s legs on, buy a few books and get a change of cooking for a while. (TLS 7)

The Captain envisages sailing about here and there, in the same way that Jacobus had been “tossed at the tail of a circus up and down strange coasts” and eventually “drifted back shamelessly” (TLS 74).

Like the circulating circus, the ladies’ orchestra of *Victory* (“Zangiacomo’s eastern tour—eighteen performers”) has travelled so widely that they have performed before “pashas, sheiks, chiefs, H.H. the Sultan of Mascate, etc., etc.” (V 32), suggesting a weaving between Arab, African and Malay spaces. Their wandering itinerary provides Lena with such “incoherent, confused, rudimentary impressions of her travels” that she is terrified of the world and uncertain of her place in it (V 64). The victimized travelling women are mirrored by the wandering criminals, Ricardo and Mr Jones. They represent the dark side of drifting, characters with neither geographic nor moral points of reference. They have lived a life of crime in all the major areas of the non-Western world— “here, there and everywhere.”⁸ Most clearly, Heyst’s initial journeying outlines an alternative geography of fluid wandering. Heyst, despite tracing a circle with his travels “with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo,” is described as emphatically “not a traveller” (V 9).

⁸ Except, again, the east coast of Africa. As Ricardo tells Mr Schomberg: “He told me the other day that it will have to wait till he is ready for it; and he may not be ready for a long time, because the east coast can’t run away, and no one is likely to run off with it” (V 119). Indeed.

On the contrary, while “a traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere,” Heyst undertakes nothing so decisive as a departure (V 9). The verbs used to describe his travels are telling: he “mooned about,” “swam into view,” “turned up.” Instead of a purposeful, directional European traveller, he is “this stranger, this nondescript wanderer” (V 16).⁹ Conrad’s Indian Ocean wanderers present the dichotomy between diffusion and direction, suggested above, such that the representation of wandering itineraries produces an entangled, acentric space.¹⁰

The tension between direction and drifting is exemplified by the movements of ships, whose tracks are in fact “plotted out.” For instance, in the story “Falk,” a steamship breaks down and, unable to harness the power of the wind, drifts aimlessly on the currents, leading eventually to cannibalism and the inversion of civilization (NN 235). Conrad, in *The Mirror of the Sea*, describes the track of a similarly wandering ship.

The track she had made when drifting while her heart stood still within her iron ribs looked like a tangled thread on the white paper of the chart. It was shown to me by a friend, her second officer. In that surprising tangle there were words in minute letters—“gales”, “thick fog,” “ice”—written by him here and there as memoranda of the weather. She had interminably turned upon her tracks, she had crossed and recrossed her haphazard path till it resembled nothing so much as a puzzling maze of pencilled lines without a meaning. (MS 78)

The track of the wandering ship crosses and recrosses its own paths, which become entangled with each other. The tangle is confusing, a “puzzling maze,” while the

⁹ This is congruent with Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the nomad, a conceptually central figure in their *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The life of the nomad is the intermezzo [...] the nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another [...] but the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988) 380.

¹⁰ For a discussion of entanglement as a postcolonial trope, based on Édouard Glissant’s notion, see Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2009).

inscriptions of weather are a reminder, in contrast, of the usual orderliness of a ship's chart. In all these cases apparent reliability gives way to drifting, wandering, and the resulting map is characterized by chaos and entanglement.

Among other things, this highlights the “net” in “network—something which connects but also knots up, entangles, entraps. In Conrad's preface to Richard Curle's *Into the East*, 1922, he speaks of “this earth girt about with cables with an atmosphere made restless by the waves of ether, lighted by that sun of the twentieth century, under which there is nothing new left now, and but very little of which may still be called obscure” (LE 67). The clinging web of telegraph cables and the invisible net of radio waves (waves of ether) have destroyed the romance of the unknown, just as the efficient steam ships and trade routes have replaced adventure with commerce. This is both an old worry, as Conrad's reference to Ecclesiastes suggests, and a highly periodized awareness that the peculiarities of the *fin d'siecle* have led to this romance-destroying reach. As Janice Ho writes, Conrad's work reveals a tension “between his nostalgic fantasy of a world in which the allure of the unmapped could still exist and the reality of a smaller and more tightly networked world that nevertheless continued to make itself felt in the structure of his narratives” (J. Ho 5). Alongside the obscurity of his writing—mysteriousness of content replaced with mysteriousness of style—such a structural effect is the recurrent theme of chance.¹¹ The novel *Chance* is the most obvious example, its plot based on a series of coincidental encounters. Similarly, gentleman Brown who turns up in Patusan and Hirsch who appears in the boat with Decoud and Nostromo are both examples of this chance that is not chance, but the

¹¹ It is worth noting as an aside that the chance-fate dynamic is another of the boundary-blurring characteristics of the Freudian uncanny: “If we take another class of things, it is easy to see that there, too, it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of ‘chance.’” Sigmund Freud, David McLintock and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2003) 236.

incursions of modernity: “an ever-expanding network of ships, telegraphs, telephones, and so forth that reticulates the world so tightly that these *prima facie* chance encounters are not coincidental at all; [...] chance encounters as a formal device signal greater interconnections and traffic between distant spaces” (Ho 15).¹² Networks here are revealed as a trap, entwining the world in an every-more constricting net.

What is particularly subtle in Ho’s reading is her emphasis on the tension between the reality and the fantasy in Conrad’s work, a tension which corresponds to the “constant shifting” between making and unmaking. Alongside the constricting net of shipping lines and telegraph cables—originating in and returning to the metropole—are the more fluid and invisible webs of rumour, hearsay, criminality and friendship described above. It is worth noting that imperial powers, both culturally and legally, associated itinerant communities with criminal activity. As Clare Anderson argues, persons of no fixed abode across the British Empire were liable to be classified as vagrants and forcibly resettled, at least partly in an attempt to control the casual labour pool. For instance, the Criminal Tribes Act in India involved compulsory registration and a pass system, and by 1947 thirteen million people were classified as hereditary criminals (Anderson “Sepoys, Servants and Settlers” 213-4). A life of wandering, with material consequences.¹³

One important implication, therefore, of the overlapping, tangled, webbed maps produced by wandering itineraries is the way in which they problematize centre-

¹² Note that *Nostromo* bumping into the *Nellie* is similar to the *Ibis* bumping into Jodu’s boat, invoking the similar sense of coincidence as well as the relative glut of ocean traffic.

¹³ Bruce Robbins draws attention to the material consequences of itinerant lives and cosmopolitan networks, in his *Cosmopolitics*: “[Cosmopolitanism] has seemed to be a luxuriously free-floating view from above. But many voices now insist, with Paul Rabinow, that the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged—indeed, often coerced.” Bruce Robbins, “Introduction Part 1: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism,” *Cosmopolitics : Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 1.

periphery models of colonial ideology—even suggesting alternative geographies, taken up in more seriousness by the later authors. In *Victory*, Heyst gets swept up in Morrison's plans to turn the island of Samburan into a centre for the production of coal.¹⁴ These optimistic plans are exemplified by the map which the two men bring to show investors.

We greatly admired the map which accompanied them for the edification of the shareholders. On it Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star—lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. (V 22)

The narrator here is ironically aware that Samburan is nothing like the “central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere.” Displacing centrality from Europe onto Samburan, the map parodies the conception of a metropolitan centre—its radiating lines of influence could just as well be read as lines of distance. The Samburan on the map is pointedly “engraved in enormous capitals,” figuring and parodying the inscription of power.

As Timothy Brennan argues, the depiction of the world arranged as centre and periphery has not only an ideological but also an economic value, or, rather, the ideological value *is* economic. He suggests that “the idea of the global periphery—not just the periphery's physical spaces where cheap manufacturing and resource extraction flourish—is itself an economic engine” (Brennan “The Economic Image-Function of the Periphery” 101). The commercial nature of the map, employed by “company promoters [who] have an imagination of their own,” suggests the real economic value of mapping, while the isolated and nearly deserted island depicted in the rest of the novel indicates its imaginative or unreal basis. Morrison, the animating

¹⁴ Coal, that “supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel”—an appropriate metaphor of *fin d'siecle* sensibility, and of Conrad's portrayal of travel. (V 7)

background character in *Victory*, provides one kind of critique of this model. He trades in places unknown to geography and rumour, and has no plans to follow the radiating lines back to Europe—until his interests in the East compel him, fatally, to do so. To Morrison, living in Europe is like living “with your head and shoulders in a moist gunny bag,” and a return there effectively “removed a man from the world of action and adventure” (V 12). His words invert the map, casting Europe in the role of the peripheral, in the same manner as Robert Louis Stevenson achieves for the Pacific in *The Ebb-tide* and “The Beach of Falesá.” In *Victory*, Morrison’s and Heyst’s wandering projects a different kind of map entirely, just as Ghosh’s, Gurnah’s and Collen’s work goes on to write the Indian Ocean as a self-sustaining “world of action and adventure.”

In addition, Conrad’s emphasis on indigenous colonization contributes to the contestation of the centre-periphery map described above. Colonization in his work is not solely a conflict among Western powers, but a complex political struggle among many groups, European, Arab, pirate and local. As Gene Moore notes, in Conrad’s Malay work, “strictly speaking, there are no natives left.” The “bushfolk” of Patusan and the Dyaks of Borneo are somewhere inland or upriver, while those who hold power are themselves refugees or colonists (G. M. Moore “Slavery and Racism in Joseph Conrad’s Eastern World” 21). In addition, representations of slavery in Conrad’s work are bound up with racism: Malay slavery remains invisible to Western narratorial eyes because it is not based on skin colour but, as in the rest of the Indian Ocean world, on ethnic or religious differences (Campbell *The Structure of Slavery*). In *Lord Jim*, Marlow describes Doramin’s wife as accompanied by “a troop of young women with clear brown faces and big grave eyes, her daughters, her servants, her slave-girls,” conflating the three categories (LJ 186). These themes are taken up in a

substantial way in Gurnah's work, in which he highlights the continuity of the history of conquering before and beyond European colonialism. Indian Ocean slavery will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

These various, haphazard itineraries create the effect of a dense, thick, congested cobweb. Like Zangiacomo's eastern tour and Jacobus' circus, the patterns created by the routes of travel are criss-crossing and fluid. If Atlantic journeys in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are remembered as an easily-mapped triangle, then Indian Ocean journeys in Conrad's work map a messy web of differing directions and distances. Through the representation of nomadic drifting Conrad, then, allows for a reading that resists the "fixed ideas" of colonial, Eurocentric thought. Nevertheless, while Conrad's work suggests an alternative geography of heterospatiality, in his representation the Indian Ocean also acts as a space of encounter with otherness, an encounter which is dangerously disorienting. In this sense, as will be discussed below, not only Conrad's ships but the ocean itself forms a kind of Foucauldian heterotopia, both an other space and a space of otherness.

"You are extraordinary—you others:" Drowning in difference

In writing the varying itineraries of this well-travelled space, Conrad explores not only the networks and connections that result, but also the sense of disorientation produced in the face of radical difference. The Indian Ocean is figured in his work as a space of excessive cosmopolitanism, in which the diversity encountered is dangerously disorienting. In this sense, many of his Indian Ocean narratives are, like those of Melville in a different context, both "unsettled and unsettling" (Tally 64). His work is concerned with the matter of the psychological response to an encounter with difference, from both sides of the dividing line—an issue which is also explored by the later writers of this space, although importantly *widened*. It is this diversity, these

“other human beings,” “the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life,” which the later writers are concerned to demonstrate and describe.

The first narrator, in the opening pages of *Heart of Darkness*, describes two types of traveller: sailors who have an essentially sedentary cast of mind, on the one hand, and sensitive sailors exemplified by Marlow, on the other. The sedentary sailors are described as curiously insensitive.

Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance. (HD 105)

In contrast to these travellers, Marlow is a sensitive character who takes in “the changing immensity of life,” although the shock of this encounter threatens to unbalance him. He is a character of the same order as Kurtz, who has been entirely undone by his exposure to a different place and people. Elsewhere in his work, Conrad makes similar distinctions between two different kinds of men. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, he employs an extended metaphor, describing the mental rigidity of men such as Captain Lingard, using the metaphor of the road.

They walk the road of life, the road fenced in by their tastes, prejudices, disdains or enthusiasms, generally honest, invariably stupid, and are proud of never losing their way. If they do stop, it is to look for a moment over the hedges that make them safe, to look at the misty valleys, at the distant peaks, at cliffs and morasses, at the dark forests and the hazy plains where other human beings grope their days painfully away, stumbling over the bones of the wise, over the unburied remains of their predecessors who died alone, in gloom or in sunshine, halfway from anywhere. (OI 152)

The familiarity of that narrow path allows the “man of purpose” to achieve length of life, but without any breadth. The narrow path and the limited vision it affords is coextensive with his whole world. And, as the narrator points out, “to us the limits of

the universe are strictly defined by those we know.” In other words, worlds are social, and socially produced.

On the other side of that barrier, then, lies “only a vast chaos; a chaos of laughter and tears which concerns us not; laughter and tears unpleasant, wicked, morbid, contemptible—because heard imperfectly by ears rebellious to strange sounds” (OI 152). The final caveat is crucial, highlighting the importance of perspective and degree of openness to difference. “Chaos” is at times all the sense that can be made of diversity, when strangeness is rebelliously resisted. The feeling of this resistance is described by the narrator when Lingard is faced by the strangeness of Aïssa, whose words and whose love for Willems are beyond his understanding.

[He] experienced that feeling of condemnation, deep-seated, persuasive, and masterful; that illogical impulse of disapproval which is half-disgust, half-vague fear, and that wakes up in our hearts in the presence of anything new or unusual, of anything that is not run into the mould of our own conscience; the accursed feeling made up of disdain, of anger, and of the sense of superior virtue that leaves us deaf, blind, contemptuous and stupid before anything which is not like ourselves. (OI 195)

The passage constitutes a vivid description of the powerful mental disturbance caused by encountering otherness, or looking beyond the barriers of prejudice or indifference to the vistas of difference beyond. The feeling is illogical but overpowering, and its power comes in part from its vagueness—half-this, half-that, made up of a mix of emotions such as anger and pride, deep-seated and pervasive. Again, Conrad uses the word “stupid” to describe the effect of the experience—as for the insensitive sailors, whose senses are dulled in order to cope with the psychic threat.

The relationship between the encounter with otherness, and the form in which a narrative conveys that encounter, is described by Michael Valdez Moses in his suggestive essay, “Disorientalism.” Moses argues that the prevailing assumption that

modernism has its roots in the experience of the metropolitan city should be amended. Marlow's experience of "extreme vertigo, of radical disorientation" in *Heart of Darkness* is a paradigmatic moment for modernist fiction, and its peculiar setting is crucial for properly understanding it.

If the experience of darkness, of radical alienation, of psychological vertigo and emotional disorientation becomes a topos of modernist narrative, it behooves us to ask if it matters that Conrad sets the Ur-text of what will become a generic, even obligatory modernist scene not in a cosmopolitan center or *unreal city* of modern Europe but in the apparently 'uncivilized', peripheral, and decidedly non-European region of imperial Africa. (Moses 44)

What Moses asks here is whether it is important that a link be made between psychic disorientation in narrative, on the one hand, and place, on the other. Moses, employing and critiquing the Saidian model of Orientalism, suggests that, rather than epistemological mastery and domination, the imperial experience instead results in "uncertainty and alienation, radical skepticism, and intense critical self-examination" (Moses 45). This is Lingard's experience, described with such cogency by the narrator of *An Outcast of the Islands*. It also describes Hassan's experience in *Memory of Departure*, or the ways in which Saleh Omar is affected in *By the Sea* by his encounter with the traveller Hussein and the diverse refugees in the United Kingdom; the detective Das's vertigo when flying across the Indian Ocean from India to al-Ghazira; and the bewildered placelessness of the Chagos refugees in Collen's work.

Nicholas Thomas argues, similarly, that the context of imperial encounters produces confusion as much as codification.

Texts grounded more directly in the liminality of colonial confrontations frequently exhibit not authority but literary confusion and the awkward sense that the writer is marked more than superficially by a tropical climate and constituted not so much by a metropolitan origin, as by his or her diasporic location, and perhaps

also by social and sexual transactions with indigenous people. (N. Thomas 167)

Thomas's work also serves as a reminder of the importance of recognizing a "pluralized field of colonial narratives [...] colonialisms rather than colonialism" (N. Thomas 8). In Moses' view it is the generalized imperial experience of the periphery that is the crucial geographical setting. Other than *Heart of Darkness*, however, many of these experiences of disorientation occur in the space of the Indian Ocean—Jim's feeling of existential dislocation on the small boat in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Lingard's experience of difference in Malay waters, the shadowy oceanic boundaries in *The Shadow-line*, to name a few. Rather than speaking of "Africa" or the "Orient," or the "East," it is worth engaging with the more concrete space of Conrad's experience, which, as was described in the previous section, traverses primarily the waters of the Indian Ocean. In addition, the more conscious writing of that space by the later authors calls for an analysis of Conrad's work in terms of the particular space of these encounters.

In some of Conrad's writing, the Indian Ocean figures as a space of travel which produces these encounters with difference to an unprecedented degree. In *Lord Jim* the *Patna* on which Jim finds his second berth is "owned by a Chinaman, chartered by an Arab, and commanded by a sort of renegade New South Wales German" (LJ 10). It also, as was discussed in the first section, carries a cargo of eight hundred pilgrims from throughout the Malay world headed for Mecca in the East, and it is the question of the human value of these pilgrims that causes the central crisis of the novel. In addition, Conrad keys into something of the mixedness of the port cities of the Indian Ocean in the opening pages of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, in which he depicts a Bombay harbour scene.

The feverish and shrill babble of Eastern languages struggled against the masterful tones of tipsy seamen, who argued against brazen claims and dishonest hopes by profane shouts. The resplendent and bestarred peace of the East was torn into squalid tatters by howls of rage and shrieks of lament raised over sums ranging from five annas to half a rupee; and every soul afloat in Bombay Harbour became aware that the new hands were joining the *Narcissus*. (NN 4)

The harbour scene—which reappears in Gurnah’s and Ghosh’s work—is colourful, mixed, a violent and clamorous meeting of East and West.

The diversity is distilled and pressurized as the novel goes on within the microcosmic confines of the ship, as the “new hands” turns out to be a mix of English, Irish, Russian, Finnish, Scandinavian, and West Indian. Ships in this literature act sometimes as heterotopic spaces, those which Foucault describes as “different spaces, those other places, [that form] a kind of both mythical and real contestation of the space in which we live” (Foucault “Of Other Spaces” 2). Foucault remarks, that “the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations where it is lacking, dreams dry up, adventure is replaced by espionage, and privateers by the police” (Foucault “Of Other Spaces” 3). The ship is a between-place, that exists both in and between ports; it is placeless, and yet real; it has both economic value as well as imaginative potential. Most importantly, the ship is heterotopic in the sense that it is a space in which social relations are mirrored but inverted, or suspended. In Ghosh’s work too the ship is a microcosm of an immensely variegated reality—for Ghosh, like Conrad, the ship is “a fragment detached from the earth” (NN 29).

Unlike the diversity of the mostly European ship, however, the depiction of the noisy rabble in the Bombay harbour scene is characterized by a mix of unspecified languages and nationalities, a faceless and undifferentiated crowd. This is a point with which the later writers take issue, regarding Conradian influence. Gurnah mentions

the absence, in Conrad's work, of large numbers of non-Europeans that were known to populate the area. He points out that in "A Smile of Fortune" the Captain walks through the town and countryside to visit Jacobus and his daughter, and never registers any of the thousands of plantation workers and indentured labourers that populated the island at that time (Gurnah "Reading and Questions"). Ghosh, as will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter, argues that the problem is not the invisibility of figures such as lascars in Conrad's work, but their inaudibility.

For this reason it always amazes me when people say I must be interested in these various things from a Conradian perspective. Whereas what really vitiates Conrad's work for me is that in the background is always this lascar - but never does the lascar in Conrad have a voice except as some sort of maligned presence. To me, that's a failure of imagination. (Boehmer and Mondal 32)

This is a slightly more specific critique, while along the same lines, as Chinua Achebe's well-known polemic against the inherent racism of Conrad's work (Achebe). It points to a lack of curiosity about what the narrator in *The Shadow-line* describes as "that mixed white, brown, and yellow portion of mankind" (SL 29).

This chapter is not concerned with the details of the debate that has stemmed from Achebe's article, except to draw on and draw out the deep ethical ambivalence which it has exposed and which has made it possible to think of Conrad, in the words of Paul Armstrong, as "a sceptical dramatist of epistemological processes," one who "oscillates between affirming and denying the possibility of understanding otherness" (Armstrong 23). As became apparent in the previous section, an important novel in this context is the later novel *Victory*, in which the author seems almost to parody his own blind-spots.¹⁵ In *Victory*, Lena is portrayed as almost laughably ignorant: "The

¹⁵ For a further discussion of the importance of this novel for Conrad's oeuvre, and particularly the character Wang, see Terry Collits, *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*, vol. 12 (London: Routledge, 2005).

quantities of ‘black men’ all about frightened her. She really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe” (V). Her geographical ignorance mirrors her ignorance of the diversity of people amongst whom she travels; nevertheless, the quotation marks around “black men” serve to signal not only mockery, but the narrator’s contrasting awareness. Similarly, the depiction of Heyst on his island is, initially, decidedly Crusoesque.

He was out of everybody’s way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous. Everyone in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little island. An island is but the top of a mountain. [...] His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. (V)

Gradually, however, the narrator discloses the presence of others on the island. First, Wang is introduced—“of the crowd of imported Chinese labourers, one at least had remained in Samburan, solitary and strange, like a swallow left behind at the migrating season of his tribe” (V). However, not even Wang can be described as solitary, since he has married a member of the Alfuro tribe; and so it comes to light that the Heyst’s “uninhabited” island is home to Wang, his wife, and an entire tribe.

More clearly, when Schomberg urges Ricardo to attack Heyst’s island, Ricardo expresses anxiety about the likelihood of being seen. Schomberg explains that “only native craft pass by,” an answer which Ricardo finds perfectly reassuring. The narrator goes on to explain.

Ricardo nodded, satisfied. Both these white men looked on native life as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs. No. Native craft did not count, of course. It was an empty, solitary part of the sea, Schomberg expounded further. (V 128)

The perspectival bias of the two men is highlighted by the narrator's emphasis on race—"these white men," "the dominant race"—and the sly "of course" provides a sense of social agreement strenuously maintained. The white men in the passage are in the role here of Achebe's Marlow, who sees the native life on the shores of the river as merely dark background scenery. Here, however, the narrator is at least self-conscious about the blinkered view.

Ricardo and Schomberg form examples of Mary Louise Pratt's "seeing men"—the "white male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (Pratt 9). Their sense of the insignificance of native life is accompanied by the belief that they too are unaffected and indeed unseen—"disregarded." In spite of this, the narrative provides numerous hints of watching eyes, and at the end of the novel the fates of the white characters are determined by the decisions of Wang and the Alfuro tribe. Questions of perspective, discussed in relation to *Lord Jim* in the first section of this chapter, are again important. In this case, however, it is not the position and perspective of the original gaze, but the returned or reflected gaze of the dismissed others who people the space.

There are other examples of this kind of ocular haunting, in Conrad's work. In *Youth*, Marlow's first sighting of the East is mirrored by its first sighting of him:

And then I saw the men of the East—they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. (HD 98)

The parallelism between the last line here and the narrator's description in *Lord Jim* of the calm Indian Ocean—"without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle"—further undermines the rhetorical insistence on solitude (LJ 12). In an analogous way,

Ho writes that “Conrad’s obscurity is a formal technique through which he tries to disguise and compensate for the humdrumness of a de-mystified world, but historical reality inevitably impinges on his narratives, much like the return of the repressed in a different form” (J. Ho 8). The white characters in these novels are haunted by the possibility of native witness. Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands* is driven half mad by the accusatory potential of Aissa’s gaze, in a manner similar to the relationship between Yusuf and his uncle in Gurnah’s *Paradise*. Yusuf, confused by the seyyid’s ambivalent treatment of him, asks Khalil for an explanation.

’But now Mohammed Abdalla is finished and the seyyid has you, and you make him feel that he’s behaving badly. You make him feel something different too, I think. You look at him all the time. [...] You look at everyone, at everything. [...] And anyone can see that your miserable eyes are open and that you desire nothing to escape them. So, if I can see that, what do you think a clever one like the seyyid sees? Eh, my brother, he feels your eyes cutting into him [...]’ (P 194)

It is this cutting gaze of witness which, in *Lord Jim*, the unfortunate Captain Brierly cannot stand. For him it is too much that Jim must sit there “while all these confounded natives, serangs, lascars, quartermasters, are giving evidence that’s enough to burn a man to ashes with shame” (LJ 48). The serangs and lascars are aligned with the abandoned pilgrims, adjudicating the guilt of the imperial sailors. This horror is echoed and embodied by the visions of the first mate of the *Patna*, who hallucinates, when Marlow goes to visit him, that the ship had been full of reptiles when he claimed to watch it sink. He is obsessed with hidden watchers under the bed, and fears being overwhelmed by innumerable, monstrous pink toads, each, significantly, topped with one enormous eye (LJ 39).

For some of Conrad’s characters, then, the Indian Ocean is a space of *excessive* cosmopolitanism. For many, the experience of diversity is overwhelming, driving Kurtz, Brierly, Willems, and the first mate of the *Patna* to various kinds of

madness. Conrad in fact often uses the term “cosmopolitan” in a derogatory way. For Conrad as for other modernist writers like Kipling and Forster, cosmopolitanism amounts to degeneration. Describing the relationship between Conrad and the city of London in *The Secret Agent*, Tanya Agathocleous suggests that, rather than a sign of progress, cosmopolitanism for the author “is a sign of modernity hurtling relentlessly towards homogeneity, corroding identities and relationships along the way” (Agathocleous 177). Thus Decoud, in *Nostramo*, is a model of “a Frenchified—but most un-French—cosmopolitanism, in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority.” Similarly, for Mr Verloc, in *The Secret Agent*, cosmopolitanism is a feature of the degradation of London’s slums. While the later authors have embraced the notion of a peculiar Indian Ocean diversity, they have not always followed in a similar valuation. Collen’s work depicts triads of friends, each from a different ethnic group in Mauritius, whose knowledge-sharing and support cut across communitarian boundaries. Ghosh revels in the linguistic mixing produced in the context of the coastal communities as well as directly through the technology of the sailing ship, and presents cosmopolitanism as largely enabling. Gurnah’s representation participates partly in the Conradian diagnosis of epistemological uncertainties produced in this space, although his writing focuses in far greater detail on the experience of the local rather than the traveller.

The spectre of witness remains largely, still, in the minds of the European protagonists of Conrad’s novels, suggesting the “maligned presence” of Ghosh’s critique. However, it should be noted that, in some of Conrad’s Indian Ocean work, the perspective of subaltern characters—lascars, women, servants—is directly described. For instance, in “The End of the Tether,” the narrative perspective shifts to the point of view of a lascar sailor, imagining his origins, thoughts and emotions.

Outside the solitary lascar told off for night duty in harbour, perhaps a youth fresh from a forest village, would stand motionless in the shadows of the deck listening to the endless drunken gabble. His heart would be thumping with breathless awe of white men: the arbitrary and obstinate men who pursue inflexibly their incomprehensible purposes,—beings with weird intonations in the voice, moved by unaccountable feelings, actuated by inscrutable motives. (ET 169)

A striking and oft-quoted example is the searing anticolonial speech of Babalatchi in *Outcast of the Islands*, which compares the greed of the imperialists to that of a tiger.¹⁶

The inclusion of these various perspectives presents also a formal challenge, of the sort described by Moses, who argues that the shock of difference in the characters is generated as an “experiential ‘aesthetic’ correlative” in the reader, through the novel’s modernist narrative techniques. These include literary irony, delayed decoding, perspectivism and generic modulation. *Victory* achieves a portrayal of alternative perspectives by employing the formal strategy of free indirect discourse, switching the focalization almost imperceptibly and suddenly between characters. Most surprisingly as the narrative goes on, the focalization is at times given over to subaltern characters. These include the oppressed wife of Schomberg and, most effectively, the servant Wang. Wang is at first described by the omniscient narrator, who hints at an alternative, interior life and the strategic deployment of inscrutability: “Wang in his native province in China might have been an aggressively, sensitively genial person; but in Samburan he had clothed himself in a mysterious stolidity [...]” (V 138). Wang carefully maintains his own obscurity, spending his free hours building an enormous fence around his property that prevents Heyst from looking in;

¹⁶ For further discussion of Babalatchi’s speech, see Robert Hampson, “Conrad’s Heterotopic Fiction: Composite Maps, Superimposed Sites and Impossible Spaces,” *Joseph Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Carola M. Kaplan, Peter Mallios and Andrea White (London: Routledge, 2005) 125.

when Alma arrives on the island on Heyst's arm, Wang's expression is unreadable.

Heyst describes Wang to Alma in racist terms—"one Chinaman looks very much like another"—but soon afterwards, the narrative shifts to Wang's somewhat more sensitive perspective.

By that time Wang was out of sight at the back of the house, but by no means out of hearing. The Chinaman could hear the voice of him who, when there were many people there, was generally referred to as 'Number One'. Wang was not able to understand the words, but the tone interested him.

'Where are you?' cried Number One.

Then Wang heard, much more faint, a voice he had never heard before—a novel impression which he acknowledged by cocking his head slightly to one side. (V 141)

From Wang's perspective, the activities of the white people are as obscure as his are to them—writing a kind of universality into the problem of otherness.

Wang had some knowledge of the more superficial rites and ceremonies of white men's existence, otherwise so enigmatically remote to his mind, and containing unexpected possibilities of good and evil, which had to be watched for with prudence and care. (V 141)

From Wang's perspective, the white men appear similarly as just so much mysterious scenery, although their power requires that they be watched with caution. Conrad therefore highlights here the mutual incomprehensibility—the experience of difference from both sides of the encounter.

Therefore, it seems that Conrad is interested in a more local as well as a more universal experience of difference—both the oceanic and the resulting interpersonal periphery. Localized in the Indian Ocean, the experience is at the same time not strictly limited to Europeans encountering locals, but is, as in the case of Wang and Babalatchi, sometimes reversed. This is accentuated by descriptions of more general prejudice. In the overlooked short story "Amy Foster," an immigrant from Central Europe, on his way to America, is shipwrecked on the English coast, which to him at

the first represents a desert island, a strange land. The narrator recounts the villagers fear and aversion of him, his blatant foreignness, as well as his incomprehension of their strange ways. The narrator, a country doctor, describes the resulting tragedy as one which arises not from the clash of sameness, as in Greek tragedies, but as a response to difference.

There are other tragedies, less scandalous and of a subtler poignancy, arising from irreconcilable differences and from that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads—over all our heads [...] (NN 107)

As John G. Peters describes, in the *Cambridge Introduction to Conrad*, “Amy Foster” shows that “the difficulties that arise when Western and non-Western cultures interact result not simply from differing settings and societies but rather from a general human inability to accept difference in others” (Peters 72).

It is these “irreconcilable differences,” and the frequency and degree of their encounter in the Indian Ocean, that map onto what Conrad elsewhere refers to as the “irreconcilable antagonisms” of which he demands “courageous recognition.” In *Lord Jim*, as was discussed above, Marlow’s encounter with gender, racial and relational difference, in the figure of Jewel, bears similarities to Lingard’s, as well as to Wang’s, experience. It is perhaps important that Marlow describes the experience in oceanic terms. The ocean, therefore, is not only the space within which and the means by which these encounters occur, but also provides the metaphoric correlative for the description of their effect. During a tense and ghostly dialogue with the desperate Jewel, Marlow feels a startling fluidity.

An inconceivable calmness seemed to have risen from the ground around us, imperceptibly, like the still rise of a flood in the night, obliterating the familiar landmarks of emotions. There came upon me,

as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of unknown depths. (LJ 227)¹⁷

Like the Lingardian traveller, he feels a sort of horror when faced with the unknown, and with depth as much as breadth. This sense of an impossible fluidity leads to a momentary panic, staved off only by the force of habit, and the wilful clouding of the facts. The mysterious character Stein, enclosed with his butterflies in a dimly-lit room, in a contained episode in the middle of the novel, offers another far-reaching sea-metaphor:

Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns—nicht wahr?...No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me—how to be? (LJ 163)

The lack of fixity, the oceanic fluidity of a world of difference is met with Stein's admonition: "to the destructive element submit yourself." The fluidity is disorienting but also necessary, and possibly even productive—ethically and aesthetically.

It is this element of the Indian Ocean—which brings together ancient and more recent networks of trade, European, African, Arab, Chinese and Malay sailors, travelling circuses, orchestras, women, lascars and coolies—which Stein here both warns against and celebrates. The sensitive traveller runs the risk of drowning in difference, but is rewarded with glances over the hedge of prejudice that reveal alternative subjectivities and geographies.

Conclusion

¹⁷ The same phrase occurs when Marlow describes Brierly's mysterious suicide, which, as it wasn't women, drink or money, was somehow related to the inquiry into the fate of the *Patna*: "He jumped overboard at sea barely a week after the end of the inquiry, and less than three days after leaving port on his outward passage; as though on that exact spot in the midst of waters he had suddenly perceived the gates of the other world flung open wide for his reception" (LJ 43).

In “Freya of the Seven Isles,” one of the three stories in *Twixt Land and Sea*, the narrator writes of the character Nielsen that, “his tracks, if plotted out, would have covered the map [...] like a cobweb.” The quotation is suggestive with regards to Conrad’s Indian Ocean. It suggests the importance of maps, both as the makers of imaginative boundaries, and as literary representations of space. It also suggests the plotting out of travel itineraries synchronically. In this case the image produced is of a cobweb, a useful metaphor for comprehending the diverse representations of the Indian Ocean world, in Conrad’s work as well as that of the later writers—connoting networks, criss-crossing, connection, as well as invisibility, traps and haunting. It also proposes a way of reading Conrad’s influence on the English language writing of the Indian Ocean world in the twentieth century, as both far-reaching and hidden, connecting and clinging.

Conrad’s Indian Ocean is a wide space, connected to the other oceans via the stormy Cape, the Suez Canal and the Malay “zones of reef,” and to the rest of the world by web-like imperial networks. The later authors are interested, for the most part, in a relatively shrunken Indian Ocean, one which impinges on coastal lives in fortuitous or disruptive ways, or which concerns particular routes and networks. Conrad’s writing therefore provides an encompassing but shallow model for later writing in the space, which widens the scope of who is depicted as primary agents of Indian Ocean travel and connectedness. In particular, the later authors are less interested in the intrusions of empire, or the European and “outsider” experience, focusing instead on what can be called “South-South” or “East-South” interactions. While Conrad provides brief glimpses of the space as seen from the point of view of a lascar or a hotel-keeper’s downtrodden wife, Ghosh writes Deeti as the heroine of *Sea of Poppies*, a coolie woman, a protagonist who also represents the space through her

drawings. Even more so, Collen's women are central to Indian Ocean space, and she focuses on instances of cooperation as well as conflict among the many different groups which inhabit the space. Gurnah rewrites *Heart of Darkness* from the Arab-African perspective in *Paradise*, and deploys multiple perspectives of very different Swahili-origin narrators in *By the Sea*, producing a vision of the Indian Ocean as one in which European influences are some among many.

However, Conrad's writing of the longevity of the Indian Ocean is far more curtailed than that of the later authors. While a history of pilgrimage can be inferred from the pilgrim ship episode in *Lord Jim*, it is neither directly remarked nor explored, and the references to Chinese and Arab ship-owners are mentioned without background or sense of prior dominance. The later authors demonstrate greater awareness of the long histories of Indian Ocean interconnection, stretching from Ghosh's description of medieval trading networks in *In an Antique Land*, to Collen's Indo-Mauritian drug smuggling routes in *Boy*. M.G. Vassanji and V.S. Naipaul both directly describe this long history in their fiction, and it forms the basis for Ghosh's figuring of the entire period of Conradian interest as a mere "hiatus" in centuries-old network of trade and cultural exchange. The later authors benefit from greater access to (and audiences for) histories of the space, and also from their more direct personal, familial and political connections. These are particularly explored by Gurnah, whose stories rely on tracing the connections among families and communities across the Indian Ocean. Finally, the later authors are interested in a variety of modes of movement that are more contemporary or delicate than are allowed for by either Conrad or most historical accounts: refugees, illegal labour, international policing, sexual exploitation, military bases, drug smuggling, networks of political dissidence, music, dance, food, feminism, religion, charity and marriage.

What can be discerned as continuities in novels of the other writers considered in this thesis, however, are those things on which this chapter has focused: the processes of mapping itself, the routes of wanderers and drifters, the emphasis on “chance” encounters in an interconnected space, and the persistent problem of how to deal with diversity. Ghosh, like Conrad, is fascinated by the problem of borders, extending the fluidity of the oceanic border of Conrad’s *The Shadow-line*, to the equally unreliable land borders of his later and significantly pluralized *The Shadow Lines*. Collen develops Conrad’s fascination with circulating rumours and goods, and her plots and island mapping in *Boy* and *Getting Rid of It* depend on the aimless wandering of her characters. Gurnah, most clearly indebted to Conrad, is concerned in all of his fiction to explore the “irreconcilable differences” that arise from encounters with otherness, is similarly wary of cosmopolitanism, and employs narrative techniques that draw on Conradian modernist form in order to convey these disjunctions.

Conrad’s experiences as a sailor, mate and captain in the three short years of his sea life, in the setting of the wide Indian Ocean world, had a disproportionate effect on his writing. This body of work maps an oceanic realm of drifting, “imperial careering” and haunting presences. In so doing, it both produces and dismantles an imaginative map of the Indian Ocean, demonstrating an awareness of the distorting power of perspective. While Conrad portrays the Indian Ocean as the “thoroughfare to the East,” bordered on all sides by lands of exotic difference and criss-crossed by ships taking men from one to another, the later writers portray it as home, with all the deepening and complications that entails. Nevertheless, many of his themes recur, such that it is not only ships but stories that traverse the Indian Ocean’s cobweb of routes.

Chapter 2

“A world of accommodations:” Amitav Ghosh

*The Injian Ocean sets an' smiles
So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue;
There aren't a wave for miles an' miles
Excep' the jiggle from the screw.
The ship is swep', the day is done,
The bugle's gone for smoke and play;
An' black agin' the settin' sun
The Lascar sings, "Hum deckty hai!"*

Rudyard Kipling, "For to Admire"

Introduction

In his *In an Antique Land*, Amitav Ghosh describes the Indian Ocean and its littoral, in an evocative phrase, as “a world of accommodations” (IAL 236). The phrase suggests the act of making room, the tolerance of difference, a sense of spaciousness, the coexistence of multiple homes—as well as implied multiplicity, on-going compromise, and negotiation. He refers in particular to the medieval Indian Ocean, which he describes as characterized by “the rich confusions that accompany a culture of accommodation and compromise” (IAL 288). In addition, in several other of his novels and essays, Ghosh writes the Indian Ocean world as a cultural space that is “still alive, and, in some tiny measure, still retrievable.” The distant past filters into the present, and the sense of a long history—particularly extending back into the precolonial past—produces the Indian Ocean, in his work, as a post-postcolonial space.¹ The Indian Ocean is show to be not only as a particular kind of space, but also and inextricably, as a particular kind of time. In Derek Walcott’s words, as in Ghosh’s

¹ In the sense suggested by Elleke Boehmer’s description of Caryl Phillips’ usage: “It is a world order which Phillips incidentally sees as ‘post-postcolonial’, his accumulation of ‘post-s’ demonstrating that he is defining it for himself, from beyond what he regards as the (perhaps more immediately or chronologically) postcolonial.” Elleke Boehmer, “Global and Textual Webs in an Age of Transnational Capitalism; or, What Isn’t New About Empire,” *Postcolonial Studies* 7.1 (2004): 11.

fiction, “the sea is History”—the ocean is produced, chronotopically, as a space of crossings and compromise through the writing of an accommodating *longue durée*.²

Ghosh’s work is filled with ships plying the Indian Ocean trade, with journeys that stretch from Durban to Aden to the Andaman Islands to Calcutta to Canton, and with myriad characters who have “nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean” (SP 12). He has, of the writers examined in this thesis, most consciously and consistently written the space of the Indian Ocean, producing it as a space of cosmopolitan diversity and interconnected networks. The references in his work to the space far outnumber that of the other writers, and he engages in direct descriptions of its character. Also, like Conrad, Ghosh’s sense of the Indian Ocean is comparative—he draws contrasts with and connections between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean (*In an Antique Land*) and the Atlantic and the China Seas (*Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*). In addition, Ghosh focuses not only on the cross-oceanic journeys that connect the east and west coasts of the Indian Ocean, but also on coastal traffic, up and down the coast of Africa and especially around India and the Bay of Bengal. As he comments in an interview: “it really has become my project, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, imagining it, giving it life, filling it in” (Boehmer and Mondal 7).

Of his oeuvre, four of Ghosh’s novels are concerned with the Indian Ocean, and will be the major focus of this chapter. *In an Antique Land*, the second half of *The Circle of Reason*, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* are all set within the space of the Indian Ocean and portray its journeys, networks and interconnected cultures. While *In an Antique Land* and *The Circle of Reason* describe primarily the western

² For a discussion see Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke, *Cultures of Trade: Indian Ocean Exchanges* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 5.

half of the Indian Ocean world, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* focus on the eastern. The remaining novels, whose publication dates alternate with these, are not explicitly focused on the Indian Ocean, but further explore the themes and concepts that Ghosh associates with it, and which will be discussed in this chapter—fragments, fluidity and change, lost and recreated histories and ethical multilingualism. Ghosh's novels can also, from a different view, be arranged into two periodized groups, marking an apparent shift in emphasis over the course of his career. The first three novels, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and especially *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), are concerned with questions of science and history, discourses that are presented as distinctly fluid and contingent. The novels are experimental both in form and content, characterized by temporal shifts and disjunctures, strange premonitions, fantastical events and philosophical conundrums. The later novels—*The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011)—feature a more traditional narrative style, and are primarily concerned with historical recovery and the telling of stories. If we consider Ghosh in relation to a Jamesonian spatial confusion, as was discussed in the previous chapter, he seems in his first novels to be largely diagnosing and exploring this condition, while in the later novels he engages in writing the Indian Ocean, filling it in.

The metaphorical interlinking of space and time in Ghosh's work, and their mutually fluid borders, suggest the usefulness of a chronotopic reading of his Indian Ocean. As Mikhail Bakhtin first argued, the chronotope acts as a critical metaphor which highlights the connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships as they are expressed in literature: "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time,

plot and history” (Bakhtin 84). Whereas Gurnah is more interested in historical gaps, and Collen in contemporary politics, Ghosh’s work pursues the sense of a long and populated history, reconstructed from necessarily fragmentary evidence. This chapter therefore weaves back and forth between Ghosh’s writing of Indian Ocean histories and the interrelated production of Indian Ocean space.

The nature of Ghosh’s Indian Ocean, and the link between the spatial and the temporal, is treated in a crucial and much-quoted scene recounted at the end of *In an Antique Land*, and also separately in the essay “The Imam and the Indian.” In the scene, the narrator and the imam of the village engage in a violent argument about the relative capacity for violence of their respective civilizations, Muslim and African on the one hand, and Hindu and Indian on the other—located on the two opposing sides of the Indian Ocean.

It seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us: we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences. We had acknowledged that it was no longer possible to speak, as Ben Yiju or his Slave, or any one of the thousands of travellers who had crossed the Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages might have done, of things that were right, or good, or willed by God; it would have been merely absurd for either of us to use those words, for they belonged to a dismantled rung on the ascending ladder of Development. [...]

I felt myself a conspirator in the betrayal of the history that had led me to Nashawy; a witness to the extermination of a world of accommodations that I had believed to be still alive, and, in some tiny measure, still retrievable. (IAL 236)

The Indian Ocean is a space which travellers have crossed for thousands of years, a culture of movement enabled by dialogue and the accommodation of difference.

Ghosh here laments the loss of a complex language, or set of languages in common, replaced by the exclusive language of the market. He describes these market terms as the lowest common denominator of communication, the language of violence and

capital, which forms “the universal, irresistible metaphysic of modern meaning.” It undoes what the Indian Ocean world may be asked to stand for—not a unitary view or language, but centuries of dialogue. The dialogue presupposes diverse—and implicitly not Eurocentric—values: alongside “tanks and guns and bombs,” it includes the possibility of talking about “things that were right or good or willed by God” (IAL 236). This criss-crossed space, with its long history of making room for, but not resolving, differences, constitutes Ghosh’s vision of a “world of accommodations.”³

This chapter will tease apart what can be meant by describing the Indian Ocean as a world of accommodations. The first section considers Ghosh’s interest in space and shadowy borders, multiplying and confounding Conrad’s shadow lines, and extending the fluidity of the ocean to the mapping of national, imperial and other limiting boundaries. For Ghosh, the Indian Ocean is a space constituted by palimpsestic, interrelated networks, which connect India with the African, Arab, South and East Asian worlds. Rather than lines on a shipping map, the networks in Ghosh’s work are grounded in the human networks of the Indian Ocean, depicted through individual human nodes in transnational groups, whether traders, lascars, coolies or families. These non-national networks provide a way of writing beyond empire, representing the Indian Ocean as a post-postcolonial space. The second section will look more closely at the ethical response to diversity, focusing on how the networked space is informed by an ethic of openness to difference. Drawing on the debate between Timothy Brennan and Bruce Robbins on the politics of cosmopolitan attributions, this section will explore the possibility of Ghosh’s writing of an Indian

³ In this description, Ghosh’s words echo those of Almásy in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*: “There is God only in the desert, he wanted to acknowledge that now. Outside of this there was just trade and power, money and war. Financial and military despots shaped the world” (265). This is played out in Kip’s dismissal of the relationship developed between the four characters in the face of the reductive power of the atom bombs, “after all those speeches of civilisation from kings and queens and presidents...such voices of abstract order.” Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) 302.

Ocean cosmopolitanism. This section highlights the movement of non-elite characters and emphasizes the importance of imaginative journeying alongside physical travel. The project of writing a non-national novel, determined to accommodate diversity, is inevitably hampered by the problem of radical multilingualism. In the majority of his novels, Ghosh employs the method shared by Collen and Gurnah, which involves writing in English while suggesting the music of other languages through rhythm and scattered foreign words. However, this section will consider the unusual method employed in the latest trilogy (still to be completed), which involves the recreation of an invented lingua franca. The final section demonstrates that the chronotope works both ways—in the same way that Ghosh’s envisioning of Indian Ocean space draws on his depictions of a long history, his historical views are spatialized in ways that produce a focus on subaltern characters and unwritten stories. Ghosh’s project of literary-historical recuperation seems to position itself as the fictional end of the subaltern studies group project, wrestling with similar concerns of recovery and disruption. Ghosh, interested in compensating for the gaps in Eurocentric history, writes the stories that imaginatively fill them in—a literary project complicated by fragments, in evidence and imagery.

“Nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean:” Non-national networks

Ghosh’s writing is, unlike many Indian writers in the vein of Salman Rushdie, relatively uninterested in empire and the nation. As he notes in a published correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, he is interested in writing about those things that provide a “way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities)” (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 147). Repudiating an interest in the postcolonial nation, in favour of less restrictive purviews, also entails looking beyond empire. As he describes in the interview:

You know, to me what's most interesting about that idea of borders is not just the crossing of nation-state boundaries but also that underneath the as-it-were dome of empire, there's so much happening once you begin to look at it from this other point of view; there are people who were eluding it, who were eluding borders and creating their own realities. (Boehmer and Mondal 34)⁴

For these partly negative reasons—what it allows him not to say—Ghosh turns to the Indian Ocean, a space which represents, and makes possible the description of, alternative subjectivities and histories, and which blurs the lines between the temporalities of medieval trade, the period of European empire and the modern nation.

The Shadow Lines is an appropriate place to start this discussion, despite little ostensible concern with the Indian Ocean. As an early (second) novel, published in 1986 soon after *The Circle of Reason*, it reveals the author's (sometimes repudiated) Conradian influence as well as his persistent concern with the general question of space. Ghosh describes the fluidity of the shadow lines on land as well as sea, a concern with border-crossing that is extended to the fluid, oceanic space. Ghosh's narrator in *The Shadow Lines* outlines a distinctly Lefebvrian view of space. In attempting to convince his beloved Ila of the constructedness of space, he points out that, "a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart" (SLS 21). Space in Ghosh's work is inseparable from its imaginative representation, and in fact cannot be experienced in an unmediated way. The narrator, in the quotation, prioritizes imaginative over geographical distance: his London is no less true than hers, even though it is imagined, via maps and stories, in

⁴ These different realities could refer to what the subaltern historian Ranajit Guha refers to as moments of "dominance without hegemony", and invoke Dipesh Chakrabarty's "heterotemporalities." Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 15.

geographically distant Calcutta. He expands on the point, staging the “unreality” of spatial constructs, during a discussion between his father and grandmother on the eve of her first flight from India to East Pakistan. Contemplating the journey to Dhaka, the narrator’s grandmother asks her son innocently about the visibility and substantiveness of the border she will cross in flight.

She wanted to know whether she would be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane. When my father laughed and said, why, did she really think the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas, she was not so much offended as puzzled. No that wasn’t what I meant, she said. Of course not. But surely there’s something—trenches perhaps, or soldiers or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don’t they call it no-man’s land? (SLS 51)

Neither the lines on the map nor a physical border patrolled by guards will be visible from the aeroplane, a disturbing thought for a woman who has survived Partition, the break-up of her family and the loss of her home. She persists by asking, “But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then? [...] What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t anything in between?” (SLS 151).

While “there isn’t anything in between”, Ghosh’s work is not suggesting the non-reality of borders and defined space. Spatial construction, the narrator learns from Tridib, is no less effective for being invented. The narrator describes an experiential encounter with maps that contains echoes of Marlow’s map-reading in *Heart of Darkness*. He uses a compass to draw circles on a map and discovers that the real distances between places have nothing at all to do with their political or imaginative distance.

When I turned back to my first circle I was struck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when people, sensible

people, of good intention, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was special enchantment in lines. [...] They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony—the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines. (SLS 233)

The “unreality” of the border between Pakistan and India—“our looking-glass border”—describes an inverse relationship with its power. In Lefebvrian terms, while the political border is represented by the line on the map, it comes to act as a representational space for division and otherness. The oceanic imagery—the pieces of land “sail away from each other”—transfers the Conradian watery lines to the apparent solidity of land.

This is one of the ways in which Ghosh expands the Conradian vision of a shadowy temporal and oceanic boundary, between two ages of maturity, to include other kinds of boundaries, temporal as well as spatial. Critics have commented extensively on the reference in the title of Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* to Conrad’s *The Shadow-line*, as well as its pluralisation in the rewriting. As Padmini Mongia notes, “appropriately pluralized, shadow lines in Ghosh’s novel have multiplied frighteningly as peoples traverse space and nations change boundaries in his novel” (Mongia 97). However, while Ghosh’s pluralisation makes explicit this multiplicity, multiple shadow-lines are also evident in Conrad’s work. Conrad’s Captain describes Bangkok, the port in which he collects his first command, as characterized by an alarming disregard for borders. Some of the buildings are constructed out of mud and twigs, so that natural and human construction cannot be distinguished, while others “seemed to grow out of the water; others again floated in long anchored rows in the

very middle of the stream.” In the same paragraph he describes how the borders between the world and the body itself become porous shadow lines: “vertical sunlight, tremendous, overpowering, almost palpable [...] seemed to enter one’s breast with the breath of one’s nostrils and soak into one’s limbs through every pore of one’s skin” (SL 40).

Significantly, in Conrad’s novella, the fluidity of the spatial and corporeal borders is reflected in the shifting boundaries between the past and the present. The narrator repeatedly mentions ghosts, describing as “ghostly” the lines in his diary, the bodies of the unhealthy sailors, the sense of the presence of the former commander of the ship (SL 87, 90). The emphasis on shadows, borderlessness, and ghosts led early reviewers to characterize the novella as a work of the supernatural; in response, Conrad made it clear in the “Author’s Note” that the ghosts in the tale are not a symbol of the supernatural, but rather expressive of “the intimate delicacies of our relation to the dead and to the living, in their countless multitudes” (SL 110). It is in the spirit of boundary-crossing or “intimate delicacies” that Ghosh too makes use of ghostly imagery, describing the spectral presence, in the cellar of Mrs Price’s house in England (which maps onto the cell in Raibajar) of various characters from the novel.

They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance—for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time. (SLS 181)

The ghosts represent the narrator’s awareness, an awareness which the resolutely present-focused Ila does not share, of the interpenetration of the past and the present. In addition, they allow the author to blur the line between space and time—ghosts, here, are conceived as *displacements* of the temporal—further multiplying and confounding the shadow-lines.

Space is therefore fluid, haunted and uncertain—qualities which are worked out in a variety of ways in the later writing, and also taken further in Collen’s writing of the nation as haunted by Indian Ocean routes of slavery and indenture. In particular, the work which most clearly motivates and describes the Indian Ocean is the uncategorizable novel/travelogue/memoir/thesis, *In an Antique Land*, which carries within itself seeds and suggestions of the later novels. Anshuman Mondal describes it as “the pivotal book in Ghosh’s oeuvre”, an appropriate metaphor of both centrality and change (Mondal 11). While the novel (I will use this as shorthand) was published after *The Shadow Lines* and *The Circle of Reason* in 1992, the doctoral thesis on which it is primarily based, “Relations of Envy in an Egyptian Village,” was published first, in 1985, and specific characters and events from the research appear in the other novels.⁵ Given its priority and ambiguous generic status, *In an Antique Land* presents itself as both a part of Ghosh’s work under analysis, and as a theoretical aid to analysis, for both his and the other works considered in my thesis.

In the foreword to a recent collection on Indian Ocean studies, Ghosh writes that “the Indian Ocean is not merely a theoretical or geographical construct but a human reality, constituted by a dense (and underexplored) network of human connections” (Ghosh “Foreword” ix). These networks are everywhere in evidence in *In an Antique Land*, which traces human connections across the ocean in both the distant past and the present. He describes the medieval character Madmun ibn Bundar as “a key figure in the Indian Ocean trade” due to his “network of friends and acquaintances [which] extended all the way from Spain to India” (IAL 155). This

⁵ For example, the wedding dance which Ghosh records in the village of Fustat, involving a hip-swivelling dancer who accelerates gradually throughout the dance, is repeated in the fictional al-Ghazira—Zaghloul, “lithe as a cat”, performs the movement which is described as “both absolutely erotic and absolutely abstract, both love-making and geometry” (CR 336). See Amitav Ghosh, “The Relations of Envy in an Egyptian Village,” *Ethnology* 22.3 (1983).

network of acquaintances provides Madmun with a crucially overlapping “network of information”:

Ben Yiju almost certainly knew of Madmun long before he left Egypt, and his friends and relatives are sure to have armed him with letters of introduction when he set out for Aden. Madmun, for his part, had probably been warned of the newcomer’s impending arrival by his own networks of information. (IAL 155)

In his turn, Ben Yiju is a highly connected man: “The names that are sprinkled through his papers speak of a startlingly diverse network of associations: entered into a file, the list would yield nothing to the Rolodex of an international businessman today” (IAL 277).

To a large extent, Ghosh represents the Indian Ocean world as a series of networks: networks of arms, marriage, oil, ships, planes, prisoners, trade, friends, information, medical personnel, drugs and smuggling. This representation is consistent with the historiography described in the introduction, as well as with Conrad’s depictions of “imperial careerers”, Collen’s similarly subaltern networks of drug smugglers and activists, and even Gurnah’s more fragile and exploitative networks of trade. In Ghosh’s work, these interpersonal networks overlap and connect to one another in distinctive, three-dimensional and palimpsestic ways. Ghosh describes in detail the relationship between Madmun and Ben Yiju’s networks, as well as their conjoined fluidity.

The vast network of relationships that Ben Yiju fitted himself into in Mangalore was clearly not a set of random associations: on the contrary, it appears to have had a life of its own, the links being transmitted between generations of merchants, just as they were from Madmun to Ben Yiju. Membership in the network evidently involved binding understandings of a kind that permitted individuals to commit large sums of money to joint undertakings, even in circumstances where there was no legal redress—understandings that clearly presuppose free and direct communications between the participants, despite their cultural, religious and linguistic differences. (IAL 279)

The networks are based on an accommodation of difference, a system of compromise which allows for trade and (relatively) peaceful relations. They also have a life of their own, comprising links both between individuals and between generations—networks of networks, forming the cobwebby palimpsest that constitutes Ghosh's vision of the Indian Ocean world.

Ghosh's networks consist in a dense and overdetermined set of connections between characters, showing some similarities with Gurnah and Collen. In Gurnah's work, marriage and employment networks radiate from the coast of Zanzibar outwards—friends of Amin's in *Desertion* have either left to study in India or Egypt, or gone to "seek a future among the network of family and relatives up and down the coast and in the interior" (D 152). The character of Uncle Aziz in *Paradise* plays a similar role to that of Madmun and Ben Yiju in *In an Antique Land*, as Jacqueline Bardolph also describes (Bardolph). Tina Steiner describes Gurnah's *By the Sea* as a narrative of networked journeys: "The characters' diasporic transnational journeys are connected to, and entangled with, circular trade voyages across the Indian Ocean, and in particular the voyage of Hussein al-Rashid, a merchant from Bahrain [...]" (Steiner "Navigating Multilingually" 55). Collen's specifically *island* networks are mirrored in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, in which he describes the links between India and the Indian Ocean islands.

Calcutta was then the principal conduit through which Indian prisoners were shipped to the British network of island prisons—Penang, Bencoolen, Port Blair and Mauritius. Like a great stream of silt, thousands of Pindaris, thugs, dacoits, rebels, head-hunters and hooligans were carried away by the muddy waters of the Hooghly to be dispersed around the Indian Ocean, in the various island jails where the British incarcerated their enemies. (SP 70)

Ghosh employs here metaphors of mud and mixing in ways that relate to both Gurnah and Collen's emphasis on messy entanglement. In Gurnah's *By the Sea*, the disastrous

affair with Hussein can be understood as a central, and possibly systemic breakdown in the networks of Indian Ocean world trade. In Collen's second novel, Sita's rape by a man in the Indian Ocean network represents a similar breakdown of network relations.

While Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* emphasizes the connections that formed across the ocean in the medieval period, it is also concerned to demonstrate the temporal connections that draw together the past and the present. His archival search was motivated by a desire to mitigate the sense of strangeness he felt as an Indian citizen in Egypt, and his description of the local, contemporary Egyptian villagers mirrors his description of Madmun and Ben Yiju.

The area around Nashawy had never been a rooted kind of place; at times it seemed to be possessed of all the busy restlessness of an airport's transit lounge. Indeed, a long history of travel was recorded in the very names of the area's 'families': they spoke of links with distant parts of the Arab world—cities in the Levant, the Sudan and the Maghreb. That legacy of transience had not ended with their ancestors either: in Zahloul's own generation dozens of men had been 'outside', working in the shaikhdoms of the Gulf, or Libya, while many others had been to Saudi Arabia on the Hajj, or to the Yemen, as soldiers—some men had passports so thick they opened out like ink-blackened concertinas. (IAL 173)

The unsettledness and connectedness of both generations of traveller are described in terms of documents, whether the rolodex or bulging passport. He acknowledges that many of the town names mentioned in Ben Yiju's documents, once well known throughout the Indian Ocean littoral, have disappeared from the map, but suggests a contemporary reincarnation.

Unlike many other medieval ports of the Indian Ocean 'Fadarîna, 'Jurbattan' and 'Dahfattan' did not quite disappear: they still exist, not as spectacular ruins, but in the most unexpected avatar of all; as small towns and villages which have prospered, once again, because of their connections with the far side of the Indian Ocean—in this instance the oil-producing countries of the Arab world. (IAL 283)

In addition, it is not only the Oxford-educated researcher who is aware of these connections. He is welcomed as a friend by Zaghloul's father because he had met Indian soldiers in Alexandria during the war, and Ustaz Sabry, the village imam, speaks of Gandhi's visit to consult Sa'ad Zaghloul Pasha, the leader of the Egyptian nationalist movement, and the cooperation Nehru and Nasser (IAL 134).

The imagery of modern networks, mentioned briefly in *In an Antique Land*, is further developed in the later fiction. The twentieth century networks depicted by Ghosh cross both land and sea, in ways reminiscent of Kipling's journeying motifs. In *The Circle of Reason* in particular, he develops the connections that persist through oil, migrant labour and leaky ships. The first part of the novel takes place in a small village near the border between India and Pakistan, where the brilliant and rationality-obsessed Balaram Bose adopts the young Alu, teaching him to become a weaver. When Balaram's house is bombed, due to increasing numbers of refugees from Pakistan in the town and a village rivalry, Alu flees suspicion across India to Mahé, pursued by the ambitious young detective Jyoti Das. There, Alu buys a passage on an old boat called the *Mariamamma* to escape to the fictional oil-rich Arab state, al-Ghazira. The *Mariamamma* had previously been involved in the coastal trade between Allepey and Calicut, and is captained by the morose Hajji Musa, who invokes a rich oral record of cross-ocean travel.

When he first took to the business Hajji Musa had listened carefully to the stories people told up and down the Malabar coast of boats setting off for al-Ghazira with twenty, forty and even (so they said) a hundred eager emigrants, but only to run out of fuel halfway, or else to be swallowed into the sea with the first mild gale, borne down by sheer weight. Unlike many other boat-owners, the Hajji's cupidity was easy-going, and he had that love of life peculiar to the morose. So he took note of the stories and made a few rules which he never broke—he sailed only in winter, after the retreat of the north-east monsoon when the sea was like a lagoon and he could be sure of a gentle breeze

behind him. And he never took more than eight passengers, but he charged them three times the going rate. (CR 169)

Ghosh confirms, through inversion, the lasting significance of the monsoon after the age of sail. In addition, sea routes are linked to land routes across the ocean. After a strange accident in al-Ghazira, Alu and his new friends leave to wander through North Africa, their journey by the end of the novel stretching from Calcutta to Tangier (CR 420).

Ghosh presents a view of the connections between India and the Arab world, in *The Circle of Reason*, as underpinned by cross-national, oceanic trade: “the sea which breaks on Mahé’s beaches is the Arabian Sea and it washes in wealth.” As his guide Dubey explains to Jyoti Das on the Indian coast, a man who is only a mechanic can go to al-Ghazira for five years and return to build himself a “large pink and green house with round portholes for windows, bristling in air conditioners.” In addition, Dubey goes on:

A lot of them are smugglers. You won’t believe how much smuggling goes on here. Mainly it’s gold coming in, from all over the world—Kenya, Tanzania, Iran, the Gulf. But there are other things, too—electronics, watches.

I was wondering, Das said quickly. You explained what they smuggle in, but what do they smuggle out? Coconuts? Coconuts! Dubey laughed. Those people don’t want coconuts over there. No, what they smuggle out is people. (CR 158-9)

The networks which actively persist into the twentieth century, connecting “Kenya, Tanzania, Iran, the Gulf”, are premised on the movements of goods, information and people across national boundaries.

The palimpsest of Indian Ocean connections therefore features networks of different temporal moments—a series of networks connected, for instance, generationally—of different types—such as networks of people and networks of information—and of different scales, the smallest of which are networks of families.

This last is a figure of immense importance in Ghosh's work, as he identifies in his correspondence with Chakrabarty, and does as much to rewrite the centrality of the nation as does his representation of the larger-scale networks of the Indian Ocean (Ghosh and Chakrabarty). This is exemplified by the potential love affair which forms the central mystery at the heart of the Ben Yiju story in *In an Antique Land*, and worked out in a different temporal context again in the multigenerational narrative of *The Glass Palace*. As Isabel Hofmeyr argues, for Ghosh, as for Gurnah and Enseng Ho, the "cosmopolitanism of the older diasporic networks offers a counterpoint to the narrowness of the modern nation-state system" (Hofmeyr "Universalizing the Indian Ocean" 723).

More generally, Ghosh highlights, especially in *In an Antique Land*, the boundary-crossing nature of Indian Ocean networks. These he describes as characterized by "free and direct communication", insisting that, "in matters of business, Ben Yiju's networks appear to have been wholly indifferent to many of those boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions" (IAL 278). This is a vision which rests on nostalgia for a preferable and unreachable past, as Gaurav Desai describes in his "Old World Orders." Desai suggests that Ghosh, in his reconstructions, sets up a false distinction between the religiously syncretic past and the modern-day intolerance enacted by the "enforcers of History": shrine-guarding policemen and "Hindu zealots" (IAL 274). Ghosh represents particular shrines, such as the Bhuta shrine in Mangalore and the tomb of the Jewish Sidi Abu-Hasira in Damanhour, as rebellions against intolerance—which, as Desai admits, is a politically appealing view.

To read the shrine as an act of defiance against 'the enforcers of History' is to participate in the well-established and indeed often well-meaning anthropological discourse of 'survivals' at the risk of erasing

historically contingent and continually renegotiated cultural practices.
(Desai 130)

Similarly, early Indian Ocean world networks are, in Ghosh's writing, resistant to categories, especially but not exclusively the nation, and create a kind of conceptual fluidity that intersects with the movement of people along network lines. Rather than portraying networks, then, as a necessarily unifying force, Ghosh insists on their changeability, as well as the paradoxical inseparability and distinctness of the elements out of which they are comprised. He is primarily interested in what he calls "an intricate network of differences" (IAL 244).

The particularity of this "network of differences" is described through contrast with networks that are only comprised of similar elements, destructive networks of trade or violence—analogous to the simple language of the market that replaces languages of good and right in "The Imam and the Indian." In *Sea of Poppies*, Benjamin Burnham is represented as a trader with global reach, "with agents and dufters in such cities as Bombay, Singapore, Aden, Canton, Macao, London and Boston" (SP 70). This trade network is exclusive rather than inclusive, involving only British and American merchants, and depends on the use of coolies—Burnham himself makes the link between coolies and slaves—and the militarily-backed one-way trade in opium (SP 74). In *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh describes the link between trade and violence:

Unable to compete in the Indian Ocean trade by purely commercial means, the Europeans were bent on taking control of it by aggression, pure and distilled, by unleashing violence on a scale unprecedented on those shores. [...] As always, the determination of a small, united band of soldiers triumphed easily over the rich confusions that accompany a culture of accommodation and compromise. (IAL 288)

It is the purity and simplicity of violence that Ghosh takes issue with, as opposed to the complexity and messiness of compromise. Purified violence allows for an

oppressive, one-sided trade, which reduces the specificity of the Indian Ocean world itself, subjecting it to a globalized, indifferent economy. In contrast, it is the intricacy of the difference-network that requires accommodation.

Ghosh's work represents some of the many human nodes and interpersonal links connecting the shores of Africa, India and the Arab world. In particular, he highlights the overlapping, palimpsestic nature of those links, which connect networks of networks and also display the shifting of networks over time. They produce the Indian Ocean as a cross-historical, transnational space, one which operates both under and beyond the "dome of Empire." However, Ghosh's work also goes a step further than this, representing the Indian Ocean, nostalgically, as not only a diverse, but a cosmopolitan space. The following section will consider the implications of this representation, which suggests the romantic possibility of an ethical Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism.

"Admirably cosmopolitan:" Accommodating difference

While the Indian Ocean is usually represented as a space of considerable and networked diversity, Ghosh also, in partial contrast to Gurnah and Collen, regularly employs the more controversial term "cosmopolitan" as a descriptor. There is an ambiguity inherent in the term cosmopolitanism, between diversity and an ethical response to it. Timothy Brennan sketches this distinction as that between empirical globalization and ethical cosmopolitanism: "globalization bears on cosmopolitanism as structure to idea" (Brennan "Cosmo-Theory" 662). Bruce Robbins notes the presence, in the work of Aihwa Onga and Kwame Anthony Appiah, of specifically Asian and African cosmopolitanisms (Robbins 1-2). Along the same lines, it may be possible to consider Ghosh's work as describing an Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, or

cosmopolitanisms. It is the inclusion of an ethical dimension to the literary space that underlies the production of the Indian Ocean as a “world of accommodations.”

In addition to representations of vast and overlapping networks, Ghosh, like Conrad, highlights the diversity of people who are brought together in the Indian Ocean by describing one of its ships. The presence of ships and detailed descriptions of oceanic journeys set his work apart from the other contemporary writers discussed here, who largely assume, but do not directly describe, ocean travel. Like the *Narcissus*, the *Ibis* in *Sea of Poppies* is “alive with the lives of those beings who trod her decks; like that earth which had given her up to the sea, she had an intolerable load of regrets and hopes” (NN 30). In the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the diversity of lascar sailors who crew the *Ibis*.⁶

This was Zachary’s first experience of this species of sailor. He had thought that lascars were a tribe or nation, like the Cherokee or Sioux: he discovered now that they came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese. (SP 198)

Later, this range of origins is further expanded by the arrival of officers from various parts of Europe as well as prisoners and indentured labourers from China and various geographically distant parts of India. The sailors are marked both by an open-ended commonality—the Indian Ocean—as well as by extreme difference. However, despite this difference and sometimes because of it, the ship’s inhabitants discover ways of getting along. Zachary and Serang Ali form an alliance between an Arakanese pirate and a freed slave masquerading as a white officer; Deeti, an Indian opium farmer, and Kalua, a lower-caste ox-cart driver with dark skin, are allowed by the strange mixed

⁶ While the lascars are represented here as crucially diverse, the novel obscures the historical fact that most lascars were in fact Muslim, as Claire Chambers points out. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, in relation to the Islamic networks depicted by Gurnah. Claire Chambers, “The Indian Ocean in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh,” *Wasafiri* 26.2 (2011): 88.

circumstances of indenture to make their marriage public; Pugli, a half-French woman brought up by an Indian stepmother, falls in love with Zachary, the Atlantic sailor. Significantly, the coolies deal with the problem of caste boundaries in the crowded hold by invoking the language of religious pilgrimage: “From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings—*jaházbhais* and *jaházbahens*” (SP 372).

This ability to get along, even if only some of the time, is consistent with Ghosh’s description of Indian Ocean spaces as peculiarly cosmopolitan. In *In an Antique Land*, he describes Alexandra as full of “cosmopolitan gaiety”, and the medieval city of Qus, as “admirably cosmopolitan, with many Yemeni, Ethiopian and Indian merchants passing through—a station for the traveller, a gathering place for caravans, and a meeting-place for pilgrims” (IAL 15, 174).⁷ The town of Fustat, which is central to the narrative, is equally diverse in terms of goods, routes and men:

There was nothing remotely rustic about medieval Fustat, whatever its appearance. With the political ascendancy of the Fatimid Empire, it had come to play a pivotal role in the global economy as the *entrepôt* that linked the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean: the merchandise that flowed through its bazaars came from as far afield as East Africa, southern Europe, the western Sahara, India, China and Indonesia. By Ben Yiju’s time Fustat had long since become the largest island in the emerging archipelago of Masr: the juncture of some of the most important trade routes in the known world and the nucleus of one of the richest and most cosmopolitan cities on earth. (IAL 37)

The cosmopolitan character of the city is a result of the trading network that extends through East Africa, North Africa, India and Indonesia, and of the join between two oceanic worlds, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Significantly, Ghosh

⁷ Mangalore and Calicut are described in similar terms—Ibn Battuta reports that the city had visitors from “Sumatra, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen, and the Fars (Iran)”, and a Portuguese sailor, Duarte Barbosa, who visited the city early in the sixteenth century, noted that the city’s merchants included “Arabs, Persians, Guzarates, Khorasanys, and Decanys” (IAL 242).

here links cosmopolitanism with gaiety, admiration and an anti-rustic centrality, portraying diversity as a value and a benefit.

As Pearson similarly describes, port cities in the Indian Ocean link very distant maritime spaces, and that is why they are “inclusive, cosmopolitan” (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 32). However, Sugata Bose suggests that “in the colonial era, the cosmopolitan array of peoples in the port cities and their hinterlands no longer translated readily into a cosmopolitan attitude” (Bose 29). This contrast between “cosmopolitan array” and “cosmopolitan attitude” alludes to the ambiguity of the term. As Brennan argues, cosmopolitanism is a “fundamentally ambivalent phenomenon”, a term that is used in both an empirical and a normative sense, to describe societies that are diverse as well as those that behave ethically in the context of diversity (Brennan “Cosmo-Theory” 659). He warns against the hidden localism embedded in what functions as a global term, in which a “national-political myth of multicultural inclusion (“pluralism”) dovetails, under specific conditions, with a purportedly supranational ethos of global cooperation (cosmopolitanism)” (Brennan “Cosmo-Theory” 669). In other words, it is necessary always to be conscious of *whose* cosmopolitanism is being discussed. This is important, he argues, because the cultural has the tendency to spill over into the political—leading, for instance, from a cultural celebration of postnational authors to a political dismissal of still-necessary national formations (Brennan “Cosmo-Theory” 672). In addition, Brennan points to the economic corollary, warning against the imperial, market-driven values embedded in what appears to be a cultural-ethical term. This is related to Desai’s critique of Ghosh’s implicit economic values based on the free market idealization of S.D. Goitein’s historical writing, particularly his much-cited *A Mediterranean Society*.

Despite Ghosh's own critique of the West, particularly its imperialist history, *In an Antique Land* shares with Goitein's work an uncanny disposition in favour of free-market economics and the market-oriented state. Its overwhelming acceptance of the proposition that multiculturalism would follow if only the market were left to work on its own ultimately reflects a libertarian rather than a liberal imagination. (Desai 134)

In Brennan's terms, Ghosh's focus on travel, mixing and cosmopolitan values, especially as a mobile, privileged intellectual, runs the risk of embracing cosmopolitanism's dissimulation of the political and the economic in the name of the cultural (Brennan "Cosmo-Theory" 677, 79).

Bruce Robbins, conversely, acknowledges cosmopolitanism's equivocation but makes an attempt to redefine the word in order to describe "'actually existing' cosmopolitanisms," scaling down the scope of the term from the universal to the local and particular (Robbins). Both critics advocate a rethinking of the use of the term, although they differ in their solutions: whether to discard or to recycle. While it is difficult to assess the success of Robbins' project—given the difficulty of producing a new definition of an old word—it does point to the way in which Ghosh deals with representations of cosmopolitanism in these novels. Ghosh's work may, in a less strict sense, be relying on the distinction between cosmopolitan diversity and a spirit of accommodation, such that he remains in agreement with the spirit if not the letter of Brennan's critique—cosmopolitanism-as-complexity should triumph over cosmopolitanism-as-levelling. It may however be more useful to read his work alongside Bruce Robbins's "cosmopolitics", which highlights both the political aspects of the term and its inevitable plurality.⁸

⁸ Other similar terms include Arjun Appadurai's "vernacular cosmopolitanism", "cosmopolitanism from below", or "micro-cosmopolitanism." It is at times difficult to distinguish between precise meanings, so that I have kept to two thinkers who provide a sense of the debate in stark terms. For further discussion see Sam Knowles, "Macrocsm-Opolitanism? Gilroy, Appiah, and Bhabha: The Unsettling Generality of Cosmopolitan Ideas," *Postcolonial Text* 3.4 (2008).

Part of this plurality includes a shift in meaning from the elite to the more democratic. Previously associated only with privileged or aristocratic travellers, the concept began to include subaltern subjects, and this “change in personnel implies a change in definition” (Robbins 1). Many of Ghosh’s subjects are involuntarily displaced—Neel and Ah Fatt especially, but also the hundred or more coolies on board the ship, are subject to economic coercion. Further back, the cosmopolitan Fustat is described as home to a peculiarly cosmopolitan set of traders:

Thus it was no ordinary congregation that Ben Yiju joined in Masr: it consisted of a group of people whose travels and breadth of experience and education seem astonishing even today, on a planet thought to be newly-shrunk. Yet, unlike others of that time who have left their mark on history, the members of this community were not born to privilege and entitlement; they were neither aristocrats nor soldiers nor professional scholastics. The vast majority of them were traders, and while some of them were wealthy and successful, they were not, by any means, amongst the most powerful merchants of their time—most of them were small traders running small family businesses. (IAL 55)

If cosmopolitanism is regularly contrasted with nationalism, then Ghosh describes a cosmopolitanism that precedes the nation by a long stretch. In addition, these travellers and merchants are “not born to privilege.” The character who interests Ghosh most in *In an Antique Land* is the Indian slave Bomma, of low status but almost as well-travelled and connected as his wealthy master.

The portrayal of a subaltern cosmopolitanism is similar to Gurnah’s depiction of a diverse littoral world; however, Gurnah highlights the ghettoization that occurs in contexts of diversity and the minute gradations of difference that people cling to in such circumstances, as will be discussed further in the next chapter. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh describes the experience of travel and displacement—which produce cosmopolitan subjects—in terms that, at first, seem similar to Gurnah’s. He recounts

the experience of colonial Indian soldiers in Singapore, and the disruptive effect of travel on their understanding.

But now that they were in Singapore themselves, with India half a continent away, nothing seemed improbable any more—everything appeared to be turned on its head. It was as though they no longer knew who they were, no longer understood their place in the order of things. Whenever they ventured beyond the familiar certainties of the battalion, they seemed to lose themselves in a labyrinth of hidden meanings. (GP 344)

The diversity the soldiers encounter is overwhelming and disorienting, just as it is for Omar in *By the Sea* and Yusuf in *Paradise*, and as was described at length in the first chapter. However, a different take is revealed two pages later.

In India, they would have taken such poverty for granted; the only reason they happened to notice it now was because of its juxtaposition with Malaya's prosperous towns. This thought made them cringe in shame. It was as though they were examining their own circumstances for the first time, in retrospect; as though the shock of travel had displaced an indifference that had been inculcated in them since their earliest childhood. (GP 346)

For Ghosh, travel is the necessary antidote to indifference, to what he elsewhere calls a “monumental inwardness.” The disorienting shock is directed towards an ethical outcome. In this passage, and more generally in Ghosh's work, travel and diversity produce intercultural communication and ethical relations. These are values that are popularly associated with cosmopolitanism even if they are often belied by its deployment. As even Brennan describes, an *ideal* cosmopolitan outlook is associated with “the thirst for another knowledge, unprejudiced striving, world travel, supple open-mindedness, broad international norms of civic equality, a politics of treaty and understanding rather than conquest” (Brennan "Cosmo-Theory" 659).

What is interesting about Ghosh's portrayal of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, is that he emphasizes the importance of imaginative journeying alongside physical

travel. The passage which immediately follows the argument between the “Imam and the Indian”, described above, is less frequently quoted, but is equally important.

Khamees, a friend who witnesses the argument, walks home with Ghosh and comforts him with these words: “Forget about all those guns and things. I’ll tell you what: I’ll come to visit you in your country, even though I’ve never been anywhere.” This statement serves as a reminder of an earlier scene, in which another friend, Nabeel, watching Ghosh put the kettle on for himself, remarks that it must remind him of all the people he had left at home.

Nabeel’s comment stayed in my mind; I was never able to forget it, for it was the first time that anyone in Lataifa or Nashawy had attempted an enterprise similar to mine—to enter my imagination and look at my situation as it might appear to me. (IAL 152)

As suggested above, this is the kind of imaginative travel that provides the contrast between Ila, on the one hand, and the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, on the other. It is also invoked by Collen’s storytellers, such as Iqbal the Umpire in *The Rape of Sita*, and constitutes the central challenge of the conversation between the two narrators, Omar and Mahmud, of Gurnah’s *By the Sea*.

In particular, Ah Fatt, a Chinese former opium addict, and Neel, a wealthy Hindu zemindar convicted for forgery, are chained together and locked in a cell in the hold of the ship. The two are, astonishingly, able to communicate in English, and develop a deep respect and affection for one another. The bond between the two men is represented as a mysterious rarity, one that provokes the cruel curiosity of their wardens, who attempt to torture and divide them during their morning exercises on the deck of the ship.

Neel glanced at Ah Fatt, who was looking stoically at his feet: strange to think, that having known each other for only a few weeks, the two of them—pitiful pair of convicts and transportees that they were—already

possessed something that could excite the envy of men whose power over them was absolute. Could it be that there was something genuinely rare in such a bond as theirs, something that could provoke others to exert their ingenuity in order to test its limits? (SP 474)

As Neel journeys down the Hooghly to the Indian Ocean and eventually Mauritius, he relies on Ah Fatt's narration of a parallel imaginative journey to distract him from the pain of leaving his zemindary.

Thus it happened that while the Ibis was still on the Hooghly, Neel was being transported across the continent, to Canton—and it was this other journey, more vivid than his own, that kept his sanity intact through the first part of the voyage: no one but Ah Fatt, no one he had ever known, could have provided him with the escape he needed, into a realm that was wholly unfamiliar, utterly unlike his own. (SP 345)

It is the “utterly unlike” that is accessed through the coming together of strangers and, importantly, their dialogue. It is “this other journey” of narrative and storytelling which Ghosh represents as the mediating factor underlying the working of accommodation. The empathic imaginative travel represented, therefore, by Khamees's comforting words, affirms the continuity of the world of accommodations in which room can be made for difference.

As Robbins writes, “politics must be forced to include the variable power of sympathetic imagination to define collectivities of belonging and responsibility in the absence of a long history of face-to-face interaction” (Robbins 9). This describes imaginative travel as crucial for political purposes, and hints at the variability of the sympathetic imagination involved in the act of writing itself. This sets up the novel as a crucial vehicle for storytelling, one which allows for the sort of imagined connection that Ghosh describes and evokes. It also introduces the problem of form, when faced with diverse collectivities of belonging. As Ghosh asks in the powerful essay, “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi”:

When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking, Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form—or a style or a voice or a plot—that could accommodate both violence *and* the civilized willing response to it? (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 202)

Ghosh is concerned that writing, like the Indian Ocean, should be characterized by compromise, the ability to “accommodate both” (or many) realities. This, he suggests, is a matter of finding a literary *form* that makes that accommodation possible, raising again the question of formal strategies employed in representing, and thereby producing, the Indian Ocean. One of aspects of Indian Ocean diversity is the multitude of languages that intersect within its shores—as is amply demonstrated by the friendship of Neel and Ah Fatt. However, that multilingualism presents a challenge for novelistic representation, met in different ways by the various novels considered in this thesis. The next section will consider the lingua franca of *Sea of Poppies* as a formal way of dealing with multilingual space.

“So much telling, so many tales:” Multilingualism as a case study in form

The dialogue that is Ghosh’s ethical response to diversity runs up against the problem of language. Not only the “language” which is a focus of the description of accommodation in “The Imam and the Indian”, comprising the dominant conceptual terms without which it is possible to communicate, but also the diversity of spoken languages through which communication occurs. At another level, multilingualism poses a particular problem for writing in a transnational setting—as Ghosh sets up in “My Grandfather’s Bookcase”—because of the language choices involved, as well as the form of the novel itself. Ghosh makes clear the links between diversity, transnationalism, multilingualism and novel writing in his essay, “Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel”, in which he interrogates the paucity of literature that

concerns oil, as the twentieth century equivalent of the spice trade (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 138). One of the reasons for this paucity is that the conventional form of the novel struggles to accommodate multilingual, heterogeneous and international contexts.

The territory of oil is bafflingly multilingual, for example, while the novel, with its conventions of naturalistic dialogue, is most at home within monolingual speech communities (within nation-states, in other words). Equally, the novel is never more comfortable than when it is luxuriating in a 'sense of place', revelling in its unique power to evoke mood and atmosphere. But the experiences associated with oil are lived out within a space that is no place at all, a world that is intrinsically displaced, heterogeneous, and international. (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 140)

This section will use language to examine in more detail the problems posed by the attempt to write novels focused on fluidity rather than place, and on communities other than those defined by the nation, through considering the problem of multiple languages.

For historians, the early modern Indian Ocean was a radically multilingual environment, a problem which had to be dealt with in order to conduct the distinctive kind of long-distance yet face-to-face Indian Ocean trade.

Communication was difficult because there was a real gallimaufry of people around the littoral of the Indian Ocean. Even in one particular location, and referring to one group, we find the sort of cosmopolitanism which meant linguistic brokers were essential. (Pearson "Connecting the Littorals" 32)

Michael Pearson posits a solution in the form of linguistic brokers, such as the numerous Portuguese and French attendants who served the Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in the 1530s. A century later there were five thousand Portuguese renegades along the eastern Indian Ocean littoral. These men, he suggests, working outside the formal structure of the *Estado*, "were absorbed into the warp and weft of peddling

trade in the Indian Ocean and obviously had to learn the appropriate languages (Pearson "Connecting the Littorals" 35). Gurnah's plots often turn on incomplete translations and miscommunications that occur in such a context. In *Paradise*, the caravan is accompanied by a translator, Nyundo, but no one is sure how much he understands and therefore whether his translations can be trusted. The same emphasis on miscommunication is apparent in *By the Sea*, where few of the refugees speak English, and Omar resists linguistic brokerage through his refusal to speak at all. Gurnah himself argues that, rather than his novels functioning as a site for explanation or decoding, "really what I'm getting at is that people just grope towards each other's meanings" (N. Jones 38).

Ghosh explores a variety of different, more successful linguistic outcomes through innovative formal means, in keeping with his representation of a cosmopolitan Indian Ocean. In *The Hungry Tide*, he explores the significance of translation and interpretation, both linguistic and cultural, through the figure of the protagonist Kanai Dutt. Kanai runs an interpretation agency and also acts as a linguistic broker between Fokir, the local fisherman and guide, and Piya, the American-born marine biologist. By highlighting translation, Ghosh draws attention to both its potential and its limits—for instance, while Kanai reproduces sections of his uncle's journal in English, the reader is asked to imagine him reading them in Bengali (Rollason). In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh muses on the multilingual nature of the medieval Indian Ocean world, and posits a different linguistic option: a trading lingua franca, one that comprises "Perso-Arabic and North Indian elements." While he acknowledges the historical silence on the subject, given the lack of evidence for what would have been a primarily spoken patois, he argues from necessity.

It is easy enough to imagine that Ben Yiju used a specialized trade language to communicate with his fellow merchants in Mangalore: the difficulties lie in imagining how he and Ashu adapted that argot to the demands of a marital bedroom. (IAL 280-1)

Ghosh here draws attention to the necessarily creative, interpersonal language that must have stemmed from a trading argot, but was still able to serve as a medium for communication between friends and lovers.⁹ The novels that take up this idea in earnest are *Sea of Poppies* and its sequel, *River of Smoke*. In these novels, Ghosh introduces a somewhat different technique, *reproducing* a lingua franca using historical sources.

The problem of multilingualism is raised repeatedly in both novels. In *Sea of Poppies*, Pugli speaks Bengali, French, Latin and English, but when adopted by a colonial household must only speak “kitchen Hindusthani”; Neel finds it strange that she speaks Bengali when her fellow-travellers speak Bhojpuri, and attributes her knowledge of English to probable prostitution; she wonders, in turn, of Neel and Ah Fatt, “what language might they share, this skeletal Easterner and this tattooed criminal?” (SP 379). The close confines of the ship again exaggerate the diversity of languages such that it comes to resemble a miniature Babel (just as Melville describes in *Redburn* and Conrad, more pessimistically, in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*). *River of Smoke* makes this point in perhaps the most extreme way of any of the novels considered in this thesis. The number of languages that are mentioned as present in Canton is overwhelming: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindustani, Marathi, Kacchi, Konkani,

⁹ Desai again provides a cautionary counterexample, one that has prominence in Goitein’s oeuvre but is conspicuously absent in Ghosh’s novel: “A meticulous student of Goitein’s oeuvre, Ghosh could not fail to have noticed the story I refer to. Its absence from *In an Antique Land* supports the basic lesson of deconstructive critique that a text’s silences may often say more than its utterances. The story is that of the Indian slave ‘Safi’ and his protestations about the fate of a young Indian slave girl abandoned by her master on the coast of Somalia.” Gaurav Desai, “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia,” *Representations* 85.1 (2004): 139.

Cantonese, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch, Mauritian creole, and pidgin. Even just the Indians speak between them more than a dozen different languages (RS 181).

In *River of Smoke*, Ghosh outlines the modern argot that develops in the multilingual trading city. It is described by two traders, Bahram Moodie, from India and Zadig Bey, from Egypt, who are invited to meet Napoleon during a re-provisioning stop in St. Helena on a visit to England. Napoleon questions the friends about China, including whether they had had to learn the Chinese language in order to trade in Canton.

They answered in one voice: No, they said, they spoke no Chinese, because the common language of trade in southern China was a kind of patois—or, as some called it ‘pidgin’, which meant merely ‘business’ and was thus well suited to describe a tongue which was used mainly to address matters of trade. [...] The grammar was the same as that of Cantonese, while the words were mainly English, Portuguese and Hindusthani—and such being the case, everyone who spoke the jargon was at an equal disadvantage, which was considered a great benefit to all. (ROS 163)

The pidgin is created from a hodge-podge mix of languages, and functions effectively precisely because of its levelling power, accommodating various linguistic groups.

This, after the fact, describes Ghosh’s approach in *Sea of Poppies*, in which he produces for the first time a highly researched lingua franca. Zachary Reid, who enters the Indian Ocean trade from the Atlantic side, introduces this inventive language in the early pages of the novel. Zachary’s ship, the *Ibis*, has a disastrous voyage to Cape Town, fraught with illness and ill-luck, so that no one but lascar crews will consider signing on. The new, lively lascar crew forces Zachary, a novice sailor, “to undergo yet another education”, re-learning all the names for shipboard parts and procedures. The narrator includes a long list of substitutions:

He had to learn to say ‘resum’ instead of ‘rations’, and he had to wrap his tongue around words like ‘dal’, ‘masala’ and ‘achar’. He had to get used to ‘malum’ instead of mate, ‘serang’ for bosun, ‘tindal’ for bosun’s mate, and ‘seacunny’ for helmsman; he had to memorize a new shipboard vocabulary, which sounded a bit like English and yet not: the rigging became the ‘ringeen’, ‘avast!’ was ‘bas!’, and the cry of the middle-morning watch went from ‘all’s well’ to ‘alzbel.’ (SP 14)

Zachary here forms the nodal point of comparison between the familiar Atlantic world and the unfamiliar Indian Ocean, and his induction into the new oceanic realms is figured as primarily a linguistic transition.

Ghosh records realizing that such a lingua franca must exist—ships were run with “*laskari* forces from all over” who had to be able to communicate. So he sought out and eventually discovered a “*laskari* dictionary which was written in 1812, printed in Calcutta by Thomas Roebuck” (Ghosh “Of Fanás and Forecastles” 6).

Alongside the *laskari* dictionary, Ghosh consulted the full Oxford English Dictionary, which contains a large number of foreign-derived words. Many of these were taken from *Hobson-Jobson*, and Ghosh’s novel functions almost as a resurrection of the playful, slang-infused vocabulary of that idiosyncratic dictionary (Yule and Burnell).

These sources provided Ghosh with many of the words used in the novel which, all told, provide a sense of an exuberant, colourful, effective lingua franca.¹⁰ Ghosh later placed a glossary, although not in the novel itself, on his official website. The glossary is fictionalized as the work of Neel and his unnamed descendants, who have

¹⁰ From a lecture given by Kate Teltscher to the University of Oxford Postcolonial Seminar, November 2010, entitled, “The Floating Lexicon: Amitav Ghosh, *Hobson-Jobson* and the OED.” Also see Kate Teltscher, “The Floating Lexicon: *Hobson-Jobson* and the Oxford English Dictionary,” *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India*, eds. Daud Ali and Indra Sengupta (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Her edited Oxford World Classics edition will be published in June 2013.

created the “*Ibis Chrestomathy*”, a list of words with their derivations, predictions for their survival into the future, and whimsical definitions.¹¹

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh’s fictional contact languages are most fully developed in his preferred contact zone, the space of a ship, boat, or harbour.¹² In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad proposes the symmetry between the ship’s tools and its languages: “An anchor is a forged piece of iron, admirably adapted to its end, and technical language is an instrument wrought into perfection by ages of experience, a flawless thing for its purpose.” Language and ships, in Ghosh’s work too, are inextricably linked, as he suggests in an essay.

The sailing ship is perhaps the most beautiful, most environmentally benign machine the world has ever known. But what really sets a sailing ship apart from other machines is that its functioning is critically dependent on language: underlying the intricate web of its riggings, is an unseen net of words without which the articulation of the whole would not be possible. (Ghosh “Of Fanás and Forecasts” 20)

The web of rigging mirrors the web of Indian Ocean routes, just as the “unseen net of words” acts out in miniature the fluidity of languages that characterize the vast network of people in the Indian Ocean world. Like the all-important image of the

¹¹ The “Chrestomathy” mirrors *Sea of Poppies* in its mixture of fact and fiction. The definition of the “arkati”, the seaman’s word for ship’s pilot, references the Oxford English Dictionary as well as an anecdotal usage, and favours the latter. As the “present author” confirms: “this entry is a good example of how, when forced to choose between a colourful and a reliable etymology, Neel always picked the former.” Amitav Ghosh, *The Ibis Chrestomathy*, 2011, Available: <http://www.amitavghosh.com/chrestomathy.html>, 24 June 2011.

¹² The recreated lingua franca is an example of a possible “contact language”, the term developed by linguists to describe trade pidgins and creoles. Mary Louise Pratt, in her work on travel writing, expands the concept of a contact language to the broader conception of a “contact zone.” She describes contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” Pratt argues that the concept of the colonial frontier, one-sided and European-focused, should be replaced with the contact zone, which foregrounds “the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective.” See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008) 8. Ghosh, it seems, goes even further than this: he is only rarely concerned with colonial encounters, and instead highlights the multilateral connections established as a result of different historical trajectories—a “network of interrelating margins.” See Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920 : Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 6.

loom in *The Circle of Reason*, the ship is a “dictionaryglossarythesaurus”, a language-producing machine, as a result of both the mixedness of its sailing crews and the complexity of its parts—“so many words, so many things” (CR 74).¹³

Therefore, not only does the ship contribute to language’s complexity, it also is the site of a multilingual ferment, which becomes, in turn, a kind of literary-ethical experiment. Tina Steiner perceptively suggests that multilingualism in Ghosh’s work has ethical as well as empirical or aesthetic dimensions. As she argues, Ghosh’s writing of the Indian Ocean lingua franca is portrayed as “more than just a matter of trading expediency but suggests rather an ethical dimension of polyglot relations across the sea” (Steiner “Navigating Multilingually” 49). Steiner goes on to suggest that the ship is a representative of this kind of ethical multilingualism.

The space between languages then could become the site of alternative subjectivities, for transformation and self-translation, because it resists the limitations imposed by possessive communities of belonging. This possibility, I argue, is pithily encapsulated in the chronotope of the ship, carrying and connecting, moving to and fro, traversing literal and metaphorical borders. (Steiner “Navigating Multilingually” 50)

Just as ships travel between ports, mutual understanding travels across languages.

While both Gurnah and Collen are also concerned with the problem of multilingualism, Ghosh in his latest work meets this challenge in a manner that is both more direct and more celebratory. Collen portrays a more established mixture-language, Mauritian Creole, by inserting words and phrases; this has the effect of adding “local colour” rather than meeting the challenge of a multilingual island head-on, and lays less emphasis on the shifting, creative possibilities of ongoing linguistic

¹³ For a discussion see Anshuman Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh*, Contemporary World Writers (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

creolisation.¹⁴ As was suggested above, Gurnah is more interested in the gaps, traps and isolation produced by multilingual contexts—his depiction of the manically and disabblingly bilingual Khalil, mocked for the Arabic accent of his Kiswahili, is a good example, as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, Ghosh's work also perhaps engages more deeply with the problematic use of English as a medium for novel-writing, both generally and particularly in the multilingual Indian Ocean. At the end of *The Glass Palace*, Dinu hires as his assistant a young writer in Rangoon, Ma Thin Thin Aye. He reads her stories, about ordinary lives in Rangoon, and is impressed by their complexity and allusiveness. He asks her a question about the choice of language in her work:

‘That story of yours,’ he said, ‘the one about the street where you live... You say the people on the street are from many different places... from the coasts and the hills.... Yet in your story they all speak Burmese. How is that possible?’

She was not at all put out.

‘Where I live,’ she said softly, ‘every house on the street speaks a different language. I have no choice but to trust my reader to imagine the sound of each house. Or else I would not be able to write at all about my street—and to trust your reader is not a bad thing.’ (GP 553)

Ma Thin Thin Aye provides here a metatextual justification of Ghosh's choice of a single language, English, as a medium of writing in the transnational context of the Indian Ocean coastline. That gesture of make-do—“or else I would not be able to write at all about my street”—is significant. A fictional solution, perhaps a *lingua franca*, is required, otherwise neither Ghosh nor any of the authors considered in this thesis would be able to write the Indian Ocean in their work.

By creating a fictional *lingua franca*, Ghosh seeks to accommodate within the form of his writing the variety of languages in order to represent Indian Ocean space,

¹⁴ Although her novel, *Boy*, was originally written in Mauritian Kreol, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

while also suggesting that a porous, transitional, creative language lays the ground for ethical relations of accommodation. This constitutes an ambitious and unique *formal* innovation in the writing of the Indian Ocean. The final section will examine more closely the research and historical speculation that form part of the process of recreation, exploring the relationship between the Indian Ocean of history and that of fiction.

“There is nothing in the history books:” Piecing together historical fragments

In “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi”, Ghosh writes that, “it is when we think of the world the aesthetic of indifference might bring into being that we recognize the urgency of remembering the stories we have not written” (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 204). The aesthetic of indifference is at odds with the aesthetic of accommodation, which attempts to bring into being a tolerant and cosmopolitan world. This interest in unwritten stories can be seen as in dialogue with the subaltern history project, a project involving the recovery of alternative histories. Ghosh’s work in particular is concerned to not only document historical gaps, but to imaginatively fill them in, to compensate for the silences. This necessitates a reliance on fragments, imaginatively reconstructing stories from “that other point of view”, which exceed and disrupt their own narration.

In a slightly different metaphoric usage from the ones considered above, Ghosh, in *In an Antique Land*, employs the image of a network to describe a particular vision of history. Noting the extant historical research on the empires and great leaders of the Indian Ocean, he writes that, “within this tornado of grand designs and historical destinies, Khalaf ibn Ishaq’s letter seems to open a trapdoor into a vast network of foxholes where real life continues uninterrupted” (IAL 15). The “network

of foxholes” provides ways in to a forgotten history, serving as a plane of possibilities that provide access to deeper layers of underlying reality. This sense of spatiality—that history goes deeper down as well as along—is linked to Michel Foucault’s assertion, that “linear successions, which for so long have been the object of [historical] research, have given way to discoveries in depth” (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 3). By digging deeper into history, Ghosh is representing it as spatialized, and thereby making room for alternative voices.¹⁵

As was described above, Ghosh takes issue with the reduction of language to the terms of a “ladder of development.” The “ladder of development” represents a chronological and progressive view of historical change, described, by Dipesh Chakrabarty, as “historicist”—highlighting unity, and change over time (Chakrabarty 23). A historicist narrative—such as the Marxist model of transition to capitalist modernity—is both unavoidable and often useful, especially for the purposes of social critique. Nevertheless, the unitary simplicity of this kind of history is productively disrupted by more local, heterogeneous histories, which Chakrabarty calls History 2s, and defines as follows.

History 2 does not spell out a program of writing histories that are alternatives to the narratives of capital. That is, History 2s do not constitute a dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1. To think thus would be to subsume History 2 to History 1. History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1. (Chakrabarty 66)

History 1 relies on universalist Enlightenment categories, which Chakrabarty reminds us are imbued with local, provisional elements of their European genealogy. These are “interrupted” by History 2s, which may be thought of as Glissant’s “histories” and

¹⁵ In a related way, Ghosh is also expressing what Jacques Derrida refers to as “archive fever”: “to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.” Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 91.

comprise silenced, subaltern pasts. Fragmentary subaltern pasts act as a trace or supplement to “historian’s pasts”: “supplementary in a Derridean sense—they enable history, the discipline, to be what it is and yet at the same time help to show what its limits are” (Chakrabarty 112). Importantly, acknowledging the plurality of the past requires the blurring of the boundary between the past and the present, as in *The Shadow Lines*, revealing “the plurality that inheres in the ‘now’, the lack of totality, the constant fragmentariness, that constitutes one’s present” (Chakrabarty 243). Incommensurable fragments of subaltern history reveal, in other words, the “heterotemporality of the world” (Chakrabarty 95).

The relationship between Ghosh and the subaltern studies project, and particularly Chakrabarty, will be discussed below. First I would like to consider the way in which the historical critique implicit in Ghosh’s work as well as much other Indian Ocean writing is achieved through an emphasis on fragments. In Ghosh’s revealing sentence quoted above, it is Khalaf ibn Ishaq’s letter, which contains a reference to the Indian slave Bomma, that permits access to the underlying “real life”—fragmentary evidence from a largely lost past. The evidence is of crucial importance in *In an Antique Land*, acting as both the existential justification for Ghosh’s research in Egypt as well as a point of entry into a lost history of exchange and travel. The letter is mentioned repeatedly, and described in a way that suggests its uncanny and destabilizing character. The novel opens with a mention of the “whisper” of the slave’s existence in history:

The slave of MS H.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942. His was a brief debut, in the obscurest of theatres, and he was scarcely out of the wings before he was gone again—more a prompter’s whisper than a recognizable face in the cast. (IAL 13)

Obscurity, whispers, disappearance—the paragraph places the fragment in an uncanny context, suggesting that it is imbued, despite an inherent fragility, with a haunting power. At the end of the letter there is a brief injunction to send “plentiful greetings” to the slave Bomma, a throwaway remark which provides access to a large and mostly invisible subaltern history.

That is all: no more than a name and a greeting. But the reference comes to us from a moment in time when the only people for whom we can even begin to imagine properly human, individual, existences are the literate and the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests—the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time. But the slave of Khalaf’s letter was not of that company: in his instance it was a mere accident that those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world happen to have been preserved. (IAL 16)

The textual fragment, therefore, is serendipitous as well as haunting, intertwined with hidden histories and forgotten lives.

Fragmentary images are widely used in Indian Ocean literature and act as thematic indicators of the disruptive fluidity and category-defiance that the space connotes, as is evident certainly in Conrad’s work.¹⁶ One thinks of the ship fragment which floats in the wide Indian Ocean, causing the near-sinking of the *Patna* in *Lord Jim*, unlocatable and haunting. In addition, Conrad relies on textual fragments to disrupt certainties and linear knowledge—for instance, the diary fragments of *The Shadow-line* and the fragmented sentences of *Heart of Darkness*. In Collen’s work, the geography and identity of Indian Ocean islands is fragmentary, which she is involved in reconstituting—represented in *Mutiny*, by the gathering of stray bits of

¹⁶ Not only the Indian Ocean, of course. Fragmentary images are used with a similar effect in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*. The novel has many affinities with Indian Ocean writing, as will be discussed in the conclusion, imagining the desert through an oceanic lens, and also collecting scraps of histories, exemplified by Almásy’s copy of Herodotus’ *Histories*: “He speaks in fragments about oasis towns, the later Medicis, the prose style of Kipling, the woman who bit into his flesh. And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus’ *Histories*, are other fragments – maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books.” Ondaatje, *The English Patient* 102.

clothing in a remaking of identity for the escaped prisoners (M 336). Similarly, the narrative of *The Gunny Sack* is episodic, each episode inspired by a memento from the narrator's grand-aunt Ji Bai's old gunny sack. The autobiographical narrator Salim uses these objects to reconstruct the history of his family and community, the Muslim Shamsi sect of Tanzania. The fragments of the past—an old accounts book, a necklace—act as motivators of memory, but also as markers for what has been forgotten. Vassanji therefore writes the fragment as an agent of both story and history, conflating the two categories in a manner similar to Ghosh's blending of science and fiction in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and his generic crossings in *In an Antique Land*.

Dan Ojwang identifies Vassanji's fragment-focused writing as “historiographic rather than historical fiction.” In other words, he argues that Vassanji is as much concerned with remembering a forgotten past as provisionalizing that remembrance (Ojwang “Memory, Migrancy and Modernity” 141). Salim is creatively involved in re-telling his genealogical history, drawing the reader's attention to inevitable “lacunae in memory” in order to demonstrate that “historiography is an act of sorcery and conjuration” (Ojwang “Memory, Migrancy and Modernity” 149). This is a useful way of describing Ghosh's earlier fiction, as in the distinction outlined in the introduction. For instance, in *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh describes what has been lost in language through, for instance, the etymologies of words like “Egypt”, denoting “darkness”, in contrast with the richer “Masr” which includes the sense of “to civilize” or “to settle” (IAL 32). In *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh has discovered similar linguistic fragments, in the etymologies and forgotten words of *Hobson-Jobson*, but these are rewritten into a coherent narrative, making up for rather than marking the loss. The later fiction, therefore, can better be described as historical, with a focus that is compensatory.

In this sense, Ghosh's and Collen's works show similarities—she reconstitutes identity from fragments of clothing, as in the example suggested above, and focuses on stories of women, slaves and Chagos Islanders, whose narratives are absent from the historical record. Gurnah's use of the fragment, on the other hand, provides an illuminating contrast. In *By the Sea*, Gurnah presents the casket of *ud-al-qamari* incense as a kind of story-generating fragment from a lost past, at first similar to the objects in Vassanji's gunny sack.¹⁷ But, early on in the novel, the *bawab* of Europe, the customs inspector Kevin Edelman, seizes the casket as potential contraband, and Omar problematizes its symbolism.

I thought I could catch the odour of the fantasy of those distant places in the dense body of that perfume, although that was only because Hussein had bound the two things together for me with his stories, and I had surrendered to both so completely. [...]

He [Hussein, the Indian Ocean trader] gave me the casket as a gift, the casket Kevin Edelman plundered from me, and with it the last of the *ud-al-qamari* Hussein and his father bought in Bangkok in the year before the war, the casket which I had brought with me as all the luggage from a life departed, the provisions of my after-life. (BTS 31)

Gurnah acknowledges the connection between the object-fragment and stories, linking the casket with a vast history of individual and social Indian Ocean history. Earlier, he suggests that the casket is in the same category as the various goods that Europe took from the rest of the world, relics that represented something lost, the provisions of an after-life. But, with the disappearance of the casket, Omar displaces fragmentary status onto himself. In pleading for entry into the United Kingdom as a refugee, he wants to ask Kevin to “think of me as one of those objects that Europe took away with

¹⁷ These include a bead necklace, a photograph, a cowrie shell, a brass incense holder, a Swahili cap, a broken rosary, a blood-stained Muslin shirt and three books – “each one a clue to a story, a person. A world.” The objects are linked to memory at the start of the novel: “Memory, Ji Bai would say, is this old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for any more. Stroking the sagging brown shape with affection, she would drag it closer, to sit at her feet like a favourite child. In would plunge her hand through the gaping hole of a mouth, and she would rummage inside. Now you feel this thing here, you fondle that one, you bring out this naughty little nut and everything else in it rearranges itself.” M.G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1989) 6, 3.

her” (BTS 12). Omar himself is, for the rest of the novel, a relic, fragment, trace of the past, and it is his own words and memories that are embedded with intractable silences.¹⁸

While Gurnah’s novels work to indicate, rather than fully realize, these silences, Ghosh is, for the most part, concerned to fill them in. *Sea of Poppies* and *The Glass Palace* are notable for their recuperative impetus. The paratext of *The Glass Palace* includes a list of published sources in the “Author’s Note” at the end of the novel, as well as an unusual authorial statement of intent. Ghosh writes that, “in attempting to write about places and times that I knew only at second- and third-hand, I found myself forced to create a parallel, wholly fictional world” (GP 549). The fictionality of the novel is given second-rate status to an invoked, possible memoir or history, despite the vast amounts of research that went into the writing—“I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks, published and unpublished; I travelled thousands of miles, visiting and re-visiting, so far as possible, all the settings and locations that figure in this novel.” Noting his “near-obsessive urge to render the backgrounds of my characters’ lives as closely as I could”, Ghosh indicates a desire to gather fragments of the past, geographic and textual, to weave a plausible fictional whole. In this project he sets up, importantly, an historian as model, Walter A. Desai, who wrote a monograph on the lost world of the Kingdom of Burma.

¹⁸ As David Callahan describes, Gurnah’s fragments are highlighted as well by an episodic narrative technique: “A fragment does duty for the whole narrative of a relationship or occurrence, so that, for example, the relationship between Yusuf’s parents is suggested by part of a conversation between them and a brief story of his father’s first love. Through the very mystery of all that is not revealed, which lies behind the fragment, can be experienced the complexity of the stories in this book [...] This opaqueness and richness of others is what the stories communicate.” David Callahan, “Exchange, Bullies and Abuse in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Paradise*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 38.2 (2000): 63.

I like to think of the ‘quiet old Indian’ living in India in his retirement, sifting through the archives of New Delhi and Bombay as an act of homage and restitution to the country he had lost. Desai’s attempt to recover traces of this erased life is to me, in its slow careful unemphatic accumulation of detail, a deeply moving work; an affirmation that every life leaves behind an echo that is audible to those who take the trouble to listen. (GP 552)

On the one hand, the slow accumulation of details, fragments, in an act of historical recuperation, is here invested with ethical value, a project that gives meaning to forgotten, subaltern lives; on the other hand, the universalizing tone of “every life” and successful recovery may contain or mute the disruptive qualities of the fragment.

In a similar vein, Ghosh’s fiction might be thought of as motivated by a desire to do better than Conrad, with his “failure of imagination”—the desire to “fully realize, and take responsibility for, the un-spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (Bhabha “The World and the Home” 147). Ghosh himself suggests a more appropriate literary forbear, in this context, pointing to “that wonderful Melville piece about the lascar that he meets.” Acknowledging the problem of anachronistic criticism, he yet insists that, “that’s why I think someone like Melville is so profoundly interesting, because even at that time he was able to see that there was something interesting here, to do with lascars” (Boehmer and Mondal 32).

Hermann Melville in *Redburn*, engages with a lascar sailor in the port of Liverpool. *Redburn* is Melville’s semi-autobiographical account of the combined imaginative and physical travel of a young American sailor, during his difficult first voyage from New York to Liverpool. The young sailor is deeply disappointed at the similarities between the docks of the two cities—an early lament about globalization—and is relieved and excited to discover the *Irrawaddy*, a “country ship” or merchantman from India. He describes the mix of the lascars who crew the ship—“among them were Malays, Mahrattas, Burmese, Siamese, and Cingalese” (Melville 217). His

portrayal of their appearance as a curiosity in the harbour incorporates both humour and sympathy. As he writes, “it was amusing at these times, to watch the old women with umbrellas, who stood on the quay staring at the Lascars, even when they desired to be private”—imagining how it is that the lascars must feel. Finding a lascar smoking on the pier, he strikes up a conversation which he finds to be revelatory.

So instructive was his discourse, that when we parted, I had considerably added to my stock of knowledge. Indeed, it is a Godsend to fall in with a fellow like this. He knows things you never dreamed of; his experiences are like a man from the moon—wholly strange, a new revelation. If you want to learn romance, or gain an insight into things quaint, curious, and marvellous, drop your books of travel, and take a stroll along the docks of a great commercial port. (Melville 218)

Not only does Melville’s character sympathetically imagine the lascar’s life, that imagining causes him to change his views of travel and indeed of reading.

Viewed in this light, Ghosh’s work can be seen as in direct conversation with the subaltern studies historical aims. The Subaltern Studies group is the name by which a collective of radical revisionist Indian (primarily Bengali) historians became known in postcolonial studies. Both intellectually and politically affiliated to Marxist thought, their work is characterized by a focus on “the people”, or subalterns. It involves a critique of both colonial and national histories—specifically their tendency to ignore ordinary people—and acts as a powerful interrogation of the postcolonial nation-state (Guha 1). Ghosh has both personal and professional ties with some of the members of the group, and his article “The Slave of M.S. H6”, which was later to become *In an Antique Land*, was first published in the group’s journal, *Subaltern Studies* (Mondal 26).

In particular, Ghosh’s work can be read as being in productive dialogue with the work of Chakrabarty, as was suggested above. Both are interested in the project of

provincializing Europe, as well as the “the question of how we live fragments of joyful existence within structures of domination” (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 155). The dialogue of ideas was realized in an exchange of emails published in the *Radical History Review*, in which the two writers discuss the premises of *Provincializing Europe*, identifying notable similarities in outlook, as well as differences. The differences include those that arise from the demands of their respective disciplines, and in particular a greater suspicion, on Ghosh’s part, of the Enlightenment categories and values that Chakrabarty holds are both inescapable and, in their humanistic guise, productive ways of thinking. In Ghosh’s view, the historian, practising a discipline which is arguably more directly related to Enlightenment and European institutional thought, is the more entrapped within its logic, while the novelist is free to engage in a stronger indictment of colonialism and a more vivid and thorough imaginative recreation of subaltern pasts. As he writes in an interview, “there are silences that you cannot hope to fill by research alone. They are never going to speak back to you because that is what Indian history is, at least popular Indian history, just this gigantic silence” (Boehmer and Mondal 32).

However, while it seems that fiction can venture further than history into certain areas of the subaltern project, there are also obvious problems with a compensatory historical-fiction approach. One is outlined in the well-known critique of subaltern studies, as well as more stringently of the work of Deleuze and Foucault, by Gayatri Spivak. Their work, she argues, participates in a covert positivism or essentialism of the subaltern subject, which in turn, at least in the latter two cases, serves to constitute the subject of Europe. This is due partly to the slippage between the two senses of “representation”—“representation as ‘speaking for’, as in politics, and representation as ‘representation,’ as in art or philosophy”; or, in other words,

representation as “proxy” or “portrait” (Spivak 70). While Ghosh is clearly invested in representation in the second sense, his own admission of ethical responsibility to forgotten historical voices implicates him in the first. Spivak suggests that a desire to “dig up” systems which have been historically buried cannot be equated with the representation of another’s voice.

Foucault is correct in suggesting that ‘to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value’. It is the slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual [...] that is consistently troublesome. (Spivak 80)

Ghosh’s representation of subaltern voices may, in this sense, participate in a troubling essentialism.

However, the irony is perhaps not lost on Ghosh that in *Sea of Poppies*, he has chosen as his most important and indeed voluble character an escaped *sati*, an instance of the self-immolating Hindu widow that forms the “silent, silenced center” of Spivak’s analysis. In this sense he seems to be flagrantly denying the impossibility of subaltern female speech, instead giving full voice to the highly favoured Deeti. In this reading, it would seem that in the later works of historical fiction Ghosh abandons the moments of “productive bafflement”, such as occur in *In An Antique Land*, which problematize the transparency of his position as writer and intellectual. In other words, there is a tension in his work between two senses of “accommodation.” On the one hand, Ghosh makes room for unheard voices, increasing the diversity of those who appear in literature. On the other hand, his writing of silenced voices co-opts them into a singular narrative, without acknowledging intractable silences.

Ghosh nevertheless in certain moments focuses on the expressive power of fragments, which go hand in hand with a deep surrounding silence. In a particularly

powerful passage of *In an Antique Land*, he describes a letter of Ben Yiju's in which the merchant tells a correspondent of the death of his only son. The letter has been damaged with the passage of time, and much of the text is illegible.

The little that remains of the passage is punctuated with a bizarrely expressive succession of silences, as though time had somehow contrived to provide the perfect parentheses for Ben Yiju's grief by changing the scansion of his prose. It reads:

And the elder [of the two children] died in Aden...
I do not know what to describe of it...
I have left a daughter, his sister... (IAL 314)

Here the fragments act to bracket a silence which is more expressive than the prose which could be imagined to fill the space.

While Ghosh's work appears at times to be more concerned with history than fiction, attempting to compensate for the absences in historical narratives, this recuperative project is underscored by the disruptive power of the fragments used. These, gathered together in an ethical act of recovery, engender not only the stories that are imagined, but the gaps that remain. The intransigent silences that persist in literary representations of the Indian Ocean will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion

V.S. Naipaul famously writes, in his essay "Conrad's Darkness", that "Conrad—sixty years before, in the time of a great peace—had been everywhere before me" (Naipaul *The Return* 385). Ghosh, in turn, expresses his interest in Naipaul's work in strikingly similar terms.

For many years I read everything of Naipaul's I could lay my hands on; I couldn't have enough of him. I read him with the intimate, appalled attention that one reserves for one's most skilful interlocutors. It was he who first made it possible for me to think of myself as a writer, working in English. (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 197)

In a sense, Naipaul intervenes between Conrad and the next generation of writers, most directly Ghosh. Naipaul's work is immensely wide-ranging, even in simply geographical terms, as he adopts and makes his own settings everywhere from the English countryside to the Congo to Trinidad. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that he touches on the Indian Ocean and its specific set of interconnecting histories and geographies. His *Half a Life* is set in part on the Mozambican coastline, and the protagonist of *A Bend in the River*, one of Naipaul's most clearly Conradian rewritings, is an Indian East African, whose trading background prompts him to travel further West and try his luck upriver.

In these novels, Naipaul describes the Indian Ocean in explicit terms, drawing on its spatial histories as background to the plot of the novel. While Ghosh too engages in direct description, more than the other authors considered here, he is also interested in Indian Ocean journeys themselves, rather than just their aftermaths. Or, in other words, he is concerned to explore diverse Indian Ocean networks in particular, rather than more globalized diasporic conditions. Naipaul's writing is nevertheless prescient, outlining some of the main issues to which Ghosh responds. In *A Way in the World*, Naipaul sums up Indian Ocean history with characteristic concision, even as he laments its absence from collective memory:

There would have been ancient connections between the [Kenyan] coast and India. It was an East African pilot who showed Vasco da Gama the way to India. The Victorian explorer Speke even published a map, said to be based on old Hindu texts, giving Sanskrit names for the rivers, lakes and mountains of Uganda. There would have been an Indian element in the mixed Swahili culture of the coast. But people didn't carry this kind of history in their heads [...] (Naipaul *A Way in the World* 349)

Naipaul describes the ancient connections as well as the gaps in this history, not only gaps in evidence but also an absence of popular remembrance. Ghosh's work both

resists and responds to this reading of the space. He describes the persistence of Indian Ocean connections across time, present in the minds of village imams, smuggling boat owners and Burmese queens, and also imaginatively produces an Indian Ocean chronotope that could contribute to the carrying of this kind of history “in their heads.” “Fiction then,” as Ghosh suggests in an interview, “allows us to reach for the trace” (Boehmer and Mondal 31).

Ghosh maps the Indian Ocean by depicting small and large-scale networks of differences that cross national and imperial boundaries. Formed by links between traders, families, smugglers, strangers, coolies, slaves and lovers, the networks include elite as well as ordinary characters. This representation forms part of Ghosh’s accommodating ethic, which manifests in a celebratory cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitanism he describes makes room for diverse people as well as different concepts, values and languages, constituting a possible “Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism.” In addition, the accommodating ethic manifests in the fiction itself, which attempts by a variety of formal means to include a sense of diversity through representing multilingualism, translation and a fictionalized lingua franca. These acts of imaginative recuperation form part of his larger historical-literary project. Given the gaps and silences with which Indian Ocean histories have to contend, Ghosh attempts to gather together fragments and imaginatively reproduce the whole.

Nevertheless, it is worth remembering, as Desai suggests, that “while Ghosh’s anticolonial narrative has much emotive weight, a more layered understanding of the history of the Indian Ocean trade suggests that the trajectory of tolerance and intolerance is not so easily established” (Desai 136). Conrad, Gurnah and Collen, in their very different ways, all point to the darker sides of movement and mixing that—

on this they are largely agreed—constitute the broad strokes of Indian Ocean representation. The interconnected, lively and accommodating world that Ghosh proposes, even if concerned with subaltern networks, can appear one-sidedly rosy when compared with the emphatically many-sided view apparent in especially Gurnah’s work. Ghosh, however, acknowledges his ideological motivations, pointing to what he sees to be the alternative to the sometimes humorous tone of *Sea of Poppies*.

I had to make it funny to make it bearable for myself, otherwise I wouldn’t have survived it. I mean it’s just so ugly, so horrific, so vile. All this opium stuff is such a secret, it’s not taught, it’s not known, it’s never spoken about, the history books disguise it. Yet, there it was, the foundation of the British Empire was opium, it was the foundation of free markets, of capitalism. (Boehmer and Mondal 35)

This dark side, like the persistent and unfillable gaps, is occasionally apparent in Ghosh’s fiction, tempering the potentially idealizing nostalgia with an aspect of performative reflection. As Desai describes, “But no matter how nostalgic, the melancholic always remains in the wings waiting to make a sobering entry” (Desai 141). In Gurnah’s work, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the position is reversed—his Indian Ocean is written in a predominantly melancholic mode, although it exhibits moments of nostalgia.

Chapter 3

“You couldn’t get anything much more complicated than the coast of East Africa where I grew up:” Abdulrazak Gurnah

I too have run away, absconded. And reaching this grim basement, I stopped to examine the collective memory—this spongy, disconnected, often incoherent accretion of stories over generations. Like the karma a soul acquires, over many incarnations, the sins and merits, until in its final stages it lumbers along top-heavy with its accumulations, desperately seeking absolution.

M.G. Vassanji, The Gunny Sack

Do you understand the sadness of geography?

Michael Ondaatje, The English Patient

Introduction

In the opening pages of Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *By the Sea*, an old man tells the story of his arrival as a refugee at Gatwick Airport in the United Kingdom, carrying little other than a casket of precious incense known as *ud-al-qamari*. The casket, like M.G. Vassanji’s gunny sack, is a repository of scents and stories about another time and place—Zanzibar, and an East African coastal space interlinked with the Indian Ocean littoral through travel, trade and culture.

Ud-al-qamari: its fragrance comes back to me at odd times, unexpectedly, like a fragment of a voice or the memory of my beloved’s arm on my neck. Every Idd I used to prepare an incense-burner. [...] Aloe wood, ud-al-qamari, the wood of the moon. That was what I thought the words meant, but the man I obtained my consignment from explained that the translation was really a corruption of qimari, Khmer, Cambodia. [He] was a Persian trader from Bahrain who had come to our part of the world with the musim, the winds of the monsoons, he and thousands of other traders from Arabia, the Gulf, India and Sind, and the Horn of Africa. They had been doing this every year for at least a thousand years. In the last months of the year, the winds blow steadily across the Indian Ocean towards the coast of Africa, where the currents obligingly provide a channel to harbour. Then in the early months of the new year, the winds turn around and blow in the opposite direction, ready to speed the traders home. It was all as if intended to be exactly thus, that the winds and currents would only reach the stretch of coast from southern Somali to Sofala, at the northern end of what has become known as the Mozambique Channel. (BTS 14)

In this passage, Gurnah describes the East African coast as integrally connected over hundreds of years with the rhythmic, predictable monsoon and the trade it brings from a long coastline circling away to the East, “as if intended to be exactly thus.” The place, the “stretch of coast from southern Somali to Sofala,” is carefully delineated, and the narrator goes on to provide a brief history of the ancient, multi-directional trade, followed by brief periods of dominance by the Portuguese, Omanis, Persians, British, Germans, French and Tanzanians. The passage makes reference to the prevalence of Islam in the space—the *ud-al-qamari*, a recurring symbol of Indian Ocean trade, is used in the celebration of “Idd,” the Muslim festival of Eid. In addition, the passage itself is rhythmic and formally complex. From the first sentences, the narrator’s voice is distinct and Marlowesque: meditative, nostalgic, inconsistently authoritative. He ties himself to the Indian Ocean world through the Persian trader and the fragrance of the *ud*, while also highlighting his distance from it and the fragmentariness and unreliability of memory. He expounds confidently on the history of the area, but draws attention to unreliability, both his own misprision and the fluidity of language—aloe wood, moon wood, *qimari*, Khmer—subject to translation, corruption, and metaphoric slippage.

In much of the rest of Gurnah’s novel and his oeuvre, that African “stretch of coast” and the long history of its connections constitute the setting and, at times, the subject of the narrative. In writing the Indian Ocean as mutually constitutive of the east coast of Africa, he maps this largely neglected coastline as part of a space of movement and travel. His work therefore profoundly troubles representations of Africa as static and unchanging, and as well as representations of the Indian Ocean as predominantly un-African—*producing* Indian Ocean Africa. In particular, shifting between the idealizations of the outsider and the prejudices of the insider, his writing

advocates a more involved vision. That vision, in contradistinction to Ghosh's more idealizing and nostalgic view, highlights not only the freedoms but also the costs of travel; the connections as well as the failures of cosmopolitanism. It does this partly through writing the alternate universalism of Islamic connectedness.

In his autobiographical essay "Writing and Place" Gurnah explains that he began to write novels because he was "thinking and worrying about things that had seemed uncomplicated before" (Gurnah "Writing and Place" 26).¹ In the essay, he describes the heterogeneity he experienced growing up in Zanzibar, where, in addition to a British colonial education, he was "learning from the mosque, from Koran school, from the streets, from home" (Gurnah "Writing and Place" 28). Although the profusion of discourses seems at first disabling, he finds that negotiating multiplicity allows him to stake out a particular relationship to knowledge.

With time, dealing with contradictory narratives in this way has come to me to seem a dynamic process, even if by its very nature it is a process first undertaken from a position of weakness. Out of it came the energy to refuse and reject, to learn to hold onto reservations that time and knowledge will sustain. Out of it came a way of accommodating and taking account of difference, and of affirming the possibility of more complex ways of knowing. (Gurnah "Writing and Place" 28)

The Ghoshian ethic of "accommodating and taking accounting of difference," explored in the previous chapter, is here set alongside what Gurnah describes as ways

¹ Gurnah's writing is regularly described by critics as both complex and invested in complexity Susheila Nasta, *Writing across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk* (London: Routledge, 2004) 352, AS Byatt quoted in Susheila Nasta, "Abdulrazak Gurnah, Paradise," *The Popular and the Canonical: Debating Twentieth Century Literature 1940-2000*, ed. David Johnson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005) 335, Steiner, "Writing 'Wider Worlds: The Role of Relation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction,'" 125, Callahan, "Exchange, Bullies and Abuse in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise," 55, Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (Harlow: Longman, 2000) 319, Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*. As Sharae Deckard recounts, Gurnah's writing negotiates between competing histories of the colonial and the postcolonial in favour of a conception of East Africa as a complex and indeterminate space Sharae Deckard, *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden* (London: Routledge, 2010) 119.. Similarly, Tina Steiner argues that, in Gurnah's novels "we find a whole range of hierarchies of domination, not just along the well-investigated axes of colonial oppression, but along multiple intersections on the Swahili coast with its complex interactions" Steiner, "Writing 'Wider Worlds: The Role of Relation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction,'" 125..

of holding onto “reservations.” While the many contradictory narratives present in a diverse space cannot be collapsed, they can be dealt with in a dynamic and processual way. Importantly for understanding the formal methods of Gurnah’s work, the process can only be undertaken from a “position of weakness”.

These are in some ways characteristically modernist themes, of displacement, unreliable narration, alienation, narrative proliferation over factual truth. However, Gurnah’s own critique of the Zimbabwean author Dambudzo Marechera provides a way of approaching his work. As he writes in his criticism,

Despite its familiar metaphors of alienation, the text is anchored in precise social and historical space: Rhodesia under Ian Smith’s government. The paradox is that the writing deliberately aspires for this historical specificity while aligning itself with conceptions of ‘literature’ that take such particularity to be pernicious. (Gurnah "The Writing of Dambudzo Marechera" 102)

Gurnah, interested in Conradian disorientations, also situates his work in a precise social and historical space, and in so doing stages the tensions between the two imperatives. His commitment to complexity—epistemological, historical and literary—is also explicitly linked to the spatial: writing *and* place. In an interview with Nisha Jones in *Wasafiri*, Gurnah writes that “most of what I’ve written about has not only been concerned with Zanzibar but with other small places along that coast. One could say they are a kind of paradigm of a certain way in which human relations work out” (N. Jones 37). Gurnah’s interest in writing this space is both autobiographical and historical, but it is also broader than that. The space acts as a “kind of paradigm,” or what Lefebvre might call a representational space, that reflects and creates a commitment to the hesitant, processual possibility of “more complex ways of knowing” (Lefebvre 33).

The first part of this chapter will introduce Gurnah's Indian Ocean Africa, focusing on the ways in which his literary mapping can be seen as a response to the absence and obfuscation—blank and black—of Africanist discourse. Drawing on Christopher Miller's analysis of Africanist discourse in *Blank Darkness*, this section shows how Gurnah's work gestures towards the gaps identified in the previous chapter, but refrains from filling them in. *Paradise* can in this way be read as mapping East Africa as a space of movement, connections and layered histories, which in turn produces an Indian Ocean marked by slavery and Africanness. In the second section, Gurnah's awareness of the ways in which perspective affects representations of Africa feeds into a more general Conradian concern with perspective, mediated by the depictions of travellers and well-travelled spaces. This section will focus on a reading of *Memory of Departure*, which demonstrates the ambivalence of travel as well as the impact of the shift in perspective that it produces, between insider and outsider. His work explores various "positions of weakness:" narrators with no ground under their feet, performing the unreliability of narration. The third section elaborates on the ambivalence discernible in Gurnah's work, which focuses on the dark sides of travel and resulting cosmopolitan diversity. While the Indian Ocean is often represented as a particularly cosmopolitan space, mediated by the inclusive Islamic networks of religion, culture and trade, Gurnah's narratives highlight divisions and intolerance, in particular through producing the Indian Ocean as an Islamic space. The final section will look more closely at the formal choices and narrative strategies that Gurnah has employed in his work, as a function of an interest in, and an attempt to represent, the Indian Ocean. In particular, it will consider the spatiality of the narrative itself—its breaks, gaps and silences, dialogic structure and narrative instability.

“This is where we are, a long way from China:” Mapping Indian Ocean Africa

In contrast to the other writers considered here, many of Gurnah’s narrators are situated in Africa. Gurnah’s writing provides a rich sense of place—in Samuelson’s phrase, as quoted in the introduction, “a unique and particular coastal sensorium” (Samuelson “Fictions of the Swahili Coast” 504). The effect is at times startling—the detailed, sensuous, yet banal description of an African Indian Ocean space subverts the gestures of dismissal evident in history and fiction of the region. In the face of outright denials of its existence, Gurnah writes Indian Ocean Africa as an everyday, detailed reality. As Isabel Hofmeyr argues, a fault line in Indian Ocean studies is “the prominence of India as opposed to the invisibility of Africa” (Hofmeyr “Africa”). While novels like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* have written against the image of an Africa stuck in time, and the myriad works of African elite migrations to the West have demonstrated at least individual links with “multiple elsewhere,” Gurnah’s coastal Africa is one that is deeply connected at all levels of society with a vast, complex and changing oceanic world. Unlike Naipaul’s narrator in *A Bend in the River*, who asserts that “the coast is not truly African,” Gurnah maps a connected, oceanic Africa.

Gurnah’s fiction is infused with spatiality—accounts of journeys, towns, the interiors of houses, and, of course, maps. The character Omar, in *By the Sea*, is deeply interested in maps.

I speak to maps. And sometimes they say something back to me. This is not as strange as it sounds, nor is it an unheard of thing. Before maps the world was limitless. It was maps that gave it shape and made it seem like territory, like something that could be possessed not just laid waste and plundered. Maps made places on the edges of the imagination seem graspable and placable. (BTS 35)

Maps are powerful, to both limit and extend the imagination, to both speak and be

spoken to. Omar is “fascinated” by them because they are, like furniture, “beautiful, intricate things,” but he is also fascinated in an ingenuous, dangerous way (BTS 19). Omar takes doubtful surety for a loan to the trader Hussein because of the allure of the *ud-al-qamari* which for him is bound together with the stories Hussein is able to tell of the Indian Ocean world, a “fantasy of those distant places.” When Hussein fails to return, effectively reneging on his promise of repayment, he sends instead a mariner’s map of South Asia. The map, a cryptic message, highlights Omar’s betrayal by “a man who had stories to tell of those distant beautiful places that were only marks on a map for me” (BTS 159).

Like Ghosh, Gurnah here describes an originary moment of map-making: “it was maps that gave it [the world] shape.” Both seek to convey a sense of the world before and after mapping, whether on the broad political scale, for Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, or on a personal scale, for Omar. He insists that, “before maps the world was limitless”—literally, boundary-less—and that maps contribute to what seems like an inevitable process of spatial reification with material consequences: “new maps were made, complete maps, so that every inch was accounted for, and everyone now knew who they were, or at least who they belonged to” (BTS 15). Similarly, in *Desertion*, the narrator Rashid describes a colour-coded map of the 1950s in which pink, green, purple and brown are used to indicate the four main colonial powers controlling the region:

A British map of Africa in the 1950s would have shown four predominant colours: red shading to pink for the British-ruled territories, dark green for the French, purple for the Portuguese and brown for the Belgian. The colours were a code for a world-view, and other imperial nations had their own colour schemes for their maps. It was a way of understanding the world, and for many who studied such maps, it was a way of dreaming about journeys that could only be pictured in the imagination. Maps are not read in the same way now. The world has become much more confusing, and full of people and

names that obscure its clarity. In any case, nothing much is left to the imagination now, when the picture has become the story. (D 148)

The passage reads almost as a synthesis of Conrad's well-known map passages from *Heart of Darkness*, discussed in the first chapter: the reds, blues and greens of the map in the office, the map in a window of the sepulchral city, and the map filled with blank spaces for a child to dream over, "that had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names." Gurnah's narrator is aware that these maps both reflect a colonial world-view, and are implicated in producing a particular vision of the world. He links the description of the map directly to the fact that "the way that young people like Amin and Rashid thought of themselves and their future had not even begun to disentangle itself from the expectations of a colonized people, living in a small place, in the interregnum (although they did not know it) between the end of one age and the beginning of another" (D 150). The maps are entangled with ways of thinking, closing down or opening up possibilities, romantically masking or ethically revealing a complicated reality.

In the map passage quoted above, Omar laments, just as Marlow does, the filling-in of details as time goes on, replacing the open-ended imaginative story with a coloured-in picture, the diachronic with the synchronic. Rashid, too, notes that details such as people and names produce obscurity rather than clarify. Christopher Miller suggests that, in *Heart of Darkness*, the process of mapping can be compared to the act of narration.

The heart of darkness thus becomes more real and present in narration than in the title; narration makes a specific, concrete locus out of the formless void, echoing what Marlow recounts happened to the image of Africa in his nineteenth-century boyhood: 'It had ceased to be a blank space. [...] It had become a place of darkness.' (Miller 177)

Faced with an absence or a void (even one that results from the fancifully unreal

colours of colonial mapmaking) imagination is free to roam; narration creates a presence but also limits the possibilities. Mapping and narration produce “a black out of a blank, oneness out of zero” (Miller 177). For Miller, as for Moses whose arguments was discussed in the first chapter, it is no accident that the paradigmatic representation of mapping takes place within the symbolic space of Africa.

Africa is imagined as a zero, a void, a blankness. The label “Africa,” despite its seemingly referential appearance, is as loaded as the obviously fictive term “Orient” (Miller 14). Even more than the Orient, which signifies difference and otherness, the term “Africa” functions as a signifier for “the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly,” “an object *apart from the world*, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else” (Mbembe and Nuttall 348). Africa acts as the Other’s other, the Orient’s orient, as the third element which has no place in the intractable binary of Orientalism.

The two interlocking profiles of Europe and the Orient leave no room for a third element, endowed with a positive shape of its own; as on a sheet of paper, both of whose sides have been claimed, the third entry tends to be associated with one side or the other or to be nullified by the lack of an available slot in our intellectual apparatus. It is Africa that was always labelled the ‘third part of the world’, and Africanist discourse reads as a struggle with the problems inherent in that figure. (Miller 16)

The construction of Africa as a blank boundary zone is epitomized by the figure of the “heart of darkness”: “the representation of a ‘shapeless absence’, the congealing of nothingness into a figure” (Miller 176). It is also a construction that has particular resonance for Indian Ocean studies, which is concerned primarily with the relationships between the Orient and its others—India and the Arab world, on the one hand, and Africa on the other.

Like Conrad, Gurnah is aware of the dangers in both ignoring a space and in trying to

fill in the blanks—his challenge is redressing the blankness without filling it with blackness, the flip side of the coin. The kind of literary mapping which attempts to make “a specific concrete locus out of a formless void, [...] a black out of a blank,” produces a static and Manichean worldview (Miller 177). Replacing ignorance with information or, more likely, misinformation, ensures that the blank white space of possibility is only transformed into a space of informed darkness. However, Miller goes on to suggest that, “driven by the same will-to-truth as Orientalism, Africanist writing projects out from itself an object that refuses to conform to the demands placed upon it” (Miller 16). Gurnah’s writing depicts an Africa that refuses to conform—squirming away from the overblown or nullifying categories to which Africanist discourse consigns it. As Gurnah writes, fiction has liberating potential when it refrains from being excessively indicative, choosing rather to hint at an “imaginatively more complex world which its construction in the narrative approaches but does not quite convey” (Gurnah “Transformative Strategies” 156). As Tina Steiner argues, re-orienting East Africa towards the Indian Ocean world, Gurnah’s work subverts both the violent hostilities of empire and the exclusions of nationalism (Steiner “Writing ‘Wider Worlds’” 125). In so doing, Gurnah “aptly points out that ‘Africa’ needs to be imagined as an intercultural and interlinguistic space of geographical proximity” (Steiner “Writing ‘Wider Worlds’” 125). Rather than portraying Africa as unimaginable and isolated, Gurnah’s work demonstrates its coeval connectedness.

The East African littoral has to a large extent been excluded from histories of the Indian Ocean, notably from K.N. Chaudhuri’s early and seminal study, but also, as Bose points out, from the work of Michael Pearson, who makes use of primarily European and Arabic sources (Pearson *The Indian Ocean*; Bose 273; Chaudhuri).

Bose himself, notwithstanding, deals with Africa largely in passing. Histories of the Swahili have been primarily based on European and other outside sources, and have tended therefore to emphasize the overseas influence on the Swahili rather than their Africanness (Horton and Middleton 3). It is worth noting that theorists of the Black Atlantic, too, including Paul Gilroy, have been criticized for side-lining the continent in their work (Zezeza; Chrisman). This absence derives from a dearth of written sources, partly, but more profoundly from Africanist constructions. As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall point out, the persistent association between Africanness and exceptionality relies on a denial of “the embeddedness in multiple elsewhere of which the continent actually speaks” (Mbembe and Nuttall 348).

Significantly, Africanist discourse is not limited to European writing. One example is Naipaul’s description of the Kenyan coast in *A Bend in the River*, in which the narrator both claims and qualifies a sense of belonging.

Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made the difference. The coast was not truly African. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place, and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean. True Africa was at our back. Many miles of scrub or desert separated us from the up-country people; we looked east to the lands with which we traded—Arabia, India, Persia. These were also the lands of our ancestors. But we could no longer say that we were Arabians or Indians or Persians; when we compared ourselves with these people, we felt like people of Africa. (Naipaul *A Bend in the River* 17)

The passage describes the way in which Indian Ocean constructions can be deployed in negative terms. The narrator’s shorthand delineates a diverse, cosmopolitan space—“an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place”—but one which excludes African inhabitants, and rejects, at least at first, African identity. Conrad’s absences are discussed in the first chapter, but both Ghosh and Collen too fall at times into this danger, albeit from the other side. While Mauritius is technically part of Africa, the

discourse of the island refuses that inclusion. As will be discussed in the next section, coolitude constructs a racial other based on distance and slavery, and Collen, although she makes an attempt at inclusion, often falls into a rhetoric of vague abstraction: “a sighing, breathing mother Africa” (GR 165). Ghosh includes areas of north Africa in his early work, particularly in *In an Antique Land* and *The Circle of Reason*, but almost entirely ignores sub-Saharan Africa. He makes one tantalizing reference to Durban and the coastline from there to the fictional al-Ghazira, and of course there is the teasing ending of *Sea of Poppies*, which veers off in the sequel away from Mauritius towards China; otherwise Africa features only as a source of lascar diversity and as the implicit other side of the *kala pani*. Relying on similar sources to the historians, the work of these authors often participates, however unwillingly, in the dismissals of Africanist discourse.

The erasure, in all three cases, is importantly linked to slavery, in particular the silencing of African slave voices in most of the countries to which they were transported during the age of slavery in the Indian Ocean world. African slaves, mostly from Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Madagascar, were taken to all of the islands (including Madagascar) as well as India, the Cape and the Arab peninsula. Living in small numbers and forced to adapt to a different language and culture, the historical record of their experience is sparse, repressed by Islamic, Catholic and Hindu regimes as well as by the familiar stereotyping of European racism (Alpers "Recollecting Africa" 87). In Amitav Ghosh's work, slavery is an echo and a distant memory, except particularly in *Sea of Poppies*. While the novel focuses on the experience of indenture, one of the main characters is Zachary Reid, son of a freedwoman from the United States. Zachary is racially ambiguous, not only mixed-race by birth but between ethnic groups on board the *Ibis*, having taken on the identity

of a white ship's Captain at the behest of a group of non-white lascars. In addition, the *Ibis* itself carries within it the marks and memories of slavery.

One thing Zachary did know about the *Ibis* was that she had been built to serve as a 'blackbirder', for transporting slaves. This, indeed, was the reason why she had changed hands: in the years since the formal abolition of the slave trade, British and American naval vessels had taken to patrolling the West African coast in growing numbers, and the *Ibis* was not swift enough to be confident of outrunning them. (Ghosh *Sea of Poppies* 11)

The ship is eventually revealed to be drilled with small holes, carved in the wood by desperate overcrowded slaves seeking air—a reminder of a dark, and, as Ghosh previously wrote in *Circle of Reason*, on-going practice of exploitative human transport.² Slavery is also an correlative of island discourse, as will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to Collen's portrayal of the overlapping categories of slavery and indenture in the Indian Ocean.

Gurnah's imagining of Africa is apparent in his novel *Paradise*, which is one of his best-known works, and, other than *Memory of Departure*, the only one set exclusively in Africa. The novel is striking for its setting—the East coast of Africa in the years between the Berlin conference and the First World War—its use of language, and its descriptive power. It self-consciously employs the Koranic story of Yusuf (the Biblical Joseph) as a model, and, in depicting a journey inland from the coast, refers to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (see Nasta "Paradise" 319). *Paradise* is focalized largely through the eyes of a child, Yusuf, taken from his family to the coast by the trader Aziz, as *rehani*, repayment for a loan. The perspective of a child, newly arrived, allows for a sense of newness provided by vivid and allusive descriptions. The novel is sensuously rich, providing

² Also see Gwyn Campbell's work on histories of slavery in the Indian Ocean. Gwyn Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, Studies in Slave and Post-Slave Societies and Cultures (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

vivid images of the harbour in the coastal town, the walled garden which serves as one of the many metaphors of paradise, the green-tinted sky over the mountains on the journey inland (P 83). Jacqueline Bardolph points out the effectiveness of the vivid descriptions, especially the attention to the sense of smell: “at the same time as the Swahili perspective defamiliarizes the reader, the sensuous rhythmical prose creates poetry and also realistic immediacy” (Bardolph 79). Vivid description mixes with defamiliarization throughout, which create a detailed imaginative map through frequent reference to places near and far away. Lodging briefly in an outpost some distance inland, Yusuf learns of the host’s origins in Zanzibar, his wife’s roots on the island of Lamu, further north of Mombasa, and those of Kalasinga the mechanic, who tells him “about India, where Kalasinga had not been for many years, but dreamt to return, and South Africa, where he had lived as a child” (P 103). His friends gather around the fire to tell “tales of Mrima and Bagamoyo, and Mafia Island and Lamu, and Ajemi and Shams, and a hundred other magical places” (P 104). Gurnah links the thin strip of African coast to a set of inland kingdoms and to the Indian Ocean world through litanies of place names and networks of criss-crossed travel routes. These connections are traced by descriptions of migrations, journeys and lineages, such that the interpersonal relations between characters, in the foreground, are anchored in a web of spatial relations between near and distant locations, in the background.

Broadly speaking, Gurnah writes against a discourse of emptiness. When Yusuf, Aziz and the traders travel inland in what is represented as one of the last Swahili-managed trading caravans, they discover a part of inland, sub-Saharan Africa that is not at all empty. As Sharae Deckard describes, rather than encountering a void, the traders are forced to negotiate with “Indian merchants, Arab city-dwellers, African slave-traders, and tribal villagers, Muslims, Hindus, and indigenous pantheists, and

German imperialists” (Deckard 112). In addition, the “tribal villagers” are not homogeneous or passive, responding in different ways to the advance of the caravan, and asserting their rights of trade. The German soldiers who begin to arrive as the novel progresses, in Chatu’s kingdom and elsewhere in the countryside, misrepresent this trade, deliberately narrowing a complex history: “it was as if no other trade had been heard of, to hear them speak” (P 71). Aziz goes on to predict that, when the European victors began to write histories of East Africa, they would sideline and demonize their trading predecessors.

One day they’ll make them spit on all that we know, and will make them recite their laws and their story of the world as if it were the holy word. When they come to write about us, what will they say? That we made slaves. (P 87)

This simplifying historical tendency is both acknowledged and strenuously resisted in Gurnah’s novels. In his first novel, *Memory of Departure*, the young narrator notes, somewhat defensively, that the seaside town he grew up in had been in existence for centuries before inland Nairobi was even thought of: “we were trading with China before the railways that gave birth to this conceited works-depot had even been invented” (MD 83). As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, in Gurnah’s work Africa is represented as a busy, crowded and connected place, with layered histories of trade, travel, oppression and hospitality.

In *Dottie*, which immediately preceded the publication of *Paradise*, the protagonist Dottie feels that “there was something shameful about all the killing and chaos that was going on in Africa,” but finds out that this was in fact the result of ignorance and prejudice.

Later, her own discovery of how complex the reality of *those places* was had given her more strength. She had found pleasure in learning an

abundance of new things about people and times she thought she had already grasped. (DT 152)

While not idealizing African reality as peaceful, Gurnah makes the qualified point here that “the reality” is more complex than that. Dottie herself employs the language of blankness, when she discovers that her “sketch of the world was little more than a tenuous and unstable metaphor, patchily blank and shimmery in the oddest places” (DT 152). Similarly, when Latif in *By the Sea* finds the many negative associations with the word “black” in the dictionary, it makes him feel “hated, suddenly weak with a kind of terror at such associations. This is the house I live in, I thought, a language which barks and scorns at me behind every third corner” (BTS 71). While Dottie’s learning provides her with few certainties, it does give her the strength to resist a more limiting, nullifying narrative—“the feeling of unworthiness that her exposure to the English way of viewing the world had forced on her” (DT 152).

At the end of the novel Dottie meets a man named Michael, who describes a traumatic incident which occurred during the African travels of his earlier life. Their conversation provides a useful reading of Gurnah’s later novel, both in terms of the rewriting of Conrad’s and Naipaul’s darkness, and to introduce the importance of perspective in relation to Africa and Indian Ocean writing. Michael relates to Dottie how, after being stationed on the east coast of Africa for some time, he travelled inland to “do a piece” on a rebel group operating near the Western border with the Congo. The situation with the rebels quickly deteriorates, and they turn on Michael and his companion, leaving them wounded and stranded in unfamiliar terrain.

He had thought of himself as making Conrad’s journey in reverse. With luck, and if all went well, he would get as far as Kisangani, the old Stanleyville, and Stanley Falls Station before that. Conrad called it the Inner Station. The heart of darkness! It was on an old trade route from the east coast which had been in use for at least a hundred years or more. Slavers and ivory hunters had tramped and marched those

mountain paths, and set up their wretched and short-lived kingdoms to harvest the bounty of the land. The upper reaches of the river were dotted with old fortresses and the overgrown ruins of towns the Waswahili robber barons had built for their host. It was only the heart of darkness if you approached it from the other end. (DT 313)

Michael narrates a history of dominance and erasure, outlining the violent, inland “harvesting” that underlies the cross-oceanic trade described in the previous chapters. In addition, for himself as an ill and wounded journalist, the old Stanleyville represents aid and succour, the heart of civilization rather than the heart of darkness. The passage demonstrates the crucial importance of perspective, which will be explored further in the next section: “It was only the heart of darkness if you approached it from the other end” (DT 313).

Gurnah’s writing of Africa in *Paradise* produces a populated and shifting literary map that subverts a tradition of writing Africa as historically exceptional—consigned to Chakrabarty’s “waiting room” of history—and geographically isolated (Chakrabarty 8). At the same time, his writing explores the dynamics and persistent currency of that construction, through an exploration of mapping in both its colonially coloured and tenuously shimmery guises. In *By the Sea*, the narrator Omar remembers a local teacher’s rendering of a very different map of the world from the one coloured in with reds and blues and greens, demonstrating for the students their place in the scheme of things.

As his story developed, he began to draw a map on the blackboard with a piece of white chalk: the coast of north-west Europe, the Iberian peninsula, southern Europe, the land of the Shams, Syria and Palestine, the coast of North Africa which then bulged out and tucked in and then slid down to the Cape of Good Hope. As he drew, he spoke, naming places, sometimes in full, sometimes in passing. Sinuously north to the jut of the Ruvum delta, the cusp of our stretch of coast, the Horn of Africa, then the Red Sea coast to Suez, the Arabian peninsula, the Persian Gulf, India, the Malay Peninsula and then all the way to China. He stopped there and smiled, having drawn half the known world in one continuous line with his piece of chalk. He put a dot halfway down

the east coast of Africa and said, 'This is where we are, a long way from China.' (BTS 37)

The map is drawn at the same time that a story is told, “sometimes in full, sometimes in passing,” so that the image unfolds from and yet contrasts with the story. The East African coast is represented, along with much of the rest of the world, by “one continuous line,” connected integrally with Europe, China, and the lands in between, which also form the continental sides of the Indian Ocean. The key word here is “continuous”—the spatial distinctions, and even the firm gradations of categorical difference, are instead seamless and fluid. Most importantly, the teacher’s final statement of the position of the “we,” in relation to “half the known world,” is specific and roughly central: “halfway down the east coast of Africa [and] a long way from China.” The narrator’s perspective is situated firmly in Africa, looking East, towards the Indian Ocean and the world to which it connects.

“Far-fetched, in a manner of speaking:” The view from the sea

Gurnah, like Conrad, is as concerned with “map-gazing” as he is with map-making. In “Disorientation,” as was discussed in the first chapter, Moses suggests that the modernist technique of perspectivism can be seen to arise from the mobility-induced dispersion that was a feature of life on the imperial periphery (Moses 61). The passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, about the *ud-al-qamari*, describes a long history of back and forth travel across the Indian Ocean world, including the east coast of Africa. This travel is facilitated by the predictable monsoon that blows from the southwest to the northeast every six months before it changes directions, and also by the warm Mozambique and Agulhas ocean currents which draw coastal traffic even further south along the African coast: “south of this stretch [the Mozambique channel], the currents turned evil and cold, and ships that strayed beyond there were

never heard of again” (BTS 14).³ As Gurnah notes immediately afterwards, some of these travellers that the winds and currents bring with them inevitably settle for short or long periods of time: as they travel they brought, “their goods and their God and their way of looking at the world, their stories and their songs and prayers, their hungers and greeds, leaving some among their numbers behind for whole life-times” (BTS 15). Representing a space in which dispersion is an even more long-standing and constitutive phenomenon, Gurnah’s writing is from the start engaged with the problem of perspective.

Memory of Departure, Gurnah’s first novel, narrates the story of a young man, Hassan, living in a poverty-stricken town called Kenge on the coast of East Africa, who embarks on a prolonged process of departure for the wide world. As Dan Ojwang notes, the “central themes of this first novel set the tone for Gurnah’s later works in which he is equally preoccupied with subjects like migration, travel and diaspora” (“Abdulrazak Gurnah” 296). *Memory of Departure* is also, in Gurnah’s own assessment, “very much the novel where I learnt the important difference between writing things down and *writing*, the process of constructing ideas in fiction” (*Writing across Worlds* 354). While at first glance the novel employs a simple first person narrative structure, it also experiments with subtle shifts in perspective, particularly the perspectival disjuncture caused by leaving and looking back. In this way, the Indian Ocean space of travel that Gurnah describes is interlinked with the travelling position of the narrator.

Journeys are central to *Memory of Departure*, both thematically and formally. The novel is an account of a place which is largely defined by travel, by the constant

³ For a discussion of the importance of coastal and cross-ocean currents to the inclusion of Africa in particular in the Indian Ocean world, see Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* 24.

movement of people and goods described in the passage in the introduction, and, particularly, the methods and motivations of a particular traveller. It begins as Hassan wakes up and walks the short distance to the waterfront to buy bread for his family. “This,” he notes, “was the morning of my fifteenth birthday,” the time at which, according to the Koran school he’d attended since the age of five, boys become accountable to God (MD 7). The coming-of-age is a non-event—“manhood arrived largely unremarked: no slaying of a ram, no staff and scroll and the command to go seek God and fortune” (MD 7). And yet, Hassan is restless and frustrated, and eventually departs to seek at least fortune on a ship bound for India. Having finally ensured his escape by securing a job as a medical orderly on that ship, he notes his resulting feelings of freedom and guilt: “I could not resist the opportunity and often I feel that I have run away” (MD 157). Departure for Hassan, as for many of the characters in Gurnah’s novels, is both an escape from suffering and an escape from responsibility, an opportunity and a desertion.

Memory of Departure ends at the moment of departure, leaving the question of the journey and its consequences unanswered. Nevertheless, the option of departure and the effects of travel are peculiarly present throughout the novel, not only for Hassan, but as constitutive of the town he lives in. As the narrator writes of a similar town in *Paradise*, “the air was filled with the travel-stained scent of other places” (P 45). Kenge, in Hassan’s description, is characterized as much by inescapable poverty as by movement, with repeated emphasis on images of the road and the sea.

Kenge was very near the sea. The taste was always in the air. On muggy days, a smear of salt would line the nostrils and the ears. On soft mornings, a sea breeze came to chill the heart at the start of a new day. In years gone by, the slavers had walked these streets. Their toes chilled by the dew, their hearts darkened with malice, they came with columns of prime flesh, herding their prize to the sea. (MD 6)

Kenge is saturated with the presence of the sea, which acts as both the marker and means of departure. Its significance in the novel is ambivalent, as the form of this paragraph suggests. The rhythm of the last sentence recalls the repetition of waves breaking on shore as well as the beat of footsteps in a slave column. “Soft,” “sea,” and “salt” lead in alliteratively to “slavers” and eventually “malice.” The pervasive smell of the sea is a reminder not only of a new day, but also the haunting memory of oppression.

Gurnah therefore highlights the costs, rather just than the opportunities, of travel. The narrative of *Paradise* surveys a large number of characters that are strangers in the landscapes in which they find themselves. Yusuf goes into detail describing the terror and sense of psychic danger produced by the experience of radical difference encountered on a journey.

He told Khalil that so often on the journey he felt he was a soft-fleshed animal which had left its shell and was now caught in the open, a vile and grotesque beast blindly smearing its passage across the rubble and the thorns. That was how he thought they all were, stumbling blindly through the middle of nowhere. The terror he had felt was not the same as fear, he said. It was as if he had no real existence, as if he was living in a dream, over the edge of extinction. It made him wonder what it was that people wanted so much that they could overcome that terror in search of trade. (P 179-80)

During his journey to the interior, Yusuf reflects on his abandonment, and compares himself to Khalil, with his hysteria and mispronounced Swahili, and Kalasinga with his homesick and lascivious stories, summing up their shared condition:

Stranded in the middle of nowhere. [...] Like Kalasinga, a thousand miles from home. Like all of them, stuck in one smelly place or another, infested by longing and comforted by visions of lost wholeness. (P 175)

Here, the small comfort which lies in the hope of return and recovery, is undermined by the chimerical implications of “visions”—there is no home or wholeness.

Moreover, the sense of being a stranger to one's unreadable surroundings is as apparent in Africa as it is in England, as we see in the later novel, *By the Sea*. One of the narrators, Saleh Omar, a refugee from Zanzibar, begins his new life in a small town by the sea.

Now I live the half-life of a stranger, glimpsing interiors through the television screen and guessing at the tireless alarms which afflict people I see in my strolls. [...] It is not that they are mysterious, but that their strangeness disarms me. [...] Perhaps I exaggerate, or cannot resist dwelling on my difference from them, cannot resist the drama of our contrastedness. Perhaps they are only straining against the cold wind that blows in from the murky ocean, and I am trying too hard to make sense of the sight. It is not easy, after all these years, to learn not to see, to learn discretion about the meaning of what I think I see. I am fascinated by their faces. They jeer at me. I think they do. (BTS 2, my emphasis)

The “half-life of a stranger” is filled with confusion and a vague sense of danger. The phrase indicates a splitting and insufficiency, as well as, in its biological usage, a sense of inevitable decay. While writers like Salman Rushdie and Edward Said have famously lauded the creative potential of a hybrid life, in Gurnah's work this celebratory note is muted if not absent; movement and journeying brings an aching sense of loss that often overwhelms the apparent gains of the experience. It is telling that Gurnah opens his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* by emphasising, unusually for Rushdie criticism, an elegiac sense of loss that he discerns in *Imaginary Homelands*: “the past is home albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (Gurnah “Introduction” 1).⁴ Gurnah is concerned with what the character Rashid describes as “the deep poison that runs through the experience of flight and homelessness” (D 200). As he asserts in an interview: “part of it is to say that diaspora and hybridity can be tragic” (N. Jones 41).

⁴ For a further discussion of “travel and/as travail” in *By the Sea*, see John Masterson, “Travel and/as Travail: Diasporic Dislocations in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea* and Kiran Desai's *the Inheritance of Loss*,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45.3 (2010).

In addition, then, to troubling ideas of African stasis, as suggested above, Gurnah also interrogates the privileging of movement at all. Hassanali in *Desertion* asks a question which is central to the representations described in this thesis.

What kind of man would leave his home to wander in a wilderness thousands of miles away? Was that courage or a kind of craziness? What was there here that was superior to what he had left behind? Hassanali could not imagine the impulse that would make *him* wish to do such wanderings. (D 19)

This is a question pertinent to the previous chapter, shifting representations of Indian Ocean mobility from connotations of moral openness to those of exile, greed and abandonment. The concern over the ethics of travel, on an individual level as a matter of desertion as in *Memory of Departure*, is widened in the later novel to a question of its politics, on the level of the collective. The imperialist Frederick and the newly arrived and more critical (but by no means innocent) Martin debate the link between civilization and travel, comparing ancient Chinese travel with modern European exploration.

If the Chinese came all this way in the fifteenth century, why did they then turn around and go back? It's a long way to China, why didn't they stay and take charge down here?' 'Perhaps because they decided that there wasn't anything here that was better than what they had at home,' Martin said. (D 90)

In this way, Gurnah's work contextualizes and thereby complicates what Enseng Ho describes as the "moralization of movement," an ethic which underpins Indian Ocean history and criticism (E. Ho xxv).

This interrogation of movement is partly achieved through the work's concern with performing the problems of perspective. *Memory of Departure* both begins and ends with the sea. At the beginning, Hassan stands on the beach and looks out to sea (which is again both "better" and "dirty"), watching as a ship arrives.

It was better by the dirty sea, away from chaos and humiliation.
 In the distance the ship drew near, carrying its shipload of
 Greek sailors and Thai rice. (MD 10)

Looking out, with his feet on solid ground, Hassan is presented with the option of leaving, represented by ships that indicate the immediate Indian Ocean locations and the wider world. From this position, Hassan describes the coastal home at his back only as chaotic, sordid and humiliating. At the end of the novel this position is reversed: he remembers and describes his life in the harbour town from the deck of a ship on the sea. This shift in perspective is highlighted by a sudden change in narrative tack. While for the majority of the work the narrative structure is chronological and first person, this final section takes the form of a letter dated 29 October 1968. The letter is written from on board the *s.s. Alice*, “three weeks away from home, somewhere between Bombay and Madras” (MD 57)—an Indian Ocean perspective. It presents a view of the town that is more nuanced and uncertain, and at least partly nostalgic: “I think a great deal about home and about my people, and about the way things were with them. I feel such pain about leaving that place. Who would have thought it? I never thought I would miss that land” (MD 158). By the end, the novel produces a narrative perspective that is literally and metaphorically “at sea”.⁵

In his second novel, *Pilgrim's Way*, Gurnah describes the view from the sea, in the passage quoted in the introduction to this thesis.

⁵ Meg Samuelson makes a similar point. Drawing on Michael Pearson's suggestion that a “history of the ocean needs to be amphibious, moving easily between land and sea” and on Greg Denning's theorizing of the beach, she argues that Gurnah's oeuvre describes an amphibian aesthetic that is connected to its littoral locations (499). A position on the beach necessitates a Janus-faced perspective, looking both towards the hinterland of the interior and the foreland of the ocean, situated ambiguously on shifting ground. As she suggests, “poised between land and sea, ambivalently constituted and abjected by colonial and nationalist orders, the beach offers a complex vantage point in this fiction.” Samuelson, “Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics,” 506.

That famous water-front, with its white-washed houses and minarets, was like a quaint model in a builder's office, clean and ordered, belying from that distance the chaos and the filth of the narrow alleyways. Visitors spoke of the charm of our narrow streets and steeply rising houses, and the pungent smell of spices in the air. They first saw us from the sea, from a distance that encouraged such self-delusion. From there it did not matter that the windows charmingly shuttered looked out of rooms that were congested with people, and enclosed women who were hidden from the lustful gaze of men. There were no smelly alleys to walk through, no slippery ditches to cross, no fanatical elders to humiliate you. From the sea, the town seemed the luscious heart of paradise. Come nearer and you have to turn a blind eye to the slimy gutters and the house walls that have been turned into open-air urinals. Come nearer so we can see whether you are dark or fair, friend or foe. (PW 154, original italics)

Remembering his childhood, the narrator describes a moment during which a friend takes him on an excursion out to sea. From the boat, the pair look back toward the Indian Ocean port city that is their home, and, for the first time, the two are treated to the same view as visitors and other outsiders, those who “first saw us from the sea.” Outsiders see only the charm of the shuttered windows, while the poverty, dirt, prejudice and patriarchal oppressions that they shut in remain invisible. Gurnah again employs the Conradian terminology here, highlighting the importance of position and resulting perspective: from the sea, the town seemed the luscious “heart of paradise.”

Perspective is a matter of authorial as well as narrative importance, with implications for African writing more generally. Naipaul links detachment—looking from a distance—with insecurity and cultural denigration.

So, from an early age I developed the habit of looking, detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it as from a distance. It was from this habit of looking that the idea came to me that as a community we had fallen behind. And that was the beginning of my insecurity. (Naipaul *A Bend in the River* 15)

As a further example of this pervasive line of thought, Gareth Griffiths cites Jamal Mahjoub's *Navigation of a Rainmaker* in his *African Literatures in English*.

This novel differs from novels by local writers, such as Francis Mading Deng, in that much of it is told from an outsider's viewpoint, as Tanner seeks to understand the confusion, chaos and corruption which the Sudan initially represents for him. In this, it shares the mood of other expatriate novels, stressing the heat, dust and moral chaos of modern Africa, and contradicts the more involved vision of local writers. (Griffiths 310)

Gurnah's writing shares this overcritical, expatriate mood at times, but also interweaves the outsider's perspective with a "more involved vision."

These are not, of course, absolute distinctions. In an autobiographical essay about his own fiction, Gurnah writes that "both arguments—distance is liberating, distance is distorting—are simplifications, although that is not to say they do not contain traces of truth" (Gurnah "Writing and Place" 27). In an interview with Susheila Nasta, he highlights the importance not so much of leaving, but of returning, citing an autobiographical journey.

I hadn't been back for a long time, because of all the political restrictions and problems and so on. I think it was out of going back after such a long time that my attention shifted. [...] When I came back from that trip, I wrote *Paradise*. I suppose from that moment onwards I have been interested in the condition of the migrant in a different way. Whereas before England was the foreground—at least, in *Pilgrim's Way* and *Dottie*—in the works following, the foreground is altered. (Nasta *Writing across Worlds* 356)

The return produces a shift in spatial as well as thematic interest, as well as a shift in perspective, which moreover promises a constant back and forth—between home and away, coast and sea, outsider and insider.

In *By the Sea*, Omar describes the complicating effect that departure has had on his perspective, which becomes apparent on his return to the coast.

Being back on the coast was like being at home, or more than that, like recognizing that here I had a place in the scheme of things. So much of what I had learnt [...] was crushing, glimpses of the extent of my ignorance, and the self-assured puniness we lived with. Back on the coast, I felt part of something generous and noble after all, a way of

living that had a part for me and which I had been too hasty in seeing as futile raggedness. (BTS 175)

The “way of living” that is evident on the African Indian Ocean littoral is both puny and generous, ragged and noble. It is this ambivalence, between idealized minarets and slimy gutters, and the importance of engaging a perspective that is “back on the coast,” which Gurnah explores through the more complicated “perspectivism”—manipulation of points of view, to use Moses’ phrase—and narrative structure of his later works (Moses 57).

“A forbearing society built as only Muslims know how:” Anti-cosmopolitanism and Islam

The more involved vision presented in Gurnah’s fiction is characterized by an emphasis on alternative universalisms as well as pervasive moral ambiguity.

Representing the east African coast as connected by routes of sea travel to distant locations across the Indian Ocean produces a vision of a diversely populated littoral, evocatively described in particular in the writing of M.G. Vassanji. Travel and cosmopolitan diversity are linked ideas, in Gurnah’s work as much as in Conrad’s and Ghosh’s, as has been shown in the previous chapters. However, Gurnah focuses on the intolerance and ghettoization of the purportedly multicultural African port towns he describes, while also laying greater emphasis on alternate universalisms, cultural, religious and psychological. Gurnah’s work demonstrates that, if it makes sense to speak of an Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, it is only through a difficult process of “social contestation [...] based on a struggle with history that is not so much shared as held in common” (Simpson and Kresse 15). In particular, his work interrogates the figuration of an Islamic cosmopolitanism.

The Indian Ocean littoral, including the east African coast, is, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, often described as peculiarly cosmopolitan. In

Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, the narrator describes his ancestor's arrival in Zanzibar: an island city famous even as far away as India, spoken of as "the Jewel of Africa, isle of enchantment."

What emotions stirred in Danji Govindji's breast as the low-lying island came into view eastwards, a dream city suddenly risen from the ocean, with its brilliant, luxuriant verdure, the shimmering white of the Arab houses in the foreground, the numerous dhows, boats, steamers and naval vessels of different flags in its harbour? As he stepped off the boat pushing aside Arab and Swahili guides babbling in Swahili, English and Cutch? As he walked among the throngs that crowded its narrow streets, black, white and brown, slaves, masters and freedmen, businessmen, hustlers, beggars and prostitutes, sailors, diplomats and explorers? (Vassanji *The Gunny Sack* 8)

The passage describes a view from the sea, one which idealizes the verdant landscape and the picturesque Arab houses, as well as the cosmopolitanism suggested by the different flags in the harbour.⁶ On landing, and walking among the streets of the town, that idealized national diversity is splintered into variety of other divisions, the racial divisions of black, white and brown, as well as differing levels of power and wealth. In his *The Book of Secrets*, the narrator describes Nairobi in the first decades of the twentieth century in similar, if litotic, terms, as "not a homogeneous society," with its Syrian and Japanese prostitutes, its railway workers and upper class European explorers.

In *By the Sea*, the harbour, before the prohibition of the *musim* trade in the 1960s, is depicted in terms of an immense diversity that echoes Ghosh's and Vassanji's depictions.

⁶ Also, this passage, from a novel largely set within East Africa and primarily concerned with the South Asian immigrants, provides a welcome note of reciprocal influence: the rare and powerful image of Africa in India, even if only by report. Later, Vassanji's narrator refers to a related port city, Mombasa, as the Bombay of Africa, where men from all over the world gathered: "throngs that crowded its narrow streets, black, white and brown, slaves, masters and freedmen, businessmen, hustlers, beggars and prostitutes, sailors, diplomats and explorers." Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* 8.

The last months of the year would no longer see crowds of sailing ships lying planks to plank in the harbour, the sea between them glistening with slicks of their waste, or the streets thronged with Somalis or Suri Arabs or Sindhis, buying and selling and breaking into incomprehensible fights, and at night camping in the open spaces, singing cheerful songs and brewing tea, or stretched out on the ground in their grimy rags, shouting raucous ribaldries at each other. (BTS 16)

The noisy rabble portrayed is also reminiscent of Conrad's Bombay harbour scene in *Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* discussed in the first chapter. While Gurnah may fall prey to the same orientalist criticisms as Conrad here—picturing the native sailors as a faceless crowd—both descriptions focus on the heterogeneity of language, action and men, creating a sense of a chaotic contact zone (Pratt; Hampson *Cross-Cultural Encounters* 88). Note again the use of the metonymic list: "Somalis or Suris Arabs or Sindhis;" likewise, Conrad populates the "*Narcissus*" with a range of nationalities, English, Irish, Russian Finnish, Scandinavian, West Indian. Later, Gurnah describes Bangkok as a city where "people from all over the world congregated: Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Europeans" (BTS 29), and Omar is detained at a refugee centre which houses people from throughout the Indian Ocean world: Ethiopia, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, producing a new sort of microcosmic cosmopolitanism.

Gurnah's work therefore participates in the production of the Indian Ocean as characterized by racial, social and cultural heterogeneity, the effects of an early and long-standing oceanic globalization; however, his work problematizes the more normative implications of cosmopolitan attributions. His writing presents a complex and pessimistic picture of littoral cosmopolitanism that contrasts with the celebratory deployment of the term that both Brennan and Robbins take issue with in different ways, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Shanti Moorthy suggests that the parts of his novels set in precolonial East Africa undermine both nationalist and some postcolonial assumptions about its idyllic prelapsarian cosmopolitanism—another

version of the “paradise” noted ironically in the title of *Paradise*. Instead, his work draws our attention to the class differences, gender issues and forced labour that persist in one form or another throughout the history of the area—in particular, the restrictions on women and the traumas of forced migration, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on Collen. Gurnah in these ways mitigates the risk of falling into what Moorthy calls “a displaced nostalgia by proxy,” which might condescendingly idealize a precolonial Indian Ocean inclusiveness (Moorthy 91). The effect is to highlight the sense of continuity between the precolonial and colonial eras and the present, as well as geographical continuity, even if this is a continuity of ignominy. In these ways, Gurnah problematizes any rosy view of cosmopolitanism, by demonstrating the various kinds of oppression that occur in what is considered a diverse society—“cruelties against women, cruelties against children, cruelties against those you see as weak, *as every society does*” (Gurnah, *Nasta Writing across Worlds* 361).

By the Sea follows the fate of an insular society turning in upon itself in the wake of colonial rule, a cycle of violence marked by broad political movements as well as personal vengeance. Similarly, in *Paradise*, Gurnah emphasizes variety rather than urbanity, and presents a picture of a small, petty, diverse world, cosmopolitan in array but not usually in attitude. The persecuted character Amina exemplifies gender, class and race divisions, having been rescued from slavery as a young girl only to be sold later into bondage as *rehani*, repayment of an impossible loan, becoming the much too young second wife of the rich Arab trader Aziz. The character Khalil is especially sensitive to the layering of boundaries that keep people apart—he berates Yusuf for addressing Aziz as “uncle” rather than the “seyyid.” Both

he and Yusuf cannot help but notice the real walls of division, made visible in the architecture of the town.

In their afternoon wanderings in the town Khalil and Yusuf had seen the huge silent houses with blank front walls where the rich Omani families live. 'They only marry their daughters to their brothers' sons,' one of the customers told them. 'In some of those sprawling fortresses are feeble offspring locked away and never spoken about. Sometimes you can see the faces of the poor creatures pressed against the bars of the windows at the top of the houses [...]' (P 49)

Different national, cultural, racial and religious groups use high walls and strict marriage customs to keep themselves apart, even to their own detriment. More subtly in *By the Sea*, even those who, through the passage of time, have become less distinguishable than the Omanis or the British, make concerted efforts to maintain identity-through-difference. After hundreds of years of migration, trade and intermarriage, "the people who lived on that coast hardly knew who they were, but knew enough to cling to what made them different from those they despised, among themselves as well as among the outlying progeny of the human race in the interior of the continent" (BTS 15).

One of those points of difference, to which the littoral society so tightly clings, is the influence of Islam. Representing a deeply Islamic society is one of the ways in which Gurnah problematizes cosmopolitan attributions is by pointing away from generalized cosmopolitanism and towards alternate universalisms. Isabel Hofmeyr describes different "universalisms"—roughly corresponding to Michael Pearson's "unities"—that recent historiography has outlined as connecting across the Indian Ocean (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 6). These include the public spheres of various diasporas that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as pan-Islam, pan-Buddhism, theosophy, imperial citizenship and Hindu reformism (Hofmeyr "Universalizing the Indian Ocean" 724). Islam in particular forms a distinctive

religious unity in the Indian Ocean, with which Gurnah's work is deeply engaged. In particular, Islam in his work constitutes a universalism that both connects and divides, as is evidenced by its troubled relationship with cosmopolitanism. In this sense, Gurnah's writing is congruent with the concerns outlined in *Struggling with History*, in which Kai Kresse and Edward Simpson demonstrate the ways in which Islam in the Indian Ocean is read both as a quintessentially fluid and accommodating connector, and as a violent and semi-imperial leveller (Simpson and Kresse).

Gurnah's writes his Indian Ocean Africa as a deeply, if diversely, Islamic space. This singles his work out, in relation to Vassanji's and Naipaul's focus on Indians in Africa and Ghosh's oddly un-Islamic Indian Ocean. In Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, the all-important lascars act as a symbol for cross-cultural interchange and a cosmopolitanism of the lower classes; however, the novel obscures the fact, as Claire Chambers reminds us, that historical lascars were predominantly Muslim, an area of conspicuous commonality. As she argues, Ghosh "fails to engage with the sensitive topic of whether religious, specifically Muslim, identity might be more important to lascars than much-vaunted syncretism" (Chambers 88).⁷ As Felicity Hand argues, Gurnah's work should be read with its Islamic heritage firmly in view. In *Paradise*, the novel's rewriting of the myth of the Koranic Yusuf and Islamic ideas of paradise, interwoven with Biblical parallels, demonstrate the lasting symbolic reach of Islamic thought and symbolism in East Africa. In addition, Islam is represented as one of the primary forces connecting Africa with the lands across the sea—connecting across

⁷ Gabeba Baderoon argues along similar lines, drawing on Nigel Worden's research, that slaves at the Cape, brought from India, Southeast Asia and east Africa, were often Muslim or converted to Islam because it offered an independent culture. In this sense, she suggests, Islam offers an example of an "alternative modernity". Baderoon, "The African Oceans—Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture," 92.

vast geographic as well as racial boundaries—as is described by a traveller on the road, whose language as much as his story is infused with Islamic ideas.

One night a man from Mombasa came to stay with them, and he told them a story of an uncle of his who had recently returned after fifteen years in the country of the Rusi, a people no one had heard of before. [...] Their savagery made his uncle suspect that he was in the country of Gog and Magog, whose borders formed the limit of the land of Islam. But even in this he had a surprise waiting for him, perhaps the biggest surprise of all. So many of the people who lived in Rusi were Muslims! In every town! Tartari, Kirgisi, Uzbeki! Who had heard their names? His uncle's surprise was shared by these people too, who had never heard of a black man in Africa being a Muslim. (P 105)

The misrecognition is mutual, but so is the recognition. He is a black man but he is also a Muslim. The limits of the “land of Islam” are, in the minds of the storyteller and his listeners, pushed further and further back, extending even beyond the Indian Ocean littoral.

These connections have marked material implications. In *Paradise*, the seyyid Aziz prepares his vast trading caravan by leveraging of a complex network of loans and investments throughout the Islamic, Swahili coastal community. The caravan operates on its journey under the auspices of Islam, avoiding alcohol and making comparisons between Islamic civilization and the incomprehensible barbarism of the native faiths. In *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul describes the pragmatic importance of religious links for the purposes of trade, as the character Nazruddin explains.

He said, 'Who are you?' I said, 'My family have been traders and merchants in the Indian Ocean for centuries, under every kind of government. There is a reason why we have lasted so long. We bargain hard, but we stick to our bargain. All our contracts are oral, but we deliver what we promise. It isn't because we are saints. It is because the whole thing breaks down otherwise.' He said, 'you should go back to the Indian Ocean.' (Naipaul *A Bend in the River* 254)

Similarly, as Felicity Hand suggests of *By the Sea*, Omar's acceptance of the document from Hussein that grants him ownership of Rajab Shaaban's house upon

default of the loan is consistent with a shared Islamic code of conduct in the Indian Ocean world (Hand 82). Part of the tragedy of the novel is that such codes gradually disappear, just as the colourful mix of sailors disappears from the harbour.⁸ However, while Omar's sense of the loss of an Islamic code of conduct is nostalgic, Mahmud is dismissive. He points out the ways in which the history of Islam is tied up with "family squabbles," and describes his father's retreat into religious piety as an escape from his familial responsibilities (BTS 195).

Islam is both attacked and defended in this work, challenged by the tenets of other religions as well as its own ideals. Kalasinga, a shopkeeper in the interior with whom Yusuf spends several months, argues at length with the Muslim boy and Hussein, the "hermit from Zanzibar," about the merits of Islam. In the end he proposes a plan to translate the Koran into Swahili, justifying his project at first in jeering terms, and then as a matter of humanist concern.

‘To make you stupid natives hear the ranting God you worship,’ Kalasinga said. ‘It will be my crusade. Can you understand what it says there in Arabic? A little perhaps, but most of your stupid native brothers don’t. That’s what makes you all stupid natives. [...]’
 ‘I will still translate the Koran,’ Kalasinga said firmly. ‘Because I care for my fellow human beings, even if they are only ignorant Allah-wallahs.’ (P 84-85)

The rhetoric of racism mixes with that of care, shifting from an accusation of stupidity to one of shared humanity. Similarly, in *Memory of Departure*, which focuses in its coastal sections on grinding poverty, familial abuse and hopelessness, the narrator is

⁸ This disappearance is also the direct result of European imperial cartography and exploration. As Wisnicki describes, the East African Expedition of 1856-9, which laid the groundwork for the later expeditions by Stanley and Livingstone, produced spectacular results partly because it relied on the existing knowledge the Arab-African trading network within which it operated. While facilitating its survey work, therefore, the network also limited the novelty of the Expedition's discoveries: "the result, as best evidenced in the EAE's four published maps of East Africa, was an attempt by both explorers to erase the Arab-African basis of their cartographical statements by writing the narrative of the EAE in place of existing Arab-African material and cultural reality" Adrian S. Wisnicki, "Charting the Frontier: Indigenous Geography, Arab-Nyamwezi Caravans, and the East African Expedition of 1856-59," *Victorian Studies* 51.1 (2008): 106.

surprised at the peace he discovers in a mosque: “I said the proper words out of habit, marvelling none the less at the sense of cleansing I felt. There was a calmness in the mosque that made the heart feel that here all its rackings could come to rest” (MD 44).

This debate is made most plain in Gurnah’s latest novel, *The Last Gift*. Here, the aging Zanzibari expatriate, Abbas, explicates the very personal dimensions of the fraught relationship between Islam and cosmopolitanism. He at first expounds the usual conception of Islam as uniquely cosmopolitan, its influence ensuring that Zanzibar, “that little place,” was a “forbearing society built as only Muslims know how, even though among us were people of many religions and race” (LG 243). This is the story he would have wanted to tell his children, and, importantly, he feels that this is the only way he would have known how to talk about it—indicating a problem of language as well as position. However, he goes on to suggest the idealizing obfuscation and silencing of the seemingly necessary association between Islam and cosmopolitanism.

I would not have told them about the rage that lay just under the surface waiting to break, or the rough justice the children of the enslaved planned to inflict on their sultan and on everyone else who mocked and despised them. I would not have told them about our hatreds, or about the way women were treated like merchandise, how they were traded and inherited by their uncles and brothers and brothers-in-law. I would not have told them how enthusiastically the women themselves performed their worthlessness. And I would not have told them about our tyrannical ways with children. Why are we such a lying, deceitful rabble? (LG 243)

Again, Gurnah focuses on the suffering inflicted on women and children in particular, while identifying the class and racial tensions which lay under the surface of the Islamic, Swahili civilization.

Nevertheless, while this reads largely as a wholesale rejection of the Islamic societies of Indian Ocean Africa, the narrative takes one final turn. The old man, a few pages along, points to more valuable aspects of the Islamic network, highlighting a sense of community and belonging that a shared religion and culture could provide, which is described as another one of the costs of travel.

When I left there I did not know how much I was leaving behind. Wherever I wandered or came to live after that nothing was expected of me. I was a man without responsibility, without a purpose. Nothing was required of me. I would have wanted to explain that to you, how I had lost that place, and at the same time lost my place in the world. That's what it means, this wandering. (LG 249)

Invoking the Conradian language of wandering, Abbas attempts to explain a sense of loss that borders, were it not for the former diatribe, on a Ghosh-like nostalgia. Not only Islam, Gurnah here suggests the profound ambivalence regarding any would-be universalism, between constraining and connecting.

While Conrad highlights the psychic danger of the experience of difference, Gurnah in these brief moments acknowledges its vulnerable and ethically generative aspects. In *Desertion*, the first section records the awkwardness involved in including a white man in the household of a local Muslim family. This is told from the perspective of the family, for whom the European is a stranger in their midst. In the second section, the narrator succinctly describes the experience from the other side, when Frederick Turner ventures through the Indian *dukas* and into the *dukawallah* Hassanali's house to examine the wounded man.

He stood up and looked around him and he was suddenly struck by the strangeness of everything, him in this place, in the yard of these people's house, standing in his waxed riding boots, tapping his calf impatiently with a riding crop, surrounded by these dark unfamiliar people that he felt inexplicably angry with and with a sick man at his feet. It was a familiar strangeness, as if a part of him was beside himself looking on, but it was necessary now that he take no notice of

it. He shook himself free of this feeling, which he thought of as irresolution and weakness despite its humane impulse, and made a sign of a stretcher with his arms. (D 41)

The feeling is both familiar and strange, an uncanny experience of shifting boundaries between self and other. It is characterized primarily by uncertainty and instability, which, although accompanied by feelings of anger and weakness, also represents a “humane impulse.” Like Conrad, diagnostic of this experience, and like Ghosh, gesturing towards its ethical potential. While Frederick himself soon falls out of the narrative, Gurnah explores a version of the humane impulse through the story of Rehana and Martin Pearce, discussed further in the next section, and through the character of the minor father-figure Zakariya.

Zakariya is one of the few characters in Gurnah’s work who is successful at achieving an ethical engagement with otherness. He represents the character of what might be called a true Indian Ocean cosmopolitan. Father of Rehana and Hassanali, he was born in India and as a young man travelled with the monsoon across the Indian Ocean. He becomes the only Indian in town to mix with the local Swahili population, a gregarious figure who eventually falls in love with and marries a Swahili woman, Zubeyda. His own self-conception denies the racial categories which so absorb his countrymen, in favour of an Islamic universality.

Zakariya had always said that he was a Muslim living among Muslims, and that was enough for him. Where he was born or came from was neither here nor there, they all lived in the house of God dar-al-Islam, which stretched across mountains and forests and deserts and oceans, and where all were the same in submission to God. He had a gift for languages, their father, and spoke Kiswahili, Arabic and Gujarati fluently. (D 62)

Invoking here the idea of Islamic *umma*, or what Gwyn Campbell calls “*Pax Islamica*,” Zakariya represents a kind of humanistic hopefulness (Campbell “Islam in Indian Ocean Africa” 43). Moreover, this force does not represent the switching of

one divisive category for another, Islam for race or ethnicity, but the shifting of attention to the local and relational. His daughter Rehana notes that “he had never seemed troubled or interested in his Indianness, so completely absorbed was he by the daily details of family and neighbours and his business” (D 64). Zakariya’s is a more involved vision.

In the interview with Susheila Nasta, Gurnah explains his writing of Indian Ocean east Africa as involving an effort, a stance, in the face of difference:

I wanted to write about a world that had always been fragmented but still manages to have something approaching civic and social life. [...] I didn’t simply want to say, ‘Look it worked before the European colonial encounter’ but instead, ‘Look how hard it had to try to work and look at the things it had to do to make itself work.’ (Nasta *Writing across Worlds* 361)

Like Kresse and Simpson, Gurnah here suggests that “any conception of ‘cosmopolitan society’ [...] ought to reflect the historical struggles on which it builds” (Simpson and Kresse 2). His work problematizes any unitary view, whether of cosmopolitanism or Islam, and designates a relationship between the space of Indian Ocean Africa and this kind of recalcitrant complexity of thought. On the East African coast, the narrator argues, even the cruelties are complicated. The following sections focus on the challenge of representing messy complexities—the formal implications of inserting cluttered uncertainties into the conversation.

“Putting the stories alongside each other:” Destabilizing form

In “An Idea of the Past,” Gurnah takes particular issue with Wole Soyinka’s championing of Yambo Oulouguem’s *Bound to Violence*. Soyinka praises Oulouguem’s “iconoclasm” in portraying Islam as a foreign, colonizing, brutish force that limits African, ultimately racial, self-awareness. Soyinka and Oulouguem’s demonizing of Islam as exclusively colonial and oppressive is, according to Gurnah,

ironic: “it decrees an authentic self for others, moments after it has refused to conceive of identity in similar terms for itself” (Gurnah "An Idea of the Past" 11-12). Gurnah resists this idea of the past in his criticism, as one that “silences rather than gives room to other voices” (Gurnah "An Idea of the Past" 16). This section seeks to explore the ways in which Gurnah’s fiction embraces a language that constitutes a form of “simultaneous knowledge,” allowing it to explore and navigate contradictions in a way that, as Hofmeyr suggests, historiography or expository prose cannot (Hofmeyr "Africa" 104). In particular, this section will explore the ways in which Gurnah’s narrators adopt a “position of weakness,” holding onto reservations and silences.

By the Sea, the novel in which Gurnah vividly evokes the Indian Ocean world as quoted in the introduction, sets “contradictory narratives” alongside each other, so as to destabilize any single reading. The novel employs a complex narrative structure, involving two alternating narrators and numerous shifts between past and present. It is primarily narrated by the elder refugee Saleh Omar, known at first as Rajab Shabaan, and the younger, exiled academic and translator, Latif Mahmud, who each narrate two chapters in the first part of the novel. The final two chapters record conversations between the two men, so that Omar recounts both his own oral narrative and Mahmud’s responses, as well as those of Rachel the refugee worker, within the confines of the written narrative. Just as Marlow in *Lord Jim* gathers information from various sources to create a relatively coherent story, which in turn forms one of the sources for the frame narrator, Omar and Mahmud draw together hearsay and reportage along with the record of their own unreliable memories, to tell parallel stories of a shared past. Rather than coherence, however, their not-entirely-overlapping narratives maintain throughout the sense of irreducible uncertainty.

The two narrative voices are noticeably different in tone. Omar's is quiet, meditative, philosophic, while Mahmud's is quicker, angrier, more direct. While Omar is concerned with the difficulty of speaking when out of place—"in the middle of nowhere"—Latif is concerned with the problem of speaking out of time—"someone called me a grinning blackamoor in the street, speaking out of a different time" (BTS 145, 71). The characters are displaced, spatially and temporally, and the novel produces, through its structure, a similar sense of disorientation in the reader. For instance, many of the characters in the novel have two names, producing a disarmingly fluid sense of identity. As Omar repeats in a mantra of grief, "My daughter Raiiya, my daughter Ruqiya" (BTS 203), an unresolved double name that evokes the still hard fought tension between subject and citizen, the old Zanzibar and the new. Mahmud's penpal Elleke turns out to be in reality a young man named Jan, assisted by his mother, actually named Elleke. Having fled to Germany, Mahmud changes his name from Ismail Rajab Shaaban Mahmud to Latif Mahmud, because, he says, he was "yearning for a quality of gentleness," the English translation of Latif (BTS 133). Mahmud reveals that the initially trustworthy-seeming narrator has not been using his real name, a fact which lies at the heart of the novel—the plot device which brings the two narrators together, producing its double-voiced structure with disorienting effect.

The novel is overtly self-conscious about this choice of narrative structure. Both narrators, from their different perspectives, explore at length their desires to both speak and be heard, assessing the potentially dubious, potentially liberatory motivations for dialogue. Mahmud, towards the end of the novel, explains to Omar that, despite his substantial initial reservations and their contradicting memories, he finds their conversation a relief.

So I've been thinking about that and putting the stories alongside each other, and seeing the gaps that I will never fill, and the ones we managed to avoid last time. I feel worn out after all this time, after all these years of thinking about that time and that place. And living here with all the comings and goings, and the trooping of my life through hostilities and contempt and superciliousness [...]. So I was looking forward to coming here, to hear you talk, for both of us to find relief. (BTS 207)

Mahmud aims only to place the stories “alongside each other,” through their dual and alternating narration. Omar justifies the dialogue to the reader in a slightly different way, but with a similar emphasis on give and take:

I had an accounting to give, and I could not have wished for a more suitable shriver, for he too needed to know what I knew, to make complete the absences and to utter the silences in his life here in the middle of nowhere. (BTS 145)

The choice of the word “shrive” here is important. To shrive is both to hear a confession and to confess, and is derived from the same root as to scribe, to write. Gurnah here indicates the two way process of the dialogue, while highlighting the dialogic character of the novel itself.

Between the two narrators there is no dominant voice or singular narrative—their stories are left to lay side by side, revealing inevitable gaps between and within the two accounts. The shifting between two narrators highlights the relationship of the narrators to each other as well as to the space. Omar's and Mahmud's lives are deeply entangled in ways that suggest the networks of family, travel and trade that connect across the Indian Ocean. They are also very different, providing often contradictory accounts of both the workings and the value of those networks. Given the absence of a frame narration that consolidates or resolves their accounts, the narrative structure undermines narrative authority. This is exemplified by the repeated references in the

novel to the favourite phrase of Melville's *Bartleby*: "I'd prefer not to."⁹ The gesture of refusal, like the view from the sea, embodies the "position of weakness" that Gurnah describes in his essay.

Elleke Boehmer, describing the multiple-narrator techniques of a prior inheritor of Conrad's "epistemological questions," the modernist novelist Leonard Woolf, suggests that "Woolf's method is to create a bricolage of voices from between the gaps and cracks of which the untenability and indeed the impossibility of [imperial rationalizations] is allowed to shade through" (Boehmer "'Immeasurable Strangeness'" 105). Boehmer argues that the vertiginous dislocation that occurs in contact with diversity and otherness can be mapped onto Bakhtinian dialogic decentring, in which a language regards itself "with disruptive effect, as if from elsewhere, or 'through the eyes of another language'" (Boehmer "'Immeasurable Strangeness'" 98).¹⁰ Gurnah's introduction of the voice of the listener—Mahmud and, in turn, Omar—results in an interplay that resists neat resolution, and that therefore stages the intense uncertainty and questioning of received meanings that is an on-going reality in an oceanic space of constant movement, as was discussed in relation to Michael Valdez Moses in the first chapter. Setting the contradictory narratives

⁹ In "The Death of the Novel," Ankhil Mukherjee, discussing J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, suggests that, "the 'cracks and chinks' in hegemonic structures that Susan inhabits are heterotopic spaces that belong to no master. Assuming powerlessness, Coetzee shows, is a viable mode of discrediting discourses of power." Omar's repeated references to Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener" suggest a concern with the kind of assumption of powerlessness to which Mukherjee refers: "I'd prefer not to" is a formula which, according to Gilles Deleuze, "hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders all words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum in language." This is the position of weakness which involves gesturing towards silences. Mukherjee, "The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers," 547. Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, ed. Gilles Deleuze (London: Verso, 1998) 73.

¹⁰ As Meg Samuelson points out, "it is, after all, surely no coincidence that Bakhtin, theorist of novelistic dialogism and social heteroglossia, of relational meaning that is always in process, should have spent his formative intellectual years in the port city of Odessa [...] nor that he should have lived and worked in an environment as ethically complicated as Gurnah's Zanzibar." Samuelson, "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics," 511.

alongside each other, allows the novel to “hold onto reservations” and affirm “the possibility of more complex ways of knowing” (Gurnah “Writing and Place” 28).

In addition, multiple perspectives and narrative voices highlight silences: the “gaps between our stories” and the “uncanny noiselessness that hovered above words.” This points to the central paradox which Saleh Omar outlines: the paradoxical “uttering of silences,” speaking in the face of and in conjunction with unfillable gaps. In *Desertion*, as I will show, Gurnah makes it clear that the paradoxical “uttering of silences” concerns not only the gaps between the stories of two men, but more broadly the gaps in the history of the Indian Ocean world and the ways in which fiction can and cannot respond to these. As maritime historian Michael Pearson asserts, the history of the Indian Ocean in English, only recently attempted, is still filled with lacunae: the indigenous experience of the Ocean has largely been ignored in historical narrative, and the subaltern experience is almost entirely missing from the sources (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 3). He suggests that this is the result of a fundamental Eurocentrism—“Could the reason for this be that for most of its history the IO was crossed and used by people from its littorals, not by Europeans?” (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* xv). And, while the Indian Ocean is underrepresented in maritime history, African involvement in the space is under a double erasure, as was described above. Stephanie Jones notes the same phenomenon from a different angle, in her article “The Politics of Love and History,” which focuses on an absence of lived, popular memory (S. Jones “The Politics of Love and History” 167). There is a twofold gap here, both the areas of blankness in the official history, and the absence of a lived history of Indian Ocean space.

For some of Gurnah’s earlier work, it could be argued that, as Homi Bhabha describes, the writing works to “fully realize, and take responsibility for, the un-

spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present,” exploring the ways in which fiction can present historical silences in the unconsciousness of the aesthetic rather than the consciousness of history (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 147). In *Dottie*, an omniscient narrator fills in some of the gaps for the sake of the reader: “So they did not know that Bilkisu’s father was a Pathan called Taimur, and that he had had youthful adventures that were like the wildest fantasies” (DT 16). Bilkisu, his story recounted for the reader in a free-wheeling paragraph, wanders throughout the Indian Ocean world: Punjab and Sind, the Arabian Gulf, Basra, ending in a journey to Cardiff with a Malayan sailor. However, the characters in the novel are left in the dark, so that Dottie has little sense of who she is outside of racist British definitions, as was suggested in the first section. The recuperative historical-literary project seems largely true of this novel and that of some other writers of the Indian Ocean world—for instance, Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, a monumental work of Indian Ocean historical recuperation, and M.G. Vassanji’s *The Gunny Sack* and *A Book of Secrets*, as described by Dan Ojwang (“Memory, Migrancy and Modernity”). Felicity Hand and Gareth Griffiths, too, have described Gurnah’s work as historically recuperative (Hand 76; Griffiths 313). However, Gurnah’s later writing works more to indicate, rather than to fully realize, these silences.

Gurnah, like Ghosh, is concerned in many of his novels with historical gaps, although his response is somewhat different. Omar describes his education as a child in the British colonial system, where he admired or at least accepted the narratives of British superiority over his own unflattering history, noting that this was a time in which he suffered from having “no recourse to irony or knowledge of the fuller story of the multitudinous world” (BTS 18). In “An Idea of the Past” he outlines a different vision of history. In this essay he describes two different uses of the past, open-ended

(Walcott) and closed-down (Soyinka), aligning himself with the Walcott's "imaginative memory." Walcott resists "a destructive and partial obsession with history" in favour of "a personal sense of historical involvement" (Gurnah "An Idea of the Past" 8).

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. [...] The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. (Walcott 37)

Jacqueline Bardolph suggests that "*Paradise* is an account of the making of history, a kind of history close to *The Histories* of Herodotus, mixing exact first-hand account with strange wonders" (Bardolph 80). In Naipaul's words, "without my own memory of the old man's story I suppose that would have been a piece of history lost forever" (Naipaul *A Bend in the River* 18).

Silence is a theme running through Gurnah's oeuvre, as the novel *Admiring Silence* indicates. In addition, both *By the Sea* and the later *Desertion* are pitted with silences: those that are described, part of the architecture of the town and of families, and those that are gestured at, the silence of history or of imaginative failure. Particularly troubling are the silences which result from the inadequacies of language. At the end of *By the Sea*, Omar fails to describe his incarceration in an island prison, explaining that, "I have taught myself not to speak of the years which followed, although I have forgotten little of them. The years were written in the language of the body, and it is not a language I can speak with words" (BTS 230). Amin, in *Desertion*, experiences his hometown as tissue of silences: the "deep humming silences" of the streets and the collection of "the town's silences, which were different in surprising ways" (D 168, 190). He remarks repeatedly on the "roaring silence of the

sea,” and the silence of distance after departure, or desertion. Most dramatically, the novel employs a narrative structural choice which, like Omar’s refusal to speak, rests on a refusal to narrate at all.

Desertion is divided into three sections, and begins on the Kenyan coast in the early twentieth century, as a wounded stranger appears on the doorstep of the mosque and is discovered and taken in by the trader Hassanali. The novel is at this point narrated by an omniscient narrator, focalized at first through Hassanali’s eyes, and then through the stranger’s, Martin Pearce, and his colonial host Frank Turner. Martin is nursed back to health by Hassanali and his sister Rehana, and when he returns to thank them, he is struck by Rehana’s beauty. Then, at the moment in which he gives her “his full attention with a kind of disbelief at the anguishing beauty of her eyes and the delicate movements of her face,” there is a sudden disruption of the narrative voice. The chapter is entitled, “An Interruption,” and here the narrator switches to the first person.

I don’t know how it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me. Yet I know it did happen, that Martin and Rehana became lovers. Imagination fails me and that fills me with sorrow. [...] There is, as you can see, an I in this story. (D 120)

The “I” is Rashid, a descendant of the impossible-to-imagine pair. He becomes an indifferent academic, and at the end of the novel gives a conference paper about “the absence of sexual encounters in this writing [settler writing from Kenya] or their sublimation into gestures of pained patronage or rumours of tragic excess” (D 258). The kind of love that occurs between Pearce and Rehana happened, as is evident from family memory and the narrator’s own ancestry, but is entirely absent from the official and literary record. In the face of this, the author-narrator stops, indicating but not filling the gap.

In *By the Sea*, the indeterminacy which highlights complexity and subverts authority is played out not only thematically in Omar's words, but also in the nature of his narrative voice. Ato Quayson, in his essay on Freud and African literature, proposes a useful reading, in the case of Gurnah's work as well as Collen's, of the relationship between historical silences, fiction and the uncanny—a concept which has, appropriately, recurred in this thesis. He suggests that some postcolonial literature, particularly by authors who, like Gurnah, can be considered “ex-centric,” is characterized by two Freudian concepts, trauma and the uncanny, because of the ways in which uncanny tropes are used to mark the traumatic silences in the text. Although Quayson does not include them, Gurnah's novels could be considered examples, alongside works like Marechera's *House of Hunger*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*, of writing that “makes links between personal identity, violence, language and nationhood in highly complex ways” (Quayson 193). This is achieved by skirting the unutterable, while nevertheless indicating its presence by means of a certain narrative instability—indicating “an unutterable traumatic occurrence, an occurrence that, though having a clear referential locus in time, cannot be named except through symbolic digressiveness” (Quayson 197).

The crumbling of language in the face of the unutterable appears at several points in *By the Sea*, providing examples of what Quayson calls the “symbolization compulsion,” a derivation of Freud's “repetition compulsion” that is the hysterical order-making response to the chaotic, traumatic or inassimilable (Quayson 197). The first note occurs in a strange passage describing Omar's entry into England and his interrogation at the airport. The customs official, Kevin Edelman, under the impression that Omar cannot understand English, vents his unwillingness to accept

“you people” into “our” country: “You don’t belong here, you don’t value any of the things we value, you haven’t paid for them through generations, and we don’t want you here.” Omar, in response, thinks,

That this too too solid flesh should melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew. It had been easy to match my breathing to his as he spoke, until the very end, because for most of the time his voice was calm and ordinary as if he was only reciting regulations. Edelman, was that a German name? Or a Jewish name? Or a made-up name? Into a dew, jew, juju. (BTS 12)

The reference to Hamlet here, the first of many in the book, is suggestive of Omar’s awareness of what Kevin wishes for him: suicide, non-existence, negation. It is followed by a sudden slippage of the language, disconcerting for a narrative voice which is otherwise quiet and meditative. A similar slippage occurs again later in the novel.

Perhaps the girls would have just disappeared from school, there one day gone the next, and everyone would have guessed they had been married. Married off, married by, done to. I try to imagine what that would have felt like. I imagine myself a woman, feeble with unuttered justification, unutterable. (BTS 36)

Again, one thing slips into another and then another. Both instances are suggestive of a moment of unutterability, of looking beyond the boundaries of language into the experience of things which cannot necessarily be contained within it—the feminine and death. This unanchored feeling is captured by Marlow’s watery description of the slipping away that occurs during his confrontation with radical feminine alterity in the figure of Jewel: “There came upon me, as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths” (LJ 227).

Like the author, both narrators of *By the Sea* are, as they alternately accuse each other, “men of words:” engaged, in their different ways, in a struggle with

language. Omar opens the novel with a description of the “vacuums” that surround language.

I marvel how the hours of darkness have come to be so precious to me, how night silences have turned out so full of mumbles and whispers when before they had been so terrifyingly still, so tense with the uncanny noiselessness that hovered above words. (BTS 1)

Throughout the novel Gurnah is concerned with the “mumbles and whispers,” the opportunity cost of speaking which necessarily excludes alternative possibilities, and the uncanny capacity of language to exceed and disrupt. In an article on the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Gurnah describes the author's “tendency to treat complexity as if it had manageable parts.”

Ngũgĩ's fiction relies on allegorical formations whose narratives are constructed into apparently self-evident paradigms. This is not inconsistent with the tendency of allegory to seem to be articulating a higher level of truth, separating out paradigmatic analogies from a tangle of minor and competing ones. These prime analogies, in other words, appear to utter a collective truth which transcends the disabling complexities of parochial realities. (Gurnah "Transformative Strategies" 142)

Kearney, in his article, “Abdulrazak Gurnah and the ‘Disabling Complexities of Parochial Realities’,” glosses the phrase to mean “the actualities of life in particular communities” (J. Kearney 48), and treats the “disabling” as intentionally ironic—a deep irony, perhaps, which forces the reader to consider the possibility that these complexities are truly disabling, for nationalist objectives as well as narrative coherence. Kearney suggests, rightly, that this phrase sums up Gurnah's literary ethic: parochially bound to a specific place within Africa, the Indian Ocean and the wider world, resistant to discursive tropes in favour of recalcitrant “realities,” and committed to complexity.

Conclusion

“I was not Afro-Caribbean, or any kind of Caribbean, not even anything to do with the Atlantic—strictly an Indian Ocean lad,” says the narrator-protagonist of Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Admiring Silence* (AS 10). In his fiction, Gurnah invokes an Indian Ocean world that is firmly anchored in Africa, both calling on and calling forth the particularity of the space—portraying the East African littoral, from Zanzibar to Mombasa, as an integral part of, and deeply constituted by its links with, this interregional arena. The coastline he describes lies beside “a warm green ocean a long way from here,” filled with the “travel-stained scent of other places.” Navigating the constant shifting between blank and black—the tension between negating and limiting—Gurnah, alongside writers like Naipaul and Vassanji, writes a populated and connected Indian Ocean Africa.

Like Ghosh, Gurnah represents societies impacted by networks of travel and migration. However, while Ghosh highlights syncretism and the transformative power of travel, Gurnah focuses on localized Islamic networks and instances of cosmopolitan failure—although he includes exceptional moments of relation. Both authors are animated by an urgent sense of historical gaps and absences—of subaltern experience, of Indian Ocean accommodations, and of the role of the east African coast and its people. Ghosh’s writing works to fill in those gaps, engaging in acts of historical recuperation that piece together a fragmentary history. Gurnah’s work largely avoids piecing things together, instead gesturing towards the gaps between different accounts and the inevitable silences that remain. This forms part of a literary ethic that embraces complexity, attempting to represent both the multitudinous world as well as more complex ways of knowing it.

Like Collen, Gurnah describes the oppression and desertion of women in Indian Ocean space, noting that the costs of travel are largely borne by the women

who stay behind. However, while Collen depicts women as workers, activists and Conradian wanderers, Gurnah stops short of giving voice to or, for the most part, imagining women as mobile. In addition, while Gurnah highlights the dark sides of cosmopolitanism, he nevertheless retains an emphasis on diasporic diversity in a manner substantively similar to Ghosh and Vassanji. His work engages very little with the Tanzanian nation or with representing proto-national anti-colonial resistance. Collen, in contrast, focuses on the nation of Mauritius, writing the nation as itself diverse, including the possibility of political resistance and dissent.

Out of the three modern writers considered in this thesis, Gurnah's is the most recognizably Conradian in form. His writing is characterized by framed and hesitating narrators, which perform the shifting perspectives of a well-travelled space, demonstrating from a variety of angles the problem of perspective for my thesis as a whole. His work is peppered with intransigent silences which can only be uttered and not filled—representing not only historical gaps but the inadequacies of language itself. Gurnah, like Conrad, is concerned with the inner workings of the encounter with otherness, and both explore the psychic costs and disturbances that result from a diverse space. However, while Conrad represents only the view of the outsider, the traveller, Gurnah depicts that experience from the perspective of both the travellers and the locals, those who have travellers forced upon them. This “more involved vision” allows Gurnah's writing to both represent and perform the “disabling complexities of parochial realities.”

In the letter at the end of *Memory of Departure*, the narrator links the act of writing with the fluidity of the ocean. He writes,

I don't know how much of what I'm saying is making sense to you.
I'm not even sure that I want to tell you all this yet. It's here now and

I'm not going to change it. Perhaps it's something to do with the sea. It is so indescribably desolate and hostile. When the sea is rough, our little craft bobs on billions of cubic miles of creation as if it were not even a fragment of existence. At other times the sea is so calm, so beautifully bright and glistening, so solid-seeming, and treacherous. (MD 159)

The difficult act of writing, its permanence—"it's here now"—and uncertain fluidity—"I don't know if what I'm saying is making sense to you"—has "something to do" with the changing and ambivalent nature of the sea. The sea is indescribable and overwhelming, but it is also beautiful, setting up an antithesis that finally narrows down to the "solid-seeming" of the final line. The indeterminacy and ambivalence between "solid" and "seeming" is suggestive of the role which the representational space of the Indian Ocean plays in Gurnah's writing, serving to complicate and nuance representations of identity, race, power, home and history. His novels stage the problems of perspective through narrative position, of authority through dialogue, and of history through gaps and silences—produced by, and producing, an African Indian Ocean space.

Chapter 4

“Like an emerald, Mauritius was ahead!” Lindsey Collen

“Must I still seek the last happiness on blessed isles and far away between forgotten seas? But all is the same, nothing is worthwhile, no seeking avails, nor are there any blessed isles anymore.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Introduction

To begin this final chapter, I return to Conrad’s “A Smile of Fortune,” the story which he describes in the preface to the collection *Twixt Land and Sea* as “the most Indian Ocean [story] of the three,” and which sets up Lindsey Collen’s writing of Indian Ocean island space. In the first paragraph, the narrator describes his sighting of the island he calls “The Pearl,” based in part on the author’s visit to Mauritius in 1888 (Sherry 34).

Ever since the sun rose I had been looking ahead. The ship glided gently in smooth water. After a sixty days’ passage I was anxious to make my landfall, a fertile and beautiful island of the tropics. [...] Very soon I became entranced by this blue, pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against the light of the sky, a mere emanation, the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar. It is a rare phenomenon, such a sight of the Pearl at sixty miles off. And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what would meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dreamlike vision so very few seamen had been privileged to behold. (TLS 3)

The Captain here evokes the now familiar Conradian Indian Ocean—calm, blue, gentle, but with an underlying hint of menace. In its midst lies an island that becomes part of that characterization, described in terms of fertility, beauty and wealth as well as an ominous unreality. Sixty days from anywhere, the isolated island is a rarity that rises like a ghostly planetary body, so exceptional as to be otherworldly. Viewed from the deck of an ocean-going ship, the vision of the island is a privilege that may end up becoming a curse.

The Mauritian author Lindsey Collen, in a fantastical passage of her novel *The Rape of Sita*, published nearly a century later in 1994, describes a different journey to and arrival at the same island. The narrator describes the protagonist Sita's leap off a worksite in Paris and her magical flight home.

And so it was that she set off, concentrating with all her might, up over the Alps, down past the foot of Italy, over the Mediterranean pool, across the corner of Egypt and Ethiopia and off Africa, and over the Indian Ocean. She saw the Carlsberg Ridge, which rose like a mountain range under the sea off to her left, as she followed the edge of the Somalia Basin. She flew over the Seychelles Islands. Way over to her left, she saw in the far distance the Mauritian islands of the Chagos Archipelago. Amongst them the horse-shaped Diego Garcia and then Salamon and Peros Banos and she flew over more of the Mauritian islands, over Agalega, Tromelin, and the Cargados Carajos Islands; Rodrig, the second biggest Mauritian island, in the meantime was over to her left. Past the vast fishing banks, the ships had let their boats down, like mother whales with their young, to go out fishing around them, and she flew on towards that part of Mauritius commonly called Mauritius. The main island.

Like an emerald, Mauritius was ahead. (RS 50)

While Conrad describes the island as isolated and exceptional, Collen depicts it within a fully populated geography. She draws in the broad sweep of the Indian Ocean—its vastness compared to the Mediterranean “pool”—the jumping-off point of Africa, the varied submarine topography, and the diversity of spread-out islands that make up greater Mauritius. Collen embraces political and economic realities in her description—the controversial inclusion of the Chagos islands and the presence of commercial fishing. Her focalizer is a travelling woman, while the female protagonist in Conrad's story is inert, trapped in a garden and largely confined to a single wicker chair. While Conrad focuses on the vast blue sea, Collen picks out all the interrelated green earth. Both passages refer to the island as a precious stone, but while Conrad invokes the rounded, pale, innocuous pearl, Collen suggests a jagged, multi-faceted emerald.

Lindsey Collen was born in South Africa in 1948, in Umtata in the Transkei, and was a student and anti-apartheid activist at the University of the Witwatersrand. She lived briefly in the Seychelles, New York, London and Mozambique, and then moved permanently to Mauritius in 1974, at the age of twenty-six (Collen "Interview"). All of her novels are set in Mauritius, and she is one of the founding members of the Mauritian socialist political party, Lalit, alongside her husband, Ram Seegobin. Her first novel, *There is a Tide*, was published in 1990, and since then she has published *The Rape of Sita* (1993), *Misyon Garson* (1996, reworked in English as *Boy*, 2005), *Getting Rid of It* (1997) and *Mutiny* (2001). Her latest novel, *The Malaria Man and Her Neighbours*, was published in 2010. Collen is one of the few English language authors from the island, which is famously multilingual. Most Mauritian literature is written in French or, more rarely French-based Mauritian Creole (Kreol Morisien), and Collen is considered to be “the nearest to an exception to this general rule” (Hawkins *The Other Hybrid Archipelago* 110). However, she wrote her third novel in Creole, acted as co-compiler of the first dictionary of Creole, and translated Creole folk and children’s stories into English (Van Driel 2). This, as well as her highly active participation in left-wing political life on the island, speaks of a conscious grounding in her adopted country, a process of active self-creolization.¹

Perhaps as a result, Collen’s work describes a Mauritius that is socially complex, politically transitional and oceanically connected. This representation resists a discourse that, as Edmond and Smith describe in their comprehensive *Islands in History and Representation*, regards islands “merely as metonyms of imperialism,

¹ For a description of Collen as a “typical example of a postcolonial writer” given her in-between position, as well as an overview of literature in other languages from the Indian Ocean islands, see Peter Hawkins, “‘Until When Shall We Remain Postcolonial?’ Globalisation, Nationalism and Cultural Self-Determination in the Literatures of the Indian Ocean,” *e-France: An On-line Journal of French Studies* 2 (2008).

rather than as specific locations generating their own potentially self-reflective [...] metaphors” (Edmond and Smith 6). The danger of this discourse is that it relegates islanders to a primitive imaginary space outside the place and time of modernity—denying a very real involvement in global networks and erasing maritime islanders’ history. In addition, it fosters anti-regionalism and hinders cooperation amongst island nations. Rather than something like Conrad’s (likely ironic) description of a generic island, this chapter will focus on those ways in which Mauritius is written by Collen as the embodiment of local particularities. Collen, I argue, writes a more local, particular and banal island space by situating Mauritius within the Indian Ocean world and regional networks. In addition, by assuming the perspective of the island, Indian Ocean spatiality is, in this chapter, grounded in on-going regional networks of travel, exploitation and activism.

In the paragraph quoted above, Sita’s flight maps a Mauritius that is at the centre of the geographic Indian Ocean, connected geologically to Africa and forming an organic unity with the other islands in the region. Her work participates, on a more detailed level, in producing the “sensorium” of Indian Ocean landscape and culture, in particular its diverse food and clothing (Samuelson "Fictions of the Swahili Coast" 504). Gurnah, in his most recent novel, *The Last Gift*, describes the similarities between Zanzibar, and the East coast of Africa, on the one hand, and Port Louis, Mauritius, on the other: “I got carried away with the sights [in Port Louis]. They reminded me of home. Many places reminded me of home, the look of the houses, the fruit in the market, a crowd outside a mosque. I could not stop seeing the similarities” (LG 259). Collen herself writes that, “the space makes sense in my head, the space around the Indian Ocean. And I feel something ephemerally and vaguely ‘in common’ in the Ports that I’ve visited that give on to it” (Collen "Interview" 3). In addition,

some of the central themes of Collen's work are enabled by Indian Ocean imaginaries—the dangerous and empowering travel of women, the underworld and criminal networks which create cross-oceanic links, the ongoing process of decolonization and the related networks of political resistance in the region, as will be explored in the third section.

However, it is also in considering Collen's work that it is possible to address the fraught question of the relationship of the Indian Ocean to that of the nation—and this will form a particular focus in this chapter, which till now has highlighted the transnational and cosmopolitan qualities of Indian Ocean representations. Frequently invoked as an antidote or alternative to nationalism, a focus on the Indian Ocean tends to tie in with an ethic of transnationalism or even post-nationalism. However, Collen's work is characterized by both a political and aesthetic commitment to the Mauritian nation, alongside a regional oceanic identity. In this reading I am following the work of Elleke Boehmer and Clare Anderson, whose "cross-national" methodology allows for a dual focus on both nations and crossings (Anderson "Marginal Centres" 342). As Boehmer describes,

I will prefer the term *cross-national* and *cross-nationalist* over transnational and its variants, because of the emphasis throughout on formations of national selfhood *alongside* intersubjectivity, and on exchanges (*crossings*) between different political and cultural contexts. [This] holds in tension the idea of separate locations maintaining a political integrity, *and yet* these in some form of relationship with one another. (Boehmer *Empire* 9)

Collen's writing is critically committed to the nation of Mauritius, while at the same time pointing to moments and methods of international relationship. As such, her novels act to reflect or effect cross-national movement (Boehmer *Empire* 4).

Paradoxically, Collen's commitment to the Mauritian nation is marked by her vocal criticism and oppositional political engagement. The political nature of her work sets it apart from the other authors considered here; although Ghosh's work is certainly ideologically driven, Collen's work is explicitly so. Her work rose to international literary fame in 1993 with the publication of her second novel, *The Rape of Sita*, which was banned by the Mauritian government hours after its publication. The novel generated a furore in Mauritius that mirrored, in miniature, that which followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 (Malik). The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Anerood Jugnauth, in a speech banning the book on the grounds of blasphemy, linked the novel to the already-banned *Satanic Verses*, and called for Collen's arrest (Collen "The Rape of Fiction"). Collen was attacked in marginal newspapers, a police investigation was opened, and the novels were to be confiscated from the bookshops in which they were displayed (S. Thomas). Particularly troubling, the author received rape and death threats from what she calls "fundamentalist" Hindu groups (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 3). Despite the controversy, and perhaps partly as a result of it, the novel went on to win the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Novel in Africa.

This paradoxical feedback relationship between political content and literary merit is indicative of much of the reception and criticism of Collen's work. While the publication history of *The Rape of Sita* initially dominated criticism—which focuses on censorship issues, religious communalism, and the "literary life"—several critics have, increasingly, paid close attention to the literariness of the work (Williams-Wanquet 200). Felicity Hand's comprehensive full-length treatment of Collen's work, published in 2011, deals sensitively with this tension, as is indicated by the title of the book, *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen*

(1948-), *Mauritian Social Activist and Writer*. Hand's reading attempts to do justice to both sides, by showing how Collen's work "reflects a common political purpose [that is] expressed through a highly poetical language and self-reflexive narrative techniques" (Hand 2). As she argues, Collen's work should be read for both its "creative energy and earnest political commitment to work towards a fairer, more humane society" (Hand 165).

Collen supports the conception of a dual project, claiming that, "I don't easily draw the distinction between the two—the political and the writing self" (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 11). However, she provides a helpful distinction, insisting that her work does not have a political "message," but a political "meaning" (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 12). She explains that, "partly, I write things too difficult to express in any other way—politically, or even to share them with someone else" (Collen "Interview"). For instance, her description of *The Rape of Sita* insists on both its political motivation and its literary method.

I was throughout the writing of the novel haunted by something like the silence of the irreducibility of the sex war at the point of rape. I don't know if that sentence makes sense, or more particularly, if it conveys what I feel—that's why I have to tell stories. [...] And that I can't quite express in any other way except through the story. (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 9)

This chapter, while acknowledging the less literary nature of Collen's work, yet attempts to demonstrate that around—and sometimes in spite of—its political messages, Collen's work develops a complex set of images with which to describe "difficult things."

The first section of this chapter describes, through a reading of the novel *Boy*, Collen's mapping of Mauritius both internally and externally, as a site of national diversity as well as international crossings. In the novel she focuses on Krish's

wandering around the island, which produces a geographic and social vision of island space. In addition, Krish's discovery of connecting links with other spaces emerges through encounters with sailors, lorry-drivers, activists, and the cross-oceanic drug trade. Collen's writing resists both the discourse of the isolated island, by situating Mauritius within the Indian Ocean region, as well as the propagandist image of the "Mauritian miracle," highlighting the "islands within islands" that divide Mauritian society. The second section expands on the troubling of Mauritian diversity by demonstrating the ways in which Collen's work depicts a nation haunted by histories of forced migration. Her novels depict Mauritian landscape and collective memory in ways that suggest a recurrence of the original voyages that brought many of the population to the island. In particular, she focuses on the traumatic nature of both slavery and indenture, suggesting ways of cutting across communal divisions. This section will serve also as an introduction to Khal Toorabully and Marina Carter's theories of coolitude, as an example of an Indian Ocean theory that is partially useful for reading Collen's work. The final, longer section is concerned with the implications for gender of an Indian Ocean viewpoint, employing Collen's explicitly feminist work as a lens. This section considers the intertextual relationship between *The Rape of Sita* and the *Ramayana*, a myth of ocean-crossing that itself crosses oceans. Collen's rewriting of the myth, and in particular her performance of its orality, is linked to her use of performance to explore women's emancipation under oppressive conditions. Focusing in particular on cyclone imagery, dance and clothing in *Mutiny*, this section will explore the limitations and possibilities of "dancing revolutions".

"Sugar paradise island indeed:" Mapping the island nation

In *The Rape of Sita*, the narrator Iqbal suggests to the reader that, "now that the [Mauritian left political] organization was being born it would be necessary to

start developing more systematic links in the Indian Ocean” (RS 57). The “more systematic links in the Indian Ocean” that Iqbal refers to are indicative of a particularly Collenesque Indian Ocean network. The protests that bookend the events of the novel, and the networks of solidarity that support them, are cross-national phenomena. Collen’s novels are written within a distinctively Mauritian, *national* context, which is simultaneously situated among the nations of a geopolitical Indian Ocean. This cross-national outlook resists both the potentially pernicious discourses of islandness—isolation and exceptionality—and the cosmopolitan multicultural discourse of the “Mauritian Miracle.” Nevertheless, the networks do not necessarily take the form of the orderly and visible trade and travel that characterizes the “age of accommodation” that Ghosh describes. Collen instead portrays an Indian Ocean underworld: a web of Indian Ocean and global interconnection that is largely invisible, concentrating on the drug trade between India, Mauritius and Africa.

In the novel *Boy*, published first in Creole and translated into English by Collen herself, Collen describes a series of journeys made around the island of Mauritius by the young protagonist Krish, the boy of the title. Like Gurnah’s *Paradise*, in which another young boy travels and matures, these journeys are filled with both danger and enlightenment. Krish at one point discovers a murder victim and is jailed as a suspect, but also meets a series of unusual individuals who introduce him to new places and ideas. The two novels, however, have very different endings. In *Paradise*, Yusuf reaches maturity when he runs away to join the German army, but it is unclear whether this is an act of cruel abandonment, or a necessary escape. At the end of *Boy*, the young man begins to see his place in the wider nation and becomes an active and critical citizen. His newfound awareness is achieved through the itineraries

of his travels around the island, so that literary mapping is crucial to the *bildung* of the plot.

The starting point for these journeys is a sense of entrapment, isolation and futility. Krish lives in the claustrophobic environment of his parents' home, ferried to school and back in his father's taxi. His parents have been overprotective of Krish ever since the death of his older brother, and as a consequence he has experienced little else of the town and island. He is, in his adolescent words, "lonely, as a fucking cloud" (B 4). When he finishes school, failing his final examinations, his mother asks him to fetch a small packet of marijuana from his uncle in the countryside so that she can make *bhang* for the Mauritian Hindu festival of Granbasin—a geographically translated festival, where "men go [...] to fetch holy water from the Ganges. Well not exactly the Ganges, but better. From a deep and mysterious lake. *Gran Basin*" (B 22). Afterwards, due partly to the headiness of travel alongside a slowly growing sense of independence, Krish avoids going straight home and instead begins his wanderings around the island.

On the first day of his unplanned travels, Krish is taken by two new friends to the beach, where his sense of isolation expands from the personal to the geographic.

Here I am sitting on the golden-silver sand of the beach, casuarina trees murmuring behind me, the reef rumbling to comfort me in the distance, a lagoon turning from turquoise to orange as I look out at what promises to be a magnificent sunset, asking myself how far I am seeing when I look out to sea. Five miles? And then where is the nearest anything other than sea? Is it Madagascar? A thousand miles away. More. [...] Or, if I look down to my left, would I, if I went straight, get to the South Pole? (B 71)

The sense of isolation generated by an all-encompassing sea gives the boy a feeling of emancipation: "A word comes into my head now, from the thought of that distance.

Free. Breathe free air." However, the surrounding ocean has a double significance,

both barrier and medium, protection and danger (Ravi 10). Directly after finding freedom in limitlessness, Boy, describing the dangerous coastal livelihood of the fishermen with whom he has been talking on the beach, suddenly becomes aware of boundedness—the danger of the ocean, the loneliness that accompanies isolation. Sitting on a fishing boat, he remarks: “I feel each one’s aloneness in the sea. Alone as I am in the world.”

Krish is keying in, here, to a well-established discourse of islandness. This is the “paradox of the island—its simultaneous boundedness and limitlessness” (Edmond and Smith 5). Islands form a powerful locus of imperial themes of possession and displacement, which can still be discerned in neo-colonial rhetoric and exoticizing tourism brochures, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey outlines in her *Roots and Routes*. She describes how, “in the grammar of empire, *remoteness* and *isolation* function as synonyms for island space and were considered vital to successful colonization” (DeLoughrey *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* 8). Mauritius provides an even more than usually overwhelming subjective experience of isolation, despite an abstract awareness of connection. The feeling is described by the historian Megan Vaughan, from the point of view of Mauritius:

This is not an island from which one can see another island, let alone a mainland of any description. It does not sit in the shadow of any large continent. [...] One can feel a little stranded, seasick, despite the fact that the island is now linked, instantly, by millions of threads of communication, to all parts of the world. (Vaughan 1)

Remote isolation denotes defensibility, manageability and control over slave populations, as well as outsider status and exotic difference. Islands were claimed and fought over as refreshment stations, with strategic mid-oceanic positions and long coastlines providing ample anchorage, while at the same time imagined as places of

exile and quarantine. They took pride of place in the colonial imagination, partly because, as Edmond and Smith note, “islands, unlike continents, look like property” (Edmond and Smith 1). This discourse provided the justification for colonization over many centuries; more disturbingly, it is still invoked to provide the justification for continuing colonial, military and tourist occupation.²

The example which forms the node around which Collen interrogates these questions of isolation and exploitation is the history of the Chagos islands. The Chagos struggle is very literally contemporary, and therefore draws the temporal boundaries of colonialism forward to the present in her writing and activism. Lalit, Collen’s left-wing political party in Mauritius, published an open letter to Greenpeace in June 2010 requesting that they withdraw their support for the creation of a conservation area in the Chagos Archipelago, describing it as “a very weak, grotesquely transparent ruse designed to perpetuate the banning of the people of Mauritius and Chagos from part of their own country” (Seegobin). This refers to Britain’s forced removal, in the 1970s, of some two thousand Chagossians from the islands, to make way for a United States nuclear military base (Philip). Renamed the British Indian Ocean Territory, the Chagos islands are, as a result, under continued colonial rule and a source of substantial revenue to the British government. Crucially, both the initial instalment of the military base and the plans for the conservation area

² As DeLoughrey goes on, “This is not merely an issue of erasing the past; it can be traced to current imperial expansion. For instance, the U.S. military was able to carry on its 1946 nuclear testing in Bikini (Micronesia) based on the island’s supposed remoteness and insignificant population [...] In fact, the Bikini Atoll was not remote enough to prevent the neighboring Rongelap Islanders from suffering the deadly effects of nuclear contamination carried by the wind.” Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007) 17.

relied on the rhetorical insistence that these islands were both remote and uninhabited.³

In her work, Collen demonstrates the slipperiness of the island paradox not only in the experience of a young boy but in the hands of the powerful—open for European military settlement, but closed to indigenous return. As Leila asks in *Mutiny*, “What does it mean, *the Islands were closed*? Where were the Islands when they were open, if that’s the expression?” (M 258). The narrator later shows that the Chagos islands are very much connected with the Indian Ocean world, describing how the island of Diego Garcia is used as a base from which to send bombs to enemies around the Indian Ocean rim—“as bombs are lifted off from there to bomb Serbia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq” (M 268). Stephanie Jones expands on Collen’s description, noting that more air attacks were launched during Desert Storm and the War on Terror from the US military base Camp Justice on the British territory island of Diego Garcia than from anywhere else (S. Jones “Colonial to Postcolonial Ethics” 216).⁴

In addition, as Gillian Beer suggests, “within islands are also islands—boundaries that may not be crossed, dangerous frontiers” (Beer 33). In *Boy*, the isolation of the island in the vast sea maps onto his own individualist isolation from the politically and geographically hidden realities of island life.

And I feel quite faint as I realize that behind every cane field, so invisible to me as I lie asleep in my mother’s house, as I go about in my father’s taxi, all over the whole country, in the mornings, even as in

³ Also see Shenaz Patel’s 2005 novel *Le Silence des Chagos* as described in Véronique Bragard, “Murmuring Vessels: Relocating Chagossian Memory and Testimony in Shenaz Patel’s *Le Silence Des Chagos*,” *e-France: An Online Journal of French Studies* 2 (2008).

⁴ Jones also describes a documentary which depicts how US military personnel wear T-shirts that proclaim, “Camp Justice, Paradise Island,” exemplifying the link between power, isolation and paradise. The discourse of isolation, mobilized by imperial interests, is violently belied by them.

the day, and this has gone on for two hundred years, there are workers, going to work like this, and I don't know it. Me sleeping away. I, a colonizer of my own land. I am giddy at my own ignorance, my own internal emptiness. And to imagine that the distribution of leaflets, like this one, is going on right now all over the country. (B 153)

Boy is geographically separated from those who are different to him, especially from the poor who inhabit his island, and characterizes himself as a “colonizer” as a result. These dangerous frontiers are described by Boy in the passage above—from the inner room in his mother's house, to the streets in his father's taxi, to the cane fields that surround the city, and behind even those—just as the sea isolates him from the wider world.

However, the above description of isolation is couched in the past tense of epiphany, which is indicative of Collen's rigorous resistance to isolationist island thought. The novel's project is partly to show that, so to speak, no man nor island is truly an island. All of Boy's journeying suggests circular wandering, going out and coming back, finding himself strangely returned to the same place, forgetting an important item and going back to the spot where he lost it. While these travels may be circular, however, they are not merely repetitive—like Collen's retellings in *The Rape of Sita*, as will be discussed in the final section, they suggest transgression rather than entrapment. This spirit of creative possibility is evoked at the start of the journeying, which begins in a kind of play that leads to direction.

[Captain] starts going round the roundabout in the limousine. He has settled his steering wheel on perpetual circles. Round and round we go. He loves it. Kid loves it too. I never did anything like this in my father's taxi, I can tell you...making a merry-go-round of a roundabout. (B 64-65)

Boy's journeys eventually return him to the home he left, but with a new awareness of his place there and sense of purpose: he makes a nation out of the island.

Indeed, as Felicity Hand demonstrates, Krish's journeys map out the geography of Mauritius, covering nearly all the major locations, natural features and social groups of the island. As she writes, "Krish's self-discovery runs alongside and in dialogue with his discovery of Mauritius" (Hand 147). She points out that the narrative attention to topography, flora, fauna, history and social diversity of the island could seem parochial, but instead place Krish in a precise social and geographic milieu. While Hand notes that the local embedding goes hand in hand with Collen's universal values, I would like to add that Collen is also concerned to map Mauritius as integrally connected with a wider Indian Ocean region. Krish's discovery of internal connectedness is coincident with his discovery of external connectedness; his developing maturity is inextricably linked to the discovery of these overlapping networks.

The culmination of the novel is Krish's decision to become an active national citizen, participating in a protest about the death sentence. That he chooses this particular issue is significant, because the person first in line to be executed is a girl he read about in the newspaper at the start of the novel—although at that time with a sense of hopelessness and frustration. She is a very young girl from India, who has been arrested on charges of drug trafficking.

And suddenly I see her again, the girl from India. She must have made some mistake that made them stab that suitcase bottom. The god of little mistakes deserted her. And they busted her. (B 47)

The girl represents the on-going, if illegal, links between India and the islands, which are linked to the internal networks of drug trafficking. As was described earlier, much of the action in the novel results from the illegal transporting of a small parcel of marijuana. Boy is sent by his mother to retrieve this package from his uncle, who is involved in what is called "interline cropping"—the practice of planting marijuana

between lines of the legal crop ginger. The Mauritian Hindu ritual, derived from an earlier migration, has contemporary regional implications: “Reflected in that lake, I see the granular photograph of the girl from India. In its waters. She too, sent on an errand” (B 22).

Similarly, Collen describes the interaction between regional and local networks of trade, symbolized by South East Asian sailors and the ways in which they intersect with Mauritian lorry drivers.

A group of four or five Taiwanese and South Korean sailors waddle-walk right under the bus window. Their feet mourning the roll of the sea. [...] Two of them no more than my age. That’s for sure. So far away from home?

While rowdy young lorry helpers from the lorry stand sit under the other big bannwar tree, minding other people’s business, spreading rumours, and preparing to go distribute new slang words around the country together with the merchandise they deliver. That’s what my teacher said. It’s them that carry *language* around. How would we all speak the same without them, he asked the class?

I am still left speechless by this question. (B 33)

The sailors and truck drivers are agents of inter- and intra-distribution respectively, demonstrating the links both within the nation and with the wider region. The reference to language is also crucial—the same language that they all speak is Mauritian Creole, the language produced by mixing, trade and travel, and the original language of the novel.

The above passage therefore also points to the fact that the interregional connectedness of the Mauritian nation, through time as well as space, is a key factor in determining one of its most salient features—its linguistic and ethnic diversity. As Srilata Ravi points out, the majority of recent academic and popular writing on Mauritius celebrates its unique success at creating a unified yet heterogenous nation out of mixed and violent origins. This is described, both in popular and academic

discourse as the “Mauritian miracle.”⁵ The term refers not only to economic growth but also its highly diverse society that has not disintegrated into full-blown conflict, unlike Gurnah’s Zanzibar, which becomes a scene of mutual reprisals, violence and corruption after independence: “In reality, we were nowhere near we, but in our separate yards, locked in our historical ghettos, self-forgiving and seething with intolerances, with racisms, and with resentments. And politics brought all that into the open” (AS 67). This is part of a wider popular and political discourse that brings together that apparently paradoxical ideas of nation—bounded, singular—and cosmopolitanism—boundary-crossing, multiple. Mauritius is relatively unique in this context, conceiving of itself as *nationally* cosmopolitan—an harmonious rainbow nation, “reflecting its many colours in the ocean” (Vaughan 2).

Françoise Lionnet, is representative of these views when she suggests the special status of Mauritius as a successfully multicultural nation.

As an Indian Ocean island, Mauritius is open to influence from East and West, North and South. It is a true site of *métissage* and creolization, and since its independence in 1968, it has managed to safeguard a measure of freedom for all its citizens without falling prey to authoritarian rulers. (Lionnet *Autobiographical Voices* 6)

The majority of Collen’s novels centre on three main characters each of whom is linked with one of three major demographic groups of Mauritius—Hindu, Muslim and African (creole, Christian). This is part of an idealizing strand in Collen’s work, similar to Ghosh’s, which participates in writing Mauritius as a model of *métissage*, in which different racial, ethnic and religious groups harmoniously coexist. The familiar

⁵ For some examples, see the following: A Subramanian and D Roy, *Who Can Explain the Mauritian Miracle: Meade, Romer, Sachs, or Rodrik?* (London: International Monetary Fund, 2001). D Brautigam, "The 'Mauritius Miracle': Democracy, Institutions and Economic Policy," *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa* (1999). A Darga, "Autonomous Economic and Social Development in Democracy: An Appreciation of the Mauritian'miracle'," *AFRICA DEVELOPMENT-SENEGAL*- 21 (1996). <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-03-15-00-mauritius-miracle-not-all-it-seems>

triplicate structure, as Felicity Hand argues, is a mechanism for ignoring communal boundaries in favour of class solidarity (Hand 35).

The references to the Mauritian miracle are apparent in Collen's work in contrast to Réunion. While Mauritius received independence in 1968, Réunion remains a *département d'outre-mer* (overseas département) of France, forming the outermost region of the European Union with nominally the same status as metropolitan France. Collen in her work undermines the terminological distinction by routinely referring to Réunion as "the colony." For Sita, Réunion is unfamiliar, bleak and disorienting. On a visit to the island, the sense of entrapment and confusion is described in the most familiar Conradian terms: "It was during this journey that she began to go mad. The journey was like a journey into madness. *Into the heart of*" (RS 104). More specifically, Réunion is "the heart of submission, the colony of colonies, known to submit there more than any colonized people anywhere, held up usually as an example of integration, assimilation, departmentalization, by the French rulers" (RS 20). Françoise Vergès remarks that, during the period of decolonization, French authorities flooded Réunion with warnings about the "abyss" that would follow from independence, pointing to African and other island examples of post-independence chaos.

The discourse was always slightly hysterical. We were warned that we were on the verge of the abyss, the abyss of independence and thus of abandonment by France. Representations of complete loss, privation and destruction transformed the aspiration for political autonomy into its reverse, a greater dependency on nefarious powers. [...] The campaign bred contempt among many Réunionnais for their neighbours with whom they share a comparable history, culture, and ancestry. (Vergès "Saint-Denis and Port Louis: An Ecology of Hybridities" 193)

In order to maintain control of the colony, France fostered a panicked fear of even the closest neighbour to the island. In addition to local anti-African prejudice, it is clear

that more general anti-regionalism in the area has been programmatically encouraged as a means of political coercion by European powers.

In contrast, Collen highlights the fluid, creative, mixed culture of the independent nation of Mauritius. Vergès, in an autobiographical reminiscence, captures the experiential qualities of cosmopolitan nationhood in Mauritius:

In Port Louis, theatres showed movies from Bollywood, restaurants offered Indian, Chinese, French and Creole food, stores sold goods from Asia, India and Europe, stalls in the streets offered food that we did not find in Réunion: dal purri, Indian bread. Shouts in Hindi, Tamil and Creole, uniforms inherited from the British for schoolchildren, women in saris, store after store of silk and shimmering fabrics, and the heavy smells of sewers, rotten garbage mixing with the sweet smells of mangoes, pineapples, litchis conspired to create the atmosphere of a city much more lively, more colourful than Saint Denis. (Vergès "Saint-Denis and Port Louis: An Ecology of Hybridities" 195)

As Vergès points out, the celebration of Mauritian *métissage*, the national embracing of cosmopolitan origins and culture, corresponds to a critique of the less successful version of multicultural nationalism evident in its "sister island," Réunion—less lively and colourful.⁶ Réunion's political project attempts to create "unity in spite of diversity," whereas Mauritius celebrates its national diversity (Lionnet "Créolité" 110).

Nevertheless, Mauritian writers, like the francophone author Anandi Devi as well as Collen, have been involved in a dismantling of the apparently successful and predominant multicultural image of Mauritius, portraying instead the deeply divided society in which social hierarchies produce suffering and oppression (Ravi 15). As the

⁶ Vergès writes suggestively that, in the sensual *métis* of Mauritius "a young Réunionnaise could entertain fantasies of being a character out of a Conrad novel," confirming the link between Conrad, cosmopolitanism and the Indian Ocean world that this thesis has argued. Françoise Vergès, "Saint-Denis and Port Louis: An Ecology of Hybridities," *L'Esprit Createur* 41.3 (2001): 195. Similarly, as Lionnet describes: "In Réunion, it is possible to identify one hegemonic or dominant symbolic system—metropolitan French culture....In Mauritius, by contrast, it is not that easy to determine which system—if any—is a dominant one: in different spheres of daily life, and for different ethnic groups, the dominant cultural mode shifts, and there is no allegiance to one colonial power." Françoise Lionnet, "Créolité in the Indian Ocean: Two Models of Cultural Diversity," *Yale French Studies*.82 (1993): 104.

historian Megan Vaughan suggests, “Mauritian society is in fact deeply anxious and divided, containing many different islands of exile and exclusion” (Vaughan 2). Cosmopolitanism exhibits itself at the level of national rhetoric, rather than as exceptional interpersonal tolerance. Despite the repeated celebrations of the Mauritian miracle, the society is, unsurprisingly, less of a model of *métissage* than it is made out to be. Collen’s novels expose and explore the contradictions within Mauritian discourse; however, for her the task is not to undermine the nation, but to hold it accountable to its own rhetoric of tolerance.

Mauritius, centrally located in the Indian Ocean, is also written as microcosmically representative. Peter Hawkins notes that contemporary Mauritian society is “a tiny microcosm in the global frame of reference, but in many ways representative of many apparently peripheral cultural settings marked by the postcolonial situation” (Hawkins “Until When Shall We Remain Postcolonial?” 10). Collen participates in this discourse, but also complicates it in a variety of ways. In her work, like in Ghosh’s, the cosmopolites of Mauritius and the Indian Ocean are not urbane travellers, but workers, activists and sailors. This generates a sense of a specifically *minor* transnationalism, or what Vergès calls a plebian cosmopolitanism (Lionnet and Shi; Vergès “Island of Wandering Souls”). She also draws attention to the fact that the ethnic, religious and cultural hodge-podge that constitutes Mauritian society is representative of the historical networks of migration that have traversed the Indian Ocean, and that have been at least partly characterized by violence and exploitation, as will be explored in the next section.

“Thinking slavethoughts again:” Haunting passages

Collen’s novels focus on representing the underclass and divisions within Mauritian society—such as gender violence and exploitation, communal exclusion,

poverty, neo-colonial economic practices, war, corruption and histories of slavery and indenture. This section will focus on one of those issues in relation to her work which serves to trouble Mauritian national rhetoric, both cosmopolitan and paradisiacal: the histories of slavery and indenture which haunt island spaces with routes of Indian Ocean forced migration. The celebration of the Indian Ocean as a space of travel has been shadowed throughout this thesis by the presence of histories of slavery and indenture, the kind of movement which underlies the mixed societies of the littoral and also belies its cosmopolitan connotations. These are largely untold stories, as Ghosh writes in an interview, partly discussed in the second chapter.

To me it's absolutely astonishing that across the entire nineteenth century, as millions and millions of Indians are being whisked off here and there around the world, you don't find a written trace of these movements, there's not a pen diary, nothing—no ordinary migrant who has explained themselves on paper or created any kind of trace. The African diaspora, by the late eighteenth century, is already producing slave narratives, testimonies, but we don't have that for any Asian diaspora. We don't have anything from the Chinese perspective, as far as I know, and we don't have anything from the Indian perspective. Fiction, then, allows us to reach for the trace. (Boehmer and Mondal 31)

Collen's fiction reaches for the trace of these histories, focusing on trauma and its aftermaths. Read partly in relation to Khal Toorabully's theories of "coolitude," her work also highlights the links between narratives of slavery and indenture.

In *Getting Rid of It*, Collen writes another tale of island wandering, this time involving three women, which exposes the underbelly of the Mauritian island paradise. The novel describes a friendship between three women, who have come together to solve the problem of how to dispose of a stillborn foetus without attracting

the attention of the anti-abortion authorities.⁷ In the novel, the three women, Jumila Goomann, Goldilox Soo and Sadna Joyna, have come together also as a result of losing their jobs, and therefore their homes. Each was working for a middle-class woman as a live-in cleaner, but all three of their bosses have committed suicide as a result of different kinds of patriarchal oppression. The narrator ensures that each of the stories of the individual women is recounted in turn, while they wander around the island, mapping in this case the outlines of the island city.

In the novel, Collen is concerned to remind readers that the roots of Mauritian diversity lie in the traumatic routes of slavery and indenture. As she writes, “collective memory lives on [...] to haunt everyone” (GR 53). Memories of slavery are described in Collen’s work as a kind of haunting, embedded in the language and landscape of the island.

[Jumila] went off with The Boy Who Won’t Speak for an outing, she said, maybe to the new docks to look at all the coloured containers, piled up like Lego, or to the old Garden to show him where slaves were hanged in public as a lesson long ago at the bottom of Plenn Vert and where no one sat on the benches till now. Blood marks the earth, she said. And off they went. (GR 38)

Gurnah’s work is similarly haunted by slavery, as is suggested by this description of an east African beach in *Memory of Departure*.⁸

The beach behind me was drying out in the sun, raising the stench of ages. In the old days, slaves who had refused conversion had gone to that beach to die. They had floated with the flotsam and dead leaves, weary of the fight, their black skins wrinkled with age, their hearts broken. My poor fathers and grandfathers, my poor mothers and grandmothers, chained to rings in a stone wall. (MD 18)

⁷ As a story of a recurring foetus, the novel shows links with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, as well as other novels, including Elleke Boehmer’s *Nile Baby*, which in their turn are also concerned with oceanic links. Elleke Boehmer, *Nile Baby: A Novel* (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, 2008).

⁸ For a discussion see Samuelson, “Abdulrazak Gurnah’s Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics,” 508.

In this writing, the beach, the iconic image of Mauritius as a tourist paradise, is a site of haunting rather than happiness. Françoise Vergès suggests that beaches, for the “wretched of the island,” are “sites of sorrow, not of leisure, sea, sex, and sun.”

The bones of their forebears were at the bottom of the ocean; the ocean had forever cut them off from the country of their ancestors; it could not be crossed because it was too rough. The beach was the territory on which slaves arrived at the island, a space on which to abandon freedom forever and encounter bondage. (Vergès "Island of Wandering Souls" 170)

Beyond the beach, the sea is haunted by slave and prison ships, current and historical— “Prison ships. Sentenced to the hulks. Hulks moored out of reach, out in the harbour of the city.”⁹ As the narrator in *Mutiny* says, employing an intimate bodily metaphor: “The dead don’t move on immediately. They get into the turmoil of our heads and the tangled roots of our hair” (M 59).

The trauma of memories of slavery, which underpin the diversity of the Mauritian Miracle, also have the effect of promoting discourses of island isolation which were discussed in the previous section. Acknowledging Indian Oceanness requires acknowledging a connection to Africa, which remains a troublesome signifier, as was discussed in the previous chapter. The disavowal by Indian Ocean populations of African connections may have psychological roots, as Adenjunmobi argues, originating in the collective trauma that associates Africa and memories of slavery. As she describes, “if memories of African ancestry have been repressed, the same cannot be said for awareness of a connection between African ancestry and slave status” (Adenjunmobi 1251).¹⁰ Edward Alpers confirms that in the hierarchical

⁹ In an article in *The Sunday Times*, March 6 2010, Catherine Philip writes that there are ongoing “allegations that Diego Garcia was used to moor US prison ships where “ghost” prisoners were tortured.” Catherine Philip, “Chagossians Fight for a Home in Paradise,” *The Sunday Times* 6 March 2010.

¹⁰ Adenjunmobi demonstrates that Indian Ocean island writers have continually disavowed regional identification precisely because it necessitates an acknowledgement of African connections. She

Madagascar, “slave status and African origin were essentially coterminous, and the stigma has persisted to the present” (Alpers "Recollecting Africa" 87).

Collen demonstrates the links between slavery, Africa and island regionality in a passage from her novel *Mutiny*. Describing her matriarchal lineage, one of the protagonists, a former Chagos islander, describes the distant African origins which influence her mother.

My mother came from Diego Garcia too, and her mother, my granny, and my granny's mother, my great grandmother. *Her* mother, in turn, had been taken there as a slave when she was only little and had brought Africa with her. My great grandmother could move into *her mother* afterwards, after her mother had died. She only did that when she went empty, she told me. *Into her mother* from Africa. But she wasn't often empty. Just at night, at full moon, when there was phosphorescence on the sea, then. *Then*, she said, she would move into her dead mother from Africa. Or her dead mother from Africa into her. It's not clear. (M 257)

Rather than being “brought from” Africa, she had “brought Africa with her.” The sea in this case is a haunting reminder of the traumatic event, and the connections with Africa can only be drawn in mystical, compulsive terms. In *Getting Rid of It*, Sadna Joyna describes the way in which slavery affects those many generations down the line.

There she goes thinking slavethoughts again. Strong young female ‘Mozambique’ no disease not yet produced offspring. Submit or kill yourself, Sadna, the slavethought comes again. Your two choices. Submit. Or, if not, suicide. *Mo zis enn ti malbar mwa*. I'm just a little coolie. *Little*, so *little* it's not worth your while hitting me. So submitted, you can't see me. *Malbar*, so you feel justified in insulting me, after all she calls herself it. *Malbar. Malbar. Malbar. Ti Malbar.*

describes how Malagasy, Réunionnais and Mauritian writers have throughout the twentieth century actively denied regional identification, despite the fact that this relegates them to the margins of such relatively marketable categories as African and Francophone literature. She writes that, “the foregrounding of descent from Indonesia, India, Arabia, and France in Zanzibar, Madagascar, the Seychelles, Comoros, Réunion, and Mauritius served a similar purpose in all cases, that is to define an identity that could not be confused with the popular identities associated with the East African coast in particular.” Malagasy writers assert their Indonesian identity, and writers from the Comores highlight Arab over African origins. Moradewun Adenjunmobi, "Claiming the Field: Africa and the Space of Indian Ocean Literature," *Callaloo* 32.4 (2009): 1251.

Healthy. *Lascarinn* pregnant possibly twins three hundred *pyas*. (GR 192)

The style of the paragraph is consistent with what Ato Quayson calls the “symbolization compulsion,” as was discussed in the previous chapter on Abdulrazak Gurnah. In this case, slavery is the traumatic event around which the text skips, shifts and repeats.

This distinguishes Collen’s work from Ghosh’s, which runs the risk at times of idealizing Indian Ocean forced migration. In *In An Antique Land*, the mysterious historical character Bomma is identified as Ben Yiju’s slave. However, the narrator suggests that “the terms under which Bomma entered BenYiju’s service were probably entirely different from those suggested by the word ‘slavery’ today: their arrangement was probably more that of patron and client than master and slave, as that relationship is now understood” (IAL 259). Gaurav Desai argues that Ghosh’s nostalgia sanitizes the experience of slavery, by highlighting, if only as a counterfactual, the best possible interpretation of the case. As he suggests, making a point more widely applicable to Indian Ocean studies, “while the cautionary note distinguishing transatlantic slavery from Arab forms is essential, it risks coming across as an apology” (Desai 138).

Collen, by contrast, not only blurs the distinction between Atlantic and Indian Ocean forms of slavery, but also between different kinds of Indian Ocean forced migration. In her work, the lasting “slavethoughts” are not the exclusive purview of African slavery—“young female ‘Mozambique’”—but include those of the immigrant, lascar and coolie—“just a little coolie,” “Malbar,” “Lascarinn.” In addition to narratives of slavery, narratives of indenture are a key aspect of Indian Ocean experience (one which also links Indian Ocean narratives to those of the

Caribbean). Conrad's character Wang, from the novel *Victory*, discussed at some length in the first chapter, is described as "not a common coolie," and his short story "Typhoon" centres around the transport and mistreatment of coolie labourers.¹¹ Vassanji's *The In-between World of Vikram Lall* maps the intersecting paths of free passengers and indentured labourers, and Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* traverses the first moments—recruitment and departure—of the coolie journey (Vassanji *The in-between World of Vikram Lall*). Collen's work describes a society that is formed out of the coolie experience, highlighting in particular the traumatic parallels with slavery, and therefore resisting the communal divisions that arise from their apparent differences.

One of the ways of reading Collen's writing of forced migration, in a localized frame, is through theories of coolitude. Developed by the Mauritian poet and theorist Khal Torabully in the early 1990s, coolitude aims to describe and theorize the experience of Indian indentured labour and the cultures that have developed from it. The term "coolitude" is related to its predecessor, *Négritude*, and both are involved in the project of attempting to recover a lost history, designated by the reclamation of a formerly derogatory word. Torabully insists that coolitude, however, is less vulnerable to accusations of essentialism than Césaire's *Négritude*.

Coolitude does not refer to one people or race or religion. It springs in fact, from a word (coolie/indentured), which at the beginning, designated an economic status, and has been broadened to encompass a human situation. Before resorting massively to coolies from India, there were experiments to bring coolies from China, Ethiopia, Brittany, from Africa. [...] The coolie symbolizes, in its broader definition, the possibility of building a composite identity to ease the pain and enrich culturally the lands in which h/she settled. (Carter and Torabully 144)

¹¹ Interestingly, in both cases, Conrad refers to indentured labourers from the far East rather than South Asia.

As Marina Carter explains in *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian labour Diaspora*, *Négritude*, as a recognition of black identity, “did not fully take into account the ethnic complexity of post abolition societies” (Carter and Torabully 3). While *créolité* and *indienocéanisme* attempted to bridge this gap, as movements they are or appear tied to the Caribbean and French-language writing respectively; coolitude, on the other hand, gives voice to the experience of Indian indenture as well as *métis* societies more generally, and has a special relevance for Mauritius as the only place where formerly indentured Indians are the dominant ethnic group.

Coolitude is difficult to characterize in an abstract way, but, related to its originary Indian Ocean contexts, insists always on complexity: ethnic, cultural, thematic. What defines a coolie text is a matter of content as well as form, as Toorabully argues.

A text about a coolie, a descendant of an indentured labourer, or related to this labour migration, can be considered part of this poetics. But this definition needs to be broadened because what is important is the approach of complexity. (Carter and Torabully 195)

An approach of complexity, Torabully suggests, is characterized by a baroque style, mixed language, and includes an emphasis on slipperiness of language itself. Central to coolitude is the consideration of the Voyage, as a space and moment of destruction and creation (Carter and Torabully 15). Focusing on the voyage rather than the mythical originary India allows for a concern with process rather than state, and avoids a fossilizing nostalgia for a fixed point of origin, in favour of the fluid ocean space (Bragard "Transoceanic Echoes" 230). Nevertheless, coolitude is not blindly celebratory about the multiplicity of crossings that it describes. In Khal Torabully's poetry there is an overweening concern with the violence inherent in the voyage, and the difficulty of expressing a history of violence.

Despite these clear convergences, however, Collen's work does not offer a perfect fit with coolitude. This is partly because she denies an active connection to the movement, and partly because coolitude's usefulness is inhibited by an overarching ambivalence between essentialism and overgenerality (Collen "Interview" 3). As Bragard describes, a central tenet of coolitude is that, "the nightmare transoceanic journey of Coolies, [is] both a historical migration and a metonymy of cultural encounters" (Carter and Torabully 15). This suggests that the discourse of coolitude aims to avoid both the denial of history that some theories of hybridity can be accused of, as well as the essentialism of an ethnically-oriented theory such as *Négritude*. Nevertheless, the discourse of coolitude wavers between a recuperation of a specific history and the signification of a generalized human hybridity. The generalism is described by Clare Anderson, who shows how, while the voyage across the *kala pani* is given special significance for coolitude, it is at the same time taken as a symbol for all migratory journeys, encapsulating universal human experience (Anderson "From Négritude to Coolitude").

Similarly, theorists of coolitude, including Carter and Torabully, essentialize the coolie experience, especially in comparison to slavery and Africanness. In an article written for the UNICEF Courier, Torabully outlines the difference between a slave and coolie experience. While the slaves were chained, the coolie had more freedom of movement, allowing them to watch the process of their exile; slaves relied on orally transmitted culture, while coolies brought with them the Ramayana, Qur'an and the Bhagavad Gita; the slaves' journey commences with what Glissant calls "the scream from the hold," while the coolies acknowledge the same moment with an "angry silence" (Torabully "The Coolies' Odyssey"). These differences define categories which mark out a distinct hierarchy, the relatively civilized Indian over the

pre-linguistic, savage African. More generally, despite protestations to the contrary, the term “coolitude” suggests a privileging of the Indian-originated inhabitants of Mauritius, especially over those of African origin.

In contrast, slavery and indenture are described in similar terms in Collen’s work. As she writes in an interview, “we are thus still slaves to the history of inequality—through feudalism, slavery, patriarchy, indenture, wage slavery” (Collen “Triplopia Interview” 10). She notes that her work is informed by Megan Vaughan, Marina Carter and in particular Vijaya Teelock’s work, on both slavery and indenture, as well as original sources from the Dutch East India Company held in the Mauritian archives (Collen “Interview” 1).¹² In addition, she highlights the traumatic nature of all kinds of forced migration. At the beginning of *The Rape of Sita*, the narrator Iqbal introduces himself as a friend of Sita’s, based on their shared ancestral journey of indenture.

I, by the way, am a friend of Sita’s. I grew up in the same village as her: Surinam. Her *dada*, paternal great-grandfather, that is to say, Mohun Jab’s grandfather, and my *gran nana*, great-grandfather on my mother’s side, were *dahajbay*, or boat brothers. That meant that our families were closer than blood relatives. The two old men had as young lads come over from Calcutta to Mauritius on the same coolie boat. They were survivors of the sea-trip. (RS 17)

The relationship between Sita and the narrator is described as closer than family, their great-grandfathers having been coolies who came across on the same boat. The originary sea-trip is placed here at the start of the novel, prefiguring further oceanic crossings later in the narrative which are similarly fraught with danger and possibility. The passage echoes one from Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, introduced in the second

¹² See Vijaya Teelock, “Breaking the Wall of Silence: Slavery in Mauritian Historiography,” *Radical History Review* 2005.91 (2005): 104-09.

chapter, in which the coolies employ the language of pilgrimage to offset that of caste, mentioned in the second chapter.

Not at all, the girl [Pugli] replied, in a tone of unalloyed certainty. On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings—*jahāzbhais* and *jahāzbahens*—to each other. There'll be no difference between us.

This answer was so daring, so ingenious, as fairly to rob the women of their breath. Not in a lifetime of thinking, Deeti knew, would she have stumbled upon an answer so complete, so satisfactory and so thrilling in its possibilities. (SP 328)

While Ghosh focuses here on the possibility of the voyage, however, Collen lays greater emphasis on its hardships. Iqbal continues his description by describing, in negative terms, the dangers and despair of the journey: “They hadn’t thrown themselves overboard. They hadn’t died of typhoid fever on the way over. Nothing had killed them. They didn’t die in the depot at Porlwi either” (RS 17).

Collen writes that *Getting Rid of It* was the novel that helped her to get over the traumatic repercussions of the censorship and violence that followed *The Rape of Sita* in 1993.¹³ At the beginning, the narrator interrupts the narrative flow to include this justification.

People aren’t used to foetuses being in stories anymore. They have been censored for so long now. Hidden in secretive gestures, not even amounting to whispers anymore.

They say things like foetuses haven’t got a place in stories. You never know what might happen if they get into stories.

What some people don’t seem to realize in all this is that there is the truth to take into account. And there are things that happen that have to be faced up to. Stories that have to be told. Like it or not. (GR 53)

¹³ “I was left afraid I would not be able to write again. That maybe I would vacillate between being too scared of censorship and being unnecessarily defiant. That words would become too difficult to choose. And my next novel *Getting Rid Of It* helped me get over that. For that alone, I love that novel.” Lindsey Collen, *Triplopia Interview*, 2005, www.lalitmauritius.com, 20 November 2012.

The narrator—or in this case more obviously the novelist—is helpless in the face of overwhelming truths, which “have to be told.”¹⁴ Collen focuses in her writing on “the history of inequality,” whether based on communal divisions, slavery or indenture. Cross-cutting all of these is the inequality of patriarchy, which acts as a further, and most basic, fault line in the Mauritian nation and the Indian Ocean. The following section will consider Collen’s literary explorations of patriarchal oppression alongside gendered emancipation, while also using her work as a lens through which to consider the gendered blindspots of an Indian Ocean viewpoint.

“Dancing revolutions:” Indian Ocean feminisms

Getting Rid of It is as much concerned with disposing of the foetus which drives the episodic plot, as it is with inscribing women’s experience in the face of male ignorance. The narrator describes the problem in so many words.

Men don’t know where all the miscarriages and abortions go. Let alone the spirits of the dead people. Some parts of real life are hidden behind a veil for men. A kind of purdah between their eyes and part of the world. (GR 67)

In Collen’s oeuvre, employing an appropriate metaphor for the Indian Ocean, it is men, and not women, who are in purdah. In this final section I will explore in greater detail the theme that has arisen at various points peripherally in this thesis—the gendered nature of the Indian Ocean, which is produced primarily around and by men who travel, often with dire consequences for the women they leave behind. In

¹⁴ As was discussed in the first section, the claim to truth suggests a problematic “speaking for” that glosses over the disjuncture between the educated, privileged life of the author-narrator and the poverty-stricken lives of the characters. As the narrator later claims, “I only write what’s in their heads. Their song” (GR 145). It is for passages such as this that Collen is criticized for an overt didacticism, an evangelical adherence to Marxist politics, and a utopian romanticization of resistance. However it can be argued that Collen’s active participation in political and working class life in Mauritius—she has worked as a community worker and potato harvester, as well as being involved in the women’s movement and Lalit—allows her a certain privileged access to local resistance politics. Lindsey Collen, “The Rape of Fiction,” *Index on Censorship* 23.4-5 (1992): 210-11. See Eileen Williams-Wanquet, “‘Anti-Novel’ as Ethics: Lindsey Collen’s *the Rape of Sita*,” *Connotations* 15.1-3 (2005): 200.

contrast, Collen's work writes women into the centre of the narrative, as travellers, drug mules, slaves and activists. Her attempts to represent female voices, requires, as it does for the other writers of this space, an act of near-impossible historical recovery. Given the absence of records, Gurnah retreats into silence; Collen, in contrast, depicts verbal silence while highlighting performance and non-verbal expression, particularly through clothing and dance. In doing so, she attempts to demonstrate "what the people here feel and do not even know they feel".

As DeLoughrey suggests, although oceanic arena studies have deepened our understanding of nomadology and diaspora, what has been overlooked are the "ways in which stability and rootedness are often conflated with stagnancy, indigeneity, and women" (DeLoughrey *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* 43). Women are rarely at the centre of Conrad's and Ghosh's fiction, with the exception of Deeti, and the two women from *'Twiixt Land and Sea*.¹⁵ Gurnah's writing makes plain the costs of Indian Ocean travel, and, in *Desertion* in particular, demonstrates that they are largely faced by women. Rehana, the daughter of Zakariya, meets a cousin from what her brother thinks of as their homeland in India. He woos her, but then without warning abandons her and returns home to another family, leaving her open to the later, and equally tragic, relationship with the foreigner Martin.

Azad's abandonment had made her stubborn, less sensitive to what others thought best for her, slightly more indifferent to opinion. Men left while women stayed behind and died after a lifetime of wheedling and scraping. (D 118)

¹⁵ In the "Author's Note," Conrad writes that "I am glad to think that the two women in this book—Alice, the sullen, passive victim of her fate, and the actively individual Freya, so determined to be the mistress of her own destiny—must have evoked some sympathies, because of all my volumes of short stories this was the one for which there was the greatest immediate demand" (TLS xiii).

The narrator extrapolates from Rehana's experience to a wider experience of a well-travelled space, noting not only the social but the economic costs suffered by women. Jamila, Amin's divorced and scandalous lover, represents the recurring figure of the abandoned woman in the next generation, but also unusually has herself travelled to other Indian Ocean ports.

Her husband was wealthy, somebody she met on her travels, Nairobi or Dar es Salaam or something like that. [...] After a year or two, he left her and then divorced her, and went back to wherever he had come from. (D 165)

Not only is Jamila abandoned, but it is her own experience of travel that prevents Amin's mother from accepting her, and results in the heartbreak that reduces Amin to silence. In this case, Jamila pays the price for both her own and her husband's travels.

Collen's writing represents not only women who stay behind, but also women who travel, focusing both on the liberatory aspects of that movement alongside its dangers and costs. *The Rape of Sita* is an exploration, amongst other things, of the dangers faced by a travelling woman in a male-dominated space. The reference to the Hindu goddess Sita in the title of the novel is not only politically inflammatory, but indicative of a wider and more nuanced intertextuality. In all of her novels, Collen retells the various myths of chastity and destruction that form the patriarchal canon of core Mauritian texts and intertexts. This dense weave of intertextual references, which draw in Mauritian as much as other literary sources, is an example of "cross-national intertextuality" (Boehmer *Empire* 1). The use of African folktales, Indian myths, Christian and Islamic religious texts alongside Mauritian literature indicate Collen's self-conscious situatedness in the region. These include the folktale of the "sham-sick trickster," referenced in *Getting Rid of It*, alongside Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, and Dev Virahsawmy's *Toufann*, itself a rewriting of

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in *Mutiny* (Virahsawmy).¹⁶ One example, which I will go on to explore at some length, is the intertextual relationship between *The Rape of Sita* and the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* centres on the abduction of Sita, Ram's wife, by the demon Ravana, and, as an oral epic, lends itself to retelling, having been sung, written, translated and reinterpreted for centuries (Richman). As Nabaneeta Dev Sen describes, in her study of Indian women's retellings of the *Ramayana* in village songs, the women's versions tend to emphasize, not surprisingly, Sita's experience over Ram's and portray his treatment of her as callous rather than heroic (Sen 19). Collen goes even further, modernizing and displacing the myth by setting it in contemporary Mauritius and the Indian Ocean, and characterizing Sita as both the raped and the rescuer.

The rewriting by recontextualization also serves to highlight the original Indian Oceanity of the ur-text. The mythical Sita is, after all, taken by the demon Ravana to the island of Sri Lanka, across the Indian Ocean. Amitav Ghosh, in the *Sea of Poppies*, provides the most vivid description of this event. Deeti at the start of the novel sees a line of *girmityas*, coolies, and asks a passerby, Ramsaran-ji, where they are going. He tells her that "a boat will take them to Patna and then to Calcutta [...]" and from there they'll go to a place called Mareech." When Deeti finds out that Mareech, Mauritius, is "an island in the sea like Lanka" she is filled with a horror that arises directly from her knowledge of the *Ramayana*.

¹⁶ The tale of the "Sham-Sick Trickster," which has its roots in Africa but has travelled to most of the islands of the Indian Ocean, Hare traditionally pretends that he is sick, inducing Tortoise first to injure himself trying to help him, and finally to carry him on his back to the king's palace. In Collen's version, Rita, a middle class woman who employs Sadna Joyna, has a dream in which her husband repeatedly tricks her, eventually beating her as she carries him on her back on their way to the hospital. Afterwards, Sadna Joyna does not know if "the dream caused Rita's suicide, or if her life caused the dream and the suicide" (GR 137). Just as with the *Ramayana*, Collen portrays the tragedy of a female character's life by rewriting a masculine folktale familiar to a Mauritian, and even an Indian Ocean, audience. Lee Haring, "Eastward to the Islands: The Other Diaspora," *Journal of American Folklore* 118.469 (2005): 293.

The mention of Lanka, with its evocation of Ravana and his demon-legions, made Deeti flinch. How was it possible that the marchers could stay on their feet, knowing what lay ahead? She tried to imagine what it would be like to be in their place, to know that you would never again enter your father's house; that you would never throw your arms around your mother; never eat a meal with your sisters and brothers; never feel the cleansing touch of the Ganga. And to know also that for the rest of your days you would eke out a living on some wild, demon-plagued island? (SP 75)

Like the mythical Sita travelling across the *kala pani*, Sita's trauma is bound up with Indian Ocean travel.

Sita is a member of the All Women's Front of Mauritius, and is invited to attend the Seychelles Conference held by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The rape occurs in transit, on her return from the Seychelles, during a layover in Réunion.

The missing night, she knew was the night of 30th April, 1982. The eve of Labour Day. She also knew she was, at the time, in Réunion, the French colony. She was in transit between Seychelles and Mauritius. (RS 52)

When she escapes Rowan Tarquin's house (his name a mix of Ravana and Tarquin, from "The Rape of Lucrece") she feels as though the ocean puts necessary space between herself and the traumatic event.

On the flight, she still had the feeling of being in flight. She was running so fast now, that she had taken off and was flying away from the danger. Flying over the Indian Ocean. Over the turquoise sea. (RS 157)

Sita is travelling between two significant events, the conference for the Ministry of Women's Affairs on the Seychelles and the birth of the organization on Mauritius. It is the busyness and joy of that event that induces the repression of the rape in the first place, which recurs at a more appropriate moment many years later. Travelling across the Indian Ocean becomes both the cause of the rape and the means of escape and recovery. Later in the novel, Collen even goes a step further, imagining the violence caused by a travelling woman herself, as Sita dreams of a revenge enabled by cross-

ocean travel: "Catch a plane over. Only a half an hour. Kill him. Commit a murder. Knife or gun. Catch a plane back" (RS 192).

As well as rewriting the plot, Collen pays attention to the formal characteristics of the oral epic. *The Rape of Sita* is primarily narrated by a character named Iqbal the Umpire. Similarly to the myth's narrator, Valmiki, Iqbal is a frame narrator. He introduces himself and the context of the storytelling in the beginning of the novel, and only appears in the story itself at irregular intervals. His frame narration is in turn framed by a preface and a poem at the beginning of the novel. Collen provides a reading of the framing devices that demonstrates their importance to the narrative, functioning to mitigate its inflammatory potential and to suggest different levels of interpretation and experience.

These were not necessarily conscious intentions, but things I was aware of. At the surface, it is a kind of instinctive fear of the censor. A Medieval device—which didn't work, I may add. And then it is like for deep-sea diving, stages of pressure, for the reader to go through. And then thirdly, it's a kind of unveiling. (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 8)

The framing device also allows Iqbal to inform the reader that the novel is the written account of an oral narrative. The novel's orality is performed by various means: Iqbal hectors his imagined audience, is frequently interrupted, and invites Sita, Dharma and others to take up the story at different moments. Like Conrad in *Lord Jim* or Gurnah in *By the Sea*, Collen evokes the sense of a story overheard and retold.

These gestures towards the rhythms and contexts of orality—repetitiousness, exhortations, digressions—also recall the formal orality of the *Ramayana*.¹⁷ The

¹⁷ Asked about her influences, Collen hesitantly lists the novelist Ananda Devi and the Kreol playwright Henri Favory—"maybe," "a bit"—but emphatically considers herself influenced "very heavily by oral stories, told by people, live." Lindsey Collen, "Interview," ed. Charne Lavery (2010), vol., 1. Collen also affirms that she has mainly encountered the myth through verbal retellings, by her husband and father-in-law, once active in the Arya Samaj movement, as well as in the women's movement. See Collen, *Triplopia Interview*.

structure of the novel is reminiscent of the “ring composition” structure of the epic, which repeats the opening line of verse at the end of the digression, and returns repeatedly to the central thread of Ram and Sita. Perhaps directly referencing this circular structure of the *Ramayana*, Iqbal suggests in the preface that the *The Rape of Sita* is structured as a “bunch of grapes,” a series of digressions that hang together by the thin stalk of Sita’s rape story. Each of the sub-stories is self-contained and related at the beginning and end to the main plot by the narrator. The circular structure is reflected finally at the level of the novel as a whole, when Iqbal returns to the words of the preface in the last pages. This circularity produces repetitiveness. Whole stories are often recounted by different speakers and the narrative features repetitions of words and phrases, often of unfinished proverbs, sayings and quotations (Goldman and Goldman 14). Key phrases reappear throughout the novel in varying contexts—“between the devil and the deep blue,” “was a man who thought he was a woman”—producing subtle shifts in meaning.

The repetitions of the contextually-inflected stories and sayings highlight the possibility of rewriting or reimagining which is central to the novel’s intertextual project. The sayings are repeated, but their different contexts change the meaning, just as the new context of Collen’s mythical retelling produces a story which is both familiar and yet, controversially, new. Iqbal describes the importance of this process of retelling at the start of the novel.

For every one storyteller, as you and I know him, there are two trainees. One to remember the story as it was, or as it is. And the other who has to retell it anew, and never the same, I am the second kind. Dharma, my friend, is in charge of remembering stories exactly as they were, or as they are. (RS 8)

Dharma is represented as a kind of historian, as opposed to Iqbal the novelist, whose job it is to retell a very old story while also shifting expectations and even events. As

Williams-Wanquet suggests, drawing on Judith Butler, “repetition with a difference can break free from the binary structures of established power and suggest the possibility of reconfiguration” (quoted in Williams-Wanquet 64).¹⁸ Repetition with a difference, in Butler’s view, allows for certain otherwise injurious speech acts (or bodily acts) to confound rather than consolidate existing power relations (Butler 20). This occurs through “restaging or resignifying,” a linguistic performance which is not simply a reversal or negation but an engagement and a challenge. In this light, Collen’s rewriting, or *retelling*, is a both a political and a literary performance.

In her fourth novel, *Mutiny*, Collen expands on the performative and revolutionary aspects of her earlier work. The novel is set within a prison for women in Mauritius, and all of the characters directly described are women. After the more traditional narrative structures of *Boy* and *Getting Rid of It*, Collen here returns to a more experimental structure like that of *The Rape of Sita*. The novel combines three broad types of narrative, woven together: the interlaced stories of three women prisoners—a young girl, adult woman, and grandmother; also, using three different kinds of text—prison law excerpts, linear narrative and recipes. This structure may even have been prefiguratively described in the opening of *The Rape of Sita*, in which Iqbal’s preface compares the “bunch of grapes” structure of *The Rape of Sita* to the structure of his fictional first novel, *Mauritius Cyclone Eye*, which, instead, was “a kind of plait, they said” (RS 1).¹⁹

¹⁸ Butler’s “repetition with a difference” is related to a number of ideas from performance studies, particularly Joseph Roach’s “repetition with revision,” a critical concept developed in the comparative “geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world,” as well as to ideas developed in Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, and, to a lesser extent, Homi Bhabha’s mimicry from *The Location of Culture*. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) xi, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁹ Plaiting or braiding is a conventionally feminine metaphor, suggestive of weaving and hairstyling, kinds of activity engaged in by the three prisoners of *Mutiny*. It is also suggestive of Lionnet’s

In *Mutiny*, Collen's awareness of the on-going impact, and indeed persistence, of colonial power and violence, is demonstrated by the sections of prison law excerpts. These consist of real quotations from the penal code of Mauritius. The repeated charges against the three women are quoted in full, the old-fashioned words—"effusions of blood"—suggesting an anachronism with real consequences. The protagonists, incarcerated in a women's prison, are trapped both by the series of barriers that make up the prison building—cells, inner walls, outer walls—and, like Krish in *Boy*, by the island itself. Again, it is significant that Collen chose to set the Mauritian novel within a prison. As Hand writes,

Mutiny—like all of Collen's novels—reveals the flip side to the Mauritian miracle far away from the five-star luxury hotels, the stylish Caudan waterfront and the hypermarkets which have become sites of access to globalized capitalism. [...] The inside of a women's prison takes over centre stage from the sandy beaches and plush apartments. (Hand 112)

In addition, the confusing layers of the penal code arise out of the layered colonial histories of Mauritius—Portuguese, Dutch, French, English—each of which have contributed to different and often contradictory sections. In addition, they are open to South Asian and African influence in their application. What is significant is that the structures of patriarchy, as much as capital, cross-cut the more obvious divisions of ethnicity and origin.

As *Mutiny* progresses, the oppressive structures of prison life are disrupted by the arrival of a fierce tropical cyclone. The storm throws apparent certainties—the physicality of the island, the strength of the prison, the regularity of time—into disarray. Under the onslaught of the wind, the prison walls begin to show their weakness and malleability.

definition of *métissage*: the "braiding of cultural forms." Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices : Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 4.

Large apparently stable things in the rest of the prison begin at the height of each gust to creak and to groan, like masts of long ago ships as they lean on the timbers and members below deck in a storm and frighten those seamen imprisoned in them. (M 186)

Using a maritime metaphor, Collen shifts the emphasis from the stability of land to the fluidity of the ocean, revealing the only contingent certainty of “large apparently stable things.” It is not only the walls of the prison but the predictability of time that is laid to waste.

Time has, of course, changed. It has either slowed right down or speeded right up, we can’t work out which, by now. Which is how we return to these more *relative* words. *Early. Late. Next. Before.* The countable aspect of time has definitely been weakened, stage by stage. (M 59)

As the cyclone howls, things become increasingly relative and connected. If the walls of the prison can be broken, and time itself can change, the capacity for the cyclone to cause social and political change begins to seem a real possibility. The imminent storm becomes a metaphor for the sense of agency and revolt in the female prisoners and, by implication, in the rest of the island’s population: “*The cyclic movement of the cyclone is getting inside of us*” (M 300).

Cyclone imagery is central to Collen’s imaginative world, as Felicity Hand demonstrates. She argues that cyclones in Collen’s work have a primarily levelling effect, equalizing the conditions for rich and poor alike: “the trope of the cyclone as the ultimate equalizer is a reminder that coping with meteorological elements on a tropical island like Mauritius affects everybody in similar economic circumstances” (Hand 120). In addition, cyclones are empowering, and in this novel the protagonist, Juna, times the revolution based on the development of the storm. Hand argues that this is a crucial part of Collen’s contribution to Indian Ocean writing.

Many Mauritian texts feature cyclones and other natural disasters as part of the violence of everyday life on a tropical island but it is Collen's use of the trope as a leveller, rather than a destroyer, that singles her work out as setting a new agenda for Indian Ocean writing. The cyclone provides psychological upheaval and material destruction among the inhabitants of tropical zones but it is in Collen's work that the cyclone fulfills a more ideological role: that of equalizer. (Hand 166)

Significantly, in this novel, the cyclone lays bare patriarchal norms and suggests the possibility of reconfiguration.

Collen's project can be described as one of "making the invisible visible"—as she suggests directly in *Getting Rid of It*, and indirectly in the other novels—and the cyclone is a useful and suggestive allegory. Cyclones are produced by precisely the same conditions that, for the majority of the year, ensure the regular and deeply influential eastern and western monsoon winds that underpin Indian Ocean relations (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 20). The monsoons form out of the latent power that builds up in the travelling currents of air, and make those winds visible through their ravaging effects. Unlike Conrad's peaceful ocean, Collen's and Ghosh's Indian Oceans are shaped by rare but predictable cyclones. Collen therefore turns us away from the idea of the coastal ocean—the tame sea as it laps on the beach—to the geologic ocean—the powerful, independent force of nature that harbours cataclysmic events. In particular, the meteorological conditions which underlie cyclonic formation can be compared to the structural conditions of oppression which persist in the space, and which tend towards unrest and revolution.

In an interview Collen observes: "I think this is at the centre of the novel [*The Rape of Sita*]: insidious forms of patriarchy, its invisibleness" (Collen "Triplopia Interview" 6). Collen's concern with inequality is focused on structural conditions rather than individual actions, for slavery and colonialism as well as for patriarchal

oppression. In many of her novels, Collen draws repeated attention to the systemic nature of heteropatriarchy (Hand 5). As Felicity Hand notes, for Collen it is the “existence of rape, not the crime itself, [that] is an indication of gender, class and ethnic inequality and abuse of power” (Hand 69). Collen makes the connection between the structural operations of rape and that of colonialism, suggesting that resistance is a matter not only of willpower—or, clearly, race or gender—but of conditions of possibility. The trigger which first brings the memory to the surface is a pair of events which are figured as colonial in character. One is a rebellion of the poor on Réunion, which acts as a symbol of hope for Sita and the political movement. As Iqbal celebrates, citing the anti-apartheid South African poet Ingrid Jonker, “You needn’t have despaired Ingrid Jonker. The child is not dead” (RS 21).

Those very children born into the heart of submission, Réunion, the colony of colonies, known to submit there more than any colonized people anywhere, held up usually as an example of *intégration*, *assimilation*, *départementalisation*, by the French rulers, those very children, the most down-trodden, unblessed of us all, have risen up by themselves like immense giants striding across the firmament. Against not ordinary masters, but against the most difficult of masters, colonial masters. (RS 20)

This occurs amid devastating news of the first Gulf war, characterized by Iqbal not only as an imperial invasion but as a rape: “Prior to the rape. Prior to storming the desert” (RS 19). Collen’s object is to connect the event of rape, a singular event, to the universal, invisible manifestations of inequality. As Sita describes, “what allows rape to exist at all [...] is something that is soaked in the whole fabric of society, and that when you add up all the insidious and often invisible aspects of patriarchy, then you end up with a balance of forces between man and woman, which allows a man, if he wants to, to violate a woman, and to know that he can get away with it” (RS 59). The balance of forces, in turn, creates an analogy with colonization, such that the rape becomes an act of possession on a vast and symbolic scale.

Is it the effect, she thought, of two hundred years of colonization, dominating me in one fell swoop? "I have taken into my body what everyone here has felt for two hundred years? The ghosts of the past are so alive that they have started to haunt me? All that Doorga ever told me about herself, and Anjalay, and Olga coming down from the mountains, and Ana de Bengal, all this allows me to feel what the people here feel and do not even know they feel." Is this possible? That she is a medium for all dead slaves of the past? The body for the spirits? (RS 109)

Just as the island is re-written as non-singular, connected by networks to a regional world, the singular event forms part of the fabric of patriarchy. Collen's feminist, class and anti-imperial politics are inextricably intertwined.

Revolution takes many forms in Collen's work. Throughout she attempts to demonstrate that, although colonialism and patriarchy have been present throughout the history of the island and the region, so have resistance and rebellion.²⁰ In *The Rape of Sita*, women are at the centre of resistance. Iqbal makes repeated reference to Sita's place in a line of rebellious females, a matriarchy that goes back to the time of the Dutch traders. The line of women starts with Ana de Bengal, who, together with two slaves, "burned down the whole of the Dutch East India Company's quartermaster's stores and the whole of the headquarters of the Company at Maybur" (RS 95). Her daughter ran away to live with the maroon community at Samarel, and had a daughter, Olga Olanda, in whose "very name is the history of Mauritius"—"Olga Olande, Olga the Hollander" (RS 97). Her great-grandmother was arrested for organizing a wage revolt at a sugar plantation, and her mother for attempting to rescue a trade unionist from prison. Each of the women in succeeding generations, as the narrator Iqbal describes it, "participates in history." Resistance networks are also connected in Collen's work through space as well as time, as is demonstrated by the

²⁰ For context see Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Introduction to Special Issue Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance," *Interventions* 4.1 (2002), Gwyn Campbell and Edward A. Alpers, "Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia," *Slavery & Abolition* 25.2 (2004).

links between women's movements along which Sita travels. In addition, Iqbal is involved in a protest against Apartheid—"No to apartheid. No to Mauritius colluding" (RS 100)—drawing its most southern Indian Ocean neighbour. In *Mutiny* the radio provides news flashes in the background of rioting in Bangalore and Seoul, such that the incipient riots on the island become placed within a much larger regional spirit of unrest and action.²¹

However, for the most part resistance networks form an underworld network like that of the drug trade that was a feature of *Boy*. As such, they fit into the larger narrative of silences and gaps in Indian Ocean history—in this case, both of suppressed resistance and the absence of women's recorded experience. Collen's approach, in response, is to rely on non-verbal and symbolic objects and acts in order to suggest the possibilities of reconfiguration: descriptions of objects, dance, activity, food and clothing. Her work depicts these various kinds of performance, counteracting the overarching emphasis on division and oppression with a kind of political hopefulness. At the same time, however, these moments, that are in narrative terms relatively weak, gesture towards the limits of the text and of imaginative recuperation. As does Ghosh, Collen grapples with the difficulty of "filling the gaps."

In Collen's work the depictions of recuperative performances include the building and placing of homes, the bright clothes that women wear to a protest, the refusal to eat one-banana rations. In *Getting Rid of It* the women who have lost their

²¹ Elleke Boehmer has described the interdiscursivity and interaction between national resistance movements in the period of high empire, 1890-1920. Collen demonstrates that not only were these multilateral connections important in the early part of the century, but they persist into the present. Collen's political party, Lalit, on its website, acknowledges the ongoing networks that inform and inspire its activities, noting that the organization "has learnt vast amounts from the huge traditions of struggle in India and Africa", as well as "world-wide-workers' struggles, liberation struggles, women's struggles, progressive political struggles of all kinds." Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920 : Resistance in Interaction*, Lalit, *Lalit De Klas*, 2013, Lalit Mauritius, Available: <http://www.lalitmauritius.org/about.php>, 9 April 2013.

homes migrate to Kan Yolof, a precarious slum on a hill, described by the narrator as a liminal space of possibility but also evident hardship.

In Kan Yolof, they live in enclosed spaces between things.
Places where the land developers haven't got to yet.
Somewhere near the docklands, near the city centre, near the
drug and prostitution rings, near the motorway. Where old warehouses,
and mansions, and stone stables, and new skyscrapers all mingle, and
in-between there are still spaces.
Interstices. (GR 145)

In finding these interstitial spaces, and also in turning them into homes, the women work with what is available in order to take ownership of a space.

In strange shapes, long oblong gaps, triangular spaces, tall thin holes, and often a wide clearing around a single tap. With corrugated-iron scraps, with newspapers painted with left-over varnish, with drums that the roller's been sent over and flattened, bits of hardboard of strange shapes, plywood torn off packing-crates, sheets, of plastic that may have been someone's shower curtains, cardboard from boxes, chicken-wire, sheets of Styrofoam, opened out gunny bags and fertilizer sacks, and other things you might find here and there if you know where to look, too. (GR 146)

In these strangely-shaped spaces the poor women of Mauritius, unlike the land developers or the "bosses," are able to, in the narrator's words, "do their own architecture".

Getting Rid of It ends with the women not only using their creative skills to create houses, but laying claim to those houses and space through a housing demonstration that represents their coming to political maturity and the resolution at the end of the novel. For this event, the three protagonists' clothing is symbolically important—"Sadna Joyna is all tinsel in what must have been someone's old red and gold wedding sari and matching *champal*. [...] Even Jumila's usually dull youthful-youthless cheeks burn with enthusiasm and confidence. In her riotously coloured *churidar*" (GR 160). After the gruelling stories of hardship and want that make up the

bulk of the novel, the women speak out publicly through their use of colour and clothing, reconstituting themselves from historical fragments represented by the reference to Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*: "The colours themselves challenge the idea of time. They defy the very notion of fading. We will never be raw cloth again. Never be sackcloth. Never be a gunny bag".

In *Mutiny*, the cyclical movement of the cyclone is metaphorically linked to the political revolt of the women by dance, highlighting the sense of cycle and change present in the word "revolution." The novel builds up the tension throughout the novel, as the cyclone gets closer and tensions rise inside the prison, until it finally releases in the moment of escape. Leila's escape is described in terms of both dance and revolution.

As planned she lopes up to Boni's cell door and quietly opens it. Then, in the lintel, she dances.

It's so easy. Round and round, dancing revolutions. (M 107)

Later, the dance moves outwards, moving beyond the prison walls as Leila releases more inmates from their cells. As they leave, the cyclone wind covers the dancers/revolutionaries in bright flowers, which they accentuate by collecting pieces of bright clothing to hide their tell-tale dull prison garb:

I watch Leila go, still dancing, *dansing*, *danzing*, and inviting inmates of Blocks B and then D to follow her if they will, and then leading a loose formation, thrown into a jazz movement by the silence of the eye, out of the main portal...

She's got green leaves, yellow acacia flowers and flamboyants bright red all stuck to her making her prison clothes the wings of a bird of paradise.

I run up the spiral stairway to the watchtower and follow their every movement. They dance to the pirogue named Sapsiway, its timbers lapped by the swollen river. Bright clothes are being pulled out of it, as if by magicians from a hat. Each needs only a smattering of—a shocking pink shawl here pulled in close, a pair of yellow high heeled shoes there, a green hat pulled down...a layered skirt, amber alternating with tan, dissembling prison trousers. (M 336)

The movement and play of language, its creolization—“dancing, *dansing*, *danzing*”—is mirrored by the free flow of jazz and the improvisatory nature of the dance of escape itself. The women’s bright clothing signifies the transition of their from prison to freedom, the long list emphasizing their individual humanity. Despite the retractions of the epilogue, which suggests that the revolution is quelled by violent forces from the west and the escapees returned to prison, the narrative suggests that these non-verbal, symbolic, unwritten actions, performed by women and the ignored of history, have served to move history forwards.

The cross-oceanic intertextual relationship between Collen’s *The Rape of Sita* and the *Ramayana*, speaks of a cross-national Indian Ocean connection, contemporary links with India, and the difficulties faced by travelling women. The performance of orality in this text links in to the emphasis on performance throughout her work, in particular through storytelling, clothing and dance. Although more generally focused on the hardships and divisions of the poor in a postcolonial island, Collen’s work recounts moments of performative emancipation, in particular claiming power for subaltern women in a space in which they are usually side-lined. Playing on the correspondences between generational recurrence, repetition with a difference, revolution and the revolving cyclone, her work suggests a contingent political hopefulness.

Conclusion

The opening passage of the diasporic Sri Lankan novelist Romesh Gunesequera’s *Prisoner of Paradise*, published in 2012, again echoes Conrad’s description of the arrival to Mauritius in “A Smile of Fortune”.

The bay was bright and blue. On the edge, the small island port lay basking in the sun. Only in her dreams had Lucy Gladwell seen such dazzling light spilling from the sky. The anchor dropped to a rousing cheer: the drumming of fists and feet, firkins and kilderkins, kegs and clogs and pails and mops rolled around the ship. After five months at sea, at last the *Liberty* had arrived. (Gunsekera *The Prisoner of Paradise*)

Set on Mauritius in a period fifty years before Conrad's, in 1825, the novel recounts the interracial love affair between Lucy Gladwell, a young British woman, and Don Lambodar, a translator from Ceylon, servant to an exiled prince. Like Collen, the title of Gunsekera's novel points to a similar ambivalence between paradise and prison in the imagining of Mauritius, and the writing shifts between an amply sensuous description of an idyllic tropical island and a record of slave revolts and violent suppression. The novel also highlights a woman's point of view in imagining the space, and its plot turns on an Indian Ocean cross-island connection, between Ceylon and Mauritius.

However, Gunsekera's novel and Collen's also maintain different points of emphasis, which point to Collen's contribution to the writing of Mauritian and Indian Ocean space. While Gunsekera highlights connections forged as a result of European imperialism, setting the novel during the period of empire, Collen is concerned with on-going capitalist and patriarchal oppression that impact on Mauritius as a postcolonial nation. Significantly, her novels are all set in the latter half of the twentieth century and focus on the United States and France as modern imperialist powers. Like Gurnah, she is largely focused on the dark underbelly of Indian Ocean connectivity, highlighting the poverty, traumas and inequality which it produces or feeds upon. Unlike Gunsekera or any of the other authors considered in this thesis, her protagonists, narrators and focalizers are predominantly women. Unlike Lucy Gladwell, however, those women are rarely privileged—rather, like Ghosh and to a

certain extent Gurnah, Collen focuses on the underclass of Mauritian society, and consequently on an underworld network of Indian Ocean connections.

In an interview, Collen describes the importance of Indian Ocean imaginaries to her own life, which also provides a useful gloss for her literary production of its spaces.

So, there the Indian Ocean is. Up there is the equator round about Mombassa and Dar-Es-Salaam, and Zanzibar. Down there, the South Pole. [...] I went to live in the Seychelles. Plumb centre of the Indian Ocean. I went there by ship, the *Karanja*, I remember its name. And there meeting people who had been ship's captains, ships that went all around those areas. And in Mombasa, seeing those old dhows that had plied the Indian Ocean for centuries. And there in the Seychelles, I was feeling India just above, and the South Pole still down there, and Mauritius, too, where they speak the same language as Seychelles. (Collen "Interview" 3)

Collen, like Conrad, has traversed a number of oceanic routes which inform her fiction in a different ways, producing Mauritius as an island cross-nationally connected with the Indian Ocean region. Her work links Mauritius historically to the eastern and western Indian Ocean coasts through the haunting passages of slavery and indenture, mapping a diverse but divided nation. She demonstrates oceanic cultural crossings through intertextual references and rewritings, which serve in part to introduce women into the Indian Ocean purview. Though sometimes programmatic, as I have tried to show, her work suggests the continuing political valence of the space in the twenty-first century, prefiguring concerns that will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion to this thesis.

Conclusion

“There was the underneath:” Conclusion

“Each morning, the sun barely up, I licked salt off the ship’s railings, believing by now that I could distinguish between the taste of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.”

Michael Ondaatje, The Cat’s Table

“Not only people travel and form connections. The southern bluefin tuna is a magnificent fish.”

Michael Pearson, The Indian Ocean

On the 28th of February 2012, the following headline appeared on the British Broadcasting Corporation news website: “Ship’s Anchor Slows Down East Africa’s Web Connection.” A ship, while waiting to enter the busy port of Mombasa, had dropped anchor in a restricted zone, accidentally damaging an undersea fibre-optic cable that provides fast internet access to the countries on the East African coastline.¹ It was one of three cables, partly owned by the Kenyan government, that connect the East African countries to each other, as well as to South Africa, India, the Middle East and the wider world. The story, and the accompanying image of a large container ship just off a white sandy beach under blue skies, act as a reminder of the material and local underlying the apparently global. The internet, symbol of global connectedness, is threatened by something as anachronistic-seeming as a ship’s anchor, but the damage is localized to a regional network that subtends and yet is part of a larger world system. The fibre-optic cable, like the telegraph cable of an earlier era, acts as a marker of what Bose describes as the interregional arena of the Indian Ocean—a space between the local and the global (Bose 7).

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17179544>, last accessed 6 November 2012.

The Indian Ocean-focused writing that has been considered in this thesis forms a set of answers to the question that Ankhi Mukherjee poses in “The Death of the Novel”: “What happens then to the fate and future of the ‘national’ novel in postnational or cosmopolitan space?” (Mukherjee 551). The academic literature on globalization is characterized by a sense of novelty—privileging a narrative of radical change over one of repetition and restructuring—that belies the mimetically mediated nature of the shift (Behdad 69). Elleke Boehmer resists this characterization in her “Global and Textual Webs,” admitting the dense and saturated interconnection of the contemporary world system but citing cross-empire networks of telegraph, railway and steamship to point to historical continuity rather than rupture (Boehmer “Global and Textual Webs” 13). It is this sense of transverse connections over time as well as space that the literature of the Indian Ocean, as has been suggested, both draws on and creates (Boehmer and Moore-Gilbert 12).² The fiction creates a sense of location from a position of dislocation, and finds a way to represent, in the traditionally place-bound novel form, stories that are primarily about travel, shifting places, and widely-traversed space (Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances* 109). At the same time, the authors discussed in the previous chapters *write* the space, bringing it into being, not only its borders and networks, but its vivid, sensuous “taste,” to refer to the epigraph by Michael Ondaatje. This imaginative depth feeds into and shapes wider cultural, including historical, figurations. Therefore, the Indian Ocean allows the authors to write with empire at a distance, to subvert Eurocentric narratives and to explore the space as paradigmatic of widely connected human relations. In turn, they provide a

² This thesis forms part, more widely, of a move to add what Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert describe as missing from postcolonial studies in 2001: “a ‘thick’ empirical sense of postcoloniality as an interactive horizontal ‘web’: that is, postcoloniality as a global network of transverse interactions, sometimes contrastive, even antagonistic, more often mutually productive and beneficial, between different anticolonial political movements and cultural mobilizations.” (Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert, ‘Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance’, *Interventions* 4(1), 2002, 12).

longer imaginative history and an alternative cognitive map to imposed imperial and national boundaries, shifting the course of historical research and, crucially, the “history that is in [our] heads”—troubling and shaping a wider understanding (Naipaul *A Way in the World* 349). The fiction, producing the Indian Ocean in literature, performs the imaginative work of writing through and from the South (Samuelson and Musila 425).

On the one hand, therefore, the Indian Ocean is an enabling space for the writers that have been considered here, each of whom adds a different layer to the increasingly deep archive of Indian Ocean imaginings. For Amitav Ghosh, the routes and networks of the Indian Ocean allow him to move beyond what he sees as the limiting histories of colonialism and the inward-looking postcolonial Indian nation. It enables him to explore cosmopolitan relations through time and in a particular space, creating the possibility for an Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. For Conrad, the Indian Ocean, as the scene of his maritime experience, provided a marketable exotic setting, but also and more importantly, formed the source and context for his interests in otherness, travel, outsider and insider perspectives and literary cartography. For Gurnah, the Indian Ocean seems to arise first from a sense of place, and forms a way to characterize a complicated kind of belonging. While Conrad could ostensibly have remained within the literary borders of Europe, and Ghosh those of India, the same does not seem true for Gurnah. His Zanzibari experience fits uneasily within a national Tanzanian rubric, and he is continually fascinated by the particular social relations that a space of long-term cross-oceanic travel engenders. Similarly, Collen’s small island nation and adopted home, Mauritius, is not easily aligned with either the African or the Asian continents or their literatures. Writing Mauritius as linked with the Indian Ocean region allows her to represent intra-national diversity as well as

cross-national interconnections. While all are involved in producing the Indian Ocean in fiction, each writes the Indian Ocean in a different mode: disorienting, nostalgic, melancholic and political, respectively.³

On the other hand, the novels considered here shape a wider sense of Indian Ocean space through their particular set of images, metaphors and stories. Conrad's depictions of sea journeys, in *'Twixt Land and Sea*, the Almayer trilogy, *Lord Jim*, and *Victory* in particular, produce an oceanic cartography of overlapping and entangled networks, shadowy borders, difference and wandering. His writing figures the Indian Ocean as a disorienting space, both productively and fearfully disruptive. In the fiction of Amitav Ghosh, the space signifies, and allows for the depiction of, alternative subjectivities—particularly transnational and subaltern. His work—particularly his *Circle of Reason*, *In an Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*—is in dialogue with the Subaltern Studies group project of historical recuperation, and he represents the Indian Ocean world as a distinctively long-lived cosmopolitan space which resists national categories and points to ethical transnational relations. Abdulrazak Gurnah, especially in *Memories of Departure*, *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea*, and *Desertion*, extends the cartographic questions of Conrad's work, and, unlike the other authors considered here, depicts the East African coast as integrally linked to the wider Indian Ocean world. This has implications both for conceptions of a static Africa and for potentially homogenizing Indian Ocean discourse. His novels also foreground the importance of narrative

³ For Conrad's disorientation, see Michael Valdez Moses, "Disorientation: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics," *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, eds. Richard Began and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For Ghosh's nostalgia see Desai, "Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia." For Gurnah's melancholic mode see Samuelson, "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics." For Collen's activist literary politics see Felicity Hand, *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen (1948-), Mauritian Social Activist and Writer* (Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2010).

structure and authority to writing of the space, performing unstable perspectives and dialogic heterogeneity. Lindsey Collen writes the Indian Ocean island as regionally connected and cross-nationally constituted, in her novels *Boy*, *Getting Rid of It*, *The Rape of Sita* and *Mutiny*. Resisting the narrative of the paradisiacal, isolated island, she highlights political and economic links with the wider oceanic region, and represents the nation as a microcosm of Indian Ocean diversity, with its miraculous *métissage* as well as its class-based divisions. Her predominantly female protagonists problematize the association of the Indian Ocean with male travel, and her emphasis on orality, cyclical movement and revolution highlight the political implications and possibilities of Indian Ocean representations.

This thesis has made comparative links across time as well as space: the intertextual links between Conrad and the later authors, as well as between east and west, island and continental coastline, land and sea. It forms an extended study of the relationship of these Anglophone authors to the space in which, and of which, they write, exploring broad Indian Ocean literary continuities and differences as expressed in English. As suggested above, it contributes to the conception of a fluid, networked space which challenges perceptions of stasis and isolation in the global South, and through which to interrogate questions of globalization and transnationality. Much of the valuable work that has been done in this area is literary-historical, tracing the production, circulation and reception of literary works and aesthetic forms around the transoceanic networks of empire, or the connections and echoes among writers who themselves travelled these criss-crossing routes. While acknowledging the importance of these circulatory textual and authorial webs, this thesis has focused more narrowly on the ways in which different kinds of transoceanic networks are represented—metaphorically, imaginatively, linguistically—in the novels of writers who have a

particular and lasting interest in the space. In addition, the analysis of the literature of the Indian Ocean world is a way in to understanding representations of the submerged histories and trans-categorical values of the Indian Ocean, contributing to the understanding of the space as a whole.

While I consider these authors as paradigmatic case studies, it is also true that the Indian Ocean and oceanic imaginaries have a wider currency in literary and cultural forums, and it is important to acknowledge these in conclusion, and to point to the connections between this work and the literature discussed. Zarina Bhimji, an artist of Indian descent born in Uganda, held her first survey exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2012. The exhibition featured photographs documenting the expulsion of Asians from Uganda under Idi Amin, photographs from travels around East Africa more widely, and *Yellow Patch*, a film inspired by trade and migration across the Indian Ocean (Bhimji et al.). BBC Radio 3's highly regarded *History of the World in 100 Objects* series included an episode on shards of Chinese pottery found on the East coast of Africa; Abdulrazak Gurnah was interviewed on the show as a representative of the space and a writer of those ancient connections. In 2012 the BBC aired a series of Simon Reeve's travels around the Indian Ocean, from Cape Town to the Philippines, incorporating environmental, historical and geographic narratives. Adding to this multigeneric exploration, as I suggested in the introduction, a number of other novelists have worked or are beginning to work in this area.⁴ Here I would briefly like to touch particularly on one of these authors, Michael Ondaatje, in some more detail below, in order to illuminate the continuities apparent

⁴ The final novel in Ghosh's trilogy is forthcoming, and novelist and critic Elleke Boehmer has indicated that she will "write something around or about [the waters of the Indian Ocean] in my next book." Elleke Boehmer and John Masterson, "Excavating Diaspora: An Interview Discussing Elleke Boehmer's Novel *Nile Baby*," *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*, eds. Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013) 258.

in the work of the writers considered in this thesis. In addition, this conclusion will draw out further lines of investigation, in relation to Ondaatje as well as others.

The first half of Michael Ondaatje's 2011 novel *The Cat's Table* recalls a journey across the Indian Ocean, from Sri Lanka to Aden and then onwards to London. He demonstrates the far-reaching and lasting legacy of Conrad for modern literature, opening the novel with a quotation from Conrad's "Youth."

And this is how I see the East ... I see it always from a small boat—not a light, not a stir, not a sound. We conversed in low whispers, as if afraid to wake up the land ... It is all in that moment when I opened my young eyes on it. I came up on it from a tussle with the sea.

As the epigraph suggests, Conrad's presence can be felt throughout Ondaatje's novel, as it can in his earlier novel, *The English Patient* (1992). However, *The Cat's Table* depicts Conrad's journey in reverse, from the perspective of a younger boy, who sees London for the first time not from a "small boat" but from the deck of a ship so large that he describes it as "this castle that was to cross the sea" (Ondaatje *Cat* 6). After the ship passes through Aden, "our last footstep in the East," the narrator describes the attendant sense of loss.

No, being within the stricter confines of the Red Sea was not an easy time for some of those at our table. Perhaps emotionally we felt landlocked after all the freedom that came with the wilder oceans we had crossed. And Death existed after all, or a more complicated idea of Fate. Doors were closing, it seemed, on our adventurous travels. (Ondaatje *Cat* 110)

As the narrator writes later, looking back, the Indian Ocean passage which symbolized leaving Sri Lanka for the West was not necessarily an adventurous rite of passage and discovery: "the truth is, grandeur had not been added to my life but had been taken away" (Ondaatje *Cat* 53). Ondaatje's intertextual relationship with

Conrad, like those of the other writers considered in this thesis, is a complex mixture of tribute and inversion.

More generally, Ondaatje's writing is suggestive of several key themes that run through this thesis. Like Gurnah, he describes the sense of displacement and disorientation that is a consequence of travel: "The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy?" (Ondaatje *Patient* 129). The title of *The Cat's Table* refers to the table in the ship situated furthest from the Captain's table—"the least privileged place" (Ondaatje *Cat* 8)—a symbol of the narrator's belief that, "what is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power" (Ondaatje *Cat* 75). Along with Ondaatje as well as recent historiography, the novels that have been considered in this thesis are interested in subaltern lives, exploring "cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history" (Ondaatje *Patient* 125), or what Dipesh Chakrabarty would describe as the subaltern pasts that "put us in touch with the plural ways of being that make up our own present" (Chakrabarty 108; Anderson *Subaltern Lives*).⁵

More directly, the narrator in *The Cat's Table* describes the port of Aden as ancient—"a great harbor as early in the seventh century B.C."—and as a representative of Indian Ocean trade, embracing a longer view of history that corresponds to the chronotopic elongation of Indian Ocean representations in this fiction (Ondaatje *Cat* 101). Like Conrad, Collen and Gurnah, Ondaatje discerns a subtle difference between the Indian Ocean and other seas, sensually and materially as well as conceptually, as the epigraph suggests. He also describes the Conradian calm

⁵ Similarly, the reversed journey of "Youth" in *The Cat's Table* serves as an act of "provincializing Europe," a task also clearly undertaken by *The English Patient*, which writes Italy as the scene of numerous imperial wars throughout history, linked to India and the Sahara. Ondaatje, *The English Patient*.

of the Indian Ocean, alongside, paradoxically, its sudden storms: “Later we learned all the names for storms. Chubasco. Squall, Cyclone. Typhoon” (Ondaatje *Cat* 92). These storms, as was discussed in the previous chapter, are a climatological correlate of the monsoon and as such are symbolically central to Collen’s work. Ondaatje’s narrator describes their disruptive power:

It was only then, in that peacefulness, that I imagined the full nature of the storm. Of being roofless and floorless. What we had witnessed was only what had been above the sea. Now something shook itself free and came into my mind. It was not only the things we could see that had no safety. There was the underneath. (Ondaatje *Cat* 97)

This reference to “the underneath” points to the other geological oceanic continuity that Collen describes between Africa and the Indian Ocean islands, as well as hinting at the monsters that, as Gurnah’s fisherman recount, are believed to haunt the ocean’s southern border. It acts as a reminder of Ghosh’s foxholes, through which it is possible to drop into underlying histories that are disruptive of stable cartographic and conceptual categories. It also suggests the “deep, deep sea” that provides Marlow in *Lord Jim* with a sense of the uncanny fluidity of identity in a space of otherness and to which Stein advocates a process of continual submission.

The consistency of Indian Ocean representations through the work that has been considered in this thesis and also more widely, as this discussion of Ondaatje suggests, is surely remarkable. Alongside important and informative differences, the forgoing discussion has explored the accretion of tropes, metaphors and methods that produce a largely coherent Indian Ocean representational space. It is a depth of accretion that, along with its containing continental roof, seems to be unique to this ocean, and which is only beginning to be explored. As Lefebvre notes,

We are [...] confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical,

economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global. Not to mention nature's (physical) space, the space of (energy) flows, and so on. (Lefebvre 8)

In particular, this thesis has focused on those things “above the sea:” the Indian Ocean as an imagined social space. Ondaatje's reference to “the underneath” points to other aspects of the space, such as the ocean *qua* ocean, with the geological, environmental and economic implications that entails. This suggests directions for further research, stemming from the concerns of this thesis, which form the focus of the discussion below.

The landscape which is at the heart of *The English Patient* is the desert, which Ondaatje describes in consistently oceanic terms. Like in Ghosh's early work, the desert is a space in which the fluidity of oceanic borders is visible on land.

In the desert it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation. When I came out of the air and crashed into the desert, into those troughs of yellow, all I kept thinking was, I must build a raft...I must build a raft.

And here, though I was in the dry sands, I knew I was among water people. (Ondaatje *Patient* 20)

In this case, it is the desert—itself an ancient ocean—which defies permanence and creates the conditions of possibility for drifting: “Here in the desert, which had been an old sea where nothing was strapped down or permanent, everything drifted [...]” (Ondaatje *Patient* 24). Oceans, along with deserts, air, and outer space, are conceptually rich as boundaryless places that signify a deconstructive mode or postmodern condition. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari list oceans and deserts as spaces that can be identified with “nomad thought,” a way of thinking that traces its genealogical heritage to Nietzsche.

It is now easy for us to characterize the nomad thought that rejects this image and does things differently. [...] It does not ground itself in an all-encompassing totality but is on the contrary deployable in an

horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert or sea.
(Deleuze and Guattari 379)

On an abstract level, the tension between mapped and unmapped spaces that has formed a focus throughout this thesis, particularly in the work of Conrad and Gurnah, can be understood through the distinction between smooth and striated space. In Deleuzian thought, striated space is the space of the sedentary while smooth space is the space of the nomad; the space of possibilities versus the space of the already-defined; the horizontal versus the three-dimensional; the bordered and landmarked versus the fluid and horizonless. In describing the nature of these kinds of space, Deleuze and Guattari are in line with Lefebvre insofar as they are attempting to identify corresponding kinds of thought. Smooth space is linked with a kind of thought that is less concerned with identity than difference, that resists ossification, codification and narrow interiority, in the tradition of Foucault's "outside thought," Blanchot's "space of literature" and Nietzsche's "gay science," to name a few (Massumi xiii). Robert Young suggests, in line with Michael Valdez Moses as discussed in the first chapter, that Edward Said's *Orientalism* should be considered path-breaking but not hegemonic, and that the work of Deleuze and Guattari "offers not something that could be described as an alternative to Said's paradigm, but a different way of thinking the operation of colonialism," in particular through "decentring colonial analysis" (Young 18). Correspondingly, rather than the particular social space of the Indian Ocean, a Deleuzian future research project would explore the ocean as a "smooth space per excellence" (Deleuze and Guattari 289).

Related to a study of this more general deployment of oceanic thinking would be to consider in more detail the drifting oceanic figures which populate Indian Ocean prose, Conrad's in particular: figures of wanderers, maritime nomads and beachcombers. These are the figures, necessarily on the periphery of historical

records, that allow for the exploration of what Enseng Ho describes as trans-oceanic relationships that were “intimate, sticky, and prolonged” (E. Ho xxi). While Ho cites primarily non-Europeans, in a potentially idealizing move similar to Ghosh’s, he also includes European “interlopers,” those who nibbled at the edges of official, state-sponsored trade (E. Ho xxii). These recall the beachcombers who form a recurring theme in Gurnah’s *Desertion*, which often focuses on peripheral or in-between figures. For instance, the colonial officer Frederick’s literary references set the discursive scene for Martin Pearce’s “sticky” relationship with Rehana, when Pearce appears wearing Frederick’s ill-fitting clothes.

It gave him the look of a beachcomber, an educated idler, one of those R.L. Stevenson South Sea ruins, especially with the bare feet and the straggly beard on him. The thought made him smile, because there was something appropriate about it, something in Pearce’s posture which was not to do with the clothes, some looseness or poise, a kind of self-possession. (D 48)

Gurnah’s writing is filled with similar Stevensonian figures, including those who are non-European, such as Azad, Rehana’s first deserting lover from India, and Zakariya, who more successfully integrates into the African Islamic community. Stevenson’s “The Beach of Falesá” produces this kind of character, in the figures of both the evil Case and the more ambiguous John Wiltshire, along with the three beachcombers in *The Ebb-tide* (Stevenson). In addition, Gurnah employs an epigraph from Stevenson’s “The King of Apemama,” in *Admiring Silence*, confirming a relationship that would also be worthy of further exploration. More generally, although these wanderers may be crucial to the imagining of fluid Indian Ocean space, they necessarily invoke a wider geography, which warrants further study.

A particular kind of wanderer that is mentioned peripherally in a number of the texts considered in this thesis, is the pirate. According to Charles Ellms, in “An

Authentic History of the Malay Pirates of the Indian Ocean,” originally published in 1837, “a glance at the map [of the Indian Ocean] will convince us that this region of the globe must, from its natural configuration and locality, be peculiarly liable to become the seat of piracy” (Ellms). Tom Lingard tussles with Sulu pirates in Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly*, and adopts a girl found in a recently boarded “piratical prau” (AF).⁶ The Mascarenes and Madagascar are inextricably associated with piracy, as Romesh Gunsekera recalls in his *Prisoner of Paradise*, in which Lucy Gladwell’s father had “chased the corsairs into the Mascarenes” (Gunsekera *The Prisoner of Paradise*). In the twenty-first century, piracy has become a matter once again associated closely with Indian Ocean maritime traffic, with the rise of Somalia-based piracy.⁷ The phenomenon has received wide coverage in the news and popular media, which cites its links with overfishing and global Islamic terrorist networks.⁸ Given its relative recentness as a phenomenon, fictional literature of modern Indian Ocean piracy is sparse, although a few works have recently been published. Nurrudin Farah’s *Crossbones* (2011) is set in Somalia and centres on a father’s search for his nephew who has allegedly joined the Islamist pirates in Puntland. Abdourahman A. Waberi’s *Passage of Tears* (originally in French, *Passage des Larmes*, published in 2009) is set in Djibouti and on an island in the Gulf of Tadjoura. Its multiple narrative strands follow the fate of a voluntary exile who works for a Montreal-based commercial information company, and weave together the politics of oil in the region, piracy, and,

⁶ In “The End of the Tether,” Captain Whalley describes the bygone days in which the then sultan of Batu Beru had provided support to the Balinini pirates led by the chief Haji Daman, referring to the nomadic peoples as “sea-gypsy tribes,” “rovers [who] hated all mankind with an incomprehensible, blood thirsty hatred.”

⁷ Somali pirates are an almost spectral anachronism, since they recreate a unity of Indian Ocean space as a unity of risk. Interestingly, Somali pirate activity is affected by the changing oceanic conditions of the monsoon, just as in the age of sail. Edward A. Alpers, “Piracy and Indian Ocean Africa,” *Journal of African Development* 13.1 (2011).

⁸ For instance, Jay Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World* (London: HarperCollins, 2011). Christopher L Daniels, *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, vol. 1 (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012).

improbably, the life of Walter Benjamin. In particular, a profitable line of research would be a comparison between representations of Indian Ocean piracy in the period of Empire and the modern period, bearing in mind the fluidity of attributions of piracy depending on whose perspective is under consideration.⁹

One of the possible causes for the rise in piracy in the Indian Ocean is a decrease in catch for local fisherman as a result of catastrophic overfishing. Ondaatje's "underneath," therefore, also points to the physical and natural sea, with its geological characteristics, its plants and animals. Pearson suggests that the routes of migratory fish should be considered as a marker of Indian Ocean unity, and also reminds us that "only 5 per cent of the deep sea has been seen at all" (Pearson *The Indian Ocean* 8). The three-dimensional ocean is coming into focus, increasingly, as an object of anthropogenic environmental destruction. Widespread overfishing is fostered by relatively weak state structures and the depredations of multinational corporations, while climate change threatens to destabilize the climatological patterns which generate the regular and heretofore predictable monsoon. As Pamila Gupta suggests in "Monsoon Fever," the Indian Ocean monsoon could be seen as a valuable theoretical tool because it not only connects oceanic geography and history with modern development, politics and even piracy, but also because it acts as a "space of future disjunctures [...] in relation to a dramatically changing physical ocean" (Gupta 71). Prescient as ever, Conrad points to this concern over questions of sustainability, in *The Mirror of the Sea*.

⁹ As Sugata Bose describes, "From the early nineteenth century onward, the state penetrated society much more deeply than it had before and reshaped several institutions in law, landed rights, religion, and some customs. It was at this time that wandering peoples on land were either forcibly settled or branded 'criminal tribes' and their counterparts at sea termed 'pirates'. Piracy may have been an old profession, but it was now infused with a new meaning." Bose, *A Hundred Horizons : The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* 25. Also see Clare Anderson, "Sepoys, Servants and Settlers: Convict Transportation in the Indian Ocean, 1787–1945," *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, eds. Ian Brown and Frank Dikotter (London: Hurst, 2007) 213.

For machinery it [the sailing ship] is, doing its work in perfect silence and with a motionless grace, that seems to hide a capricious and not always governable power, taking nothing away from the material stores of the earth. Not for it the unerring precision of steel moved by white steam and living by red fire and fed with black coal. The other seems to draw its strength from the very soul of the world, its formidable ally, held to obedience by the frailest bonds, like a fierce ghost captured in a snare of something even finer than spun silk. (MS 43)

The contrast between sail and steam is related to the twentieth century shift from ocean to air travel, a form of transport that draws even more heavily on natural resources.¹⁰ Collen outlines the potential, too, for environmental discourse to be used to nefarious ends, such as the designation of the Chagos islands as a conservation zone in order to justify the removal of its inhabitants. This construction is congruent with the imagining of the largest Indian Ocean island, Madagascar, as both an environmentalist's paradise and nightmare.¹¹ As this suggests, an ecocritical study of Indian Ocean space, possibly modelled on Atlantic ecocritical work such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey's "Heavy Waters," would be a timely and fruitful avenue for further research (DeLoughrey "Heavy Waters").¹²

Part of the pleasure of reading in and around the Indian Ocean is the discovery of unusual things in unexpected places, anachronisms, fragments, chance and

¹⁰ In addition, an examination of the impact of different forms of transport, especially the shift to air travel, on Indian Ocean imaginaries would be worth exploring. See the conference paper presented by Tina Steiner, "'Dwelling-in-Travel': Of Ships, Trains and Planes in M.G. Vassanji's Fiction," *ASAUK Biennial Conference* (Leeds: 2012), vol.

¹¹ See Charlie Gardner, *Indian Ocean: The Real Madagascar and How We Can Save It*, 2012, WWF, Available: http://www.wwf.org.uk/wwf_articles.cfm?unewsid=5932, 10 April 2013, Timothy Clark, "Towards a Deconstructive Environmental Criticism," *Oxford literary review*. 30.1 (2008), Deckard, *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden* 3.

¹² There are a few examples from this literature that would be appropriate for further study, including the following. In his essay, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" (1992), Ghosh links the spice trade, an early Indian Ocean connector, with its contemporary manifestation, the oil industry—trades that differ the scale of environmental destruction each entails, forming an interesting comparison. In *Desertion*, Gurnah describes the wasteful plunder of European hunters, who leave piles of rotting carcasses in their wake, stretching the connotation of the title to include the sense of "desertification." Dan Sleigh's *Islands* performs a similar elongation of the history of environmental destruction, linking it to the depredations of early imperialism, describing the initial colonisation of Mauritius, in which marooned sailors move from place to place on the island, gradually denuding it of all wildlife as they go. Sleigh, *Islands*.

coincidence.¹³ In an opening essay to *Eyes Across the Water*, Amitav Ghosh describes how, “Bangladeshis, like Armenians and Gujaratis, often tell stories about the unexpected places where their countrymen are to be found” (Ghosh “Of Fanás and Forecastles” 15). He refers to a website maintained by an Australian family history community—not the first place, one might assume, where a Bangladeshi searcher would look for countrymen—which publishes ships’ manifests from the nineteenth century. Useful not only for disclosing Dickensian, British-originated family history, the manifests list names and places of origin of lascar crewmen. From this historical distance, the list seems impossibly diverse: the Phillipines, Malaysia, India, Bengal, east Africa and the Arab world. This forms a pleasing anecdotal opportunity, but it also brings to our attention the study of literary representations of the Indian Ocean, which, as Ghosh concludes, is “not merely a theoretical or geographical construct but a human reality, constituted by a dense (and underexplored) network of human connections” (Ghosh “Of Fanás and Forecastles” ix). Any critical or imaginative engagement with the space necessitates acknowledging and finding a way to represent multiplicity—which in turn means accommodating multiple forms of representation. Standing alongside the lists, narratives and maps of historical and cultural writing, the literary representations described in this thesis provide the varied images, stories and literary performances that give the space imaginative depth, invoking and evoking the representational space of the Indian Ocean.

¹³ For instance, the discovery of Boer war memorials in India, a narrative of chance and connection that seems deserving of a Conrad novel. See Isabel Hofmeyr, “South Africa’s Indian Ocean: Boer Prisoners of War in India,” *Social Dynamics* 38.3 (2012).

Appendix 1

Chronology

1895	Joseph Conrad, <i>Almayer's Folly</i>
1896	Joseph Conrad, <i>An Outcast of the Islands</i>
1897	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Nigger of the "Narcissus"</i>
1900	Joseph Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i>
1902	Joseph Conrad, "Youth" and "The End of the Tether"
1912	Joseph Conrad, <i>Twixt Land and Sea</i>
1915	Joseph Conrad, <i>Victory</i>
1917	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Shadow-line</i>
1986	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Circle of Reason</i>
1987	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Memory of Departure</i>
1992	Amitav Ghosh, <i>In An Antique Land</i>
1993	Lindsey Collen, <i>The Rape of Sita</i>
1994	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Paradise</i>
1996	Lindsey Collen, <i>Misyon Garson</i> (Mauritian Creole) Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Admiring Silence</i>
1997	Lindsey Collen, <i>Getting Rid of It</i>
2000	Amitav Ghosh, <i>The Glass Palace</i>
2001	Lindsey Collen, <i>Mutiny</i> Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>By the Sea</i>
2004	Lindsey Collen, <i>Boy</i>
2005	Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>Desertion</i>
2008	Amitav Ghosh, <i>Sea of Poppies</i>
2010	Lindsey Collen, <i>The Malaria Man and Her Neighbours</i>
2011	Amitav Ghosh, <i>River of Smoke</i> Abdulrazak Gurnah, <i>The Last Gift</i>

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